



ZANNIZINE

A QUARTERLY ON-LINE MAG DEVOTED TO COMMEDIA





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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

INTRODUCING ISSUE 5 OF ZANNIZINE

Welcome to Zannizine's fifth appearance - our Spring 2022 Issue.

The Present Status of Commedia

With the Spring Issue 2022 we are into our second year and perhaps it's the right moment to think again of our aims and goals in running a magazine devoted to Commedia. We are pleased with what we have achieved so far. The wide range of articles has already built into a sizeable archive which sort of complements the excellent Routledge Companion, with the added advantages of worldwide and free access, and our images in glorious colour.

Our regular readers are less than we had hoped (about 300 at present) which brings me to our goal and intention to lead (or join) a movement to raise the perceived status of Commedia as an art form, particularly in Britain, which is pitifully low if we compare it to dance, drama, opera and music. The general opinion is that it is an eccentric niche practiced largely by amateurs and 'intellectuals' of interest only to others of the same small circle.

There is no shortage of creative talent, but there is a lack of facilities, opportunities, and even encouragement - these we can provide through the Zannizine, The London Commedia Centre with all the facilities of Sands Film Studios and the Mini Commedia Festival as a show case. We will take up the subject in the Summer Issue and we would like to hear your experiences, ideas and comments on Commedia's present status.

In the meantime, we hope you enjoy the present selection.

Barry Grantham and Bill Tuck.

Our cover illustration

Carnival – when the last of the meat was consumed before the fasting (or starving) time of the year, which in the Christian world is known as Lent. In acknowledgement of the significance of Carnival within the history of Commedia, this issue presents an article from a long-forgotten dance journal, written by George Edinger and illustrated by the well-known artist Michael Ayrton, whose drawings of Commedia masks provide a lavish decoration for this little piece of nostalgia. It is his version of The Captain that graces the front cover of this issue.

**Contributions to the mag are welcome from all interested in things Commedia – please enquire or send material for consideration to either of the editors:
Barry Grantham at brrgrantham@gmail.com
or Bill Tuck at bill.tuck@chalemie.co.uk**

CommediaZannizine.co.uk
is the website host for our magazine

The Masks of Michael Ayrton

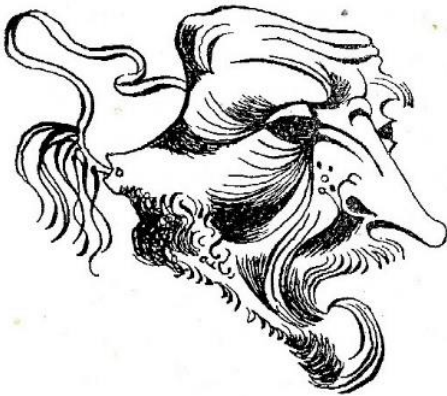
An introduction by Barry Grantham

Richards Buckle's influential magazine 'BALLET' ran for several years in the forties of last century. It was instrumental in my own goal of creating a magazine which eventually materialized as The Zannizine. Buckle commissioned many well-known and up-and-coming artists to decorate his pages, including Michael Ayrton. As both painter and sculptor he had a penchant for all that was weird and mystical. His works can be seen at the Tate, and he gets high (but not astronomical) prices in today's art market. Of the author of the text, George Edinger, I know little, and although he provides a rather charming and appropriate account of Carnival I feel that the text accompanies the drawings rather than the other way round.



Michael Ayrton 1921 - 1975

CARNIVAL by George Edinger



AT THE outset of the Lenten season when all devout persons were called on to abstain from eating meat, not because there was a dollar shortage but because it was the decree of the Church, the peoples that emerged from the wreck of the Roman Empire always gave a farewell feast to their meat. 'All Flesh Farewell', or in the dog Latin of the day, 'Carne Vale'.

This farewell party was staged on the grand scale. The cities gave themselves over for days and weeks to masquerade and mockery. From Twelfth Night until Shrove Tuesday, Rome and Venice, Dijon and Cologne, Antwerp and Seville made merry in their many ways. It was the great feast of Carnival, now smothered by wars, revolutions and shortages in Europe, but still alive in the cities of Latin America, beyond the South Atlantic.

Carnival is the Roman Saturnalia: it is also the Bacchanalia of the Greeks. You can trace it to the yearly procession of the classic wine god which commemorated his first coming out of India in a long route of capering Satyrs and prancing Centaurs, to the clang of cymbals and the Pipes of Pan, with a great flourishing of the vine-wreathed staff called Thyrsis. You can prove it, down to many details to be the Roman Saturnalia; resurrection of that golden age before thundering Jove had ousted Saturn from the throne of the heaven. Then masters served their slaves; the whole City sat down to communal masked

meals and grave Lucian found that he must lay aside his work, drink and dice, smear his body with rust and be ducked in fountains at the bidding of the elected Lord of Misrule.

Popes were not always reconciled to this pagan survival in Christian Rome. Alternately they strove to compromise, to suppress, to adapt and to adopt; until, at last, the Saturnalia became the Carnival.

Rising to the climax of its glory in sixteenth-century Florence (Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and many other painters of the Renaissance lavished their art and ingenuity on the great cars, drawn by white oxen with gilded horns, or plumed horses with silver harness wrought with dragons, tritons and cherubs, confounded in a strange medley of the scriptures and the Classics) the Carnival held its splendour in the Catholic Europe till the French Revolution; and in some places longer. It lingered in Paris till the fall of the Second Empire, in Rome till the end of the Papal State and in Rio de Janeiro till the second world war.



In eighteenth-century Venice Carnival began on Twelfth Night. It was a highly individualist affair. There were no organized processions like the one that stretched the length of the Toledo at Naples and numbered 200,000 masks. At Venice every-one went mad his own way.

