



# ZANNIZINE

A QUARTERLY ON-LINE MAG DEVOTED TO COMMEDIA

Issue 12 – Spring/Summer 2026

**PLAYING COMMEDIA**



## INTRODUCING ISSUE 12 OF ZANNIZINE

Hello and welcome. It is my turn to introduce you to our next edition of ZANNIZINE and in fact, apologise for its alarmingly tardy appearance and tell you what happened – or to be more precise what didn't happen. So I am going to count on your indulgence and tell you a little of the quite amusing story of Zannizine's creation.

You may be aware that I have spent much of my life involved in *Commedia* and I have always been fascinated with the 'Magazines' that often precede and promote 'Movements' in art. For instance, the Russian *Mir Iskustva (World of Art)* (1900-1904) was a progressive publication which expressed the aims of a group of young Russian artists including Alexander Benois, which later inspired the creation of Diaghilev's *Ballet Russes* (1910); Edward Gordon Craig's *The Mask* (1908 to 1921) which eventually influenced theatre production, and ARK (1950 - 1978) from the Royal College of Art, with cover artwork by Len Deighton and Alan Fletcher.

So of course I must have my own and so, I established a magazine devoted to *Commedia*, which I named *The Zannizine* in honour of a whole group of Masks, going back to the early days of the art. Unfortunately, I offended my very talented IT partner, by mimicking his Cockney accent. As he never spoke to me again and soon left the country, my first attempt came to an end. A year later, the lovely Bill Tuck persuaded me to have another try.

Our plan was to put out four issues per year, roughly attributed to Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter. *The Zannizine* would be free, and the contributors would not be paid. Articles would be under 1,000 words. We soon learnt the importance of colour and all articles were expected to be illustrated. I designed a banner showing an engraving of a Zanni and the letters in a Zanni font, however I misspelt 'Quarterly', which was only noticed by the newly recruited Cheryl Stapleton, and so, I had to do it all again.

Each issue would be known by a number, so in the three years we ran, it should have brought us to Issue 12 but a hiatus struck and the rather splendid issue 11 remained our last performance for many months.

We were all so busy with other concerns – sometimes even trying to earning money – and Cheryl and I had also been occupied with setting up *Commedia Players CIC*, a new company to support artists and events. "How are we going to let people know?" we asked each other, "We were going to need Zannizine!" So, we reconvened the team and here is Issue 12.

– **Barry Grantham**



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*“Zannizine is for the now. Gathering inspiration from the past, fostering experiment and collaboration in the present and securing a future for the Commedia dell’Arte”*

**- Barry and Bill**

# How Harlekino Saved My Life



*Harlekino, Troupe Courage 2026 © Kamerich & Budwilowitz*

**by Katrien van Beurden**

Sometimes you encounter a character who does not only exist on stage but slowly finds a place in your own life.

For me, that character is Harlekino.

For twenty-five years I travelled the world with a suitcase full of commedia masks, creating theatre in villages, war zones, universities and city squares. I worked with actors, students, tribes and urban communities. Everywhere I went I encountered the same question: how do people survive in a world that can be unpredictable, harsh and sometimes cruel?

In all these encounters I kept meeting the same character.

Harlekino.

Not literally, of course, but as a spirit, an attitude, a way of being. The Harlekinos I met were cooks, students, soldiers, mothers, children, street musicians and actors. People who, despite everything, kept playing, kept improvising and kept searching for a way forward.

Over the years I began to realise that these Harlekinos were not just characters I encountered along the way. They slowly became something else.

Today they are my self-made theatre family — the most extraordinary family I have ever met. A family made of people who refuse to stop imagining, who continue to create, laugh, stumble and rise again, even when the world makes that almost impossible.

Harlekino, for me, is the archetype of the survivor.

He emerged in the sixteenth century in the tradition of Commedia dell'Arte. He was a zanni, a servant from the poorest regions of Northern Italy. In the hierarchy of society he stood at the very bottom. He had no money, no status and no power over the events that shaped his life. In the stories it was always others who controlled the world: the wealthy merchant Pantalone, the all-knowing Dottore, or the boastful Capitano.

Harlekino had to react to the world that happened to him.

And precisely there lies his strength.

Where others possessed power, he possessed resourcefulness. When he found himself in trouble, he invented a solution. When he fell, he got up again. When reality became too heavy, he turned it upside down through play, humour and imagination.

He did not overthink.

He played.

Over the years Harlekino has played a central role in many of the performances we created, including [Heroes of BB](#) and [The Horse of Jenin](#). And now, after decades of traveling and performing with this character, he finally steps forward in my own solo performance: *Harlekino*.

My fascination with Harlekino began long before I knew his name.

As a child I grew up in a house shaped by grief, loss and domestic violence. It was a house where emotions could erupt without warning, where silence could suddenly turn into chaos. As a child you cannot change such a world. What you have instead is imagination.

When my little brother died, I was eight years old. At his funeral I stood beside the small coffin and thought: this house is empty. What will he play with now?

So I started collecting toys. Everything I could find I stuffed into his coffin. In my child's logic it seemed like the only possible solution.

Looking back, I realise that something essential revealed itself in that moment: when reality becomes too large to understand, we begin to play.

Play becomes a way to survive.

When I first encountered Commedia dell'Arte during my theatre training, I immediately recognised something I had always felt intuitively. Here was a theatrical form in which the body, imagination and improvisation were central. With a single mask an actor could create an entire universe

The mask forces the actor to work through the body. The moment you put it on, the body begins to speak. Every movement, every thought, every emotion becomes visible. Without sets or props the actor must create the entire world through mime. The audience must clearly see where the character is, what they are doing and what is happening.

This form pushes the actor toward extreme precision. But the pursuit of precision inevitably leads to mistakes. And these mistakes are a gift. They force the actor to improvise, to begin again, to incorporate failure into the play.

This, for me, is the essence of Harlekino.

He is the one who stumbles, falls, gets up and continues.

Through all these experiences I began to understand why Harlekino fascinates me so deeply.

He is not a hero.

He is not a leader.

He is not a genius.

He is a servant, an outsider, someone without power.

And precisely because of that, he becomes the mirror of the audience. He reveals how human beings, despite everything, continue searching for ways to live. He shows our awkwardness, our hunger, our failures and our brilliant improvisations.

He reminds us that survival is often simply a matter of continuing to play.

After twenty-five years of traveling, a moment came when I, myself, had to lie still.

Shortly after becoming a mother I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Lying inside the MRI machine, listening to the monotonous beeping, I suddenly realised how difficult it was for me to do absolutely nothing.

My entire life I had been moving — travelling, creating, performing.

Now I had to lie still.

In the narrow tunnel of the machine, with the rhythm of the scanner echoing through my body, another question slowly appeared.

How would Harlekino play with the fear of death?

Because that is what he always does. He takes the thing that terrifies us the most and turns it upside down. He pokes at it, dances around it, tricks it, laughs at it — not because death is funny, but because play gives us a way to look at what would otherwise be unbearable.

Lying there in the darkness of the machine, I suddenly realised that Harlekino had been teaching me this all along.

Not how to defeat fear.

But how to play with it.

That is why Harlekino is so important to me.

He reminds me that even when life knocks us down, we still possess one instrument that cannot be taken away from us: our imagination.

And sometimes that is enough to stand up again, make a somersault, and continue the play.

