

# ONE TWO MAN GUVNORS

BY **RICHARD BEAN**

BASED ON **THE SERVANT OF TWO MASTERS** BY  
**CARLO GOLDONI** WITH SONGS BY **GRANT OLDING**

DIRECTED BY **JULIA RODRIGUEZ-ELLIOTT &  
GEOFF ELLIOTT**



**AUGUST 31 - SEPTEMBER 28, 2025**





## Dear School Partner,

Welcome to A Noise Within Theatre! We are thrilled to welcome you to the 2025-26 season – a season that we like to call **Songs from the Volcano** – featuring timeless stories bursting with upheaval, transformation, and the embers that push us to grow. In *One Man, Two Guvnors*, a down-on-his luck Englishman hoping to score some food and some money finds himself working for two employers at the same time, posing the essential question: what can go wrong when someone invests in their own self-interest a little too much?

In this study guide, you will find articles, classroom activities, behind-the-scenes interviews, and other exciting materials, all crafted to align with the Common Core and the California VAPA Standards. This study guide can be enjoyed by teachers and students alike, our hope being that teachers and students enjoy it together!

We offer this study guide as a free resource for contextualizing the show and drawing parallels with our modern world, and you can find guides from our past seasons available for download on our website.

We hope this study guide will prepare you to enjoy the show to its fullest potential and to create a lasting memory of a fantastic day at the theatre. We are happy to have you!

*Warmly,*

A Noise Within Education



# Table of Contents

4 Meet the Characters

5 Play Synopsis

7 About the Playwright: Richard Bean & Carlo Goldoni

8 Themes and Motifs

11 Classroom Activity 1: Physical Comedy Workshop

12 About *Commedia dell'Arte*

13 Essay: THE ENDURING LEGACY OF COMMEDIA DELL'ARTE

15 Essay: WHAT'S SO FUNNY?

17 Classroom Activity 2: Comedy Writing Challenge

19 Discussion Questions

20 Sneak Backstage: A Conversation with the Dialect Coach

22 Bonus Material

---

Credits

Author	Dr. Miranda Johnson-Haddad
Education Director and Editor	Lea Marie Madda
LACAC Education Intern	Julia Gonzalez
Production Photography	Daniel Reichert
Graphic Design	Teresa Meza & Sarah Wong

Front cover image: Kasey Mahaffy, Cassandra Murphy, Ty Aldridge, and Trisha Miller by Daniel Reichert.



# One Man, Two Guvnors

Each character is inspired by a traditional commedia dell'arte stock character, indicated in **orange!**

**Francis Henshall:** A man-of-all-work who is now employed by both Rachel Crabbe and Stanley Stubbers.  
*Arlecchino, Zanni*

**Dolly:** Charlie Clench's employee and Francis's love interest.  
*Columbina*

**Rachel Crabbe:** The twin sister of Francis's former employer, Roscoe Crabbe. In love with Stanley Stubbers.  
*Innamorati*

**Stanley Stubbers:** A well-off upper class young man. In love with Rachel Crabbe.  
*Innamorati*

**Charlie "the Duck" Clench:** A middle-aged man whose criminal pursuits have made him wealthy.  
*Pantalone*

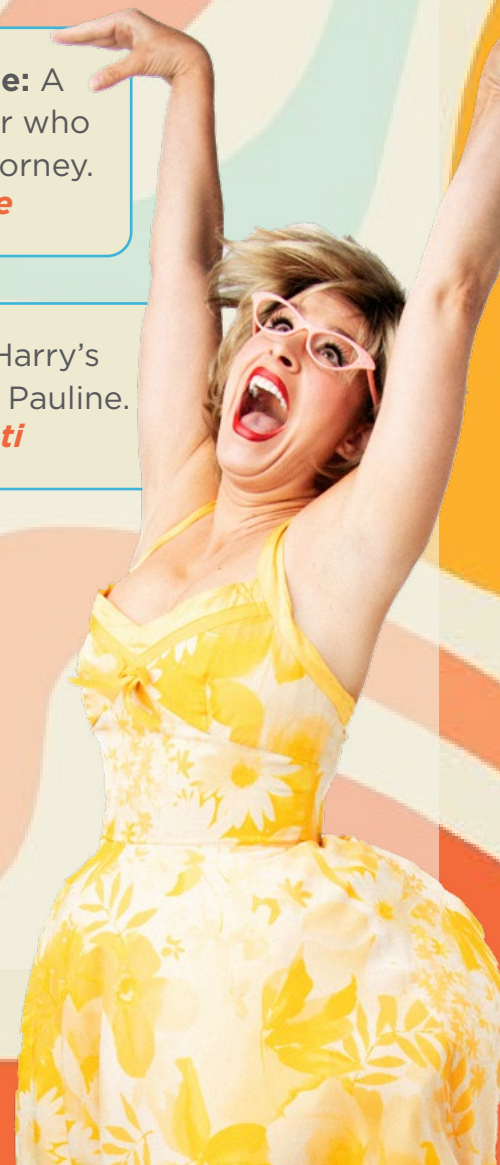
**Harry Dangle:** A corrupt lawyer who is Charlie's attorney.  
*il Dottore*

