Servant of Two Masters
Study Guide

Dramaturg’s Note: Finding Our Servant

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In the early 19th century, a major change was occurring in the Italian theatre landscape. Commedia dell’arte, the theatre genre that had ruled not only Italy but also most of Europe for more than 200 years, was under hot debate. Beloved for its use of improvisation, stock characters, masks, and physical comedy (lazzi), commedia had pushed the limits of its genre past the point of respectability, and many were calling for reform.

One of the lead reformers was a man named Carlo Goldoni. Goldoni, who started his career as a playwright by writing canovacci (improvised scenarios) for local commedia troupes, wanted to bring back charm and honor to his native theatre. So he started to write. Goldoni’s aim was to create a hybrid theatre form, one that took the best parts of the commedia dell’arte genre and combined them with the writing style of more contemporary playwrights, such as Molière.

With each script he wrote, Goldoni came a little closer to his goal. Replacing the canovacci with full-length scripts, Goldoni removed the masks from the actors, cleaned up the humor, and gave loving homage to the diverse characters found in his homeland. The Servant of Two Masters, which many consider to be his best work, clearly exemplifies the process of reform, adaptation, and sheer fun that was happening in Goldoni’s canon of work as he worked to develop and update commedia into a theatre form that would continue to be beloved by his more modern audience.

With this production of The Servant of Two Masters, director Stephanie Breinholt has taken Goldoni’s vision and pushed it even further. Throughout this study guide, you’ll get a glimpse of how the production has, in the spirit of Goldoni, taken a beloved classic and created a crazy, zany world that brings the best parts of commedia together with a modern adaptation that is bright, colorful and (hopefully) hilarious.

—Janine Sobeck, dramaturg
Quiz: Which Commedia Character Are You?

If you went on a walk one day and found a purse full of money with nobody around, what would you say?

A. Oh, how wonderful! Now I can buy flowers for my love!
B. Oh, here’s where I left MY money!
C. Sweet, now I can buy dinner!

What would your perfect night be?

A. A beautiful moonlight stroll with my love.
B. I would stay in. It’s too expensive to go out.
C. A trip to the all-you-can-eat buffet!

What would you do if you suspected your significant other was cheating?

A. I would run away in tears, lock myself in my room, and never love again!
B. I would sue him/her for disloyalty and take all their money!
C. I would create an intricate plan to win back their affection...probably including backflips...or pie!

What is your favorite type of movie?

A. I can’t decide between a romance or a romantic drama. I’ll bring the tissues.
B. A free one!
C. A Kung fu-slapstick-romantic-comedy-cartoon!!!!!!

In three words or less describe yourself.

A. Passionate, amorous...passionate
B. Frugal, thrifty, and wise
C. Funny and witty...wait that was 3 wasn’t it?

In what other plays or films have you seen these characters?

If you answered mostly As, then you are an Innamorati (Lover):
You are young or young at heart and have a truly romantic spirit. In your quest for true love you’ve come across some drama and had to make some difficult decisions. But you still believe in love, first and foremost. You’ll do whatever you can to protect your significant other, and they are the most important thing in your life.

If you answered mostly Bs, then you are a Pantalone (Vecchi):
You are either physically old or an old soul, but you want to feel young and often go for lovers who are younger than you. You are very good with money and have developed a nice financial cushion...which you are VERY reluctant to relinquish! You may be a small business owner or someone who deals with selling goods and services.

If you answered mostly Cs, then you are a Zanni (Servant):
You are goofy, agile, and excitable. Your main goal in life is to make people laugh at your own expense. You also adapt to different situations easily. You are eager to please and often keep your feelings to yourself in favor of getting along. If you’ve found your true love, it was totally by accident, and if you haven’t then never fear—once you find him or her, they will be yours forever. And you’re hungry—always, always hungry.

Adapted from the quiz found at: http://quizilla.teennick.com/quizzes/8368753/noaction
Taking on Goldoni

In order to create this production of *The Servant of Two Masters*, Director Stephanie Breinholt had to assemble a cast who could handle the rigor of commedia dell’arte, respect the changes made by Goldoni, and embrace the vision of this modern production. Here’s a sneak peek into our journey.

The Auditions

Breinholt held a hilarious audition process, which included having the actors form groups where they performed improvised lazzi as well as created musical “offerings” based on an assigned genre: an offering that involved the use of kazoo.

Commedia Bootcamp

Once the cast was assembled, Breinholt and Dramaturg Janine Sobek held a day long Commedia Bootcamp, introducing the cast to the history of the genre, its specific characteristics, and teaching them the unique physicality and personalities that define each commedia character.

Rehearsal

When normal rehearsals began, the cast started the process of creating the world of the play. This included creating their individual characters, as well as the moments of lazzi. Breinholt, together with her chorus of servants, also worked to create the many musical moments found within the production.

Creating the Characters

Costume Designer Lyndi Sue Mecham worked to create a world where the different characters gave nod to their traditional character design while adapting to the modern ideas of this production. Working with Director Stephanie Breinholt, each character was given a variety of iconic “images” that were melded together to create a fun and unique design that supported the personality created by the individual actors. Here’s a look at the inspiration behind several of the characters.
Truffaldino’s Search

Truffaldino’s worked up quite the appetite serving his two different masters. Help him get through the maze to find his dinner on the other side!

Bibliography on The 4th WALL

For a full bibliography and resource guide, scan the QR code or go here:

http://4thwalldramaturgy.byu.edu/the-servant-of-two-masters-bibliography