

A study guide for students and educators

The Milwaukee Repertory Theater Presents



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This study guide is researched and designed by the Education Department at the Milwaukee Repertory Theater and is intended to prepare you for your visit. It contains information that will deepen your understanding of, and appreciation for, the production. We've also included questions and activities for you to explore before and after our performance of

MIRANDOLINA



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SYNOPSIS

MIRANDOLINA is a fun-filled story about the battle of the sexes. The Italian innkeeper, Mirandolina, is a remarkable young woman who is quite deft at juggling her countless admirers. However, she is truly tested when three young men seek her hand at once. There is the Marquis of Forlipopoli who will offer her protection with a lordly title, even though he is lacking in wealth. Then there is the Count of Alfabiorita, who is generous with his expensive presents. And lastly there is Fabrizio, the serving man of the inn, whom Mirandolina's deceased father suggested to be her husband. All three of these men have crossed paths and are willing to do anything for her. However, when the Knight of Ripafratta comes to stay at the inn, Mirandolina is quite captured by his extreme dislike of women. She attempts to woo him and make him her own all while being continuously pursued by her three other suitors. Will Mirandolina be able to win the heart of the Knight?

"She is not like any other woman. She's got something more... This combination is quite out of the ordinary."

Marquis of Forlipopoli

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



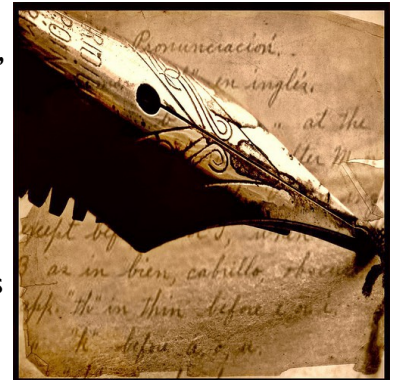
Carlo Goldoni was born in Venice, Italy on February 25, 1707. From his memoirs we have discovered that it was his grandfather who introduced him to the world of theater at a very young age. However, some resources state that his grandfather died before he was born. In any case, Goldoni was very interested in theater: his toys were puppets and his books were plays. At the age of eight he attempted to write a play. The boy's father placed him under the care of Caldini, a philosopher, at Rimini but the youth soon ran away with a company of strolling players and came to Venice. He began to study law at Pavia, a school in Venice. He began writing at this time and was forced to leave the city after he ridiculed certain families that lived in Pavia in his writing.

Goldoni was employed as law clerk at Chioggia and Feltre, but returned to his home town and began practicing law. But his true love was the theater. His first play was a tragedy, AMALASUNTA, produced at Milan, but it was a failure. His next play, BELISARIO, written in 1734 and another tragedy, succeeded. Goldoni wrote many tragedies, but he soon realized that he really wanted to write comedies.

He wanted to change the Italian stage and decided to use Molière as his inspiration. Goldoni was the great reformer of Italian comedy. He changed it from the typical Commedia dell' Arte or improvised comedy, but used it as an inspiration for his works. He found that there was even more comedy in everyday life, and freed plays from masks and improv. In 1738, he produced his first real comedy, L'UMO DI MONDO (THE MAN OF THE WORLD). Goldoni was constantly writing and eventually became acquainted with the manager Medebac. He was determined to pursue the profession of playwriting in order to make a living. Various theater managers hired him for work, but this was not enough for Goldoni. In 1761 he went to Paris seeking more opportunities and enjoyed considerable popularity in France. When he retired, the King of France gave Goldoni pension for his work. During the Revolution, he was denied the extra money. Goldoni died in France on February 6, 1793 and the next day, his pension was restored.

GOLDONI'S WORKS

Goldoni was said to have changed the face of theater in Italy. In his career, he wrote over 200 titled pieces. These included tragedies, tragicomedies, comedies, operas, opera bouffe, cantatas and serenades, oratorios, religious plays, poetry, intermezzos, and books. Most of his writings have no actual date of publication leaving us to wonder how many plays he worked on at a time. Goldoni felt that Commedia dell'Arte (see page 4) was too fanciful and not engaging enough for the audience. He thought that there was plenty of comedy in everyday situations and wanted to have it formalized, not improvised. This was a dramatic revolution that had been attempted by others, but not achieved before. Goldoni was



inspired by his love of human kind and his intrigue of human relationships and the study of philosophy. Most of his comedies focus on rationality, honesty, humanism, and love. His characters were usually of the middle class and were unconventional. His desire to emulate the average person's life was clear throughout his works. Goldoni did not use the stock characters, instead creating his own characters influenced by Commedia that were more three-dimensional. He looked at different people and occupations and incorporated reality into his plays. In *MIRANDOLINA*, Goldoni uses a female innkeeper as his main character. She is providing a life for herself without her father or a husband; something that was somewhat unheard of during this time. He also plays with the idea of love and how it is not always straightforward and easy to understand. Goldoni also used switched the role of the Knight. During this time, it was customary to have the knights easily woo ladies of all social stature. However, it was his choice to make the Knight despise women giving the play a real twist. He also uses two females as the comedic relief, something that was usually left to the men at that time. Goldoni was a master at what he did: bringing real life to stage in a believable and amusing way.

