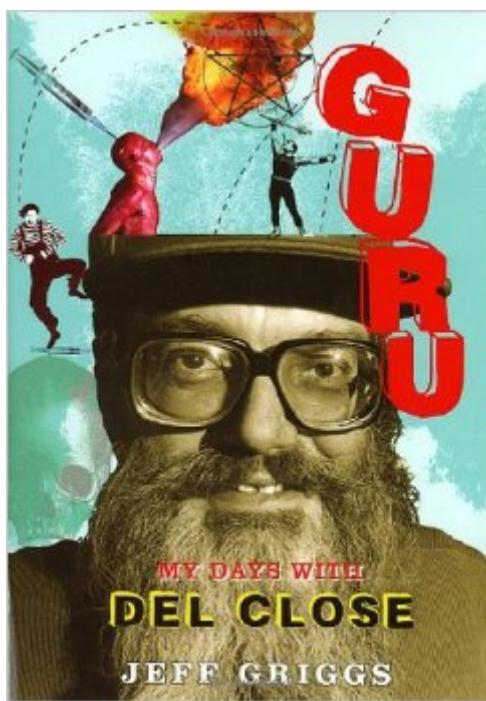


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Guru: My Days With Del Close



Synopsis

A legend of improvisational theater, Del Close is best known for discovering and cultivating the talents of John Belushi, Chris Farley, Bill Murray, Mike Meyers, and countless other comedy giants. He was resident director of Chicago's famed Second City and "house metaphysician" for "Saturday Night Live," a talent in his own right, and one of the brightest and wackiest theater gurus ever. Jeff Griggs was a student of Close's at the ImprovOlympic in Chicago when he was asked to help the aging mentor (often in ill health) by driving him around the city on his weekly errands. The two developed a volatile friendship that shocked, angered, and amused both of them and produced this hilarious and ultimately endearing chronicle of Close's last years. With all the elements of a picaresque novel, Guru captures Close at his zaniest but also shows him in theatrical situations that confirm his genius in conceptualizing and directing improvisational theater. Between comic episodes, Jeff Griggs gives the reader the essentials of Close's biography: his childhood in Kansas, early years as an actor, countercultural exploits in the 1960s (he toured with Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters and designed light shows for the Grateful Dead), years with the Compass Players and then with Second City, and continuing experimentation with every drug imaginable, which pretty much cost him his health and ultimately his life. He was comedian, director, teacher, writer, actor, poet, fire-eater, junkie, and philosopher. "Being a really good actor does not necessarily guarantee that you will be a very good improviser," Close liked to say. "Being an actual, complete, hopeless, wretched geek in real life doesn't disqualify you from being a solid improviser, either." He approached improv the same way he conducted his life—in bizarre, dark, and dangerous fashion. Guru captures it.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

True genius - that of visionary and driving force caliber - is rarely seen and even less seldom acknowledged during one's own lifetime. Del Close, the father of long-form improvisational theatre and the idea of improv as an art form, casts a long shadow as the central figure of *Guru: My Days with Del Close*, by Jeff Griggs. In a mentor/protégé dynamic reminiscent of Ronald Harwood's "The Dresser", Griggs - a young, talented performer - finds himself entrusted with, at first, weekly errands for the slowly ailing Close. A somewhat odd pairing from the start - the ever-rebellious, outspoken and temperamental Close and the somewhat reserved, patient Griggs - find they are alike at the very core as both are insightful, driven and passionate about the work on stage. In his teachings at IO (formerly ImprovOlympic) in Chicago - along with Charna Halpern - Close taught, mentored and sometimes fought fiercely for honesty and intelligence onstage. Through Griggs we are privy to the secrets, insights and, oftentimes, despair that accompanied a mind of such magnitude. The critiques of class work, for instance, are priceless for anyone who has taken an improvisational stage class: Take it seriously. Commit. Think of your stage partner and your relationship together, over yourself. (In the spirit of full disclosure, I have been fortunate to have studied with teachers mentioned in this book, including Jeff Griggs, who is remarkably insightful as a teacher and tremendously talented as a performer. Being taught by a mentored student of Close's gives me a kind of "Closean Pedagogical Contact Buzz" - a metaphor Mr. Close might have enjoyed. Or not.

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