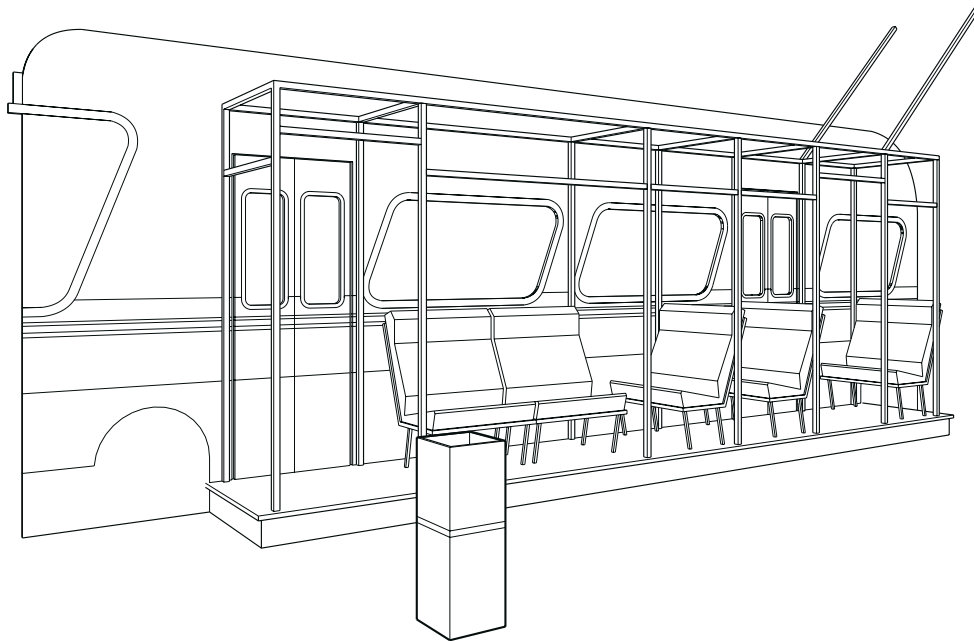


# THE NUMBER 14



*"Delightful... dazzling, brilliant...  
astounding! This bus ride is so  
exhilarating that you don't really  
care where you get off"*  
New York Daily News

*"Winningly, wild. A slap-happy  
ride. The performers go about  
their work with zest and talent"*  
New York Times

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## THE PERFORMANCE / PRODUCTION

Inspired by COMEDIA DELL'ARTE, SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE, PUNCH AND JUDY, silent movies, mime and vaudeville, THE NUMBER 14, set on a city bus, captures the beat and frantic rhythm of urban life. The first skit features a group of commuters, robot-like, always in a rush, oblivious to everything but their watches. A series of varied and inventive skits follow which may include: the loud-mouth guy with his Walkman, the old man on the wrong bus, the always-running-late real estate agent, the “Yo-man” athlete, the giggling, self-conscious schoolgirls, the rapper and more. The chaos, humour and pathos of city life are captured in this production which invites us to travel on a city bus and gain some insights into the human condition. Every time THE NUMBER 14 is produced it is updated to include current social observations.

The Axis Theatre Company’s one-hour production of THE NUMBER 14 uses six highly skilled actors who transform themselves, often with the help of masks, some life-size puppets, and a lot of song and dance, into more than 30 characters. Most of these characters are hilarious but some are sad, some are disturbing, and some are just plain weird.

The production grew out of many long sessions where the actors played, improvised, and created characters together. The set is the interior of a bus, and it could be any bus, anywhere. We see, entering and exiting, people we know, and perhaps, people we are.

Sometimes we are reminded of the satiric, out-

rageous skits on SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE: two high-school girls created an absurdly funny routine out of practically nothing; the proper lady in the flowered dress and hat slips and tumbles in the most ungainly fashion; the high-school kid who breaks into a rap song and dance routine; the lover bringing flowers to his date; and so on.

Clearly, the company finds no situation too mundane or too sad to poke fun at. Take, for example, the innocent dreamer who assumes the spirits of other bus passengers: the man who rambles on about cooking pork chops; the opera singer; the political activist; the musical comedy star; the person in dire straits. The actor turns these characters into compassionate, humorous, and musical portraits. On THE NUMBER 14 there is nothing too sacred or too small, too crazy or too prosaic for it not to be turned into comedy.

Though the essence of THE NUMBER 14 characters is quite real, all the performances are heightened, extreme. The characters break into clown routines, turn somersaults, dance, sing, wear masks, and swing on the bus pole. Though the production urges us to see the drama and comedy all around us and to examine more carefully the world in which we live, we are ultimately meant to have a very good time. We are asked to have fun and laugh at ourselves and at the surreal humor that is all around us. Good comedy does not need to justify itself.

