



January 2015

Performing The Role Of Sylvestro In Scapino!

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PERFORMING THE ROLE OF SYLVESTRO IN *SCAPINO!*

by

Zachary C. Lee
Bachelor of Arts, Valley City State University, 2011

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

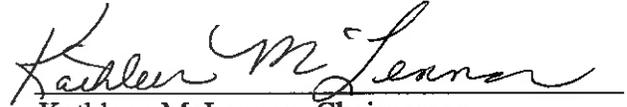
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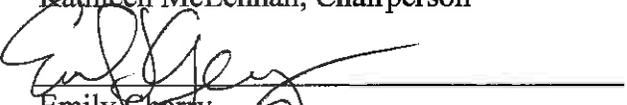
Master of Arts

Grand Forks, North Dakota

May
2015

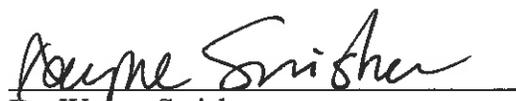
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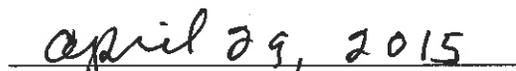

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Dr. Wayne Swisher
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April 11, 2015

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the members of my advisory committee—Kathleen McClennan, Emily Cherry, and Ali Angelone for their guidance and support during my time in the master’s program at the University of North Dakota. You have made me a better theatre practitioner while becoming dear friends. I would also like to thank my peers for being professional and creative. The time I have spent in the UND Theatre Department has been challenging, rewarding, and enjoyable.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to successfully portray the character of Sylvestro in Frank Dunlop and Jim Dale's *Scapino!*, an adaptation of Moliere's *Les Fourberies de Scapin*. In order to fully grasp the comedy of the script, an analysis of the comedy of *Scapino!* was conducted using French philosopher Henri Bergson's essay *Laughter*. This helped to find what made situations and characters funny in the script. It also influenced an analysis of the character of Sylvestro. By using Bergson's philosophies and applying them to the research, the third chapter illustrates that the rehearsal process of *Scapino!* has been successful and the production promises to be a hit.

CHAPTER I

HISTORY AND PLAY ANALYSIS

I have been given the opportunity to play the character of Sylvestro in the University of North Dakota's 2015 spring production of *Scapino!* by Frank Dunlop and Jim Dale. The purpose of my research is to take on my character to the best of my abilities. In order to take on the role of Sylvestro, I must first analyze the script's comedy as a foundation to approach the character. The methodology of my analysis will be based on French Philosopher Henri Bergson's essay *Laughter* (1900). Bergson's analysis focuses on the process of comedy by describing the elements that make up a comic situation and a comic character.

Scapino! brings elements of Commedia del 'Arte to contemporary times. Adapted from a Moliere piece into then present day Naples in 1970, it contains Moliere's original story based on a commedia dell'arte character with a twist of singing, physical comedy, and audience interaction. It has been suggested that the script was essentially a vehicle for Jim Dale to carry the show (Production Book, 14).

For the purposes of this analysis I will focus on three elements of comic situations and three elements of comic characters in the play. In the first chapter, I will use these six elements to analyze the play as a whole. In the second chapter, I will analyze the character of Sylvestro. In the third chapter I will describe how this analysis may be applied to the rehearsal process. The third chapter will report to what degree this analysis

did or did not prove useful in the rehearsal process.

In 1671, after making enemies with his satirical comedies of *Tartuffe* and *The Misanthrope*, Moliere was forced to write something less offensive. He wrote *Les Fourberies de Scapin* or *The Double Dealing of Scapin* during a time when the Italian Commedia dell'Arte companies were immensely successful. Commedia dell'Arte productions at the time consisted of stock characters that followed a loosely structured plot allowing the performers to improvise their usual gags. As many Paris theatre companies were fearful of the Commedia's success, Moliere conjured the idea to use their art form for his own theatre. He heightened the language and tightened the construction of the story. Unfortunately for Moliere, the play was not an initial success. He lost the patronage of King Louis XIV the following year, and he did not show *Les Fourberies de Scapin* again. He died the year after. Although not an initial success, the play went on to be successful in Europe as it was one of the favorites of the Comedie Francaise repertoire (Production Book, 14).

Frank Dunlop adapted Moliere's *Les Fourberies de Scapin* into a new version entitled *Scapino!* for the University College in London twenty-two years before it opened on Broadway. It was then invited to be presented at the Edinburgh Festival where it was well-received. After a decade of not performing *Scapino!* again, Dunlop took his Pop Theatre group for the Edinburgh festival in the late sixties. As a result of his work with Pop Theatre group and plays like *Scapino!*, Dunlop was asked to join the National Theatre of Great Britain as Executive Director where he commissioned a theatre geared to young people called the Young Vic. This theatre without pretenses enticed people who did not usually go to the theatre into the door. It was not as formal or expensive as West

End theatres. Under this company, *Scapino!* would thrive with Jim Dale playing the role of Scapino in 1970. (Production book, 17).

Throughout its different runs, *Scapino!* has been very well received by critics. The *New York Times* box score that gives critical reaction to newly opened shows gave *Scapino!* at the Levine Theatre 13 favorable reviews with no negative or opposing reviews (Production Book, 17). Edith Oliver for the *The New Yorker* raved, “The production is a glorious cornucopia of every kind of comedy, with no theatrical tradition left untapped” (Oliver).

The story remains the same as Moliere’s, but Dunlop added to his original adaptation. He claims, “We added music, and it got bigger and bigger and bigger through rehearsals. So much so that, at the moment, about two-thirds is close to Moliere, and then there is another third which is improvised additions and music” (Production Book, 25). They chose to add a song that seemingly has no connection to the story. This song is sung by the cast at the beginning, near the middle, and at the end. The lyrics of the song *Minestrone Macaroni* appear to be taken directly out of the menu of an Italian Restaurant. There may have been two ideas behind using this ridiculous song. First, it could have been used to help specify the setting of the play in Italy. Secondly, it may have been added to showcase the talents of the actor who originally played Scapino- Jim Dale. Leah D. Frank of the *New York Times* suggests that Dale’s phenomenal talent helped to make the show a success. She asserts that Dale “was hailed as a show-business phenomenon for his multitalented performance. He sang, danced, did acrobatics, played guitar, juggled and just plain stole the show” (Frank).

With Dale being credited on the *Scapino!* script as one of the playwrights, one can assume that this may be explanation for the song that bookends the story without adding or relating to it. The stage directions state that “Scapino enters café balcony playing second measure of ‘Minestrone Macaroni’” (*Scapino!*, 5). It allowed Dale to showcase his guitar playing and singing abilities.

Aside from the song, the show ends with Scapino addressing the audience. Although the fourth wall is broken throughout the show, the interaction that Scapino has with the audience at the end is unrelated to the story. He jokes around about pantomiming instruments to the song and threatens to expose the three people that he claimed were not enjoying themselves during the production. Scapino asserts, “There are three people among you who are hating every minute of this” (*Scapino!*, 85). He goes on to say that it is okay and the cast will continue making fools of themselves until they stop and point at the non-participatory audience members to get up and hum “Minestrone, Macaroni” on their own. This playful threat appears to be a final plea to get the audience involved in the production and to enjoy it. These additions not only add time to Moliere’s short script but can be attributed to Dunlop’s notion of theatre for young people.

These additions add some fun to the spectacle of the performance, but they do not affect Moliere’s original storyline from *Fourberies de Scapin* which stays the same in this adaptation. Multiple story lines make a difficult analysis of the play. Therefore, the analysis will include a summary of the story. An organizational chart of characters is depicted in Figure 1 for reference.

