

Masquerade!

a Commedia dell'Arte musical

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Music and lyrics by David Billings, Rob Fairbairn,
Mark Lecky and Kevin O'Hara. Book by
Lynne Bartlett, Mark Lecky and Kevin O'Hara.

*"Was awesome! It provided huge scope for drama, music, dance, gymnastics and clowning."
Bombay School*

"Masquerade proved to be the perfect musical which enabled the 22 students of the junior youth theatre to demonstrate a wide range of skills. It was also a vehicle which suited the varying levels of experience. It was a tremendous success, both students and parents were thrilled and overwhelmed with the delightful script and the simplicity of set and the dazzling style of production - I LOVED THE MUSIC.

*PS - could I please have 'A Kidsummer Night's Dream' for perusal?"
Spotlight Youth Theatre, Australia*

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Bushfire Press

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a Commedia dell' Arte musical

music & lyrics by David Billings, Rob Fairbairn,
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book by Lynne Bartlett, Mark Leehy & Kevin O'Mara

adapted from *The Prince and the Pauper* by Mark Twain

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Production notes

Background - Commedia dell'Arte

Masquerade! has been written and composed in the style of Commedia dell'Arte, a theatrical style developed in Europe in the 17th century by troupes of travelling players. It was a very 'portable' type of street theatre, playing mainly to the working classes in villages. A prop basket would contain a few props and garments and changes to character or scene happened before the audience's eyes. The players would use stock characters, such as Arlecchino, Pulcinello, Columbina and Scapino to improvise amusing comedies or social satires, adapting to the current events of the village. Music and sound effects were provided by a drum, a tambourine, a flute, a fiddle or whatever else was to hand. Popular dances of the day would also be included.

The use of leather masks, covering the eyes and nose and signifying the characteristics of the stock characters was a trademark of Commedia.

Synopsis

Masquerade! is set in a European village during the renaissance. It was during this time that the princes became more interested in knowledge than money, and so brought about great social change. Our story is about the dawning of this time as it occurs to a young prince. He is to become king and is convinced that the old ways of his kingdom (as embodied in his tutor, the old fashioned Linguine) are not necessarily the best ways. The tale has been adapted from Mark Twain's The Prince and the Pauper. In true Commedia style, the story of his enlightenment takes place over a single day - a day in Paradiso.

ACT 1 - MORNING

Arlecchino welcomes the audience and introduces the players through a song. By the end of the song all is in place and we are ready to begin.

It is morning in Paradiso and the marketplace is in full swing. The Palace Guards arrive to clear the streets so that the young Prince Nicolo may walk there. Nicolo has been brought to the square by his tutor Pantalone, who thinks the fresh air might aid latin lessons. Nicolo manages to slip away – to taste some freedom – and the guards scatter and search for him. Enter Nicola, running away from her cruel father. She hides behind the fountain. When Nicolo enters and finds her there he is astonished to see that they look alike (they do not have to look too much alike for the comedy to work). Prince Nicolo and pauper Nicola swap clothes and make a deal to spend a day seeing what life is like on the other side. The Travelling Players arrive and the townspeople gather to the square to hear the latest songs and the latest gossip

ACT 2 - AFTERNOON

Prince Nicolo finds life with Nicola's father in their poverty stricken home an eye opener and vows that things must change.

Pauper Nicola finds life at Court tedious and silly. She also sees some of her friends thrown into the dungeon for begging and vows that things must change.

They both make their escape.

Arlecchino brings on the Travelling Players and the audience is treated to a Carnivale!

At the end of the revelling both Prince and pauper are caught and news arrives of the King's sudden death.

ACT 3 – EVENING

Arlecchino contrives to bring Scapino and the Prince (whom Scapino thinks is his daughter) to the palace for the Royal Masquerade Ball, at which the new King is to be crowned. The court believes that Nicola is the Prince and prepares to crown her (against her pleas and those of Nicolo) but Arlecchino cleverly shows that there has been a switch.

