

MERCURY



Teacher's Resource Pack

Contents



Page 3: History

Page 4: Synopsis

Page 5: Commedia dell'Arte

Page 6: Key Themes

Page 7: Meet the cast

Pages 8: Meet the creative team

Page 9-10: In rehearsals

Page 11-12: Costume designs

Page 13: Set design

Page 14-17:
Secondary School exercises



History

They Don't Pay? We Won't Pay! was originally written and titled in Italian as *Non Si Paga! Non Si Paga!* by Dario Fo & Franca Rame in 1974. It was first translated as *Can't Pay? Won't Pay!* and with new adaptations and productions it has undergone similar translations such as *We Can't Pay? We Won't Pay!* and *Low Pay? Don't Pay!* It soon became Fo's best-known play internationally after *Morte accidentale di un anarchico* (known in English as *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*), and eventually a North American English language adaptation was created by R. G. Davies around 1984.

By 1990, it had been performed in 35 countries and our production will hopefully highlight how it continues to make waves as a political farce, and for being a bold comedy about consumer backlash against high prices. Something that even decades later is still enormously relevant, and possibly now more than ever. The play has been described as capturing something universal in the actions and reactions of the working class.

The play was written to criticise the merchants and landlords responsible for raising the prices of necessary goods and rent and the bosses who cut jobs, salaries and benefits. At the time the play was written, the Italian Communist Party leader, Enrico Berlinguer, had launched a programme of "historical compromise" in which members were to follow a policy of sacrifices for the national interest. They reluctantly acceded to lower working-class living standards. Fo, whose original Italian script makes direct criticisms of the Italian Communist Party, urged party members to reject the policies of their party leadership. Dario Fo was a famed Italian playwright, actor, theatre director, stage designer, songwriter and political campaigner for the Italian left wing.

In our production, we have worked with playwright Deborah McAndrew to update this classic script for a 21st century audience and we're sure you will feel the relevance of this punchy political satire.



Synopsis

The play is set in 2023 and focuses on a single day when a few hundred women revolt against increasing food prices and decide to pay only what they want for their bags full of groceries, which ends up being nothing. The women escape with their groceries, but soon the police are knocking on every door in the neighborhood to root them out. Pressure builds as layoffs from the local factory are expected, and the police start issuing eviction notices since no one can afford to pay their rent.

Anthea has just returned home carrying bags of food. She tells her friend, Maggie, about the women's revolt at the supermarket. Anthea is mixed torn between delighted at her haul and fear from her law abiding husband, Jack. She doesn't see much wrong with what she has done, since the prices were so high and she doesn't have enough money to pay rent let alone eat.

Jack sees that Maggie has gained incredible weight all of a sudden. Anthea quickly invents a story of hidden pregnancy to cover her tracks. From this initial untruth, Anthea's lies and actions grow ever larger and wilder. Eventually, both couples and a Police Constable (who also plays a Police Sergeant) are sucked into her new reality, with their own eccentricities and desperation causing complete chaos.



Commedia dell'Arte

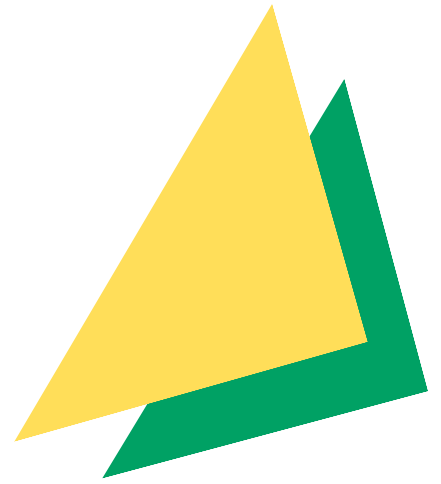
In *They Don't Pay, We Won't Pay*, elements of Commedia dell'Arte is used throughout and is known as "Italian comedy". It was a humorous theatrical presentation performed by professional players who traveled in troupes throughout Italy in the 16th century. Commedia troupes included women and children, at a time when males had traditionally played all roles, a development that would influence modern acting conventions.

