

***Commedia Nuova: New Pedagogical &
Performative Approaches for Contemporary
Australia | Rosa Campagnaro, 2023***

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Executive Summary

Background

The Fellow, Rosa Campagnaro, is a teaching artist, theatre director and founder of Make A Scene - a theatre arts education company specialising in Commedia dell'Arte - performances, workshops and actor training. Campagnaro is incredibly passionate about Commedia and has dedicated the past 20 years to the form - honing her craft - and specialising in this area. She sees the joy Commedia brings audiences and the profound benefits it has on students and actors:

“On behalf of all the students and teachers we would like to say a huge grazie! Learning about Commedia has allowed those students who are usually told ‘to focus and sit still’ the opportunity to find their place and be themselves. To be honest, the incursion is by far one of the best I’ve seen. I was even more inspired to learn more about Commedia.

Thank-you for the beautiful gift you are providing students (and teachers).”

(Sylvia Petrovska Templestowe Heights Primary School)

Commedia dell'Arte - the Italian Comedy or *Commedia all'improvviso* - is a theatrical tradition which evolved from the Roman masked theatre of 300 BC, Atellan Farces and was at the height of popularity in 16th century Italy. The original Commedia form disappeared in the 18th century with - *la riforma goldoniana* - stripping the comedy of masks and focusing on the written text. In the mid-20th century Commedia was revived by a group of artists [including mask-maker Amleto Sartori and practitioners Jacques Lecoq and Gianfranco De Bosi] and is the form with which we now identify Commedia. The main characteristics include: exaggerated movement, improvisation and grotesque mask representations of character types. While Commedia is hundreds of years old - the themes and types present are universal and timeless - and as such, still relevant and engaging to contemporary audiences. However, there are some features that can be problematic for contemporary audiences. In a post-pandemic, #metoo and #BLM world, the Fellow saw the need for a revision of the work, and on a personal level, after the demoralising and devastating effects of the pandemic on artists, she felt the need to also reinvigorate her practice. The Fellow saw a need for a new pedagogical and performative approach to Commedia - a framework which maintains the rich cultural tradition of the form - while staying relevant and accessible to contemporary audiences.

The international leg of this Fellowship was undertaken in October 2022 in Northern Italy: Venice, Padua and Milan. The Fellow undertook three weeks of intensive practical performance workshops with Giovanni Fusetti [Helikos, Padua] and later with Carlo Boso [Atelier Teatro, Milan]. She conducted research at the *Biblioteca di Studi Teatrali di Casa Goldoni*, [Venice, Italy] and continued her research through exclusive access to the Helikos library of performance books, resources and mask artefacts. A highlight of the Paduan residency was a personalised tour conducted by Fusetti, of the renowned *Museo Internazionale della Maschera Amleto e Donato Sartori*.

In Milan, at the conclusion of the Boso intensive, the Fellow was honoured to be invited to present at Atelier Teatro Milano's *Mille e Una Piazza* conference for local and international Commedia practitioners. She appreciated the rare opportunity to network, converse and exchange ideas with other Commedia artists.

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Upon her return to Melbourne, Campagnaro consolidated learnings by assisting Fusetti on his Commedia dell'Arte week-long intensive with Melbourne Physical Theatre School [December 2022].

The Fellow began disseminating through practical workshops at the Drama Victoria State Teachers' conference [November 2022] and independently with an exploration workshop for Drama teachers, theatre practitioners and Make A Scene company members [January 2023]. She is currently using research findings to create pedagogical guidelines for schools teaching Commedia dell'Arte.



Figure 1. Photographer Lisa Businovski

Fellowship Learnings Summary

The Fellow identified two major areas of growth:

Campagnaro was reminded of the importance of using the physical body as a starting point for creating effectively embodied masked types. Inspired by Fusetti's pedagogical and directorial approach [which is influenced by his training with Jacques Lecoq], Rosa was able to more profoundly grasp the concept of the *mimodynamics* method, for example.

The Fellow gained a good understanding of the historical trajectory and context for Commedia, and the dramaturgical processes involved in developing a *canovaccio* [scenario or plot outline]. Understanding the origins of the form is particularly useful when making the form meaningful for a contemporary audience. Knowledge was gained through research at the *Biblioteca Goldoni*, Helikos library and later in Boso's workshop lectures.