Nicolo is crowned King and – with the wisdom he has gained during his time as a peasant – decrees that from this day forward the Kingdom will be ruled in a new way ... and that poverty will be ended.

Cast

Arlecchino: leading player, narrator and raconteur. Wears a 'harlequin' patchwork jacket (in diamond shapes if required)

Nicolo: young prince of Paradiso; wears a cloak and/or crown; an innocent, frustrated with his environment; could have a certain vision - a 'renaissance man'

Pantalone: chief adviser to the prince; a father figure, concerned for the prince's welfare

Linguine: royal teacher; dour disciplinarian; not a 'renaissance man'

Nicola: pauper girl; assertive (not aggressive); a survivor; caring

Scapino: Nicola's nasty father; selfish, exploitative; blames his woes on everyone else

Duke Fettucine

Cardinal Mozzarella

The Players: Arlecchino's four off-siders. They become characters as required throughout the story. Player 4 is a bit of a loose cannon, getting cheekier as the show progresses

Band: small group of recorder and untuned percussion players

Small group of Beggar children

Villagers

Villager 1

Tax collector

Soldier 1

Soldier 2

Performing troupe (the *Travelling Players*) - It would be useful if they have some circus/gymnastics/calisthenics/aerobics skills.

Ladies and gentleman of the royal court

Setting

a village square in a European village - fountain in the centre, castle PS, slum OP

Time

the renaissance

Acts, songs, music

Act One - Morning

Overture
Ain't It a Beautiful Day!
Voices of the Poor
Here They Come
We Bring-a the News

Act Two - Afternoon

Siesta Song
On the Other Side
Carnivale!

Act Three - Evening

Palace in the Sky
Masquerade
Finale
Curtain - Carnivale!

Music

The music is in the style of comic opera and the band is an integral part of this show, playing on-stage. They need have only basic skills on recorder or untuned percussion. The on-stage band plays to either live music or the backing CD provided.

Props and sets

We have suggested items 'drawn from the ordinary' to represent the few props required. Whatever is used, make sure it is easily brought on and off and does not weigh the show down. Keep it sparse, light and moving.

Costumes

The main actors can be in black (or brown) tights and skivvies or leotards with an item or two to signify their character. Arlecchino is a kind of master of ceremonies, making everything happen as we watch, and his/her four 'Players' assume different roles during the show to enable the action to occur.

The villagers and other minor roles can be in street clothes with simple costume additions to show their characters or can be in 'home made' costumes of paper or garbage bags.

Dance

True to Commedia we have used known folk dances as the basis of the choreography. Feel free to explore floor patterns and additions with the students.

There is an instrumental section in the song *Carnivale!* where the travelling players strut their stuff. These characters can come from the school's athletics, tumbling, gymnastics, calisthenics or aerobics teams, or can be individual students with gymnastics, juggling, baton or other 'circus' skills.

Mask

We have kept the use of mask in this production to a minimum. It is used only in the masquerade ball scene in act 3. The students can make their own masks, either worn on the face or held by a stick.

Videotape & DVDs

If you intend videotaping your own production, or making a video/DVD, please complete an application form, available from the publisher. Royalties are payable if videos or DVDs are made available (whether a fee is charged or not).

Masquerade!

Act 1 - morning

Lights down a quarter

The four PLAYERS ENTER PS, dressed in black, carrying a prop basket. They set it down CENTRE STAGE and EXIT OP

ARLECCHINO ENTERS OP dressed in black. He comes CENTRE STAGE, looks into the basket, takes out harlequin jacket and/or hat, puts them on. He then picks out a mask, looks at audience through it,

Musical sting

does exaggerated bow and addresses audience with arms outstretched

Arlecchino: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen ...

Music

... Tonight's tale concerns a fountain ... (he moves to downstage OP to his 'spot', from where he indicates with flourishes)

The PLAYERS bring on the fountain from OP, singing 'La-la, la-la ...'. Then they EXIT, two to PS and two to OP

... a palace ...