The traveling commedia troupes consisted of 12 or so professional performers, and each specialised in a single character. In spite of the range of dialects spoken throughout Italy at that time, there was no attempt made to change the performance's dialect from region to region. Even when a local company performed, much of the dialogue would not have been understood. Regardless of region, *il Capitano* would have spoken in Spanish, *il Dottore* in Bolognese, and *l'Arlecchino* in utter gibberish.

The focus was placed on physical business rather than on spoken text. Performances took place on temporary stages, mostly on city streets, but occasionally even in court venues. Better troupes, such as *I Gelosi*, performed in palaces and became internationally famous once they traveled abroad.

Music, dance, witty dialogue, and all kinds of mischief contributed to the comic effects. As a result, the art form spread throughout Europe. Commedia conventions and characters found their way into other theatrical traditions, such as the British "panto", which flourished from 18th century, American clown routines, comic entr'actes, and minstrel shows which featured characters with names such as Harlequin, Columbine, Scaramouche, and Pantaloon, and in the French character Pierrot (a descendent of Pedrolino), an icon of the early 20th Century with his evocative white face and silent gesture, and in Bip, the white-face clown created by the legendary French mime, Marcel Marceau.

Key Themes



Class

The two central characters are working class. 'They Don't Pay, We Wont Pay!' tells the story of two working class women, Anthea and Maggie, who are frustrated by rising prices and struggling to make ends meet.

Political power

The play tackles issues of inflation, police brutality, unemployment and the influence of the unions. All of which is very prevelent today.

Cost of Living

The drama begins with a group of strong, determined working-class women who have rebelled against the sharp rise in the cost of living by taking overpriced goods without payment from the supermarket.

Morality

The two women try to conceal their shoplifting from the police. Anthea's husband is strongly opposed to this form of shoplifting, and it is no coincidence that he is a communist trade union leader.

Meet the Cast



Laura Doddington
*****ANTHER*****

MERCURY **DON'T PAY? WON'T PAY!**
Fri 17 - Fri 31 Mar



Tesni Kujore
*****MAGGIE*****

MERCURY **DON'T PAY? WON'T PAY!**
Fri 17 - Fri 31 Mar



Jack Shalloo
****LEWIS****

MERCURY **DON'T PAY? WON'T PAY!**
Fri 17 - Fri 31 Mar



Marc Pickering
****EVERYONE ELSE!****

MERCURY **DON'T PAY? WON'T PAY!**
Fri 17 - Fri 31 Mar



Joseph Alessi
****JACK****

MERCURY **DON'T PAY? WON'T PAY!**
Fri 17 - Fri 31 Mar

Meet the creative team

Adaptor - Deborah McAndrew

Director - Ryan McBryde

Designer - Zoë Hurwitz

Lighting Designer - Robbie Butler

Composer and Sound Designer - Mark Melville

Casting Director - Ellie Collyer-Bristow CDG

Assistant Director - Emmy Briggs



In rehearsals



Photo credit: Pamela Raith



Costume Designs

ANTHRA ★



- A BIG B/W
TURKEY COAT
- A PATTERNED
JUMPSUIT?
(THICK LEGS?)
- ★ BOLD EARRINGS
- ★ MESSY HAIR
PART CLIPPED BACK.
- ★ 80'S JUMPER?
- ★ PLATFORM TRAINERS?
(OR HEELS BUT MAKE
TOO HIGH)
- ★ SHOES





Set Design



For more information about the Design process for *They Don't Pay?*, *We Won't Pay!* Please visit the Mercury Theatre's Box Office and attend the exhibition breaking down the design process.

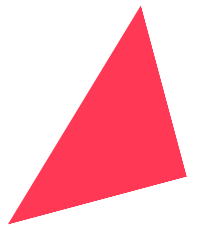
Exhibition runs between 14-31 March.

Secondary Activities



Workshop (Secondary)

Curriculum links: Drama, English Literature



Objective:

- To understand the fundamentals of physicality and character within Commedia dell'Arte

Warm-up – Silly Sound & Silly Walk

Everyone stands in a circle and the game starts with the teacher. The teacher makes a silly sound and everyone in the circle should copy. Every person in the circle gets their chance to create a silly sound while everyone else copies.

On the second time around the circle, the teacher pairs their silly sound to a silly walk across the circle. They take the place of someone on the opposite side of the circle and that person then performs their own silly sound accompanied with a new silly walk. Everyone gets their change to pair a silly sound to a silly walk.

