



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 8 OF ZANNIZINE

Welcome to Zannizine's eighth appearance – our Winter 2022/23 Issue.

Winter is nearly over; Spring is on the doorstep. Time to don our most extravagant costumes in anticipation of Carnival, with its Masquerade Balls and pre-Lenten Feasts. Well, it may not all be happening where you live, but this issue of Zannizine is full of ideas that are intended to provoke your thoughts about the role of Commedia in these sorts of activities.

Nowadays of course, 'Carnival' means Rio or New Orleans, or even Notting Hill, but in the eighteenth century it meant Venice, or possibly Rome. And as far as Commedia was concerned, Venice was the centre of that world. Other cities may have their celebrations of Fasching or Fasnacht, but Venice held firm – at least until quashed by Napoleon in 1797 – to the tradition (for either sex) of dressing in the traditional white 'bauta' mask and black cloak or as a character from the Commedia dell'Arte, most frequently Pulcinella or Columbina (in black full-face mask). Echoes of the Venetian Carnival could be heard throughout Europe in those days and London was not immune. Venetian Masquerades were a feature of London life throughout the eighteenth century and our extended introductory article by Barbara Segal discusses their role in English Society at that time.

The end of Winter also marks the time for the next Festival in celebration of **World Commedia Day** on 25 February. Having been forced to abandon it twice through the recent Plague Years, it is with great excitement that we mark its Spring awakening. Our following issue will be devoted to accounts of how this unique event was celebrated in many locations throughout the world.

With this issue we are now on the verge of entering our third year, adding to our accumulated Commedia knowledge. A reminder once again not to think of 'Zannizine' as a newspaper. In the words of my co-editor "It is more like a rather gorgeous self-expanding coffee-table book to be dipped into as the moment arises. The articles in the first issue are as relevant as those of the latest. New subjects and titles are awaiting us. Some are nearly ready for printing, others half finished, and many just an idea."

In the last issue we published the winning entry in our challenge to 'write a Commedia scenario'. To widen the field, we have instituted a new section in this issue: **From the Archives**. The intention here is to explore and share scenarios that have been tried and tested. These may offer useful starting points for new work or inspiring material for troupes to revive.

Bill Tuck

Our cover illustration

The cover for this issue shows a detail from a Masquerade 'in the Venetian manner' at Ranelagh House held in 1759 to celebrate the birthday of the Prince of Wales. Based on an illustration by no less an artist than Canaletto, it records the extent to which Venice and Commedia had caught the imagination of the English public at that time. From 1749 through to near the end of the century, a whole series of similar published representations confirm the participatory enthusiasm of a public keen to engage in 'Playing at Commedia'.



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12.00noon - Pulcinella Parade meeting at Sands travelling to the Norwegian Church. All welcome!

2.00-4.00pm - Performing Commedia Workshop with Gerry Flanagan, Cheryl Stapleton & John Broadbent

4.30-7.00pm Love & Madness open rehearsal followed by informal performances.



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Booking: <https://minicommediafest.co.uk>

THE MASQUERADE AS PARTICIPATORY COMMEDIA

Commedia dell'Arte translates as “commedia of the professionals” and it is this very aspect that we celebrate on 25 February as World Commedia Day, for on that day in 1545 Ser Maphio's troupe signed a letter of incorporation in Padua, making them the first actors to register their company as a business. The following centuries saw a great flourishing of Italian Commedia dell'Arte throughout Europe, reaching its peak in the 18th century. On the English stage, for example, pantomime became the most popular form of theatre. As created by John Rich and others, pantomime of this period was based on a very English interpretation of Commedia dell'Arte, without dialogue, but with all the stock characters of Harlequin, Columbine, Pantalone, The Doctor, Capitano, etc. (though often under different names: Capitano, for example, becomes The Lieutenant).

In parallel with this development, however, the public wanted its own performative involvement with this most popular art form. The opportunity for this came with the Swiss impresario, Count J J Heidegger, who took over the Haymarket Opera House on those nights when opera was not playing and created the Masquerade Ball. These rapidly became one of the most prominent forms of participatory entertainment in England in the 18th century. They were enormously popular with all ranks of society, from Royalty downwards. Although entry tickets were quite expensive, ranging from 3 shillings to 5 guineas (an unskilled labourer earned 5 shillings a week), the lower orders frequently gained entry, sometimes being given unwanted tickets by their masters. Most accounts attest to a great mingling of all classes in society, to a far greater extent than on the continent.

“The World it self, excuse the Phrase, is
A Ball; where, mimic Shapes and Faces,
The Judgement of our Senses cheat
And Fashion favours the Deceit...”

Count J J Heidegger



View of the Jubilee Ball, Ranelagh Gardens, in celebration of the the birthday of George, Prince of Wales, May 24th, 1759 – handcoloured etching by Nathaniel Parr after Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto)

Costume was, of course, an important part of the Masquerade. The great variety of costume adopted by the ‘masqueraders’ can be seen in the elaborate pictorial representations of the Balls held at Ranelagh Pleasure Gardens from 1749 through to the 1770s. While not all dress was in the form of commedia characters, the numbers of Harlequins, Pulchinellas, Dottores and Pantalones that appear in these representations is considerable.

It was obligatory for all masqueraders to be masked. The detailed images from the scenes shown here, indicate that almost all are indeed wearing masks and it is perhaps this aspect that is the most striking feature of a Masquerade. For those adopting the mask and costume of a Commedia character, it would also mean acting out the part as if on the stage. A ‘Harlequin’, for example, would be expected to move and dance with almost as much dexterity as his on-stage version, and however inept the performance of a costumed ‘Pantalone’ might be, it would surely have been recognised as at least a worthy attempt at portraying this character. Many may indeed have been very competent portrayals.

Being masked, being in disguise, added considerably to the gaiety and glitter of a Masquerade. A good part of the excitement from this disguising came from the fact that “everyone ...wears a Habit which speaks him the **Reverse** of what he is”. “I found nature turned topsy-turvy, women changed into men and men into women, children in leading-strings seven-foot high, courtiers turned into clowns, ladies of the night into saints, people of the first quality into beasts or birds, gods or goddesses”. “All state and ceremony” is “laid aside; since the *Peer* and the *Apprentice*, the *Punk* and the *Duchess* are, for so long a time, upon an equal Foot” (Castle, 30)

Not only could you be disguised as someone quite the reverse of your everyday self - you also had to **act** the character you portrayed, or perhaps caricature it. For instance, a masquerader dressed as a friar “incessantly preach[ed] up penitence and abstinence”, although his “face was the picture of luxury and voluptuousness”. A cross-dressed woman was obliged to assume all the normal liberties of a man.

