



Mark Siska's comprehensive documentary **Compass** details the birth of the American Improvisational Theatre. Improvised performance is an ancient art form, predating even Grecian theater.

Compass was modeled after the Italian improvised troupe, Commedia Dell Arte, 16th century-18th century. Formed on the fundamental concepts of Viola Spolin's theatre games, **Compass** began in 1954, birthed in Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood which surrounds the University of Chicago. The Cold War, Atomic Age, McCarthyism and American consumerism, were all key components which created the need for something new: "a release at a time when it was needed; that is why it exploded," according to **Compass** player Shelley Berman.

The following people have been interviewed for the documentary **Compass**, which has been in production for three years: Shelley Berman (actor, improviser, comedian); Ed Asner, (actor); David Shepherd (original founder and producer); Jane Alexander (actor, former National Endowment for the Arts chairman); Abner Mikva (Compass consultant, judge, law professor); Suzanne Shepherd (actor); Mark Gordon (Compass player, actor); Andrew Duncan (Compass player, actor); Jane Coleman (American Improvisational Theatre historian); Charles Jacobs (Compass business manager); Mickey Leglaire (original Compass player); Leo Stodolsky (original Compass player, director, Max Plank Institute); Larry Arrick (original Compass director, Yale Theatre professor); Josephine Forsberg (Improvisational educator); Rolf Forsberg (director, Compass, audience member); Richard Orlikoff (Compass lawyer); Helen Axlerod (therapist, audience member); Leah Rochal (actress); Bernie Sahlins (Second City founder); Jonathan Pitts (Chicago Improvisational Festival director).

As an art form important to American culture and theatrical history **Compass** is a historical survey focusing on formative years when Improv was played out through scene, audience suggestions, satire, as well as dramatic improvisation something not true in today's American improvisation.

Mark Siska has been working with David Shepherd, who founded **Compass** with Paul Sills, Viola Spolin's son, who died in June 2008, two weeks before he was scheduled to be interviewed for the project. Although Paul was not interviewed for this project, he has begun to emerge as a character through the stories and recollections of the subjects interviewed thus far. Paul's theories, practice and life's work have been well documented and will be included in the documentary.

Currently 30 hours of interviews have been recorded since 2006 from Chicago, New York and Los Angeles. A work in progress cut of 60 minutes has been completed. 90% of the principal photography has been completed, with a few interviews remaining. A sample of the opening title sequence can be viewed at <http://compassdoc.blip.tv/#1732024>. Photos and more information about the project can be viewed at www.studio207.tv. The project has been shot in High Definition Wide Screen Format, which includes 16 mm color and black and white. Estimated total running time for the project is 90 minutes.

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