

SchoolTime

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dance music theater

Performances

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY

1906  
Centennial Season  
2006



## Study Guide

### Piccolo Teatro di Milano

Thursday, October 27, 2005, 11:00 am

Friday, October 28, 2005, 11:00 am

Zellerbach Playhouse

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# SchoolTime Study Guide

## Piccolo Teatro di Milano

A demonstration of *commedia dell'arte* and characters from *Arlecchino, Servant of Two Masters*

October 27, 2005 11:00 am

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## Italy

Piccolo Teatro di Milano is from Northern Italy. The characters in *Arlecchino*, *Servant of Two Masters* speak a dialect from Venice, also in Northern Italy.



# Welcome!

Dear Educator and Students,

Welcome to *SchoolTime*! On **Thursday, October 27** or **Friday October 28, 2005** at **11:00 a.m.** (check your confirmation form), you will attend a *SchoolTime* performance by members of **Piccolo Teatro di Milano**, Italy's renowned theater company specializing in *commedia dell'arte* (co-MAY-dee-ah del AR-tay), a form of street theater developed in Italy in the 16th and 17th centuries. This art form is distinguished by its style of improvised comedy that relies on the physical and verbal dexterity of the actors.

Founded in 1947, Piccolo Teatro di Milano is an ambassador of Italian culture on stages all over the world. The centuries-old, yet timelessly entertaining, story of *Arlecchino, Servant of Two Masters* (ar-le-KEE-no) will be explained in English as three or four actors impersonate characters from the play. Your students will thoroughly enjoy learning about the origins of slapstick comedy from these masters of comedic theater. "Anyone who has seen a Saturday morning television cartoon, an Abbott and Costello movie or a farce will recognize the comic techniques here," said *The New York Times*.

This study guide will help you prepare your students for what they will experience in the theater and give you a framework for how to bring *commedia dell'arte* into your curriculum. Targeted questions and exercises will help students understand the presentation and the art form, as well as the history and traditions of this influential genre of theater. Your students can actively participate at the performance by:

- OBSERVING how the actors use their bodies to communicate.
- WATCHING for characteristics that distinguish *commedia dell'arte* from other styles of theater.
- THINKING ABOUT how the performers learn their skills and what they must do to prepare for the performance.
- REFLECTING on what they have learned about *commedia dell'arte* and the world of comedic theater.

We look forward to seeing you at the theater!

Sincerely,

Laura Abrams  
Director

Rachel Davidman  
Administrator

Education and Community Programs, Cal Performances



# 1 Theater Etiquette



## **Be prepared and arrive early**

Ideally you should be at the theater 30-45 minutes before the show begins so that you can allow for travel time and parking, and be in your seats at least 15 minutes before the performance begins.



## **Be aware and remain quiet**

A theater is a “live” space—you can hear the performers easily, but they can also hear you, and you can hear other audience members, too! Even the smallest sounds like rustling papers and whispering can be heard throughout the theater — so it’s best to stay quiet so that everyone can enjoy the performance without distractions. The international sign for “Quiet Please” is to silently raise your index finger to your lips.



## **Show appreciation by applauding**

Applause is the best way to show your enthusiasm and appreciation. Performers return their appreciation for your attention by bowing to the audience at the end of the show. It is always appropriate to applaud at the end of a performance, and it is customary to continue clapping until the curtain comes down or the house lights come up.



## **Participate by responding to the action onstage**

Sometimes during a performance, you may respond by laughing, crying or sighing. By all means, feel free to do so! Appreciation can be shown in many different ways, depending upon the art form. For instance, an audience attending a string quartet performance will sit very quietly, while the audience at a gospel concert may be inspired to participate by clapping and shouting.



## **Concentrate to help the performers**

Performers use concentration to focus their energy while on stage. If the audience is focused while watching the performance, the artists feel supported and are able to do their best work. They can feel that you are with them!

# 2 Setting the Stage

## Learning Objectives

The following are three learning objectives for the Piccolo Teatro di Milano performance. You may develop others that suit your own curriculum needs.

- Students will gain an understanding of *commedia dell'arte* and its contributions to the theatrical world.
- Students will be able to identify stock characters and make relevant connections to comedy today.
- Students will be familiar with and able to describe at least 3 characters from *Arlecchino, Servant of Two Masters*

## Pre-Performance Questions

Reviewing these questions with your students prior to the performance will help them prepare for *SchoolTime*. Students who are familiar with the vocabulary, concepts, and themes they will encounter on stage are much more likely to enjoy and connect with the performance.

After reading or paraphrasing the following information about *commedia dell'arte* with your students, take a moment to discuss these questions:



- What distinguishes *commedia dell'arte* from other forms of theater?
- What are the key “ingredients” of a *commedia dell'arte* performance?
- How does live theater differ from other types of media and entertainment?

## Vocabulary

Vocabulary boxes are provided within various sections. Students can look up definitions and then use the words in a sentence or essay about *commedia dell'arte*.

# 3 About the *SchoolTime* Performance

## Teatro Piccolo di Milano Presents a demonstration of *commedia dell'arte* and characters from *Arlecchino, Servant of Two Masters*

Three or four actors will impersonate the characters **Arlecchino**, **Pantalone** and **Smeraldina**. One of them will also act as a narrator who, in English, tells the story of the play. The actors will perform some basic *commedia dell'arte* actions, including characteristic improvised comedic routines known as *lazzi*.



