



Arlecchino (Harlequin)

This is the mask of "Arlecchino", best known as Harlequin, probably the most famous Commedia character.

Being one of the servants, Arlecchino is like a 5-year-old. He is eager to please his master or mistress (one of the lovers, or Pantalone, or La Signora), lives in the present, loves what he sees, forgets what is out of sight. His first attention is to food: how to get it, how to savor it, how to preserve it for later. He loves tricks and physical antics (known as "Lazzi"). He relishes his adroitness at getting out of difficult situations and seldom considers the consequences until it is too late. Never malicious, Arlecchino is sympathetic to everyone's misfortunes, to a fault. Arlecchino usually cannot read, which makes him confuse messages sent by lovers. He is ignorant yet clever; slow mentally but quick physically. His actions and moods can change in an instant. He may fall in love with Columbina, but it is puppy love, never lustful.

Physical Characteristics

His lower back is arched, and his arms are often bent with hands on his hips, in readiness to serve. His legs turn out in 4th position, sometimes with heels together and other times with the back knee bent and the front leg straight, like a Baroque bow. He runs quickly and lightly, kicking his feet forward. He sneaks to steal food with large, exaggerated, silent steps. He can stop in an instant, especially when caught in one of his pranks. He carries a slapstick, which makes noise when it hits something and serves as a potential weapon, musical instrument, magic wand, eating utensil, or phallus.

An appropriate animal image for Arlecchino is an Irish setter puppy.

Arlecchino Mask





Columbina (Servant)

Columbina, one of the most famous female servants, also known as Servetta. She was a first Zanni and usually did not wear a mask.

She was fresh and frisky, usually servant to the young lover or Isabella and was the smartest character in a scenario. She was autonomous, self-sufficient, and quite rational. Usually paired with Arlecchino, she was sometimes known as "Arlecchine". Other names for the female servant were Franceschina, Smeraldina, Olivetta, Nespola, and Spinetta.

Physical Characteristics

Columbina was not afraid to show her buxom contours or flaunt her robust hips. She was young in spirit but "mothered" the other servants. Originally robust in her gestures, she became lighter in her walk, more engaging in her manner, and less overtly sexual in the seventeenth century. She stands with hands on her hips, or holding a basket or tamborine, while flirting audaciously with the young lover or Capitano, knowing that Arlecchino is her great love.

A comparable animal image for Columbina is a pet cat, smart and cuddly.

Columbina Mask





Pantalone (Miser)

Pantalone was one of the Old Men of the Commedia scenarii. He originated in Venice as a wealthy, miserly, paranoid, lustful merchant. He professes poverty but money is his obsession. He finds elaborate ways to hoard it, count it, hide it, manipulate deals, and avoid spending. He is lascivious and thinks he is a master at seducing beautiful young women, but if he had to choose between a beautiful young woman and money, he would go first for the money. He usually gets duped in the end.

He complains about his physical ailments: aching back, bad knees, gout, etc. that conveniently come and go at his discretion. He is sometimes married to the La Signora character, and/or is the father of one of the young lovers (inamorata), or he is lusting after a sweet young thing. He wants his son or daughter to marry into a family with money and is especially disgruntled by his lazy or lustful son.

Physical Characteristics

His pelvis is tilted under but he is not hunched over, as one might mistakenly do in playing an old man. His knees are bent with his heels together, toes pointing outward; he runs and walks heels first. His hands and fingers actively fidget in counting money or holding his money pouch (which conveniently hangs down between his legs). In spite of being old and sick, he is surprisingly agile. He can be quite acrobatic when being foiled by servants, beautiful women, and his family. Pantalone usually has a curled, pointed beard, red leggings, and a long cape (denoting higher status).

A comparable animal image for Pantalone is a turkey or rooster.

Pantalone Mask





Il Dottore (Doctor of Everything)

This is the mask of **Il Dottore**, the pedant from Bologna (site of the oldest **European university**). Il Dottore professes to know everything, but actually knows nothing. He loves to hear himself speak and expounds on answers, whether asked or not (but he is always wrong). He claims to be a doctor of medicine, philosophy, science, law, language, literature, art, politics, or the classics, or all of them. He is a delightfully pretentious bag of wind. He may like to drink. He may have rosy cheeks from drinking.

His mask covers the forehead and nose, signifying his heady thoughts and nosy intrusions.

His sense of space is broad, like his girth. He bounces when he walks and uses his hands expressively to clarify his vivid ideas and descriptions. When Il Dottore enters a room, he demands attention and respect through his non-stop orations engaging non-sensical Latin and Greek sounding phrases, signifying nothing.

