

The Company

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Summary

“All the world’s a stage” Said Shakespeare, 30 years after this show begins.

Before Shakespeare, before Gershwin, before *Hamilton*, there was Commedia dell’arte. In the 1500s, Italy was the height of culture, and travelling Italian actors developed the tropes of comedy that we know today. It is in one of these rag-tag companies of artists that we lay our scene.

Cecilia is not an actress. In fact, she had never seen a show until the troupe crashed into her village. After her husband’s sudden murder, Cecilia’s secure life is shattered. With fear and determination, she leaps into the world of masked villains, masters, servants, soldiers, and lovers.

But life is not all roses and rounds of applause. A string of murders follow the troupe wherever they go, drawing attention that is (for once) unwanted. As the death toll grows, so does mistrust between the actors. Does the killer lie among Cecilia’s newfound family? Onstage, masks can conceal the actor’s faces, but there is no room for secrecy when the stakes get high.

And high they are. Although theatre is incredibly popular, actors are... not so much. Perhaps it’s because they’re always begging for sponsors. Perhaps it is because they’re queer. Perhaps it’s because their leader is low-key practicing occult magic behind closed doors. Perhaps it’s because they’re in the business of smuggling Jews and Protestants out of Italy.

Whatever it is, the pope doesn’t like them that much.

Cecilia also learns that, even in the theatre world, money is power. Currently, she’s uneducated, poor, and now, husbandless. If she’s going to get to the bottom of these deaths and make it out alive, she’s going to need some wealthy friends. Until then, Cecilia must have a quick mind, a sharp tongue, and a strong fist.

Welcome to the Renaissance!

Logline

After mysterious murders begin, an uneducated girl flees her Italian village to join a troupe of traveling Commedia actors who have their own dramas and secrets to uncover.

Format

This show follows a procedural format with a serial plotline. Every episode, the actors arrive in a new town and meet new people. However, the true focus of each episode is not what happens in the town, but rather who in the troupe is impacted by it. Later seasons may revolve around different mysteries or problems, but the general format of each episode will stay the same.

Because the show travels through Europe (and elsewhere), there is less sense of “home” in the setting. The caravan is “home base,” but the actors find home in each other. Scenery can range from town squares to wineries to the insides of noble houses.

Each episode is approximately 40 minutes, and there are 9 episodes in the first season. Each season covers 1-2 historical years. I don’t anticipate there being any large jumps in time.



Actors perform at a renaissance fair in Minnesota.

Tone and Style

Although the “murder mystery” premise of the show may seem dark, the visual style of the show will not be. It should have the energy and color of a Renaissance fair. This means loud music, toasts, and dancing are highly encouraged. Although it should feel rooted in history, this show is about art and artists, and should be entertaining for those who are unfamiliar with the period.

I’m inspired by the colors and style of *Reign* (in fact, there is a historical overlap between the shows). *Outlander* does an excellent job mashing historical accuracy with fantasy, and manages to be feminist in that time period. However, any reference to magic in *The Company* is a reference to the historical practice of magic, and magic does not actually exist in this world.

Likewise, it is not a horror story. Depictions of death are minimal and not intentionally gory or upsetting.



Renaissance-Era depiction of actors displays the accessibility of theatre to the public. Actors did not necessarily take themselves seriously.

Characters

CECILIA is young, witty, and new to traveling the world. She is 19 in the pilot and has lived in the same Italian village her entire life. There, she lives with the memories of her sister who died when they were both very young. She works with her husband as weavers, and it's clear to anyone who met them that she was the one running the business. When he is killed in episode one, she is left without family to tie her down. Only nineteen yet already considered a widow, she jumps at the opportunity to do something more meaningful.

Despite her somewhat tragic history, she is an unusually lucky person and survives unharmed from all of the scrapes her sharp tongue tends to get her into. Like many of the characters, she has a strong attachment to Italian culture and Catholicism. She is physically strong and capable of much more than her appearance chose. Her lack of Education limits her, and she is jealous of her new friends that can read and write. To compensate for her illiteracy, she picks up on various skills and makes jokes that endear others to her. Not all of these new friends will have her best interests at heart, so she must hope that her luck will last.

COSIMO is the leader of the commedia troupe. Although he plays the simple-minded Zanni onstage, he is a conniving Brighella in real life. Vampires aren't real in this world, but if they were, his long black cloak could easily turn into bat wings. Slim in body, he is no physical match for Cecilia, but easily manipulates and outwits her. Later we find out he is attempting to practice dark magic. He believes Cecilia to be capable of incredible magic feats, and wants to use her in his rise to power. His magic practice has also earned him the respect and funds of the Italian nobility. The other actors depend on his finances for protection, so overcoming his influence over them will be Cecilia's biggest challenge.