Music

Two PLAYERS bring on a free standing signpost reading TO THE PALACE from OP, singing, and place it PS, standing beside it

... a slum ...

Music

Two PLAYERS bring on a free standing signpost reading OFFAL COURT from PS, singing, and place it OP, standing beside it

... a prince ...

Music

Players go to basket, singing, as an actor dressed in black comes from OP, goes to the prop basket and is handed prince cloak, a pendant (the royal seal) and crown by the PLAYERS, which he dons. He remains by the basket

... and a pauper ...

Music

An actor dressed in black comes from PS, goes to the prop basket and is handed a pauper shawl & cap by the PLAYERS, singing, which she dons

A prince ... and a pauper ... two complete strangers ... yet ... somehow ... identical ... well, almost ...

She then takes a position OP, and he EXITS PS. The PLAYERS take the basket around to the back of the fountain

Our tale contains villagers ...

Music

VILLAGERS appear in costume from either side, singing. Some are carrying simple, hand-held props to suggest various trades, occupations or character types (eg blacksmith, shopkeeper, street-seller etc). Once in position they stand. They may move their bodies to the music but must remain in their positions - they have not gone 'into character' yet. The BEGGAR CHILDREN take positions around NICOLA

... and a band ...

Music

The BAND ENTERS OP, singing 'Pom-pom, pom, pom ...' and takes up its position in front of the fountain or to the side of the stage

... (indicates audience) an audience ... (all sing and ARLECCHINO encourages audience to join in)

... and ... (he makes a 'cut' gesture with his hands, silencing everyone)

... a BEGINNING!

The villagers each take a partner and begin to waltz around the stage as the BAND plays. Arlecchino remains in his spot

Ain't It a Beautiful Day!

Arlecchino

Welcome to Paradiso

Villagers

Beautiful day (here in the square-heh-heh-hare)

Music and life (fill the air)

Colours and dreams (here on display-hey-hey-hey)

Find what you need

In a square on a market day

Ooh-ooh, everyone sing
Whether a pauper or whether a king
Ooh-ooh, everyone say
“Ain’t it a beautiful day!”

The BEGGAR CHILDREN sit around NICOLA as she ‘holds court’ with them

Nicola

If I were Queen (**Beggar children:** *Queen for a day-hey-hey-hey*)
I would decree (*we’d obey*)
I would be wise (*gracious and fair-hair-hair-hair*)
I would decide
Together: That the world is a place to share

SCAPINO ENTERS OP *and sees* NICOLA

Ooh-ooh, everyone sing
Whether a pauper or whether a king
Ooh-ooh, everyone say
“Ain’t it a beautiful day!”

SCAPINO *goes to* NICOLA

Scapino

What are you doing
Wasting my time with your dreaming?
You should be begging

Nicola

But begging is breaking the law-aw-aw-aw

Scapino

Look at the day
There are customers waiting
Nicola - don’t forget we are poor
Now - GO!

NICOLA *and* BEGGAR CHILDREN *scatter*

Dance

The villagers waltz in pairs as the recorders and untuned percussion play

During the dancing the BEGGAR CHILDREN move around in a group, twirling and performing as they attempt to get the dancing villagers to put money in their cups. NICOLA moves away from SCAPINO but does not beg. She is sad

Meanwhile, the PLAYERS take bicycle helmets and reflective jackets from the prop basket, looking as though they are playing ‘dress-ups’. One or two EXIT OP and return with 4 brooms

Two SOLDIERS ENTER PS *and notice the* BEGGAR CHILDREN

A TAX COLLECTOR ENTERS PS *and rubs his hands in glee as he sees potential customers*

Villagers

Beautiful day (*here in the square-heh-heh-hare*)

Music and life (*fill the air*)

Merchants

We buy and sell

Band

We sing and play-hey-hey-hey

Tax collector

I take the tax

He takes coins from unimpressed merchants and the BAND

During the following chorus he hands SCAPINO a notice, which SCAPINO immediately screws up and discards

All

Everyone has a part to pay

Villagers

Ooh-ooh, everyone sing

Whether a pauper or whether a king

Ooh-ooh, everyone say

“Ain’t it a beautiful day!”