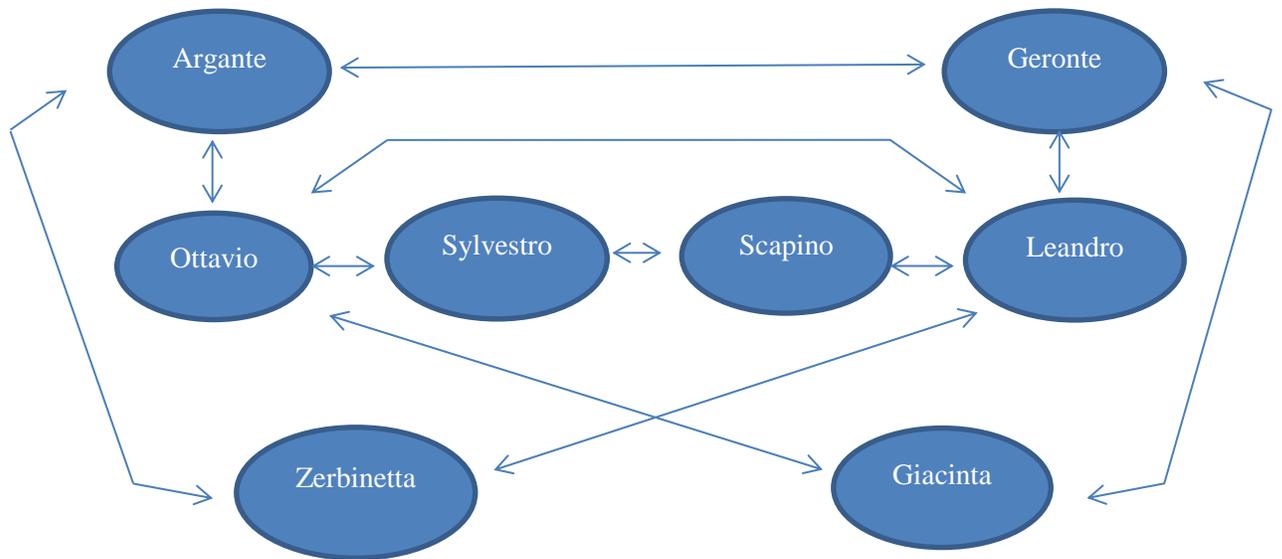


Figure 1. Chart of *Scapino!* Relationships. This chart will help to keep the relationships of *Scapino!* in order.

Scapino! deals with class struggle and mistaken identity. The main conflict is between the two old misers—Argante and Geronte and the servant Scapino. Argante and Geronte are the protagonists. As stock characters in commedia they would be called padroni—miserly rich men at the top of the hierarchy (Longman, 9). They want their boys to marry the right kind of woman in order to keep their family names strong. Although the lovers-- Leandro and Ottavio wish to defy their fathers and marry the ones they love, it is Scapino who is the antagonist. Scapino is a zanni—a trusty servant from the Commedia tradition who the lovers employ to solve their issues (Longman, 9). He is the one who actually plans and incorporates the schemes against the fathers' wishes to allow the young men to marry. He wants to trick the fathers in order to make his friends happy and satisfy his deceitful urges. The intrusion occurs when, hearing the news of his father's early return, Ottavio goes to Scapino to beg him to help stop his father from breaking up his new marriage.

Scapino uses his quick wits and his best friend Sylvestro to trick the fathers into giving him the funds the lovers require to live happily with their new significant others. By the end of the first act, all seems well as the lovers have the money that they need. However, Scapino's thirst for revenge on Geronte causes him to abuse the old man by hiding him in a sack and beating him with a sausage. The climax occurs when Leandro and Ottavio's new lovers are found to be victims of mistaken identity. Giacinta was the girl Ottavio was to marry all along and Zerbinetta turned out to be a long lost daughter of Argante. Through some convincing, The misers forgive Scapino for his trespasses and they all are happy.

Why is it Funny?

A key element to this production is the comedy. The script, much like a commedia script, is more of an outline than a complete text. It is a simple storyline that allows the director and cast to add as much of their ideas as they can imagine. Jim Dale claims "*Scapino!* is not a triumph of feeling or emotion. It's not felt; it's choreographed" (Production Book, 40). This play is not about feeling for a character, it is about the comedy. John Simon from *New York Magazine* noted, "*Scapino!* is funny because it gives the directors and actors full scope for weaving their grace notes and cadenzas around a simple, basic comic line: it provides archetypal characters and situations that coax the last drop of ingenuity from their interpreters" (Simon).

The scripted text in itself may not be particularly funny. It is a comedy of situations that requires the actors to work together to extract the comedy. Jim Dale stressed "*Scapino!* is a showcase for ensemble acting" (Production Book, 46). He describes the play as ten thousand moments. The Young Vic company incorporated

whatever specific talents that the actors in the company had to offer whether it was juggling, music, dancing, or tricks. Each actor brought their own talents to the show.

In order to find the comedy in *Scapino!* it was imperative to look at some criticism on comedy and why we as humans laugh at things. This led me to Henri Bergson's studies. French philosopher Henri Bergson lived in France 200 years after Moliere. His writings of philosophy won him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1927 (*Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia*). In his 1901 essay *Laughter*, Bergson questions the human trait of laughter and provides answers for why we as humans laugh. He suggests that laughter and the comic spirit is more important than just entertaining audiences. He questions, "Begotten of real life and akin to art, should it not also have something of its own to tell us about art and life?" (Bergson, 62). He posits that the comic represents an imperfection in society and laughter is the corrective. In the essay he describes what he believes makes situations and characters comic. In order to find the comedy in *Scapino!*, I will analyze the play using three elements of Bergson's idea of what makes situations comic and three elements of what makes a character comic.

What Makes Situations Comic?

Bergson does not try to define the comic spirit but rather regards it as a living thing that has patterns. He suggests that humans are pliable and adaptable creatures. They have a fluidity as they live their daily lives. When this fluidity is upset laughter occurs. Bergson states, "Any arrangement of acts and events is comic which gives us, in a single combination, the illusion of life and the distinct impression of a mechanical arrangement" (Bergson, 105). Three elements of a comic situation that Bergson describes in *Laughter* that are prevalent in *Scapino!* are mechanical inelasticity, repetition, and inversion.

Mechanical Inelasticity

Mechanical inelasticity occurs when someone's fluidity is disrupted. This can happen naturally or artificially. A man walking down the street will not be funny to an observer because he is moving fluidly and acting naturally. Neither will be a man that, walking down the street, decides to sit down. However, a man who trips over his own foot and falls to the ground will be comic. This disrupts the fluidity naturally. The man is a victim of chance that he miscalculated his steps and ended up on the ground. It can also be comic if the man trips because someone has spread out a bag of marbles underneath him. This disrupts the fluidity artificially. The man is now a victim to the person who rolled the marbles under his foot.

In *Scapino!* much of the mechanical elasticity comes artificially and it usually happens at the hands of Scapino. Three examples of mechanical elasticity are comparisons that Bergson makes to children's toys: Jack-in-the-box, Dancing Jack, and Snowball.

The Jack-in-the-box

The Jack-in-the-box refers to the classic children's toy. Bergson proposes that when a character acts like a jack-in-the-box, we laugh. He asserts, "It is a struggle between two stubborn elements, one of which, being simply mechanical, generally ends by giving in to the other, which treats it like a plaything" (Bergson, 106). This comic element is found very clearly, and literally, in the scene between Scapino and Geronte where Geronte is hidden in the sack.

Scapino tells Geronte that men are after him so he has to hide in a nearby sack. Scapino pushes Geronte in the sack, then jams Geronte's umbrella in the sack after him.

