

FRATERNALCOMPAGNIA

Founded in 2000, the Company takes its name from that of the first historically recognized theatrical company in Italy, according to the oldest known records, a document dated 25 February, 1545. Inspired and spiritually linked to the kind of experiences which allowed Commedia dell'Arte to flourish during the Renaissance (remember that the term "art" was akin to "trade, workmanship)," FraternalCompagnia has been promoting and enriching the tradition of masked theatre for ten years, with a program of projects and productions and by organizing the first International Commedia dell'Arte Day (promoted by the SAT Association) sponsored by UNESCO and by the Italian Center of ITI (International Institute of Theatre). In march 2011 FraternalCompagnia was at Osaka university with workshop, masks exhibition and performance obtaining great appreciation.

Commedia dell'Arte as universal theatre

Commedia dell'Arte (or "Theatre's Infancy" as Jacques Lecoq called it) flourished during the Middle Ages and, in spite of bans and ex-communications by the Church, which declared the shows immoral and even diabolical, managed to win the enthusiastic approval of an audience comprised of both peasants and aristocracy.

The actors involved were professionals, and as such created the moniker "Commedia dell'Arte" (the Medieval sense of the term "arte" being equivalent to "trade" or "profession") in order to distinguish their work from the type of theatre being performed at court by intellectuals and courtiers and in the church-yards by priests and deacons.

These professional, wandering performers can sing, dance, tell stories, mimic and, most importantly, make use of masks. In fact, it is only with the development of Commedia dell'Arte masks that the spoken word arrived on the stage. At this point, masks were no longer full-faced, but only half-masks, designed, rather than to inspire awe by their magical/religious function, to move and amuse the crowd. The characters appearing in the various "canovacci" (plots outlined for theatrical performances which, however, leave the dialogue up to the improvisational techniques of the actors) represent traditional, universally recognizable human stereotypes. Since the mask hides the actor's actual facial expressions, he has to convey meaning through accentuated body language and gesticulation, without sacrificing physical authenticity.

Doctor Graziano, also known as Dr. Balanzone

Dr. Graziano, the Bolognese stock character, is an atypical figure, given to solo performances due to his "genetic predisposition." The character was developed to parody the stereotypical figure of an apparently highly-cultured man belonging to the world of academia which is actually self-contained and self-congratulatory (as we might say today). But he is also a child of street theatre – or better *Piazza* theatre – which, in observing the confraternity of travelling hucksters and beggars roaming the squares of Italy and the world, developed the character of the charlatan (who preys on a gullible populace by vaunting false titles and putting on pompous airs) and later the pedantic (who pretentiously and presumptuously declaims his own, frequently inconsistent, knowledge) and eventually evolved into the well-known stock character of Commedia dell'Arte. Dr. Graziano bears a particularity unique among the array of improvisational theatre's stock characters: while the others are known for their typical regional dialects, he speaks "Grazianese," a "new" language comprised largely of nonsense, Latinisms, pseudo-French, long and pointless lists, random association of ideas and a thousand other stratagems that render his speech irresistibly comical and of great theatrical impact.

The good doctor's career runs the gambit from charlatan to quintessential emblem of pompous and affected power - the power of the façade culture, composed of arrogance and pedantry. But while his

discourses are thoroughly ridiculous, they do display a certain, though limited, enchanting virtuosity. The words are like music, linked together by a common meaning, but which as a whole make no sense; the speeches are delivered in an impressive crescendo of a single, long-winded breath, while his body gesticulates its verbal mimicry. The doctor is a “type,” just like Harlequin, Zanni, Pantalone etc. and brings with him the stardom based on a career appearing in thousands of different plays: unlike an actor and more than a mere character, he belongs to the audience...

SPEECHES AND JOURNEYS OF DR. BALANZONE Director's notes

This show (the “backbone” of *Visita al Dottore*, directed by Romano Danielli, but developed specifically to be performed abroad with the artistic collaboration of Carlo Boso) takes us on a journey through Doctor Balanzone’s most well-known repertoire, right alongside his companion characters – the Captain, Harlequin, the Serving-Maid, Zanni. It is a journey not only into the heart of Dr. Balanzone’s Commedia dell’Arte, but also an evolutionary journey through the centuries, through his encounters and through the places where he has performed. Themes covered range from Quackery to power struggles, from superstition to magic, to love and death, through a series of gags, jokes and direct contact with audiences. The various scenes are first presented into the local language.

The show has been developed keeping in mind the specific expressive techniques which characterize the great tradition of Italian popular theater: improvisation, the use of masks, singing, dance and pantomime create a forceful theatrical language which gets the meaning of the sketches across, no matter what language they are presented in. Sets, costumes, props and lighting, with the support of the Fine Arts Academy, have been specially designed to assure that the production can easily be transported and adapted to any kind of space, to facilitate presentations both at a national and international level. The piece has been constructed with an eye to current national and international social and cultural situations, as well as with historical and social references harkening back to the period of Commedia dell’Arte’s inception (1500-1750)

The Show VISITA AL DOTTORE

During the renaissance, town squares were full of characters with a thousand tricks up their sleeves trying to strike it rich by inventing miracle cures (the charlatan) or practicing medicine without any kind of diploma (the quack) before the scandalized gaze of the clergy (the monk). Out of such characters came the first Graziano who, from his lofty erudition lavishes improbable prescriptions/recipes on his servant; an absolute Pedant capable of carrying on hours of discourse about nothing...but how do such characters experience love? Long-winded serenades enhanced by culinary similes dedicated to his beautiful beloved cannot compete with the sensuality of Pedrolino and the ensuing duel results in a defeat for our hero. A film clip shows us just how animated the street performers were in the old days, with Franceschina, the serving maid - object of the rival lovers - spitefully mocks them declaring that she cannot stand this Doctor Balanzone who is constantly bursting on the scene showing off his new garments, which he has been wearing for centuries. This evolution leads all the way to the 20th century, where a melancholy showman and a hard-headed farm-wife stand in the winds of changing times, where frenetic rhythms lead directly to TV: here the show’s female host introduces us to Botox Silicone, the latest incarnation of our faithful Doctor. The show is performed in Italian language for a university public and the Italian cultural institutes abroad.