The anonymity afforded by the disguise gave people enormous freedoms. It must have been very exciting, very liberating, to be able to play the role of someone from a completely different class or gender. To avoid one’s gender being identified by the pitch of one’s voice, masqueraders of both sexes adopted the very high-pitched “masquerade squeak”; “The first Noise which strikes your Ears upon your entering the Room is a loud confused Squeak, like a *Consort of Catcalls*”. (Castle, 36)

Along with Commedia characters, the illustrations show a that a favourite disguise was as a Church character -- Friar, Nun, Bishop, etc.. Such a disguise enabled those of little religious faith to parody religious figures with obscene or heretical sermons of their own devising. In the same way, hated authority figures -- judges, magistrates, and the nobility -- could be cut down to size by suitable costuming;



Detail from the Jubilee Ball of 1759, showing Dottore, Pierrot, Scaramouche, Harlequin and Punchinello characters

apprentice boys could ape the aristocracy; men could woo any lady of their fancy - occasionally, this turned out to be their own wives, in heavy disguise! Women could behave with the predatory freedom normally accorded only to men. Subversion of the normal constraints imposed by gender were particularly liberating for women. Women of any social rank could go to a masquerade ball without an escort; church was the only other place to which she could go alone.



Detail from the Jubilee Ball of 1759 showing the notorious Ms Chudleigh, flanked by two figures

This element of sexual licence was very much to the fore in representations of the Masquerade and figures such as the notorious socialite Miss Elisabeth Chudleigh (later Duchess of Kingston) frequently adorned the illustrations, as shown here at Ranelagh.

It is likely that the frequent adoption of Commedia costume by masqueraders reflects a growing awareness of Venice, partly as a result of the Grand Tour. Whether experienced directly, or by repute, the influence of Venice and accounts of its Carnival would have been widespread by the middle years of the 18th century. In 1749, the Ball at Ranelagh is billed as a “Jubilee Ball in the Venetian manner” while later in the same year it is entitled as “Masquerade for the Venetian Ambassador”, and once again showing Miss Chudleigh and her admirers.

While some might see the subversive behaviour manifested at masquerade balls as threatening to society, others believe that a temporary reversal of roles acts to define and reinforce

society’s classifications, serving more as a safety valve than as a means of subversion. A commentator from an earlier age nicely sums this up: “Wine barrels burst if from time to time we do not open them and let in some air” (Davis, 102). The masquerade ball could well serve both functions: subversion, as well as the provision of a safety valve.

The masquerade ball created a world where everyone was equal, where everyone could create their own identity. Not everyone approved of this liberation. Many disliked the deceit inherent in the act of disguising; disguise hides a person’s true nature, their inner core. Addison complained that “instead of going out of our own complectional Nature into that of others, ’twere a better and more laudable Industry to improve our own, and instead of a miserable copy become a good original”. ” (Paulson 124).

If our everyday persona can be seen as a ‘mask’, how do we find our ‘true’ self? Oscar Wilde remarked that “Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell the truth”. In the 18th century, the satirist Henry Fielding expressed similar sentiments in his poem *The Masquerade*; the ball-goers “masque the face, t’unmasque the mind”. So, was it only at the masquerade ball, behind the shelter of a mask, that people could reveal their ‘true’ nature?



Miss Chudleigh again – plus admirers

Subversion of the social hierarchy would have rendered the masquerade highly threatening to many. But equally disturbing was the common assumption that under the protective cloak of anonymity, an individual's innate licentiousness would inevitably emerge, women's in particular. Masquerades were seen as midnight orgies, as "Nurseries of Lewdness, Extravagancies and Immorality". They represented the work of the devil. Indeed, it was often claimed that it was a masquerade that led to the original Fall of Mankind, since the devil first addressed himself to Eve in a mask.

Commedia dell'Arte itself was often seen as subversive and was

frequently met with hostile disapproval in this regard. It could also be spectacularly lewd, as witness the illustrations by Jacques Callot. Pulcinella and his English counterpart Mr Punch epitomize this role as he blusters, bullies and seduces his way through the world. It may be no accident that the figure of Punch is the one most frequently seen at the masquerade balls of the mid 18th century!

The Masquerade Ball provided the context and environment in which the public in general might indulge their fantasies in the guise of characters from the Commedia dell'Arte. Here they could freely demonstrate their dancing skills as a mercurial Arlecchino, poke fun at the learned as a pompous Dottore, satirise the wealthy in the guise of a Pantalone, or play the coquette as a Columbine. It was indeed an opportunity for participatory Commedia, where others so similarly inclined might applaud and encourage the performance without fear of self-incrimination. Just as recent developments in Musicology (cf. Turino below) have recognised the importance of the participatory element in music-making, so too have theatre studies begun to appreciate its role in the wider domain of performance. It is in the light of this that we might once again look at the important social and political role that the Masquerade Ball played in the 18th century.

Barbara Segal

<https://open.conted.ox.ac.uk/sites/open.conted.ox.ac.uk/files/resources/Create%20Document/k.%20The%20whole%20world%20in%20miniature%20Louise%20Lamb.pdf>

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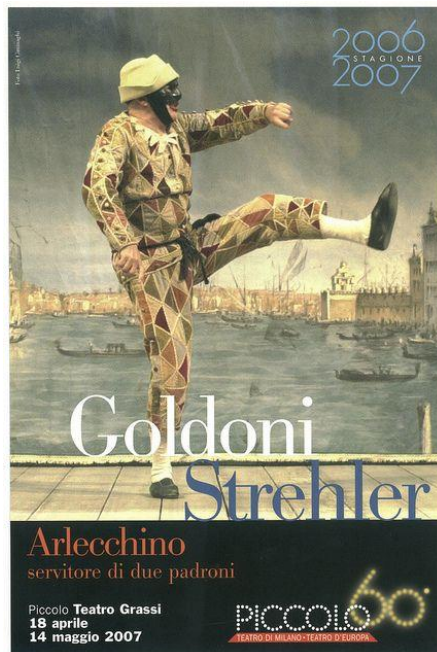
Wm Hogarth, *Masquerade Ticket*, 1727. On the left is the altar of Priapus; on the right is Venus, masked; at the back there are two *Lecherometers*, for measuring the level of sexual excitement.

