

Harlequin & Harlequina

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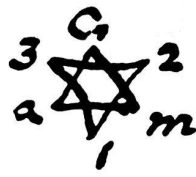
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UNDERGLAZE BLUE
HEXAGRAM MARK³¹.

only on a few figures. Most figures have a number from 0 to 3, or a dot, impressed or scratched underneath the base³⁰. Between 1763 and 1767, the factory also used a cryptic mark, applied in blue under the glaze, which represented an alchemical sign for the Four Elements. This was a hexagram with letters and figures at the six points and probably a fancy of the worker J. C. Kilber, who had discovered the process of painting in underglaze blue. An Italian Comedy figure with this mark beneath the base is unlikely to have been produced and painted in Bustelli's lifetime, since he died early in 1763.

In his Catalogue of the European Porcelains at the Bavarian National Museum in Munich published in 1908³² F. H. Hofmann, then the curator of porcelain, first listed ten figures which we now know to be Bustelli's Italian Comedians. At that time, they were enumerated under the heading *Modelled by Franz Bastelli 1754 to 1765*. Hofmann had not yet recognized a Reading Girl (Corine) as a comedian, and only tentatively ascribed a Rococo Lady (Lalagé) to the Comedy. A Gentleman of the Italian Comedy (Octavio) turned out to be a putative *Capitain Italien*, whilst Julia is called a Dancer of the Italian Comedy. Isabella is described as Columbine, and a figure (Anselmo), again only doubtfully attributed, is said to be based on *Ricoboni's* Narcisin de Malalbergo. Fifteen years later, Hofmann knew Franz Anton Bustelli's right name, and by the time his history of the Nymphenburg factory appeared in 1923, he had found the List of 1760 and the 1767 Price List in the archives, and had completed the extraordinary tour de force of correctly identifying all

sixteen figures against the names in the 1767 List³³, although he was not convinced himself of the flawlessness of his intuition.

To this day, we adhere to his nomenclature as well as to his pairing of the eight couples, which he arranged with four women actors standing to the right of the beholder, four to the left, thus composing a formation for dancers in a minuet or another such contemporary eightsome. In a display of interweaving bodies, each figure is rotating on its own axis, yet clearly attuned harmoniously to the movements of its partner by bearing, by body-language and, not least, by the flows and twists of its finery and accoutrements.

Hofmann believed in 1923 that with time his arrangements of the pairs would undergo some changes, especially if each name in the 1767 List could be ascribed with some certainty to one or the other of the sixteen figures. No such change has taken place in over seventy years, and as we have since come into possession of an increasing fund of engraved source material about the *Commedia dell'Arte* and the *Théâtre Italien* – material to which Hofmann did not have access in his time – we can only admire the unfaltering intuition with which he named and paired Bustelli's creations. Even in the few cases where no iconographical models have yet been found, Hofmann's attribution of a name seems to be borne out by the gestures and expressions of the porcelain figure.

Franz Anton Bustelli did not slavishly copy postures and costumes from engravings, as was frequently done by lesser modellers at other porcelain factories, neither did he work entirely without two-dimensional models, as was once believed. It is true that his style is unmistakably his very own, which does not preclude the use of engravings and other iconographic material as primary inspiration. In the absence of a list of the 288 sheets which he left behind, we shall attempt to gather here some possible sources for his comedians from the extensive material now available, and compare them with the modeller's creations – emphasizing however that these attributions strictly represent only the writer's opinion.