**Pauline Clench:** Charlie's daughter.  
*Innamorati*

**Alan Dangle:** Harry's son, engaged to Pauline.  
*Innamorati*

**Lloyd Boateng:** A longtime friend of Charlie's.  
*Brighella*

**Alfie:** Waiter at the inn.  
*Zanni*





# Play Synopsis

**As the audience enters, a skiffle band plays.** Inspired by American blues and jazz music, skiffle bands were very popular in England during the 1950's and 1960's; they played upbeat, catchy tunes on simple instruments that were often homemade.

## ACT 1

**Brighton, England, 1963.** The play opens in the house of **Charlie Clench**, a middle-aged man whose criminal activities have made him wealthy. He is speaking at the engagement party for **his daughter, Pauline, and her fiancé, Alan Dangle**. The guests include Alan's father (who is also Charlie's corrupt lawyer), **Harry Dangle**; Charlie's clever and attractive assistant, **Dolly**; and family friend **Lloyd Boateng**. We learn that until recently, Pauline was engaged to **Roscoe Crabbe**, whom she did not wish to marry, but Crabbe was unexpectedly murdered last week. The party is interrupted by **Francis Henshall**, who identifies himself as Roscoe's "minder," or bodyguard. He throws the party into an uproar by announcing that Roscoe Crabbe is alive and well. "Roscoe" then enters, but it is actually **Roscoe's twin sister, Rachel**, disguised to resemble her dead brother. Lloyd sees through the disguise, and Rachel tells him that her boyfriend, **Stanley Stubbers**, killed Roscoe. She and Stanley are preparing to flee the law by escaping to Australia, but first she needs the money that Charlie had promised Roscoe in return for marrying Pauline.

Outside a local inn, **Francis addresses the audience** and tells them his story. Stanley Stubbers pulls up in a taxi and hires Francis as a helper. The perpetually-hungry Francis



## Play Synopsis *continued*

agrees and finds himself **working for both Roscoe/Rachel and Stanley (the “two masters” of the play’s title)**, who are both staying at the inn without knowing the other is also there. Alan arrives, intending to murder Stanley, who gives him a false name, increasing the overall confusion.

At Charlie’s house, **Pauline is crying because she doesn’t want to marry Roscoe**, but Rachel arrives and comforts her by revealing her true identity.

Back at the inn, Francis attempts to wait on both Rachel and Stanley as they dine in separate rooms. His constant mistakes, and his frantic attempts to cover them up, result in **total chaos**.

### ACT 2

At Charlie’s house, **several characters confront each other** with various threats (including lawsuits and murder), adding to the misunderstandings.

At the inn, Francis relaxes after a good meal. He offers the audience a quick lesson in *commedia dell’ arte*. Dolly enters, and she and Francis share a **romantic moment** before Francis’s efforts to fulfill his duties to both Stanley and Roscoe/Rachel result in upheaval yet again.

Francis’s **attempts to disguise the fact that he is working for two bosses** lead him to tell Stanley and Rachel that the other has died. Both head for the Brighton Pier, intending to jump off, but instead they have a **joyful reunion**.

All of the characters find themselves back at Charlie’s house, where **they are finally able to clear up the confusion**. Rachel and Stanley learn that they won’t have to move to Australia, due to a legal loophole that Harry identifies. Pauline forgives Alan for wrongly believing that she loved Roscoe. Francis tricks several people into paying for him to take a two-week trip to Majorca, Spain, with Dolly. **The play ends happily, with a song.**

## Authors

**Richard Bean** (b. 1956) is an award-winning English playwright who has written numerous plays, many of which are inspired by earlier works and theatrical traditions. Bean was born in Hull and spent his after-school hours working in a bread factory before leaving to study psychology at university. Bean's plays, which include *The Mentalists* (2002), *The Hypocrite* (2017), and *Jack Absolute Flies Again* (2020), have been performed at major theatres throughout England, as well as on Broadway and elsewhere.