What do the actors' body positions communicate to you?

### Plot Summary

*Adapted from an article by David Finkle*

(This plot summary provides a context for the characters who will appear in the Piccolo Teatro di Mialano *SchoolTime* performance. *Arlecchino, Servant of Two Masters* will be performed in its entirety October 26-30, 2005 at the Zellerbach Playhouse)

Director Giorgio Strehler's work is a play within a play. In *Arlecchino, Servant of Two Masters* there is action both on the stage and alongside it. When the actors step off the center-stage risers, they drop their characters; a prompter leafing through a worn script comments on how he thinks the players are doing; musicians gather to accompany the occasional "on-stage" singing; and the actors relieve each other in carrying various props.

The ingenious goofball **Arlecchino** attends to two masters who are unaware that he's drawing dual salaries. The character Beatrice Rasponi has come to Venice disguised as her late brother, Federigo; she aims to resume her love affair with Florindo Aretusi. Florindo



happens to be her brother's murderer, but that doesn't seem to have affect on her ardor. As Federigo, Beatrice pretends to court Clarice, the daughter of another stock character of *commedia dell'arte*, **Pantalone**. The thick-skulled Pantalone, having heard news of Federigo's demise, agrees to allow Clarice—who was once Federigo's intended—to marry her chosen swain, Silvio, Dr. Lombardi's son .

**Arlecchino** has been retained as a personal servant by both Beatrice( Federigo) and Florindo, and he must try to satisfy both of them, a feat that he accomplishes only intermittently. More often, he's preoccupied with filling his stomach and handing off letters to the wrong recipients, confusing his masters' belongings and wielding his actual slapstick, a noisemaker made from two pieces of wood he keeps tucked in his belt. In the end, the romantic lovers are united, Pantalone is pacified. Arlecchino, finally fed, is exonerated and betrothed to Clarice's maid, **Smeraldina**.



Arlecchino, with his slapstick and Smeraldina. Scenes from *Arlecchino, Servant of Two Masters*.

impersonate  
prompter  
demise  
slapstick  
exonerated

### Vocabulary

lazzi  
ingenious  
swain  
pacified  
betrothed

improvise  
ardor  
intermittently  
wielding

# 4 About the Artists

## Questions About the Artists:



- Based on the reading about Carlo Goldini, the playwright of *Arlecchino, Servant of Two Masters*, how would you describe his personality and character?
- How would it be to perform the same role for 10 years? How might Giorgio Bongiovanni, who plays the role of Pantalone, respond to that question?
- What kind of training do you think is required to be an actor with Piccolo Teatro di Milano?

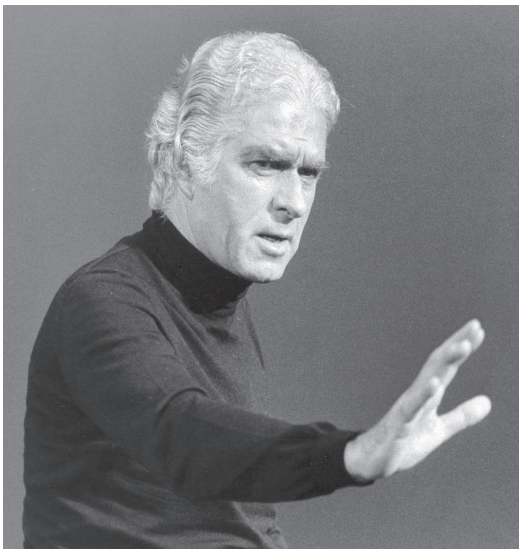
## Piccolo Teatro di Milano

Known worldwide as an ambassador of Italian culture, Piccolo Teatro di Milano was founded as the first Italian public theater in 1947 by **Giorgio Strehler**, Paolo Grassi and Nina Yinchi. With the slogan “A Theater of Art for Everybody,” the company has three venues in Italy in addition to its traveling stage, which is sometimes called its fourth stage. Over the last half-century, the company has traveled to more than 200 cities worldwide and has performed *Arlecchino, Servant of Two Masters* and other *commedia dell’arte* works over 2300 times.

Since Strehler’s death in 1997, Piccolo Teatro has been managed by Sergio Escobar and stage director Luca Ronconi. In addition to *commedia dell’arte* and the works of Carlo Goldoni, the Piccolo Teatro presents great classical dramas, including works by Shakespeare, Chekhov, Brecht, Beckett, and Pirandello. In 1991 it was named a “Theatre of Europe” by the Union of European Theatres, an international organization that fosters cultural exchanges among theaters. Every year since 1999 it has organized an international theater festival in Milan, with theater companies coming from around the world to perform.

