

TART I15: COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE

INSTRUCTORS: MARCELLO BARTOLI, MICELA MOCCHIUTTI, LINO SPADARO

CONTACT HOURS: 95

CREDIT HOURS: 3

COURSE DESCRIPTION

From the sixteenth to the late eighteenth century the itinerant performers of the Commedia dell'arte developed a style of acting and performance that was to have a tremendous impact on the development of the European theatre. In the twentieth century this style was rediscovered and once again influenced such movements as the expressionist theatre, theatre of the absurd and the futurist's experiments, as well as individual artists such as Meyerhold, Gordon Craig, Samuel Beckett, Lecoq, Mnouchkine and many others. A study of the traditional techniques developed by Commedia provides modern actors with a vastly expanded artistic repertoire from which to develop a personal style.

This acting class will develop the practical use of the masks of the stock characters of the Commedia dell'arte. Through work on gesture, voice and movement within a specific socio/historical context, students will explore the characteristics of Arlecchino, Zanni, Brighella, Pantalone, Colombina and others, with the intention of developing the student's own personal version of the character.

The class format will be based on intensive studio work with daily exercises designed to develop the masked character. Students will work on improvisational techniques through work on various *scenari* and *lazzi*. Scene study in the form of short scenes, or *canovacci*, takes place in the final phase of the work.

The application of Commedia masks in comic traditions from Goldoni through Gozzi to Molière and Marivaux may also be a feature of this course, depending on faculty.

In addition to the intensive studio component, this course will include a mask-making workshop.

Students will sculpt a clay version of one of the stock Commedia masks, making a mold from this that serves as a "negative" for the fabrication of a mask in latex and fiberglass. The student then completes the mask through applying layers of finishing coating and finally paints and highlights its dramatic potential.

Informal class presentations of studies and scenes are a regular part of the class schedule. At their discretion, faculty may present students' work before a wider public at the Accademia or a local venue.

JOURNALS + ASSIGNMENTS

We consider keeping an up-to-date, accurate journal of the training—and artistic and cultural reflections that it inspires—to be an essential element of each student's journey through the semester.

These journals are not intended for public dissemination, but the Program Director will at his discretion ask to have access to them at specific points in the semester to help evaluate students' progress.

The journal may take several forms, including the literary, the visual and the photographic. The ultimate objective of this task is to produce a coherent record for each individual student that serves as a point of crystallization for his or her artistic and intellectual growth.

In addition, the Program Director will set short written assignments at key moments in the semester so that students can articulate clearly their progress and demonstrate comprehension of fundamental principles of the training. The Program Director will provide students with a full calendar of assignments.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this course is to impart a thorough understanding of the development of the Commedia style of acting through the appropriate use of gesture, movement and improvisational interaction while in performance. Students will be able to develop their own personal “masked” character. They will also appreciate how Commedia dell’arte, and its underlying tensions between master and servant, lover and cuckold, young and old, has parallels in theatre from the Elizabethans to the present day, and that the fundamentals of mask work constitute a template of skills applicable in more traditional forms of western theatre.

They will be able to design a mask based on a traditional Commedia character that they subsequently sculpt in clay. Once the mold is created a mask is produced that is then completed with painting for potential studio use.

OUTCOMES

Each student should have a detailed understanding of the characteristic of the principal Commedia characters with the ability to work within at least one of the characters through the appropriate use of gesture, movement and voice. Through practical experience they will see how the characters interact. Students will also have a basic grounding in mask construction skills and they will have researched ways in which the vocal and verbal aspect of the character fits in with its physical presence. They will be able to present short scenes (*canovacci*) involving the central Commedia characters. They will understand how the actor’s work within the mask can inform their acting in any situation thereby, constituting a reference point for their future studies and career.

REQUIRED TEXT

Commedia dell’Arte, An Actor’s Handbook, John Rudlin, Routledge

SUGGESTED TEXT

The Tricks of the Trade, Dario Fo, Theatre Arts Books
Masking Unmasked, Four approaches to Basic Acting, Eli Simon, Palgrave Macmillan
The Venetian Twins, Mirandolina, Carlo Goldoni, Oberon Books Limited
Commedia dell’arte, A Handbook for Troupes, John Rudlin, Olly Crick, Routledge
The Italian Comedy, Pierre Louis Duchartre, Dover
Lazzi, Mel Gordon, Performing Arts Journal

Please note: Students are not required to obtain the suggested text.

MEANS OF EVALUATION

Attendance and class preparation	60%
Presentations	25%
Journal	15%