Every Ridotto Ball and serenade was thrown open to any guest in a mask. St Mark's Square was a mass of scaramouches, harlequins, Moors, Albanians, yodelling Tyrolese, gypsies, fortune tellers, and quack doctors screaming at the tops of their voices, of masked women, shrouded in dominoes, and screened by fans; women of every degree of virtue. The fortune tellers plied the busiest trade. At their raised tables, screened by celestial and terrestrial globes, they proclaimed through speaking tubes into the ears of their masked consultants the fate and fortune, in love and play, that awaited them this Carnival, for the Carnival drew all Europe. Behind his mask, screened by his costume, the foreign visitor, thrust into the crowd at a ball; jammed among a mass of gondolas attracted by a moonlit serenade, or pressed against green gaming tables piled high with golden sequins could always strike up that romance of which the memory would gild his declining years.



At Cologne the Carnival (it lasted in some sort till 1914) was a more organized affair. A committee of Councillors met every week from the eleventh day of the eleventh month until Ash Wednesday to choose the best songs, commemorative odes, most suitable plays, colour schemes for the grand procession, designs for the triumphal cars and trappings for the horses that were to draw them.

On the Monday, Giant Carnival drove in an eight-horse chariot to the throne in the Neumarkt and with eight Moorish pages holding up his azure robe ascended the steps and proclaimed the Carnival open with a flourish of trumpets, a roll of kettle drums and the firing of cannon. Then the chosen song of the year was sung by the assembled citizens and for that day all was

over. Shrove Tuesday came the grand procession: came rócoco mandarins on ponies, dancing dervishes, the scarlet City guard, knights in inlaid armour, the triumphal car of the Muses Papageno and Papagena dancing hand in hand, Peruvians, Turks, Indians and Greeks; Giant Carnival himself a real gold crown on his head, riding a crimson dolphin; Hanswurst capering at his side in cap and bells; eight horses drawing him along, and eight his queen, her car a silver swan with old Neptune decked with seaweed bestriding its neck. Next all the noblest families of Cologne in their coaches, dressed in costumes of the Middle Ages, and, at the end, a troop of cuirassiers in white with helmets and breastplate gilt.



The greatest carnival was the carnival of Papal Rome. 'In Rome' writes Goethe, 'with its peasant clothes and hooded friars and shovel-hatted priests it is in some measure Carnival all the year.' But Shrove Tuesday was the climax. On Shrove Tuesday all Rome gathered along the Corso, the carriages drove three abreast coming and going each side of the way from the Piazza del Popolo to the Palazzo Venezia. Only foreign diplomats had the right to drive their carriages between the two traffic lines. The Corso ceased to be a street. With the walls of all the houses hung with tapestry; with every balcony and window full of on-lookers in fancy dress, with carpets stretched from house to house across the way, it become one long gallery, and the kindly climate made one forget that the gallery lacked a roof. From all the innumerable balconies, hangings of crimson and emerald green, bright blue, white and gold were fluttering in the sunshine. From windows and parapets and roofs of houses streamers and draperies were floating out upon the streets; shop fronts were taken down and the windows 'filled with company like shining boxes at a theatre' Dickens says. Doorways, their doors removed, gave on to tapestry lined groves hung with garlands of flowers and ever-greens. Builders' scaffoldings were gorgeous temples radiant in silver, gold and crimson and 'in every nook where women's eyes could glisten there they danced, laughed and sparkled like the glistening lights on water.' Along the Corso, in and out the carriages scampered a hundred

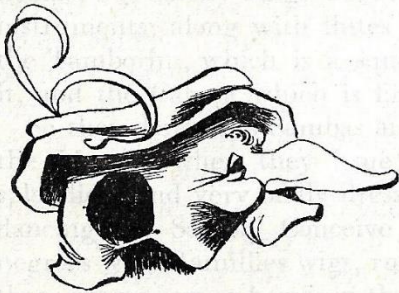


Punchinellos laying about them with their bladders; strutted the Quacqueri, the made-up Macaronis in wonderfully curled wigs, peering into the carriages with enormous quizzing glasses; wandered the 'advocates' declaiming, with giant spectacles on their noses, from the most formidable scrolls, grave and solemn charges, mostly of infidelity, against embarrassed persons too easily recognized. Men dressed up as women, women as young gallants. Urchins made hideous noises with mussel-shells screaming into sensitive ears. Over the carriages, blew a storm of confetti. Into the carriages and out of the carriages came handfuls of fruit and flowers. Here were two coachmen perched on a box with monkeys' heads, there another with an enormous double face, one leering at the horses, the other cocking its extraordinary eyes into the carriage. There were coachmen dressed as women with flowing tresses; there were curly poodles perched barking on

the boxes. There were gilded and exquisite coaches; there were carriages that held six people, two women and four men, the women to display their charms were raised up on higher seats ... 'a coachful of grave

mamelukes, a party of gypsy women in terrible conflict with a shipload of sailors, a man monkey on a pole surrounded by a rout of strange creatures with pigs' faces and lions' tails.'

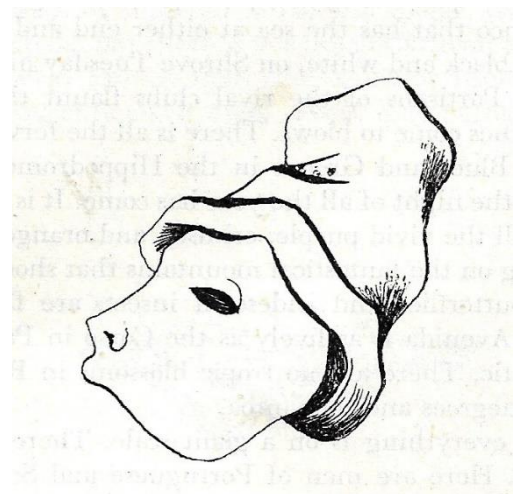
Suddenly a flourish of trumpets, Papal Carabineers, with towering bearskin caps over their green, red-faced uniforms, canter between the carriages, edge off the maskers with the flat of their sabres and magically the Corso is cleared for the event that gave it its name. At full gallop from the obelisk in the Piazza del Popolo twenty riderless horses, spurred by jingling goads and the lure of a good meal of oats at the further end, go speeding down to the Palazzo Venezia. Barely has a Roman citizen explained to a visiting Milor (all Englishmen are Milors) that in the good old days it was not horses but Jews who ran this race to make a Roman holiday, when the winning number is shouted from end to end of the Corso. And now it is dusk, the azure dusk that is harbinger of the Roman night. A hundred little flames, a thousand, ten thousand twinkle the length of the Corso into which maskers and carriages come crowding back; and the vendors of candles, every sort and size of candle, scream their wares . . . 'Moccolo, signor, ecco Moccolo.' For every one must have his lighted candle. *Sia ammazato chi non porta Moccolo!* And now there is only one aim of every man and woman on the Corso; to extinguish someone else's candle and keep his own alight. 'Who can describe the hundred ways of putting out a Moccolo, the giant bellows, the monstrous extinguishers and the fantastic fans?' asks Alexandre Dumas.