The exercise can either finish at this point or students can be asked to show their silly sound paired with a silly walk one more time. Once every student has shown theirs, someone in the circle is picked to walk towards another student. Whichever student they walk towards, the student inhabits their silly sound and silly walk, not their own.

Activity 1 Exercise – The Imaginary Rope

Students will stand in a circle. Ask a student to imagine they have a rope attached to their nose. The student walks around the inside of the circle with their nose pulled in front of them, ensuring their feet remain the last part of their body to move. How do they feel doing this? If the students watching saw this character onstage, what might they think about them? Are they nosey and overly interested in other people's business?

Students should then pair up and take it turns to use the imaginary rope on their partner using different body parts. How might it feel and what type of character would lead with their knees or the torso for instance?

Activity 2 – Exploring Stock Characters

Ask students to find a space in the room and ensure they have space around them to move.

The Servants (Zanni)

The servants are clowns and tricksters and have common sense, intelligence and a love of practical jokes.

Using the warm-up exercise, which body would they lead with? Students should walk around the space as Zanni. Ask students to move at a normal pace, then ask for them to walk slowly (The Little Zanni) and at speed (Zanni Running) to begin basic exploration of the six types of Zanni walks. Zanni are acrobatic and have their weight on one foot, bottom stuck out, back slightly arched, chest high, head balanced on the horizon. Never completely still, the zanni bounces from one foot to another, keeping the centre low with one leg bent, the other straight. There is a slight tension under the upper arms to give them a lift, but the lower arms hang loosely.

The Old People (Vecchi)

There are usually two of these featured in commedia dell'Arte and more often than not, they play the two lovers' fathers. The Pantalone and Il Dottore (The Doctor) are the most common stock characters of Vecchi.

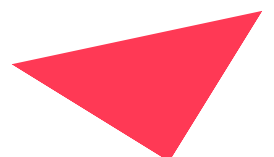
The Vecchi are usually obsessed with money and greedy. Tricks are often made at their expense and believe they are more intelligent than they actually are.

Using the warm-up exercise, which body would they lead with? Students should walk around the space as Vecchi. The Doctor pushes his belly forwards and gestures with his hands in front of him. He is known for his large waist-line and leads with this. Moves at a pace which is relevant to that of his old age. Pantalone has a typical old person stance with feet together, toes apart, knees well bent and facing apart to create a nicely crutched position. Leading with his face and being in everyone else's business while protecting his purse. Walk is incredibly slow as the Pantalone is not in a rush.

The Lovers (Innomorati)

The lovers are not masked in traditional Commedia dell'Arte and not only love each other, but themselves. Their romance is often detrimental to the plot, even if they are not the main characters of the piece.

Using the warm-up exercise, which body would they lead with? Students should walk around the space as the Innomorati. High status and everything they do is melodramatic. Both lovers glide instead of walking and pose every time they are still. Pride and vanity in every move they make.



Activity 3 – The Party

Select two students to host a party. All other students should form an audience. The party hosts should begin miming preparing for a party, maybe making some sandwiches and putting up some decorations. After giving some time for improvisation, the teacher should shout freeze and select another student. That student should play either a servant, an old man or be paired with another student to form the lovers.

The student(s) knock on the door and the hosts must greet them. The students entering should be reminded of what has been learnt so far including the walk of the type of stock character they are along with their status amongst the other guests.

Students should enter as guests after a sufficient time as to allow the students in the party to engage appropriately and navigate themselves through improvisation enough for personalities and commedia traits to be observed.

Optional Addition to Activity 3 – Use of Lazzi

Lazzi (a joke) are moments within a piece of commedia dell'Arte of physical comedy that are not plot related, but rather offer a moment away from the story before coming back to it afterwards.

Once the party has been established and all guests are present, the teacher should freeze the action. The meaning and examples (an old man might clutch his heart and pretend to have a heart attack from shock, a lover might faint to the floor or a servant might be about to be hit and grabs another character to use as a shield) of Lazzi are provided to the class.

Once the teacher has identified a guest to perform a moment of Lazzi, the teacher can unfreeze the party and allow the moment to take place. Repeat this a few times to show the various possibilities of Lazzi.