Playwright Richard Bean

**Carlo Goldoni** (1707-1793) was an Italian playwright and author who lived in Venice. Goldoni wrote in both French and Italian, and he made frequent use in his writings of the distinctive Venetian dialect as well. He also wrote librettos for several Italian operas, and he is frequently credited with having revitalized Italian theater. *The Servant of Two Masters* (*Il Servitore di Due Padroni*), which is the inspiration for *One Man, Two Guvnors*, is one of Goldoni's best known and most enduringly popular plays.



A portrait of Carlo Goldoni by Alessandro Longhi, Creative Commons

### FUN FACTS ABOUT

### **One Man, Two Guvnors**

*One Man Two Guvnors* is an adaptation of a play by the Italian playwright Carlo Goldoni entitled *The Servant of Two Masters* (*Il Servitore di Due Padroni*), written in 1746.



# Themes & Motifs

## Comedy and Humor

*One Man, Two Guvnors* explores the age-old question of what makes something funny. The play also demonstrates that certain comic elements are enduringly funny. These elements include slapstick and physical comedy, clever wordplay, lewd jokes, and social satire, among many others.

## Stock Characters

*One Man, Two Guvnors* draws heavily from the Italian theatre tradition of *commedia dell'arte*. In fact, the Italian playwright Carlo Goldoni (1707-1793), who wrote *The Servant of Two Masters* on which *One Man, Two Guvnors* is based, invented the term. *Commedia dell'arte* plays feature recognizable character types, also known as stock characters. These include the Young Lovers, the Clowns (sometimes called *Zanni*, from which the English word “zany” may derive), the Old Man (who often stands in the way of the Young Lovers), the Clever Servant, the Main Couple (older and wiser than the Young Lovers), the Doctor/Professor, the Clever Maidservant, and the Boastful Military Captain. There are many other such stock characters, though not every character appears in every *commedia dell'arte* play.

Images Left to Right: The classical appearance of the Harlequin, stock character in the *commedia dell'arte* of the 1670s. Creative Commons.com.

Harley Quinn, a fictional character inspired by Harlequin. Official psds.com





## Themes & Motifs *continued*

### Breaking the Fourth Wall (or seeming to...)

Several characters in *One Man, Two Guvnors* break the fourth wall - a common feature of *commedia dell'arte* plays. As Didi Hopkins, a British theatre maker and expert on *commedia* has said, “The [character’s] relationship is also with the audience, not just with the person onstage.” Francis directly addresses the audience more than any other character, though Dolly and Lloyd do as well. All three are unquestionably the cleverest characters in the play, and because they have the least money of all the characters, all three are also constantly looking to improve their status. By speaking to the audience, they are letting us in on the joke and inviting us to root for them.

### Skiffle Bands and Popular Music in the 1960’s



The Quarrymen. Flickr.com.

At the beginning of *One Man, Two Guvnors*, a skiffle band plays. Skiffle bands were inspired by Black American blues and jazz music, and they were very popular in England during the 1950’s and 1960’s. They played upbeat, catchy tunes on simple instruments that were often homemade (a washboard, an empty jug). One of the best-known British skiffle bands of the time was The Quarrymen, founded by John Lennon, who would go on to form The Beatles. At a time of significant social change in both the U.K. and America, skiffle bands were a precursor of rock-and-roll, and they represented a new type of music favored by younger people. Skiffle bands faded with the coming of rock music, but there are still skiffle bands performing today in both the U.K. and the U.S., and they have a small but devoted following.

### Social Change

Although *One Man, Two Guvnors* was written in 2011, it is set in England in 1963, a time of significant social change, not just in the U.K. but in the United States as well. Looking back, playwright Richard Bean is able to bring a 21st-century perspective to a time period of momentous social upheaval. In doing so, he adds comedy. For example, when Dolly cheerfully predicts how much better everything will be once England elects its first female prime minister, today’s audiences know that this actually happened in 1979 with the election of Margaret Thatcher, but Thatcher’s government was the exact opposite of what Dolly confidently envisioned.