The Corso is as light as at noon. You can see the fair features crowding fourth floor windows; 50,000 lights flutter the length of the street. As soon as one is put out the bearer hastens to relight it lest his neighbours descend on him with the mocking shout that makes him a target of everybody's ridicule. *'Senza moccolo, senza moccolo!'* For two hours the mad scrimmage confounds prince and pauper, rising to a frantic crescendo till out over the night the bells of the Campidoglio boom twelve. And that instant every candle is put out. The Roman Carnival is over.

Yes, it is all over. We shall never see its like. Yet up till the nineteen-thirties the Carnival at Rio de Janeiro (stopped while Brazil was at war) still held all the colour and vivacity of Carnivals in Papal Rome. Until invading modern conceptions came in with the talkies and the radio, until old Brazil succumbed to the aura of the USA, the Carnival at Rio attracted special cruises across the South Atlantic. Rio has three Carnival Clubs, now shorn of their former glory. Each has its colours that determine the scheme of their competing processions on the last night of Carnival. The Tenentes do Diabo, they are the oldest club and date from Imperial times, have red and black; the Fenians red and white; the Democrats black and white.

The poorest families in Rio, white and negro used to save and spare all the year to afford three days' splendour and finery at Carnival. On the Saturday night everyone brings out his fancy dress. Even the taxi-drivers come out as harlequins and pierrots. In every street there is an all night dance and, because mixed blood runs hot at Carnival, the streets are patrolled by cavalry.



Monday is given over to the local spectacles staged by the negro communities of the various little hills, the Morros, over which the suburbs sprawl. Each Morro has its Carnival song, set to the African rhythm drumming rhythm of the Congo. Ahead ride slouch-hatted Gauchos, the cowboys from the great plains of Rio Grande do Sul. There are turbaned Africans from the sultry North. There are mounted bands with kettle drums and trumpets; squadrons of Persians, Moors and Incas, cars that are revolving globes, and cars that are writhing serpents. Lighted torches dance on the red and black cars and costumes of the Tenentes do Diabo, the white and scarlet of the Fenians, the white and black of the Democrats; till the last of them has turned away along the seashore at the further end and a burst of fireworks cascades into the sea.

In this year of grace, 1948, when Hollywood has taken up Rio with its 'Carioca' and other unrealities made in the USA; Rio imitates New York. The youth of the Brazilian capital has grown somewhat scornful of the old-fashioned Carnival. Its forms are being resurrected, but the true spirit of Carnival is dead. Perhaps in Bahia or Pernambuco where the old easy-going ways of Imperial Brazil still linger, the Carnival retains more of its essentials; but there is not much Carnival spirit in the World of 1948. Yet if ever Europe finds time to enjoy itself once more, some who can now read only about these revels, may perhaps see them come again to life.



Text by George Edinger

Drawings by Michael Ayrton

Reproduced from *Ballet* February 1948

YES, DARK LORD

by Nathan Hook

Yes, Dark Lord was a mask show I devised in 2019 and was performed for a short run by a cast of five at Bristol Improv Theatre. It was set in an undefined pantomime fantasy world and drew upon Commedia and modern improv elements, as well as inspiration from a storytelling card game 'Aye, Dark Overlord.'



Most the cast played 'goblins,' based on a generic form of zanni. Aside from the mask (pictured), goblins wore an underlayer in neutral/earth tones, brown 'boot tops' to suggest fantasy boots and a coloured tunic that became their effective name (e.g. 'red shirt'). Goblins have a low cunning but live in the present and don't think about the past or future. Due to being the weakest beings, goblins find the suffering of others funny, as it's not them for once.

One cast member (changed in different shows across the run) played the Dark Lord, based on elements of Pantalone and Magnifico. He had a red horned devil mask (pictured) and a hooded black robe with gold vertical stripe; this 'red under layer, black outer layer' recalls Pantalone, while his body language was straight, slow and deliberate. Skeletor from Masters of the Universe was a strong conceptual inspiration here.



Before the show, written audience suggestions for fantasy quests were gathered in a skull cup. As the audience entered the theatre, goblins showed the audience as 'lieutenants of evil' to their seat, then attempted to look busy with a song. That song was ended abruptly with the sudden arrival of the Dark Lord, who spoke of his evil plans and the quests he had sent his goblin servants on.

The main act of the show consisted of the Dark Lord drawing an audience suggestion, reading it, and then expanding on it with additional improvised monologue (in improv terms, a 'Harold'). The goblins would then explain to him and the audience what happened on the quest; the goblins fail every quest. The show alternates between 'long' and 'short' quests by default, though less strong suggestions might also be handled as short quests to not dwell on them.



A long quest involves three ‘encounters,’ in mythic structure terms ‘threshold guardians.’ The goblins have different ways of telling the story available to them:

- Enacting: The goblins play out meeting someone else in the world, which means they are engaging in double-play of being goblins acting a someone else.
- Slide show: The goblins arrange themselves into a shape or picture, while one then explains what this represents. This is repeated, as if presenting a series of slides.
- Cunning Plans: Each of the goblins state a plan they came up with to overcome an obstacle. However, all the plans happened at once, and they then each explain how they failed from tripping over each other.
- Telling: The dark lord commands one of the goblins to narrate what happened and changes the narrator on his whim. Hesitation, absurd claims, contradicting earlier story elements and making him look bad angers the Dark Lord.



A short quest might be played out as:

- Goblin Whispers. One goblin turns to another and says ‘you told me to do X’ which is a plausible corruption of the quest. This goes round repeatedly until it turns out they did something completely different.
- Song: singing an improvised (often bad) bad about the quest.