COMMEDIA IN CONTEXT

From PULCINELLA in VENICE to Mr PUNCH in LONDON

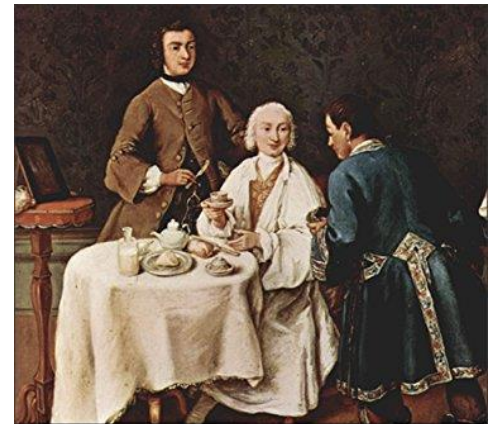
The term *Commedia dell'Arte* appears to have been first used by the Italian playwright Carlo Goldoni in the 1750s, but the theatrical style that it denotes goes back much further, at least to the 15th century – though many would argue that its true origins lie in a very dim and distant pagan Dionysian past of fertility cults and seasonal rituals.

By the mid-eighteenth century it had fallen into decline (at least in Italy) and Goldoni's original involvement was as a script-writer for one of the few remaining commedia companies in Venice. His best-known work *The Servant of Two Masters* was, in its first version, a commedia script for the company of Antonio Sacco, who performed in the



Modern 'masked' performance of Goldoni's play, now called *Arlecchino*

traditional masks representing the characters of Harlequin, Pantalone, Il Dottore, etc. and space was allowed for the actors to improvise. Only in the later version (which we know today) did it become fully scripted and maskless – the characters now being 'real' persons, but with commedia names: Arlecchino, Pantalone, etc. This was the basis of Goldoni's projected reforms of Italian Theatre. There was, however, strong opposition in Venice to this supposed 'reform'. Led by the writer and aristocrat Carlo Gozzi, they sought to reinstate the traditional masked characters and their improvised style of commedia. In face of this opposition Goldoni's project broadly failed – at least in Venice – and he went off in a huff to live and write in France, where he remained until his death in 1793. This is all somewhat ironic for, these days, Goldoni is revered as the founder of modern Italian comedy – with a dedicated museum in Venice – and Gozzi, along with Venetian commedia, is largely forgotten. A further irony is that now, even in Venice, *A Servant of two Masters* is performed as Commedia and in Mask.



'Maskless' performance of Goldoni's *The Servant of Two Masters*

This is part of the context in which *Commedia dell'Arte* found itself in Venice in the last quarter of the 18th century. Like the English countryside at this same time, Venice could be seen as in terminal decline, no longer with a powerful trading empire, but simply the haunt of idle aristocrats and tourists (many from England on their Grand Tour, spending their wealth following the successful enclosure of their estates in the home country!). There is thus a close parallel at this time between the situation of the English countryside – with its loss of power through industrialisation – and Venice, the epitome of urbanisation – with the loss of its trading base. The great symbol of this situation is Carnival.

Carnival, of course, goes back even further than commedia. In Venice, its ritual function had long been established and formal boundaries set as to what was viewed as permissible behaviour. It was, in fact, a

controlled expression of community cohesion. By the end of the 18th century, however, it had come to symbolise Venetian decadence.¹ Carnival meant masks, and among the most popular at this time was that of Pulcinella. A mainstay of the Italian *Commedia dell'Arte*, Pulcinella derived his character from the Neapolitan low-life figure of *Pulecenella* – supposedly named because of his chicken-like gait or cock-like arrogance and stupidity. The character, along with the *Commedia*, travelled abroad, becoming Polichinelle in France and Punchinello in England. The description of Punchinello from Hogarth's *Analysis of Beauty* gives a good idea of his character as seen by the 18th century Englishman:

Punchinello is droll by being the reverse of all elegance, both as to movement, and figure, the beauty of variety is totally and comically excluded from this character in every respect; his limbs are raised and let fall almost altogether at one time, in parallel directions, as if his seeming fewer joints than ordinary, were no better than the hinges of a door.

Domenico Tiepolo

Pulcinella is the character illustrated in Tiepolo's series of 104 drawings *Divertimento per li regazzi* (or *Entertainments for Children*) executed between the mid-1790s and the artist's death in 1804. This remarkable collection of drawings lay virtually undiscovered until it was auctioned off as a set in Paris in the 1920s, then broken up and individual drawings sold, many to American museums and collections.² The approach taken by them is that of the art historian, looking into considerations of how they came to be made, etc., and of their importance as examples of an artist's 'late works'.

My interest here, however, is in their significance as a document about *Commedia* in Venice during the last quarter of the 18th century. The only other iconographic representation of similar significance is the series of drawings by Jacques Callot (1592-1635) almost two hundred years earlier, published under the title *Balli di Sfessania*.



Domenico Tiepolo. One of the panels from the *Via Crucis* cycle, in the Oratory of the Crucifix at San Polo



Unlike Callot's, however, Tiepolo's drawings are not simply representations of standard *Commedia* scenes, but use the character of Pulcinella to comment on the world around him.

Death and Resurrection in Tiepolo

Tiepolo was, for much of his life, primarily a religious painter. Beginning with an important commission to do a series of *Fourteen Stations of the Cross* for the Church of San Polo at the age of 21, he worked as part of his father's workshop (the rather better known Giambattista Tiepolo) for around 25 years on large-scale history and religious paintings, both in Italy and Spain. It is tempting therefore to see in his *Divertimento* opus an underlying religious theme, with Pulcinella perhaps as a Christ-figure. The visual references are there, to be sure, but they are far from explicit. A ladder propped strategically against the wall in the burial scene stands

as a good promise of later ascension. His firing squad execution by fellow Punchinelli is a reasonable analogue of Christ's death at the hands of his compatriots (and references a similar scene by Goya).

The fresco paintings that he executed on the walls and ceiling of the family villa near Venice frequently depict Pulcinella (usually in multiples) and several are remarkably like the earlier 'ascension' paintings created in the workshop of his father – showing Pulcinella high on a swing, for example (again with ladders strategically placed). It is tempting to see this period of his work as a secular negation of all that he had created or even believed in his earlier life.

This may be going too far. A more likely interpretation is to see this whole series of paintings and drawings as a commentary on the decline of Venice itself, with the 'ascension' as an expression of hope that even the humble Pulcinella 'everyman' might finally emerge from the decay.