He is a reflection of the changing class politics during this period of the Renaissance and takes advantage of social unrest. He is also the only character based on a historical figure. Cosimo Ruggeri, personal astrologist to Catherine de Medici and rumored practitioner of the dark arts, is my inspiration for him.

PIERRA is the grand 1st Woman of the troupe, both onstage and off (although she "has played every role imaginable, darling") She is determined to retire gracefully and train Cecilia to take her place. When she wants to, she commands a room better than Cosimo. At times aloof and indirect, it is clear she has more important things to do than answering all of the protagonist's questions. One of these priorities is hiding the identities of herself and many other cast members, who are in danger because they are Jewish. Pierra is a trans woman who has found acceptance and success in theatre.

NICCOLO was the ingenue of the troupe until Cecilia came around. He plays the Arlechino onstage and is a crowd favorite, as well Cosimo's favorite. He doesn't share the reverence to the boss that the rest of the cast does, and allies with our protagonist when the time comes to oppose him. Still, he doesn't encourage her to upset the social boundaries too much, in fear of losing his home. Raised on the road, Niccolo is Cecilia's opposite because he has never had a hometown. This lifestyle encourages his flighty, carefree attitude. He doesn't seem to mind being usurped for the place of ingenue, and it seems that his dreams lay beyond the stage. Initially, he is a love interest of the protagonist until it is revealed that he and the cast's 2nd lover are together.

DANIELO is the second newest member of the acting troupe after Cecilia. He joined a few years ago with his sister who tragically died just weeks prior to Cecilia joining the cast. He resents her for taking his sister's place, although he tries to not let this tension bleed into their onstage romances. He is a second lover onstage, but losing his sister has forced him to abandon naivety in real life. Although many audience members believe him to be in a relationship with Cecilia, he is committed to Niccolo. Above all, he is loyal to those who are good to him.

DIANA aged out of the 2nd lover role just in time for Cecilia to come. She now plays the sassy maid Smeraldina, although is not nearly as rambunctious in life. She is married to the cast's Capitano, and they have no children together. She cared deeply for Daniello's sister, but is more forgiving of Cecilia's arrival. She holds steady while drama unfolds around her, perhaps at the expense of her own emotions.