After the failure, one or more goblins was selected for punishment, ending up under a red spotlight in the centre. The first punishment was a collar hung about their neck that caused a shock when a bell was rung. The bell was then passed out into the audience to control, with both bell and collar movable during the show. Other punishments included singing or dancing a song of pain, curses to speak in rhyme or as an animal, or handing out soft balls to let the whole audience stone them.

The end of the show was not fixed, but often ended with the whole batch of goblins being sent off for execution, and the Dark Lord explaining he would defeat the forces of good next time.

The show was designed to be immersive & interactive. While not given full characters the audience were endowed with a social role as the Dark Lords middle management ‘lieutenants of evil.’ Goblins could directly address them, beg for mercy, hide among them, and otherwise treat them as people within the fictional world. The whole show took place in the single location of the Dark Lord’s throne room that the theatre represented.



Rather than using imaginary object work as improv often does, props included generic containers, such as a sack and wooden box. The goblin could present an object using this prop. For example, in one show, the goblins brought the dark lord a pet snake (instead of the actual goal of the quest) in a sack. The dynamic sound board enabled finding a snake sound effect mid-show, with the unseen snake in the prop sack effectively becoming a character played by the sound technician.

There was an original intent to include slapstick elements in the show with a safe slapping technique, but due to limited rehearsal time this was not included in the run.

The show was designed to explore two main themes. Firstly family, in that the Dark Lord and goblins represents an abusive dysfunctional family, but still a family. Secondly, the nature of evil, in that rather than a hero's journey of character growth, it represents evil in a perpetual cycle of trying, failing and trying again without ever being fully defeated. It also brought out the evil nature of the audience's own selves when they call for harsh punishment of the goblins.

While far removed from Commedia in some respects, I feel the show captured some of the key essence of the form and brought it to a modern new cast and audience. It also certainly demonstrated to improv-trained performers and theatre the benefit of a grasp of Commedia.

Nathan Hook

Yes, Dark Lord

Show devised and directed by: Nathan Hook

Original Cast: Jacob Van Barneveld, Will Gawned, Tina Malhotra, Emma Thomas (Emma T), Ben Trevillion.

Original Run: November 2019, Bristol Improv Theatre

Photo Credit: Andrew Yeoh



Joan Schirle (1944 to 2022)

For those of us with a Eurocentric theatrical disposition, it often comes as a surprise to find Commedia happening in America, but it does. That it still does is partially due to the dedication and skill of the late Joan Schirle.

Olly Crick



As a commedia enthusiast I had, of course, heard of Dell'Arte school and the Dell'Arte players, both located in the small town of Blue Lake, amidst the Redwoods of Northern California. The first person I met from there was in 2013 at a Commedia conference in Windsor, Canada, and it was Joan Schirle. She was up there on the plenary podium with Carlo Boso, Antonio Fava, John Rudlin, Katrien van Beurden, Carlos Estevez and Professor Domenico Pietropaulo. I listened as she gently unfolded her opinions and views that, whilst definitely being commedia, differed slightly from the various European strands I was familiar with. It was exciting stuff and I listened intently. Together with my co-editor Judith Chaffee, we decided instantly that she must write something for our forthcoming Routledge Companion to Commedia. In the end we asked her to write two chapters, because, quite simply, she wore her learning gladly and generously. Later on, in 2016, I was fortunate enough to interview her fully in Denmark and spend a few days with her and a group of students.

The two things that stood out about her to me were, firstly, a great generosity of spirit and, secondly, her level of expertise. I was struck by her insistence not to compare her practice with others, be defined by how others saw their practice, or set performers and teachers in any way in competition with or against each other. Her drive was always towards some form of ensemble-based performance and mindset in which the individual was of less significance than the group. Within this configuration an individual could be supported to shine on stage, but the building blocks of her way of doing theatre were always collective and mutually supportive. Even after a few beers she would politely adjust her piano playing to my enthusiastic and somewhat off-tempo rendition of 'All of me'.

What did she do then? She joined Carlo Mazzone-Clementi and Jane Hill in 1976 in founding the Dell'Arte players, and working at the Dell'Arte school that Hill and Clementi had set up, eventually rose to become its artistic director. Joan earned a B.A. in theatre arts from the University of Santa Clara, and an MFA in playwriting from Humboldt State University. Beginning in 1969, she was a certified teacher and trainer in Alexander Technique.

At Dell'Arte International she initiated original, collaborative ensemble theatre, exploring the role of the actor-creator in addressing issues of power, privilege, homelessness, water politics, indigenous rights and medical malpractice. Among unusual projects she initiated, The Rural Residency component began as an extended encounter with remote rural communities, including tribal partners on the north coast. Boldly, she led groups of students to stay within a community for an extended period and negotiate with them what that community required in terms of arts and theatre, and then to try to create it for and with them. A yearly theatre festival set up by Dell'Arte, formerly called the Mad River Festival, for example, was renamed the Baduwa't Festival out of respect for, and in partnership with the Wiyot Tribe. Schirle also established and led 20 of Dell'Arte's unique one-month study trips to Bali for traditional performing arts (topeng, dance, mask carving, shadow puppetry) taught by Balinese masters.

Her many awards and honours include a Lifetime Achievement Award, (ATME) Association of Theatre Movement Educators, Fox Foundation/TCG Resident Actor Fellowship award for professional development, Cairo International Experimental Theatre Festival in recognition of leadership in the field of Experimental Theatre, San Francisco Bay Area Critics Circle Awards for Original Script for Ensemble Performance, Los Angeles Critics Circle Award, Performance.

At the time of her passing she had just premiered a new chamber opera, "Bird of the Inner Eye", based on the life of US conscientious objector Morris Graves. She performed and wrote for the Dell'Arte players, notably creating the role of Scar Tissue, in a series of comic film noire mysteries.

