



Commedia Dell'arte

The characters in *The Barber of Seville* are based on traditional characters from an early style of Italian theatre called *commedia dell'arte*. *Commedia* began in the 16th century and was a form of early improvisational theatre*. The troupe of actors – usually 10 – had a cast of characters that they put in a variety of loose plots. The actors developed specific comic business called *lazzi*** that they would improvise around. The humour was often bawdy*** and coarse. The stock characters**** were performed in half masks and included: two old men who are foolish, greedy know-it-alls (Pantalone and Il Dottore); a comic servant who is a lazy, intelligent trickster (Arlecchino); and two young lovers (Innamorati). In *The Barber of Seville*, Figaro is similar to the role of Arlecchino, Count Almaviva and Rosina are the Innamorati, Dr. Bartolo is based on Pantalone and Don Basilo is developed from Il Dottore.

The character of Figaro was a hit – partially because he provided the basis for a commentary on the social structure of pre-revolutionary France. Much of the humour in *The Barber of Seville* comes from the servant class pulling one over on the aristocracy.

* **Improvisational theatre** is a type of theatre where the acting and creating happens on the spot: there is no formal script, and often just some basic information like the setting or a prop to help set the scene.

** **Lazzi** are pieces of well-rehearsed comic action commonly used in *commedia dell'arte*. During improvised performances, *lazzi* may be used to fill time or to ensure laughter in a show (like slap-stick comedy).

*** **Bawdy** describes humour that is obscene or gross.

**** **Stock Characters** assume the stereotypes of different personalities in society.