Personal Impact

The Fellow has worked and specialised in this area for several years, and in the past has been referred to as an expert. The Fellow prefers to not think of herself in this way, because she believes there is so much more knowledge and skill to be gained before wearing this label - if at all! In order for the Fellow to enrich and improve on her practice in an honest and meaningful way an attitude of openness to new learning was necessary. Despite practising in a certain way for several years, the Fellow needed to allow herself to be challenged to alter and change habitual approaches and - in the process - also confidently create her own methodology.

Professional Impact

The Fellow acknowledges this was a rare opportunity for a mid-career artist to revitalise her praxis in a supportive collegiate environment with like minded practitioners in the Helikos residency [Lelda Kapsis, Margherita Peluso and Beth Twentyman] and with leading Master teachers [Fusetti and Boso]. The Fellow returns to her sector with an eagerness to confidently disseminate new found knowledge to her industry colleagues, artists and company members.

Sectoral Impact

The Fellowship has given Campagnaro the opportunity to further solidify established links with theatre education associations: Drama Australia and Drama Victoria. She has begun updating Make A Scene educational resources - aiming to provide accessible guidelines that will give teachers confidence to teach Commedia - and to hopefully ensure the longevity of the form in Australian schools.

The dissemination of the work began at the Drama Victoria conference [December 2022], where - in line with one of the Fellowship intentions - uncomfortable and frank conversations about the work and its potentially problematic features were initiated. The beginning was an ongoing constructive dialogue with colleagues, artists and educators to refine approaches and teaching methodologies for Commedia to ultimately secure its position in our Australian curriculum. Providing teachers with the tools, justification and confidence to teach Commedia, increases the possibility of schools choosing Commedia as the preferred performance style of study as is required in the Drama and Italian curricula: "Identifying and discussing different performance styles..." [ACARA Drama, 2023] and "...comparing aspects of theatre across cultures, focusing on the purpose, origins and values." [ACARA Italian 2023]. Including VCE prescribed areas of learning where "Theatre styles include... Commedia dell'Arte." [Theatre Studies Design 2019]

The dissemination of the theatrical form will continue through the Fellow's current studies in the Masters of Fine Art (Directing) at the National Institute of Dramatic Art where she aims to stage a work in the style of Commedia and which utilises new found methodologies and approaches in the production process.

Considerations / recommendations

The Fellow has made the following recommendations:

The need for educational resources for teaching Commedia dell'Arte and practical examples of the theatrical form through live performance. Resources should be treated as an ever evolving working document - continually updated to reflect contemporary trends and urgencies in the educational and in sociopolitical landscapes.

Additional support from Italian and language education bodies, for example - Victorian Association for Teachers of Italian - to assist in the promotion of Commedia dell'Arte in the curriculum and through their networks of teachers.

Tertiary training institutions and performing arts colleges to include Commedia dell'Arte in their training programs.

Fellowship Background

Context

The Fellow's overarching drive is to ensure Commedia dell'Arte is taught in schools, experienced and enjoyed by Australian audiences, now and well into the future. In Australia we are fortunate to have Commedia as an area of study on our curriculum and the style has also been well received by the general public, as seen through the Fellow's work in the area where "Campagnaro's credentials as a... theatre practitioner and expert in Commedia dell'Arte are impressive and the Australian theatre scene is reaping the benefits." [Di Risio 2016]

The Fellow's intended outcome is to create a new contemporary Australian pedagogical and performative approach to the style. Campagnaro's objectives are twofold - her teaching is informed by her experience as a theatre-maker and performer - and her theatre-making is enriched by her work as a Commedia teaching artist. The aims are to apply best practice techniques to theatre making in order to produce work that is accessible and relevant to contemporary Australian audiences and by imparting new found knowledge and resources to support teachers in the teaching of Commedia in schools.

Applying best practice techniques to creating and performing Commedia - through Make A Scene and the Fellow's studies at NIDA - aiming to recontextualise the form for a new Australian audience without discounting the rich tradition and cultural context from which it has evolved.

New findings will be disseminated through teaching resources and professional development workshops aimed at addressing perceptions and misrepresentations of the form that are dated and potentially harmful. Resources will include an accessible framework - that acknowledges uncomfortable tropes and invites dialogue and discussion - providing a better, less problematic and relevant contemporary approach to Commedia.

The Arts sector, independent artists and arts communities faced the most devastation - financial and mental - as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Here the Fellow's objective was to revitalise her practice and community morale by helping to alleviate the negativity and demoralising effects of government and societal perceptions that deemed the role of the artist as "disposable" [McDonald 2020].

