

Commedia 101

Teacher Resource Pack



INTRODUCTION

Commedia dell'arte is one of the most engaging styles of theatre for students. Elements of commedia have made their way into almost every theatrical form from the writings of Shakespeare (most notably *A Comedy of Errors*) and Molière, to opera (*I Pagliacci*), puppet theatre (*Punch and Judy*) and pantomime, to the work of the Marx Brothers and Rowan Atkinson. The fast pace and improvisatory nature of *commedia dell'arte*, along with its use of stock characters, make it incredibly accessible to a young audience.

The premise behind *Commedia 101* is to introduce students to the style of *commedia dell'arte*, allowing students to experience, first hand, the improvisatory nature of *commedia*. Students will see *commedia* stock characters, classic scenarios and *lazzi*. This performance embodies the fundamental principal of the style: how to embody a character, through the use of the body, the voice and the mask.

These notes are designed to give you a concise resource to use with your class and to support their experience of seeing *Commedia 101*.

CLASSROOM CONTENT AND CURRICULUM LINKS

Essential Learnings: The Arts (Drama), SOSE (History, Culture) and English

Style/Form: Commedia Dell'Arte, Traditional & Contemporary Clowning, Shakespeare, Melodrama, Visual Theatre, Physical Comedy, Physical Theatre, Non Verbal Communication and Mime, Improvisation, Slapstick, Political Satire, Parody, Absurdism.

Themes and Contexts: Creativity, Imagination, Transformation, Play, Audience Engagement and Interaction, Roles & Relationships, Status, Choices and Dramatic Form.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Commedia dell'Arte, also known as "Italian comedy," was a humorous theatrical presentation performed by professional players who traveled in troupes throughout Italy in the 16th century. *Commedia* troupes included women and children, at a time when males had traditionally played all roles, a development that would influence modern acting conventions. The traveling *commedia* troupes consisted of 12 or so professional performers, and each specialised in a single character.

In spite of the range of dialects spoken throughout Italy at that time, there was no attempt made to change the performance's dialect from region to region. Even when a local company performed, much of the dialogue would not have been understood. Regardless of region, *il Capitano* would have spoken in Spanish, *il Dottore* in Bolognese, and *l'Arlecchino* in utter gibberish. The focus was placed on physical business rather than on spoken text.

Performances took place on temporary stages, mostly on city streets, but occasionally even in court venues. Better troupes, such as I Gelosi, performed in palaces and became internationally famous once they traveled abroad. Music, dance, witty dialogue, and all kinds of mischief contributed to the comic effects. As a result, the art form spread throughout Europe. *Commedia* conventions and characters found their way into other theatrical traditions, such as the British "panto", which flourished from 18th century, American clown routines, comic entr'actes, and minstrel shows which featured characters with names such as Harlequin, Columbine, Scaramouche, and Pantaloon, and in the French character Pierrot (a descendent of Pedrolino), an icon of the early 20th Century with his evocative white face and silent gesture, and in Bip, the white-face clown created by the legendary French mime, Marcel Marceau.

Performance Conventions

Props

There were no elaborate sets in *commedia*. Staging, for example, was minimalistic—rarely anything more than one market or street scene—and the stages were frequently temporary outdoor structures. Instead, great use was made of props including animals, food, furniture, watering devices, and weapons. The character *Arlecchino* carried a *battacchio*, two thin strips of wood tied together, which made a great noise on impact. This gave birth to the word "slapstick", and went on to define a style of physical comedy.

Improvisation

In spite of its outwardly chaotic spirit, the *commedia dell'arte* was a highly disciplined art requiring both virtuosity and a strong sense of ensemble playing. The unique talent of *commedia* players was to improvise comedy around a scenario. Responding to each other, or to audience reaction, the actors made use of the *lazzi* (special rehearsed routines that could be inserted into the plays at convenient points to heighten the comedy), musical numbers, and impromptu dialogue to vary the happenings on stage.

Physical Theatre

Masks forced actors to project their characters' emotions through the body. Leaps, tumbles, stock gags (*burle* and *lazzi*), obscene gestures and slapstick antics were incorporated into their acts.