Among the more enigmatic of Domenico's work is *Il Mondo nuovo* (1791) (*The New World*) in which a crowd is gathered around a hidden showman displaying some object of considerable interest to the audience. A Pulcinella figure stands off to one



side, unable to see or comprehend whatever might be attracting the audience's interest – it is indeed a 'new world' in which the old characters of the commedia may have no place. In this sense it stands as a metaphor for the 'death' not only of commedia, but of a whole way of life that is soon to pass. With Napoleon's invasion of 1797, the Venetian Republic finally collapses.



The value of Tiepolo lies in the fact that he creates a series of powerful visual metaphors based on the Commedia character of Pulcinella. While on the one hand his Punch is an everyman indulging in very ordinary things – eating, drinking, dancing, going to the zoo – on another level he is quite alien: he is born from an egg, he is imprisoned for unknown crimes, executed by fellow citizens and finally buried, only to rise again as a terrifying skeleton. Pulcinella transcends the human to become humanity as a whole – the character stands not for an individual, but for a specific aspect of all individuals, or of society.

Death and Resurrection in Commedia

There are a number of scripts from traditional Commedia in which Pulcinella does indeed get 'killed'. It is the nature of Commedia however, that the character as represented by the mask is assumed to be immortal – unlike the characters in Shakespeare, say, where they are representations of 'real' individuals and therefore mortal. One example of this from the Commedia repertoire is the script that supposedly formed the basis of the Stravinsky ballet *Pulcinella* (from an early 18th century Neapolitan manuscript):

Pulcinella is extremely attractive to all the girls of the village (for unstated but imaginable reasons). The other lads are jealous and plot to kill him. They all dress as identical Pulcinelli (perhaps to confuse the girls, who might be expected to fall for them once the real Pulcinello is out of the way). A 'friend', whom Pulcinella persuades to stand in for him, is beaten up and killed by the village boys. But the death is only feigned and Pulcinella, as magician, resurrects him. All is forgiven, relationships are resolved, couples reunited and they live happily ever after.

That, at least, is the ballet version. I suspect that the original Commedia version was both much darker and much ruder. Sexual voraciousness was certainly a part of the Pulcinella 'character', as attested by Duchartre:

The Neapolitan (or Venetian) Pulcinella found his way into England at the end of the seventeenth century, and there he proceeded to give rein to all the cold-blooded ferocity which he had stored up in his nature. His irony then took on an English tone, and he developed into a great seducer of the young girls of the people. A ballad of the eighteenth century affirms that his ardour became so intense that he required at least 22 women to keep him satisfied.

From this description it would appear that the ballet version was heavily sanitised for the consumption of a more squeamish modern audience.

From Pulcinella to Mr Punch

The English Mr Punch was probably not all that different from his Neapolitan ancestor, or even his Venetian counterpart. There is much dispute about where and when the character of Mr Punch emerged onto the English scene. There is the famous account of Samuel Pepys coming across a puppet show with commedia characters in the 1660's and many similar encounters throughout the 17th and 18th century. But our earliest scripts for a Punch & Judy show date only from the first quarter of the 19th century. What does seem to be the case is that in the late 18th century, just as Pulcinella was being banned from the streets of Venice his English compatriot Mr Punch was emerging as a major figure on the streets of London – Death and Resurrection again?

Bill Tuck



¹ James H. Johnson, *Venice Incognito – Masks in the Serene Republic*, University of California Press, 2011

² Adelheid Gealt, *Domenico Tiepolo: The Punchinello Drawings*, George Braziller, New York, 1986. See also: Linda Wolk-Simon, *Domenico Tiepolo: Drawings, Prints and Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* [<http://www.metmuseum.org/pubs/bulletins/1/pdf/3269143.pdf.bannered.pdf>]. Many of the images from *Il Divertimento* discussed here are available directly online, by simply typing the keywords 'Domenico Tiepolo' and 'Divertimento' into a search engine.

BOOK REVIEWS

Pulcinella: Or Entertainment for Children, by Giorgio Agamben
(English translation by Adam Kotsko)
Published by Seagull Books, (2nd ed. Edition, 8 Feb. 2019) and
available from Amazon at £16.10



The list of subjects that Giorgio Agamben has tackled in his career is dizzying--from the dangers of our current political moment to the traces of the distant past that inflect the culture around us today. With *Pulcinella*, Agamben is back with yet another surprising--and surprisingly relevant--subject: the Commedia dell'Arte character who later emerges in England as Mr Punch. At the heart of *Pulcinella* is Agamben's exploration of the album of 104 drawings, created by Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo (1727-1804) near the end of his life, that cover the life, adventures, death, and resurrection of the title character: *Divertimento per li ragazzi*

(Entertainment for Children). Who is Pulcinella under his black mask? Is he a man, a demon, or a god? Mixing stories of the enigmatic Pulcinella with his own character in a sort of imaginary philosophical biography, Agamben attempts to locate the line connecting philosophy and comedy. Perhaps, contrary to what we've been told, comedy is not only more ancient and profound than tragedy, but also closer to philosophy - close enough, in fact, that, as happens in this book, at times the line between the two can blur.

Agamben translator and critic, Adam Kotsko says that in this book Agamben recapitulates his entire career as a thinker - remembering each book or essay and finding them echoed in some aspect of the character Pulcinella. Agamben tells us that he was doing this to recapitulate his own career.

The result may be seen as a strange collection of thoughts that don't entirely hang together well (bits of etymology, bits of bookish scholarship, some thoughts

about comedy, and political resistance). There are regular flashbacks to the themes, obsessions and terminology of Agamben's earlier books. So, if you add these two points together and see this jumble as a compendium of Agamben's own works, then you do get the answer Kotsko came up with.

Perhaps the most interesting thing about the book, however, is to ask why Agamben chose to write it, adopting the same title as that given by Tiepolo to his sequence of 104 drawings tracing out the life, adventures and eventual death of his principal character Pulcinella. To understand this better it may be



necessary to view Agamben's own career as traced out by his output of many heavyweight volumes of political commentary and social observation, while at the same time leafing through the Tiepolo drawings of Pulcinella's parallel career as illustrated in the 104 drawings of the *Divertimento per li regazzi*.

Unfortunately, there does not appear to be any single volume currently in print that contains the full set of 104 drawings. The original collection was sold as a single lot at auction by Sotheby's in July 1920. Bought by a London dealer for the knockdown price of £600 it was later sold to a Paris dealer who, after exhibiting them at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in 1921, broke up the collection and sold it on to anyone interested or wise enough to purchase. In this way it was largely dispersed to various museums and private collections, mostly in the USA.

