

Responses to the Commedia Workshop

Hannah: The most recent class we had was an absolute blast! I loved so many elements about it. Firstly, the fact that we were up on our feet for most of it or in a circle made it a lot easier to interact with the people around me; I felt much more a part of the group and noticed that we were all even more curious to learn in this format. Secondly, I felt I got a lot more out of the class as we were being involved in the activities. I could see through the character's eyes and connect with the actors who performed it so long ago. I felt a deeper connection to the subject and know that I will have a different, more understanding perspective when/if we study commedia dell arte again!

Katherine: I found this workshop challenging at first because it contradicted everything I have learned in physical theatre/mime at Studio 58 (indicating with gestures etc) . It took me a while to let go that training and surrender to the nature of this art form. Once I did, I found that I was able to access the physicality of each character due to the training from studio.

I also had to remind myself that this form of comedy was born in a time where stock characters and sexism was not taken to offence. I personally do not find it funny to see old men drooling over the body parts of women....but again I had to remind myself that this was from a different era.

After class, I thought a lot about these characters and where they appear in theatre today. The first show that came to my mind was *Beauty and the Beast!* I would love to talk more about this in class and pros and cons of stock characters. What does it add to theatre? How has theatre challenged this over time?

I found it challenging to remember all the names of the characters. I would have benefited to have a handout to review before this workshop (or after) so I was not so lost. This is probably because of my processing speed/ LD. So the workshop made me a tad anxious because I had to keep up.

However, over all, I learned a lot about Commedia! I think this was an amazing idea to have as part of a theatre class. It gave the class a hands-on learning approach and it also bridged the gap for people in the class who have not experienced acting first hand.

Abi: I love Angela's knowledge of the subject and I'm glad that she made us jump right away into the physical theatre instead of giving a lecture on the history of the subject. It is very interesting for me to see the archetypes in the Italian comedy and how this has also influenced comedy archetypes in my native country, Philippines. Even the physicality is very similar.

The masks made us actors rely more on what our bodies can do instead of the facial expressions. The wants and qualities of the characters are very distinct and simple. They are not like the comedic characters nowadays who are more complex but the modern characters still carry their resemblance with the archetypes.

Bracha: The workshop was an energizing experience the other day getting to let go and be larger than life was fairly freeing. It shows the fun side of stereotypes with a very physically involved piece that would be perfect for large audiences who sometimes can't hear the actor speak. The masks were well made and I'm most curious to see how they would be typically made. Perhaps even getting the chance to make my own. Overall I'd love the opportunity to dive more into that type of physically dominant theatre.

Kevin: I found the Commedia very entertaining and fun to do. I wasn't too thrilled at the start because I had a long commute and was very tired but the energy was really great. The instructor gave off a very friendly aura that inspired all the other students as well which in turn helped me. Overall I think it was a great exercise to have and definitely would like to do more activities like this.

Jess: I really enjoyed the Commedia workshop this was my first time experiencing this form of theatre. After experiencing the workshop I did a fair amount of research into the art form and the history is quite fascinating. I loved how interactive it was and how welcoming it was to all of us even those like me who aren't that confident on stage.

Sofie: I really enjoyed learning about comedy delle'arte. I had never heard of it before so I loved learning and immersing myself in something new. I liked that it was interactive and we got a chance to understand a bit of what it would be like if we performed as the specific characters. I love the characters and how they all are connected and are set characters that have been around for so many years. I also love all the masks that one gets to wear. It definitely opened my mind into a new world of theatre that I'm very interested in learning more about. Thank you!

Zac: I thought that was a phenomenal introduction to the work we're about to explore. It was initially difficult to allow myself to drop in to such dramatic and over the top work at 8:30 in the morning, especially since I didn't think I'd be doing any of that until 9:30 in Studio, but that quickly changed as the energy of the group rose.