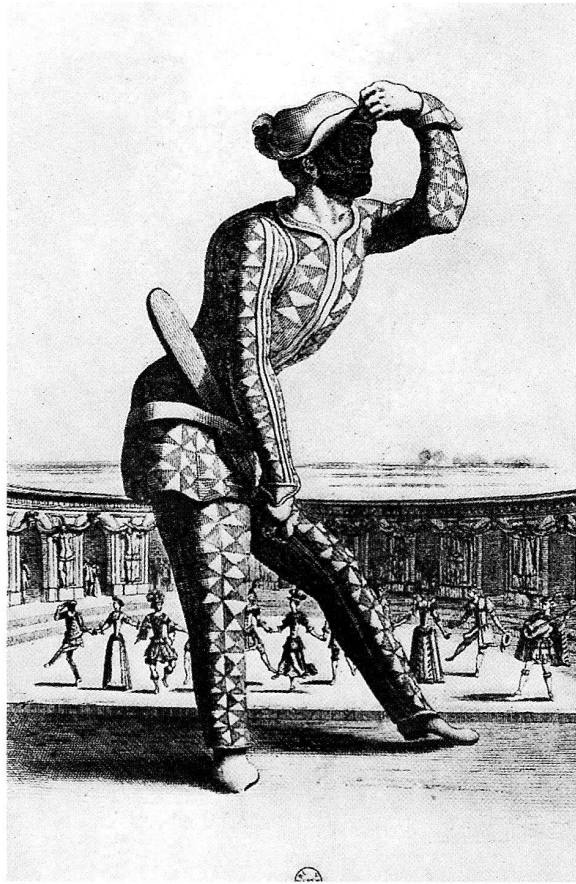
Harlequin & Harlequina

Bustelli's outstanding models of Harlequin and Harlequina are not in the series of sixteen Italian Comedy figures named in the 1760 and 1767 Lists. They were produced earlier and surviving examples of these two are much rarer still than those in the series. Whether these are the reasons why they have been largely ignored in recent literature on the subject

of the comedy figures is difficult to assess, yet they represent the artist's first foray into the rumbustious world of the strolling players, and for that reason become an integral part of this study. They were modelled in an unusual size for porcelain figures of that period, being more robust and 1 cm to 2 cm higher, than the subsequently modelled series.



7. HARLEQUIN. Height 20.4 cm. Impressed shield mark in concave scroll. Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich.



8. ARLECCHINO. French engraving by Jean Dolivar (1641–1692). Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

Bustelli created Harlequin and Harlequina in 1756–1757. A coloured pair, priced at 20 guilders, was delivered to the Electoral Court at Munich in 1757³⁴. They are no longer there. These superb models have solidly built rococo scrolled bases with applied flowers and leaves, and scrolled treetrunk supports; the marks are impressed on the concave vertical sides of the cut-out scrolls (figs. 7 & 12). *Rückert* has likened their modelling and size to another pair of large figures: a Brandenburg soldier gloating over the misfortunes of his wench, whose skirt has been torn at the back by a dog, thus exposing a rounded bottom³⁵.

Harlequin and Harlequina turn one towards the other in a delicate ballet movement. Bustelli immortalized his Harlequin by giving him a tortuous stance that readily calls to mind the rococo scrolled designs of the eighteenth century goldsmith and ornamentalist J. A. Meissonnier, and his Harlequina by her teasing response to his impudent gestures.

Harlequin

Harlequin originally came from the town of Bergamo in Lombardy, but soon lost his Bergamask characteristics in his Italian Comedy role. He is the best-known of all Italian Comedy actors. The role first took shape in early sixteenth century masquerades during Carnivals which, in turn, had their roots in Roman Mimes. The earliest of these comedians were called *Zanni*, and Harlequin was one such *Zanni*-figure which appeared within the acting troupes of the *Ge-losi*³⁶.

Ricoboni distinguishes two Harlequins in his History: the *Arlequin Ancien* from about 1500, and the *Arlequin Moderne*, active from the 1560's. The first was probably a more aggressive, a more ribald, smutty and violent buffoon, than the second one. This «modern» Harlequin became the role model of all who followed, right into the eighteenth century. His mind was possibly less keen – often he even pretended

to be simple-minded and ignorant – but he was as insolent in his effrontery as his predecessors, scoffing and jeering without let-up, unmasking with frequently offensive sallies all manner of damaging faults in master and servant alike, but withal a faithful and active servitor, in many plots that of Sir Pantalone. Whilst fearful of his master’s wrath, he was yet up to all sorts of tricks and impostures. His role demanded that he be agile and acrobatic, his movements rapid, even violent at times. He was a glutton, a philanderer, sometimes a coward. It was the gift of improvisation, the chameleonic capacity to take on all colours and characters which represented the difference between a good and a bad Harlequin. For the quick-witted, just one word or a situation on stage would supply the opportunity for instant prevarication, subterfuge and witty rascality. The dimmer person would lack the gift to make use of a poisonous tongue without running the risk of clumsiness.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Ricoboni considered the role of Harlequin as the symbol of the art and the spirit of the impromptu theatre. What the public demanded of him above all else were agility and acrobatic skills, the capacity to somersault wildly across the boards, to dance. He had to be up to funny monkey tricks and be a consummate mime, and also, always, to show obvious signs of being most insistently amorous of one or the other servant girl, and sometimes of their exalted mistresses too. Frequently depicting a work-shy ne’er-do-well, Harlequin fitted into every scene of the Comedy with his incisive repartee, his crafty cunning and impudence, or his loutish manner. Because he was an irrepressible and lovable rogue, his often coarse buffooneries were easily forgiven.