## Themes & Motifs *continued*

### Class Differences

Many of the characters in the play represent stereotypes of various socio-economic classes: entitled Stanley Stubbers, a wealthy, upper-class young man; Charlie Clench, whose criminal pursuits have made him rich but cannot grant him social status; corrupt attorney Harry Dangle, who proudly admits that he uses his education as a “weapon”; and Pauline and Alan, the good-hearted but dimwitted children of Clench and Dangle. Clever, working-class Francis and Dolly have the brains and the boldness to go after what they want, and to acquire the financial means to do so. Although the U.K. has become much more ethnically and culturally diverse in the twenty-first century, it remains a very class-conscious society.

#### FUN FACTS ABOUT

### One Man, Two Guvnors

Possibly the most famous Chicano theatre company in Californian history, **El Teatro Campesino** also drew inspiration from the tradition of *commedia* in many of their early works. El Teatro Campesino created short skits that featured stock characters, humor, and improvisation to bring awareness to the work of Caesar Chavez, the United Farm Workers Union, and the Delano Grape Strike of the 1960s.



Teatro Campesino.  
[www.elteatrocampesino.com](http://www.elteatrocampesino.com)



# Physical Comedy Workshop

## ACTIVITY

## Objective

Investigate the world of physical comedy through hands-on group games and exercises!

### Step 1: Prep

How can you tell a joke without using any words?

**Physical comedy:** comedy that uses the body (as opposed to words) to get a laugh—is based on three core principles: **exaggeration**, **timing**, and **physicality**. Are you ready to give those principles a test run?

### Step 2: Play!

#### Exaggerate, Exaggerate

Give students a simple task or a scene – carrying a large wedding cake, sneaking past a sleeping parent, blowing up a balloon, taking out the trash, etc. Have them perform at the following three sizes, one at a time. Size 1 – understated and realistic. Size 5 – stage-ready, exaggeration. Size 10 – cartoon-like absurdity.

**Level Up:** Have students perform as a duo. What new physical comedy bits can be found by two people performing together?

#### Slow Motion Showdown

In pairs or small groups, students should stage a slow-motion scene of a high-stakes situation—a battle, a race to the finish line, a zombie invasion, receiving a college acceptance letter, etc. Students should make sure to use their most exaggerated facial expressions and gestures.

**Level Up:** Pair the scene to a hilariously dramatic song, or have another student live-narrate the performance.

#### Expert Interview

Each round requires three students. One student is the ‘expert’ who speaks in gibberish or a made-up language. Another student is the ‘interpreter’ who translates and embellishes the expert’s sounds and gestures into English. The third student is the ‘interviewer’ who asks the expert questions pertaining to their area of expertise—French cooking, the biology of elephants, the existence of mermaids, etc.

**Level Up:** Have two experts speaking in gibberish together, making it hilariously difficult for the interpreter to keep up, or allow the student audience to contribute interview questions.

# About Commedia dell'Arte

## Did you know that *One Man, Two Guvnors* is heavily inspired by an art form called commedia dell'arte?

*Commedia dell'arte* was a form of theatre that originated in Italy in the 1500's - although the term itself was not invented until nearly two centuries later by the Italian playwright Carlo Goldoni (1707-1793), who wrote *The Servant of Two Masters*, on which *One Man, Two Guvnors* is based. Here are some common elements of *commedia dell'arte* theatre:

- **Stock Characters:** *Commedia* performers specialized in certain recognizable stock characters—many of which we still see in plays and movies today! Fun fact - performers sometimes specialized in one stock character for their entire career.
- **Masks:** Traditionally, each stock character had a corresponding mask, often made of wood and leather. These masks contained exaggerated expressions and features, adding to the fun.
- **Improvisation:** Although the performers were familiar with the basic plot points, *commedia* plays were almost entirely improvised—meaning they were made up in the moment!
- **Lazzi:** Lazzi were short comedic bits or gags, often recognized and beloved by the audience. In a movie today, we might see a lazzi in the form of a pie thrown in a face or a character slipping on a banana peel!



**Innamorata**—a female young lover—This stock character always comes paired with an *innamorato* (a male young lover). Typically young and attractive, an innamorata is driven by love and romantic desire!



**Arlecchino**—the comedic servant—Also known as the Harlequin, this stock character is constantly hungry and driven by his desires for food and pleasure.