## THE ARTISTS

**THE AXIS THEATRE COMPANY**, based in Vancouver, British Columbia, has been touring its unique brand of physical theatre since its formation in 1975. Each year the company creates two or three original plays that incorporate mime, mask, dialogue, dance, acrobatics, puppetry, and music, while exploring pertinent social issues. In addition to its adult programming, the company is recognized as having one of the most effective theatre-in-education programs for young people in Canada. The company's productions have been performed across Canada and the U.S. as well as in Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, Ireland, Scotland, Israel, and much of Europe.

Axis Theatre Company's production of **THE NUMBER 14** was nominated for a Drama Desk Award in New York and has won numerous awards in Canada. The play is currently available in formats suitable for youth/family audiences, teens and adults.

**WAYNE SPECHT**, Director, Axis Theatre Company Artistic Director, has been an active member of the Canadian mime, clown, and movement-theatre community for many years and in many capacities, including performer, director, administrator, teacher, and festival organizer. Since its formation in 1975, he has been Artistic Director of the Axis Theatre Company. He was awarded a career achievement award from the Vancouver arts community in 2002.

**ROY SURETTE**, Original Director, has been responsible for many award winning productions including **WHALE RIDING WEATHER**, **LILIES**, and **THE NUMBER 14**. He is Artistic

Director of the Centaur Theatre, Montreal in addition to directing for The Arts Club Theatre, Touchstone Theatre, and the Shaw Festival in Ontario.

**MELODY ANDERSON**, Mask Designer and Maker, is a visual artist, theatre designer, and craftsperson. In addition to their use in stage productions, her masks have been used as teaching tools in acting workshops throughout North America.

**NANCY BRYANT**, Costume Designer, has had her work seen across Canada, the U.S. and Europe. She designs for ballet, modern dance, and theatre.

**PAM JOHNSON**, Set Designer, has worked at most regional theatres in Canada, winning many awards for her designs. She also has had a distinguished career as a writer and director.

**GERALD KING**, Lighting Designer, is in demand internationally for his innovative lighting designs. He has worked extensively in Canada and overseas.

**DOUGLAS MACAULAY**, Sound Designer and Composer, is also an arranger, musical director and educator. He has written for orchestra, concert band, and jazz band, as well as composing film scores and music for many plays.

**THE NUMBER 14** was written by Peter Anderson, Melody Anderson, Gina Bastone, Colin Heath, David Mackay, Wayne Specht, Roy Surette, and Beatrice Zeilinger. Additional material was developed by Darlene Brookes, Tom Jones, and Allan Zinyk.

## BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

1. Ask students to choose one of the influences on THE NUMBER 14 and do a report on it. Topics might include, for example: Marcel Marceau, the character types in COMMEDIA, vaudeville routines, SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE, one or several clowns.
2. Have students bring in pictures of clowns or draw clowns. Ask students to write an inner monologue for their clown.
3. Have students – maybe four at a time – pretend they are other people. Suggest that they pick strong character types, e.g. a tycoon, a bag lady, an eccentric professor, a romeo. Have the students come up in front of the class and sit as if they were on a bus. Have the other students (the audience) write inner monologues for these characters.
4. Have students study someone they do not know (on the bus, in the street, in a public place) and give that person a name, an occupation, and a particular problem he or she is thinking about. Compose or choose a song and/or dance for that person.
5. Exactly as with exercise #4, have students study and create a character. Then have these characters enter one by one on a bus. The bus steering wheel gets stuck and the driver cannot move the bus. Everyone gets stuck. What happens?
6. Show a Charlie Chaplin movie: THE CIRCUS or A DAY’S PLEASURE, or THE GREAT DICTATOR if the students are older. Discuss what things are funny and why? How does Chaplin manage to find so much humour in events that are not always funny?
7. Bring in various selections of music: classical, rock, and rap. Have students form sets of partners. Have each set of partners listen to a selection. Encourage them to be inspired by what they hear and to move and relate in any way they wish in relation to each other. Each pair may perform the work they develop for the other students.
8. Have students write down one or two outrageous sentences such as: “You have an artichoke growing in your ear,” or “I just saw a genie come out of a bottle,” or “I am so in love that I think I can fly.” Then put all these phrases into a box or hat. Have students come up in pairs. Each one picks a phrase from the hat and they begin a conversation with these phrases. See what happens.
9. Look at the section on COMMEDIA DELL’ARTE and have students each pick one character type, and then have them break into groups of four or five and create skits.

## AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

1. What did the students relate to in the production? Have them write about what interested them, what they found funny or true. Whom did they know on THE NUMBER 14?
2. Have students pick a favourite character from the production and write a short life history of the character.
3. Divide students into groups of four or five. Have each group pick a section of the production and reenact it. Let students do their own interpretation of the particular chosen section. Talk about choices; theirs vs. the actors. For example, how would they portray the loud youngster singing along to his Walkman?
4. Have students pick a scene from the production and turn it into something serious. Talk about the thin line between sadness and laughter.
5. Have students pretend that they are a reviewer for a major newspaper and write a review of the play. What elements of the play did they like best and what elements did not work for them? What do they think could make this play better, if anything at all? Is there anything they would change or do differently?
6. Have students create their own THE NUMBER 14 show. Change the name of the bus to one they know and have them each create character, use masks, music, etc. Tell them they need to find at least one place in the skit where they will use music and one where they will dance.
7. Have students look at scenes in the production in the light of *COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE*, vaudeville, clowning, and *SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE*. Discuss specific instances where these influences are apparent in THE NUMBER 14.
8. Ask the students to come up with some situations, e.g. getting sick to one's stomach on a bus, having ants in one's pants while at the ballet, and then mime the situations.
9. Draw one of the characters in the show in his or her home. Have students become the characters they have drawn. Have these characters visit one another. What would the schoolgirl do if she met the rapper at a dance? What would the real-estate agent be like on a date with one of the commuters?

## CUSTOMS, CULTURES AND SOCIAL FORCES

### CLOWNS AND COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE

A clown is a very specific kind of comedian. A comedian is not necessarily a clown, although comedians use many clown tricks. The character of a clown is always funny, but may also be vulnerable and tragi-comic. For example, look at the work of the actress Giuletta Masina in many of Federico Fellini's films, especially her pathetic and hilarious character in *LA STRADA*. A clown is presented as someone who cannot adapt to the outside world, yet is simultaneously able to reflect our fears, foibles, and desires. A comedian, on the other hand, can be sophisticated, witty, and amusing without being foolish or losing control of a situation.

The tragi-comic figure of the clown was not invented by a single individual or by a single culture. The figure of the clown has been constantly evolving throughout history. All societies and eras have valued the clown who is capable of poking fun and revealing our human and vulnerable sides.

The following four clown types have evolved over time:

#### The **AUTHORITARIAN AND SOPHISTICATED CLOWN**

is often in white face and is quite bossy and foolish in a pseudo-intellectual manner. This clown type was fully developed by the end of the 17th century.

The **AUGUSTE CLOWN** is the butt of jokes, makes many pratfalls, gets hit and tweaked, and is usually at the mercy of the white face clown.

Often the auguste wears big shoes, a red nose, and a wild orange wig.

The **CHARACTER CLOWN** describes a clown who has developed his or her own routine and usually works alone. He or she is the most realistic of clowns. Charlie Chaplin is the best example of a naive, terribly sad, but dignified character clown.

The **NEW VAUDEVILLE CLOWN** is a comprehensive term to describe contemporary clowns who have rejected the three preceding traditional clown types. They usually work alone and without make-up, and seek to establish a more sophisticated relationship with the audience in contemporary pieces or routines. Bill Irwin is a noted example of this type of clown.

**COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE** was theatre performed by troupes of strolling, comedic, professional actors. It developed and flourished in Italy from the 16th to the 18th century. The **COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE** actors, who were known for their immense skill and devotion to their art, used improvised dialogue, masks, satire, song, dance and farce. They drew freely upon the life of the day for their material, using and commenting upon the customs and frailties of all classes. Many books have been written about this extraordinarily inventive improvisational theatre because its popularity and contributions were great and spread throughout Europe. Its influence on European theatre, particularly French pantomime and English harlequinade, was enormous.

As with most improvisation, **COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE** worked with a basic scenario and with basic stock characters, which constantly evolved and with which the actors improvised. These humorous interruptions were called “lazzis”. The actors developed these stock characters out of their native culture. However, the essence of the commedia characters—the lovers, the fools, the cuckolds and so on—are to be found in all cultures and eras. It is the unusual ways in which these actors made these universal character types specific and their own that accounts for much of the success of the **COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE**. The commedia actors created their characters not only with costumes, masks, and appropriate names but also with very identifiable ways of moving and standing.

There are hundreds of variations of these stock types, but all fall into some basic types. The following are only some of many:

**THE YOUNG LOVERS** (*innamorati* in Italian) did not wear masks and were often not funny. Love was a serious business.

Most of the actors playing the character roles (*maschere* in Italian) wore half masks. These roles were divided into masters and servants.

