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Homemade Comedy

ONLINE
COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE
RESOURCES





A Message from Rosa

Thank you for purchasing our **Homemade Comedy** resource!
Not only are you contributing to the survival of a small independent theatre company at this very challenging time, but you are also helping a number of creatives – many of whom have lost their livelihoods – earn some income. If you think it's pretty hot stuff and you'd like to recommend it to colleagues, rather than simply sharing the resource, we ask that you please direct them to makeascene.com.au/homemade-comedy for purchase.

I hope you find this resource useful and it becomes the source of much online laughter!

Grazie e buon divertimento!

Rosa Campagnaro
Director, Make A Scene

About this Resource:

The included lesson plans are designed as a course to be taught in sequence, however, you may choose to teach the lesson plan or exercises that suit you and your curriculum best. You may use this as an introduction to comedy, slapstick or *Commedia dell'Arte*. (Please note this is *not* a course in the study of *Commedia*, with all its conventions and nuanced stock characters, but rather a guide to understanding and embodying the spirit of comedy and *Commedia* by getting students to be physical, playful and present.) Some lessons refer to handouts – these can be found in the Appendices, together with other teacher-only resources, at the end of these resources.

This resource includes activities to extend senior students so as to acquire a better understanding of the actor's process for developing characters and telling stories. Likewise, many of the activities and exercises are suitable and adaptable for primary or junior secondary students. We recommend, however, that you review all material – including written excerpts and videos – before setting lessons.

Feel free to separate and disperse the lessons however you see fit. If you have trouble separating this PDF using your Print > PDF (or similar) function, you can always find each separate lesson plan, plus all the appendices, additional resources that Make A Scene may add to over time, and a spare copy of this entire document, in this Dropbox:

[\[link available in full package\]](#)

All Make A Scene videos are hosted and clearly labelled on our *Homemade Comedy* showcase on Vimeo:

[\[link and password available in full package\]](#)

These are a mix of character or *lazzi* video tutorials, guided by our talented company members Mason Gasowski and Freya Pragt, and archival excerpts from our current and past shows:

- [The Servant of Two Masters](#) by Carlo Goldoni, adapted and translated by Rosa Campagnaro and starring Christian Bagin, Sharon Davis, Irene del Pilar Gomez, Roby Favretto, Darcy Kent, Lelda Kapsis and Freya Pragt. Performed at La Mama Theatre as part of the 2016 VCE Theatre Studies Playlist.
- [Venice in Love](#) created by Rosa Campagnaro and Christian Bagin. Recently revised and performed by Mason Gasovski and Freya Pragt.
- [Pinocchio](#) created by Rosa Campagnaro, Christian Bagin and performer Jasper Foley. Performed at La Mama Theatre as part of the 2018 VCE Theatre Studies Playlist.

All other external links (such as YouTube videos) are provided within the lesson plans.

Please don't hesitate to get in touch on info@makeascene.com.au if you have any questions, quibbles or quandaries!

Make A Scene acknowledges the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first inhabitants of the nation and the traditional custodians of the lands where we live, learn and perform on. We pay our respects to them and their cultures; and to elders both past and present.

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LESSON 1

You say
LASSO,
I say
LAH-ZOH!

FOCUS: Defining *lazzi*

LESSON 1

You say LASSO,
I say LAH-ZOH

There are a few theories on the **origins** of the word **lazzo** (plural: **lazzi**). It is commonly believed that it comes from the Italian word meaning “joke” or “jest”. It could also be derived from the Italian word *lazzarone*, which translates to slacker or scoundrel. The word may even originate from *laccio*, which translates to “string” or “rope”, and may signify “tying up the action” or as a transition between scenes. Whatever the origins, most seem to agree that **lazzi** are **physical and verbal games, jokes or gags** performed by the actors on stage, including **interaction** or ‘play’ with the audience. **Lazzi** can be silly **slapstick**, comic business or a variety of comic **routines** (rehearsed or improvised).

For a **lazzo** to be fun, the actor has to be in a **playful state**. If the actor worries about whether they’re being funny or what the audience thinks, it’s probably not going to be funny! Actors often talk about ‘being in the moment’ – this means being committed to the play or the game. Think of the phrase *dance like nobody is watching* – the only way you’re going to be funny is to not care about being funny!

In [Commedia dell’Arte](#) the following techniques are used to create **lazzi**:

1. Exaggeration and absurdity
2. Rhythm and timing
3. Audience interaction*

* Sometimes this is by direct interaction (ie talking to an audience member or getting them up onstage) and sometimes this by simply “sharing” a moment (ie when an actor discovers (or does) something and then looks directly at the audience to silently share their discovery – this is particularly engaging *commedia* technique when employed by a masked actor).



Watch

Take a look at company member Mason Gasowski performing a classic **lazzo** from Make A Scene’s [Venice in Love](#):

Lesson 1: Lazzo of the Fly

[\[link and password available in full package\]](#)

Respond

- List examples of **exaggeration** and **absurdity**.
- What are the objects Arlecchino mimes?
- What places/spaces does the **lazzo** visit?
- Notice the **timing**. When does it slow down or speed up for comic effect?
- What does the masked actor do to **engage** the audience?

