

Commedia dell'arte



At the end of The 15th Century when the urge for religious drama had died out a new secular drama emerged in Italy. It was an improvised drama based on stock plots (scenarii) and stock characters such as Signor Pantalone or Il Dotore. Most of the characters were masked. The engine of the show was the antics of the comic servants, known as Zanni, who worked comic bits of business, lazzi, which were physical and hilarious. Many of the actors had special skills as musicians, jugglers and acrobats which they integrated into their characters. Conventional plot lines drew on themes of

adultery, money, jealousy, old age and love.

The troupe of performers would travel from Town to Town, performing outdoors on trestles set up in the market square and would seek their fame and fortune either by patronage or else by passing the hat and receiving their money from an enthusiastic audience. It is impossible to underestimate the huge influence Commedia Dell'Arte has had, not only in , but also on the history of Western Drama. Commedia was

very popular in France and each country adopts elements of this theatre and adapts it into it's culture. Various characters have evolved outside Italy, such as Hanswurst (Germany), Pierrot (France), Petrushka (Russia) and of course the famous Mr Punch who has become one of the great English Theatrical traditions in the "Punch and Judy Show"



Karel Dujardin, Commedia dell'arte show (1657) (Louvre)