Stock Characters

According to renowned *commedia dell'arte* Maestro Antonio Fava, the characters of the

commedia dell'arte can be divided into four main categories:

1. The Servants (or *Zanni*), including Arlecchino (Harlequin), Pulcinella (Punch), Colombina (Columbine), Scapino (Scapin), Brighella, Pedrolino, Pierrot, and the like;
2. The Old Men (or *Vecchi*), such as the greedy Magnifico (Pantalone), the know-it-all professor (il Dottore), or the stuttering Tartaglia;
3. The young Lovers (or *Innamorati*), with names such as Isabella, Flaminia, or Ortensia (for women) and Flavio, Orazio, Ortensio, or Leandro (for men).
4. The boasting Captains (or *Capitani*) and their female equivalent, the vivacious and oftentimes violent La Signora.

Hundreds of character names exist, each the invention of a particular actor, but all of them can be viewed as a derivative or hybrids of these four major character types, some of which were associated with a particular region of Italy such as **Peppe Nappa** (Sicily), **Gianduia** (Turin), **Stenterello** (Tuscany), **Rugantino** (Rome), and **Meneghino** (Milan).

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 of many of the favorite characters of 17th- and 18th-century European theatre.

Masks

All the fixed character types, the figures of fun or satire, wore colored leather masks. Their opposites, usually pairs of young lovers around whom the stories revolved, had no need for such devices.



Costumes

The audience was able to pick up from each character's dress the type of person he was representing. For elaboration, loose-fitting garments alternated with very tight, and jarring color contrasts opposed monochrome outfits. Except for the innamorato, males would identify themselves with character-specific costumes and half masks. The *zanni* (precursor to clown) Arlecchino, for example, would be immediately recognizable because of his black mask and patchwork costume.

While the innamorato and the female characters wore neither masks nor costumes unique to that personage, certain information could still be derived from their clothing. Audiences knew what members of the various social classes typically wore, and also expected certain colors to represent certain emotional states. Regardless of where they toured, *commedia dell'arte* conventions were recognized and adhered to.

Music

The inclusion of music and dance into *commedia* performance required that all actors have these skills.

LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Art Form Definitions

Amorosa/Amoroso: the female and male young lovers respectively, another term for the *Innamorati*.

Battacchio: the wooden bat Arlecchino and other characters used, made of two wooden slats that when struck will produce a loud slapping noise without applying a striking blow.

Canovaccio (pl. **canovacci**): the summary of just a short scene.

Commedia: Italian for "comedy", it also is the widespread short name of the art form originated as masked, semi-improvisational street theatre with stock characters.

Commedia dell'arte: Italian for "comedy of the professional artists", the full name for the art form. Outside of Italy it is also simply called "Italian Comedy".

En travesty: cross-dressing in the attire of the opposite gender; going in drag. Though *commedia* allowed women to act in the female roles, sometimes (especially in the earliest years), men would play the older female roles with masks. Throughout all of *commedia's* history, male and female Masks would often disguise themselves as a member of the opposite sex during the course of the plot.

First zanni: also called the *primo zanni*, these were servants of the highest rank, most power, and often most intelligence. These were the "straight man" of the classic comic duo. See also second zanni.

Harlequin: a term and proper name derived from Arlecchino usually meaning representing a clown, pantomime, or lovable tramp. Because of Arlecchino's brightly coloured costumes over the centuries, this term can also describe such clothing.

Harlequinade: derived from harlequin, a comedy featuring pantomime clowns or another term for *commedia dell'arte*.

Improvisation: creation of dialogue and action by the actor at the moment of performing instead of from a memorized script. In *commedia*, the improv is guided by the summary of the scenario.

Innamorati: the plural form of the *innamorata* (female) and *innamorato* (male), the young lovers present in most scenarios. It is their desire to be with each other that most of the other plots revolve around. Individuals can also be called *amorosa* and *amoroso*.

Intermezzo (pl. **intermezzi**) - short, unrelated and independent performances done between the acts in some *commedia* productions. These can be musical numbers, dances, jugglers, short comedic skits, etc.

Irony, dramatic: elements of the plot or characterizations that are known to the audience but not to the characters on stage. This was often used in *commedia*, especially for audience members who were familiar with certain Masks and for some characters are easily fooled.

Lazzo (pl. **lazzi**): various comedic stage business (verbal and physical) that often have little if anything to do with the plot but can be inserted in almost any play.

Mask (1): (Italian – **maschere**) usually made of hardened leather, these covered the face and were shaped to associate with a particular character, often with exaggerated features such as long nose or deep wrinkles. The mask usually covered only three quarters of the face (though known as a "half-face mask") leaving the mouth exposed for expression. Other characters used intense makeup in lieu of a mask and others wore no mask at all. Later generations did away with many of the masks to give the actor a wider range of facial gestures.