Methodology

The Fellowship began with a visit to *Casa Goldoni Museo e Biblioteca di Studi Teatrali* [Goldoni's House Museum and Library for Studies of Theatre] in Venice to research Goldoni's eponymously titled play, *Mirandolina*, which the Fellow has translated and is currently adapting. Campagnaro collated materials; relevant readings and critical essays on the play. Other exciting discoveries at the *Biblioteca* included the opportunity to view original photographs from a production of

Mirandolina [La Fenice, Venice, 1952] directed by iconic filmmaker, Luchino Visconti which featured Italian acting royalty, Marcello Mastroianni. The privilege to conduct research in the Goldoni library amongst volumes of his works was not lost on the Fellow, who found the experience both thrilling and thought provoking.



Figure 2. Casa Goldoni, Venice (Italy) - exterior



Figure 3. Fellow, Rosa Campagnaro researching in Goldoni House Library



Figure 4. Italian acting royalty, Marcello Mastroianni (picture on the left) in a production of *Mirandolina* directed by Luchino Visconte at La Fenice in Venice (circa 1952-1957)

The following week, the Fellow began her residency with Fusetti at *Helikos: Scuola Internazionale di Creazione Teatrale* in Padua to explore, discuss, play and research with artist colleagues: Lelda Kapsis, Margherita Peluso and Beth Twentyman. The exploration began by defining Commedia; what are the ingredients that distinguish this form and how do we use these in a modern context with contemporary types, and more specifically Australian types?

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Figure 5. *Helikos*. Under banner. From left to right: Giovanni Fusetti, Lelda Kapsis, Rosa Campagnaro, Margherita Peluso, Beth Twentyman. Padua, Italy.



Figure 6. Workshop masks belonging to Helikos, made by Stefano Perocco

The residency also covered the history and evolution of Commedia, and was a good reminder that what is perceived as traditional Commedia is actually a 1940s reconstruction. A Commedia revival inspired by original paintings [ie Jacques Callot sixteenth century etchings] as well as scenarios and writings from Flaminio Scala [Saleno 1967] and Angelo Beolco, who wrote “vernacular comedies” including the “peasant character and whom he played... Ruzante.” [Carroll 2017] and most importantly the artists who were instrumental in this resurrection.

The practitioners which undertook this revival in the late 1940s were, Gianfranco De Bosio with the “...aim of producing shows based on the rediscovery of the figure Ruzante, Amleto Sartori, “... who discovered and redeveloped the iconography of leather masks...” and Jacques Lecoq, “...who invented an original way of teaching theatre based on French mime...” [Poli, 2017]. They observed everyday people in the fields and going about their business - starting with this physicality - to create exaggerated masks types. The masks were a hybrid of what they found from the past and what they observed in the present.

Understanding this period in the last century when Commedia was revived is crucial in evolving the form for the twenty-first century. This knowledge has given the Fellow permission to create new iterations of the form for a contemporary audience, as did their Commedia grandfathers.

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Fusetti guided the Fellow and the group on a tour of the Sartori Mask Museum in Padua. One of the many highlights included; the mask Sartori created for Il Piccolo Teatro's 1952 revival of *Arlecchino servitore di due padroni* [directed by Giorgio Strehler] where the Fellow learned of the instrumental "partnership between Amleto and the Piccolo." [Sartori 2017]. It was particularly thrilling for the Fellow to discover an original copy of Amleto Sartori's book, *Scultore Poeta* [Sartori 1969] in a secondhand Paduan bookstore, and which will make an invaluable addition to her personal collection and resources.



Figure 7. Courtyard of Sartori Mask Museum, posing with Amleto Sartori's, *Arlecchino* sculpture. From left to right: Margherita Peluso, Lelda Kapsis, Giovanni Fusetti, Rosa Campagnaro



Figure 8. Sartori Museum signage



Figure 9. Fellow (Campagnaro) in courtyard in front of Sartori Museum building

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The second week of the residency included discussions with Fusetti, consolidation of notes, recordings, transcripts and research through access to the Helikos library. Additional unplanned and pleasant surprises to the itinerary included: a bespoke tour of Venice with a focus on the Venetian Courtesans of the eighteenth Century and a production of Goldoni's famous play, *Gl'Innamorati* [The Lovers].