**– Katrien van Beurden**

*Harlekino* is touring throughout 2026. For full tour dates and venues, visit Troupe Courage:

<https://www.troupecourage.com/en/tour>



# PLAYING COMMEDIA

by Cheryl Stapleton

Performer, director, teacher, author and an editor of this journal, Barry Grantham is never one to sit idle. Behind the scenes, he has been putting the finishing touches to a wonderful new addition to his growing collection of published resources. Many readers will already know – and perhaps own – Barry’s books *Commedia Plays*, featuring works such as *The False Turk* and *Pantalone Goes A-Wooing*, as well as *Playing Commedia*, his invaluable illustrated guide to commedia movement and gesture.

We are delighted to announce that a NEW one and half hour video masterclass will soon be available to purchase as a digital download. *Playing Commedia* accompanies the book of the same name and features a recorded masterclass led by Barry himself. Covering games, exercises, gestures, movement, improvisation and mask work, it offers actors a practical and inspiring introduction to performing commedia dell’arte for students, teachers, performers and directors.

Our cover image for Issue 12 is from *Playing Commedia*. We would like to share a trailer for the video with you. Click the image to watch it now:

This exciting new resource will be released as part of the launch of the newly founded **Commedia Players CIC**. This community interest company has been created to support British artists and events to ensure

the spirit of Commedia dell’Arte is kept alive for future generations. A new website will be launched soon from where the *Playing Commedia* video and other resources will be available. Full details will be shared with our mailing list, so if you are not already subscribed, please do sign up. You can join by clicking this link or scanning the QR code:



[Join the Commedia Zannizine Mailing List](#)



FROM A FILE MARKED –

## 'JOTTINGS OF THEATRICAL BIOGRAPHY'

by Barry Grantham

Unlike dear Judy Garland, I can't claim to have been born in a trunk, though it could quite easily have been so. My parents had met while playing Ford and Mistress Ford in Shakespeare's *'Merry Wives of Windsor'* with the Matheson Lang touring Shakespearean company. I was born, not on tour, but in Salford, twin town with Manchester. Salford's only claim to fame was the fact that its traffic policeman wore white as the smog was so bad that they wouldn't be seen if they dressed in the black.

So, why Salford? A little more family history explains: my father's great ambition, was to make it, not as an actor but as a film director. He had made some progress in that direction, by serving as an 'assistant director' to Alfred Hitchcock, who had not yet deserted England for the States.



*Claire Bushell and William Grantham Parker as Rosalind and Orlando in As You Like It for the Matheson Lang Company.*



*William Grantham Parker as Pierrot Noir in a verse play by Laurence Housman.*

William Grantham Parker – for that was my father's name – set about setting up a film company: British Supremacy Pictures Limited of Tudor Offices, 122 Oxford Rd, Manchester, offering shares on 'such and such' terms. My father presented himself with a fifty-one per cent share to retain absolute control. Next, he must have a 'studio' and to this end took up the lease of a derelict Tudor mansion and estate, in the Cheshire countryside, somewhat south of, and under the jurisdiction of, Salford – as would be young Master Barry Grantham, who was there by this time, but had yet to make an appearance.

Now, we must introduce William's wife, the former Claire Bushell of Northampton and mother to be, whom William was about to leave in the derelict manor house under the sole care of an Airedale Terrier appropriately named 'Tudor'.

According to my mother's account, she spent the first terrified night in a rickety four-poster with the Airedale at the bottom of the bed and an unprimed blunderbuss across her. She couldn't sleep. As she lay there, she was aware of odd sounds emanating from the attic above her – footsteps – someone was walking about up there. Then she realised that she was on the top floor of the mansion. They could only be in the loft. What are they doing in the loft at one in the morning? It must be explained that a ramshackle family of caretakers were still in residence, but what were they doing up there at one in the morning?



*Claire Bushell as Queen Catherine, in Henry VIII, the Matheson Lang Company.*

The same thing happened the following night. First the footsteps of more than one person, then– what was it? Scrapping? Then dragging something heavy across the floor? After a time, it stopped. Thank goodness her husband would back the following day. He was, and he explained that the 'caretakers' were stripping valuable lead and copper from the house, but then he left her for a third day, returning with the disastrous news that the man he had trusted, had decamped with £2,000 which was William's entire capital. He kissed his wife and said he'd be back in a day or two. But he wasn't. He left his wife, his unborn child, and the Airedale terrier and vanished.

### **HOW MRS WILLIAM GRANTHAM PARKER (NEE MISS CLAIRE BUSHELL) BECAME MADAME GRANTHAM, AND HER SON, FROM THEN ON, THE PLAIN 'BARRY GRANTHAM' WE ALL KNOW.**

So Claire found herself penniless and far from the countryside she knew, estranged from her family for marrying an actor and, I gather, she offered herself as 'Maid of all Work' to those who would employ her – but they didn't want the baby, or the Airedale Terrier.

And so, we lose track of her for three or four years and find her in Rawtenstall, a Lancashire mill town of which we have more evidence, since Barry had started to have memories by this point. Tudor the Airedale, also had his memories but although he understood nearly everything that was said, he still found human speech beyond him.

So, Barry tells us about Rawtenstall: of the knocker-up who tapped on your bedroom window to wake you, and then the clatter of a hundred or so pairs of clogs on the cobblestone streets on the way to the long day's work. And how clearly he remembers his 'Auntie Janie'. She had an ample bosom and an even more ample behind, and I would not have expected anything less of a boy's 'Auntie Janie'. She had an ample handbag – also to be expected – which looms large in the following incident:

"Has he been a good boy today, Claire?"

"Yes, very good."

"In that case, I'll see if I can find something in my handbag."

And then, with exaggerated searching and rummaging, she produced a shining silver half-crown. I held it before me, not quite sure what I was to do with it.

"Why don't you give it to your Mummy to look after?"

This was one of the innumerable ways she tried to help, as she knew of our desperate circumstance. Her kindness went further.

"Mrs. Grantham," (if the situation demanded it, she would address my mother formally) "You speak real' posh, if you don't mind me saying so. There are lots of folk round here who want to better themselves. Why don't you set up as a teacher? You could use the front room. And why not put a notice out front?"

**AND THAT IS HOW A BOARD OF GOLD LETTERS ON A GREEN  
BACKGROUND ...**

**MADAME GRANTHAM,  
ELOCUTION AND SPEECH TEACHER**

**... APPEARED BEFORE AUNTIE JANIE'S SMALL HOUSE IN ONE OF  
THE BETTER DISTRICTS OF RAWTENSTALL, LANCASHIRE.**

Claire, never one to do things by halves, had within a few months, gained an L.R.A.M. which was soon added to her name on the green board.

Time passes and things change, as is the habit of things. We do know that Madame Grantham left Rawtenstall to set herself up as an elocutionist in the big city of Manchester, where she took on a two room flat in the pleasant district of Levenshulme.

### MY NEXT JOTTING IS DATED DEC 5<sup>TH</sup> 1939

That makes me 8 years old. It is noted here that my first *Commedia* role was at the Queen's Hall, Manchester, as *Little Joe* in my father's mime play *Harlequin Married*. This was an important event, as I was to spend so much of my later life performing, teaching, directing and writing about *Commedia*, but there is more to explain from that short 'Jotting' ... to begin with, I appear to have regained a father!