Mask (2): is also a term for *commedia* characters, even for those who did wear an actual mask.

Punch and Judy - English puppet plays based on the *commedia* character of Pulcinella.

Satire: Is comedy that is targeted at an individual or topic in society to provoke thought and to question the status quo. Parody is a form of comedy that imitates and mocks a style, a person or some other target to trivialize and poke fun.

Second zanni - also called the *secondo zanni*, these were servants of the lowest rank, least power, and often the most foolish. These were the "funny man" of the classic comic duo. See also first zanni.

Slapstick (1): the English name for a *battacchio*, the wooden prop bat used to make slapping noises.

Slapstick (2): The derived term for humorous, exaggerated violence and extreme physical comedy as well as the genre of such comedy.

Stock characters: In *commedia* characters are based on typical social types and over the years were named and became highly recognizable to the audience. The characters were in

many ways archetypes for characters in societies everywhere e.g. the miserly cranky old man, the mischievous servant, the lover, and the bragging soldier. The characters of the *commedia* usually represented an exaggerated mood for example sadness, mockery, confusion, or anxiety.

Vecchi: the old men, often Pantalone and Dottore and a few others. These usually represent the highest ranks of society (as seen in the plays) and have some control over the lives of the others, regardless how stupid, foolish, or (in actuality) impotent they are.

Zanni: the male laborers and servants, lowest on the social ladder, often from the peasant class. The word is derived from Giovanni, the most common male name of the time in Italy (the equivalent of naming them "John"). Can also be a generic independent Mask with the name Zanni.

PRE-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

Key words and concepts

Discuss and define the following terms with your class in relation to the performance of *Commedia 101*:

Slapstick, visual comedy, physical theatre, mime, acrobatic, high status, low status, clown, masks, heightened physicality.

Making and Presenting

1. Stock Characters

Go through each of the main stock characters in *Commedia* including how they walk, talk, stand, dress etc.

2. Jokes & Tongue Twisters

To prepare for *Commedia* it is important to get students to start thinking about jokes, what makes them funny and how they are told. Get the students to think of ones that they know or give them a selection to say to the class. Tongue twisters are a great way to warm-up for any vocal performance. They can also be incorporated into *Commedia* performances as part of the dialogue.

3. Status

Have students pair up. One student takes the high status role and the other the low status role. High status sits on a chair, low status sits on the floor next to the chair and holds the front leg closest to them. High status demands a story (remind the students that the high status character is demanding and not polite to low status), holding up their hand closest to the low status. This hand is a Taser. Low status starts to tell a story. If high status doesn't like the story, they can Taser the low status. Have students swap places.

4. Create a Nonsense Scene

Hand out a list of nonsense words and have students create a short improvised scene that is based around and features that word. The scene could tell the story of the origin or meaning of the word.

5. Create a Comic Scene

Create a short comic scene that illustrates the origin of a moral or saying such as "A bird in

the hand is worth two in the bush.”

Post-Show Follow-up

Discussion

- Discuss how *lazzi* were used in the show. Focus on how the actors drew out the dramatic tension of the scene, the stock characters used, how they interacted with each other and the audience, how status was shown.
- Identify the comic styles used and the theatrical techniques employed by the actors to create the performance.
- Discuss how the masks are used to create the characters.

Making and Presenting

Exercise 1: Seven Levels of Energy

Objectives:

- Find the performance energy needed to play the Commedia masks
- Discover which energy level and possibly which mask character best matches the students own personality
- Sustain and increase concentration and energy

These levels must be shown in the body at all times. The verbal exchanges that come from them are less important for our purposes than the physical exchanges.

Have the students stand neutral and explain the first level. Let them do it and then call freeze. On freeze they come to neutral but do not drop their focus or energy. Explain the next level and continue in this manner until you have finished all seven.

1. Barely Sustainable

The key to this first level is to lose control of the hips and spine. I can walk because I have control over my hips. I have control of my head and upper body because I have control over my spine. Losing control over your spine and hips move through the room allowing yourself to fall off balance and regain it slightly. The hips will dictate which way you fall. If you fall to the floor, how do you get back up on your feet? You have to cheat a bit with a large class so that no one gets hurt but you can still find room to let go. You do not talk at this level or interact because you only have enough focus to catch your balance for brief moments.