And she's still up there on the Dell'Arte staff roster. Of course

<https://dellarte.com/about-dellarte-international/leadership-staff/joan-schirle/>

and Michael Fields shares some memories

<https://www.americantheatre.org/2022/02/09/joan-schirle-the-ascent-of-a-legend/>

and Mr Fusetti writes a poem

<https://giovannifusetti.com/2022/02/04/joan-schirle/>

and Joan talks about how Commedia came to America: "Arlecchino Appleseed".

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7LZzuTeiBYo>

There is more, of course, and those who knew her better than me will remember them. Her unwavering and loving determination to make the world a better place through theatre and the arts makes her not just a good, but a great example, of how a life in theatre should be. Travel well, Joan.

Olly Crick

BOOKS AND BOOK REVIEWS



Very often the issue with starting your own Commedia book collection, apart from the expense of them (especially academic books), is knowing what to buy and what you, the reader, want out of it. Academics want one thing and performers want another. Academics may moan about the poor pedagogy of performers, while actors complain that the people who write the books have never been on stage. There are, I promise you, people who have experience of both, but very often it is best to look for what you want out of the book. As a former street

performer with a fascination with the Commedia, I developed a reading method that looked for material that was of use to a performer. Here, then, is a place to give brief reviews of Commedia books, keep oneself up to date with new publications and pick the bones out of some old ones. You can't learn Commedia from a book, but some of them sure can help. We will (ahem) in the interests of honesty, leave you, the public, to judge books written by those concerned with this Zannizine.

Olly Crick

Some new books, folks!

Ok, readers, I'm bringing to your attention five new books on Commedia dell'Arte that have come out over the last eighteen months or so, and all published by Routledge. If you want to buy them new, try the Taylor and Francis website, and if second hand try AbeBooks as second-hand copies might be coming around soon. I confess I had major fingers in three of them, but more of that later: first a brief description of the books and their subject matter.

1 *Performing Commedia dell'Arte, 1570-1630* (London: Routledge, 2020). Natalie Crohn-Schmitt.

This is a truly excellent account of commedia dell'arte in its historical heyday, detailed, informative and very readable. Crohn-Schmitt is a long-term Commedia scholar, and has considerable expertise in Commedia's performing methodology, focusing in with a keen eye on scenarios, improvisation and the practice of rhetoric. The book offers a coda on Commedia dell'Arte today as well and is both a good introduction to the formative period of our beloved genre, as well as benefiting you (the reader) by including up-to-date scholarship and recent discoveries.

2 *Commedia dell'Arte, its Structure and Tradition: Antonio Fava in Conversation with John Rudlin.* by John Rudlin and Antonio Fava.

For those not familiar with Antonio Fava's previous book and his workshops, here is another glad blast of the maestro's opinions, advice, and instruction in how to do Commedia. John Rudlin (also a notable Commedia scholar) asks provocative Commedia questions, and then lets the tape run, as Antonio excitedly launches into his instructive and entertaining monologues. To quote the Amazon blurb:

“Fava explores the role of each stock Commedia character and their subsequent incarnations in popular culture, as well as their roots in prominent figures of their time. The lively and wide-ranging conversations also take in methods of staging Commedia dell'Arte for contemporary audiences, the evolution of its gestures, and the collective nature of its theatre-making. This is an essential book for any student or practitioner of Commedia dell'Arte – provocative, expansive wisdom from the modern world's foremost exponent of the craft.”

Well ... I would say there are more than one 'foremost exponent' knocking around, so be advised this is the Fava view of the Commedia world. Other flavours are available (see book 4). It is a good companion piece to Fava's first book.

3 *Commedia dell'Arte Scenarios* by Sergio Costola and Olly Crick

Getting hold of the original scenarios (in the English Language) to see how they were written, what the stories were about and what conventions were used can be problematical for an English language reader. Previous editions in the English language (Henry Salerno; Richards Andrews; Crohn Schmitt and Heck, Heck and Cotticelli) are all quite expensive or out of print. Step forward Sergio Costola (and a wee bit of editing by yours truly) with a selection of scenarios from all the major surviving collections (Scala, Correr, Corsini, Locatelli and Casamarciano), thus granting us access to a variety of collections, previously unavailable in English. The variety is surprising, and despite such apparent limitations such as stock characters and apparently fixed staging, the locations and subject matter ranges from heroic opera, historical epic, bourgeois comedy and low (Neapolitan) farce. Once one has mastered the art of reading a scenario (imagine making sense of a Shakespearean comedy with no script, and just from stage directions) this is a useful introduction to this historical composition and performance method.

4 *The Dramaturgy of Commedia dell'Arte* by Olly Crick and Sergio Costola.

Why did I write this? I've read a lot of books and done a lot of workshops with good (even great) commedia teachers and what bugged me continually was comments by some to the effect that 'that isn't commedia'. So, what is Commedia, and what on earth are people who do it now think they are doing? Taking as a starting point a range of artists' practice since the genre's reinvention post WW2, I tried to build up a picture of what each artist thought they were doing (and what they actually did!). I identify strands of practice, and schools of Commedia training (Piccolo Teatro di Milan, Giovanni Poli, Carlo Mazzone-Clementi, Jacques Lecoq, Dario Fo, Antonio Fava, Carlo Boso, etc.), and note how they differ in performance and practice, and come up with a more inclusive model of Commedia. Also included is a digression on unmasked Commedia (Pete Talbot and Annie Ryan), the neuroscience of masks and a no-brainer conclusion that women innovate more in the genre than men! (what happens if you love the style, but have issues with the patriarchy, sexism, and 'its only the men who get to wear the masks' etc.).

5 *Commedia dell'Arte for the 21st Century: Practice and Performance in the Asia-Pacific*: edited by Corinna Di Niro and Olly Crick.

Whilst us in Europe are slumbering, down under folks are still doing Commedia. This is a book with a multitude of chapters by a multitude of authors, all of whom have, in some small way, performed, taught, thought about or reimagined Commedia in the Asia-Pacific region. It covers a lot of ground, and is full of surprises: that Thailand has a native equivalent of a slapstick; Harlequin meeting Hanuman, Commedia in

India, in Singapore, in Australia, in New Zealand and all of it pushing the boundaries, creating hybrids, and reinventing itself as it goes along. A cockney hippy ends up as mask maker in Bali; the Piccolo Theatre of Milan perform in Beijing to an audience of picnicking high end military officers; and 3 male performers improvise a two-hour show for some native Queenslanders, who have never before seen Commedia.