Ooh-ooh, everyone sing

Whether a pauper or whether a king

Ooh-ooh, it don’t mean a thing

But that’s OK

“Ain’t it a beautiful day!”

Soldiers

(*grabbing the* BEGGAR CHILDREN)

You’re nicked!

Everyone’s attention is turned to the BEGGAR CHILDREN. NICOLA *is horrified*

All freeze for applause. As applause ends, the SOLDIERS *take the* BEGGAR CHILDREN OFF PS, *with the villagers looking on in horror*

Soldier 1: Come on, you little urchins.

Soldier 2: Begging’s against the law.

Scene 2 immediately follows

The PLAYERS, now acting the part of GUARDS, begin shooing the villagers off OP, prodding, poking and pushing as required

Player 1: Make way for the Prince.

Player 4: Yeh, make way.

Player 2: Move along, move along.

Player 3: We want no peasants on the street. Be off with you.

Arlecchino: *(to audience)* It was the best of times, it was the worst of times ...

Player 4: *(kicking ARLECCHINO in the pants)* And that includes you.

Arlecchino: *(exiting)* You don't have to take your role TOO seriously, you know.

The PLAYERS take up their positions as guards

PRINCE NICOLO ENTERS PS, *followed by PANTALONE and LINGUINE*

Nicolo: I REFUSE to do my lessons on my birthday.

Pantalone: That's why I've brought you out here, Prince Nicolo. It's such a beautiful day and -

Nicolo: - and I STILL have to put up with Latin lessons ... on my birthday! It's not fair.

Pantalone: But I'm sure your highness will find the lessons more agreeable out here. It will be a special birthday treat. And then, tonight, we will have the Masquerade Ball in your honour. Oh, it will be such fun and -

Nicolo: *(looking around)* I thought you said we were going to the village square, Pantalone, where the commoners have their markets and the children play.

Pantalone: Indeed, sire.

Nicolo: So where are the peasants? Where is the market? Where are the children?

Pantalone: We couldn't have COMMONERS around while the royal personage is doing his lessons.

Nicolo: Well I WON'T DO THEM! That'll get you in trouble, won't it?

Pantalone: Sire!

Nicolo: Not unless you get rid of this ridiculous herd of guards. What are we expecting, anyway - the attack of the Roman army?

Pantalone: We must protect the royal personage, sire.

Nicolo: Dismiss them.

Pantalone: But sire!

Nicolo: Or I won't do my lessons.

Pantalone: But sire!

Nicolo: (*pointing PS*) They can wait over there, by the castle gate.

Pantalone: But sire!

Nicolo: Linguine can call if they are needed.

Pantalone: But sire!

Nicolo: Can't you say anything else?

Pantalone: But -

Nicolo: - Pantalone!

Pantalone: Guards! Prince Nicolo has spoken. (*He indicates and the PLAYERS (as guards) EXIT PS.*)

Nicolo: You too, Pantalone.

Pantalone: But I must protest, your highness. What would your father say? The King is not well, as you know. In fact he is most UNwell (EXITS PS).

Nicolo: Father will never know. (*To LINGUINE*) Linguine. Let us begin. (*Sarcastically*) I can hardly wait.

Linguine: Your highness should really be more respectful of your highness's studies. It is widely held that Latin is a most useful language. A most useful language, indeed.

Nicolo: To the Romans, perhaps ... to the DEAD Romans ... tell me, Linguine, did the Romans have children?

Linguine: Well of course they did, sire.

Nicolo: And were their children allowed to play games, OR did they just study Latin?

Linguine: I'm sure I don't know, sire.

Nicolo: And what about you, Linguine - were you allowed to play games when you were a child?

Linguine: Your highness, I am a royal teacher ... I was not allowed to be a child. (*He consults his books, getting ready for the lesson*)

Nicolo: (*sighs*) Oh, well ... Let us proceed. (*To audience*) What I would not give to be free of this torture ... to run and to play as commoner's children do. (*Thinking*) Hmmm ...