I've always been fascinated by Commedia as a form. I had some training in it a few years back when I was attending an arts program called Centauri in Toronto. There I took a ton of different programs in film, clown, stage combat, and physical theatre which had a large portion of it dedicated to Commedia. I think this kind of art form could very easily become stereotypical and dull. Despite the archetypal structure of the characters, the specificity within the choices you make not only physically, but emotionally as well make the work much stronger. The last time I engaged in that kind of work I would have been about 15 so I'm really glad it's found a way back into my life. And in an English course! Who would've thought...

Sarah: I loved Thursday's class. In high school drama class, we did Character Mask in grade 10 and Commedia in grade 12. These were some of my favourite moments of my entire high school education. I love being physical and letting myself become the character whose mask I am wearing.

Commedia, as with much of theatre, can seem very opaque to people who do not consider themselves to be a part of it. I thought the instructor did an excellent job of making it transparent. You do not have to be a classically trained actor to act. You will be fine long as you are willing to give yourself over to it. And in this case, look silly.

One thing that I did not love was the lack of respect for the masks. Mask work has a very spiritual component to it. As with Clown, you are not yourself when you are wearing the mask. If you want to speak as yourself you must take it off. You do not fuss with the mask when you are active in it. She did a good job of telling people not to let us see them put the mask on but there was room for improvement. I understand why she did not make these points. By painting the mask as some spiritual tool you can alienate outsiders. I do not, however, think that is enough of a reason to ignore the rules.

Overall I had a lot of fun. I would love to have more guest instructors and physical classes in the future.

And these two were from the shy students who did not participate in the exercises, but sat and watched with me:

Gurneet: Firstly, thank you for being so mindful of my non theatre background today and for making the situation so relaxed and enjoyable. Today I learned a lot about how certain stereotypes we have today come from old tales and plays in which characters consume these “norms”. For example the pretty girl is being the most adored.

Another thing I was amazed by is how expressions and tone of speaking can change the interpretation of a dialogue completely. The entire class was so amazing and involved in their characters that even without a mask, their identities were masked. Some of the characters discussed/ performed seemed familiar but I did not know details nor background of them. Even without the prior knowledge, it was a very joyful experience being an audience and observing what roles and norms were in theatre and it got me thinking about how times have changed/ modernised.

I hope to learn about the different concepts behind characters and their roles as they must vary from culture to culture and from country to country. Today's presentation also got me wondering how dialogue and stereotypes have or have not modernised along with the challenges this evolution of arts is dealing with. I am excited to read plays and understand them on a deeper level especially after today's introduction.

Avneet: I learned and was very fascinated with pretty much everything I saw in Thursday's class. I had honestly never really experienced anything like that before and I really, really enjoyed it. I had done a film class in grade 8 I believe, but it was a mandatory elective and it was selected for me. I never really acted in that class and I tried to make myself as invisible as possible. I get super anxious going into EVERY class because the thought that I could be picked on to answer a question by the teacher scares me in every class. The thought of having to talk with new people and express my opinion also scares me a lot which is why I was scared when I walked into Thursday's class. Thankfully, I was grateful to be allowed the opportunity to sit and watch the performances be acted out.

I was shocked and a little inspired because I was amazed with how creative everyone was and how they were able to improvise any scene that was given. Everyone was so confident and they were able to get into character right away with such courage confidence. Since I had never seen or done anything like that, I had a little trouble grasping and understanding the storyline and the characters. I always have trouble remembering which character did what but the way the actors acted out the scenes and made it their own made me realize that there was no right story or wrong. It took me a while to realize that but once I did, I started to imagine how I would play the character; in my head. Never in front of people though. For example, Capitano was acted out in various ways and he was given a different personality in different scenes by different actors. I believe pretty much every actor played and portrayed him differently in their own way. I imagined what Capitano would be in my eyes and how he would look and act. The drama instructor was also amazing. She was so supportive of everyone and I loved the way she told the stories and kept adding on to the characters and gave freedom to others to add on to them as well. It was so much fun to watch everyone and I learned so much in that class. It was unlike anything I've seen and I hope I get to watch and learn more in the upcoming classes.