

NAC Ed Video: Commedia

Hello! My name is Carrie Nath and I am a theater and movement artist and arts educator from Omaha Ne. And, I am on the Nebraska Arts Council Artist-in-the-schools roster. Today we are going to play with one of my favorite, and funny, art forms Commedia dell' arte.

Say it with me: I will say it – then you go: Commedia dell' arte: (pause) Commedia dell' arte (pause) Roll that R with me; rrrrrrrrrr. Excellent!

Today we are going to learn a little bit of the history of Commedia; ; some mime technique (yes, I said mime); meet the Stock Characters and explore some samples of comic lazzi, or scenes. Bonus footage: how to make some wickedly hysterical commedia masks out of things you can find at home.

Shall we get started?

So – Commedia dell'arte: Comedy has been around forever from the Ancient Greeks to present day (cites examples). And there's nothing better than a good bellylaugh. Good for the soul. Where did Commedia begin: A long time ago in Italy - the 16th century – the late 1500's - Originally it was designed for street vendors to draw crowds. Then, 5 families, the greatest being the Andreini family, decided to make people laugh. They created caravans – trailers that looked like little campers – They would ride into town, fold down the side of the trailer to make a stage – and using masks, costumes and oftentimes mime in order to disallow any language or dialect barrier - perform comic scenes playing stock characters that we still see in comedy today.

Before we meet these stock characters, lets learn a little mime technique.

Challenge 1:

Mime: We are going to create an introduction of ourselves using these three phrases

“Hello

“My name is _____.”

“I love _____.”

Take just a moment and fill in those blanks for yourself.

Now, I would like you to add a series of gesture with your introduction. Like this:

Hello – add one gesture for hello – however you would say hello. I do it like this – you might do it like this – or this

Pause and try it

Then point both hands to your chest when you say “My name is...” I am going to do it, then you do it. (example)

Now create 1 gesture -mime is about being specific so not a whole lot of gesture or it gets really confusing (example) No.

One gesture that says something about your name. My name is Carrie which is also a literal action. The gesture can say something about who you are. I'm kind of nutty so it could be this:
Carrie

Pause and try the "My name is" with your name and gesture.

Great. Now – we are going to put the first two lines together. It looks like this:

I am going to do it then you do it:

Hello

My name is Carrie

Pause and try it.

Awesome: final line of the introduction goes like this

Point your two hands towards your chest again on "I" and two hands over your heart on "Love" and add 1 gesture for the thing you love. Mine looks like this:

Pause and try the last line.

Excellent. Now, let's put them all together. Mine looks like this.

(Example)

Pause and try it

Great. A couple of tips. Be sure to go clearly from one line to the next. Don't drop your hands in between. It takes away from the flow of the line. For instance:

(example)

Keep the line nice and smooth like this:

(example)

Pause and practice

Challenge 2:

Now, do the intro without any words. Mine looks like this (example)

Remember – be specific and Nice and Smooth!

Pause and give it a try

Excellent. You are ready to meet these stock characters.

Stock Characters

Each company had stock characters: characters that exaggerated one part of the human being. It was believed that if you put all of the qualities of the stock characters together, it would make one whole person. The stock characters had a very specific costume and a half mask to help the audience easily recognize the character no matter how far away the stage might be. Because they were masked, they had to be very expressive with their bodies.

To help us remember each character, I have created a stock gesture for each as we learn who they are. And, I have some awesome masks to share with you. Let's meet some of my friends.

Pantalone The old, miserly man of state; very wealthy; usually the father of a young lover and is desperate to match him or her as wealthy as possible; he loves to chase beautiful women.

Mask: Very pronounced nose because he's always sticking it into other people's business; wrinkly with large bushy eyebrows

Costume: Full body red suit; black robes of intelligentsia signifying wealth and good education; often seen with a fez as he is traveler.

Stock Gesture: Body crouched over; arms close to sides; palms extended up with fingers rubbing together to signify “money, money, money”

I will do the stock gesture, then you do it. “Pantalone”

Arlecchino A servant; usually to a Pantalone; a jokester; laughs with his whole body; plays jokes for fun; if he ever hurts anyone he would make good in the end; constantly “getting one over” on the wealthy members of the town; very acrobatic; juggler

Mask: Simple black cloth; much like the “Zorro” mask of today

Costume: Long pantaloons and doublet with little triangles that indicate patches on his clothes signifying how poor he is (we now know him as The Harlequin with the diamond shaped pattern on the costume)

Stock Gesture: One heel extended forward on the ground; arms framing the self with one up and one down as if to say “Ta-da”

I will do the stock gesture, then you do it. “Arlecchino”

Colombina The sassy servant; smartest one in the household; Arlecchino’s side-kick; always coming up with the plan

Mask: Simple black cloth; much like the “Zorro” mask of today

Costume: Shepherdess skirt with simple corset that laces in front (signifying poverty as the corsets that strung up the front had to be tied by the person wearing it – corsets strung up the back were laced by someone else)

Stock Gesture: One heel extended forward on the ground with hands on hips and a little shake of the hips to indicate “sassiness”

I will do it, then you do it. “Colombina”. Let’s start from the top and review: Pantalone, Arlecchino, Colombina – awesome.