**Pantalone**—the old man—This stock character is generally a wealthy old man involved in business, known for often standing in the way of the Young Lovers. He is usually very greedy and loves money.



# The Enduring Legacy of Commedia dell' Arte

For many of us, the term *commedia dell' arte* conjures up old-fashioned images of actors wearing strange masks and costumes while they move about the stage in highly stylized ways as they navigate familiar plotlines. Such images, however, represent only the earliest theatrical versions of this art form. In fact, we see many contemporary dramas—in the theater, at the movies, or streaming on our televisions, laptops, and PlayStations—that are actually updated adaptations of these older plays.

The basic elements of *commedia dell' arte* have never gone away because they have never stopped being entertaining. The stock characters and the qualities they represent, the basic plotlines, and even the flamboyant costumes have carried down through centuries of theatrical and cinematic representations. From Shakespeare's plays to Dickens's novels to the heroes and villains who inhabit the Marvel and DC universes, we can trace the ever-changing yet enduring influence of *commedia dell' arte* traditions.

Shakespeare's professional career began during the later years of the sixteenth century, which was roughly the same time that *commedia dell' arte* flourished in Italy. Although we don't know whether Shakespeare himself ever traveled to Italy, we do know that he was familiar with popular Italian literature and Italian theatrical traditions. We see numerous characters in Shakespeare's plays who correspond to the stock characters of *commedia dell' arte*, especially the Young Lovers (such as the Helena-Demetrius-Hermia-Lysander quarter in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*); the Old Man, who stands in the lovers' way; the Boastful Military Captain; and the clever servant/maidservant. Although comic plots





# The Enduring Legacy of Commedia dell' Arte *continued*

involving twins go back to classical times, the twist that Carlo Goldoni provides in *The Servant of Two Masters* (and that Richard Bean replicates in *One Man, Two Guvnors*) of having the female twin dress to resemble her dead brother also occurs in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

We don't need to go as far back as Shakespeare, though, to find examples of *commedia dell' arte* characters and situations, or even as far back as Charles Dickens—though Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* is a well-known example of the cranky Old Man of *commedia*. The mutants and superheroes of the Marvel and DC universes, with their specific characteristics and abilities, are not far removed from the characters of *commedia dell' arte*; they even wear distinctive masks and costumes. Many contemporary video games, such as *God of War: Ragnarok* and *The Last of Us*, owe something to the archetypal characters of the earlier dramatic art form. One cultural critic has even suggested that the Muppets recall the Young Lovers and also the Zanni (or Clowns) of *commedia dell' arte*.

Most dramatic literature, whether serious or comic, is often “in conversation” with the earlier dramatic traditions that provide the foundation for the later work; indeed, in *One Man, Two Guvnors* some of the characters, especially Francis, frequently comment to themselves or to the audience about *commedia dell' arte* traditions. And while we can certainly enjoy Shakespeare or Dickens or a video game or the Muppets without being familiar with the earlier literary works that influenced them, we can appreciate these later works at a deeper level when we also recognize the echoes of what has gone before.

## FUN FACTS ABOUT

### **One Man, Two Guvnors**

In English slang, the word “guvnor” (or “governor”) means “boss” or sometimes “father.” Sometimes shortened to “guv,” the word originated in Cockney slang and can be used as a casual yet respectful way to address someone in authority. Try pronouncing it yourself: ‘GUV – nah’



# What's So Funny?

Ask one hundred people what makes something funny and you'll probably get one hundred different answers. Some people love crude humor and naughty jokes, while others can't stand them. Some may prefer physical comedy and slapstick; others will tell you that clever wordplay brings tears of laughter to their eyes. Some people love playing pranks (though not everyone loves being pranked), but some people find pranks mean-spirited and unkind. Still others may favor weaponized forms of humor such as satire and subversive literature. And some people are fascinated by the use of humor as a psychological survival tool (think of Ellie's constant joking as she travels through the terrifying post-apocalyptic world of *The Last of Us*).

Certain types of humor may even become associated with particular cultures, such as the uniquely British sense of humor that we see in the Monty Python skits (who can forget the dead parrot or the fish-slapping dance?), Fry & Laurie's comedy sketches, Rowan Atkinson's silly routines, and even some Beatles songs. And when it comes to the characteristics of the dramatic form known as *commedia dell'arte*, its Italian origins are clear. *Commedia dell'arte* features many different kinds of artistic expression that have been valued in Italian culture for centuries: singing, dancing, elaborate costumes and masks, and a sense of humor that incorporates slapstick, witty language, buffoonery, social upheaval (usually in the form of servants outwitting their masters) and satire—truly, something for everyone!