Linguine: ... now let me see ...

As LINGUINE reads from his book, NICOLO tiptoes out of sight around the back of the fountain

ahem ... repeat after me: veni .. vidi ... vici ... I came ... I saw ... I conquered ... your highness ... I'm waiting ... your highness? That's ... I came ... I saw ... (*Looking up*) I disappeared! ... Oh! Guards!

The PLAYERS (as guards) arrive, headed by PANTALONE

Pantalone: What is it? (*Looking around*) The Prince, where is the prince - Linguine, what have you done with the prince?

Linguine: I don't know. I don't know. He disappeared in the middle of Caesar's speech. I was just getting to the part where -

Pantalone: - I told you Latin was a stupid language. (*To PLAYERS*) Guards - search the village! (*They EXIT OP*) I hope you've also studied sorcery, teacher - we may need a little magic to save our necks from the gallows. (*He EXITS OP*).

Linguine: Perhaps we should have started with Greek. (*He EXITS PS*)

NICOLO comes from behind the fountain and checks that the coast is clear

Nicolo: At last ... freedom ... Now for some fun! (*EXITS upstage OP*)

NICOLA comes running on stage OP, fleeing her father

Scapino: (*offstage OP*) Come back here you little urchin ... When I get my hands on you I'll ... I'll ... I'll ... just you wait and see what I'll do!

NICOLA looks around for a hiding place and goes behind fountain

Scapino: (*running onstage OP*) Where are you ... where has she gone? It's no use hiding from me, Nicola. (*To audience*) She's a haughty one, that daughter of mine. (*Shouting to the empty village*) Too proud to beg are we, my little princess? Well just remember who you are and where you come from. You can hide from me ... but you can't hide from your belly. You can't hide from hunger ... or cold. And it's a cold and a hungry world for the poor.

SCAPINO begins to sing:

VOICES OF THE POOR

VILLAGERS and PLAYERS (in black) ENTER during Scapino's first verse

Scapino:

I've been a couple of places, I've seen a thing or two
I've heard plenty of rumours, I'll tell you what's true

When there's a pain in your belly, wolves are at your door
Hardly a crumb on your table, you pay for being poor

Villagers:

Hunger in the darkness, howling at your door
See us, hear us, voices of the poor

Scapino:

Born a lord of the manor, privileged by birth

Villagers:

Born a thief and a beggar, we all walk this earth

Scapino:

See the prince at his table, servants at his call

Villagers:

See the babe in the stable, crying to us all

All:

Hunger in the darkness, howling at your door
See us, hear us, voices of the poor

(During the instrumental refrain, the PLAYERS don items from the prop basket - a beggar-woman's scarf, a cloth cap, a walking stick etc)

Player 1:

I can't feed my children, I can't help them grow

Player 2:

No wood for the fire, old ones feel the cold

Player 3:

Infant in her cradle, too weak to cry out

All

Everyone is watching, the flame of hope die out

Hunger in the darkness, howling at your door
See us, hear us, voices of the poor

(The BAND plays an instrumental break on recorders/tuned percussion, and untuned percussion)

We've been a couple of places, we've seen a thing or two
We've heard plenty of rumours, we'll tell you what's true
When there's a pain in your belly, wolves are at your door
Hardly a crumb on your table, you pay for being poor

Hunger in the darkness, howling at your door
See us, hear us, voices of the poor

All EXIT, leaving SCAPINO alone on stage, in front of the fountain

Scapino: *(removing belt from trousers)* When I get my hands on you, Nicola ... I'll take my belt to you - *(His pants fall down)* You'll pay for this! *(He runs off PS holding onto trousers)*

NICOLA comes out from behind fountain

Nicola: *(to Audience)* I won't beg. It's time the poor stood up for themselves. We're people - just like the rich ... If I could be in charge - just for one day ... one day we'll share this world all together. And I won't beg!

NICOLO ENTERS UPSTAGE OP

Nicolo: I say - are you a peasant?

