

Sinestesiaonline

PERIODICO QUADRIMESTRALE DI STUDI SULLA LETTERATURA E LE ARTI
SUPPLEMENTO DELLA RIVISTA «SINESTESIE»

ISSN 2280-6849

PLAYING COMMEDIA

Gale McNeeley

Abstract

Commedia dell'Arte comes alive when played passionately by characters, as a sort of spiritual need. It is a spectacular dance of contrasts. In my 40 years of work as an actor, I have always discovered its delightful poetry, wisdom and liveliness.

Parole chiave

Actor, Commedia dell'Arte, Mask, Performing Arts

Contatti

gale.mcneeley@gmail.com

The most important thing we can learn from theatre is how to play well with others. In Commedia there are no stars, no heroes, no heroines. Every actor, in every mask, is a protagonist. That means that your story is as important as every other character's story. Your needs, your actions and your reactions rule the play with comedy, drama, melodrama, farce..... just like every other character's do. Without you there would be a hole, where there should be a player.

Actors were called players in the old days (19th and first half of the 20th centuries). "Here is a list of the players," they would say, indicating that it is all about play. Today we say, "I am rehearsing a new play," or we're playing Shakespeare tonight. If theatre isn't play, what is it? Work? If it is, why do it? Even when you get payed to play it needn't turn into work.

What makes playing Commedia interesting is contrast. First, how is each actor/person different from the others? I say each "actor/person" because each actor is a unique person. Only you have had your experiences, your Mom and Dad, your family, your successes and failures.

However long you have lived, you have learned so much, not through your successes as real as they are, but through your failures. The most successful people are not those who have succeeded all the time, but those who have failed often and learned from every failure. They are the people who have taken the most falls, but then (as the old song says) picked themselves up, dusted themselves off and started all over again.

In Commedia, every character takes the fall, spectacularly and in public, but that doesn't stop them. No! they don't die, they live to fight another day, because they still need love, food, praise, sex, life itself. They all need to live if they want to get what they want, and all this struggle, passion, success and failure takes place in front of an audience.

Why does an audience laugh? Because they do the same stupid things, trying to get what they want, but they try to keep their failures hidden. As they watch the masked characters on stage, what they are feeling, although they may not know it, is, "I've done that before. I'm as foolish as Pantalone and Capitano, Dottore or the Zanni. Yes, and the clueless Lovers." The audience breathes that in and exhales on a laugh. It makes them feel better somehow, more comfortable with their own foibles.

That may be an exaggeration of what is happening to the audience, but so is Commedia. Commedia is a fabulous, fantastical explosion of each archetype in society.... in life! We have met them all. What Commedia does is to amplify every character so that they are immediately recognizable in all their needs and imperfections. In the story they play out before us, they find themselves in situations where their human needs run head on into the needs of all the other characters, and in a spectacular way.

That's what makes Commedia so immediate and accessible. It's a human comedy of needs. That's what gives it life! Actors, playing characters with the same needs you have, in a spectacular dance of contrasts. Commedia has no limits. That's why it's fun to play.

visit my YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCA8Kjw5dR23wtwoN74mHrtw>