DISCUSSION: Goldoni wrote so much it's hard to believe he had any time for anything else. Even if you are a great writer, it must take a toll on you. What did he have to overcome in order to get all of his plays written and published? Do you think that you could write this much in a lifetime? Discuss these questions with your classmates.

ACTIVITY: Goldoni believed that there was comedy in every day situations and that it did not need to be improvised. Jot down some ideas of things you see in everyday life that might make a good scene. Share your ideas with a small group and pick one situation. Create a short scene based on this and perform it for the class. Do your classmates relate to this scene? Briefly discuss the scenes and the comedy that can be found in real life.

RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

Carlo Goldoni. Moonstruck Drama. 8 Dec 2008. <<http://www.imagi-nation.com/moonstruck/clsc93.html>>.

"Commedia dell'Arte." *Theatre Database*. 8 Dec 2008.

<http://www.theatredatabase.com/16th_century/commedia_dell_arte_001.html>.

"The Commedia dell'Arte." *Theatre History*. 2002. 9 Dec 2008.

<http://www.theatrehistory.com/italian/commedia_dell_arte_001.html>.

Crick, Olly and John Rudin. *Commedia Dell' arte: A Handbook for Troupes*. Routledge: New York, 2001.

Goldoni, Carlo. *Memoires de Goldoni*. BiblioLife: Colorado, 2008.

COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE

Commedia dell'Arte had a long life in Italy. It was popular for about 400 years, especially during the 16th and early 17th centuries. This form of theater is essentially improvised comedy. While the situations and characters were planned beforehand, the actors had no real script to memorize. Commedia had to reach to a very broad spectrum of audience members, so the performance was usually slapstick or low comedy (easy for the lower class to understand) and rarely intellectual. The subject of these shows varied, but often times took the form of love intrigues, clever tricks to get money, or outwitting a simpleton.

Commedia also used stock characters. Stock characters remained constant throughout the shows and were easily identifiable by the audience. There were about 12 stock characters including the Pantalone, the old man of the town; the Capitano, the cowardly soldier; the Suitors, the youthful and handsome men; the two Zanni, the clowns; the Arlecchino, the faithful servant; the Brighella, the manipulator; and the Rosetta, the innocent female. Most of the important characters, except the hero, wore a mask. The use of masks provided the audience with something to connect to from show to show, but also limited the actor's facial expressions. Their movements were much broader and their voices had to be louder and more interesting to listen to. Using masks might not make sense today; however, performances during this time were done by candlelight so it was easier for the audience to see the big mask than the actor's face.

Around 1550, the Commedia actors started to form troupes that traveled to different cities became very much like roaming clans. Some of the actors in the troupes would play a certain character for so long that they would take on their characters name in real life. While the troupe may essentially do the same show from night to night, the performance usually differed because of the audience response. The actors would take advantage of the responsive audience and change the dialogue, the order of scenes, or the climax of the show. Each actor had to be a fast thinker and had to pay attention to the audiences reaction as well as what the other actors were doing as well.

Commedia has influenced many forms of theater and can be seen throughout Europe: the plot devices, characters, and fast thinking. Many playwrights, such as Moliere, Shakespeare, and Ludvig Holberg have used Commedia as an inspiration in their works.



The Capitano is the braggart soldier who is usually vain of his good looks but not so talented with a sword. He can win any lady he chooses. This character originally wore white with a cape, but progressed to a jacket and tight fitting trousers that were red and yellow striped. The mask was flesh colored and usually had a very long nose with a heavy mustache for comedic effect.

The Pantalone is the old man of the town. He is usually wealthy but often times got his money taken from him in a comedic way. His walk is usually stiff and his body is aged. This character usually wore red tight fitting trousers and a short buttoned jacket. The mask was usually brown in color and showed an aged and sunken face. The actor grew a very long beard as well.



GOLDONI VS. COMMEDIA

While Goldoni was influenced by Commedia, his works were significantly different from it. Below is what a Commedia script and a Goldoni script might look like. Both of these scenes are from MIRANDOLINA.

COMMEDIA SCRIPT EXAMPLE

Characters: Mirandolina and the Knight

Setting: In the Knight's bedchamber at Mirandolina's Inn.