2. Social or Casual

The key to this second level is to have control over your hips and spine but keep them loose. You have enough control to walk and turn your head, etc. However on this level you waste your energy and throw it away by being loose and casual. It is also called "social" because now you can make eye contact and communicate with other people although it is wasted energy. No real thought goes into your voice or conversation. No real focus on what you're doing. Your mind wanders. You can try to run but it is wasted energy and soon runs out of steam. Explore different levels now by sitting, picking things up casually.

3. Efficiency

The key to this third level is to have perfect control over your whole body. You use just enough energy to do the job. You are focused and always have something to do. You

complete every task before moving on to another. Run, crawl, skip, jump, etc. Move things around and if you need to adjust your clothing or hair you do so with complete focus and precision. When you walk your arms swing at the right speed to match your stride. Your speech and emotions are efficient as well. Give only the right amount of emotion to a situation. You do not move on to another exchange until the present exchange is complete. When it is over you move on without second-guessing or forgetting something. Everything you do, all your actions are important from this level onward.

4. Action

The key to this fourth level of energy is to have total and complete commitment to what you are doing. You give more than you need because you are one hundred percent committed at all times. This is the level of impulse. You are a person of action. The moment you decide to do something you do it. This applies to your verbal and emotional exchanges. If you are angry you are completely angry. If you decide to jump you jump without questioning why. The challenge is to not edit your thoughts or impulses, when they occur to you, do it! You are never at a loss for something to do.

5. Suspension

The key to this fifth level is to be completely aware of and in control of your body, senses, impulses, and environment all at the same time. Your body moves as one unit. You are aware of what your hands, legs, etc. are doing at all times because you are focused completely. You can hear, smell, see, and sense everything around you. Nothing escapes your awareness. Explore different levels but do so without making a sound. This forces you to be aware of how to shift your weight and how to become aware of which muscles must move first to execute a move. Think of a cat on the hunt. It is aware of everything and will not proceed until it knows it is safe.

Move around the room from point a to point b. Point b should be on the opposite side from where you are. Figure out how you can get there and how fast you can get there. Every new level encompasses the previous ones so you are in control and committed completely. Every level from here on up is vital. Your activities and mind set must have a life or death quality. Failure is not an option.

6. Dilemma

The key to this level is to second-guess every impulse and decision you make. The dilemma must be physically and emotionally expressed as well as orally. Remember that everything is vital on these energy levels and failure has dire consequences. Everything is important. Follow every impulse blindly and then stop yourself. The example that I like to do with the students is that I tell them that they were supposed to bring something to me and that they have only one minute to go get it. Of course they do not know what it is and I reject everything they present. I count down for them. "You have twenty seconds, ten seconds, etc." They should take the urgency and sense of running out of time seriously and build their frantic state as high as they can.

7. Ecstatic or Climactic

The key to this level is to bring a single action to a climax and hold it there until you tell them to do it. This can be tying their shoe or picking something up off the floor. This action must be vital to them and they should be desperate to complete it. Their emotional state should be at its peak. It is the ultimate moment before something has to happen. Push them and suspend the moment for as long as possible constantly telling them that they must need to complete this action. Then tell them to do it! Watch for the immediacy of the release.

Notes:

While the class settles down and catches their breath you can discuss the following ideas:

- The actor (as an actor and not playing a character) is always on level 4 "Action"
- She is committed one hundred percent to everything and aware of everything

- You need more energy than necessary to play on stage so that it reads to the audience
- The actor can play casual and efficient but can not be themselves casual or merely efficient This applies to the higher levels as well
- The actor can be in a state of suspension as well as play it but cannot be in a dilemma or be themselves lost in an ecstatic state on stage. They must be in control and aware of when to exit or stop. Therefore the actor is always on the fourth level because she must be ready and committed at all times
- Students should apply this state of readiness and commitment to their classes as well.

Commedia dell' arte plays on the higher levels of energy. The lowest it can possibly be is level four, "Action" but should be played higher.

Exercise 2: Find the Character

This first class should be done without the masks so that the students can explore the characters without being intimidated by the masks. Once they have a feel for the characters and the way they move then it will be easier to play the mask later.