COMPETITION:

Can you write us your best Original Commedia Scenario?

I have one copy each of items 3, 4 and 5 (from the list above) to give away as prizes, and in the interest of spreading the word of commedia am offering them as prizes in Zannizine's first ever **Commedia-competition**.

Can you write a commedia scenario? First prizes is first choice of the above books (3, 4 or 5), second prize, second choice etc. First prize will also get published in Zannizine.

Rules: use traditional roles, use an 'argumento' as does Flaminio Scala, and a three-act structure. Maximum length 3000 words. I suggest no more than 7 characters as you might run out of space, but indicate acts and scenes in the usual way (e.g. Act 1 Sc. 2). No dialogue, but indicate action, lazzi and also musical interludes if you want. A cast list and props list to be included too, following Flaminio Scala's practice. It has to be an original scenario, but in the spirit of 'original practice', one could adapt a known story or use bits (technical term: stock scene or 'theatregram') from other plays to compose your master- or mistresspiece.

Deadline: all submissions must be sent to Olly at oldspottheatre@aol.com (clearly labelled **scenario competition**) and be in .rtf, .doc, or .odt format.

Judging will be by the Zannizine editors and Olly and our decision is final. Deadline for submissions will be the 1st of August, with your scenario to be published in the Autumn edition of Zannizine.

(Dr) Olly Crick

MAURICE SAND

TOWARDS AN APPRAISAL

Barry Grantham

Baron Jean-François-Maurice-Arnauld Dudevant, (1823 - 1889) is not someone that you would readily associate with the Commedia, and his image, one of many to be found on the internet, is equally unfamiliar, but give him the pseudonym of Maurice Sand and he will be recognised as the creator of our most familiar images of the Commedia dell'Arte.



You may not know that he was the elder child and only son of George Sand, the French novelist and feminist, and her husband, Baron François Casimir Dudevant, that he studied art under Eugène Delacroix, was an entomologist, geologist and biologist, in addition to writing and illustrating *Masques et Bouffons*, first published in Paris in 1860. This article is a very personal attempt to explore my wavering assessment of Maurice Sand's contribution to Commedia, from my first enthusiasm (I think I first read it in translation around 1955) to being highly critical of the text and with a positive distaste for the paintings. But before I do here are a couple of incidents in his extraordinary life. First an early one.

George had ditched Maurice's father, the Baron, and fallen in love with a young musician, setting up home with him on the isle of Mallorca. Not the holiday home that may spring to mind, but a cold and uncomfortable place in which to sojourn during the winter of 1838/39, which did nothing to alleviate the signs of consumption in the musician, whom you will by now have identified as Frédéric Chopin. Then add to the nest George's fifteen-year-old son, Maurice, who took an intense dislike to the composer and resented his mother's infatuation. There were further complications when Chopin met Maurice's sister, Solange, and took a liking to her, which was not appreciated by George.



George sews,
Chopin plays,
Maurice scowls



Happier relations with his mother are seen in his illustrations to her works, and they seemed to have shared an interest in the macabre. As an example, here is one of Maurice's pictures for George's *Legends Rustiques*, 1858. It shows a troupe of Lubins (sometimes called Lupins) wolf-like creatures standing with their backs to the cemetery wall, which seems to give them some comfort. They were said to be more dreamy and sorrowful than threatening. They had their own language and talked very softly.



George - or perhaps it's time to call her 'Aurore', the name used by friends and lovers - spent much of her childhood with her grandmother, Marie Aurore de Saxe, in the village of Nohant in the French province of Berry. In 1861 she inherited her grandmother's house. There Chopin created some of his most familiar pieces, Eugène Delacroix had a studio, and frequent visitors included Balzac and Flaubert. It was there also that Maurice and Aurore created the Noholt Marionette Theatre which, if our last picture is to be believed, was highly successful.



I think it was back in 1955 that I first read the *History of the Harlequinade*, the English translation of *Masques et Bouffons*. How I lapped it up. I remember trying to memorize the names of all those Latin and Greek actors, only to learn from wider reading that they were unlikely to be connected to the Commedia dell'Arte, which arose quite independently in the mid 16th century. How old was I? If it was 1955 then I was 24, but I was well on my way along the Commedia Road. My father, you see, was an actor and had played Pierrot in a play by Lawrence Houseman, and he coached me for my 1951 solo début in *Pierrot and Co* at the Torch Theatre, Knightsbridge. In 1952 I got married, starting a lifelong partnership with Joan née Chorlton. That year, I also used mime (Marceau style) to attract large crowds to my mother's sideshow at Battersea Pleasure Gardens. In 1953 I started teaching Mime and Commedia at the newly opened Pineapple Studios (and danced in *Red Shoes* the same year). 1954: I was giving classes in Improvisation and Commedia at the Oval House and City Lit; 1955: It seems Maurice Sands' master work inspired me into a flurry of activity: founding the Intention Company with my students, giving performances at Bear Gardens Theatre, the City Lit and, with an extra-large cast, presenting *The Duchess Mislaid* at The Oval House .

Now it is March 2022 and I have just taken down - I say 'taken down' because they have been lying on a high shelf gathering dust for a decade or more - my two volume *History of the Harlequinade*, first English edition 1915. Now that's odd for a start - didn't they have a war on? And on the fly leaf of the second volume a pencilled note saying that I bought them from Sutherland Books for £65 in 1983. I've just opened the first page and started to read and it makes nice reading - He's a jolly good storyteller.

"The first mime, or rather the first comic actor was he who leapt upon a bench or table to delight the assembly by his singing, his dancing, or his relation of an amusing story. Improvisation prompted all such early attempts."

I shall read it right through and by the time of our Summer Issue, I will be able to give you an assessment of how I rate Maurice Sands in my more mellow years.