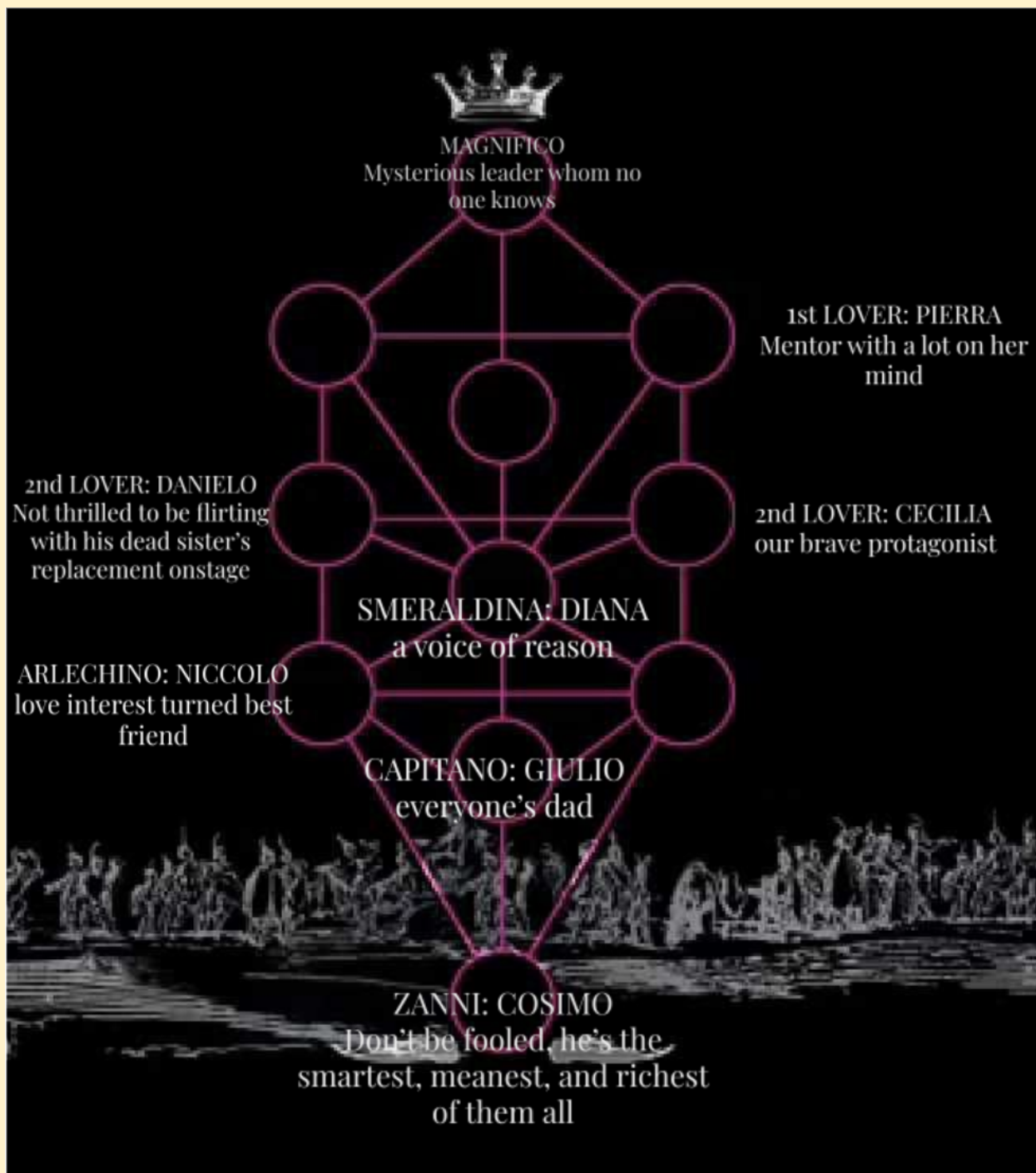
GIULIO would be a golden retriever if the cast were animals. (Sometimes, I think he wishes he could go onstage as an animal, just to hear the crowd laugh). Instead, he plays blindly arrogant Capitano onstage. Married to Diana, he is a caretaker figure for the cast. He knows the basics of medicine and is never seen without a smiling face. Both he and Diana are aware that their marriage is largely for convenience.

MAGNIFICO the benefactor of the troupe and it's unofficial leader. Their name is known to none except, supposedly, Cosimo. No one ever sees this character's face until it is revealed to Cecilia.

***There are some characters of traditional Commedia dell'arte that are not covered by this cast. It is assumed that these roles are filled by extras or members of the show's ensemble. The religious outcasts that they save are bit-parts in episodes as needed, as are the residents of the towns the troupe performs in.



THE IRREGULARS features an ensemble cast of mystery-solving misfits.



The names of our cast overlaid onto a traditional hierarchy of Commedia characters. Note that the most powerful characters are not always the most powerful actors.

The World

Set in 1585. The entire Italian renaissance has already happened, but the rest of Europe is just catching up. Many outside influences are coming from various Mediterranean/Middle Eastern/African countries through trade. It is an incredibly wealthy period, and about half of the cast has come from some significant wealth. The other half is poor, illiterate, and dependent on those with better backgrounds.

The troupe is named “Compagnia de Reitti” or, “the misfit company.” The history of the troupe itself is about two lifespans long. The adult members of the cast, COSIMO and PIERRA, remember it's golden age. In recent years, they've struggled to maintain their momentum. The cast is diminishing in size. Most recently, DANIELO and his sister joined, but the sister died shortly before the troupe arrived in our protagonist's town. It seems the company's luck is about to run out.

DANIELLO remained in the cast after his sister's death, perhaps because he has nowhere else to go. He is deeply affected by his sister's loss and subsequent replacement. She is also mourned by the actress who took her place, DIANA. These tumultuous events have made our power-hungry antagonist even more controlling.

The cast is tight-knit, and although friendships and factions do occur, everyone agrees that they are safer together than they are apart. This is especially true for the religious outcasts, the jews and protestants, whom the troupe smuggles around the country.

The troupe's biggest secret is the identity of their leader and benefactor, a shadowy figure known only by the name “Magnifico.”

There are a few historical figures who we can meet over the course of this series. The most important is Catherine de Medici, who is living out the final years of her life in France when this show begins. COSIMO is based on a real historical figure who was said to have predicted her death. Other historical figures include Galileo Galilei, famed astronomer, and William Shakespere. We'll have to get out of Italy to meet him, though.