Although the term *commedia dell'arte* can be translated as “professional theater,” or “theater as art,” the plays themselves were often dismissed as frivolous by later playwrights and more serious authors, including Carlo Goldoni, who coined the term *commedia dell'arte* and was himself a master of this artform, though he also wrote many serious works. Goldoni considered the earlier plays to be lowbrow entertainment, due to their



Monty Python's *Flying Circus* - Nobody Expects the Spanish Inquisition! Flickr.com.

## What's So Funny? *continued*

frequent use of slapstick and physical comedy, exaggerated situations, and bawdy jokes. Nevertheless, these features have been the hallmarks of comedy for as long as people have been writing and attending plays. From the ancient Greek authors, to Shakespeare, to contemporary sitcoms and movies, what people find funny has remained remarkably consistent over time. It is therefore no surprise that *commedia dell'arte*, in both its original form and in more modern adaptations such as *One Man, Two Guvnors*, still makes 21st-century audiences laugh—a lot!

What always makes you laugh? What never does? Have you ever been surprised to find yourself laughing at something that doesn't usually amuse you? What we as an audience, and as a society, find humorous can tell a lot about us, as individuals and as a group. Popular forms of comedy can also tell a great deal about the time and place in which they flourish. In general, most people dislike cruel humor that comes at the expense of someone else, which may also explain the enduring popularity of *commedia dell'arte*. These plays almost always have a happy ending, and even though certain characters may be deceived, they're not really harmed by the deception—indeed, they're perfectly happy. In general, most people are grateful for moments of shared laughter and community, especially during times of anxiety and social division. As the actor Donald O'Connor sang in the 1952 movie *Singin' in the Rain*, when in doubt, "Make 'em laugh!"



# Comedy Writing Challenge

## ACTIVITY

**Objective**

Explore how alliteration creates humor in a scene and use alliteration to write a comedic scene of your own!

**Step 1: Read**

Read the excerpt from Act 2 Scene 3 OUT LOUD. Francis Henshall and Stanley Stubbers discuss why Francis is in possession of a very particular framed photograph.

*(Silence.)*

FRANCIS. I bought it off Paddy, who was given it by his previous employer in lieu of payment before ... he died. *Silence.*

STANLEY. Before he did ... before he did what?

FRANCIS. Before he did ... die.

STANLEY. He did die, did he?

FRANCIS. He did.

STANLEY. What did he die of?

FRANCIS. He was diagnosed with diarrhea but died of diabetes.

STANLEY. He died of diabetes, did he?

FRANCIS. He did didn't he.

STANLEY. Were you there?

FRANCIS. When?

STANLEY. When he was diagnosed with diarrhea but died of diabetes.

FRANCIS. No, I was in Didcot, and he was diagnosed with diarrhea but died of diabetes in Dagenham.

**Step 2: Discuss**

What makes the above scene funny? Notice the use of **alliteration** – a literary device in which the author uses words with the same opening consonant sound in close proximity of one another. In this case, we hear the /d/ sound 30 times! Can humor really be as simple as some excessive alliteration?



## Comedy Writing Challenge *continued*

### Step 3: Write

Now it's your turn to write an alternative scene between Francis Henshall and Stanley Stubbers using a different consonant sound. How else can Francis explain what happened to Paddy's previous employer? Plosive consonants tend to yield the funniest results - /b/, /p/, /t/, /k/, and /g/ (just saying...)

---

FRANCIS. I bought it off Paddy, who was given it by his previous employer in lieu of payment before ...

STANLEY. \_\_\_\_\_

FRANCIS. \_\_\_\_\_

STANLEY. \_\_\_\_\_

FRANCIS. \_\_\_\_\_

STANLEY. \_\_\_\_\_

FRANCIS. \_\_\_\_\_

STANLEY. \_\_\_\_\_

FRANCIS. \_\_\_\_\_

STANLEY. \_\_\_\_\_

FRANCIS. \_\_\_\_\_

STANLEY. \_\_\_\_\_

FRANCIS. \_\_\_\_\_

# Discussion Questions

## Before the Show:

1. What makes something **funny**? Is this an easy question to answer?
2. **Physical comedy** plays a major role in *One Man, Two Guvnors*. What are some examples of physical comedy that you have seen in movies or shows recently? Why is this kind of humor enjoyable?