Domenico Tiepolo: The Punchinello Drawings by Adelheid M. Gealt

George Brazillier, New York 1986

Available (used) from Amazon (from £150)

Since then, a number of books have been published featuring the drawings of Tiepolo, and many include examples from the *Divertimento*. The most comprehensive collection of drawings from the *Divertimento* was compiled by Adelheidt Gealt and included full sepia colour reproductions of 77 of the original 104 drawings, together with 24 reduced monochrome copies of the remainder (many of which are presently of unknown location). Although no longer in print, used copies can occasionally be found.



Frontispiece to Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo's *Divertimento per li regazzi*

MUSIC IN COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE **PART III**

In previous articles examining the relationship between music and commedia, we considered the kind of music each mask might have played, then at the sort of music that had been composed for commedia performances. In this third instalment we look at some specific examples where commedia has been a major influence on the musical composition itself, whether or not it had actually been used for a commedia performance.

While there is no shortage of little pieces for piano, say, that have 'Harlequin dance' or some such title, it is more difficult to find major works by well-known composers. Perhaps the first and most obvious is Igor Stravinsky's *Pulcinella*. This was originally conceived as a ballet for the Ballets Russe company and was based on a commedia script called *The Four Pulcinellas*, supposedly unearthed by Léonide Massine in a Naples bookshop. First performed by the Ballets Russes in 1920, with Massine in the title role, nowadays it is more frequently performed as a purely musical piece, *The Pulcinella Suite*, without any of the songs that convey the narrative in the original.



Neyire Ashworth & Klaus Abromeit, CommediaFest 2017

While a number of re-choreographed versions have been produced in recent years, there appears as yet to have been no attempt at recreating the original choreography. It is not clear whether sufficient information exists to attempt such a reconstruction, but the very successful reconstructions by Millicent Hodson and Kenneth Archer of other Diaghilev ballets would suggest that such an attempt could be very revealing. As it stands, we have little in the score that seems to reflect anything of the Commedia character of *Pulcinella*, save for the famous trombone solo that appears some 37 minutes into the ballet [<https://youtu.be/sppiYdxeKFY>] or 18 mins into the *Suite* [https://youtu.be/J_E7w9P8x5o]. An enlightening talk on the problems of reconstructing the Ballet Russes choreographies was given by the Hodson-Archer team at the Commedia Festival in 2016 (unfortunately they did not include a discussion of *Pulcinella*)

Closer to a deliberate attempt to characterise a Commedia character or 'mask' is the extended work of Karlheinz Stockhausen called *Harlekin*, written for solo clarinet. While the full version runs to nearly an hour, a shortened version, *Kleine Harlekin*, is usually less than 10 minutes long. You can see a full version here: [<https://youtu.be/PZXjOnACbA>] or a shorter version here: [<https://youtu.be/zFrfD-4PfcS>]. It is a feature of this work that the performer is given detailed instructions by the composer as to how they are expected to move while playing, along with specific lighting instructions and stage directions in the score. Extracts from this work were performed at the Commedia Festival in 2017 by clarinetist Neyire Ashford and dancer Klaus Abromeit.



Suzanne Stephens as Harlekin 1976. Costume designed by Stockhausen.

Staying within the domain of explicit characterisation, we have the famous piece *Pierrot Lunaire* by Arnold Schoenberg. Set for one singer and a small collection of instruments, this work was first performed in Berlin in 1912. It is based on a collection of poems by the Belgian poet Albert Giraud (1860 – 1929) entitled *Pierrot lunaire: Rondels bergamasques* (1884), which expound on the actions of a drunken Pierrot figure as he confronts the moon. While Pierrot was essentially only a minor Zanni character in the Italian commedia, he came to greater prominence on French 18th century adoption (as shown by his frequent appearance in Watteau). During the romantic period of the later 19th century, it came to symbolise the life and concerns of the 'artiste', struggling to create while held at a distance from normal society.

21 of the 50 verses of the original were used (in a German translation by Otto Hartleben) by Schoenberg as the text for his 'sprechstimme' adaptation. This proved to be quite revolutionary at the time and the work has now come to be regarded as one of the great musical compositions of the 20th century. It is notable that Schoenberg at some point remarked that the 'singer' was not to follow the emotions created by the **words** of the poem, but rather to follow that of the composer's interpretation of the character as expressed in the instrumental music.

Unlike with Stockhausen's *Harlekin*, Schoenberg does not appear to have given explicit instructions on how the piece should be staged, though it has been suggested that his preference was to have the instrumentalists behind a semi-transparent screen. The first performance, staged in Berlin in 1912, is described thus:



Schoenberg with the original 'Pierrot Ensemble' of 5 instrumentalists and singer (Albertine Zehme)

"A frail man, as rash in his temperament as he was docile when listening to his music, Schoenberg watched as the lights dimmed and a fully costumed Pierrot took to the stage, a spotlight illuminating him against a semitransparent black screen through which a small instrumental ensemble could be seen. But as Pierrot began singing, the audience quickly grew uneasy, noting that Pierrot was in fact a woman singing in the most awkward of styles against a backdrop of pointillist atonal brilliance."
(Mike Fabio)

This would certainly solve one of the major problems with trying to stage the work in something of the 'Commedia' style: As many modern performances show, including those below, the five instrumentalists along with piano and conductor generally get in the way of the main character Pierrot, and clutter up the scenery. Better (and cheaper!) perhaps, to employ a recorded instrumental track and a solitary performer! The staging problem is demonstrated in these otherwise excellent productions:

Ensemble Intercontemporain under Pierre Boulez (in 2004): <https://youtu.be/7vM4B1fNTQ8>

Israeli Chamber Project (in 2016): <https://youtu.be/eH7OnSOHBWg>

The next example is from only a few years later than the Berlin performance of Schoenberg's *Pierrot*. In 1917 the composer Ferruccio Busoni conducted the first performance of his One Act opera *Arlecchino, oder die Fenster* staged in the Stadttheatre Zurich. Much better known for his piano compositions and elaborate re-workings of Bach, Busoni appears to have for many years been interested in the Commedia dell'Arte and in the figure of Arlecchino, in particular.

