

Pulcinella, il Cameriere (Pulcinella, the Waiter)

by Studio Babette

Introduction to Curriculum Tie-ins

As students will discover as they explore the history of theatre, the development of comical characters took a very long time. From dwarf-like buffoons to blabber-mouthed fools, deformity was an actor's primary device when entertaining audiences, starting from the times of ancient Egypt. However, it was the Italian commedia dell' arte (or comedy of craft) of the 16th century that finally looked more at the personality flaws of people, rather than just their physical appearance, in order to amuse the masses.

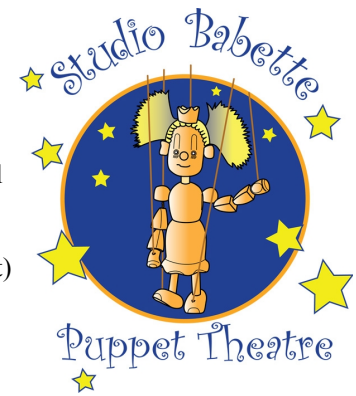
From a simple master and servant skit, many new comical characters evolved, typifying the vices of medieval people. Pride, envy, gluttony, sloth, lust, greed and anger were physicalized by actors in the bodies of stock characters such as Pantalone, Pulcinella, Harlequino, Capitano, Dottore and others to mock people's unacceptable behaviour, playing on stereotyped bigotry. Thus Pantalone the landowner was a miser, Capitano the military man was a pumped-up idiot, Dottore the Doctor was a superstitious hack. The names and improvised skits of these commedia characters changed from village to village, from region to region, and country to country.

Puppeteers jumped on the bandwagon and brought these stock characters to life in a different way - with hand puppets. They dressed their puppets in the same costumes that the actors used for their commedia characters, even giving them tiny masks, and they would appear in town squares to entertain children and adults alike in familiar comic routines.

Pulcinella, il Cameriere, (Pulcinella the Waiter), written, designed, built and performed by Studio Babette, is inspired by the Guarettelle tradition of Italian commedia dell' arte puppetry.

In our scenario or episode, the greedy Pantalone is cajoled into helping the hapless Pulcinella, and then wants to get the most for his good deed. However well-intentioned, Pulcinella takes a circuitous route indeed to reward him. It seems the more he tries, the worse it gets. The accidental discovery of Pantalone's artistic talent delivers some satisfaction to both. However, that dissolves when Pantalone's spoiled daughter Angelina appears and offers an unattainable object of desire for poor Pulcinella. Pantalone will never give Pulcinella his most precious gift, his daughter. The giving and taking bounces back and forth like a see saw with no one ever satisfied, that is, except for the gluttonous demon dog!

Comedic devices used in Pulcinella, il Cameriere include: stock characters, surprise, physical violence, double-take, repetition, rhetoric, song, dance, play on words – pizza/Pisa.



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