The Fellow continued learning with a week of practical mask work and exploration of *canovaccio* [development of scenario] with Carlo Boso at Atelier Teatro, Milan. Scenario is a key ingredient of Commedia and our sixteenth century ancestors were highly skilled in the art of scenario and improvisation. This intensive week concluded with the Fellow presenting with Peluso at Atelier Teatro's, *Le Mille e Una Piazza* festival and International Commedia Conference. The Fellow was honoured for the opportunity to report on, and share videos and accounts of her Commedia work in schools with Make A Scene and was equally thrilled to meet other Commedia practitioners, widening her professional networks and exchanging ideas and practices.



Figure 10. From left to right. Rosa Campagnaro, Carlo Boso and Margherita Peluso. Commedia dell'Arte Intensive at Atelier Teatro Milan.



Figure 11. From left to right. Margherita Peluso and Rosa Campagnaro presenting at Le Mille e Una Piazza festival in Milan. October 2022.



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Figure 12. Giovanni Fusetti and Rosa Campagnaro with Melbourne Physical Theatre School participants wearing masks by Newmi Newman [Commedia dell'Arte Masks Bali]

The Fellow continued her residency in Melbourne [December 2022] assisting Giovanni Fusetti - in a week-long Commedia intensive for local artists at Melbourne Physical Theatre School. An excellent opportunity to watch the *Maestro* in action work with Commedia novices to be able to consolidate processes and methodologies.

The final stage was for the Fellow to test and disseminate the work with her Company members, teachers and local artists [January 2023]. The session was very productive and the discussion and explorations led to a consensus on new approaches to the form, many of which will contribute to the new guidelines in the Fellow's development of teachers' resources.

Period

The international component of the Fellowship commenced in October 2022 for three weeks followed by the Melbourne intensive with Melbourne Physical Theatre and led by Fusetti [December 2022]. The Fellow began dissemination of the work - at the Drama Victoria Conference in [December 2022] and with the Fellow's company Make A Scene [January 2023]. Most recently, the Fellow was honoured to be invited to present to the Bachelor of Arts (Acting) students at the National Institute of Dramatic Art in Sydney.

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Figure 13. Photograph: NIDA students in front of NIDA banner with Fellow, Rosa Campagnaro.

Biography

Campagnaro has been delivering her unique brand of theatre, performance techniques and training to schools, educators and theatre professionals since 2004, through organisations such as Drama Australia, La Mama Theatre, Deakin University, the Fairfax Youth Initiative and Melbourne Theatre Company to name a few. Her practice and approach to performance creation is influenced by her Jacques Lecoq physical theatre training with Norman Taylor at Movement Theater Studio [New York] as well as her studies at Venezia InScena [Venice, Italy] and most recently with Master teacher, Giovanni Fusetti.

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As founding Artistic Director of Make A Scene, she has created, directed and performed several original touring shows, translated and adapted Carlo Goldoni's *The Servant of Two Masters* and collaborated on a magical solo adaptation of Carlo Collodi's classic *Pinocchio*. Both works were performed at La Mama Theatre and have featured on the coveted VCAA VCE Playlists and published through Currency Press. Campagnaro's innovative and Covid-responsive work on her 2020 digital learning resource, *Homemade Comedy Teachers' Resource*, earned her a Drama Victoria Award for Excellence in Online/Digital Delivery of Drama.

As a valued and respected member of the profession, Campagnaro served on the Drama Victoria Committee of Management and proudly continues to support theatre education through this wonderful organisation. She is currently studying a Masters of Fine Arts in Directing at the National Institute of Dramatic Art.

Abbreviations/Acronyms/Definitions

ACARA: Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority

Antipatica: Italian word for not likeable.

Canovaccio: The Italian word that refers to the scenario or plot outline used in Commedia dell'Arte performances. Players would follow the canovaccio as a structure and guide for their improvised play.

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Capocomico: Theatre company manager, producer and performer

Commedia or Commedia dell'Arte: The Italian masked comedy.

Jacques Lecoq: Physical theatre practitioner, pedagogue and contemporary of Sartori, Fo, Clemente and De Bosio. Lecoq founded the Ecole Internationale de Theatre in Paris where he taught from 1956-1999.

Maestro: Master teacher.

Mask and references to mask: The word mask can refer to both a character and a physical face mask. Likewise when discussing mask type this can mean one of the following: a Commedia mask character, other mask character or unmasked character type.

Mimodynamic: is a phrase coined by Jacques Lecoq to describe an exercise used as a rehearsal tool and entry point for creating character. It allows a performer to discover character by exploring their physical world before, or without interference, from the psychological and cerebral, "allowing the actor to translate into bodily action the sensations aroused in them by colours, words, music." [Lecoq 2000].