About this time, I became aware that most other children – even girls – had a father, but I felt that Mummy and I had managed perfectly well without one. And for quite a long time, we did.

But then strange things began to happen. I noticed several pairs of trousers in the wardrobe, and they didn't look like Mummy's trousers, and there was a smell of cigarettes and neither of us smoked, and then I found the bedroom door locked when tried to turn the handle – "I'm busy now. I'll see you soon." What can Mummy be doing in the bedroom that I can't help her with?

The truth was that William had found his wife and wanted to resume married life. Claire agreed but put him on probation. Could he be trusted?

After some weeks it seems he was accepted, and that was when Mummy said,

"Barry, I want you to come and meet your father."

I wasn't sure I wanted a father. "Is he going to stay with us Mummy?"



Madame Grantham  
LRAM, Elocution and  
Speech Teacher.



William Grantham Parker  
in a military role, 1930's.

But I went to meet him. I didn't dare look higher than a pair of now animated trousers. I put my hand out to shake hands, but he didn't take it. Instead, he took hold of me by the waist and lifted me high above him. I struggled a bit, but he was strong and he held me firmly. I recall him laughing – a joyful and loving laugh – and he suddenly confirmed, “Yes, I think he will do.” He hugged me to him and eventually set me down. I ran to Mummy, who was also laughing. And so I met my father, who in time I was to love and admire with all my heart.

So, let's add a bit of background to my father and his family. Go back a few generations and we have a wealthy and socially well-placed young lady falling in love with an even wealthier, but socially less well-placed Mr. Parker. This would not do. So, the two families conferred and decided that the problem could be solved by adding the socially valuable 'Grantham' to the wealthier one, and so the couple became Mr. and Mrs. Grantham Parker. The name was passed on a couple of generations until we arrive at my father William Grantham Parker whose family ran a factory making pencils. As our William reached a suitable age he was taken round the factory, “One day this will be yours, my son.” As he was taken round, he was appalled at the conditions the workers endured. How many hours of heat and noise could women, children, and old men take? At the end of the tour there were three very elderly ladies whose job it was to polish the final product. Surely, at their age they should be sitting at a cozy fireside, knitting or drinking tea?

He left the factory and became a Communist.

Soon World War arrived and William was conscripted and sent to France. There he fought in the trenches. In defence, he killed a Turk with his bayonet and became a Pacifist.

He had some photos taken in costume representing his range from 'Pirate to Piero', 'Chicago Gangster to Julius Caesar', 'Down and Out to City Toff' and became an actor. He met my mother as 'Ford' in the *Merry Wives of Windsor* and they soon married, and he became a father.

As we got to know each other, we shared some 'Man' time – like sitting on a wall to watch the world go by. Mummy would never have sat on a wall! Then, there was the whole bicycle thing. His dismount was a thing of beauty; first he would put on the pressure so he could free wheel, then he would extend his left leg behind him in a perfect Arabesque, followed by *rond de jambe en l'air en dehors* to join it to the right one and then with a neat *pas de chat* he would dismount. Then there was the excitement – to Claire's alarm – of rides on the cross bar. I loved my Mummy, but I was glad I was a man.

In 1945, I left for London to study with Idzicowski and I never saw my father again. He never came to London. My wife, Joan never met him, though she did speak to him on the phone. But there is one more memory to share. It happened a few years later.

My mother had come to settle in London, and we took a maisonette in Egerton Gardens, just opposite the Brompton Oratory and a stone's throw from the Victoria and Albert Museum. We had just settled in when a present arrived from my father – I think the only one he gave – but it was the greatest gift I was ever to know. It was a model stage, made for a set designer; it was 20 inches wide, 15 deep and 15 high. It was of unpainted wood and had no decoration. A series of slats duplicated the flies of a traditional theatre, forming slots into which a series of masking wings, arches, and a set of door and window flats, all made in plywood, could be inserted. The one thing it missed was the cyclorama that had so impressed me at Glyndebourne. I made one of cartridge paper and wooden supports. Then I needed light. I experimented with various bulbs and coloured gelatines. Then I must have dimmers. This was before such things could be bought. So, I made a dimmer board. It consisted of 8 half-pint milk bottles filled with salt water, one terminal at the bottom and the other on a stick of wood which could be raised and lowered. It worked well and luckily, I didn't burn 32, Egerton Gardens to the ground.

There was a little note that said,

*"This is to remind you that The Theatre is yours and you are The Theatre."*

You see, I mention Glyndebourne. Oh dear. We'll have to go back a bit. In fact, to 1944: I was 12 years old, and my ambition was to be a comic. I entered every competition I could find. At that time, they were called 'Go As You Please Competitions'. I was billed as a *Character Comedian*, and my father wrote four or five monologues for me. I remember (with the photos to help) a *Village Parson*, hair parted in the middle and *pince-nez*; a *Mad Professor*, curly grey wig, grey beard, and the same *pince-nez*. I was equally at home with female characters: the *Char Lady*, padded dress, wig, out of date women's hat, and a broom; a *Housewife* in a scarf and curlers, and



*Barry Grantham, character comedian, age 12, 1944 – a Vicar and 'a Lady in the queue'.*

short dress, and a shopping bag. I usually won the competition but sometimes I had to settle for second place to a girl contortionist. If the boy soprano singing *Jerusalem* was there, neither of us got a look in.

On one occasion, the show was compered by a local comic who said:

“Not bad son, the only thing is, you can't just walk off like, you've got to finish with a song.”

“But I can't sing.”

“Anybody can sing. Come to the piano..... Oh. Alright. You can't sing. You'll have to learn a comic dance.”

So, I chose the best dancing school in the area (or rather, my mother did): *Suffield and Tweedy*, Dean Street, Manchester. They put me into first position and showed me a movement with my arms:

“That's right, up the middle out, and now softly down at the side”

“Do I have to do this to learn a comic dance?”

“Oh yes, we all have to do ballet first.”

That's how I became a ballet dancer. It was more than 20 years before I learned a comic dance. Then I came to London to study with Idzicowski, soloist from the Diaghilev Ballet. A fellow student, John Pygram, happened to be Ballet Master of the *Song of Norway*, a musical based on the life and music of Grieg, playing at the Palace Theatre. He told me that one of the male dancers was leaving and asked, would I like to join the show? I would, and I did. No rehearsals with the company. John taught me the routines. So, on I came with my three colleagues in our lederhosen and struck a suitably Nordic pose. This gave me a moment to take in a group of Maidens doing a traditional 'Pillow Dance', and in the centre holding the 'Pillow' an especially attractive girl. It was quite some time before I learnt even her name. You may have guessed it.

– **Barry Grantham**



## *Punch and Pulcinella – A Tale of Two Puppets*

by **Olly Crick**

(with a few corrections courtesy of Irene Vecchia)



Credit: Casa Guarattelle publicity,

<https://www.facebook.com/events/545364076046004>

To us Britons, Pulcinella is one of the most enigmatic characters of the *Commedia dell'Arte*. He is a very different beast from his English puppet avatar, Mr Punch. We, the English, are very sure who Punch is, and how he behaves, but in Italy the Pulcinella puppet is not like that at all. There are further complications in that, it doesn't appear that the two characters we may have heard of most – Harlequin and Pulcinella – never (or at least very rarely) appear in plays or scenarios together. Harlequin comes from the North of Italy, from the mountains around Bergamo and appears as a rural bumpkin or immigrant in the predominantly urban settings of the comedies. Pulcinella is definitely a native of Naples and is more 'one of us' to a Neapolitan, rather than 'one of them'. Both take the role of second Zanni, but more of that maybe in another article. Today it is time to talk puppet.