END OF PART I

Jacques Callot's *Balli di Sfessania*

By John Rudlin



Jacques Callot, born in Nancy in 1592, is supposed to have run away to Italy twice as a young teenager, in quest of the roots of the Renaissance. By the age of seventeen he was there again, this time with his parents' support, studying in Rome for three years: first drawing, then as an apprentice to the famous French engraver Philippe Thomassin. In 1612 he moved to Florence, where he worked under Giulio Parigi, a true Renaissance man: architect, engineer, artist and designer of festive theatricals for the court of the Medici. He remained in Florence for ten years and during that time perfected a technique of using his burin to etch through hard varnish, thus giving finer detail than the soft fluid used hitherto. This enabled him to depict sharply focussed backgrounds using a double magnifying glass, thought to have been given to him by Galileo. It was not until his return home that he used this technique to produce the 24 images that constitute the *Balli di Sfessania*. Etched from drawings in his Italian sketchbooks, there are 24 of them, each measuring 10x7 cm. With the exception of the frontispiece which depicts an actual Commedia performance on a fit-up stage, they each feature two prominent foreground figures engaged with one another in various ways, with a background of other multiple activities such as tumbling, stilt-walking, mock combat, serenading and dancing. These are best studied with a magnifying glass!

The question which has puzzled scholars and Commedia buffs alike is “What have these activities specifically got to do with the performance of what we now call Commedia dell’Arte”? They seem to be taking place simultaneously, in an open *piazza* between a few houses and a rocky outcrop, in a Tuscan town such as Empoli or Prado. Many of the names inscribed under the principal figures occur nowhere else in the literature or iconography of the genre, for example: Smaraolo cornuto, Ratsa di Boio, Cicho Sgarra, Collo Francisco, Mestolino, Maramao, Taglia Cantoni. There are nine Capitanos, all with different names and very little costume, revealing highly developed musculature. Bello Sguardo and others are similarly scantily attired, but lack the ‘Cap.’ prefix. Other names are familiar sounding, but spelled in a unique fashion, though there is nothing unusual about that in aural transmission. Zanni, such as

Pulliciniello, Metzetin, Scapino, Scaramucia, Gian Farina, all have names which are immediately recognisable, however. The *servette* are represented by Lucretia (from Napoli) and Fracischina with a huge tambour and Riciulina, who appears to be bare-breasted. The *signoras*, Lavinia and Lucia, have their own individual names, which again is normal. Unusually, there are no *vecchi* and no *primo amoroso* either. This is not a company rehearsing, then, as some have supposed – one Capitano would be quite enough!

Some of the figures’ foreground activities are obscene:



The poor donkey in the background is seemingly being persuaded forward by a bellows up the bum, an even worse fate than that which awaits Cucuba in front...

Another category is grotesque posturing:

Cicho’s phallus (for those interested) is not personal priapism: the predecessor to the more familiar Spanish style rounded codpiece was shaped thus. Whether the naughty boy was actually concealed inside it I have not been able to discover...



Only the third category does seem to offer images of Commedia in action:

A randy Capitano doffs his hat and seems to be asking an innamorata for the favour of the next dance. Note the couple that are already dancing in the background.



Callot did not categorise his plates, however, and the sequence and numeration we use today was established by Fagnani in the early 18th century. #1, the frontispiece, shows a zanni dancing to a mandolin whilst playing the tambourine. In #8 Metzetin is playing a mandolin, and so is Fritellino in #23 and Razullo in #19:



In the backgrounds I have discovered a further six mandolins being played. Tambours and tambourines abound: this musical pervasiveness is more comprehensible if we re-name the series (in English), *The Ballets of Sfessania*.

In #24, Taglia Cantoni and Fracasso (presumably the maker of *fracas*) are not actually fighting – as is usually supposed – they too are *dancing*:



Fracasso's weapon is undoubtedly wooden, more of a slapstick, in fact, and their battle is obviously not serious, more like a formalised Morris dance, with swords rapping together in time. Note that this, the last plate, is signed by Moncornet: this is because all the illustrations I have used are from engravings, made usually in Paris, where publications of the Balli in folio form were very popular in the 1730s. The engraving process gives more definition than etching when printed, and survives multiple pressings, although the image often becomes reversed.

The ancient Greek word 'balizein' meaning 'to leap with joy' reached France, via late Latin, in the 15th century as 'ballet', i.e. 'little dance', and England much later as a 'ball' (although the English phrase 'to have a ball' is more redolent of the original meaning). All Callot's figures are in fact having a ball with true Commedia gusto. *I Balli di Sfessania* is an artefact – a montage not a reportage – an artist's perception of dance forms being rehearsed rather than enacted.

To emphasise this distinction, the background to #19 is an actual Commedia in performance on a trestle stage with a large audience standing in front. Unfortunately, the Balthazar Moncornet collection is in fact a selection – consisting of only sixteen plates – and #19 is one of those missing.

Here is the original, well-worn etching:



... and here is the background as seen through the magnifying glass of modern technology:

The stage is a cut above that of the frontispiece, with a painted drop closely resembling the buildings in the piazza, and cuckold horns on one of the front posts – presumably the badge of the performing troupe.

Zanni seems to be propelling an innamorata into the arms of her suitor. A very tall figure is eavesdropping and a very small figure is in open attendance. Costumes are full, definitely from category three above.

This is reportage, the nearest one can get to a photograph of an actual moment in performance. Here too is an actual audience, come to see the show, by contrast with the knots of mainly disinterested passers-by in the backgrounds elsewhere. They, I would suggest, are doing a ‘passaggiare’: they have come to the piazza to be seen, not to see.



The foreground figures, then, cannot be from this company, and the movements they are making are not typical of standard Commedia performance. They are nearly all dancing, or preparing to dance. If we look discerningly at their measured steps, we can almost hear the music and feel the rhythms invoked by the tambours..