The improvisational character of commedia does not fit well with the highly structured nature of formal opera. It is not surprising therefore, that there are very few operas with anything like a standard commedia scenario. Busoni's *Arlecchino* does, nevertheless fit the pattern, at least as far as the scenario goes:

The principal character Arlecchino sets out to seduce the beautiful young wife of the village tailor. By persuading him that a war has been declared and that he has received his call-up papers. With the tailor out of the way, Arlecchino pursues his objective. Meanwhile his own wife, Columbina, becomes aware of his infidelity and taunts him by embarking on her own affair with Leandro, the village lothario. Arlecchino discovers the affair and fells Leandro in a duel. The Dottore revives the seemingly dead Leandro and all ends with a parade and dance of the rearranged couples. The tailor Matteo, remains reading his Dante, oblivious of the whole deception – a true Pierrot figure.



Alexander Moissie in the title role in the original production (1917)

Partly because of the difficulty of staging, the opera is seldom performed. Renewed interest in this period – and in Commedia dell'Arte – has led to several recent attempts at a full staging. One such can be viewed online at <https://youtu.be/t34mndg-s5l> and another at: <https://youtu.be/cTaDDyWkP00>

The next group of pieces are purely of music, with little attempt at staging either through dance or mime. Joseph Horowitz (1926 – 2022) is an Austrian born English composer well-known for his numerous instrumental works and for a children's piece *Captain Noah and His Floating Zoo* (1970), his biggest popular success. Among his less well-known works is an 8-minute, impressionistic piece *Commedia dell'Arte*, composed in 1994/96 for wind band. Here the intention is simply to evoke the idea of a Commedia performance, but without any attempt at delineating any individual characters. A full performance can be found here: https://youtu.be/D_mBQjxPurY

More interesting, from our point of view, are the numerous attempts by a number of well-known composers to create a 'sound portrait' of particular commedia characters. The modernist jazz composer John Zorn has created a suite of pieces, labelled *Commedia dell'Arte*. Composed in 2014/15 the suite explores in turn the characters of Harlequin, Colombina, Scaramouche, Pulcinella and Pierrot. Each is set with a different instrumental or vocal ensemble: Harlequin is played by flute, clarinet, bassoon and viola; while Pulcinella adopts a brass quintet and Pierrot a quartet of cellos; Scaramouche is a jazz piano trio and Columbina is set for four voices. By choosing instrumental timbres that in some way reflect each character an imaginative 'sound portrait' emerges. It is an open question, of course, whether the addition of a dance or mime enactment of the character would add significantly, but attempts have been made.

Further musical portraits of commedia characters have been created by composers Ana Sokolovic and Michele Biki Panitti. In the case of Ana Sokolovic, whose work *Commedia dell'Arte* was composed between 2010 and 2013, the instrumental group is a standard string quartet. Here the characters are intended to be evoked simply by the musical styles adopted rather than by varying the instrumentation. This can be heard in the performance by the Bozzini Quartet here: <https://youtu.be/Y-krEnLvtTQ>

The same work, however, can be heard together with a commedia interpretation in a video performance recorded January 2016. Here the actors Claude Tremblay et Maude Desrosiers, present a full-on interpretation of the commedia characters in parallel with the instrumental music: <https://youtu.be/Z5p1aC1r5ic> This is an excellent example of the difficulty of matching Commedia performance to a pre-composed score, particularly when the score itself is technically very complex.

Our final example is the series of 21 miniature ‘portraits’ of Commedia characters created by the composer Michele Biki Panitti in 2014. This collection of 21 pieces, each no more than 2 or 3 minutes long, uses a small instrumental ensemble, based around piano or accordian, and clarinet, to evoke each character. Clearly targeted at the popular end of the Spotify streaming market, it gives a very simple but attractive interpretation of ‘commedia’, quite different from all those listed above, but in keeping with the many hundreds of similar compositions created as ‘commedia’ pieces. It serves well as an example of the genre and does not pretend to be anything other than a light-hearted approach to the musical portraiture of the Commedia dell’Arte characters.

Improvisation is a central aspect of Commedia dell’Arte. This places it at some odds with the attempt by composers to represent the characters of Commedia in musical form. In Schoenberg’s masterpiece *Pierrot Lunaire*, for example, the vocal part of the Pierrot character is specified in considerable detail, along with the words of Giraud’s poem on which it is based. This demands a great deal of effort on the part of the performer: the initial performance in 1912



The first page of the *Pierrot Lunaire* score by Schoenberg, published 1914

is said to have required 40 rehearsals. What remains as scope for improvisation lies in movement and staging and in this respect many current interpretations show considerable skill and ingenuity. Nevertheless, the complexity of the music tends to detract, both visually and aurally, from the basic simplicity of the performance.

The Stockhausen piece details not only the notes to be played by the solo clarinetist, but also their movements, along with rules for the lighting. Even the costume for the first performances was designed by Stockhausen himself. This, of course, reduces the scope for improvisation even further. The effect is to further distance such performances from the essential simplicity that characterised the original Commedia dell’Arte. It is, after all, something of this return to simplicity that motivates the rediscovery of this long neglected art form today.

DER KLEINE HARLEKIN * Stockhausen

Es gelten die gleichen allgemeinen Spielanweisungen wie für die Komposition HARLEKIN. Auch die Betonung ist wie beim HARLEKIN. Der Kostüm muß jedoch ganz anders sein (als Beispiel siehe Foto).

MARSCHTANZ (ca 112)
Auf- und Abbewegung der Schritte mit Hin- und-Her- und Auf- und Ab-Bewegung mit Kopf- und Beinbewegungen.

ETWAS LANGSAMER (ca 100)
am Bühnenrand nach links laufen (rechts vom Publikum) nach rechts laufen.

The image contains a detailed musical score for 'DER KLEINE HARLEKIN' by Stockhausen. It includes instructions for the clarinetist and flute player, such as 'sich langsam (atmen) 2. vorwärts', 'aufsteigen', and 'mit der Hand'. There are also performance directions like '3. 4. dim. bis pp, vor & zurück, 2. 3. cresc. bis ff' and 'Bei längeren Deuten (Bündeln) mit W. und die Fußspitze bei jeder Deutung Fuß aufschlagen und dann mit abwechselndem Fuß eine Bewegung über dem Boden, oder in der Luft, gemacht (Stockhausen, diese Bewegung ist jedoch nicht vorgeschrieben)'. A circular stamp from 'www.metoriel.com' is visible at the bottom.