In England, dressed in red in the vestigial uniform of some bullish C18th Redcoat or sly recruiting Sargeant, Punch causes shivers of shocked delight as his acts of domestic violence escalate up the social ladder and, savagely dealing with Dog Toby and a Crocodile on the way, he evades British Justice. Turning the table on Jack Ketch the hangman, he ultimately escapes, telling his audience that, 'That's the way to do it'. The story is, of course, somewhat problematical as it traditionally starts with misplacing the baby (always assumed to be Punch's own) that he was left to mind, and beating his wife, Judy, over the head with a stick. Victims of his casual killing spree end up, often as not, in the sausage machine.

It is, on one hand, wooden headed glove puppets doing what they do best: bashing each other and the booth's playboard with a series of satisfying thwacks and employing the obvious difference between a 'live' puppet (with the operator's hand bringing it to life) and a dead one (lying on the playboard *sans* hand). On the other hand, with modern sensibilities taken into account, it is an amoral saga of societal revenge and class war. It is sparked off by the (male) indignity of having to babysit. If it were a film, it would be a headcount western, directed by Quentin Tarantino. And did I say, performed mainly for children?

Part of its delight is in its sheer contrarianism. Mr Punch does all the things we have been told, from a very early age, not to do. It is also a puppet show, performed by glove puppets

which, unlike marionettes, have absolutely no claim to naturalistic or realistic gesture. It is very clear to anyone, especially children, that it is not real, and therefore perhaps not to be emulated. I have never seen kids role playing Mr Punch after a performance, so maybe the extremity of the action is, somehow, seen as something not to be copied. Could one see the Punch show as an anti-morality play, and a deliberate carnival of extreme anti-social acts? We can enjoy with glee a whole range of transgressive acts, but the audience is left in no doubt that we really shouldn't do this at home.

G.K. Chesterton (1873-1936), English writer and lover of paradoxes, stated that "Fairy tales do not tell children the dragons exist. Children already know that dragons exist. Fairy tales tell children the dragons can be killed." Mr Punch is certainly a metaphorical dragon, but, despite his misdemeanours, is not killed at the end. The Punch show, in my opinion, leaves the children with a dilemma, which they may or may not be consciously aware of. The Punch puppet show, makes clear that what Punch does is not what society approves of, but leaves us, un sentimentally, with a choice that stays with us for the rest of our lives: do we 'Punch' or do we find other ways to face our woes?

The Neapolitan puppet from which, historically, Mr Punch descends from is Pulcinella, and he manifests as a masked actor, a glove puppet and, also, as a stringed marionette. As comparison I will deal with the glove puppet here.

In 2019, I was able to visit the newly opened *Casa Guarratelle* in Naples. It is not a grand new purpose-built puppet theatre, but an empty room in the bottom floor of one of the Neapolitan tenements – and is meant for Neapolitans not tourists.

The first performance I saw, acted as a rough template for all the other. From the subsequent performances (performed by Salvatore Gatto, Irene Vecchia and Gianluca di Matteo and their Maestro Bruno Leone – all international performers), I was lucky enough to see some themes of the Pulcinella phenomenon emerge, differentiating it from its descendant Mr Punch.



*Credit: Tonino Vitale, 2019, Napoli, Casa Guarratelle. Featured: Marcello Squillante, Pulcinella, Irene Vecchia.*

Pulcinella starts the show dancing ‘in the name of love’ with his ‘beloved one’ Teresina, and they always appear together at the end of each show to celebrate both his survival and the survival of their relationship, though we never actually see them marry: Teresina ends with “I have good news – I talked to father and we have papers, a house, and we can go get married”. Pulcinella carries a wooden stick, rather than a scaled down slapstick, and there is a lot more sexual inuendo present, and he delights in farting at people he doesn’t agree with. His default position at the beginning of a show is one of hunger, and generally he gets into ‘situations’ because of his search for food or employment. The main antagonist is Don Pasquale, supposedly a ‘rich man’, but actually a ‘*guappo*’ (Neapolitan for an aggressive bully) also hunting for food. He has a large fierce dog who is protecting a bowl of beans that the dog earned for him that morning.



*Credit: Giorgio Cossu, 2010, Napoli Largo Banchi Nuovi. Featuring Irene Vecchia and Pulcinella.*

Pulcinella is very much a representative of all Neapolitans, struggling against ‘the man’ for dignity, food and love. He is also – so I have heard – the unofficial guardian deity of the city.

The structure of a Pulcinella show and a Punch show are similar, but while Punch acts out of gleeful nihilism, Pulcinella acts out of love and the need to put food on the table. Below is a rough transcript of a show.

1. *Pulcinella is woken up by the puppeteer, and starts with his back to the audience, before seeing the audience. He is starving hungry.*
2. *Pulcinella lures a chicken to come close, chases it, fights it, and eventually catches it and carries it off.*
3. *Pulcinella cooks the chicken, eats the cooked chicken and goes to sleep.*
4. *A large dog appears, belonging to the owner of the chicken, and barks at Pulcinella. He chases the dog off.*
5. *The Rich Man/Neighbour appears and wants to know where his chicken is. He attacks Pulcinella with a stick. Pulcinella gets the stick off the Rich Man and beats him. The Rich Man returns with a knife and they fight again. Pulcinella wins and kills him.*

6. *The dog comes back and attacks Pulcinella. They fight and the dog is killed.*
7. *As the dead Rich Man won't stand up on his own, Pulcinella puts the dead Rich Man in a coffin and goes to sleep. Death keeps appearing and moves the body in the coffin, which surprises, terrifies, and then annoys Pulcinella. Eventually Pulcinella catches death out and they fight: Pulcinella wins and Death goes away.*
8. *A Policeman arrests Pulcinella for murder.*
9. *A Judge tries Pulcinella for murder, and as he pleads hunger and starvation he is nearly let off, until he argues with the Judge and hits him with his large hammer like gavel. Pulcinella is then sentenced to death.*
10. *A Priest offers Pulcinella the last rites, but Pulcinella thinks the priest is touching him up and chases him off.*
11. *The hangman comes and tries to get Pulcinella to put his head in the noose, and Pulcinella feigns stupidity until the hangman puts his head in. Pulcinella hangs him and escapes.*
12. *Pulcinella goes back to his beloved, and they dance in happiness and snog a lot.*

If you are ever in Naples, or the Amalfi coast, try and see if there is show on. [The Casa Guarratelle is on Facebook](#), and a short walk from the historical centre, and the puppeteers are very welcoming. Language is no barrier, I promise.