## After the Show:

3. What did you think was the most surprising or **unexpected moment** in the play? How did physical comedy contribute to this moment?
4. How did the setting of **1960s Brighton** as well as the use of the **skiffle band** influence the tone of the play and its commentary on social change?
5. Why does **Francis Henshall** lie so much? Is he driven by survival, greed, or something else? Why do we still root for him despite his flaws?
6. *One Man, Two Guvnors* is based on a much older play *The Servant of Two Masters*. What parts of the play felt 'timeless' or just as interesting now as it would have been for audiences in 1746? Which elements felt traditional and which felt **modern**?
7. Would you call *One Man, Two Guvnors* simply a farce—or does it have **something deeper to say**? Your answer might explore power dynamics, the class system, or more.



# A Conversation with the Dialect Coach



Dialect Coach Andrea Odinov

We sat down with *One Man, Two Guvnors* Dialect Coach Andrea Odinov to ask her some questions about the art of dialect work!

**Andrea—help us set the stage! How did you first make your way to the theatre industry?**

After a three-year M.F.A program at UC Irvine, I began acting professionally for a bit in Los Angeles as well as in regional theatre. Because teaching was actually my career goal, and all things voice was my focus, I then became Certified in Fitzmaurice Voicework® and trained in Knight-Thompson Speech work to support my profession.

**What is a dialect coach? Does every play production have a dialect coach on the team?**

A dialect coach is someone who supports the director's vision for how the characters might sound and supports the actors with producing those sounds. The job begins with reading the script, researching and gathering sound samples, analyzing those samples, then communicating that information to the actors. It requires deep listening and collaboration with the director and actors so that who the characters are and the way they speak feels natural and seamless. It's a little bit of design, a lot of research, and a lot of communication. And it's fun!

**Is there a difference between a dialect and an accent?**

Great question! There's a lot of overlap between the two terms but basically "accent" refers to word pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation only. Example: / CAR/ vs /CAH/. Dialect, however, is a variety of a language used by a group of speakers usually in a similar geographic region or social group. It covers pronunciation as well, but also vocabulary and grammatical differences. Example: soda vs. pop, "ya'll" vs. "youse" Fun fact: everyone has an accent!

"Not every play uses a dialect coach. Sometimes a script doesn't specify where or even when characters are from, so each actor's own accent is appropriate."



# A Conversation with the Dialect Coach

## *continued*



Day 1 of Rehearsal at A Noise Within

**One Man, Two Guvnors is set in Brighton, England in the 1960s. How similar or different will the actors' dialects be to a standard British sound (sometimes referred to as Received Pronunciation, or RP for short)?**

Only a few characters will sound similar to RP. The Brighton accent can be a combination of SSBE (Southern Standard British English) and Estuary, which is its own combination of RP and Cockney sounds. It really depends on where a character is from and educated. So, aside from the characters who consider themselves “upper class”

or highly educated, the other English dialects and accents you'll hear will be Estuary (Essex and other counties) as well as East London / Cockney.

**Are there any dialects you have noticed to be particularly challenging for the actors you've worked with throughout the years? How do you help them overcome those challenges?**

I believe that everyone can learn an accent or dialect—if—there's enough time and energy put in. And that's the biggest challenge: Time. I don't think there are universally challenging dialects for people in general, just for individuals based on their own speech system and how similar or different is the one they're trying to acquire. Learning a dialect or accent is like learning dance choreography, but inside your mouth. Some folks pick it up instantly, others need more time. My job is to figure out what works for each individual and how to get them where they need to be before the Stage Manager takes them away from me. (!) Usually challenges are overcome physically through play: which frees up habitual speech patterns, and repetition: which builds new muscle memory. Then there's the mental work: trusting you can do it, and trusting that your loving Dialect Coach will have notes for you when you're not. I will say that the actors at A Noise Within are hard-working professionals who are extremely skilled with accent work, so the challenges are very few.