NIDA: National Institute of Dramatic Art

VCAA: Victorian Curriculum Assessment Authority

VCE: Victorian Certificate of Education

VATI: Victorian Association for Teachers of Italian

Fellowship Learnings

In Fusetti's words, he describes his pedagogical approach to Commedia as a "deductive movement process to find it [the character]." [Fusetti 2022]. This approach is deeply rooted in the physical and focuses on a process that starts with general movement patterns and the discovery and identification of characteristics for the character type. The fundamental learning for the Fellow was understanding that when developing character types - masked or other - it can be more effective to utilise the *mimodynamic* method as an entry point as opposed to the psychology of the character by "allowing the actor to translate into bodily action the sensations aroused in them by colours, words, music..." [Lecoq 2000].

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This was evident when investigating Australian types, here starting with the physical - exploring Australian animals and sounds - led to interesting mask discoveries. Kapsis' mask play developed into a distinctly recognisable Australian character - a female new money type - with problematic views and a Kookaburra cackle! The new type worked with the traditional Commedia mask made by Stefano Perocco - from Fusetti's personal collection - and demonstrated that yes, new Australian types are possible and we can still call this a Commedia representation.

The production of Goldoni's *The Lovers*, *Gl'Innamorati* [Chiodo 2022] at the *Teatro Stabile Veneto*, was interesting in that it seemed to focus on the text and the psychology as opposed to the body. There seemed to be a disconnect between the exaggerated movement and the player and it appeared contrived as opposed to coming from a place of play, which in turn, consolidated the Fellow's learnings with Fusetti where he stated, "Goldoni... would give priority to the text and not to the movement" [Fusetti 2022]. Here the Fellow gained a stronger understanding of Goldoni and his eventual detachment from Commedia dell'Arte altogether - stripping the play of masks and improvisation - the cornerstones of the form.

"Goldoni uses the mask of commedia and the types of commedia but it's not commedia - and that will be my definition. La Riforma Goldoniana was a deliberate decision to move from types to character from improvisation to script from a canovaccio to script and from mask to psychological realism." [Fusetti 2022]

The Atelier Teatro intensive [Milan], was focused on the origins of Commedia and the importance of dramaturgy in *canovaccio*. Boso's lectures to the group, incidental musings and humorous tidbits became an invaluable source of information that gave the Fellow insight and clarity into the cultural and historical context for Commedia throughout the ages. For example, the genesis and function of masks was particularly fascinating where Boso stated "Masks were ceremonial. Worn by priests so they could go into an altered state while conducting rituals, crossing over to the *otherside* to talk to Gods and come back with the answers to problems." [In conversation with Boso October 19, 2022]. The most profound area of growth for the Fellow was both understanding ancient Greek comedy and improvising in Italian. The Fellow was able to work with a small ensemble to create

a *canovaccio* from the Greek comedies, *Alcestis* and *Cyclops* by Euripides. The language barrier made this exercise somewhat challenging, but the Fellow was satisfied she was able to contribute to the Italian improvisations and understand the dramaturgical context to make clear meaning for the audience.

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Likewise, The Fellow made significant dramaturgically relevant discoveries at the *Biblioteca* and took advantage of the wealth of knowledge at her fingertips, and discussed with library staff their professional opinions on the perceptions around the play being touted as a feminist piece. This sparked a passionate response from the *Biblioteca* who completely disagreed with the idea that *Mirandolina* supports the feminist cause and in the context of an informal discussion referred to the character as “*antipatica!*” [In conversation with Biblioteca Goldoni September 30, 2023] for her taunting and spiteful behaviour and as such did nothing for the feminist cause. Not only was she an *unlikeable anti-feminist*, it was added that, historically women ran businesses and Inns like *Mirandolina* does in the play, and that this was not particularly unusual or progressive for eighteenth century Italy, despite what our twenty first century sensibilities may like to believe. The Fellow found this insightful and it gave her a new perspective, inspiring further research into the text and historical context. Fortuitously, she was able to build on this by engaging Friend in Venice Tours - which focused on eighteenth century women of Venice - in particular the courtesans.

The courtesan tour was led by historian Nadia Danesin [October 12, 2022] and focused on the legend of Veronica Franco whose story later became the inspiration for a film [Dangerous Beauty 1998]. It was particularly fascinating to view the city through an eighteenth century lens - the time Goldoni would have been writing *Mirandolina* - and to understand that while women were still oppressed and their options limited to courtesan, wife or nun, becoming a courtesan was still considered a sensible career choice. They were typically educated, cultured and had a considerable amount of power, often servicing rich and powerful decision makers from the aristocracy to the Venetian Doge.