The costume of the *Arlequin Moderne*, which is the one with whom we are concerned here, consists of a short jacket with a pleated muslin collar and long trousers of a light yellow cloth base sewn with red and green triangular cloth patches, copper buttons and a yellow belt with a metal buckle. He wears white stockings and white leather shoes with red ribbons, a black head kerchief under a grey hat with a hare’s tail, black chin scarf and a half-mask. His bat is not a short wooden sword, as it might appear, but a two-bladed slap-stick which he can clack into an opponent’s face.

Bustelli’s *Harlequin*, of whom we can only illustrate an undecorated example (fig. 7), adheres on the whole to this description, although his short jerkin is a tighter fit than that shown by Ricoboni³⁷. The buttons and the buckled belt are there, so are the trousers ending just above the ankles. The shoes here are buckled and not beribboned, and the actor wears no mask – it would hide that unique impudent laugh and the twinkling eyes which Bustelli bestowed on his Harlequin, turning boldly towards his Harlequina. He strides away from a tree-trunk support, left leg forward, right hip out, the upper body turning to the left and his head twisted



9. French engraving of Evariste Gherardi (1666–1700) as ARLECHINO. Private Theatre Collection.

to the right in an axial rotation very distinctive of the artist’s concept of his actors’ movements. The right hand pushes his hat from the left temple, at the same time making the well-known, somewhat improper gesture of the *mano in fica*, the «intruding thumb». We can trace this and other hand signs to a reproduction of Andrea de Jorio’s nineteenth century compilation of ancient Neapolitan hand and finger gestures transmitted from generation to generation³⁸. The left hand holds the slapstick to his side. The solid rococo base with a deep concave scroll, on which we find the impressed shield mark, has applied flowers and leaves. On the whole, the Bustelli Harlequin, and his Harlequina, are more solid, vigorous models in the baroque tradition than the sixteen Comedians which were to follow them shortly.

The Italian Comedy’s most popular actor also became the one most frequently portrayed in paintings and engravings. Copper engravings appeared in France in the seventeenth century and often showed Harlequin’s cavalier stance in facing his contender (fig. 8).

It is interesting to observe that in this image, which was evidently engraved before the expulsion of 1697, Dolivar places his Harlequin before a dancing troupe on the stage of



Giosep. Ferd. Miller presentando la persona d' Arlequino.
Die Munter Polihar kan Traur'ge lustig machen *Selbst ein Heracitus mus maner Euvfall lachen*
Mein Semper froher Geist bringt alls in bon humor *Wan Ich den Arlequan stell in der Maigue vor.*
Elias Bäck del. et sculp.

10. Giosep. Ferd. Miller in the role of ARLEQUINO. German engraving signed Elias Bäck a.H. delin: et sculp. Early 18th century. The Institute for Theatre, Cinema and Television Research. University of Cologne (Niessen Collection).

a proper theatre, and not on the trestle-boards at a country fair. No one know's whether this, or any of the following engravings, were in Bustelli's archives, but we see here the first elements of inspiration: one foot forward, the other knee bent, the trunk scissoring forward from the hip, the slap-stick held in the belt and the opposite hand at the head. In all seventeenth and eighteenth century engravings, Harle-

quin is invariably masked, as the tradition of his role demanded. This fact went against Bustelli's artistic sensibility and he ignored it completely, for the facial expressions of his figures were important elements of his sculptural talent. Another illustration of a Harlequin with a hand to his head represents the actor and historian of the *Théâtre Italien*, Evariste Gherardi, who himself was one of the famous pre-

senters of the role towards the end of the seventeenth century (fig. 9).

Again, the masked actor with his patched costume assumes the familiar silhouette – the process of one engraver adopting certain features from an earlier one has begun, and will continue throughout the eighteenth century.

A slightly later German etching which comes very close to the Nymphenburg figures, without Bustelli's joyous twistings of the body, however, and which one feels must have been available to the artist, depicts another famous Harlequin, Gioseppe Ferdinand Miller in the titular role (fig. 10). Whereas the French engravings still spelled the name in the Italian manner – Arlecchino – the German engraver had adopted the French spelling – Arlequino. Here we have very similar dancing steps and the trunk bent forward, with the right arm raised to the hat, but without the contortion to the left temple of the porcelain model. Elias Bäck's engraving was later copied and incorporated into a number of composite images of the Commedia dell'Arte, like Weigel's troupe (fig. 4), in which this Harlequin is the fourth actor from the left.