– Olly Crick

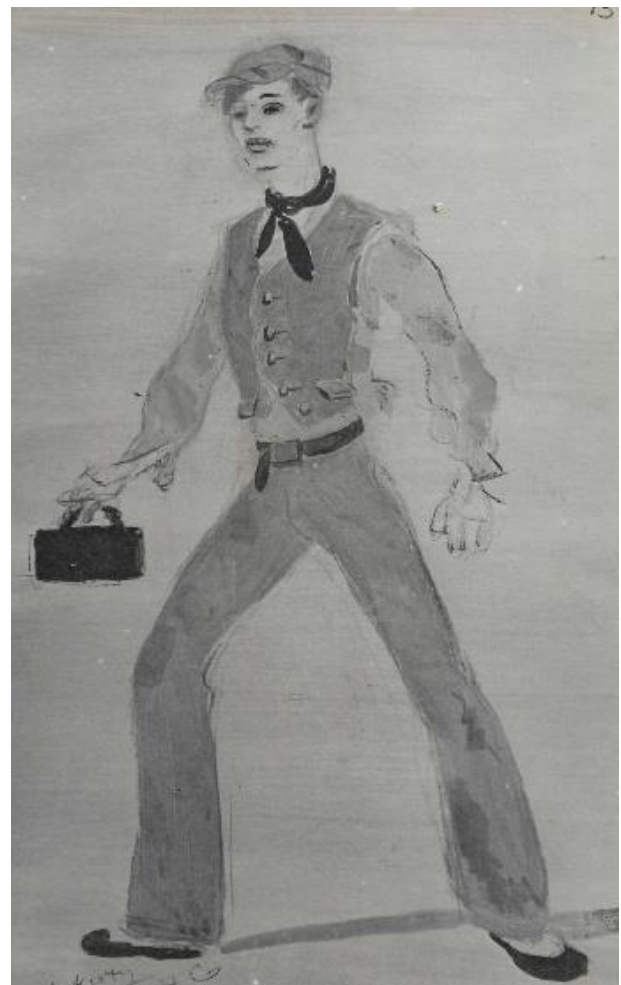




by Barry Grantham

If you have read *'My Jottings'* earlier in this issue, you will know that my father worked and spent much of his time in Manchester, whereas I and my mother enjoyed the clean country air of Wilmslow, some 15 miles south of the great industrial city. Sometimes we didn't see him for weeks on end, but he always kept in touch by that miracle of the age - the telephone. It was in that way that he told us that he had been offered the job of editing a weekly newspaper on ... *Dogs, Their Care and Well-being*. But my father, feeling that his wife was much more of a doggy person than he was, invited her to take over the job.

The subject didn't appeal to her either, but she offered an alternative proposal. She would produce a weekly newspaper on Ballet, a really 'in' thing at the time. Strangely, the publisher liked the idea and commissioned Claire to "go ahead". And that is how, with the help of a lot of strong coffee, a young male typist, an ex-barrow boy and me write, design and get support from the ballet world (luckily, I was filming *Red Shoes* at the time). WORLD BALLETS NEWS came into being, to be sold by W.H. Smith, and other stationers. Remarkably, Joan bought a copy in Haywards Heath without connecting it to the dancer in *Song of Norway*. We lasted nine weeks until the publisher realised he wasn't going to make any money out of it. So at 16 years old, I got my first experience of working to a weekly deadline.



Costume design by Hein Heckroth for Barry Grantham's character in the film *Red Shoes* (1948)

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No. 1

THURSDAY, 23rd OCTOBER, 1947.

SIXPENCE

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## The Ballet World greets World Ballet News

*I have read with interest of the impending publication of a new periodical to be devoted to Ballet, namely, "World Ballet News."*

*Its announced aims and objects are admirable in conception, but not without difficulties of realisation. If "World Ballet News" can offer a service not already given by existing periodicals, it should find a warm welcome. I am happy to wish you and your staff all success in your endeavours.*

Yours very truly,  
*Raymond Beaumont*

*A weekly ballet paper—certainly this means courage. Sincerest good wishes! May it meet with competent writers, numerous patrons—and plenty of exciting facts to report.*

*Barry Grantham*

*"World Ballet News" should be of the greatest value to all followers of the arts, and I wish it every possible success.*

*Arnet L. Hawksley*

---

*My very best wishes to the "World Ballet News" and hoping they may carry out the excellent motives and intentions.*

*Phyllis Bedells*

---

*May I send you every good wish for the success of your new venture, "World Ballet News."*

*Pauline Frank*

---

*With good wishes,*

*Marie Raubert*



*Best wishes to World Ballet News  
Moira Shearer*

---



**Miss Moira Shearer—"Aurora," "Sleeping Beauty"** —Photo by Baron

*As an artist I warmly welcome the new publication, "World Ballet News," which is to serve as medium to all admirers of the arts.*

*With sincere wishes,*  
*Edwina Dyer*

---

*I am very pleased to learn of the inception of "World Ballet News" and I am glad to have this opportunity of adding my own good wishes for its future success.*

*I feel quite sure that artistes and ballet-going public alike will extend a warm welcome to this new paper which so clearly intends to be of service to ballet everywhere.*

*Mona English*

*Wishing you every success*

*Knowledge and Culture are the only weapons for prosperity and peace. I therefore welcome wholeheartedly your new venture.*

*Wishing you success and good luck,*  
*Nadia Nicolson-Rogat*

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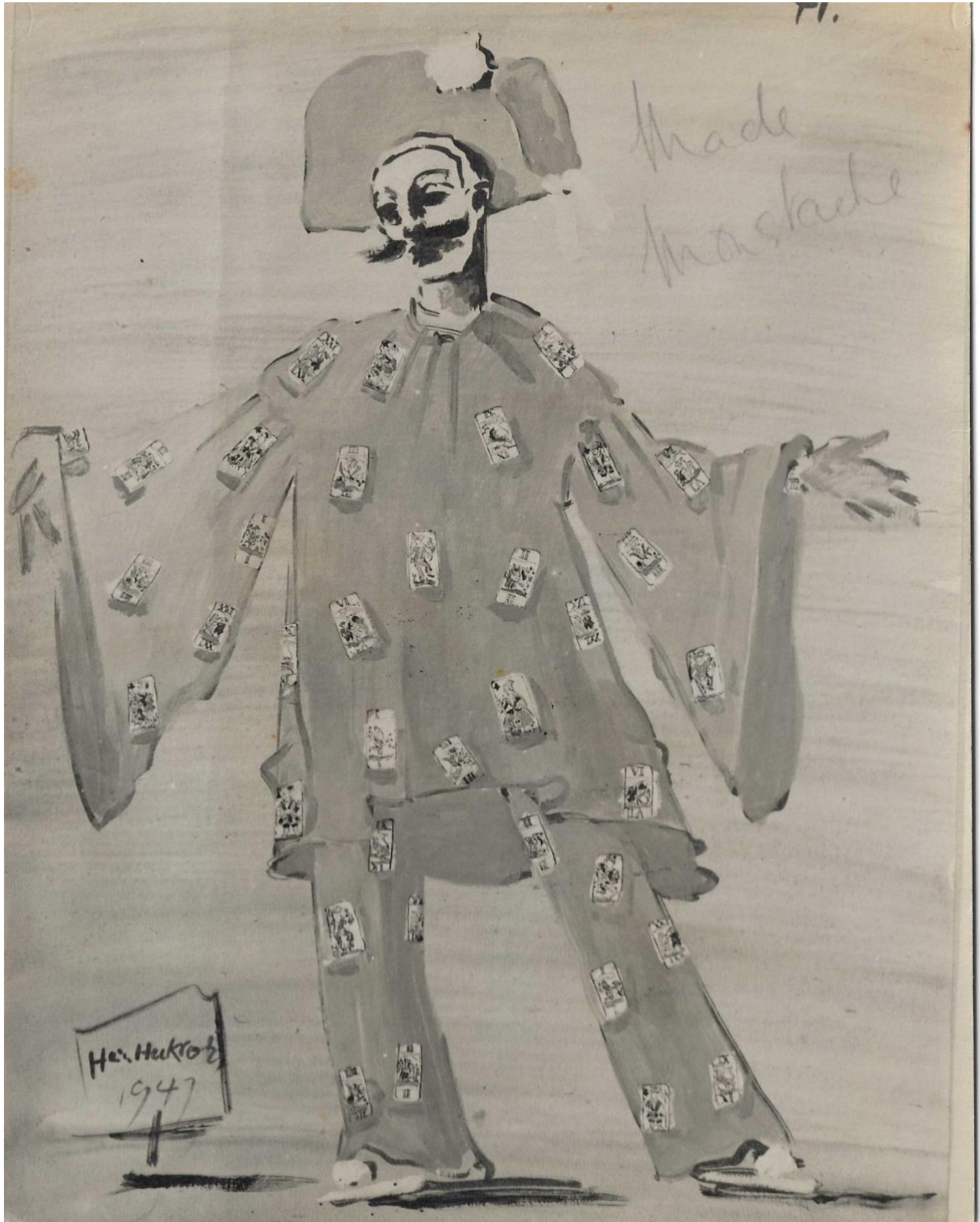
*Heartiest good wishes to "Ballet News"; unbiased critics and competent writers will always have the appreciation and support of*

