The Commedia Christmas Carol

By Lane Riosley

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

Performance Rights

It is an infringement of the federal copyright law to copy or reproduce this script in any manner or to perform this play without royalty payment. All rights are controlled by Eldridge Publishing Co., Inc. Contact the publisher for additional scripts and further licensing information. The author's name must appear on all programs and advertising with the notice: "Produced by special arrangement with Eldridge Publishing Company."

ELDRIDGE PUBLISHING COMPANY
hiStage.com
© 2010 by Lane Riosley

Download your complete script from Eldridge Publishing
https://histage.com/commedia-christmas-carolthe

DEDICATION

This play is dedicated to Prof. Maureen V. McIntyre,
a wonderful commedia del arte director and teacher.

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. All of the many wonderful characters are played by this small troupe of 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 cranky but beloved Pantalone. 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.

THE CHARACTERS *(4 m, 4 w)*

(See end of script for listing of Dickens roles each actor plays.)

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.

PANTALONE: A bitter old miser.

RUFFIANA: A merchant woman and a gossip.

MEZZETTINO: The troupe musician, he is vain and a little lazy.

ZANNI: She is the players' servant.

Time: Now.
Place: Anywhere.

*(**Props** and **costumes** are listed at end of script.)*

SETTING

The stage is bare except for a tree with bare limbs. The set represents a traditional outdoor venue, just a patch of ground under a tree. All sets and props are brought in by the Players in two wagons with many shelves and hooks holding costumes and props, just like a traveling merchant's wagon. The Players have made all the props and their costumes from found objects, and they go to and from this wagon 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.

SETTING – continued

One cart is low to the ground with small wheels while the other is taller, with shelves. Both carts have four upright posts and each cart is hung with costumes, props and simple instruments such as sleigh bells, long, tubular bells and frame drums. Cutout panels of wood along the top frames of the carts are hand-painted with various scenes and they can be flipped up or down to change the scene, such as the skyline of old London or a pastoral skyline with trees.

Their clothes are all periods and no period, in earth tones and shades of darkened colors. When they play each of their various characters, they slip on a hat, a shawl, a robe, or a jacket, usually one or two items that distinguish the character. When they change into a character there is also a change in stance, movement and voice that happens as they put on the costume pieces, for commedia Players literally "put on" a character.

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, or well-rehearsed comedic stage business, particular to each character. Lazzi serves to elaborate on some shortcoming of a character and are often "running gags."

Skeleton Dance: A very old tradition associated with Arlequin. Skeleton dances in the middle ages portrayed the dance of death during times of plague. Arlequin dances with the skeletons and defeats them, a symbol of his life and vitality overcoming death.

ACT I

(AT RISE: The PLAYERS enter singing, pulling their two carts. Players circle the stage and greet the audience. Vying for attention, as they dance and sing, PUNCHIN and PANTALONE step out in front of ROSETTA and COLUMBINE, who push them back. ARLEQUIN and ZANNI pull the carts. MEZZETINO strums a guitar. Oblivious to them all, RUFFIANA plays her tambourine. The players set the carts upstage left and right, 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!
PANTALONE: I am Pantalone.
RUFFIANA: Hello, I am Ruffiana!
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!
MEZZETTINO: *(Strums a chord, poses.)* Mezzetino.
ARLEQUIN: *(Leaps center, in front of ZANNI.)* Aha! I am Arlequin!
ZANNI: *(Shoves ARLEQUIN out of the way.)* And I am Zanni!
ARLEQUIN: *(Shoves ZANNI.)* Arlequin!
ZANNI: *(Shoves back.)* Zanni!

(ARLEQUIN and ZANNI get into a shoving match lazzi that ends with them growling at each other like puppies. They run into the audience, chasing each other.)

COLUMBINE: *(Out.)* Scusi, I will take care of this. *(Grabs ARLEQUIN and ZANNI and drags them, yelping, back to the stage.)* Vieni con me! You both come with me! What kind of example will you set for the children, eh? Now, you shake hands and show everyone how to be friends.

(ARLEQUIN and ZANNI stare at each other and then just when it seems they will shake hands they suddenly resume growling like angry puppies, snapping at each other.)

COLUMBINE: *(Cont'd.)* No, no, no! Shake hands! Now!

(Woofing and snarling, THEY reluctantly shake hands and go to separate sides of the stage.)

COLUMBINE: Good! Now, we begin. Today we play for you "A Christmas Carol." *(ROSETTA hands her "The Big Book of Stories.")* This story was written by a very great man. His name was Charles Dickens and he lived in London. This is a wonderful story and there are many fine parts for everyone. There is a hero.

(PUNCHIN, MEZZETINO, PANTALONE and ARLEQUIN suddenly perk up like prairie dogs.)

COLUMBINE: *(Cont'd.)* And a lovely young girl.

(ROSETTA poses, bats her eyes, hopefully.)

COLUMBINE: *(Cont'd.)* And a handsome, brave young nephew.

(Posing, ARLEQUIN and MEZZETINO lean toward her.)

COLUMBINE: *(Cont'd.)* And there is a wonderful family with a loving mama and a papa and beautiful little children. Such a beautiful family.

(PLAYERS sniffle sentimentally.)

End of Freeview

Download your complete script from Eldridge Publishing
https://histage.com/commedia-christmas-carolthe

Eldridge Publishing, a leading drama play publisher since 1906, offers more than a thousand full-length plays, one-act plays, melodramas, holiday plays, religious plays, children's theatre plays and musicals of all kinds.

For more than a hundred years, our family-owned business has had the privilege of publishing some of the finest playwrights, allowing their work to come alive on stages worldwide.

We look forward to being a part of your next theatrical production.

Eldridge Publishing... for the start of your theatre experience!