The Characters

1. **Arlecchino:** A low status servant. Arlecchino is hyperactive and a prankster who is constantly becoming carried away with the moment he is in. Because of this he can appear to be foolish but has the ability to outwit everyone else.
2. **Pantalone:** An old miser. Pantalone is a patriarch (or matriarch, then called Pantalona) character, who is extremely wealthy and powerful. A hypochondriac who always desires to become more rich and powerful.
3. **Dottore:** The Doctor. An old, pompous windbag whose treatments are often worse than the condition. Loves to lecture and expound without making any sense.
4. **Capitano:** A Military figure. Arrogant and over-bearing but really an inept coward at heart.
5. **Brighella:** A low or mid status servant. Big, strong, and loves to eat. He can either be played crafty or dim witted. A regular servant in low status or a foreman character in mid status, however in both cases he is often out for himself and will try to get something for himself out of every situation.
6. **Tartaglia:** A low status servant or in some cases an accountant or lawyer. (White-collar worker.) Although he can be very eloquent when alone, he is a nervous wreck in the company of other people.
7. **Isabella:** One of the lovers. Often the daughter to Pantalone. She is romantic and can be naive but as the daughter of Pantalone can also be just as self-absorbed and deceitful.
8. **Colombina:** Low status servant. She is a flirt and very intelligent. She is often the love interest of Arlecchino.
9. **Lelio:** One of the lovers. He is a perfect counterpart to Isabella. He can be the son of one of Pantalone's rivals, someone who Pantalone does not approve of, or Pantalone's daughter.

Describe the character to the class and ask them to give you an exaggerated pose. Ask them next while still in the pose to talk like the character. Now have them move around as the character. Have them find the character's pattern that will become a 'stylized' walk which will lead to a special 'signature' movement that they will use when entering scenes.

Notes:

- Remind and encourage them to remain above energy level four, 'ACTION'.
- Remember that the girls in the class should not play men but apply each character's traits to female characters. This also applies to the boys who should find the male counterparts to Isabella and Columbine. Lelio could also be Pantalone's son.
- The signature movement can be a gesture or completely zanni and acrobatic. Each student creates from his or her personal abilities.

Exercise 3: Audience 'Takes' and suspended moments

Objectives:

- Share reactions directly with audience
- Develop timing

The students work in pairs. The improvisation involves giving a gift. One person gives the other a surprise gift. The person receiving the gift first reacts to the idea of getting an unexpected gift. They give that reaction to the gift giver and then hold it and share it with the audience by looking at them with the reaction. Then back to the gift giver. Then they open the gift and see what it is. They react to seeing the gift and repeat the previous procedure with the new reaction. They can either silently mime or tell the audience what the gift is. Let the class work all at the same time as a warm up and then have them demonstrate to the class.

Next have them react to the gift and then give the opposite reaction to the audience and then return the original reaction to the gift giver.

Next you can play a variation on the telling a secret or rumour game. In a circle one person begins by telling the person next to them either a secret or rumour. The person receiving the news gives their reaction directly to the class and then gives that reaction to the next person in the circle and tells them what they heard. When it gets back to the original person they react to the fact that their secret is out or reacts to the changes in the rumour.

Notes:

- Be simple when miming the gift. The reactions are more important in this exercise than showing what the gift is. If it is easier to verbally say what it is then use words.
- Encourage them to play with the length of the suspended moment or take to the audience to see what works and what doesn't.
- The reactions should be physically overreacted.

Exercise 4: Character relationships

Objectives:

- Learn how the different character energies work off one another.
- Discover which character is 'your' character.
- Gain an understanding of stage balance and positioning when playing with another character.

Review the characters from Exercise 2, then work with the improvs below.

Scenario 1: The examination - Pantalone and Dottore.

Scenario 2: The secret rendezvous - Lelio and Isabella / Arlecchino and Colombina.

Scenario 3: The seduction - Capitano and Colombina.

Scenario 4: Kitchen duty - Brighella and Arlecchino / Colombina and Tartaglia.

Scenario 5: The threat - Brighella and Tartaglia / Capitano and Lelio.

Scenario 6: The proposition - Capitano with either Brighella, Arlecchino, or Pantalone.

Now play with more than two characters. The following improv is done with entrances and exits. The character giving the instructions always exits before the new character enters. For example, Pantalone gives instructions to Arlecchino then exits before or as Colombina enters and so on. Tartaglia is left trying to remember or mixing up the instructions while repeating them to the audience.