Skills enhancement approach

Campagnaro was able to revitalise her practice and increase her skill-set in this area by immersing herself in the Italian culture. While *Commedia* is an ancient traditional form, its roots are firmly planted in its country of origin and the Fellow was able to absorb this through all the books, museums, art, art history and people that continue to reflect and embody this culture.

The most prominent skill acquisition was the exercises and approaches to masks; these discoveries have been immediately utilised in the Fellow’s practice and have formed the cornerstone of her dissemination workshops.

The additional historical perspective has made it easier to put the work into a modern context whereby the creation of a contemporary practice that has its foundations in the tradition can now seem more permissible and easily attained. Acknowledging the old while discovering more relevant contemporary parallels.

The new perspectives offered at the *Biblioteca* and the discussions and improvisations that followed during the Helikos residency were invaluable in helping focus the Fellow's vision for the production of *Mirandolina* as well as, providing essential readings, resources and recommendations.

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Priority areas

The Arts have proven to be a necessity - not only in education - but as serious contributors to the Australian economy where the Arts employed "194,000... and contributing \$14.7 billion to the economy" [Browne 2020]

The Arts, in particular theatre and more specifically Commedia dell'Arte are imperative for professional and personal growth. In online newspaper, The Conversation, Bronwen, Covers & Wade-Leeuwen argue that not only do the arts contribute to skills in science based areas but "create a new way of thinking that is engaging, multifaceted and inclusive" and develop humans for the future that value "connection, care, community and culture." and finally citing one of Italy's greats as an exemplar, "people such as Leonardo DaVinci have shown us the importance of combining science and art to make discoveries." [Bronwen, Vovers & Wade-Leeuwen 2018].

There is light at the end of the metaphorical tunnel! After the devastating effects of the pandemic it's refreshing to see a government that seems to be focused on not only Arts in education where "Australian students have the opportunity to receive an education that includes...the arts but to also provide this through a "cultural infrastructure" to support the Arts [Australia's Cultural Policy 2023]. A policy led by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese - who recently stated in the same report that his government is determined "...through our many and varied forms of artistic expression that we build our identity as a nation" [Australia's Cultural Policy 2023]. The priority now is for Arts practitioners and educators to hold the government accountable and on-track to deliver this five year plan.

Personal, Professional and Sectoral Impact

Personal

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The great Italian satirist, poet, artist and Nobel laureate recipient - Dario Fo - was quoted as saying, "When the world forgets to laugh, it becomes dangerous" [Fo 2006]. Fo [along with Sartori, Lecoq and De Bosio] was instrumental in the rebirth of Commedia dell'Arte in the mid twentieth century. Together rediscovering the ancient art of leather mask creation and employing Commedia performance techniques in satires that made sociopolitical comment, they understood the importance of preserving and promoting the art of laughter, comedy and Commedia - for the collective sanity and stability of the populace.

Commedia is a sixteenth century theatrical style that evolved from a history of masked comedic performance tracing back to the ancient Greeks and further back to the dancing fertility rituals of prehistoric times. Through practical explorations with Fusetti and Boso and the visit to the Sartori mask museum, the Fellow was able to more clearly trace the links and origins of the form and gain a deeper understanding of the significance and importance of Commedia. The impact of which solidified her determination to continue working in this field through performance and education, here and abroad.

Professional

At Helikos the Fellow made significant discoveries about modern Commedia types. Discoveries that allow for an evolution of the form, ultimately making it more accessible to a contemporary audience, which was one of the Fellowship main objectives. For example, if we were to compare or make contemporary links with the traditional Commedia type of The Lover - who is narcissistic, shallow and self indulgent - we could easily link the type to the Social Media Influencer. Consequently audiences, and particularly young people, connect to the work on an accessible level, understand and make critical commentary about contemporary society and the links with historical perspectives. Thus simultaneously debunking myths surrounding Commedia and making it relevant and accessible.