FROM THE ARCHIVE -

The Death and Resurrection of Punchinello:

A Commedia piece in the manner of a Mummers Play,
for concert interlude or street theatre performance
by *Chalemie Theatre Company*

Devised by Bill Tuck & Barry Grantham and based on
a performance at the International Mummers Festival, Gloucester, 2014

Programme (Revised – February 2023)

Outline

The performance piece is designed to run for about 20 minutes and will involve a minimum of 11 performers (6 musicians and 5 actor/dancers). It will be fully costumed and presented in the style of *commedia del'arte*. The story is the death, burial and resurrection of the commedia character Punchinello – his death symbolizing his rejection from both Italy and France following the revolutions of the 1790s – and his re-emergence as Mr Punch in England during subsequent decades. It is also symbolic of the fact that 1797 marks the year in which Venice loses its independence following Napoleon's invasion – and the wearing of masks is banned by the new regime.

The minimum cast is:

5 actors/dancers

6 musicians (3 trombones, 2 taborers, 1 percussion)

The piece is intended to have a duration of approximately 20 minutes and to run continuously.

No special staging is required, nor would music-stands, seating or other ancillary equipment be needed.

The Burial of Punchinello
(Domenico Tiepolo, after 1797)



Performances

The first performance was in Bath as part of at the Conference on 'Georgian Pleasures', 12th/13th September 2013. It was later staged at the Chalemie Summer School in Oxford (August 2014) and at the International Pipe & Tabor Festival in Gloucester (6th to 8th September, 2014). It has since gone through numerous revivals and performed at the International Mummers Festivals (Bath, Stroud, Gloucester) and the Commedia Festival, Rotherhithe in London)

Background

Commedia dell'Arte is currently undergoing something of a world-wide revival. Although driven by interest groups in Italy, where it has long been a recognized form of theatre, there are also significant moves within the UK. It was, of course, enormously influential during the 18th century and formed the basis of the 'English Pantomime' of that period – the most popular form of theatre entertainment during the 18thC. Only much later did it evolve into the children's Christmas entertainment of Victorian times or its infantilised modern form.

There is currently a move to have *Commedia dell'Arte* recognised by UNESCO as a unique art form worthy of listing as Non-tangible Cultural Heritage and to this end a world-wide *Commedia dell'Arte Day* takes place every 25th February. The latest incarnation of the *Punchinello Project* was launched as an open workshop/rehearsal on the weekend of the 23rd/24th February 2017. Since then it has been performed every year (with the exception of the Plague Years 2021 & 2022) on or near to *World Commedia Day* as part of *Punch's Progress*, a street parade component of the Mini Commedia Festival.

Punchinello is one of the principal characters of the Italian *Commedia dell'Arte* – a style of improvised theatre based on the use of masks, physical comedy and mime techniques. Spoken dialogue – where it existed – was highly stylised, frequently profane and bawdy. Only outline scripts were used – the actors were expected to improvise using a number of well-rehearsed routines and stock comic turns (or *lazzi*) – there was no 'play-script' in the modern sense.

From its origins in Italy during the 16th century it moved to France and became popular with the royal court (particularly in the version promoted by Moliere, where a play with full text alternated with *commedia* interludes). It also emerged in England during the early 18th century and was adapted by theatre directors such as John Rich and David Garrick to become the basis of English pantomime. This was not the pantomime that we know today as 'children's Christmas entertainment' but a sophisticated interweaving of classical stories such as Perseus and Andromeda and rude comedy, usually involving Harlequin and Columbine.

With the coming of the French Revolution, *Commedia dell'Arte* falls out of fashion – possibly because of its earlier association with the royal court and its aristocratic patronage. Its subversive politics was not sufficiently robust to endear it to the fierce Puritanism of the revolutionaries. Much the same happens in Italy. Venice through much of the 18th century had adopted *commedia* as its own special brand of theatre and the masked characters were favourites during the months of *Carnival*. But in 1797 the Venetian Republic was over-run by the French under Napoleon and ceased effectively to exist (becoming part of the Austrian Empire until being re-united with a newly formed Italy in 1850s). Along with the *La Serenissima*, *commedia* largely disappears in the north of Italy – although it had been under threat for some time before this, as reflected in the rivalry between the playwright Gozzi (who wanted to promote it) and Goldoni (who wanted the characters of the *commedia*, but without the masks and the improvised dialogue). The wearing of masks was itself banned from 1797 until 1802, and then only permitted as part of a theatre performance.

In England, however, Punchinello reappears during the later 18th and early 19th century in the robust form of the Punch & Judy Show – again not initially a seaside entertainment for children, but a highly portable version of street theatre based on glove puppets and designed for adults who would not normally be able to afford seats in the traditional theatres. Mr Punch is of course the resurrected Punchinello of the Italian *Commedia dell'arte* – banished from France and Italy, but finding a safe haven in England (one of the original asylum seekers, perhaps?). This is the basis of our 'plot'.

Synopsis of the Plot

We omit any representation of the causes of Punchinello's death— various causes might be suggested. The 'play' begins with a cortège: the corpse of Punchinello is being carried for burial in the soil of England, his adopted homeland. The pall-bearers and accompanying musicians are, of course, also all Punchinellos – for unlike Harlequin, Pantelone, or any of the other stock commedia figures, Punchinello was never a unique individual. He was an 'everyman' figure, so could exist in multiple form. This idea has been beautifully represented in the drawings that Domenico Tiepolo produced in Venice in the late 18th century (and mostly after 1797). For this reason, we adopt the 'Tiepolo' costume for the Punchinello character: - tall white conical hat, baggy white shirt, white trousers, black mask with large hooked nose, and a peculiar posture adopted because of his hump back and protruding belly. All the Punchinellos of the cortège are thus dressed identically.

Also important is Punchinello's gait: his origins suggest that he was hatched from an egg by a turkey, so he should walk in the manner of a chicken (this is also suggested by the etymology of his name: Pulcinella – its Italian form -- derives from the Italian noun '*pulcino*', meaning 'chick'). Thus, while playing and marching all the Punchinello figures should imitate the 'chicken walk', knees raised in an exaggerated step and leaning back, with neck and head going forward and back in the characteristic 'pecking' move. Not so easy while playing the trombone, I suspect!

Additional characters from the *commedia* may appear, however. The cart carrying the timpani might be dragged by a ragged Pantelone figure, in a role-reversal that symbolically captures the relative decline of this character in the English commedia (Pantaloone is much less important than Mr Punch) as well as symbolising the fall of patrician Venice. Likewise, a scattering of Harlequins, Mezzotinos or Columbines would not be inappropriate.