*Sep masq*

---

*My very best wishes for the success of "World Ballet News." I feel sure it will be of great service to all dancers and also to those interested in the wide field of the art of dance.*

World Ballet News, Issue 1, Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1947. Written, edited and published by Barry Grantham (1947)



Another costume design by Hein Heckroth for Barry Grantham's character in the film *Red Shoes* (1948)



# Commedia: Learning the Habit of Virtuosity

by Olly Crick

Commedia dell'Arte was arguably the first professional theatre in Western Europe and has several unique stylistic and organisational features: each actor playing the same character role within each play, and each play being constructed to utilise these same characters in differing sets of relationships. This lifetime connection between actor and role creates a unique and habitual skillset: the result of both a performer's technical training as well as the ongoing process lasting an actor's career. In contemporary theatre, an actor may be judged for their ability to play many parts, but in Commedia (as in other types of global popular theatre) an actor is judged by how well they portray a single role or type. The length of time playing the role, together with the personal imaginative and cultural affinity to that part which allowed them access to it in the first place, certainly created, I would suggest, a range of deeply ingrained performance habits, unique to each performer.

The actors read the audience, the performance space and, where present, the mood of their patrons. Consequently, the skills of a Commedia actor must be ingrained and habitual so they can be employed 'without thought' in the moment and in a different, *improvised* way of performing a particular action on stage. This skill may appear to have similarities with Keith Johnstone style 'Impro' but comes from a very different cultural milieu.

Generic Commedia dell'Arte performances incorporate virtuosic physical action and verbal displays, separately and together, which become the audience's benchmark of enjoyment, naturally putting great demands on its performers. Developing a range of embodied performance habits allowed Commedia's performers to cover both of these fields; such dexterity in both the physical and verbal spectrum of performance skills is the lifelong cultivation of the performative habitus that allows these actors to be deemed successful performers on stage. The conscious employment of learned habit, which then allows the further development of comic tropes, *lazzi* etc. based on an interactive triangulation between an actor's individual experience, the audience's reactions, and their conscious decision making in the existential moment of performance. Simply repeating learned

behaviour (habit) does not, as bitter experience informs us, suit every audience. The Commedia 'performance habit' can be seen as both a skillset and an active process of evaluating response.

The dramatic roles within a Commedia scenario are, with minor regional variations, defined by age, names, known regional characteristics and hierarchical social positions, which were indicative of the role's economic power. For example, *Pantalone di Bisognosi* is an older merchant from Venice, the patriarch of a household, responsible for both a business, their unmarried children and all the associated servants. Each stock character comes from an unchanging position in the social hierarchy, but the actor still has a wide range of options with which to engage an audience dependent on the specifics of the plot. For an intensely class-conscious audience, the question is never the psychological one of 'how does this situation change the character's view of the world', but 'how does this social type react to this particular challenge'? Commedia actors do not necessarily learn to 'act', but to depict the *tipo fiso*.



Carlo Goldoni's, *The Liar (Lažnik)*, SNG Drama Ljubljani (1954). Aleksander Valič (as Pantalone), Andrej Kurent (as Lelio). Public domain <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

Training in a habitual performance ability helps us understand how a historical Commedia actor may have navigated their performance texts, which in Commedia's case was more likely to be from a scenario than from a fully realised script. Scenarios, or *canovacci*, are characterised by having full character arcs and equal stage time for all its roles, presented in the form of a list of scenes indicating which characters were on stage, what action they carried out onstage in relation to other characters, and when they exited. The actors, according to theatrical research and popular legend added their own words and actions to turn them into a fully-fledged dramatic play. When the character's reasons for being onstage were fully explained in the scenario, this task was apparently straightforward. For example:

**Act 1, Scene 4: *The Old Twins*, Scenario by Flaminio Scala:**

Pasquella, an old bawd and a dirty witch, now appears. She greets Isabella and asks why she is sad. Isabella tells the bawd that she is love with Flavio, but that he loves a courtesan. Pasquella promises

that with her magic, Flavio will fall in love with Isabella, and that he will not go back to the villa [to meet the courtesan]. Isabella gives her some money and promises more and, fully consoled, Isabella goes into the house, leaving Pasquella to boast of her magic and of the shrewd [cunning] way she lives.

(Salerno 1967: 2-3<sup>1</sup>)

However, when the scenario outline for the actors was less informative, how could they proceed? Consider the following case:

**Act 1, Scene 6: *The Dentist*, Scenario by Flaminio Scala**

Thereupon, Arlecchino, Isabella's servant, enters and plays a ridiculous scene with the Captain [Spavento].

(Salerno 1967: 86)

The problems this second example throws up are ones of repertoire, character performance, and audience contact skills. It is clear from context that this scene should be an amusing one, so one can assume that the two actors involved had either a working relationship allowing them to attempt new material without prolonged dispute, or else a repertoire of previously performed scenes from which to draw. Their long association with each role would allow them to know which elements in the unfolding scene would reward them most, and their audience contact skills would indicate to them how long (or short) each scenic element should be. This skill should be considered as part of the Commedia habit. Several Commedia scholars have dwelt upon this level of audience awareness: Richard Andrews refers to the ability to change the length of a scenic unit as 'an elastic gag' (Andrews 1993: 185<sup>2</sup>); Kathleen Lea believes that 'all the speeches of the Commedia dell'Arte are built upon a collapsible principle, they could be protracted or cut short to meet any emergency' (Lea 1962: 23<sup>3</sup>); and Robert Henke believes that the start and end points of these elastic units were fixed by known cues, and that what went between these fixed cues was extendable or retractable (Henke 2003: 34<sup>4</sup>). Part of the historical Commedia actors' virtuosity was, therefore, both an intuitive and a technical adaptability to the mood of an audience.