This results in a yelp from Geronte as the point of the umbrella has undoubtedly stabbed him. As Geronte is in the sack, Scapino pretends he is a villain giving himself a mighty beating that the sack also falls victim to. At the end of every beating, Geronte reflects the imagery of a Jack-in-the-box as he screams out in pain from the brute giving him a beating. This scene also uses a familiar process in comedy- Repetition. Once the next imaginary villain comes, Geronte is pushed into the bag again with the stab of the umbrella to follow. He is beaten and he pops out again screaming. The third time, however, when crammed into the sack, Geronte is sure to pull the umbrella in with him to avoid being pricked. The situation ends with Geronte sticking his head out unexpectedly to see Scapino making the voice of a General of a squad of soldiers. This image also reflects the classic action of the Jack-in-the-box toy (*Scapino!*, 67-72). The mechanical inelasticity of the Jack-in-the-box example is Scapino inflicting pain on Geronte. Geronte is trying to hide in the sack from the bandits and is constantly getting beaten by a sausage and stabbed with an umbrella which disrupts his fluidity. The fact that we laugh at Geronte instead of feel sorry for the old man makes it comedy.

The Dancing-jack

The Dancing-jack refers to when a character unknowingly is being used as a puppet to do another character's bidding. Bergson posits, "The transition is easily made, from the Dancing-jack which a child works with a string, to Geronte and Argante manipulated by Scapin" (Bergson, 111). He is referring to the characters in Moliere's *Fourberies de Scapin*, but the same is true in the Dunlop and Dale version. Throughout the play Scapino is using people to his own advantage to get what he wants. When he tricks Geronte and Argante into paying thousands of lire, they are absolutely under his

control. They completely believe his deception and are willing to pay the money to protect themselves and their sons. The same is true for his manipulation of Sylvestro. He gets the nervous fellow to act as a dangerous and vicious lout.

The comedy in this scenario comes from knowing the intentions of each character. The audience knows that Scapino wants the money from the two fathers and they know it is a deception. With the deception of Argante, Scapino tries to convince him that he will save money and even profit from paying money to Giacianta's make believe brother. When this does not work, Scapino brings Sylvestro in to act as the gangster brother. This scares Argante into paying the money. Scapino offers to take the money to the thug but Argante refuses at first preferring to see what happens to his money. Scapino questions Argante's trust and tells him if he cannot be trusted then someone else can do his dirty work. By the end of the scheme Argante is begging Scapino to take his money.

In the case of Geronte, Scapino is able to convince him that Leandro was in danger of being kidnapped. When the miser finally agreed to pay up to save his son he handed the 500 thousand lire to Scapino. After Scapino already has the money, he calls Geronte over and convinces him that he did not pay the money. Although he just paid, Geronte is totally under Scapino's control and hands him his entire wallet (*Scapino*, 52-56). It is funny to watch the two fathers change their motives to save themselves from harm that is completely imaginary. The mechanical inelasticity of the dancing Jack is another case where the fluidity is disrupted artificially. Scapino deceives the men from acting naturally to becoming more mechanical because they fear what is going to happen if they do not provide the money.

The Snowball

The third comic element in situation that Bergson describes is the Snowball. He suggests that it is “an effect which grows by arithmetical progression, so that the cause, insignificant at the outset, culminates by a necessary evolution in a result as important as it is unexpected” (Bergson, 113). Much like a snowball rolling down a hill and increasing in size, these situations build from an unimportant action which keeps affecting things until it becomes a sizeable problem. Another analogy he refers to is pushing over a row of toy soldiers. As the first toy soldier wavers, it would seem insignificant by itself. However, with the entire row of soldiers behind it, the first toy soldier knocks over the toy soldier behind it and does not stop until the entire row is sprawled out on the floor.

This snowball element occurs in the first act when Leandro thinks that Scapino has betrayed him by telling his father that he is married to Zerbinetta. This begins as a minor infraction that Scapino committed to Leandro. He wants Scapino to confess to what he told Geronte. As Geronte heard the rumor from Argante, Scapino is clueless as to what information Leandro is trying to pry out of him. Leandro picks up a sausage and tried to hit Scapino with it, Scapino dodges the blow and it Ottavio is hit. This frustrates Leandro causing him to chase Scapino with Ottavio attempting to break up the altercation. Scapino is still questioning Leandro of what he did when Leandro kicks him into the boat. Leandro orders him to confess and chases him stage right onto a chair at the table. Up on the chair like a cornered dog, Scapino confesses to drinking a barrel of wine that was given to Leandro as a gift. This makes Leandro angrier, but it was not the confession he wanted. He swings at Scapino, misses and hits Ottavio again on the backswing. Even more frustrated at this point, he chases Scapino through the water and into the audience. In the audience, Scapino confesses to keeping the gold watch that

Leandro gave him to give to the gypsy girl. This makes Leandro very mad and he chases Scapino into the backstage area. As Leandro is searching for him, he stumbles upon Scapino backing out of the café. At the exact moment that Leandro tries to hit him, Scapino jumps into the café as Ottavio is coming out and the blow once again lands on Ottavio. Leandro chases Scapino behind the set, up the ladder, and onto a hanging rope. As he is hanging there, he reveals himself to be ghost that scared Leandro into almost breaking his neck a few weeks ago. In a rage, he hits Scapino with the sausage this time landing on its intended victim and causing Scapino to fall off the rope (*Scapino!*, 37-41).

When Leandro initially goes after Scapino he is mad about what Scapino relayed to his father. This was enough for Leandro wanting to hit him. As Scapino dodges the blows and escapes him, Leandro is mad that he keeps hitting Ottavio by accident. The situation snowballs with Leandro's aggression as Scapino keeps revealing tricks that he has played on Leandro. As he chases Scapino, hears the deceits, and hits his friend on accident he is fuming when he finally corners Scapino on the rope and lands the blow making it all the more fulfilling for Leandro and funny for the audience. The effect should be like that of toy soldiers. As you give a light push to the first soldier soon the momentum picks up as the entire army of toy soldiers come crashing down. Leandro comes in peeved ready to scold Scapino. By the end of the scene, Ottavio is battered, Leandro is outraged, Scapino is in more trouble and everyone is out of breath. It also introduces the weapon of the sausage that is repeated in use throughout the show.

Repetition

The second element of comic situations is repetition, or the recurrence of words or situations. Bergson admits that repetition is a staple in classic comedy. But why is repetition funny? Bergson claims:

“The truth is that a really living life should never repeat itself. Wherever there is repetition or complete similarity, we always suspect some mechanism at work behind the living” (Bergson, 82).

Things being repeated are funny because repetition is unnatural. *Scapino!* uses repetition in words and in situations throughout the course of the play like the repetition of the sausage. One example of the repetition of words occurs when Scapino is scamming Geronte out of his money. Scapino has unfolded his false story about Leandro being abducted by a Turk after they were lured onto his boat. As Scapino continues to unfold details about the ultimatum and the ransom due, Geronte keeps exclaiming, “What the devil was he doing on board that boat?” (*Scapino!*, 54-55). Instead of thinking ahead and deciding what he will do, Geronte gets more angry as he repeats the same phrase as Scapino tells him bad news. This repetition makes Geronte comic because it shows that he is focusing on the cause of the problem instead of the solution. This reveals him as a miser because the solution to the problem is paying thousands of lire.

Scapino! also uses repetition of situation. Throughout the play the running gag is Scapino out-witting people for his gain. First, he scams Argante and Geronte separately for the money to satisfy their sons. In the second act, Scapino tricks Geronte into hiding in a bag and thinking that he is being beaten up by criminals. Finally, Scapino tricks the two fathers into forgiving him by making them believe that he has been in an accident and that he is near death. This use of repetition in words and in situation is a comic

element that Moliere knew that carried through to the adaption. Bergson, who references the *Fourberies de Scapin* script in which he was familiar, suggests that Geronte repeats “What the deuce did he want in that galley?” which is a different phrase but similar to what it was adapted to in *Scapino!* which is “What the devil was he doing on board that boat?” Because the plot is unchanged, that would mean Moliere had originally included the repetition of situations. These comic elements are timeless and continue being funny for generations.