Plot: Mirandolina and the Knight are talking, women and men are the subjects of the conversation.

ACTIVITY: Pick four actors and have them perform these two scenes for the class. Don't let the Commedia group see the Goldoni script and vice versa. Let them rehearse for a short amount of time. After the performances, discuss them. How did the Commedia group differ from the Goldoni group? Which scene was better? Why do you think this is so? Do you think this activity would have different results with different scenes?

ACTIVITY: Perform your very own Commedia dell'Arte scenes for your classmates. Get into small groups, or troupes, and come up with a basic plan for the scene. Pick the characters, the setting, the conflict and the conclusion. Briefly rehearse the scene and then share it with your classmates. Feed off the audience and improvise the rest of the scene. Use your imagination and have fun with this. For added effect, do this activity over several days and get costumes, masks, props, and small set pieces. Do a longer scene and use real Commedia characters.

GOLDONI SCRIPT EXAMPLE

Setting: In the Knight's bedchamber at Mirandolina's Inn.

Plot: Mirandolina is trying to win the heart of the Knight by tricking him to believe that she is not a typical woman.

MIRANDOLINA: Ah, but men don't give the attention and patience to such things as we women do. What about a nice ragout with some special sauce?

KNIGHT: Thank you. You may have got round the Count and the Marquis like this. But it won't work with me.

MIRANDOLINA: Yes! Did you ever see such a pair of spineless nincompoops? They no sooner come to lodge at the Inn, than they immediately begin to make love to the landlady. As I haven't other things to attend to but their nonsense. Of course, I have to make myself pleasant and engage in light conversation for the good of the house, but it makes me laugh to see them thinking I'm going out of my way to flatter them.

KNIGHT: Excellent! That's the kind of plain talk I like to hear.

MIRANDOLINA: Oh, I believe in saying what I think. Straight out!

KNIGHT: Oh, come on, you must admit you do lead those two on a little.

MIRANDOLINA: Me? Heaven forbid! With those two? Speak to them if you like. Ask them yourself if I've ever given them a single sign of encouragement. Naturally, I'm not rude to them. That would hardly be in my own interests. Though I'm sorely tempted to be sometimes. I just can't bear weak men. And do you know what I hate just as much? Women who run after men! Oh, I know I'm not as young as I used to be. Nor do I have the looks I had once. But I've had my chances. It's just that I've always valued my freedom too much to get married.

KNIGHT: Oh, yes. One's freedom is one's greatest treasure.

MIRANDOLINA: And so many simply throw it away.

KNIGHT: I couldn't agree with you more... Keep your distance!

MIRANDOLINA: Are you married, Your Excellency?

KNIGHT: Me? Heaven forbid! I don't need women.

MIRANDOLINA: That's wonderful! Don't ever change! Women, sir... if you only knew... but I shouldn't speak badly of my own sex.

KNIGHT: Do you know, you're the first woman I've ever heard talk like this.

MIRANDOLINA: I'll tell you a secret. When you're the mistress of an Inn like I am... well, the things you hear! Men have every reason to be wary of women. I sympathize with them completely.

ACTIVITY: Do some research on the other Commedia dell'Arte characters. How did they act? What did they look like? Did they wear a mask? Do you think that these characters are believable and that the audiences could relate to them? Do you think that any of them might have distracted the audience? Discuss your findings and ideas with small groups.

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**“The theatre is so endlessly fascinating
because it's so accidental.
It's so much like life.”**

Arthur Miller

Our lives are greatly enhanced with theater. Studying and viewing it teaches us about other cultures and times, collaboration, work ethic, and imagination. We become more aware of the world around us with these concepts, and in addition to this, more alert to and responsive of human nature. With this improved understanding of what theater can provide for us we are able to gain a better appreciation not only for theater, but for life as well.

VISITING THE REP

The Milwaukee Repertory Theater is housed in the Milwaukee Center at the corner of Wells and Water Streets, downtown. Our building was formerly the home of the Electric Railway and Light Company. This name is still carved on the wall outside.

You'll enter on the Wells Street side into a large, open space. Our box office will be visible on your left as you come through the front doors. The large space is the main hub for the businesses that share this building: a bank, an office tower, the Pabst Theater, and the Intercontinental Hotel. There will be a staircase on your left and the Stiemke Theater is next to the staircase.

Inside the lobby are restrooms, water fountains, and a coat check. If you decide to bring a snack, please know that food and drink are NOT permitted in the theater. However, you can leave things (at your own risk) in the coat check room, and enjoy them outside the theater during intermission. Most plays have one intermission that is about 20 minutes long. You might also want to look for signs in the lobby which give the full “running time” of the play.

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