Dropping the capital ‘S’ for a moment (I think it has to do with pronunciation rather than etymology) we are left with Fessinia. Fescenna was a town in ancient Etruria, which gave its name to *Fescenina carmena*, ‘Fescenine verses’ being the usual English translation. However, my Latin dictionary gives *carmen* as ‘song’ before ‘poem’, ‘ode’, ‘verse inscription’, ‘incantation’ and, finally, ‘a dramatic piece’! The *Fescenina carmena* were originally sung (in Latin during the 5th century B.C.) in farming villages at harvest home, later spreading throughout the Etruscan region at private gatherings and public weddings. Their form was that of a dialogue, a *contrasto*, an exchange of raillery between two participants, wearing masks made of bark; this could be improvised as well as specially written. At first harmless and good-humoured, these odes gradually became more and more obscene and scurrilous – attacking both men and gods – and were eventually banned by Emperor Augustus.

In his *Balli di Sfessania*, Callot, then, is not illustrating Commedia as he witnessed it during his time in Italy (elsewhere in his oeuvre we find superbly detailed portraits of Pantalone and Scappino, for example), but re-constituting a possible folk ur-form where indecent verses, sometimes *all'improvviso*, were not only sung to celebrate the fertility of the land or to wish fecundity for newly-weds, but also danced in lewd accompaniment.

The original etchings are preserved in the **Musée Lorrain** in Nancy. The complete set can be found on line at <https://galeries.limedia.fr/images/jacques-callot-les-balli-di-sfessania/>

John Rudlin

ENDS AND ODDS

Biographies of Contributors

Nathan Hook

Nathan studied psychology and then humanities with The Open University. Enrolled as a part-time distance PhD student at a game research lab in Tampere University, Finland, he bridges these subjects in his research, publishing findings on the psychological processes of identification with fictional characters. He currently works in the civil service on the Covid-19 response, and as a CBT therapist & hypnotherapist in private practice.

From a background in game design and character play, he developed an interest in improv theatre a few years ago, and from there into both conventional modern theatre and commedia. He performs in theatre productions around Bristol. He drew upon his different interests in improv, commedia and game design in devising and directing his first theatre show. Given his therapy background he is also interested in the comparison between hypnotic trance states and mask play.



John Rudlin

John studied Drama and French at Bristol University where he became very involved in the practical aspects of performance – acting, writing and directing. These activities continued after graduation and led eventually to a post at the Exeter University organising their degree course on drama, in which the central activity was to be in the actual practice of these arts, rather than just writing about them. Nevertheless, as most of his practical work had been based on that of the French director Jacques Copeau he wrote a monograph on him for the Cambridge series 'Directors in Perspective' and subsequently co-authored *Jacques Copeau: texts on theatre* for Routledge.

His work at Exeter continued for a number of years until changes to the funding of English Universities in the early nineties convinced him as Head of Department that they would either have to expand or close. Unwilling to compromise with the idea that 'small is beautiful' this led to the closure of the Drama department, along with several others. Emulating Copeau, John then emigrated to France, setting up a small rural centre for performance research, Centre Sélavy. This ran for ten years between 1992 and 2002 and attracted students from all over the world. It was there that he was at last able to devote the time and attention to *commedia dell'arte* that the form demands. Now theoretically retired he is still writing books and plays and taking workshops and role-playing in learning environments.



Olly Crick

Olly Crick has been a commedia enthusiast since classes with Barry Grantham in the 1980s, has performed with the Unfortunati, The Medicine Show, Venice Carneval in 1990 and ran The Fabulous Old Spot Theatre Company. He publishes on Commedia, likes to talk about it a lot and even has a PhD in it. Superpower: commedia dramaturgy.



Mini-Commedia Festival Postponed:

Unfortunately, the Mini-Commedia Festival that was planned for the weekend of 25 to 27 February, 2022 at Sands Films Studio in Rotherhithe had to be postponed due to Covid – except for the opening night, which was held, as intended, over Zoom.

It is our intention however to re-run the series of live shows later in the year, possibly as a set of individual performances rather than an entire weekend of performances.

Live and streamed from
Sands Film Studios, London
25th - 27th February 2022

Barry & Bill's
5th Mini Commedia Festival

Book online:
<https://minicommediafest.co.uk>

Friday 25th February
7.00pm (GMT) *Commedia dell'Arte Day*
A virtual celebration!
Commedia banter and films
from across the globe.

Saturday 26th February
7.45pm (GMT) *The Good, The Bad and ... The Funny*
World exclusive! Anna Cottis
presents a scratch performance
of her new show.

Sunday 27th February
1.00pm (GMT) *Discovery Zaimi!*
A workshop with Didi Hopkins

6.00pm (GMT)
Barry Grantham &
Didi Hopkins present *The Road to Commedia*

Saturday and Sunday
evenings also feature
an extravagant medley of short Commedia acts.

Although, because of Covid restrictions, seating in the theatre is very limited, most of the performances and workshops will be live-streamed from the theatre and viewable online. Once dates have been agreed, further information and links to booking facilities will be posted on the festival website:

<https://minicommediafest.co.uk>

Review of *Barry & Joan*, the movie:

“all-singing all-dancing vaudevillians get their moment in the sun”
 [The Guardian, 8 May 2022]



Created by Director Audrey Rumsby with Editor/Producer Eric Pomert, this new film gives a joyful insight into the creative world of Barry and Joan Grantham, who have devoted their lives to two theatrical traditions: the ancient one of the Commedia dell’Arte and the more recent one of Vaudeville, and the film tells of the differences and similarities. The film also features some delightful cartoons of the Commedia Masks

‘*Barry & Joan* is a delightfully quirky film, informative and funny, and capturing a couple of troupers who are two of our few remaining links to vaudeville. A must for anyone interested in the history of theatre and comedy.’
 [www.theartsdesk.com]

These two British eccentrics have kept the skills of vaudeville alive for over seventy years. Since becoming stage-struck lovers in 1948, Barry and Joan have taught, danced and acted alongside the greats of British film and theatre. As the last of the golden generation of vaudeville artists, it is to be hoped that this film might serve to pass their legacy on to future generations.

The film *Barry & Joan* is on release at selected cinemas throughout the UK during May and June.

Barry Grantham will be teaching the Art of Commedia at the Chalemie Summer School at Uppingham School for the week of Monday 11 – Sunday 17 July, 2022 (www.chalemie.co.uk)

For enquiries, contact Barbara Segal on Tel: 020 7619 9855 or email: barbara.segal@chalemie.co.uk

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