

A Commedia Christmas Carol

A Play in One Act

By Lane Riosley

*Based on the classic story "A Christmas Carol"
by Charles Dickens*

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Story of the Play

In this faithful adaptation of the Charles Dickens classic, a traveling troupe of commedia del arte players re-create the Victorian world of "A Christmas Carol" on a bare stage in just one act! All of the many wonderful characters are played by only four actors with cleverness, skill, and comedy. Dickens, an actor, playwright, and enthusiastic theatergoer, used many theatrical characters in his novels, especially characters from the commedia del arte tradition. The most notable of these is Ebenezer Scrooge, who is played in this adaptation by commedia's big-nosed Punchin. Just as they would have done in Dickens' own time the players bring their homemade costumes and props onstage with them. Sometimes frenzied, but always fun, this dynamic adaptation puts a fresh spin on one of our most beloved holiday stories. (For a full-length version, please visit Eldridge Publishing at www.hiStage.com.)

Premiere Performance

This 1-act version was first produced in December, 2013, by the Children's Theatre of Charlotte's touring company, The Tarradiddle Players, at the Wells Fargo Playhouse. It was directed by Steven Ivey with the following cast and crew:

Columbine: Leslie Ann Giles

Arlequin: Stephen Seay

Punchin: Scott Miller

Rosetta: Tanya McClellan

Set designed by Tim Parati

Costumes by Jennifer Matthews

THE CHARACTERS

COLUMBINE: A common girl, but very clever and good at dance and tumbling, the troupe leader.

ARLEQUIN: The mischief-maker, clever, athletic, and funny.

PUNCHIN: Bombastic and proud with a big nose.

ROSETTA: Fancies herself a lady, also funny and a good dancer.

Many other characters are portrayed through cutouts, puppets and soft sculptures. Please see end of script for more information.

Playwright's Notes

In considering the staging of the commedia style, it is helpful to remember the most famous twentieth-century artists of the commedia, the Marx Brothers. Commedia players traditionally use lazzi, which are comic bits of stage business, and some lazzi notes are included in this script. Lazzi serve to elaborate on some aspect of a character and they are often "running gags." Skeleton Dance: A theatre tradition, hundreds of years old, associated with Arlequin.

Setting

The stage is bare. All sets and props are brought in by the Players in a cart, like a traveling merchant's cart or medicine show cart. The cart's four vertical posters end in tops shaped like street lamps. The cart has sets of hand-painted drapes that can be moved to change the setting, such as the skyline of old London or a hearth and fireplace. The cart is also Scrooge's bed. The Players have made all the props and their costumes from found objects and they go to and from this cart throughout the play, selecting and returning props and costume bits.

There is a central acting area the troupe uses, and when stage directions advise enter or exit, it means the central area. The Players set and clear all acting areas, themselves. Once the performers enter at the top of the act, they remain onstage at all times.

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(AT RISE: The PLAYERS enter singing, pulling the cart. They circle the stage and greet the audience. Vying for attention as they dance and sing, PUNCHIN and ARLEQUIN step out in front of ROSETTA and COLUMBINE, who push them back. The PLAYERS set the cart upstage and conclude their singing with dancing, taking roles in the song as they sing.)

PLAYERS:

Good King Wenceslas looked out,
on the Feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about, deep and crisp and even,
Brightly shone the moon that night, tho' the frost was cruel,
When a poor man came in sight, gath'ring winter fuel.

(The PLAYERS assemble down center.)

COLUMBINE: Welcome, everyone! Today we are here to play the story of *A Christmas Carol*. I am Columbine!
(Flourishes a fan.)

PUNCHIN: And I am the great Punchin. A great actor with a great nose. This is Punchin and this is his nose. You may applaud us both.

ROSETTA: Benvenuto! Benvenuta! I am Rosetta!

ARLEQUIN: *(Leaps center, in front of HER.)* Aha! I am Arlequin!

ROSETTA: *(Shoves ARLEQUIN out of the way.)* And I am Rosetta!

ARLEQUIN: *(Shoves in front of HER.)* Arlequin!

ROSETTA: *(Shoves in front of ARLEQUIN, right at the apron.)* Rosetta!

(ARLEQUIN and ROSETTA get into a shoving match lazzi that ends with them circling COLUMBINE and swatting at each other.)

COLUMBINE: *(Out.)* Scusi, I will take care of this. *(SHE swats ARLEQUIN and ROSETTA on their heads with her fan.)* Infamio! Why must you always fight? What kind of example do you set for the children? Now, you shake hands and show everyone how to be friends. *(ARLEQUIN and ROSETTA stare at each other and then, just when it seems they will shake hands, they suddenly resume swatting.)* No, no, no! Shake hands! Now! *(THEY shake hands and go to separate sides of the stage.)* Good! Now, we shall play for you "A Christmas Carol." This story was written by the very great man, Charles Dickens of London. This is a wonderful story and there are many fine parts for everyone. There is a hero. *(PUNCHIN and ARLEQUIN suddenly perk up like prairie dogs.)* And a lovely young girl. *(ROSETTA poses, bats her eyes, hopefully.)* And a handsome, brave young nephew. *(Posing, ARLEQUIN leans toward her.)* And there is a wonderful family with a good mama and a loving papa and lovely little children. Such a beautiful family. *(PLAYERS sniffle sentimentally.)* I will play the good mama.