## Carlo Goldoni, *Playwright*

One of Italy's greatest playwrights, Carlo Goldoni was born in 1707 in Venice and wrote his first play at age eight. He wrote many drafts of *Servant of Two Masters*, (or *Servitori di deu padrone*; the character name Arlecchino was added to the title years later by Georgio Strehler). Goldoni wrote 16 comedies in 1750 and 1751, and together they constitute his manifesto of theatrical ideas. When productions of his first few works were not well received in Milan and Venice, Goldoni decided that the Italian stage needed to be reformed. He abandoned the 17th-century neoclassical theatrical traditions and the current form of improvised buffoonery known as *commedia dell'arte*, and set about developing a new comedy of manners, which was inspired by the people he knew and by his critical observations of the society of his time. His comedies demonstrate a sharp eye for the difficulties, paradoxes, and injustices of life. Throughout his career, he was attacked by rivals who never accepted his theatrical innovations. In 1761 he left Italy and joined the Comédie Italienne in Paris. Goldoni died in 1793 after several years of illness. As a playwright, his life's work totalled 120 plays.



## Giorgio Strehler, *Director*

Affectionately called "The Maestro" by his European audiences, Giorgio Strehler was one of the most celebrated directors of the 20th century. Born in the Italian city of Trieste in 1921, Strehler graduated from the Filodrammatici Drama School in Milan. He interrupted his career to join the Resistance movement during World War II. After the war, Strehler returned to Milan, and in 1947 founded Piccolo Teatro di Milano, Italy's first public theater, with Paolo Grassi and Nina Vinchi.

During his 50 years as artistic director of Piccolo Teatro, Strehler developed a theater that was formally rigorous, politically committed, and open to a broad audience. Over the

ambassador  
neo-classical  
rivals

### Vocabulary

venues  
theatrical traditions  
"The Maestro"

manifesto  
paradoxes  
artistic director



course of his career he directed some 200 plays and operas in Milan, Rome, Paris, and Salzburg. Strehler died in 1997.

### **Enrico Bonavera, actor, *Arlecchino***

Enrico Bonavera, the understudy for Ferruccio Soleri in the role of Arlecchino, has worked with Piccolo Teatro since 1987. In the evenings, you may see him perform the role of *Brighella*, the Inn Keeper. His career includes theatrical research projects as well as a long list of acting roles all over Italy. He also teaches theater internationally.

### **Giorgio Bongiovanni, actor, *Pantalone de' Bisognosi***

Giorgio Bongiovanni studied at the Piccolo Teatro School and has performed in a number of Piccolo Teatro productions, many under the direction of Giorgio Strehler. He has performed the role of Pantalone for ten years. His acting career includes many Piccolo roles and work with other notable Italian directors.

### **Alessandra Gigli, actress, *Smeraldina***

Alessandra Gigli, a young actress who studied with director Giorgio Strehler at the Piccolo Teatro School, has worked in Italy in dramatic and musical theater and on television. Her passion for theater is matched by her passion for singing, ranging from folk to jazz, which has also led her to work with a number of musical groups.



What might be going on in this scene? What could the gestures be expressing? What else do you notice that gives you information about this scene?

# 5 About the Art Form: *Commedia dell'arte*

## Questions about *Commedia dell'arte*



- What is *commedia dell'arte*?
- How did this art form begin and where?
- Are there similar stock characters in American comedy?

## What is *Commedia dell'arte*? An Overview

Written by Mel Gordon, UC Berkeley Professor of Theater

*Commedia dell'arte* (co-MAY-dee-ah del AR-tay), the theatrical genre that emerged from the urban centers of Renaissance Italy in the 16th century, altered European notions of comedy and humor. It also signaled the beginnings of modern acting in Western culture. *Commedia* troupes included female performers and children – a strange innovation where previously men and boys acted all the parts. Since the *commedia* performers' dialogues were mostly improvised and unscripted, spectators had to judge the productions on the actors' onstage creativity, not the work of an unseen playwright or director.

Itinerant *commedia* ensembles staged their first performances in Northern Italy and Bavaria (now part of Germany) around 1550 and, within one century, were seen throughout Europe. The hundreds of troupes became so wildly popular that civic authorities in Spain and France tried to ban or limit their activities. Not only was the *commedia dell'arte* considered obscene and anti-clerical, the monies the Italian actors collected were thought to be a drain on the national treasuries of those countries.

During its two-hundred year heyday, *commedia dell'arte* troupes naturally varied considerably in style and artistry, yet they shared certain characteristics: the performers were full-time, professional actors; the same stereotypical characters (stock characters), appeared in every play and were instantly recognized by their adoring audiences in play after play; most of the *commedia* characters spoke only Italian and wore grotesque-looking half-masks, which necessitated a broad physicality; and the action was clownish and frequently bawdy.



What do these 4 masks have in common? What makes them particular to *commedia dell'arte*?

Like its actors, the *commedia* itself was flexible and adaptive. Performances could take place in marketplace booths, castle dining halls, enclosed arenas, or on formal vista stages. Additionally, the ridiculous *commedia* slapstick appealed to all social classes and varieties of audiences. It was no wonder that local censors attempted to discourage its knockabout antics. Playwrights like Shakespeare and Moliere unashamedly borrowed from the *commedia's* characters and graphic storytelling. By the time the traditional *commedia dell'arte* began to disappear from public view in the 1740s, it had become the very symbol of European theatricality.

**Vocabulary**

- genre
- playwright
- itinerant
- ensemble
- anti-clerical
- heyday
- stereotypical
- stock characters
- physicality
- bawdy
- vista stages
- censors

### Basic *Commedia dell'Arte* Stock Characters

*\*Commedia dell' arte* involves a long list of stock characters. The characters listed here are just a sampling. Those with an asterisk will be part of the Piccolo Teatro di Milano *SchoolTime* performance.

