

THE FALSE TURK
in Twelve Minutes



One-act curtain raiser
in the style of the seventeenth-century
Commedia dell'Arte

Cast

The Capo Comico – Company Manager
Pedrolino – Silent Zanni
Pantalone – Vecchio
Isabella – Innamorata
Flavio – Innamorato
Franceschina – Servetta
Arlecchino – Zanni

Source

Based on several seventeenth-century scenarios

Playing time

15 minutes including the Prologue

Stage requirements

Any interior or exterior space
Approx: 4 x 3 metres minimum

Costumes

Traditional *Commedia dell'Arte*
Turkish disguise for Flavio and Arlecchino

Props

Minimal

Music

Optional, including 'Eastern' for the entrance of the Turks

Introduction

The False Turk is a suitable introduction to the *Commedia dell'Arte* where either rehearsal or performance time is limited. It also gives the actors a chance to familiarise themselves with some of the principal Masks, with the 'Italianate' type of plot, which forms the basis of most extant scenarios, and the opportunity of playing some typical *Lazzi*. For actors unfamiliar with the style it doesn't present too steep a learning curve; and the Prologue with Capo Comico and Pedrolino (in this case the stupid pre-Pierrot) gives a chance for the type of mime/clowning with which most performers are familiar, before embarking on the less familiar *Commedia* genre.

The play itself is inspired by *I Finti Turchi*⁵ and incidents to be found in several other early scenarios, but here in a vastly truncated form. In the Prologue the actors are seen briefly 'as themselves', and without their masks – a departure from the usual rule. This is done for two reasons; the dramatic one of providing an excuse for the drastic abridgement of the play, and the 'training' one of distinguishing between the naturalistic acting needed to represent 'The Players' and the bravura manner of *Commedia*.

The plot is a typical one: lovers parted by a tyrannical and avaricious father and the stratagems employed by the servants to bring the lovers together again and discomfort the offending parent. The characters are standard ones, and dressed traditionally. Pantalone wears his red pantaloons and jacket under his *zimarra*.⁶ He has the brown mask with an aquiline nose and a straggly grey beard. He is irritable, threatening, aged but by no means weak.

Isabella appears at the very height of contemporary fashion (1670). She is beautiful, elegant, rebellious – her father's daughter. Flavio is handsome, well bred, and apparently somewhat inept until his change into the Turk proves another side to his nature.

5. 'Finto' might more correctly be translated as 'fake' but this would give too much away.

6. Loose, full-length black coat.

THE PLAYS

Franceschina, here a serving woman of peasant stock, is old enough to comfort the motherless Isabella, but young enough to attract Arlecchino. Due to the extreme shortness of the play, a rounded portrayal of the characters is unlikely unless the actors have played them previously. This is particularly true of the mercurial Arlecchino. It is helpful if the actor portraying him keeps in mind Arlecchino's great devotion to his young master, Flavio, his malicious joy in playing on Pantalone's avarice, and his sense of involving the audience in the escapade.

The fact that the play itself must be completed in the twelve minutes shows the speed with which action and dialogue must be accomplished.

Scenario

Prologue

The Capo Comico, Pedrolino, Pantalone, Isabella, Flavio, Franceschina, Arlecchino.

The Capo Comico – the company manager – enters and announces the performance. No one appears, except the stupid and silent Pedrolino intent on sweeping the stage. The Capo Comico, in the hopes of filling the embarrassing stage-wait, asks him to entertain; the results give even greater embarrassment. The company, still not fully dressed and muttering among themselves drift in. Each actor is introduced by the Capo Comico, who then realises that the star performer,⁷ Arlecchino, is not among them. They tell him that he is nowhere to be found. Each player in turn offers to take on the role, until Arlecchino himself appears and asks what play they are going to perform. *The False Turk* is chosen – a play that would normally take two hours. The Capo Comico tells them that it is much too late, in fact there are only twelve minutes left. At Arlecchino's suggestion, they offer to perform it in twelve minutes.

7. From around 1680, the role of Arlecchino had become the main attraction for the public, attaining something like star status, although his part in the play was only that of a lowly servant.

THE FALSE TURK

Scene 1

Pantalone, Isabella, Flavio, Franceschina, Arlecchino.

The cast announce *The False Turk in Twelve Minutes* in unison. Isabella tells us that she is in love with Flavio, and he confirms that the passion is mutual. Pantalone separates the lovers, informing us that he forbids the liaison. He also forbids that of his maidservant Franceschina with Flavio's man, Arlecchino. He orders Flavio to leave and never to see his daughter again.

A chance remark, that he will 'lose himself in the sands of the desert' from Flavio, and a fear from Isabella that her father might even force her 'to marry a Turk if he were rich enough', give Arlecchino and Franceschina the idea for a ploy to outwit Pantalone. Flavio leaves, and Franceschina advises Isabella to pretend to submit to Pantalone's will.



'His kingdoms stretch for more than a thousand camels'

Scene 2

Pantalone, Arlecchino, Isabella, Franceschina.

Arlecchino buttonholes Pantalone, telling him of a wealthy Turk who has come to the town looking for a wife, and wants to meet Isabella. At first Pantalone is reluctant, but is tempted by Arlecchino's tales of immeasurable riches.

THE PLAYS

Pantalone tells his daughter to prepare to receive a rich suitor. She refuses at first but is persuaded by Franceschina to pretend to submit.

Scene 3

Pantalone, Isabella, Flavio, Franceschina, Arlecchino.

Flavio, disguised as the Grand Turk, enters with Arlecchino as his Eunuch. He treats Isabella as if she were a slave girl for sale in the market, and says that he will take her. Arlecchino offers to 'buy' Franceschina.

Isabella, trying to fend off the Turk's advances, pulls on his beard and realises that this is Flavio. She consents to marry the 'Turk' as long as Pantalone will give his permission there and then . . . Franceschina also gets his blessing for her marriage to the 'Eunuch'.

The impostors reveal their true identities and Pantalone passes out as the story comes to an end. The company ask for applause for completing *The False Turk* in twelve minutes.

During the applause the Capo Comico enters with Pedrolino and 'presents' his company. They all exit, Pedrolino still with his broom, being the last on stage.

Finis.



Flavio and Arlecchino
return in disguise

The False Turk – in Twelve Minutes

Prologue

The Capo Comico, Pedrolino, Pantalone, Isabella, Flavio, Franceschina, Arlecchino.

The Capo Comico – the expansive actor-manager of the Commedia company – enters with a flourish, craves our attention, bows profusely and addresses the audience.

CAPO COMICO Gentlemen, ladies – your servant Francesco Gabrielli, manager of a renowned company of comedians, who have the honour of offering for your approbation one of their acclaimed comedies. Noble gentlemen, fair ladies. The famous Nessuni Commedia Company.

Nothing happens. The Capo Comico repeats the cue. Pedrolino puts a head out from behind a wing or curtain.

Pedrolino, come here at once. At once!

Pedrolino comes forward, sweeping the stage.

(Sotto voce.) Well, where are the company? Pantalone? Flavio? Isabella? Franceschina?

*Pedrolino shakes his head and goes on sweeping.*⁸

(In his presenter's voice.) Gentleman, ladies – the irrepressible Pedrolino!

(Sotto voce.) Well, do something. Yes, you. Do some acrobatics, juggling. *(Pedrolino tries to do a trick but fails to pull it off.)* Well, dance. *(He stands as if he were preparing to do something.)* You're going to do something? I think you've already done something!

8. *Lazzi of 'Nothing will stop me'*, No. 46, page 255