**PANTALON** (*Pantalone* in Italian) was always old, often retired from active business. Whether rich or poor, he is a slave to money. He is usually avaricious, somewhat senile and married to a young, pretty woman who deceives him. He is a foolish, yet sympathetic character.

Pantaloon’s best friend, **DOCTOR** (*Dottore* in Italian), was a professor of questionable intelligence. He was pretentious and silly. “...he has spent his whole life learning everything without understanding anything.” (*THE ITALIAN COMEDY*, Duchartre, pg 196)

**PULCINELLA** was one of the comic servants who could appear in many guises. Usually he was the prankster, irresponsible, witty, intelligent, and sometimes a little cruel. Pulcinella evolved into Punch of the English **PUNCH AND JUDY SHOW**.

Of all the **COMMEDIA** characters, **HARLEQUIN** (*Arlecchino* in Italian), was the most recognizable and yet enigmatic. He finds his ancestors in Roman theatre. He is droll, whimsical, a thief sometimes, a pander, a rascal. He is volatile and elusive. He is the ignorant valet, yet cunning and showing flashes of real intelligence. He always has love trouble but his mistakes and clumsiness, both in love and other matters, have an eccentric charm. Always energetic, he is agile and very much the acrobat.

**COLOMBINE** (*Columbina* in Italian) was a worldly-wise maidservant. She was witty and resourceful, often in love with rascals, but she could hold her own in any situation.

The **CAPTAIN** (*Capitano* in Italian) was a young master. He was often a Spanish soldier who boasted of his romantic and military exploits, only to be revealed as ineffectual in both areas.

## GLOSSARY

**Commedia dell'arte** • improvisational, comedic theatre that flourished in Italy from the 16th to the 18th century.

**Mask** • a covering for the face, made out of a variety of materials, which can represent the face of a human or animal or mythical creature. Masks have been used in theatre all over the world for more than 30,000 years. The ancient Greek word for mask is *prosopon* (face); the Latin word is *persona*.

**Mime (or pantomime)** • a dramatic method of telling a story without using words. Though closely allied to dance, mime is its own discipline. In the 20th century, the French actor and mime Etienne Decroux (1898-1989) was the first to develop a systematic language of physical expression, which led to the 20th century revival of pantomime.

**Punch and Judy** • a traditional English puppet play which is derived from *commedia dell'arte*. Punch is a cruel braggart, and his wife Judy, whom he beats, is a garrulous, faithless shrew.

**Vaudeville** • stage entertainment, consisting of dances, songs, magic acts, acrobatics, and satirical and humorous sketches, which was particularly popular in the U.S. in the second half of the 19th century and through the beginning of the 20th century. With the advent of motion pictures and especially talking pictures, vaudeville passed from the entertainment scene.

## REFERENCE MATERIALS

Some students may be interested in learning more about how to perform or the history of *Commedia dell'arte*, masks or mime. They will find the following texts useful.

- **THE ITALIAN COMEDY**, by Pierre Louis Duchartre - Courier Dover Publications - 1966
- **NEW AND CURIOUS SCHOOL OF THEATRICAL DANCING: THE CLASSIC ILLUSTRATED TREATISE ON COMMEDIA** by Gregori Lambranzi – Courier Dover Publications - 2002
- **COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE: AN ACTOR'S HANDBOOK** by John Rudlin - Routledge - 1994
- **THE COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE: A STUDY IN ITALIAN POPULAR COMEDY** by Winifred Smith - Columbia University Press - 1912
- **THE READER'S ENCYCLOPEDIA OF WORLD DRAMA** edited by John Gassner, Edward Quinn - Courier Dover Publications - 2002
- **BE A MIME** by Mark Stolzenberg – Sterling Publishing Company Inc - 2001
- **PAPER MASK MAKING** by Michael Grater - Courier Dover Publications - 1984
- **MASKMAKING** by Carole Sivin – Sterling Publishing Company Inc – 1986

## ABOUT AXIS

Thirty-five years of thought provoking, award winning creativity have earned Axis Theatre Company a rightful place on the world stage of modern dramatization. Recognized as one of British Columbia’s cultural institutions, this extraordinary company has captured the hearts and minds of audiences the world over.

In addition to touring *The Number 14* extensively in North America and around the world over the last 19 years, we have created other touring favourites such as *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Emperor’s New Threads*, and *King Arthur’s Kitchen*. New for the college, university and adult mainstage is *Don Quixote*, an “Epic Comedy of Love and Delusion”.



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Axis Theatre Company engages, under the terms of the Canadian Theatre Agreement, professional artists who are members of the Canadian Actors’ Equity Association.