*Commedia* characters can be separated into three groups. There are those with money ( masters), those without money (the servants or *zanni*) and the lovers. The friction between each group results in the physical and bold comedy found in *commedia*. There is a constant power struggle between masters and their *zanni*, usually with the masters being made to look like fools, whether they realize it or not.

The servants were known as zanni, from which, the word 'zany' is derived. Much of the comedy within *commedia dell'arte* comes from the actions of the *zanni*. They are workers and as such, show signs of a life of hard work. There is a clear division between the masters,



who are involved in the *commedia* plots and the *zanni*, who are involved in the scenario's unraveling, and seem to possess an independent comic existence.

## Master Characters

**\*Pantalone.** Fool. A cheap and ridiculously gullible, old merchant from Venice, who is an idiotic authoritarian figure who attempts to disguise his old age through his tight-fitting Turkish outfit. Although he is married to a beautiful woman (who often cuckolds him), he chases other women. Rarely successful, he never gives up hope.



Pantalone

He wears red breeches, a red vest, and a black ankle-length coat and carries a handkerchief, a money-pouch and wears a dark brown mask with a hooked nose. Pantalone is bent over both from age and from the effort he takes to protect his money pouch.

**The Dottore.** Fool. A pompous and Latin-spouting scholar from Bologna whose speech is filled with malapropisms and gibberish. He is often greedy with members of his family and is a great bore to other characters. He has a pot-belly, and wears black from head to toe except for his white collar. His face is distinguished by a red spot on the cheek. He wears a black semi-mask that only covers his nose.



Capitano

**The Capitano.** Trickster. A vainglorious and insufferable soldier, usually from Spain, who constantly boasts of his victories in war and love, but is always discovered to be a pathetic coward and terrified of women. He wears a huge, plumed hat with a flowing cape and an over-sized sword. He also sports a tiger-cat moustache, speaks with a Castillian accent and bass voice, and moves with flowing motions. He wears a black mask with round eyes and a huge, sometimes malformed, nose.

## Zanni (Servants)

**Brighella.** Wildman. A violent and cynical libertine who becomes involved in schemes of unlawful seduction and theft. His costume is white trousers and a green-striped jacket. He carries a dagger in his belt, which he sometimes uses to poke holes in curtains and wine barrels. He sports a beard and moustache, and wears a brown mask with a hooked nose and upturned eyebrows.

**\*Arlecchino.** Wildman. A fool or child-man from Bergamo. He is either completely stupid or has the wit and cunning of a young brat. A master of disguises, Arlecchino is extremely agile and acrobatic. He speaks with a deep parrot-like voice. His costume includes a small grey, felt hat, often with a hare's tail attached, and a multi-colored, patched, short waistcoat and breeches. He always carries a wooden sword, or slapstick, and wears a black mask with a snub nose.



Arlecchino

**Columbine.** Wildwoman. The maid of one of the old men or the wife of Arlecchino, this character (here called Smeraldina) is a happy-go-lucky and successful schemer. She is intelligent, pretty, small, and skilled in dance and rhetoric. She can also exhibit a vulgar but charming interest in sex. She dresses like her mistress or Arlecchino, but always wears a small apron.

### **Lazzi: The Comic Routines of *Commedia dell'Arte***

*Commedia* performers are universally praised for their laughter-inducing improvised dialogues and off-the-cuff mimicry. Much of the *commedia's* comic and super-physical stage business is familiar and repetitive, and is often at odds with or independent of the complex *commedia* storylines. These discrete and spontaneous character routines are known as *lazzi* (LAHT-zee). These *lazzi* have normally been the high points of the *commedia* comic interaction, and audiences have come to expect them.

**lazzo**  
**(singular)**

**lazzi**  
**(plural)**

Acrobatic, obscene, or ridiculous, specialized *lazzi* can be planned or unplanned and are often dropped into any one of dozens of plays. Rather than furthering the plot, *lazzi* generally interrupt the stage story and appeal directly to the spectators' sense of whimsy. Individual actors, especially those playing Arlecchino, have perfected a crazed repertoire of these often repeated bits of stage business.

How the *lazzi* were traditionally initiated on the stage is a debatable point. Some routines were obviously used whenever a scene appeared to drag on too long and were totally improvised by one actor. Others, involving stage properties and several actors, had to be intricately planned in advance. Still other *lazzi* could be instigated by a single performer, forcing unsuspecting partners to improvise around him or her.

## Examples of Different *Lazzi*

### *Lazzi of the Ladder*

There are many different comic routines that begin with Arlecchino carrying a ladder. In this scenario one of the following actions can occur: (a) Arlecchino walks the ladder as if it were a pair of stilts; (b) The ladder keeps slipping when placed against the wall; (c) Suddenly frightened, Pantalone shakes the ladder as Arlecchino attempts to pick apples; (d) Determined not to let Arlecchino reach the top, Brighella rattles the ladder as the upper half bends back and forth; (e) In a panic, Arlecchino continues to slip off the ladder's rungs as the Captain shouts for him to hurry and drop his love letter in the lover's window; (f) The ladder that Arlecchino is climbing bends at the top so that he enters the wrong window; and (g) Arlecchino and another character each bring in a ladder and place it against the other: creating a "Roman ladder" they form several acrobatic positions, walk on double stilts, and wind up climbing over each other.