## Bonus Material

**Want to go deeper? ANW's Resident Dramaturg, Miranda Johnson-Haddad, has some suggestions.**

### Video Resources - Physical Comedy:

- For what may be the all-time best, and the funniest, example of slapstick comedy, see the classic number “Make ‘em Laugh,” as performed by the great Donald O’Connor in the 1952 movie *Singin’ in the Rain*: <https://youtu.be/iGCNBdCvzL4?si=B8lYdC1HuFRzR7qO>
- And let’s not overlook “The Fish-Slapping Dance” from the incomparable British television show *Monty Python’s Flying Circus* (1971): <https://youtu.be/T8XeDvKqI4E?si=2pdn4FW4lIKsS9NI>
- Here’s Dick van Dyke (as Rob Petrie on “The Dick van Dyke Show”), giving a lecture on comedy, in which he explains that today’s audiences are too sophisticated to laugh at such things as people injuring themselves. The comic bit begins at 19:00 and runs to 23:30: <https://youtu.be/sIWslf8n6b4?si=yqsCIV4cBlIPXfXj>

### Additional Reading - Carlo Goldoni and *The Servant of Two Masters*:

- For more on Carlo Goldoni, see: <https://www.shakespearetheatre.org/blog/a-well-made-comedy-the-legacy-of-commedia-dellarte-carlo-goldoni/>
- For a detailed plot synopsis of Goldoni’s play, see: <https://www.bard.org/study-guides/synopsis-the-servant-of-two-masters/>
- For an older (1928) English translation of Goldoni’s play, see: <https://gutenberg.ca/ebooks/goldonident-twomasters/goldonident-twomasters-00-h.html>

### Additional Resources - *Commedia dell’Arte*:

- For more on the history of *commedia dell’arte* and its character types, see: <https://italoamericano.org/maschere-commedia/>
- For a fun, five-minute video about how the stock characters of *commedia dell’arte* are often identified according to specific physical characteristics and movements, see: <https://youtu.be/JJEwuurzDe4?si=M3JCf9okOvAbKta9> For the sequel, a slightly longer

## Bonus Material *continued*

video that provides more detailed information about the character types, their masks, and their movements, see: [https://youtu.be/h\\_OTAXWt8hY?si=pkIve3ffxooFCpyZ](https://youtu.be/h_OTAXWt8hY?si=pkIve3ffxooFCpyZ)

- For some fun visuals, check out the website for this group of friends who love costumes, and who chose a *commedia dell'arte* theme for a recent photoshoot: <https://danielleroeleveld.nl/2023/02/venice-in-series-our-characters-from-la-commedia-dellarte/#:~:text=The%20Lovers%20never%20wear%20the,beauty%20marks%20to%20their%20faces.%E2%80%9D>
- For more about recent examples of *commedia dell'arte* characters (including the Muppets), as well as suggestions about what today's actors can learn from the earlier theatrical art form, see: <https://www.backstage.com/magazine/article/commedia-dellarte-explained-78337/#:~:text=History%20of%20commedia%20dell'arte&text=This%20power%20became%20so%20evident,a%20keystone%20in%20theatrical%20history.>



## ABOUT

# A Noise Within

A Noise Within produces classic theatre as an essential means to enrich our community by embracing universal human experiences, expanding personal awareness, and challenging individual perspectives. Our company of resident and guest artists immerses student and general audiences in timeless, epic stories in an intimate setting.

Our most successful art asks our community to question beliefs, focus on relationships, and develop self-awareness. Southern California audiences of all ages and backgrounds build community together while engaging with this most visceral and primal of storytelling techniques. ANW's production of classic theatre includes all plays we believe will be part of our cultural legacy. We interpret these stories through the work of a professional resident company—a group of artists whose work is critical to their community—based on the belief that trust among artists and between artists and audience can only be built through an honest and continuing dialogue.

In its 30-year history, A Noise Within has garnered over 500 awards and commendations, including the Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle revered Polly Warfield Award for Excellence and the coveted Margaret Hartford Award for Sustained Excellence.

More than 45,000 individuals attend productions at A Noise Within annually. In addition, the theatre draws over 18,000 student participants to its Education Program. Students benefit from in-classroom workshops, conservatory training, subsidized tickets to matinee and evening performances, post-performance discussions with artists, and free standards-based study guides.



**aNoiseWithin**  
Classic Theatre, Modern Magic

Julia Rodriguez-Elliott & Geoff Elliott  
PRODUCING ARTISTIC DIRECTORS

ADDRESS 3352 E Foothill Blvd  
Pasadena, CA 91107

TEL 626.356.3100

FAX 626.356.3120

EMAIL [info@anoisewithin.org](mailto:info@anoisewithin.org)

WEB [anoisewithin.org](http://anoisewithin.org)