The ridiculous Italian menu song, *Minestrone Macaroni*, is also repeated throughout the show. It not only bookends the show at the beginning and the end but it also breaks up the scenes between the plotting of revenge on Argante and Geronte and the actual deception of them. If this song is not already funny itself for being goofy, it will be very funny repeated three times. They say that there is a rule of three for comedy, and Dunlop tends to follow that in his repetition.

Inversion

The final element of comic situations from Bergson’s essay that is used in *Scapino!* is inversion. Bergson suggests that any time that roles are reversed it is funny. He continues, “Thus, we laugh at the prisoner at the bar lecturing the magistrate; at a child presuming to teach its parents; in a word, at everything that comes under the heading of “topsyturvydom”” (Bergson, 121). This “topsyturvydom” tends to occur in situations in *Scapino!*

Scapino works for Geronte as a guardian. Geronte and Argante are both wealthy old misers. Inversion occurs when Scapino is scamming the two old misers. It is funny that Scapino, a servant, would treat his boss or someone of the higher class the way that

he does. Scapino tricks Argante into thinking that Sylvestro is Giacinta's thug brother. We then see Argante quake in fear when earlier we saw Argante cause the same reacting in Sylvestro. This inversion of the servant and the master is comic because the roles are reversed.

In a way, it is a whole play based on inversion. Both of the young men have taken lovers that their fathers do not approve of. They put in an egregious amount of effort in order to stay with their newfound lovers when, in the spirit of Moliere, there has been mistaken identity and they have been with girls that meet their fathers' approval. The girls go from being despised by the fathers. They think the girls are scum—a gypsy and a homeless girl-- who are not of name, unworthy of their sons' hands in marriage until they find that they are the lost daughters of each of the fathers. With this discovery they are welcomed with open arms and only Scapino is in trouble.

What Makes Characters Comic?

Bergson's idea of what makes characters comic is an amalgamation of attitudes, gestures and movements that reveal the mechanical nature of a person. These traits show inattention to others and add up to unsociability. He suggests, "Unsociability in the performer and insensibility in the spectator—such, in a word, are the two essential conditions [of becoming a comic character]" (Bergson, 154-155). In no way is the character to arouse fear, sympathy or pity in the spectator, otherwise it will not be comic. The unsociability of the performer comes from his unawareness or callousness to social life. Bergson states, "Any individual is comic who automatically goes his own way without troubling himself about getting into touch with the rest of his fellow beings"

(Bergson, 147). Three traits that make up this unsociability in *Scapino!* in which Bergson notes are rigidity, automatism, and absentmindedness.

Rigidity

Rigidity is standing firm about a belief or a virtue unflinchingly even when challenged. Bergson claims, “A flexible vice may not be so easy to ridicule as a rigid virtue. It is *Rigidity* that society eyes with suspicion” (Bergson, 150). As long as it is not arousing fear, sympathy or pity, a character that has this inflexible rigidity can be comic. Geronte has this rigidity in *Scapino!* He is worried about his money over everything else. When Scapino is scamming him out of his money by telling him the story of his son’s abduction by a nameless Turk, Geronte believes him entirely. Although Geronte believes the story and has the funds the entire time, he will not pay the ransom. He suggests that Scapino swap places with Leandro instead. This would endanger Scapino instead of his son and save him money. As Scapino pries, Geronte misleads Scapino into thinking that he is going to reveal a hiding place for his money and then tells Scapino to sell his mattress which is worth nothing. Scapino continues to plead and Geronte tries to bargain with Scapino about the price the imaginary Turk set. With time running out, Geronte finally reveals that he has the money and says he will pay. However, he tries to walk off with the money before Scapino stops him and makes him hand it over (*Scapino!*, 52-56). Geronte’s greed is an example of rigidity. He would rather Scapino die in order to save money. With a two hour ultimatum, he bargains with Scapino instead of paying which puts his son’s life in danger. However, as spectators, we know that no one is in real danger so the rigidity of Geronte is comic.

Automatism

Automatism is when a person acts like a machine. Bergson suggests, “What is essentially laughable is what is done automatically” (Bergson, 154). It is when acts are committed without thinking. This automatism can be involuntary gestures or unconscious remarks. Sylvestro has some moments of automatism in *Scapino!* After Argante and Geronte have heard about the tricks that Scapino and Sylvestro played, Argante calls on Sylvestro to confront him. Sylvestro is submissive and scared so when Argante asks, “So, you and that other rascal Scapino have conspired together to cheat me, and my son’s in it, too. Do you think I’m going to stand for it?” Sylvestro nervously replies “Yes!” and then quickly corrects himself, “No!” (*Scapino!*, 75). Perhaps subconsciously Sylvestro knew that Scapino and he would escape punishment unscathed and that informed his initial answer, but he knew that was not the answer that Argante wanted to hear. As Argante continues to berate Sylvestro, he announces, “I’m not going to be made a fool of” in the same automatic fashion, Sylvestro responds, “Yes...er...No!” correcting himself more quickly (*Scapino!*, 76). His impulse to respond with “Yes!” is an example of automatism and turns it into a comic moment.

Absentmindedness

Absentmindedness is similar to automatism in that a character has an inattentive disposition to the surrounding world. Bergson posits, “Absentmindedness is always comical. Indeed, the deeper the absentmindedness, the higher the comedy” (Bergson, 155). He goes on to say that systematic absentmindedness is one of the most comical things comprehensible. When a character is so passionate about something that they are continuously oblivious to their own actions it is comical. Sylvestro provides an example of absentmindedness. After Scapino convinces him, Sylvestro passionately plays a

criminal character to frighten Argante. He is very convincing at being threatening, but he bumps into a chair near the beginning. He is overcome with passion that he does not look where he is going. He continues to frighten Argante and finishes with an impressive display of threats. As he walks away he bumps into a bench. Thinking it was human, Sylvestro breaks his mobster character and apologizes to the inanimate object. When he sees that it was only a bench, he jumps back into his mobster character and hits the bench with the chain he is carrying. He was so caught up in passionately playing the role of a mobster that he was unable to pay attention to his body. His absentmindedness is comical as he apologizes to a bench.

Scapino! promises to be a very funny production which depends on comic situations and characters rather than just the talents of one outstanding performer. It will be a very physical show that will rely on smart actors working together to play up the comedy. The script for the show may be called a blueprint. The comedy will depend on the physical action of not only Scapino, but the entire cast. The rehearsal process will be focused on creating that physical action in situation and character.

CHAPTER II

SYLVESTRO

Sylvestro plays a large part in the first act of the show. He helps to voice the exposition and move along the story of Ottavio and Argante. When Ottavio is giving a long-winded explanation of why he is in trouble to Scapino, Sylvestro barges in and gives the truncated version. This fast forwards the story of Ottavio and Argante so that Scapino can begin his tricks. In the same fashion, he helps speed up the process of getting the money out of the old miser. When Argante is giving him resistance to paying the money, Scapino signals Sylvestro to enter the scene as the gangster character that they have fashioned. This *Godfather*-esque character frightens Argante into paying the money that Ottavio needs to live with Giacinta. Sylvestro plays a minor role in the second act. He tries to stop Scapino from taking unnecessary risks and nearly falls victim to a failed ruse.

Sylvestro is a unique character because he is summoned to portray a completely different character within the play. For the actor, this means that one gets to analyze and discover who Sylvestro is as a person and how that differentiates physically and vocally from the character that he plays to intimidate Argante. In order to do this, I must examine the “real” Sylvestro and then figure out how the character he plays differs.

Who is the “Real” Sylvestro?

A character analysis enables the actor to engage with the script to fully flesh out the character. In order to get a better understanding of who Sylvestro is, it important to

ask questions pertaining to the physical and emotional aspects of the character.

Answering these questions will help discover who the character of Sylvestro is.