### *Lazzo of the Tooth Extractor*

The Doctor [or Arlecchino disguised as a dentist] fools Pantalone into thinking that rotten teeth are causing his obnoxious breath. Using oversized or ridiculous tools, the Doctor extracts two or more good teeth from Pantalone's mouth.

### *Lazzo of the Chase*

With a drawn sword, the Captain chases Arlecchino. They remain on the stage in a stationary position as they mime running, each slightly out of reach of the other. As they run, each begins to acknowledge the audience's response.

## Piccolo Teatro di Milano and the New *Commedia*

It is difficult to think of an historical style that has affected 20th-century acting more than the *commedia dell'arte*. Some of the most popular entertainments of the 20th century—such as motion picture comedy, both silent and with sound, and radio comedy—are closely related to the *commedia*. Charlie Chaplin, W. C. Fields, Bert Lahr, the Marx Brothers, Jack Benny, or Laurel and Hardy are 20th-century comedic actors who have drawn their style and material from *commedia dell'arte*.

Today, the Piccolo Teatro di Milano is internationally recognized as one of the premier practitioners of *commedia dell'arte*. In addition to managing three professional theaters, the Piccolo created a highly acclaimed acting school with 70 full-time and 150 part-time members. Graduates from its many programs have created independent *commedia* theaters throughout Europe and North America. Because of the Piccolo's supreme artistry, Arlecchino still waves his slapstick in our astonished faces, and the show still lives in Italian and gibberish.

### Vocabulary

whimsy  
mimicry  
repertoire  
instigated  
dialogues  
practioners  
spectator



Can you identify any of the characters?  
How does the set contribute to the scene?



# 6 Activities and Exercises

## *Commedia dell'arte* Glossary

**lazzi:** (LAHT-zee) Extended comedic riffs that frequently interrupt the action.

**commedia dell' arte:** ( co-MAY-dee-ah del AR-tay) “Comedy of the Art” or “Comedy of the profession” means unwritten or improvised drama, and refers to the manner of performance rather than to the subject matter of the play. This genre had a long life in Italy, probably of about four hundred years (from the 14th to the 18th century). It flourished especially in the 16th and 17th centuries.

**dialect:** A regional or social variety of a language that varies by pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary. Speech that differs from the standard literary language or speech pattern of the culture in which it exists.

**slapstick:** A theatrical prop made out of two thin strips of wood separated at the handle by about half an inch. When the slapstick hits an object, the two strips of wood slap against each other, making a loud sound without hurting the person being hit. Arlecchino wears a belt and a slapstick. “Slapstick comedy” is named after this prop.

**stock characters:** The actors of the *commedia* represent fixed social types (*tipi fissi*), for example, foolish old men, devious servants, or military officers full of false bravado. Characters such as Pantalone, the miserly Venetian merchant; Dottore Gratiano, the pedant from Bologna; or Arlecchino, the mischievous servant from Bergamo, began as satires on Italian “types” and became the archetypes for many of the favorite characters of 17th- and 18th-century European theater.

# Language Arts

## ***Post -performance acitivity***

### ***Activity 1: Be a Critic***

Reviews are an important part of the professional performing arts world. Reviews are written by critics to describe the show and let the general public know what he/she thought of the performance. This activity allows students to “put on the critics hat” and express their own point of view about the performance.

***Objective:*** To learn about the art of writing a review of a performance.

***Time:*** Class period.

***Materials:*** Copies of “Arlecchino Steals Spotlight at Theater Fest,” a sample review from *The Gazette*, Colorado. (See page 20.)

#### ***Procedure:***

1. Read the sample review as a class, in pairs or individually. Identify words or phrases that seem to be particular to the writing style of the review. Discuss the critic’s response to the performance and any bias that may have been included in writing the review.
2. Have students write a review of the *SchoolTime* performance they attended at Cal Performances. Make sure to include the date, time and place of the performance. Remember that a review includes the whole experience, including elements of the performance space, for example; the climate in the theater, condition of the theater, did the performance start on time? These elements are all part of the audience experience and will help others decide whether or not they want to see the performance.
3. Have students share their reviews with each other and then with the whole class.
4. As a culmination of this activity we invite you to nominate a few of the reviews to be:  
1) submitted to Cal Performances; 2) included in your class newsletter; or 3) submitted to your school newspaper.

## **Activity 2: Comedy in the Classroom**

Students will have great fun writing their own *lazzi* scenarios and acting them out in class. This key component of *commedia dell'arte* can be updated when your students write and enact their own scenes that will have you and the rest of the class laughing out loud.

**Objective:** Students will engage in creative writing using their imagination to create comedic scenarios that can be performed in class.

**Time:** Class period.

**Procedure:**

1. Have a class discussion about comedy. Show clips from Charlie Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, The Three Stooges, or any other slapstick comedy performance. Read aloud the examples on page 20.
2. As a class, brainstorm about classroom scenarios that could be considered *lazzi*. After students have had some time to work together as a class, break them up into small groups of 3 or 4 to write their own scenarios. It is good to have a theme or focus.

Prompt ideas for *lazzi* scenarios:

- A group of friends spend Saturday afternoon at an amusement park
  - On the way to school
  - The teacher is late for class and students are waiting
3. Have students share their scenarios. Then put them all in a box, and have each group pick one that they will work on to present to the whole class.