Nicola: What's it to you, fancy pants?

Nicolo: Shh! No one must know I'm really the ...

Nicola: Really the what?

Nicolo: Never mind. You see the thing is ... I'm looking for ... well I've heard that ... I've heard that the villagers here have a splendid time -

Nicola: *(interrupting sarcastically)* Really?

Nicolo: Yes, and they have foot races and fairs and ... and the children play all the day.

Nicola: Where have you been living - on the moon?

Nicolo: No ... er ... actually ... I've been living ... in the ... promise you'll keep this a secret? I live in the palace *(points PS)*.

Nicola: So what are you, then, a servant?

Nicolo: Actually ... and you must keep this absolutely secret ... I'm Prince Nicolo.

Nicola: And I'm Cleopatra.

Nicolo: I say! Are you doubting the Royal Word? ... Look, I can prove it. *(He takes off the royal seal hanging around his neck and gives it to her)* This ... is the royal seal.

Nicola: Well, I suppose that explains the clothes. But if you're really the prince, where's all the guards?

Nicolo: *(proudly)* I gave them the slip.

Nicola: *(getting interested)* Go on.

Nicolo: That's why I have to hurry. I may not have long before they catch me and I am very keen to find out what life is like for my subjects. You see it's my birthday and I never have any fun and -

Nicola: (*interrupting*) It's my birthday too. My parents even called me Nicola, after you.

Nicolo: (*proudly*) Really? I say, what an honour.

Nicola: It's just something poor people do. I'd better keep moving (*beginning to EXIT PS and handing the royal seal back*).

Nicolo: (*ignoring the royal seal*) No, wait ... (*gets an idea*) I say, I've a great idea. Why don't we swap places for the day?

Nicolo: Are you mad?

Nicolo: We're the same height, the same age ... even our names are similar ... and -

Nicola: - You are mad!

She is shocked and accidentally drops the royal seal in the fountain. They both bend over to retrieve it and see their faces in the water. Both slowly rise to look at each other in amazement

Nicolo: And ... look there, our reflections in the water ... we even look alike - (*to audience*) well, almost.

Nicola: There's one important difference.

Nicolo: What's that?

Nicola: You're a boy and I'm a girl.

Nicolo: Surely we could fool them for a few hours - come on! It'll be such fun - a real hoot!

Nicola: (*to audience*) In charge for one day ... I could change the world ... I could make a difference. (*To NICOLO*) Alright, you've got a deal.

NICOLA whacks NICOLO enthusiastically on the shoulder - a gesture of camaraderie that the prince is not used to. He is shocked but instantly recovers

Nicolo: Great!

They swap covering garments

Nicolo: (*taking royal seal*) I'd better keep this. We'll meet back here at sunset - just in time for the Masquerade.

Nicola: Done. (*She begins to EXIT PS*)

Nicolo: Now when does the fun begin?

Nicola: Well, there's a carnival this afternoon, in honour of your birthday, and the Travelling Players should be arriving any minute. (EXITS PS)

ARLECCHINO *comes running on OP*

Arlecchino: And here they are!

The BAND ENTERS DOWNSTAGE OP, playing the tune 'Here They Come' on untuned percussion and recorders, and take up their position by the fountain. The VILLAGERS enter, singing the song

Here They Come

Villagers

Here they come, here they come
Blow the whistle and bang the drum

Here they come, here they come
Blow the whistle and bang the drum

Here they come, here they come
Blow the whistle and bang the drum

Here they come, here they come
Blow the whistle and bang the drum

Here they come, here they come (*Carnivale*)
Blow the whistle and bang the drum

Here they come, here they come (*Carnivale*)
Blow the whistle and bang the drum

Here they come, here they come (*Carnivale*)
Blow the whistle and bang the drum

Here they come, here they come (*Carnivale*)
Blow the whistle and bang the drum

During the song, the TRAVELLING PLAYERS ENTER OP, singing. They finish the song with:

Travelling Players

We're here!