The Second City opened its doors on a snowy Chicago night in December of 1959. No one could have guessed that this small cabaret theatre would become the most influential and prolific comedy theatre in the world.

With its roots in the improvisational games of Viola Spolin, The Second City developed an entirely unique way of creating and performing comedy. Founded by Spolin’s son, Paul Sills, along with Howard Alk and Bernie Sahlins, The Second City was experimental and unconventional in its approach to both theatre and comedy. At a time when mother-in-law jokes were more the fashion, The Second City railed against the conformist culture with scenes that spoke to a younger generation.

The Broadway success of Mike Nichols and Elaine May – members of The Second City’s predecessor, The Compass Players – put attention on the fledgling company. Soon, alumni of The Second City – such as Alan Arkin, Barbara Harris, Robert Klein, David Steinberg and Fred Willard – began to cement the theater’s reputation for developing the finest comedic voices of each and every generation. With the debut of NBC’s Saturday Night Live, populated by Second City Alums John Belushi, Dan Aykroyd, and Gilda Radner, the theatre became internationally known for its ever increasing roster of comedy superstars.

Soon, Second City’s sister-theater in Canada developed its own sketch comedy series, SCTV, hailed as one of the greatest comedy series of all time and featuring an all-star cast that included Martin Short, Andrea Martin, Catherine O’Hara, John Candy, Eugene Levy, Dave Thomas, Joe Flaherty and Rick Moranis.

By the 1980’s, The Second City had become much more than a small cabaret theater on Chicago’s north side. In the middle of the decade, The Second City would begin a new era as Second City Toronto proprietors Andrew Alexander and Len Stuart would buy out Bernie Sahlins’ interest in The Second City Chicago and set in motion a new era of innovation for the company.

Today, The Second City continues to produce the premiere comic talent in the industry. From Mike Myers to Steve Carell, Stephen Colbert to Tina Fey – The Second City imprint is felt across every entertainment medium. Additionally, The Second City has grown well beyond a single stage to become a diversified entertainment company. Second City Training Centers in Chicago, Toronto, and Los Angeles teach thousands of students every week; four touring companies perform Second City revues all over North America and abroad; Second City Communications has become an industry leader in bringing improv-based methodologies to the corporate sector; and Second City continues to create unique media in television, film and the digital realm.