

Madrid's action-packed English-language comedy scene, interview with Josh and Rusty

Thanks to a whirlwind of stand-up comedy shows, improv groups and international festivals, you can enjoy live comedy in English in Madrid every week! This year alone, the city hosted an international comedy competition and received a visit from the world-famous stand-up comedian, Eddie Izzard, himself.

So, how do I find out about shows and get up on stage?

You can check out our [calendar](#) for upcoming events, but first, get to know the city's three main English-language comedy groups:

- Ace Comedy Factory** was founded by Joshua Saxon (from London) and Rusty Birdwell (from Tennessee) last March with monthly open mic comedy showdowns at [Triskel Tavern](#) in Malasaña. They've also launched an event called "Comedy Super Team, Go!" which Josh calls the "*best of*", as they perform their most polished sets and feature comedians such as Archie Bezos and Kirk Bonacci.



Rusty on stage at Comedy Super Team, Go! at [Ancora](#)

2. Freshly Comedy prides itself on being Madrid's first English-language comedy group. It has two different shows: "*Freshly Squeezed*" (45 min stand-up/45 min improv) and "*Freshly Baked*" (90 min pure improv). At all of these events, expect lots of drinks, jokes and games, plus audience participation...



Freshly Comedy – doing what could only be improv – at [Beer Station](#)

3. MAD Improv is an English improv group that meets every Saturday afternoon. The first three weekends of the month are free, while the last is a 4-hour masterclass given by Benjamin Nathan-Serio, costing €25. Anyone can join; you don't have to be a native speaker or have any previous experience. In fact, one Spanish woman joined because she had to do public speaking in English at work. (check out their [meetup group](#))



improv workshops in English near Puerta de Toledo on Saturdays from 4:30-7:30pm

Inside scoop on Madrid's English-language comedy scene

To give you a roadmap, I sat down with Josh and Rusty, the guys who founded [Ace Comedy Factory](#) and collaborate with [Freshly Comedy](#). Rusty is one of the leaders of [MAD improv](#) and Josh organized this year's [Festival Internacional de la Comedia \(FIC\)](#), which featured an outstanding line-up including Reginald D. Hunter, one of the UK's best known comedians whose 200-seat show sold out. The festival also included the [Funniest FICer competition](#), Spain's premiere English-language comedy competition held in Madrid and Barcelona, plus a free inaugural event in Retiro – [The Big Comedy Picnic](#) – in which eighty people set up picnics on the grass.



seen at The Big Comedy Picnic in Retiro

First impressions

When I first met Rusty, I asked him how he got his name. His answer: "Well, my parents just couldn't decide. My father wanted to call me Chainsaw and my mother, Butterfly!" It turned out this was an "elevated truth", a tactic both Rusty and Josh use in their sets.



doing improv I assume...

Oh, and Josh likes to be called Batman if possible. He likes bats.



the batman of comedy indeed

Sitting down with Rusty and Batman for coffee at [La Ciudad Invisible](#) felt like a behind-the-scenes glimpse into their free-style warm-up; the shenanigans that go on when they hang out together often lead them to come up with their best lines.

What's the crowd like?

They get a lot of regulars and people from all over the world. One of the regular comedy-goers, Amy Flippant, from the UK, said: "I remember thinking it was cool to see so many nationalities and accents [on stage] in one event. There were Brits, Americanas, Canadians, and Spaniards, so it's very welcoming." She also witnessed all sorts of comedy, from loud and slapstick to very very surreal (especially at the picnic), and lots of first-time performers, too.

Why do you think Madrid has such a widely popular comedy scene in English?

Both Josh and Rusty agreed that the amount of stuff going on is quite unexpected. It shows the city's welcoming nature as well as the power of Madrid's expat community to start new things. Unlike cities like New York and London, there's little competition for English comedy in Madrid; it's a niche market here. What started out with a few English-language comedy nights a month has since turned into an action-packed micro-culture of stand-up and improv groups that are at it all year long. Not to mention the many English-language theater groups. That's a whole other story...

How did you get into comedy?

Both are pretty new to comedy. For Josh, who has a background in Journalism, it was always on his bucket list. On a whim, he participated in the [FICer Competition](#) last year and has been hooked ever since. Rusty calls Josh "super multi-talented," as he's not only a comedian and host, but also handles the web, organization and PR for many events. Rusty grew up doing theater and improv, and some film acting, although he stopped when he went into writing. While living in Madrid, he got the urge to get back into it and began organizing [Ace Comedy Factory](#) with Josh last February.

Do you get nervous?

"Yeah, of course," said Josh. He's had a few tense moments on stage, but it's part of the game. "I compare it to getting punched in the face. Once it's happened, you can stand up for yourself." Rusty followed with a quote he had recently heard: "The master has failed more times than the beginner has ever tried."

Their advice for anyone who wants to start something new in Madrid

“Go for it!”

Images from [Ace Comedy Factory](#), [MAD Improv](#), [Freshly Comedy](#) and [Madrid International Comedy Festival](#)