PUNCHIN: And I will play the loving papa.

ARLEQUIN: And I will play the hero. Of course.

PUNCHIN: The hero is always the older man with the heroic nose. See? *(Poses in profile, as if that settles it.)*

ARLEQUIN: Columbina, can't I be the hero?

COLUMBINE: Ah, Punchin is right.

ARLEQUIN: No!

COLUMBINE: The hero is the older man.

PUNCHIN: Ahh!

COLUMBINE: Oh! And there is one very important thing I must tell you. *(Looks around, pulls THEM all toward the audience.)* This is a ghost story. *(Holds up the book.)*

ARLEQUIN: *(Hides behind COLUMBINE.)* Ghosts? No, Columbina! I'm scared of ghosts. I mean, it will frighten... eh... *(Points at the audience.)* them! *(To the front row.)* You would be very frightened, wouldn't you? Yes? You do not want a ghost story, do you? *(Behind him ROSETTA prompts the audience to applaud and shout YES!)* No!

COLUMBINE: You will all like it, I promise. Now, places, everyone. Tutti! (*PLAYERS take their places.*) Once upon a time, a long time ago, there was a far away land called London. A great city on the great river Thames. There were many boats on the river and many houses in the city. (*Pulls the drape of a painting of the city of London.*)

ARLEQUIN: (*Pulls a cardboard boat from the cart and mimes it floating down a river.*) Ding-ding! Ding-ding! Ding-ding! This is a boat on the river.

COLUMBINE: Grazie.

ARLEQUIN: Prego!

COLUMBINE: It was winter. The coldest winter that anyone could remember. There was snow and ice everywhere. (*PUNCHIN, ROSETTA and ARLEQUIN whistle like the winter wind.*) Now, this London was full of many people. (*The PLAYERS hurriedly put on costume pieces.*) Some were very rich, some were very poor. This is the story of a very rich man.

PUNCHIN: That's me, I'm the rich man! (*Goes to the cart and pulls off the Scrooge jacket and hat, puts it on, struts about, proudly.*)

COLUMBINE: His name was Scrooge. (*The other PLAYERS, in bits of rich or poor costume, stroll about, playing Scrooge's neighbors.*) Scrooge! A squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old man! (*As COLUMBINE punches out each word, PUNCHIN transforms himself, twisting, taking on the bent and bitter character of Scrooge.*)

PUNCHIN/Scrooge: Grrrr!

ROSETTA/Townswoman: Good day to you, Mr. Scrooge.

PUNCHIN/Scrooge: (*Shakes his walking stick at her.*) Bah!

ROSETTA/Townswoman: Mercy! Help!

COLUMBINE: Scrooge! The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shriveled his cheek, stiffened his gait, made his eyes red, his thin lips blue and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice.

PUNCHIN/Scrooge: Grrr! Bah, humbug!

ARLEQUIN/Street Musician: My dear sir, how are you? Let me play a jolly song for you.

(As ARLEQUIN starts to play a musical instrument PUNCHIN “accidentally” stabs his foot with his walking stick.)

ARLEQUIN/Street Musician: *(Cont’d.)* Oh, oh, ouch! Oh, my toe! *(Hops away as PUNCHIN chuckles out to the audience as if he has done something clever.)*

(ROSETTA sets up the office of Scrooge and Marley: the drape of a window, two stools and a table.)

COLUMBINE: Once upon a time, of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve, old Scrooge sat busy in his counting house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather, and Scrooge could hear the people in the court outside, wheezing up and down, beating their hands, and stamping their feet just to warm themselves.

ROSETTA/Lady: Ah, the snow! Ah, the ice! Oh, but it’s cold! And the snow just keeps falling. *(ARLEQUIN tosses a bucket of fake snow over her. She spits it out.)* Grazie.

ARLEQUIN: Prego!

COLUMBINE: The door of Scrooge’s counting house was open that he might keep his eye upon his clerk. They had a very small fire.

(ROSETTA plops a tiny bucket on the floor and then drops a tiny wad of red paper into it, for fire. COLUMBINE changes into costume for the Nephew.)

ARLEQUIN/Bob Cratchit: Excuse me, Mr. Scrooge, but might we have just one more coal for the fire? My fingers are so stiff I can barely hold my pen.

PUNCHIN/Scrooge: Bah! I can see that you wish to part company with me, Mr. Cratchit!

ARLEQUIN/Cratchit: What? Oh, no, sir!

(PUNCHIN/Scrooge rises up in height, intimidating ARLEQUIN who crouches down before him. This is Scrooge’s lazzi of intimidation.)

End of Freeview

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