Relationships

Sylvestro's true character can be determined by his relationship and interactions with the people around him. There are three important people in Sylvestro's life: Ottavio, Scapino, and Argante. Sylvestro has been employed by Argante to be Ottavio's guardian. Sylvestro's task was to watch over Ottavio while his father was away and prevent him from getting into mischief. With this task he has failed. Ottavio has married Giacinta who he has fallen madly in love with and otherwise would not be able to be intimate. Now that Ottavio's father, Argante, is back they are both in trouble. Argante has arranged for Ottavio to marry a daughter of Geronte. Ottavio is in trouble for marrying someone against his father's will and Sylvestro is in trouble for allowing him. For this reason they both look to Scapino for help. The relationships between these three characters and Sylvestro are all important but considerably different from one another. As Ottavio's guardian, Sylvestro should have power over him. That situation would call for Sylvestro to provide guidance to Ottavio. His relationship with Scapino would suggest equality. They are coworkers who are also friends. Neither should have power over the other. Sylvestro's relationship with Argante is that of an employee to a boss. Argante has the power to punish Sylvestro and make him lose his job.

Ottavio

Sylvestro's title of guardian implies some seniority or maturity over Ottavio, but this is not so in their relationship. Sylvestro has no guidance to provide Ottavio when he asks for it. In the first scene, Ottavio is worried about his father's wrath

as he has recently returned. He is vocalizing his worries as Sylvestro parrots everything he says by repeating what he says. After Ottavio commands him to stop, he asks how to get out of the mess he has gotten himself into. Sylvestro replies, “I’m just as much in the mess as you are. I could do with a bit of advice myself” (*Scapino!*, 9). This suggests that Sylvestro is in the same predicament as Ottavio and is worried more about himself. There is no leadership that Sylvestro can provide. Ottavio asks for advice again shortly after and Sylvestro still has none.

Aside from the lack of leadership to offer Ottavio, the stage directions hint at Sylvestro allowing himself to put up with physical abuse from Ottavio. When Ottavio demands that Sylvestro stop parroting everything that he says he hits the table (*Scapino!*, 9). This intimidating gesture is one that has been passed down from his father. Later on we see Argante use this gesture to instill fear in Sylvestro. As Ottavio pleads with Sylvestro to help him get out of trouble, he jumps across the stream and grabs Sylvestro by the neck. As Ottavio questions, “What can I do? What can I do?” he almost pushes Sylvestro into the stream. Sylvestro asserts, “I can’t swim” to get him to stop (*Scapino!*, 10). This suggests that Sylvestro is pushed around by Ottavio and could be one of the main reasons that he was not able to detour him from getting married against his father’s wishes.

Scapino

Sylvestro is helpless. He needs Scapino to fix his troubles for him so that he will not get beaten by Argante. Sylvestro praises Scapino’s abilities in order to get his help. He admits, “I realize that I haven’t been blessed with your brains...And that I haven’t got your genius for getting mixed up with the law” (*Scapino!*, 16). Even though they hold the

same position, it is clear that Sylvestro, as well as Ottavio, look up to Scapino and his quick wits. He is able to manipulate people and get out of trouble. It also suggests that Sylvestro is not very bright and definitely slow-witted. Sylvestro looks at himself as inferior to Scapino's intellect which indicates a self-confidence issue. Sylvestro is not a problem solver like Scapino. He is a passive character that relies on others.

Sylvestro, just like everyone else, looks up to Scapino. In his book, Frank Dunlop claims that the character who plays Carlo is always Scapino's understudy. He reasons, "Carlo is in fact a rather poorer, seedier, dirtier version of Scapino" (Production Book, 36). I agree with this notion and I posit my own: Sylvestro is a cowardly version of Scapino. He admires Scapino's trickery abilities, and he wishes that he could do the same himself, but he lacks the wit and abilities. Because he lacks these abilities, he clings to Scapino as his best friend to live vicariously through him. Even through moderate abuse from Scapino, Sylvestro will do anything to hold onto him. He is his one and only. Scapino and Sylvestro are yin and yang. Scapino is athletic, sharp, and works hard to deceive people to get what he wants. Sylvestro is stagnant, slow witted, and believes that things will fall into place with little effort from himself.

Argante

Sylvestro fears Argante's wrath. He tells Ottavio, "I can see a thunderstorm of belts on the ear bursting on me" when referring to the pain that Argante will likely inflict upon him (*Scapino!*, 9). This fear is justified as Argante walks in livid about the situation. He is visibly angry and he bangs his fists on the table as he promises consequences for the young man and his guardian. He is upset with Sylvestro for not doing what he was contracted to do. Sylvestro fears Argante because he is his boss and controls his financial

stability. He is not necessarily physically intimidating, but the hierarchy is what causes Sylvestro's fear.

Sylvestro jumps in the scene to advise the audience that Argante is “not good natured, not at all good natured” (*Scapino!*, 29). Scapino agrees and Argante even agrees that he is not a good natured fellow. Argante is Sylvestro's single obstacle in *Scapino!*. He is the only one keeping Sylvestro from doing what he wants. If Argante did not return, Sylvestro would get to remain in his comfortable state with no worries in the world.

Through the relationship of Sylvestro to these three characters, we get a better understanding of who he is. He can be characterized as a slacker who is about to get his comeuppance for his lackadaisical nature but who is unwilling to suffer the consequences. He depends on others to keep him out of trouble. It is this unwillingness to withstand punishment and his loyalty to Scapino that makes Sylvestro agree to playing a part in Scapino's ruse.

Physical Attributes

When Argante bids Sylvestro to go find his son he uses the term “pear-shape.” This would suggest that Sylvestro holds some extra weight in his waist, stomach and backside. The physical shape of a pear would match Sylvestro's motivation and work ethic. Sylvestro is a character of inaction. Often times, he is sitting back listening while Scapino is pulling a trick or the lovers are panicking about their situation. He is very much worried about his own safety and well-being without putting any of the work in. That is why, right away when Ottavio comes begging for help, Sylvestro pawns the work off onto Scapino. Perhaps he really does not have the intellect to pull off such a scam, but

I would challenge that he does not want to put in the effort and take the risk of getting mixed up with the law.

Emotional Psychological Behavior

Sylvestro is a man who does not have a calm collective personality to get through challenging situations like Scapino does. He is a man of habit. When events disrupt his comfort zone, he becomes more and more nervous. This is exactly what happens starting at the beginning of the play. News breaks that Argante is back and Sylvestro knows that he is in trouble because he did not do his single responsibility—watch over Leandro and prevent him from making any foolish mistakes. Argante's entrance marks a consistent growth in his anxiety and fear. His boss is furious with him and he fears losing his favor with Argante but more importantly he fears his wrath. Argante makes Sylvestro jump and quake with fear.

As a man of habit, the act of playing the thug is way outside of his comfort zone. He only does it out of fear of being in trouble with Argante and out of his trust for Scapino. He is also worried for Scapino's well-being. Before they exit to practice the gangster character, Sylvestro warns, "just as long as you don't get mixed up with the law" (*Scapino!*, 31). This is referring to Scapino's past troubles with the law. Not only does Sylvestro have himself to worry about, he is also worried about Scapino.

After the deceptions were enacted on the two misers successfully, Sylvestro is finally able to relax. When intermission comes along, he is back into his comfort zone. This lasts only shortly until Scapino wishes to cause more harm to Geronte. Sylvestro worries that this is an unnecessary risk. When the deed goes wrong and Scapino is discovered deceiving Geronte, things quickly make Sylvestro anxious once again.

Argante and Geronte confer and discover that Scapino has tricked them both. After they leave, Sylvestro comes on and begs, "Please, God, don't let them find out I was mixed up in all of this" (*Scapino!*, 76). He is a bundle of nerves, comically of course, that has been through more stress than ever before. At this moment, he resorts to calling out to a God that is unfamiliar to him. He does not find real relief from his anxiety until the climax when it is discovered that the lovers were married to the correct people all along.

