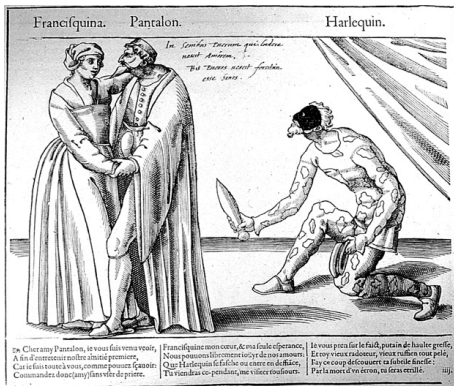


## DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Prof. Christopher Swift

*Scapino!* is an English-language version of the Molière play *Les Fourberies de Scapin*, adapted for the modern stage by Jim Dale and Frank Dunlop. The 1974 adaptation was conceived as a comic vehicle for the multi-talented Dale and ran for 176 performances on Broadway. The Molière version is rarely performed in the United States; audiences will be more familiar with Molière's classic plays *Tartuffe*, *The Imaginary Invalid*, and *The Misanthrope*. Molière drew concepts and scenarios from the popular improvisational style called *commedia dell'arte* when composing his comedies, and more than his canonical plays, *Scapin* bears a close resemblance to the Italian source material. *Commedia* is known for its stock characters, *lazzi* (short comic routines), stunts, slapstick, ribald humor, and songs – all of which are also essential to the entertainment



value of *Scapin/Scapino!* In fact, the sadistic “beating in the sack” scene in the play was a popular routine in *commedia*, first recorded in performance in 1568 in Bavaria. The stock character “Zanni” (a trickster servant, like Scapino herself) is often the perpetrator of crimes (such as the *lazzi* of ‘interruption,’ ‘servant’s will,’ and ‘tooth extraction’) against his guileless masters, the comedic impulse deriving from topsy-turvy scenes role reversal and social rebellion.

In many ways, laughter in *commedia* is a form of social corrective to rigid behavior (the miserliness of the parental figures in *Scapino!*, for instance), what Henri Bergson called a “social gesture”:

Society will therefore be suspicious of all inelasticity of character, of mind and even of body, because it is the possible sign of...an activity with separatist tendencies, that inclines to swerve from the common centre round which society gravitates... [Society] is confronted with something that makes it uneasy, but only as a symptom—scarcely a threat, at the very most a gesture. A gesture, therefore, will be its reply. Laughter must be something of this kind, a sort of social gesture. (Bergson, 1900/2002)

However, I don't believe this quote explains the comedy of *Scapino!* entirely. Throughout rehearsals over the past couple of months, I had the sense that much of the laughter that arose from the throats of the actors, stage managers, and director were simply moments of emotional and/or physiological release. All of us experience violence, deceit, restriction, and mechanistic tedium in our modern, big city lives. *Scapino!* is an opportunity to throw off the numbing drudgery of routine in order to experience a few moments of silliness.

The director would like to thank a number of individuals who contributed vitally to this collaborative venture between the Entertainment Technology and Humanities departments: Bonne August, Karl Botchway, David Smith, Charles Scott, Ann Delilkan, Roman Kezerashvili and George Kiezik. I would especially like to thank the efforts of theatre faculty from both departments, for their tireless efforts, attentive mentorship of students, and good cheer.

### **Additional Reading**

Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*. Trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell. Project Gutenberg  
<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/4352/4352-h/4352-h.htm>, accessed 1 Dec. 2014.

Mel Gordon, *Lazzi: The Comic Routines of Commedia dell-Arte*. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1983.