

# Commedia dell'Arte

## STOCK CHARACTERS

**Magnifico**—the master, evil, looks down on everyone, physicality like an eagle.

**Zanni:** the servant, peasant, curious, enthusiastic, physicality like a pigeon.

**Pantalone:** old master, miserly, mean, friends with the Doctor.

**The Doctor:** man of learning, leads with his stomach, knows everything but understands nothing.

**Arlecchino (the Harlequin):** servant, has no logic, happy go lucky, cheeky, always hungry.

**Columbina:** servant, cunning and playful, intelligent.

**Brighella:** servant, cunning



## HISTORY

- ◆ Started in Venice in 1600s.
- ◆ First time women were seen on stage.
- ◆ Characters represented the different types of people in society from kings to servants.
- ◆ It was street performance.
- ◆ Troupes travelled around Europe performing.
- ◆ Scenes were improvised around planned entrances and exits.
- ◆ No scene were more than 3 minutes long.
- ◆ The relationship between performers and audience was key.

## KEY FEATURES OF COMEDIA DELL'ARTE

- ◆ Comedy
- ◆ Masks
- ◆ Master & servant
- ◆ Interaction with the audience
- ◆ Improvisation
- ◆ Stock characters
- ◆ Exaggerated physicality
- ◆ Actors engaging with the audience, breaking the fourth wall.

## KEY WORDS & TERMS

**Lazzi:** comic business that interrupts the scene.

**Gromolot:** babble speak. It sounds like language but is made up.

**Stock Character:** characters that is easily recognisable to the audience because of their reoccurring appearance.

**Improvisation:** performing without rehearsing, making it up on the spot.

**Slapstick:** a form of comedy that is based on deliberately clumsy actions and embarrassing events.

**The Fourth Wall:** an imagined wall separating actors from the audience. While the audience can see through this "wall", the convention assumes, the actors act as if they cannot.

**Clocking the Audience:** when a performer acknowledges the audience, breaking the fourth wall. Often used to create comedy.

## COMEDIA DELL'ARTE'S INFLUENCE CAN BE SEEN IN:

Pantomime  
Shakespeare  
Melodrama

Sitcoms such as *Miranda* & *Fawlty Towers*  
Charlie Chaplin & Laurel & Hardy