**Note:** Violence and obscenity are part of *commedia*. You may want to discuss the difference between staged action and the use of the slapstick as a substitute for actually slapping someone. Creating guidelines for their scenarios will also help students stay on the task at hand.

# Visual Art

## *Commedia dell'arte* Paper Masks

Masks are a key element of *commedia dell'arte* productions. With this activity your students will make masks based on *commedia dell'arte* styles. These can then be used with theater games, or in the *lazzi* your students create.

**Objective:** Students will create a three-dimensional mask based on a particular character or theme from *commedia dell'arte*.

**Time:** Allow 1 hour for the art project and clean up. Additional time is needed to prepare materials ahead of time and present the topic or theme for the masks.

**Materials:**

Poster board or lightweight cardboard for the mask

Pencils and erasers

Scissors

Glue sticks or tacky glue

Transparent tape and colored tape

Hole punchers

Wooden dowels 12 inches in length—one for each mask

Stapler (optional)

Colored construction paper or other easy-to-cut papers

Assorted washable markers

Yarn, raffia, stick-on “jewels,” ribbons, feathers, pipe cleaners, (materials which can be easily glued, woven through holes or stapled to the mask )


**Preparation:**

Depending on the grade level, cut the mask template or cut a few templates to pass among students. Cut papers into small geometric or organic shapes. Cut extra poster board into small pieces. They can be used to change the shape of the basic mask, including making the hooked noses.

**Procedure:**

1. Show the pictures of masks on page 12, or use other examples to introduce students to the characteristics of a *commedia dell'arte* mask. Students should have a general idea in mind for their mask. Have students draw a picture of what they want the mask to look like.



- 
2. Trace the mask template on to poster board with a pencil. Cut it out. Eyeholes can be made by cutting a slit from the side of the mask to each eye, then covering the slit with tape to re-close.
  3. Cut shapes from poster board and tape to the basic form if a different mask shape is desired.
  4. Cut pieces of colored papers to cover the mask. Use glue stick or stapler to apply the papers to the mask. Cut fringe, strips, make paper chains, punch holes, etc. Add embellishments such as feathers, pipe cleaners, stick-on jewels, yarn, colored tape, raffia, ribbon, or other materials. Markers can be used to create patterns and designs if desired.
  5. Attach the dowel to one side of the mask. Attach securely with masking tape or other strong tape. Be sure to balance the dowel so the mask will not fall forward.

**Tips:**

- Paper strips can be curled around pencils before applying to the masks.
- Wooden chopsticks can be used for lightweight masks instead of wooden dowels.