Moral Analysis

Ethically, Sylvestro walks the line of ethical and unethical action. In act one he is a catalyst for Scapino to come out of his retirement of scheming to help Ottavio and himself to get out of trouble. He also implores Scapino to trick Argante into paying money so that the two men can support themselves and pay off their bills. This action is unethical in that he talked Scapino into deceiving an old man for immunity from punishment and for financial gain. The money they received could be considered stolen. It could be argued that urging this deception was justified and ethical because Ottavio and Leandro are in true love with their significant others and their fathers are making them marry others against their will. However, Sylvestro does not care about that aspect in the least. All he knows is that he will be poor and in physical pain by the hands of Argante if the issue is not resolved.

In act two, Sylvestro finds himself in a similar moral dilemma. Scapino wants revenge on Geronte for the troubles he gave Scapino in tricking him out of his money. For Scapino the stakes are the same as before. He holds all the risk. However, at this point Sylvestro discourages the scheme because it does not benefit him and can only bring about trouble. As Sylvestro is always looking out for himself, I do not think that he

has a moral compass when it comes to his imminent danger. He will have anyone do anything to get him out of trouble. In the rarest of occasions, he will even take action himself.

Rank

Sylvestro was hired by Argante to watch over Ottavio while Argante was off on a business trip. He was to guide Ottavio and keep him out of trouble which he fails at because of his laziness. Argante looks down on Sylvestro because he is a servant, and he is incompetent. He failed to keep Ottavio out of trouble. Argante holds rank over Sylvestro as his boss which is the main reason that he fears the old man. If he was not his boss, Sylvestro would not be so intimidated by him.

As a servant of Argante, Sylvestro holds the same rank to Ottavio as a nanny would. Ottavio is fairly grown so he feels that he does not need to be watched over. As a child of a rich father, Ottavio looks down on Sylvestro as the servant class. He is respected no more than a butler or a maid. . This could be one of the reasons why Sylvestro makes minimal effort to keep Ottavio out of trouble. Sylvestro trusted him to be a responsible young adult, and he was mistaken.

Sylvestro makes it clear that he is poor. After Scapino makes some progress deceiving Argante, Sylvestro reminds him, “I agree, you’re a genius so far, but there’s the matter of the money.” He asserts, “There’s not only eating to consider, but the creditors are beginning to chase me down the street” (*Scapino!*, 30). This adds a layer to the character of Sylvestro because this explains his fear of disappointing Argante. He is in debt because he is waiting for Argante to get back to pay him the money for a job well done. The creditors are always pestering him to collect their money and his incompetent

job performance will undoubtedly lead to loss of salary. That is one reason that he urges Scapino to get them out of their problem. It also gives Sylvestro reasoning behind eating Argante's food after he leaves it on the table. Sylvestro is probably hungry and looking to take advantage of any free meal.

Animal Attributes

When Argante comes onto the scene complaining about his son's situation he exclaims "As for the ferret Sylvestro I'll...beat him to a jelly" (*Scapino!*, 22). This insult gives an observation on the characteristics of Sylvestro. A ferret is related to the weasel with neither animal being known as vicious or hard working. Ferrets sleep up to twenty hours a day. This implies that Argante finds Sylvestro lazy. Sylvestro had one job, and he failed at it. As there is no evidence of Sylvestro stopping Ottavio's illicit marriage, we can assume that he did not try very hard to prohibit it. Sylvestro is worried more about his own comfort than his fellow men. This characteristic matches up with the character of a ferret as well as being a person who is not intimidating.

Fourth Wall

The rules of the fourth wall do not apply to *Scapino!* Characters constantly talk directly to the audience at times where it is appropriate. These moments are scripted sometimes and can be choices made by the actor in the moment as well. Dunlop recalls, "I tell the actors generally not to notice the audience sitting beside the dock sipping their drinks. But sometimes they can choose to see them and mix them into the action" (Production Book, 29). I believe that Sylvestro uses the audience as a confidant so they may actually sympathize with him. It is not necessarily that the people onstage do not hear him when he says the line to the audience, but he thinks that they will sympathize

with him so there is strength in numbers. There are three instances where it is conceivable for Sylvestro to be talking to the audience.

The first instance is the only scripted line of Sylvestro speaking to the audience which was mentioned earlier. This is the moment where he is affirming that Argante is not good natured. This line is a confession of Sylvestro's fear of Argante. By saying this to the audience, they know that Sylvestro is in serious trouble for getting mixed up with the old man.

One instance where a line that is not scripted but makes sense being delivered to the audience occurs in act one when Scapino is arguing that he should not help Ottavio and Scapino because he got in trouble with the law. He says, "Yes, we didn't quite agree on a certain manner." To that, Sylvestro replies, "They didn't quite agree" (*Scapino!*, 11). Because of his relationship with Scapino, this would be the kind of line that Sylvestro would say under his breath to Ottavio. However, considering that the audience are patrons of the restaurant that are overhearing this story, the stronger choice would be to say it to them hoping that they will feel for Sylvestro.

Another instance when Sylvestro may be talking to the audience is where he already has an audience onstage listening to him. He interrupts Ottavio to stop him from rambling on about his troubles and gives the short story of how they got into their mess with Argante. This is one of the rare times where Sylvestro has the attention of multiple people onstage. It would make sense to include the onlooking audience of the cafe as he is making a big show of how Ottavio's actions are causing them misfortune. This is the kind of outburst in a restaurant that a person would include anyone who would listen in order to shame the perpetrator.

The final time that Sylvestro may be addressing the audience is during the scene where he puts on the disguise as the thug brother of Giacinta. It is clear to the audience that it is only shy Sylvestro in the wrappings of a gangster. Because Argante would be hiding and averting his eyes, this would allow Sylvestro to play with the audience when making his threats on that “rat” Argante. Delivering this monologue to the audience would include them in the gag.

Following Dunlop’s suggestion, these instances give Sylvestro an opportunity to include the audience. He can treat them as a confidant, reach out to them for sympathy, and play with them. This gives Sylvestro another confidant to interact with and gives him his own chances to add the audience into the action of the show.

Ten Thousand Moments

As mentioned in chapter one, *Scapino!* as a literary work does not have much substance. It is essentially a blue print to allow the director to put in as many choreographed movements and comedic gags as they see fit. Jim Dale viewed the play in a different way than a traditional climactic play where the audience is emotionally attached to the characters. He asserts, “It’s made up of ten-thousand moments. If we drop all of these moments, we’re left with nothing. Nothing!” (Production Book, 40). Playing Sylvestro, I am responsible for discovering the moments in which he participates. This is vital so that those moments are not dropped. Many of these moments will come from the director’s vision, but a few of these moments can be realized by breaking down the script.

The first comedic moment that Sylvestro takes part in is the parroting scene. Ottavio just heard that his father has returned, and he is warning Sylvestro about it. Sylvestro is so frightened that he can only repeat what Ottavio is saying. This is funny

because of the unnatural repetition of the words and it makes Ottavio so frustrated that he nearly pushes Sylvestro into the ocean. The punchline is that Sylvestro cannot swim which is funny because he is a grown man. It is right off the dock and would not require effort to save himself.

The second comedic moment for Sylvestro occurs when Giacinta comes onto the scene, and she is having a very sweet moment with Ottavio. As they are declaring how they will love one another no matter what happens, the stage directions state that Scapino and Sylvestro start miming a film crew for a romantic movie. Scapino is running the imaginary camera while Sylvestro uses his Coke bottle as a microphone. Although Ottavio and Giacinta are in earnest, Scapino and Sylvestro have that playful spirit of two single friends making fun of the friend in a relationship. They turn an honest, important moment to Ottavio into a comedy through their ribbing.