The Fellow was introduced to, and inspired by the first sixteenth century prima donna [leading lady] - Isabella Adreini - a formidable multi-talented woman of the stage and stage business, displaying "... magnificence as an actress, singer, poet and playwright..." [MacNeil 2017] and whose name continues to resonate through the Commedia as the character of the female Lover. Born in Padua [not far from Helikos Studios], Adreini was the first female *capocomico* [company manager] and a quadruple threat! Not only lauded for her writing - as a poet and playwright - but by all accounts an incredibly charming and engaging performer, often breaking convention by gender-bending and playing multiple characters. Such was her reputation - one of admiration and respect - in 1559 she was invited to perform at the festivities for a Medici wedding - a mind-blowing solo, *La Pazzia*

d'Isabella [Caprara 2020]. In business she was a savvy visionary - inventing the concept of what we would now call marketing. Consciously and strategically gathering her team to promote herself as both an actor and writer - with her husband as publicist. A true iconic feminist and working mother of eight at a time when the patriarchy had majority control and women performing on stage was dangerous with "Religious and political forces... resulting in papal bans against women performing." [Goell 2017]. The Fellow is compelled to promote this important historical female *capocomico*, who should rightly share the Commedia historical limelight with figures like - Sartori, Lecoq and Fo.

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Sectoral

The Fellow began dissemination of the work and findings with a practical workshop for Teachers at the 2022 Drama Victoria State Conference. She discovered that teachers were indeed struggling to teach the strictly *traditional* style in the current sociopolitical climate, and found the new approaches to the style, the practical exercises and discussions immediately beneficial and easily implemented into their classrooms. Here teachers participated in practical exercises and were given permission to celebrate this Italian theatrical form without judgement. For example, the Fellow explored exercises with Italian accents, gibberish and non-verbal language of Italian gestures, and followed this with a discussion about how teachers can implement this work in a classroom. The general consensus was - yes! If the comedy is celebrating the culture and the artform - why not?

Rosa's workshop left me feeling empowered because I now have the knowledge and understanding to disentangle misinformation and generalisation. I feel better prepared to utilise Commedia in the classroom anew.

[Gemma Cavoli, Drama/English Teacher, Scotch College, Melbourne]

The dissemination of the work continued with a professional learning day for performers and teachers. The aim was to equip participants with tools and techniques that they could utilise to not only teach - Commedia dell'Arte - but comedy in general in both their classrooms and as a rehearsal tool for performance. The other equally important focus was the discussion around - old approaches - what can we keep and what do we alter? For example we discovered that it was best to acknowledge or flag dated and/or offensive tropes, agree that they are now problematic and look for relevant contemporary parallels to replace these.

Written feedback from participants reflected the overall success of the workshop and the immediately positive impacts on their teaching, for example, teacher Genelle Lentini was "emboldened to continue teaching this style" [email correspondence January 19, 2023] and actor, Julie-Anna Evans found the experience "inspiring... and loved the physical character work" [email correspondence

January 22, 2023] which is feeding into her development of a new show. Lyall Brooks, Education Coordinator at the Malthouse Theatre found the workshop to benefit his practice as an educator and practising artist:

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Deconstructing the 'traditional' Commedia dell'Arte paradigm is essential to broadening access and inclusivity in this robust and fundamental art form; what may have been perceived in the past as uniquely 'European' or 'colonial' can now be experienced as an open-source model for performance and pedagogy.

Rosa has shown that Commedia, without erasing its own cultural history, can be owned by everyone - regardless of background - and used to respect and celebrate that difference; reclamation instead of cancellation.

I believe the interrogation and research undertaken for this Fellowship is inherently transferable to other theatrical styles - and I can only hope others take up the challenge with as much rigour and passion as Rosa.

[email correspondence, February 28, 2023]

In March this year the Fellow was invited to present and work with students at the National Institute of Dramatic Art where she continued to test new found knowledge and approaches and the overall feedback from teachers and students was overwhelmingly positive including NIDA Course Convenor, Tobhiyah Stone Feller in the following feedback from email correspondence on March 20, 2023:

The students are of all disciplines including makers, technicians, designers, stage managers and actors.

Given the size of the group and the range of performance competencies I was astonished at how many students chose to participate, the majority joined Rosa for an embodied experience while others chose to participate through some movement and observation from their seats, this made a lecture-meets-workshop learning environment that felt incredibly dynamic and effective.

She covered principles including mimodynamic movement, archetypal character relationships, and character movement patterns as well as mask. Her charismatic delivery and selection of exercises had students wholeheartedly committing their attention to the session.



