

Performance ANXIETY

Conquer your fears, learn a new skill and have great fun all at the same time says *Caroline Phillips*

1 HAVING A LAUGH

Want to become a stand-up comedian in a week? Then join a group of (mostly) comedy virgins in a classroom adjoining an Islington pub. You'll be tutored superbly by Dec Munro, an ex-Cambridge Footlights award-winning director-cum-comedic hero – who's coached students to Hollywood actors and the unemployed to billionaires in the art of being funny. You can't be taught a sense of humour, but you can learn a lot at this London 'joke school'. Enough to end the course by performing with gusto at the friendly showcase in front of 70 strangers.

BOOK IT: Five-day intensive beginner's course, £450. angelcomedy.co.uk/courses

2 OFF THE CUFF

Remember *Whose Line is it Anyway?* Improv is about spontaneously creating theatre by listening and responding unscripted: establishing location (if someone's milking a cow, assume a farm) and building characters (from tarot reader to marine biologist), their relationships and unplanned dialogue. Meeting weekly in a central London school, teacher Mandeep Singh insists that there are no mistakes. 'You don't have to be funny, clever or quick,' we repeat on his instruction. The humour comes from the situation. It's great not thinking twice, always saying yes, being impulsive, allowing the group to create something bigger than its parts. It's impossible to worry about anything as you jump like a gnat on amphetamine from scene to scene. It's brilliant for shyness, innovation, creativity and public speaking. And such fun.

BOOK IT: Eight-week course (two hours per week), £220. hooplaimpro.com

3 CLOWNING AROUND

Wanna run away to the circus? Or to become a self-employed clown? Magic, stilt walking, juggling, acrobatics and being idiotic your thing? Any self-respecting clown will tell you that it takes at least a year to learn all those clowning skills – from timing, character development, physical comedy to improvisation. Hollywood is clown school central while genius Sacha Baron Cohen trained with the renowned French clown Philippe Gaulier. But you can pick up a lot in London or online with clown prof Jon Davison of London Clown School. He'll teach you to generate ideas, create and structure material. And how to perform. Best of all, you'll uncover what's unique and funny about you. Your wildest, most fun, crazy (and vulnerable) self. Then stick on a red nose – and roll on those birthday parties, carnivals and church fetes.

BOOK IT: Courses from £130. jondavison.net ■