A comparable animal image is the **howler monkey**.

Il Dottore Mask (The Doctor, professor)



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Capitano (Cowardly Braggart)

This is the mask of **Il Capitano**, the cowardly braggart soldier. He is the foreigner in the scenario, speaking with an accent (or two), who enters to conquer arrogant foes, to rescue young damsels in distress, or to win the hearts of beautiful widows. He is, however, a wimp. He avoids fighting at all costs by deflecting conflicts, feigning death, or outsmarting aggressors. He vainly claims superior physical prowess on the battlefield and in bedchambers all over the world but fails at everything. In his mind, anyone is a fool who cannot recognize his beauty, strength, sensitivity, and foresight. In fact, he is usually penniless and easily intimidated. He is often the suitor of La Signora in a scenario, but seldom wins her over in the end.

Some of the il Capitano masks have long noses, signifying brawn over brains (the longer the nose, the fewer the brains..)

His sense of space is the vast world around him for fighting. He holds his weapon strongly and aggressively (anything from an old, rusty or crooked sword to a stick he thinks is a sword but doesn't really know how to use it. When bragging, he stands tall and has a wide stance, with feet firmly planted. When avoiding conflict, he becomes small and shy, shriveling and shivering in fear. He can run very fast when necessary.

A comparable animal image is the bantam rooster.

Capitano Mask





Innamorati (The Young Lovers) No Mask

In Italian they called Innamorati and are essential to Commedia plots. There are often two sets of lovers so the four continually get confused with who is in love with whom. Their props are often letters that get mishandled and misread (especially if their zanni have switched the letters).

Characteristics: They “float” with a sense of eternal Love, and are always off balance. Their sense of space is out beyond themselves, as if ultimate love is the universe. They relate primarily to themselves and are actually in love with Love, not necessarily a particular person.

The Lovers do not wear masks, unless they are the Cavalliere, seeking to fight to the death because they think they have lost their love anyway.

When they move, it is usually only two or three steps at a time and diagonally. Their balance hovers on one foot, awaiting word about love, or their lovers.

They have two ultimate emotions, exaltation and desperation, and their lives go back and forth between those two. They can be physically ugly when love is threatened.

They are known by such names as Isabella, Flaminia, Lidia, Silvia, Angelica, Ortensia for the women; and Flavio, Lelio, Fabrizio, Leandro, Aurelio for the men.



Flamina, or la Senora

La Signora, an Italian phrase which can be translated to "the lady" in English) is a character in Commedia dell'arte. She is the wife of Pantalone and the mistress of Pedrolino. She is tough, beautiful and calculating, and wears very wide dresses along with very heavy makeup. She walks with a flick of the toe and her arms held far out to the sides of her body.

La Signora could be a "courtesan" (high class prostitute), but typically manages to wrangle her way into the household of an old man, usually Pantalone, where she would inevitably cuckold him. She was an older, sexually experienced Colombina, known as Rosaura.

- Appearance: Overdresses, wearing too many jewels, flowers, feathers, and ribbons and wearing too much hair and makeup.
- Physicality: Like Il Capitano, uses excessive and big gestures.
- Character Traits: Main aim is satisfaction of physical needs – more jewels, dresses and sex. She will scheme to have them assured. She has an immediate attraction to her counterpart, Il Capitano, and they must be together. However, she is married to Pantalone, and she cheats on him regularly.

A common lazzo of La Signora is to have a fight with another woman, as she is very proud and often ridicules others.

Flamina, la Signora Mask



Magnifico (an Evil Pantalone mixed with Capitano qualities)



Zanni (generic servant)

Zanni (Italian: ['dzanni]) is a character type of *commedia dell'arte* best known as an astute servant and a trickster. The Zanni comes from the countryside and is known to be a "dispossessed immigrant worker". Through time, the Zanni grew to be a popular figure who was first seen in *commedia* as early as the 14th century. The English word *zany* derives from this character. The longer the nose on the characters mask, the more foolish the character.

The name *Zanni* is a variant of the name *Gianni* and was common in the Lombard-Venetian countryside which provided most of the servants to the wealthy nobles and merchants of Venice. In Italian it is specifically a name of someone whose identity is not of any importance.

Zanni Mask



Stanco Tartaglia

Stanco Tartaglia or the stutterer is sometimes a bailiff, a lawyer, a chef or a politician. He is short sighted and a bit of a narcoleptic. The Tartaglia mask combines the energies of a mouse and a mole.