Figure 14. Featuring Freya Pragt and Lily Fish. (photographer Lisa Businovski)



Figure 15. (left) Atelier Teatro Milan and (right) Featuring Rosa Campagnaro (photographer Lisa Businovski)

Recommendations and Considerations

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The Fellow has had twenty years experience providing Commedia programs to students in schools. Between 2010-2020 the Fellow's Commedia dell'Arte Theatre Education Company, Make A Scene had performed over 900 shows in schools nationally and taught over 1000 workshops [Make A Scene 2020 homepage]. This was possible because Commedia dell'Arte featured, and continues to do so on the Australian and Victorian curriculum, whether it be through Performing Arts and/or Italian subjects. However, we shouldn't become complacent, the Arts and especially Performing Arts are continually fighting for their place on the curriculum despite "89% of Australians agreed that the arts should be an important part of education for every Australian." [Saunders 2019]. In order for Commedia dell'Arte to be kept alive and thriving, educators need to be supported with updated teachers' resources and guidelines that will give them a contemporary framework and shared language to address the potentially problematic and misunderstood characteristics of Commedia dell'Arte. However, independent practitioners like the Fellow cannot do this alone.

Additional support from Italian and language education bodies like VATI to promote Commedia dell'Arte in the curriculum and to their networks of Italian Teachers. Inviting and encouraging practitioners to present at teachers' conferences [through workshop presentations and performances] and facilitating introductions, networking and connections with networks of Italian Teachers, would be welcomed.

Likewise, recommending that Drama education bodies seek to develop stronger affiliations with independent artists, by promoting practitioners and companies specialising in physical theatre and Commedia dell'Arte. Not only inviting artists with specialisations to present at conferences, but respecting and nurturing the artist and artform by providing adequate remuneration for their time and expertise. After all the conference delegates are training the artists and practitioners for the future.

While the Fellow has had past Commedia productions selected for the VCE Playlist through the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority [VCAA Playlist 2016, 2019], more could be done to support independent companies producing productions for the teaching and learning of VCE Drama and Theatre Studies. Currently, independent practitioners are competing with state and established companies like Melbourne Theatre Company and Malthouse Theatre, to stage work for the purposes of the VCE written examination. The Fellow has a track record for not only providing high quality Commedia productions for the VCE Playlist but also accompanying award winning teachers' resources in the form of practical face to face workshops and written resource kits which support the teaching and learning of the play and significantly assist in the students' preparation for the end of year examinations [Drama Victoria Award recipient 2016 & 2020]. The recommendation is to establish a fund to support independent practitioners that not only contribute to production costs but the writing and distribution of teachers' resources for VCE examinations.

The Fellow recommends that Performing Arts tertiary training institutions and colleges include Commedia dell'Arte in their actor training programs. Lecoq famously said, "The body knows things of which the mind is ignorant." [Lecoq 2000, p8] The body is the actors' tool and the vehicle for effective storytelling. Consequently, actor training institutions could address this by having a movement program that includes Commedia techniques more like our European and American counterparts.* Commedia provides multifaceted training for actors - equipping them with character development tools - but also theatre-making skills that extend self-employment opportunities and in turn sustainable artistic careers. The Fellow is currently studying the Master of Fine Arts in Directing at NIDA and hopes this qualification will assist her advocacy and promotion of Commedia dell'Arte in tertiary training institutions.

Finally, the Fellow recommends a Commedia dell'Arte symposium that brings together both practitioners and educators and culminates in a festival of performances and workshops for the general public. A festival that could be realised with support from the aforementioned education bodies and perhaps arts organisations like Regional Arts Victoria, which have recently supported the Fellow on a regional tour of her Commedia show *Pinocchio* [Regional Arts Victoria 2022].

*Commedia is on the curriculum at both Yale School of Drama and the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London in the Masters of Acting

Conclusion

Twentieth century Commedia ancestors revived this teatro through - ambition, curiosity and humanity - seeing the need to keep the art of laughter alive and well for a healthy functioning society. Inspiration should also be sought from trailblazing primadonna, Andreini, who was adamant that her name “won’t ever disappear into oblivion.” [Caprara, 71]. Likewise for Commedia to remain relevant to a contemporary Australian audience and to ensure its longevity, the key is education and performance - making it both accessible, inclusive and most importantly - joyful.

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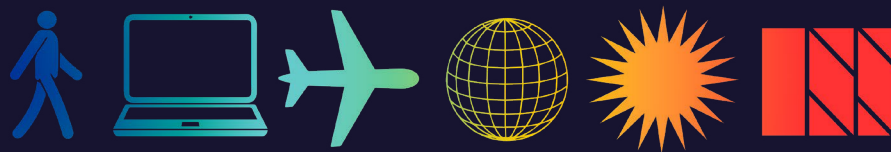
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