The habits acquired in this process also related to corporeality or body shape, the space occupied on stage, vocal delivery, and, in terms of modern reconstructions, involving both

<sup>1</sup> Salerno, H.F. (1967) *Scenarios of the Commedia dell'Arte: Flaminio Scala's Il Teatro delle Favole Rappresentative*, New York: New York University Press

<sup>2</sup> Andrews, R. (1993). *Scripts and Scenarios: the Performance of Comedy in Renaissance Italy*. Cambridge & New York: University of Cambridge Press.

<sup>3</sup> Lea, K. (1962 [1934]). *Italian Popular Comedy: a study in the Commedia dell'Arte (2 vols.)*, 1560–1620, with special reference to the English stage London: Russell & Russell.

<sup>4</sup> Henke, R. (2003). *Performance and Literature in the Commedia dell'Arte*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

head and foot positions. As a visual indicator of character, the shape in which an actor holds their body is vital in communicating who it is and their dynamic or emotional state. Naturally, each Commedia role has a unique body position, which, to borrow and adapt Brecht's phrase, can be classified as a 'comic gestus' (Brecht 2015: 5-6<sup>5</sup>). An actor working continually to create and then portray a role's gestus would, one assumes, develop the mannerisms of the role as second nature, and similarly evolve a way of relating to



*Harlequin dressed as a woman from a series of 12 scenes from the Commedia dell'arte by Huquier, 1729-1732, based on the drawings of Gillot. Rijksmuseum.*

other characters and the audience through the lens of their adopted gestus. Here habit becomes vital in the development of Commedia because, if one's performed physicality and body shape is second nature to the actor, it then becomes something they do not need to be thinking about consciously when performing, and their focus can be directed onto other performance elements, such as vocal delivery and, crucially, adjusting one's performance to the audience

Twentieth-century Commedia pedagogue Carlo Mazzone-Clementi<sup>6</sup>, co-founder of the US Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre, held that '*al'improvviso*', literally translated as 'all of a sudden', is an integral part of Commedia performance.<sup>1</sup> He believed Commedia to be a form of theatre that was constantly reacting to, and therefore including in the performance, events outside the planned presentation. In his performance, the ability to both depart from a planned story arc and return to it (more or less) seamlessly must be part of an actor's skillset, and therefore habitual. Incorporating audience comments,

<sup>5</sup> Brecht, B. (2015). *Brecht on Theatre*, third edition. Eds: M. Silberman, S. Giles & T. Kuhn. London & New York: Methuen.

<sup>6</sup> Carlo Mazzone-Clementi was a Paduan born actor and "single-handedly brought commedia to the United States, starting in New York in 1958" (Towsen, 2011: Internet). but eventually settled down in Blue Lake, Northern California, a town of only 1,200, where he founded, with his partner Jane Hill, the Dell'Arte school of physical theatre. In Italy Clementi's worked with the artists who reinvented Commedia in the wake of the Second World War (Strehler, Marcel Marceau, Dario Fo, Lecoq, and Marcello Moretti. From 1948 to 1951 Clementi worked as Lecoq's assistant with a company called the Paduan Players, originally formed by Gianfranco di Bosio, which was based at the University of Padua and for whom Amleto Sartori created masks. In 1951 Eric Bentley came to Padua and directed the company in Brecht's *The Exception and the Rule*, introducing Clementi to Brecht and, by implication, Commedia's political potential. Under Bentley's patronage he came to America in 1958, and ran a programme of Commedia and mime classes, using a set of Sartori masks and ended up being appointed as Professor of Movement at the Carnegie Mellon University. He was concerned with making the actor's body responsive and expressive, and her focussed on keeping reaction 'live' for the performer.

reactions and onstage disasters was to him all part of the performance. The performance habit involved being able to then relocate the story arc and carry on.

A more specific example of an actor's habit being integral to a performance is that relating to head and foot positions. The positions of the feet will always dictate the overall direction of the actor's body. An apparently counterintuitive action occurring every time two people play a scene together is that the person speaking turns 90 degrees from the audience whilst the person listening (reacting to what is being said by the other) faces them directly, with body and torso in line with the front of the stage. For an actor, this means that one spends a lot of time talking to the ear of one's stage companion. This relationship changes instantaneously when the speaker changes, and both parties turn through 90 degrees: the one facing the audience turns to the other actor, and the one facing their protagonist turns to face the audience. Although one may assume that talking directly to the audience on the part of the actor 'with the lines' would be the standard procedure, especially in popular theatre, it is more effective the other way: the audience's focus is on the person reacting to the lines whose body position is more 'open'. Whatever news, good or bad, is being delivered, the audience experiences a character's reaction to it directly. Only one person on stage is directly facing us, the audience, so our eyes gravitate to them instinctively. This stage positioning becomes a habit when an actor no longer has to think which way they should be facing but knows to just do it as part of the art of Commedia. Having this skill located with its common practice further indicates why Commedia, despite an apparent focus on the individual characters and masks, is definitely an ensemble form.

Why should a Commedia performer need to be habituated to improvised recovery and improvised story? Looking at early modern theatre as a European wide phenomenon, rather than as a national or nationalistic one, there are strong indicators of flexible performances being the norm in both English and Italian theatre practice. Richard Preiss' *Clowning and Authorship in Early Modern Europe* (2014)<sup>7</sup>, as part of his argument distinguishing the printed play and the actual live experience of an Elizabethan playhouse, collects many records of audience reactions and disruptions in a play (see Preiss 2014: 27-35). The picture he builds up is one of constant interruptions, stage invasions, barrages of nuts and apples, and a constantly fluctuating ownership between performers and audience as to who was controlling or leading the event. Faced with all of this, it appears that a printed play text does not add useful information about a group of performers assaying a live performance. Habitual flexibility in the face of bouts of intense interruption is the most likely way that the early modern and Commedia performances could have been performed successfully. That

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<sup>7</sup> Preiss, R. (2014). *Clowning and Authorship in Early Modern Theatre*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.

said, we should not forget that underlying this habitual flexibility, is a rigid conformity in physical acting.

An actor's habits are all acquired in the service of engaging an audience with their performance. Moreover, due to the picaresque nature of Commedia staging (backdrop, trestle stage, market square, non-illusionary), the emphasis lies on the performative believability of their actions, rather than on any concept of realism. As such, the performance is focused on a range of directly performative and meta-theatrical relationships with the audience, none of which make any attempt to disguise the reality of the wooden platform in a market square. Within an alfresco Commedia performance there are so many elements at play, performative, technical and practical, that an actor needs to focus all their energy on attracting and then keeping an audience's attention; the ultimate point being that this can only be achieved if the actor's performance skills were skilled enough to be habitual as well as conscious.

This article was previously published in an extended version, 04 July 2024, in the journal *Performance Research*, Vol 28, Issue 6, under the title, The Problem of Commedia dell'Arte: Achieving habitual virtuosity.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2023.2335076>

– Olly Crick



# When Orlando Lassus Played Pantalone

by Bill Tuck

On Twelfth Night 2025, in the unlikely setting of Headington Quarry Village Hall near Oxford, a small troupe of masked commedia players joined forces with twenty-four Renaissance musicians armed with sackbuts, cornetts, curtals and the occasional theorbo. The production was modest, under-rehearsed, and gloriously chaotic – entirely in keeping with the spirit of *Commedia dell'Arte*.