One of the next comedic moment occurs when Scapino is showing Sylvestro how to play a gangster. He has him put his hat on sideways, make his eyes into slits, and walk with a limp. When Scapino tells him to walk like the gangsters in the movies, Sylvestro walks in a way that resembles more of a zombie than a gangster. Scapino comments, “I think we’ve been watching the wrong films” and shows him how to properly do it until he is at an acceptable level to trust him to play the part (*Scapino!*, 31). This will be funny because of the mechanical inelasticity of Sylvestro. He is not able to imitate other people as expertly as Scapino so he will be very awkward. It will also be funny to see how much improvement Sylvestro makes from the time that he does his thug training to the time that he actually plays the role for Argante.

Aside from these bits, Sylvestro has funny lines here and there. For instance, when he discovers the nurse tell the fathers that it is Giacinta that is married to Ottavio he utters, “Well, I’d never believe it if I hadn’t seen it with my own ears” (*Scapino!*, 77). He is so dumbfounded by the fact that he is safe that he misspeaks and says that he saw it with his ears. These bits are some of the bigger comedic moments that Sylvestro plays with other people. However, it is not until he plays the thug character that he gets the chance to truly shine.

Sylvestro the “Thug”

Sylvestro is used as a pawn in Scapino’s plot to save Ottavio from his consequences for marrying Giacinta instead of the wife Argante picked out for him. In the scheme that he has imagined, Scapino plots to get 200,000 lire from Argante by saying that Ottavio’s new brother-in-law demands it in order to dissolve the marriage of Ottavio and Giacinta. This imaginary brother-in-law, played by Sylvestro, is a vicious criminal. Scapino describes him:

“He’s one of these roughnecks, one of these toughs who stand around the street corners poking people on the nose, beating them with chains, talking about nothing but punching and slashing and shooting, standing there with cut-throat razors waiting for the streakers, and thinks no more of killing a bloke than drinking a glass of wine.” (*Scapino!*, 45-6)

This description of the character that Sylvestro is to play is an extreme departure from the passive Sylvestro that has been introduced previously. This will make the thug character whom Sylvestro plays more comic. The big challenge for Sylvestro in the thug

scene is that Argante and himself are not strangers. Sylvestro has to stand face to face with his boss whom he knows well and convince him that he is another person.

It may be a choice of the costume designer to disguise Sylvestro in the thug scene, but, as the actor it is important to first disguise him by finding the physicality and dialect of the character. A hint of this is revealed right when Scapino devises the plan. He admits that he is looking for someone to play the character of the thug when his eyes land on Sylvestro. Unsure if Sylvestro will be right for the part he gives him a set of physical commands. He orders:

“Make your hand into a fist. Put your hat on one side of your head. Stand up! Lean on one leg. Put that hand into your pocket. Now make your eyes into slits...Now strut around like one of those gangsters in the films we’ve been watching.” (*Scapino!*, 31)

Scapino sees something in this impromptu audition that makes him cast Sylvestro as his villain. But the work is not over yet. He asserts, “Now a couple-a more disguises for your face and voice” which suggests that they are going to continue working to make this a believable character. Scapino says “Let’s go meet with the Godfather” as they exit (*Scapino!*, 31). This statement along with his command to “strut around like one of those gangsters in the films we’ve been watching” makes it clear that this character is to be a mobster. *Scapino!* was published in 1974, just two years after *The Godfather* was released. The film broke records at the box office and won many awards. It would be safe to assume that *The Godfather* is one of the films to which Scapino is referring. In the movie it presents hard talking Italian-American New York City mobsters. These types of

characters give Sylvestro and Scapino inspiration for the physicality and dialect of the thug character.

When Sylvestro's "performance" comes along he is a completely different person. He paces around with a newfound sense of confidence and swings a chain violently as he curses Argante's name and threatens him. He pantomimes a brawl in which he single-handedly fights Argante and his entire posse. He exclaims, "If only he was here right now with all his friends and relations! Just let him get near with thirty policemen!" (*Scapino!*, 50). It is clear that his character means business. He is willing to fight Argante's whole family if he does not get his money.

As mentioned in the first chapter, Sylvestro is a character that depicts automatism and absent-mindedness throughout the play. The example of absent-mindedness in chapter one is the one moment that would possibly reveal him as Sylvestro during the thug performance. Right near the end of his appearance as the thug, after he has threatened Argante and pantomimed a battle between himself and Argante's entire family he starts leaving. While he turns to leave he bumps into something that is in his way. At that moment, he breaks character to apologize to what turns out to be a bench. When he sees the bench, he realizes that he was no longer acting as the hardened strutting mobster but the "real" Sylvestro. He jumps right back into character and smacks the bench with his bicycle chain. Luckily, Argante does not catch this break in character so the plan is not ruined. Argante realizes this and quickly gives Scapino the money to spare himself the wrath of the villain.

Sylvestro's "performance" as the thug is a comic situation that needs to be set up and delivered properly. Bergson suggests:

“Every comic character is a *type*. Inversely, every resemblance to a type has something comic in it. Though we may long have associated with an individual without discovering anything about him to laugh at, still, if advantage is taken of some accidental analogy to dub him with the name of a famous hero of romance or drama, he will in our eyes border upon the ridiculous, if only for a moment. And yet this hero of romance may not be a comic character at all. But then it is comic to be like him” (Bergson, 156-7).

This scenario that Bergson depicts relates directly to Sylvestro’s situation.

Sylvestro, a passive coward in the opening scenes is playing the part of an iconic gangster from a movie like *The Godfather*. He may not be funny by himself in earnest and a character from *The Godfather* is not funny in earnest but Sylvestro impersonating that character is funny. I believe that the bigger departure that the “real” Sylvestro” is from the character that Sylvestro plays, the more comic the moment would be. For this reason the “real” Sylvestro should be the complete polar opposite of the thug that he plays. The “real” Sylvestro shall be quiet while the thug will be loud, the “real” Sylvestro will be closed off while the thug will be more expressive, and the “real” Sylvestro shall be more stagnant while the thug will be a ball of energy. Differentiating the two polar sides of this character will make the situation more comic.

Sylvestro’s Journey

Even though it may be considered a “silly” comedy, I believe that there is some character growth in Sylvestro in *Scapino!*. Sylvestro gets anxious and scared about the situation between Ottavio and his father as soon as he hears the news that Argante is back. He is helpless and does not know what to do other than ask Scapino to get him out

of it. Scapino chooses Sylvestro to help him to deceive the old miser. I think that his performance in tricking Argante gives him some self-confidence and makes him feel that he can be like Scapino. This is the first time that he has fooled someone the way that he fooled Argante. Although he is still scared of being found out until the end of the play, I think that it was a step forward for Sylvestro. He may consider pulling tricks like that on his own one day.

The challenge to playing a character in this wild comedy is to know what is funny about your character. When rehearsals start, finding the physical and vocal differences of Sylvestro and his alter ego will be a top priority. Making comedic discoveries of bits and gags not specified in the script will help to make this production of *Scapino!* unique to our ensemble. Sylvestro's contributions to the ten-thousand moments that Jim Dale posits will be just as crucial as the rest of the characters. This is an ensemble piece that will require every actor to know what is funny and be able to actively display those comedic moments.

CHAPTER III

REHEARSAL

The following chapter is a reflection on my rehearsal process for *Scapino!* In this chapter I have taken the liberty to speak in first person about the process. In this chapter I will compare elements of the finished production to the vision I had when writing the first two chapters of my thesis and how they differ. I will also reflect on how my analysis helped ready me for the rehearsal process.

The rehearsal process for *Scapino!* has been a challenging and rewarding experience. Director Ali Angelone has dubbed the play “Italian Cardio Circuit” and this could not be more true. Her interpretation of *Scapino!* is a movement heavy production that is part farce and part choreographed musical numbers with no singing. Going into the rehearsal process after writing the bulk of my thesis, I had certain ideas of the play and Sylvestro that since have been altered.

