

Main Stage News

Directors' Note by Rodney Higginbotham

Long before there was a Second City and an Improv Olympic, and long before Del Close was training actors in improv skills they would use as cast members on Saturday Night Live, Mad TV and SCTV, there was improv.

Commedia dell'arte (which translates as comedy of professional players) was a form of improvisational theatre developed in Italy in the late sixteenth century that thrived deep into the eighteenth century. Even commedia had improvisational roots that some theatre historians trace back to the Atellan farce of the Roman Empire. The foundation of commedia was the scenario, an outline of a story the actors were to follow by improvising much of the dialogue. Inserted throughout the performance of the play would be memorized comic routines made up of stage business and dialogue called lazzi. Therefore, although no two performances were alike, the story would always be told.

The typical story of a commedia performance involved low and middle class characters embroiled in an intrigue of

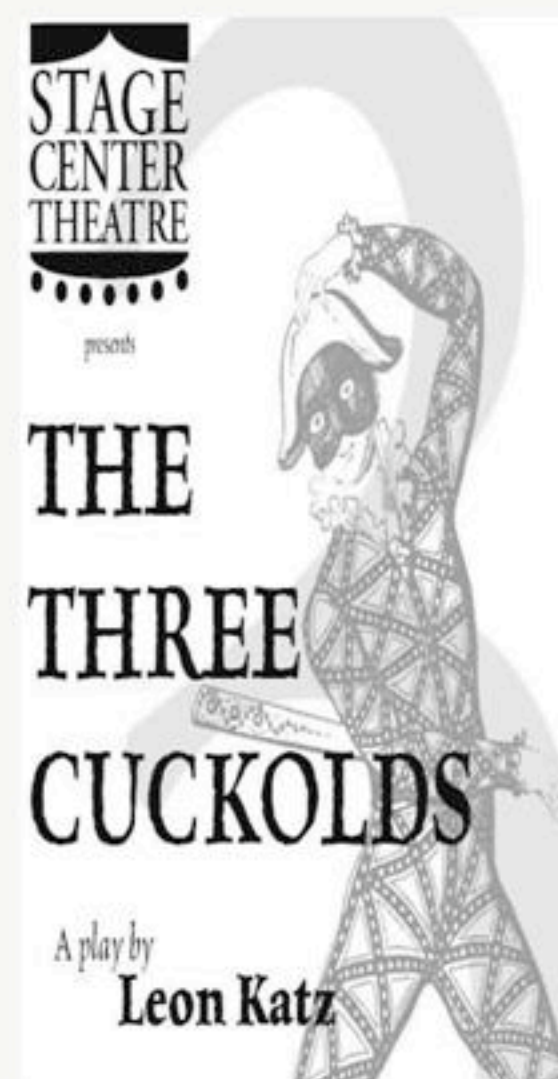
love and greed. The intrigue would frequently be concocted by the comic servant character, Arlecchino (Harlequin in English) often seen delivering love notes between the two lovers in the story. The intrigue would always be heavily flavored with humor derived from sex and "outhouse" gags that gave the performances mass appeal.

Slapstick comedy, the style of commedia comedy, is the rough and tumble physical comedy that many of us first experienced watching The Three Stooges or Roadrunner cartoons. The name comes from a prop carried by Arlecchino as a bat used to strike other characters. The slapstick was made from two pieces of wood designed to clap together making a loud noise.

Part of what made commedia so accessible to the audience was the familiarity with the stock characters. When an actor made a first entrance in a performance, the audience immediately knew the name and personality of the character since the character was identifiable from the distinctive traditional design of the mask and costume. This easy recognition of characters combined with an em-

phasis on physical comedy made it easier for audiences to understand and follow the plot. This was a particular advantage for those commedia troupes that toured to neighboring countries where Italian was not spoken. Much was communicated to the audiences nonverbally.

Leon Katz, the translator of *The Three Cuckolds*, created his play by adding dialogue to an authentic Italian Renaissance commedia scenario. Our student actors have enjoyed the challenge and new experience of taking on this centuries old form of theatre as they have rehearsed the script. We hope that you will enjoy your trip back in time as the players present their show on a simple platform stage here in the piazza under the warm Mediterranean sunshine.



CURRENTLY RUNNING:

◆ *The Three Cuckolds*

Written by Anonymous

Translated by Leon Katz

Closing This Weekend!

Remaining Dates:

October 26-28th @ 7:30pm

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Ultimate Pendejada

November 14 & 16 @ 1:40 & 7:30 p.m.

The Birthday Party

November 30-December 2, 7-9, 14-16 @ 7:30 p.m.

Auditions for Spring

Jan. 16th 1:40-3:00 p.m. & 6-9 p.m. Jan. 17th 6-9 p.m.

The Actor's Nightmare

February 13 & 15 @ 1:40 & 7:30 p.m.

Proof

February 22-24, March 1-3, 8-10 @ 7:30 p.m.

Fitting Rooms

April 10 & 12 @ 1:40 & 7:30

The Mineola Twins

April 19-21, 26-28, May 3-5 @ 7:30 p.m.