Yet behind this village-hall entertainment lay something more ambitious: an attempt to reconstruct one of the earliest documented commedia performances in European history.

The project began with a request from the Lute Society for a talk on “*Commedia dell'Arte and the Lute*.” Finding images of commedia players with lutes is easy enough; musicians appear everywhere in the visual record of the form. One image in particular, however, suggested a larger story: the famous “*Fools' Staircase*” frescoes at Trausnitz Castle, painted after 1575, depicting masked performers, musicians and servants in scenes unmistakably connected with commedia performance.



Prince Wilhelm (later Duke Wilhelm V of Bavaria) commissioned the “*Fools' Staircase*” at Castle Trausnitz, designer Friedrich Sustris, artist Alessandro Padovano (1575-1579)

Those frescoes point back to the lavish 1568 wedding celebrations of Prince Wilhelm of Bavaria and Renata of Lorraine in Munich. Among the festivities was a *Commedia dell'Arte* performance devised by two leading musicians of the Bavarian court: Orlando Lassus and Massimo Troiano.

Troiano's published account of the festivities survives, along with a detailed scenario now widely regarded as the earliest substantial commedia scenario we possess. What makes it remarkable is not merely its date, but its personnel. The performers were largely court musicians. Lassus himself played Pantalone; Troiano played both the Innamorato and a swaggering Spanish Captain. Music and theatre were not separate disciplines here but parts of a single performance culture.

This is easy to forget when modern discussions of commedia focus primarily on masks, lazzi or improvisation. In the sixteenth century, music was embedded in the form. The Munich performance employed some twenty-four instrumentalists, many of whom had recently participated in Alessandro Striggio's monumental forty-part motet *Ecce Beatam Lucem*. These were elite musicians applying their skills to comic theatre.

Lassus's presence is especially striking. One of the most celebrated composers in Europe was not simply composing incidental music for a comedy; he was acting in it, lute in hand, as Pantalone. The frescoes at Trausnitz may even depict him in character.

Our Oxford performance, *The Marriage of Isabella*, borrowed elements from Troiano's scenario while simplifying the plot into a familiar commedia framework: young lovers obstructed by elderly authority figures, aided by scheming servants and sustained by disguise, confusion and flirtation. Isabella is pressured by her guardian Pantalone to marry the elderly Dottore Graziano, while secretly loving the penniless Flavio. Through the interventions of Franceschina and Arlecchino (and a shipwreck and a cross-dressed disguise) the lovers are eventually reunited.

The details matter less than the machinery. The plot demonstrates how recognisable many commedia conventions already were by 1568: the *vecchi* blocking youthful desire, servants manipulating events from below, disguises generating confusion, and music woven through the action.

Several surviving visual sources illuminate these conventions beautifully. A woodcut from the Recueil Fossard shows Pantalone attempting to serenade a lady while Zanni feeds him prompts from behind, only for the old man to misunderstand them disastrously. The same comic device appears in the Trausnitz frescoes, where Zanni clutches a cue sheet behind a

serenading Pantalone. Such visual evidence reminds us how dependent commedia was upon rhythm, interruption and performance timing rather than fixed literary text.

Music itself often carried the comedy. Lassus's villanella *Zanni*, included in our reconstruction, presents a drunken servant arguing with his master from the wine cellar in increasingly absurd exchanges. The piece blurs the boundary between song, dialogue and comic routine in a way entirely characteristic of commedia performance.

The reconstruction also highlighted how naturally music, dance and improvisation coexist within this theatrical world. Dances from Fabritio Caroso and Cesare Negri fit seamlessly beside Lassus's music, while the possibility that the celebrated trumpeter Cesare Bendinelli attended the Munich festivities offered every excuse for exuberant brass fanfares.

Perhaps most revealing, however, is the degree to which these supposedly 'amateur' actors were already expert performers. Court musicians understood projection, gesture, rhythm and audience engagement instinctively. Commedia's reliance on physical characterisation rather than memorised text would have suited them perfectly. The mask itself does much of the work.

The Munich festivities also produced some curious afterlives. Giovanni Battista Scolari, who played Zanni, later became a goldsmith at court and created jewellery featuring commedia imagery, including pendants showing Pantalone and Zanni serenading lovers. Troiano's fate was darker: implicated in the murder of a court violinist in 1570, he fled Bavaria and vanished from the historical record.

The experience of reconstructing this material also sharpened the parallels between commedia and William Shakespeare. *Twelfth Night* in particular feels remarkably close to a commedia scenario: young lovers obstructed by ageing authority figures, disguise, mistaken identity, trickster servants and comic humiliation. Read through a commedia



Jewelled pendant by Giovanni Battista Scolari showing Pantalone & Zanni serenading two lovers in a gondola. Kremlin Exhibition Moscow 2011, credit: shakko, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons. No changes made.

lens, figures such as Sir Toby Belch, Malvolio and Sir Andrew Aguecheek begin to resemble variants of Pantalone, Brighella and Capitano.

Recent productions inspired by Artemis Preshl's *Shakespeare and Commedia dell'Arte: Play by Play* have explored precisely these possibilities, treating Shakespeare not as distant literary monument but as part of a broader European performance tradition shaped by masks, improvisation and physical comedy.

For commedia practitioners, this opens exciting possibilities in return. Shakespearean plots, stripped back to their theatrical mechanics, can become raw material for improvised commedia once again.

One suspects the players of 1568 would have understood this instinctively. For them, music, movement and masked comedy belonged naturally together. Our somewhat chaotic Twelfth Night reconstruction in Oxford may only have captured a fragment of that world, but it was enough to remind us how alive it still feels.



Three views of 'Malvolio' – Instead of the conventional 19th century view of Malvolio, why not play him in the character of Brighella? (shown here in the Maurice Sands illustration)

– Bill Tuck






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## BIOGRAPHIES OF GUEST CONTRIBUTORS

**Katrien van Beurden** is the founder and artistic director of the international theatre company Troupe Courage. In May 2023, she was appointed Knight in the Order of Orange-Nassau, an honour recognizing her boundless dedication to making theatre relevant and indispensable. This tribute not only marks her career but also reflects her tireless search for the essence of theatre and its transformative power. She previously directed the production *The Horse of Jenin*, which was selected by the Dutch Theatre Festival as one of the most impressive productions of 2025.

Katrien is a highly sought-after teacher and has taught, among others, at the Academy for Theatre and Dance (Amsterdam), NYU Tisch (New York), The Freedom Theatre (Palestine), and the Netherlands Film Academy in Amsterdam.

Di Trevis of the Royal Shakespeare Company describes her work as “deadly serious yet primal and witty at the same time.” Theatre critic Kester Freriks wrote: “Important and innovative theatre. Van Beurden proves herself the heir to Peter Brook.” Judith Chaffee from Boston adds: “She developed an entirely new Commedia that transcends time, space, and culture.”

As an actress, she appeared in films such as *Tom Adelaar*, *The Resurrection of a Bastard*, and *Kidnap*, and had television roles in *Summer Without Mum*, *Christmas with the Kuipers*, and *The Flight Disaster*. Last season, she played the leading role in *The Fireworks Disaster*, and this season she can be seen in *Buza 2* (BNN/VARA) and *The Silence* (Netflix).



*Katrien van Beurden, Troupe Courage © Sacha Muller*