In any production, reading the script beforehand will give an actor a certain idea in their head of how the show will be presented. Because people are different, this never matches up with the director’s vision exactly. In the instance of *Scapino!*, I imagined the show being presented much like the script because that is what I have been studying all year. Because of this, I had some qualms with parts of the script because they seemed extra tacky. Specifically, I did not care for the song “Minestrone Macaroni” which seemed a little too pointless or for the three page monologue at the end where Scapino speaks with the audience about some people not enjoying the show and requiring

everyone to sing along. Luckily, the first week of rehearsals relieved me of both of these worries. The song was cut. Angelone instead used recordings of Italian songs played through a jukebox onstage in place of “Minestrone Macaroni.” This turned a moment which I imagined the cast standing around singing a meaningless song into choreographed dances that helped to tell our story.

The implementation of the songs also added to the characters of the wait staff. In the script, the wait staff is used to move the play along from scene to scene. They are essentially glorified stage hands. However, under Angelone’s direction, they do considerably more than that. An entire story has been constructed of the head waiter (Tyler Folkedahl) and his struggles with running a restaurant with his incompetent waitresses (Michelle Stahlecker, Julia Amundson, Rachel Perry, and Jacqueline Degraff). The added music bookends the show as well as accentuates the chase scene and begins the second act.

The deletion of the ending monologue was a relief. I could not have agreed more with Angelone’s decision to cut it. In the original production it made more sense. Jim Dale as Scapino was a pop singer turned actor. His fame preceded him which might have made his audiences ecstatic to be talked to by this star. However, in our production, that is not quite the case. Joe Bussey as Scapino will go on to do great things, but he does not have the fame that would merit a five minute chat with the audience after the story of the play has been concluded. The original version seems like a case of holding audiences captive after a show which I disagree with. As soon as the final bows have ended the

audience should have every right to leave if they so desire. They should not have to listen to speeches or be required to sing with the cast if they are not so inclined.

Angelone's vision of the show also helped me shape the character of Sylvestro. I had imagined Sylvestro as a timid character that would not get attention from women. On the first day of rehearsal when choreographing the opening song, the waitresses' movement revolved around flirting with Sylvestro. This gave me a new outlook. I had assumed that Sylvestro did not watch over Ottavio simply because he is lazy. However, this adds the element of neglecting his duties for other earthly pleasures. Sylvestro is entranced by the young women and it becomes clear that that is the reason that he did not successfully complete his job of making sure Ottavio stayed out of trouble.

Besides women, Sylvestro's other love that I have discovered is food. Given that they are in a restaurant, Sylvestro uses his relationship with the waitresses to acquire food and drink throughout the play. Rarely is there a scene where Sylvestro is onstage without a glass of wine, a dinner roll, or a baguette. This coincides with my analysis of Sylvestro being poor and hungry. He uses any opportunity to get free food.

This rehearsal process has been very freeing as an actor. Ali Angelone has made it clear from the beginning that the rehearsal process is a time to play, improvise, and experiment. This has led to discoveries such as being thrown into the push up position on the boat by Ottavio, falling to the ground and crawling away from Argante's cane strikes, and the cartwheel and table jump in the thug scene. Letting us play, make choices, and improvise in the rehearsal process takes the pressure off of the director to

micro-direct everything and also lets the actors be creative. I will note that in the past I have been encouraged to play as well. However, this process has marked my growth as an actor by taking that advice more sincerely and really trying new things. This whole idea of experimenting and playing coincides with Frank Dunlop's ideas when he directed the original production. The *Scapino!* production book asserts, "If something new and marvelous happens in rehearsal, something far better than what he had originally planned—or than what has been played up to that point—Dunlop will be the first to suggest integrating it into the show (12). This justifies the changes that were made to make our production unique like adding the Italian music.

The original *Scapino*, Jim Dale suggests that rehearsals are more fun than performances but hard work (Production Book, 24). At the moment I am writing this, we have not yet had any performances for the public but I believe that what he says could be true. Back in the early stages of rehearsal, right after we got off book and started to experiment was the most fun. It helps that the cast consists of all my close friends that I have made over the past two years at UND. We would try some outlandish movement or voice and the others would feed off of it and, in many cases, break down laughing onstage. Coming to rehearsal ready to work but being able to have fun is something that helps make a rehearsal process in a show like this successful. In *To The Actor*, Michael Chekhov talks about using the method that works for you to make your craft pleasant. He asserts, "For acting should ever be a joyous art and never enforced labor" (170). Although I do not consider myself a subscriber to the Michael Chekhov school of

acting, I think this notion is one that needs to be addressed more often. You should like what you do as an actor or find a different profession. The joy and fun I had from the rehearsal process of *Scapino!* outweighed all of the sweat and hard work.

Analyzing the comedy of the script using Henri Bergson's *Laughter* was a great benefit to me going into the rehearsal process. This made me realize what was going to be funny and the reasoning of its comedy instead of stumbling upon it all in rehearsals. An example of using Bergson to my advantage was at the end of the thug scene. In my first chapter, I analyzed the characteristics of comic characters. In this I suggested that Sylvestro shows absentmindedness when he is playing the part of the thug. He threatens Argante as the thug, bumps into a bench, and breaks his character of the thug to reveal his true self apologizing to the inanimate object by saying "I beg your pardon" (*Scapino!*, 50). After seeing it was a bench, he jumps back into character and hits it with his chain. In our staging of the thug scene, the furniture was not set up in a way that this was possible therefore the line was cut. For a while, Sylvestro came onstage and played the part of the thug flawlessly and exited without breaking character. I felt that this was doing a disservice to the script and my analysis of the comedy. After more experimenting I added something that helped to show Sylvestro's absentmindedness in the scene. He runs around Argante and beats up his imaginary relations and policemen while on the floor. When he got up, I added him trying to jump from his back to his feet. Being a rather athletic move that I myself cannot do, Sylvestro fails and lets out a painful groan to the audience. This breaks him from the character of the thug and reveals his true self, much

like the chair hit. He is so caught up in passionately playing this thug character that he overestimates his physical skill and ends up hurting himself. I thought that this was a good substitute for the gag in the original script and is funny for the same reason.

Without my knowledge of Bergson, I might have let Sylvestro play the part of the thug flawlessly, which knowing Sylvestro's skill, would make no sense and waste a comic moment.

These moments are vital to the success of the production. Jim Dale looks at the whole production as being made up of moments. He claims, "It's made up of ten thousand moments. If we drop all of those moments, we're left with nothing. Nothing!" (Production Book, 40). Angelone also made it clear to us how these moments are important. Almost everything in the play is choreographed. While Ottavio and Giacinta are telling the heart breaking story of their love, Frank Dunlop had Scapino and Sylvestro pretend they were a film crew making a motion picture of the soap opera unraveling before them. In our production, Scapino and Sylvestro toast their glasses and down their wine, share a piece of chocolate, lick their fingers, get enthralled by the story, breakdown into tears, and wipe away each other's tears perfectly synchronized in time. Her attention to detail and specificity will make for a very tight, hilarious production.

Overall, as Angelone has told us over the course of the rehearsal process, "this is such an ensemble piece." No amount of analysis or preparation would benefit me any without a great cast and crew. The people working on this show are smart, creative, and willing to work. Because they have come ready to work since day one, we have been able

to run the whole show since very early on in the rehearsal process. For that reason, I have to thank the University of North Dakota Theatre Department for hiring talented and devoted faculty that teaches their students to be professionals. This whole experience has been a great opportunity. My analysis helped to inform the building of my character and to understand why *Scapino!* is sure to be funny. I cannot wait to perform this production for the people of Grand Forks and the surrounding community. It has been a joy to work on and with this production I hope to bring a smile to many faces and to fill the Burtness Theatre with laughter.

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