Scenario 7: The instructions

- Pantalone to Arlecchino to Colombina to Brighella to Tartaglia
- Lelio to Isabella to Colombina to Arlecchino to Tartaglia

Notes:

- Use the audience takes from Exercise 3.
- Remind them to over act. Commedia is very broad, physical action. Avoid being too intellectual.
- *Commedia dell'arte* is not politically correct theatre. It was and is, very crude and political. Allow the students as much latitude as is permitted in your school and your own personal teaching philosophy.
- Keep the characters' relationships and social status in mind.
- Always arrange yourself so that you are never talking upstage to someone. This will be important for when the masks are on.
- Remind them of their character's personal signature gesture or movement when entering and exiting

Exercise 5: Wearing the Masks

Objectives:

- Become comfortable with a close fitting mask.
- Understand the size of play needed for the mask.
- Develop proper breathing.

The students work in groups of six. They try on the masks and make them comfortable on their faces. They line up with their backs to the audience giving each other as much elbowroom as possible. When they are ready you tell them to turn. The characters turn and create an exaggerated pose for the audience. Then tell them to move. The characters begin to move around and talk all at the same time. When you call freeze they return to their poses. Then one at a time they talk and move around solo when you call them.

Notes:

- Even though these are half masks some students will feel claustrophobic under the mask. Remind them to breathe deep to avoid hyperventilating.
- Remind them to talk out to the audience and remember their stage positioning.
- All their reactions should be overreactions.
- They should put the mask on with their backs to the audience and turn their backs when taking the mask off.
- Never place a mask face down after taking it off.
- Encourage them to say anything while doing the first exercise even if it is repeating what they remember from the previous class
- After everyone in the class has had a chance to experience a mask you can play with the character encounters from Exercise 2 or your own variations.

Exercise 6: Plot/Counter Plot

Use this class to play with the following improv as a preview to having the students write their own Commedia piece.

Objectives:

- Develop and maintain good listening skills.
- To enjoy simplicity
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This is a variation on the "instructions" improv and is played in groups of six. Pantalone wants something. He plots to get it with the help of Dottore. They hire Capitano to carry out the plot. Arlecchino over hears the plot from a secret hiding spot. He devises a counter plot to ruin Pantalone's plans. He enlists the help of either Brighella or Colombina. They in turn enlist the help of Tartaglia who is left alone on stage to mix it all up. *Lazzi* are essentially entrances and exits where your personal signature is played out. Then the scene occurs. The scenes break down like this:

- Pantalone enters talking about something he/she wants (more money, power, etc.) Arlecchino is hiding and spying on Pantalone. Pantalone tells us what it is and then tries to think of a way to get it. He can't quite figure it out so he calls for Dottore who enters.
- Pantalone tells Dottore what he wants and asks for help in getting it. Dottore comes up with a plot to get it. (This should be a diabolical plot.) They call for Capitano who enters. Pantalone explains what he wants and tells Capitano the plot. Capitano boasts about how simple it will be. Pantalone and Dottore exit satisfied that they have the perfect plan.
- Capitano continues to brag to the audience. Arlecchino distracts and tricks Capitano into leaving.
- Arlecchino then comes out from hiding and is upset about the plot. Arlecchino repeats the plot to the audience and tells them how horrible it is and then comes up with a counter plot to foil Pantalone's plan. He needs help so he calls Brighella or Colombina, who enters.
- Arlecchino first explains Pantalone's plot then his own counter plot. The other servant is equally horrified at the plot and then happy at the counter plot. They agree to help. They repeat the counter plot to Arlecchino who then exits satisfied that he has the perfect plan. Brighella or Colombina then repeat the counter plot to the audience but change it a little so that they get something for themselves out of the deal. (More meals, better work position, etc.) They call Tartaglia who enters nervously.
- Brighella or Colombina first tell Tartaglia the original plot and then their version of the counter plot. After Tartaglia repeats the counter plot correctly Brighella or Colombina exit satisfied that he/she has the perfect plot. Tartaglia is left alone on stage and tries to remember the counter plot but can't. Tartaglia mixes both plots together and then exits satisfied that he has the correct version.

Notes:

- Keep the plot and counter plot as simple as possible.
- Listen and remember what you are told. Accept the plot and do not block the improv. This is key to keeping it simple.
- Remember that the comedy is in the characters' reactions and their physical play not necessarily the dialogue.
- The student is stuck for a 'signature' then give them suggestions that are physical. For example, Pantalone enters counting the money in his moneybag by either singing or doing the 'money' dance. He/she enters complaining of an ailment

such as a trick knee, back pain, etc. Arlecchino enters always announcing himself the same way or jumps through the door or cartwheels, or runs into the room and passes the person who calls him forcing him to stop and look around thinking that no one is there. Brighella enters always eating something. Each character has *something* that is based in their personality.

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