Dottore He is a doctor of philosophy; talks and talks and talks and says NOTHING; fat to indicate well fed and wealthy

Mask: Wrinkly and aged; bulbous nose; accentuated forehead to indicate intelligence and a big thinker.

Costume: simple undershirt and pantaloons with black robe of intelligentsia over the top and a scholar

Stock Gesture: Belly protruding front; left arm “holding a book”; right arm rotating from forearm down to indicate “talking too much” while saying “blah blah blah”

I will it, then you do it. “Dottore”

Capitano This is a BIG MAN who is really a chicken; supposedly in the Navy; has many tales of defeating hundreds of men with one hand tied behind his back; not sure if he was ever IN the Navy; he is an out-of-towner

Mask: Can have a Bulbous nose; heavy brows as everything is heavy. Also can have a square jaw and dashing appearance.

Costume: Captains doublet and hose; sash to indicate high rank in navy; sword at side

Stock Gesture: Super hero stance with arms pumping biceps at either side; chest puffed out; then retreating into self with fingers at mouth accentuating chattering teeth and legs shaking “chicken stance”

I will it, then you do it. “Capitano”

The Lovers (The Inamorata) Wealthy; in love with love and all things love; either desperately in love or out of love; intelligent but naïve; usually in the household of a Pantalone

Mask: Simple beauty if masked at all

Costume: Wealthy gown or suit

Stock Gesture: weight on one foot with other foot trailing behind as if floating; hands over heart; sighing

I will it, then you do it. “The Lovers” From the top: Pantalone, Arlecchino, Colombina, Dottore, Capitano. Now

Brighella The out-of-towner come to trick everyone out of their money and possessions; greedy; mean-spirited; whereas Arlecchino plays tricks for fun, Brighella could care less if he or she or they hurts anyone

Mask: Ominous with big nose to stick into everyone’s business

Costume: Traveling outfit; often changes into clothes of a local townsman in order to trick people into thinking that he or she is from the town

Stock Gesture: Crouched over like Pantalone only the palms are down, forearm extended tight from the body; fingers clawing down towards the ground like a giant predatory bird

I will it, then you do it. "Brighella" From the top superfast: Pantalone, Arlecchino, Colombina, Dottore, Capitano, The Lovers, Brighella. Excellent.

Here are the names of all of the characters. If you would like to pause and look them up on the internet to see the full costume you can do that now, or, after you view the whole video.

Lazzi and Character Intros

These characters were set in comic lazzo (i) that became well renowned. Audiences would often request certain storylines. There is only one existing story line today that can be traced back to the beginning. However, we have many companies that have regenerated what was believed to be a "dead art form." There are multiple lazzi existing today.

If you look below the video, you will see the different comic lazzi. You can create your own scenes at home.

With a family member, decide which stock characters you would like to play
Choose one of the scenes below featuring those characters
Create an intro like we did earlier, only this time use your stock character. How would they say hello? What do they love? It might look something like this:

Hello.

My name is Arlecchino

I love Laughing

Practice the intro with words and then mime the intro

You can act a storyline out by yourself. For example: I am going to play Arlecchino winning the heart of his beloved Colombina. (example)

Now act out the storyline you have chosen. Try it with and without words.

Awesome job! I hope you have fun playing with these characters and creating your own scenes. Stick around right now for the bonus footage: making your own mask with things from your home.

Mask tutorial:

Here's an easy way to make a mask with things from your home. You will need:

A paper plate or a cereal or cracker box. I am going to use a paper plate.

Crayons, markers or colored pencils

Scissors

Yarn or elastic

- 1 Cut a paper plate in half.
- 2 Measure to the halfway mark of the paper plate and cut a 2 inch curve for your nose.
- 3 Measure in approximately 1 ½ - 2 inch from the top of the curve to identify the center of your eye and mark it
- 4 Cut a curve for the bottom of the mask
- 5 Cut out two holes for the eyes

6 Decorate the mask specifically for your character. Ask yourself: who is this character? What does he/she/they want? Are they rich? Are they not wealthy? How can I show who they are on the mask? I have chosen colorful diamonds for Arleccino.

7 measure out elastic or yarn to hold the mask on your face.

8 Staple, tape or cut a whole and attach the elastic or yarn. And, voila! You have a mask!

I love Commedia and I hope you will love it too. Thank you for playing along and have an awesome day!