## **Drama**

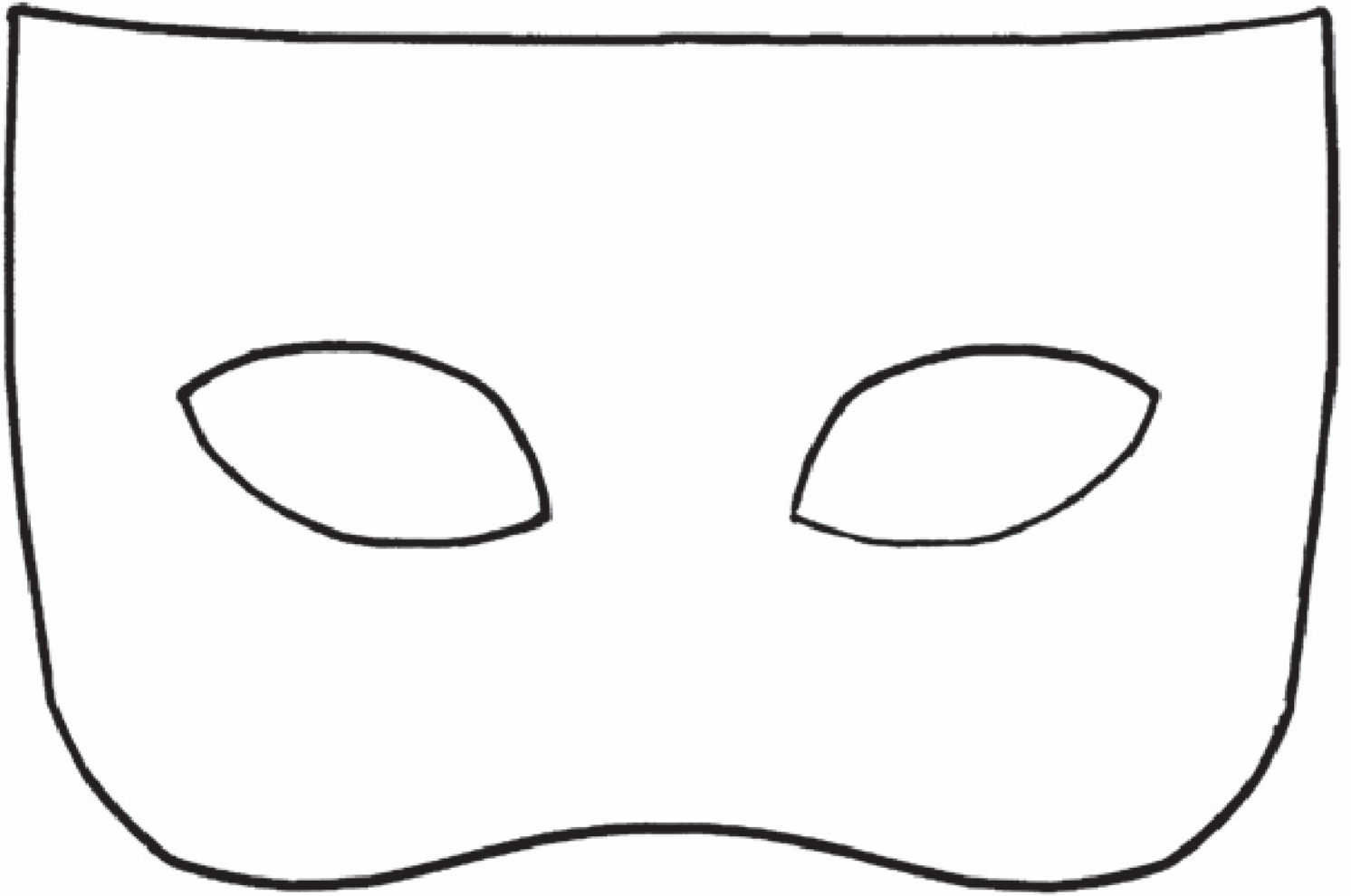
### ***Wearing the Masks***

***Objectives:***

1. Become comfortable with wearing a close fitting mask.
2. Understand the physicality involved when performing with a mask.
3. Learn how to exaggerate gestures and expressions.

***Materials:*** *Commedia dell'arte* masks (preferably ones that students have made)

***Procedure:*** The teacher acts as the director. The students work in groups of six. Wearing their masks, students line up with their backs to the audience giving each other as much elbow room as possible. When they are ready, each student will be cued to turn and approach the audience in character moving around the space. The characters begin to move around and talk all at the same time. When the director calls “freeze” they return to their poses. Then one at a time they talk and move around individually when cued. After everyone in the class has had a chance to experience a mask, they can play with different character encounters, or have them act out the *lazzi* scenarios.



sample of finished mask



# 'Arlecchino' steals spotlight at theater fest

By MARK ARNEST  
THE GAZETTE

## REVIEW

Over the past two weeks, the Colorado Festival of World Theatre presented eight plays. All were good; several were outstanding.

But the weekend performances of "Arlecchino, Servant of Two Masters" were the festival's highlight. For three frenetic hours, the Piccolo Teatro di Milano served the audience a feast of comic brilliance.

The star was the legendary Ferruccio Soleri as Arlecchino. It's a role Soleri has performed more than 2,000 times since 1960. As Soleri recently told the New York Times, Arlecchino isn't Hamlet; he's just a lovable man-child, resourceful one moment, blundering the next — and always hungry.

However, the role's physical demands are huge, and the 75-year-old Soleri proved he's still up to the task. He can do a full flip. His energy and skill are marvelous to behold whether he's attempting to re-seal a letter, struggling to swat a fly, or waiting tables — a scene that requires the most precise timing imaginable.

Carlo Goldoni's 1745 play pays homage to the Renaissance commedia dell'arte, the improvised, slapstick street theater that would eventually develop into the physical comedy of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton. Goldoni tied the hijinks to a slightly more sub-

stantial story than was usual.

But only slightly. Clarice is about to marry her beloved Silvio — whose hotheadedness is equalled only by his ineptitude with a sword — when it turns out Clarice's previous betrothed, Federigo, has not been murdered as was reported; instead, he's in Venice with his servant, Arlecchino.

"Federigo" is really Beatrice, the murdered man's sister, who's come looking for Florindo, his murderer — whom she loves. Meanwhile, Arlecchino takes on a second master, who coincidentally turns out to be Florindo.

The deceptions and mistaken identities gave director Giorgio Strehler room for every visual pun and sight gag in history. (Strehler died in 1997; Soleri directed this restaging.) In this enormously sophisticated low comedy, every situation and prop is mined for comic gold, from the innkeeper Brighella's stammering over words beginning with "c" (it's a naughty pun in Italian) to the feather in Silvio's cap that keeps finding its way into Florindo's face.

Soleri is joined by an extraordinary ensemble — eight principals, four nimble extras, and five musicians. Even the prompter gets into the act.

Everyone gets a moment to shine — as Clarice's maid Smeraldina, Alessandra Gigli got es-



PHOTO COURTESY OF COLORADO FESTIVAL OF WORLD THEATRE  
At 75, Ferruccio Soleri still has plenty of energy and dexterity for his title role in "Arlecchino, Servant of Two Masters." The legendary comedian has played the part more than 2,000 times since 1960.

pecially enthusiastic applause for her tirade on sexual double standards — but what's most impressive is the speed and intensity of the actors' interaction.

The comic climax is surely the theater's funniest recognition scene, and it would be both rude and indelicate to give the joke away.

"Arlecchino" was presented in Italian with English supertitles. I'd never more deeply regretted not knowing Italian: Not only is Goldoni's plot ex-

tremely twisted, but there's no way any translation could keep up with dialogue that runs at the average speed of a Gilbert and Sullivan patter song.

But by the second act, the richness of the physical action had taken over, and I almost stopped looking at the text.