The entire group marches to the tune of Handel's 'Dead march from Saul' on blue trombones and pipe&tabor (or, ideally, panpipe&tabor – this being the traditional accompaniment for Punch&Judy). The pall-bearers carry the body of Punchinello on its bier. On arrival at the burial-ground (ie. the performance area) the bier is laid on the ground (preferably raised a little on legs?) and the funeral oration begins. It might be appropriate to have the orator costumed as Il Dottore. During the oration the Punchinellos are (probably) silent, but the female characters might weep and wail rather dramatically. From there it proceeds to his awakening.

The character of Punchinello (Italian/Tiepolo) is envisaged being transformed into a very English Mr Punch. So his costume could well be quite different from the others – who would appear to be somewhat aghast at this new apparition. It then proceeds to the *lazzi* of Punch's res-erection – suitably rude and vulgar! This should probably end in a chase as Punch seeks to assert his lascivious desires on any available female.

There should probably be an Epilogue, spoken again by Il Dottore. In fact it might be a nice touch if it is the ministrations of the Doctor (e.g. , sprinkling the 'corpse' with holy water) that revives Punchinello – to the Doctor's surprise.

The oration at the graveside needs to carry some of these ideas of Punchinello's rejection by the Continent – his place of origin – and welcome in England. A long version follows – a much shorter version might be more appropriate.



Oration on the Death of Punchinello (sample)

Make room, make room good gentles all,
 Give space for us to set our stall!
 Though don't expect a play to follow –
 We've come just to bury Punchinello!

A tale of death in distant lands,
 Of hero slain by alien hands:
 Driven from Flanders, France and Spain
 He took refuge at home again
 In Venice, where he thrived for years,
 Had friends – he thought – and no more fears.
 A peaceful, quiet life he sought
 Amid these folk whose trust he bought
 Through gen'rous pranks and humble wit
 With wife -- and baby on the way –
 He thought he ever more would stay
 In Venice, not foreseeing that
 His friends grew jealous of his estate.
 Consumed by envy they did lust
 Upon our hero's girl: "There's just
 A chance, if we detain the lad
 We'll have the lass – can that be bad?"
 "We'll dress the same – she'll never know –
 All clad in white from head to toe"
 So, they betrayed him to the court
 The trial was swift, the sentence short,
 In words at least, if not in fee
 "He'll hang!" the judge cried out with glee
 "For gross intent and blasphemy!"
 Our boys at this were quite dismayed
 They'd only thought to have him splayed
 In village stocks for just a day
 So they with girl could have their way.
 But hanged he was. Now we must grieve
 And cart his body overseas
 To milder climes where laws are just
 And minor crimes forgiven must
 Be. So we've come to bury Punchinello
 A merry chap and jolly fellow.
 An innocent whose crimes were few
 But passions great. If we but knew
 His sense of hurt at trust betrayed
 We'd grant his wish to have him laid
 In hallow'd ground 'neath English oak.
 An all-round fellow and right good bloke!



Bill Tuck, December 2012

The Death and Resurrection of Punchinello

Characters:

Mr Punch
Zanni/Il Dottore/Priest
Polly/Columbine
Napoleon (Punch's adversary)
Roomer/Narrator/Mayor
Musicians, Comedians and Dancers

[The cortege draws into the performance arena: drum in front, followed by the band playing the Purcell *Funeral March* (musicians all dressed as identical **Punchinellos**). **Zanni** brings up the rear dragging a cart containing the body of yet another Punchinello – represented by hat & mask on black draped boxes]

Roomer: Make room, make room, good gentles all,
 Give space for us to set our stall.
 But don't expect a play to follow
 For we've come just to bury Punchinello. [gestures to cart]

Polly: Can I first do my dance?.

Punchinello: Oh very well. [Polly dances *La Matelotte*]

[At end, Polly starts to collect money in her small tambourine, but **Zanni** intervenes with a large bucket. Zanni pushes Polly aside and attempts to collect money in bucket. Lazzi of the bucket and turnip]

Napoleon enters: In comes I, Napoleon bold.
 I may not be big, but you'll do as you're told!
 Stop this at once, we can't have dancing!
 [and, on seeing the cart, with corpse]
 And what's with this cart, and this tall white hat thing?

Company: Oh can't you see? It's Punchinello,
 He's dead you see, and gone quite yellow!

Napoleon: Dead you say? We can't have that,
 The traffic here will soon quash him flat!
 Get off with you and leave these shores
 We don't want queer folks like you at our front doors!

[Band starts to play *the Battle Pavan* and **Napoleon** struts around brandishing his sword. **Punchinello** is pushed by the others to confront him. Lazzi of the *Two Captains*. They fight and Punchinello is killed]

Polly: Oh dear, oh dear, what have you done?
 You've gone and killed my favourite son!
 Quick, send for the Doctor.

The Doctor: In comes I, good Doctor Sprat.
 I'll cure all ills – and come to that
 If they're not long dead there's quite a chance
 I'll bring them round, to sing and dance.

[examines Punchinello]

No this one's quite dead. There's not a hope – we'll have to bury him.
I'll do the rites for this poor sod
And commend his sorry soul to God

[in Latin mumbo jumbo.

He circles the body while scattering 'holy' water from a small flask]

Questo pasta redemptore

Ipsa facto misericorde

Vite pronto et pro bonum

Quad errato demonstrandum!

[At the end of this ritual Polly and the rest of the Company look on aghast as Punch's baton slowly rises.]

Doctor: [examining the bottle] Damn! I must have used the wrong formula.

[He tries to push it down, but this only brings Punch into a sitting position.]

Punchinello: [In some glee] Ah – that's the way to do it!

Your spell has gone and set me free!

And now an Englishman I'll be!

[rips off costume to reveal Punch costume]

Mr Punch will be my name

And jolly mayhem be my game!

Now music I'll have – and be quick about it,

We'll dance and we'll sing - let's get the party started!

[Band starts to play **The Morrisco** while **Mr Punch** dances around taunting **Napoleon**. It ends with Napoleon being knocked down by Mr Punch. All (Punch, Polly and the Doctor) then dance to celebrate the end of Napoleon -- music continues throughout].

Roomer: (Epilogue)

"Now ladies and gentlemen, your sport is most ended.

So prepare for the hat, which is highly commended.

The hat it would speak if it had but a tongue,

Come throw in your money, and think it no wrong!"

Exit (to music)

THE END