

This free adaptation is loosely inspired by several theatrical traditions, most particularly from the comedies of Plautus (c. 254-184 B.C.), a Roman comic playwright who composed over 100 comedies, virtually all of which were inspired by Greek New Comedy sources. *Miles Gloriosus*, the short, sketchy source play central to this free adaptation, focuses on the escapades of a boastful, lecherous soldier who claims to be courageous, but is, in actuality, a coward. This character, as well as other familiar stock types depicted in the play, inspired the emergence of *commedia dell'arte* in Italy during the early Renaissance. Often improvisatory, *commedia* expanded on familiar stereotypes found in the plays of Plautus and other ancient comic writers. The stock characters emerging from *commedia* included clever servants, young lovers, and a variety of fools-befuddled old men, quack doctors and pedants, and a swaggering soldier, the Capitano. *Commedia* became a dominant theatrical form in Europe from the mid-16th to the late 18th centuries as troupes of *commedia* actors toured, influencing the greatest dramatists of those centuries-Shakespeare, Molière, Corneille, Goldoni, Lope de Vega, Beaumarchais, and many others, to create literary classics from their improvised plays.

Commedia re-emerged in the 19th century in harlequinades and pantomimes-and again in the 20th and 21st centuries- as an inspiration to writers, actors, directors, and designers (as well as artists, musicians, and poets) reaching beyond the confines of the realistic stage. For many of them, the familiar *commedia* stereotypes emerged as profound human archetypes. Pirandello, Brecht, Beckett, and other dramatists acknowledged a debt to *commedia* traditions, as well as later entertainments inspired by it, including silent film comedy, music hall, and vaudeville. Contemporary comic playwrights (and troupes like the San Francisco Mime Troupe and El Teatro Campesino) capitalized on the enduring plots and character types of *commedia*, while actors turned to the improvisatory style typical of *commedia* for inspiration. Many found in *commedia* instantly recognizable characters and a free-flowing anarchy-a lunatic brand of comic mayhem that audiences generally describe as farce. Today, in the work of Nobel Prize-winning playwright and actor Dario Fo, *commedia* offers a foundation for political and social satire. Fo has written that *commedia*'s clownish characters are "grotesque blasphemers against all our pieties. That's why we need them. They're our alter-egos."

This adaptation of *The Braggart Soldier* is indebted to the inspirations mentioned here, from Plautus to Fo, but its goal is mostly to amuse-mixing old and new while demonstrating the ways in which the ancient plots and characters permit us to see that what we laugh at-and perhaps who we are-hasn't changed much over the centuries.