The great French painters of the eighteenth century, having broken with the academic restraints of an earlier age, were one and all charmed by the antics and emotional involvo-

ments of the improvised theatre. Lancret and Pater, later Boucher and Fragonard, all pictured scenes from the *Théâtre Italien*, but the most intensely sentimental paintings came from the brush of Watteau (fig. 11), who was an assistant and a friend of Claude Gillot at the Opéra in Paris. This painting is an expression of the nascent spirit of the *rocaille* style in France, a spirit which found its most sparkling revelation in the Bavarian rococo of Franz Anton Bustelli. Yet their Harlequins have little in common but this spirit of joy, even though Watteau has respected the earlier tradition of the hand to the head.

It is clear that Franz Anton Bustelli used two-dimensional and traditional iconographical models as a primary inspiration for his Harlequin figure, and many others, but his genius as a sculptor created an entirely new image of this well-beloved comedy character.

Harlequina

We are more familiar with the role of Columbine in accounts of Italian Comedy plots – the pert servant-girl more or less in love with most of the male members of the cast. Similarly, Harlequina's role is that of a maid, quite often



11. ARLEQUIN, PIERROT ET SCAPIN. Engraving by Louis Surugue, after a painting by Antoine Watteau, 1719. Private Theatre Collection.



MADemoiselle HARLEQUINE

12. MADemoiselle HARLEQUINE. Anonymous French engraving from a series of fourteen, c. 1720. Deutsches Theatermuseum, Munich.

with a more intimate relationship to Harlequin than that of his other innamoratas. The role was not known in the original Commedia dell'Arte and first appears in France, in the *Théâtre Italien*, at the end of the seventeenth century as a variation of Columbine. Harlequina has been described as fickle, a cheeky sparrow with easy backchat, and full of quips and cranks, who twists people round her little finger. One critic said that «she flutters like a blue-tit, but does not coo like a dove»!

Bustelli's figure of *Harlequina* follows in its essentials the rare engravings depicting the role, but again, true to the importance which the artist attached to facial expression,

she wears no mask. Traditionally, the costume is modelled on that of Harlequin, but with patches of different colours to his. In the beautiful model here shown (fig. 13), these patches are alternately iron-red, black, purple and white. The tight-fitting hiplength jacket with a gold hem and gilt buttons is topped by a wide lace collar under a gold-bordered ruff with a red bow, the sleeves have white muslin cuffs. She wears a long voluminous gold-hemmed skirt, white hose and gold-buckled, red-edged yellow shoes. A short slapstick is held in her turned-in left hand, whilst the right holds a green, round hat with a yellow feather. Once again, Bustelli adds his touch of humour, for only the three



13. HARLEQUINA. Height 21.9 cm. Impressed blue and white shield mark outlined in gold on concave scroll. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Gift of R. Thornton Wilson, in memory of Florence Ellsworth Wilson, 1950) MMA COLUMBINE.

middle fingers hold on to the hat, index and little finger are raised. Harlequina provides the answer to Harlequin's rude gesture by giving him the cuckold's sign of the *mano cornuta*, the «horned hand»³⁹. The figure stands, with tree trunk support, on a strong, gilt-bordered rococo base with applied flowers and leaves; the blue-and-white, gold-outlined shield mark is impressed into the paste of the concave scroll.

One of the earliest engravings of Harlequina, of unknown provenance (fig. 12), shows *Mademoiselle Harlequine* with her saucy little hat in a similar attitude as our figure, naturally without Bustelli's inimitable movements and expressions – but the posture is there. The same stiff pose, but now

with the left hand raised, can be discerned on the third person from the right in the *Troupe of Italian Comedians* (fig. 4). As we have mentioned, the latter engraving was most likely a composite put together by Weigel from earlier engravings, such as figure 12.

However, there seems to be little doubt that Bustelli knew the Schmidt engraving after Lancret's painting of *Le Théâtre Italien* (fig. 14) in which Harlequina traipses about gaily between the Dottore and Pierrot. Bustelli's porcelain figure is very similar to this picture. It seems that Harlequina is the only one of his comedy figures which was modelled closely after a recognizable engraved source.



14. Detail from *LE THÉÂTRE ITALIEN*. Engraving by Georg Friedrich Schmidt after a painting by Nicolas Lancret, now in the Louvre. First third of the 18th century. Pilet & Saisset, *Les Fêtes en Europe au XVIII^e siècle*.