The Piccolo Teatro's production of "Arlecchino" is the dictionary definition of "classic": The company's energy and inventiveness bring centuries of theatrical tradition to life.

# 7 Supplemental Resources for *Commedia dell'arte*

Cal Performances' Education and Humanities programs offered in conjunction with the Piccolo Teatro di Milano performances.

## ***Sightlines* Pre-Performance Talks**

Zellerbach Playhouse

*Wed, Oct 26, 7:00-7:30 pm* / Professor Paolo Bosisio, University of Milan

*Thu, Oct 27, 7:00-7:30 pm* / Professor Mel Gordon, UC Berkeley

*Fri, Oct 28, 7:00-7:30 pm* / Professor Bosisio

*Sat, Oct 29, 7:00-7:30 pm* / Professor Gordon

## ***Commedia* in the Bay Area**

*Sat, Oct 22, 3:00-6:00 pm*

Zellerbach Playhouse

A panel discussion moderated by Professor Mel Gordon, with the Dell'Arte Players, and others. The Dell'Arte Players is a unique organization devoted to the art of the actor/creator and to the development of "Theatre of Place." Internationally renowned for its stunning physical theatre virtuosity and exciting combination of themes and styles, including mask, music, movement, and amazing special effects. The company is also known for its unique residency work in communities and for its master classes in physical theater forms.

## **Exhibitions**

Zellerbach Playhouse Lobby

*Fri-Sun, Oct 21-30*

*Commedia dell'arte* curated by Mel Gordon & costumes from Piccolo Teatro di Milano.

## **Making Theater with Ferruccio Soleri of Piccolo Teatro di Milano**

Zellerbach Playhouse

*Thu, Oct 27, 3:30-5:00 pm*

Regarded as the definitive *commedia dell'arte* actor on any stage, Ferruccio Soleri made his debut in the role of Arlecchino in 1953.



## **Conference**

### **Taboo and Humor: What's Funny and What's Forbidden**

*Fri, Oct 28, 3:00-5:00 pm*

*Zellerbach Playhouse*

Mel Gordon moderates a discussion with Jim Valley, writer for *Arrested Development*; Maggie Rowe, director of *Hollywood Hellhouse*; Jack Perez, cult film director and writer of *Wild Things II*; and Paolo Bosisio of the University of Milan, with a cameo appearance by Ferruccio Soleri.

## **Websites**

<http://www.commedia-dell-arte.com>

<http://www.theatrehistory.com/italian/>

<http://www.isebastiani.com/Scenarios.html>

## **Books**

Ducharte, Pierre Louis. *The Italian Comedy*, Dover Books.

Fishetto, Laura. *The Harlequin and the Green Dress*. For ages 4 to 8.

Lawner, Lynn. *Harlequin on the Moon: Commedia dell'Arte and the Visual Arts*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1998.

# 8 Connections to California State Standards

## California State Content Standards Theater Grades K-12

For the particulars to your grade level please visit:

<http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/index.asp>

### 1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

#### Processing, Analyzing, And Responding To Sensory Information Through The Language And Skills Unique To Theater

Students observe their environment and respond, using the elements of theater. They also observe formal and informal works of theater, film/video, and electronic media and respond, using the vocabulary of theater.

### 2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

#### Creating, Performing, And Participating In Theater

Students apply processes and skills in acting, directing, designing, and scriptwriting to create formal and informal theatre, film/videos, and electronic media productions and to perform in them.

### 3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

#### Understanding the historical contributions and cultural dimensions of theater

Students analyze the role and development of theater, film/video, and electronic media in past and present cultures throughout the world, noting diversity as it relates to theater.

### 4.0 AESTHETIC VALUING

#### Responding to, analyzing, and critiquing theatrical experiences

Students critique and derive meaning from works of theater, film/video, electronic media, and theatrical artists on the basis of aesthetic qualities.

# Theater Standards Directly Connected to *Commedia dell'Arte*

## Grade 5

### 2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

#### *Development of Theatrical Skills*

2.1 Participate in improvisational activities to explore complex ideas and universal themes in literature and life.

## Grade 6

### 2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

#### *Development of Theatrical Skills*

2.1 Participate in improvisational activities, demonstrating an understanding of and context.

#### *Creation/Invention in Theater*

2.2 Use effective vocal expression, gesture, facial expression, and timing to create character.

2.3 Write and perform scenes or one-act plays that include monologue, dialogue, action, and setting together with a range of character types.

## Grade 7

### 1.0 ARTISTIC PERCEPTION

#### *Development of the Vocabulary of Theater*

1.1 Use the vocabulary of theater, such as playwright, rehearsal, dress rehearsal, run-through, and cold reading, to describe theatrical experiences.

### 2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

#### *Development of Theatrical Skills*

2.1 Use improvisation in rehearsal to discover character and motivation.

2.2 Maintain a rehearsal script/notebook to record directions and blocking.

### 3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

#### *History of Theatre*

3.2 Compare and contrast various theater styles throughout history, such as those of Ancient Greece, Elizabethan theater (English), Kabuki theater (Japanese), Kathakali dance theater (Indian), and *commedia dell'arte* (Italian).



This Cal Performances *SchoolTime* Study Guide was  
written, edited, designed and produced by  
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with contributions by Professor Mel Gordon  
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