LESSON 6

Arlecchino in #iSD

FOCUS: Developing the Arlecchino (Zanni) character from *Commedia dell'Arte*

FOR TEACHERS: The *Create Your Own Masks!* handout can be found in the Appendices

Arlecchino in #iso

ABOUT ARLECCHINO

Arlecchino is a very popular version of the **Zanni** stock character in **Commedia dell'Arte**. As a stock character, an actor creating their own Arlecchino needs to work with an associated animal – or in this case, a combination of two animals: a **monkey** and a **cat**.

The mask itself reflects the features of both of these animals, and it heavily influences the character's **physicality, behaviour, voice** and **motivations**.

Like many of the *Commedia* characters, Arlecchino is a creature of **extremes**. They can be lazy and lethargic, like a cat, and playful and energetic, like a monkey. They are not educated, but this doesn't mean that they are stupid. In fact Arlecchino is **street smart**, and can be **sly** and manipulative especially when they need to get out of trouble or when the object of its desire is **food**!

The **costume** is distinct and easily recognisable by its **multi-coloured diamond pattern** – which makes reference to the poor servant who can't afford new clothes and must continue to repair the one coat they do have!

In some scenarios Arlecchino can be **Colombina** or **Arlecchina**'s love interest. (Arlecchina is a female version of Arlecchino. She has similar characteristic to Colombina, but she is a little more grotesque because she is a masked character.)

Some contemporary examples of Arlecchino and Arlecchina you might recognise are:

- Bart Simpson (*The Simpsons*)
- Phil Dunphy (*Modern Family*)
- Jake Peralta & Gina Linetti (*Brooklyn Nine-Nine*)



Watch

In this video, company member Mason Gasowski guides you through his process for developing Arlecchino:

Lesson 1: Lazzo of the Fly

[\[link and password available in full package\]](#)

Activity

CATS AND MONKEYS AND ZANNI, OH MY!

It's time to get on your feet, get your Arlecchino on, and go exploring!

1. Firstly, explore the house or the room you're in **as a cat**. Play with the energy and movement of a cat. How does a cat move through the space? How does a cat interact with objects it encounters in that space? Give it a good amount of time – luxuriate, stretch – really inhabit your inner cat!
2. Next, explore the house or room **as a monkey**. Again, play with the monkey's energy and movement – and variations. How does a monkey travel through the space? How does it play with objects, furniture, other primates...?
3. Finally, what happens if you **combine** the cat and the monkey? Experiment with contrasts in energy – going from lazy and sneaky to energetic and playful. Again, explore the house or room, its space and objects, playing with this newfound energy.

Improvise

You may not have a literal Arlecchino **mask**, but you should definitely put your figurative **“silly hat”** on for this! It's time to make our cat/monkey animal combination a living, breathing – and comic! – human character...

- What happens when Arlecchino explores the house looking for food?
- As Arlecchino, try the mimodynamic exercise again
- Try or revisit the lazzi in Lessons 5, 7, 11, 12 and 14.

Extension

If you want to get super creative, you can make your own mask using plaster strips or *papier mâché*. Your teacher can provide you with the *Make Your Own Masks!* handout, and you can also check out the [Make A Scene blog](#) which documents the process of making a plaster mask:

makeascene.com.au/masks-masks-masks

Watch

Just a reminder you can catch an example of Mason's Arlecchino in action from our earlier lesson:

Lesson 1: Lazzo of the Fly

[\[link and password available in full package\]](#)



Appendices & Resources

ATTACHED RESOURCES

Included for teachers in this section are the following handouts and resources referenced in the Homemade Comedy lesson plans:

- **Lesson 2 Exercise Examples:** A “cheat sheet” for teachers to give you prompts for the / *Love Lucy* “Respond” exercise
- ***The Servant of Two Masters Act 2 Scene 2:*** Handout for the reading activity in Lesson 8
- ***Make Your Own Masks!:*** Reference images, inspiration and instructions for students to create their own *Commedia*-style masks

EXTRA RESOURCES

Our Make A Scene *Homemade Comedy* dropbox can be found here:

[\[link available in full package\]](#)

In there you will find:

- Individual lesson plans, separated and ready to disperse
- A folder with all appendices
- A full copy of this *Homemade Comedy* document
- A folder for extra resources that aren't directly referenced in this document; Make A Scene may add to this over time based on teacher feedback and requests

CREDITS

These resources have been written and compiled by **Rosa Campagnaro**.

Tutorial and demonstration videos created by and featuring **Mason Gasowski** and **Freya Pragt**, directed by **Rosa Campagnaro**.

Additional resource compilation and design by **Lyall Brooks**.

Photography by **Alex Motta** (studio character images) and **Lisa Businovski** (*The Servant of Two Masters* production images). All other images and thumbnails sourced online.

Featured illustration at end of Lesson 3 by **Karen Thorn**, part of a special Make A Scene commission (more sketches coming to makeascene.com.au soon). Karen makes beautiful and memorable sketches of workshops, classes, rehearsals and productions – please email info@makeascene.com.au for an introduction