If COSIMO and MAGNIFICO are our antagonists, their biggest threat is the Catholic Church. Everyone knows of it's huge influence on society, and although they must fear it, they don't respect it.

A Note on History

1500s Europe may not appear to be the most diverse when casting comes to mind. However, the Italian renaissance was a time not only of great art, but of hugely expanded trade. The members of the traveling company would have interacted with scholars, traders, and missionaries from around the Mediterranean and beyond. This includes modern-day Egypt, Libya, Greece, Spain, Morocco, Syria, Lebanon, and Israel, to name a few. I encourage a cast of characters that is as racially and religiously diverse as possible.

Historical accuracy is incredibly important in elements of theatre, costume, historical timeline, and scenic design. However, if the characters in this universe can speak in modern english, there can be black people that weren't slaves and servants.

Additionally, this acting company represents a fantasy-like world of acceptance and being your 'true self'. None of the characters experience homophobia or sexism from their fellow actors, only from the outside world (and very little at that). This is not a corset-pulling, women hating world.



Another period depiction of characters traditional to Commedia. A mix of exaggerated costumes and gestures conveyed meaning through humor.

Season One Episodes

Ep 1. THE TRAGEDY OF COMEDY: The company arrives in Cecilia's small town, stirring up trouble in the form of color and laughter. In her home, Cecilia's husband comforts her after waking up from a nightmare, but they break into an argument. Cecilia leaves to see the show, only to return to her husband tragically murdered. Feeling confused and guilty, she returns to town and is comforted by Cosimo and other cast members, who whisk her away on their adventure.

Ep 2. ROAD SHOW: Cecilia wakes up, disoriented, in the back of a traveling carriage. She meets Niccolo who introduces her to the other members of the cast. She meets Diana, who is suffering from performance anxiety. In time, they arrive at a small town and she watches them do a show. By their standards, it is dysfunctional, but the spectacle of it is enough to convince her to stay on. Cecilia has a long conversation with Pierra, who begins to mentor her. In the night a girl is found dead.

Ep 3. IMPROV: Cecilia begins acting. She tries hard to get along with Daniello in scenes, but he is cold to her. Feeling put out, she turns to Niccolo. Their conversation is interrupted by Cosimo and Pierra, who insist they pack up early and get on the road. The townspeople blame them for the murder of the girl, and they are being pursued by soldiers hunting non-catholics. It is here that Cecilia learns one of the biggest secrets of the troupe. They end up being stopped, but Cecilia is able to deter the soldiers with her quick words. This action lands in the troupe, and even a nod of thanks from Daniello.

Ep 4. THE SHOW MUST GO ON: The troupe lands in a new city. While establishing their setup, they are greeted by the kind nobility who host them. Cecilia grows particularly close with one of the grandfathers of the family. Cosimo goes on a mysterious errand to France, so his role is taken by the grandfather. Cecilia attempts to follow Cosimo, but is found out before she can learn vital information. Tensions between Daniello and Niccolo emerge and explode onstage. While performing for the town and family, the grandfather dies. The family drives the troupe out of town with accusations of murder.

Ep 5. CHARITY: Taking a break from the spotlight and terror, the troupe restocks in a small village. Cecilia suggests they invite children to act in a show. Daniello signs on, and together they put on a successful children's show. Just as the act is closing, Cosimo returns, injured. As Giulio heals his wounds, Cosimo warns the troupe of great danger they could be in. They resolve to drop off the last of their religious refugees and continue to safer territory.

Ep 6. INTERMISSION: Things are looking up for Cecilia as they close up a show in a new city. To celebrate the show and the safety of their companions, they take a detour to a vineyard and everyone gets drunk. Diana reveals her love for Daniello's deceased sister, and Daniello forgives Cecilia for taking her place. Pierra treats the cast to a dramatic revival of her greatest performance. In the night, Niccolo hears something terrible from Cosimo's tent, and packs to leave. Cecilia begins to track the similarities between the murders.

Ep 7. THE ART OF SCIENCE: The troupe arrives in Pisa to a screaming crowd, but they are not the avid fans as anticipated. Instead, they are protesting the supposed murderers. They are arrested, and meet a young Galileo in jail. In jail, they realize there has been another murder, and suspects are being brought in for questioning. Both Galileo and the actors are released, but not before hearing talk of Cosimo's location. Galileo recognises Cosimo from studying astronomy, and encourages Cecilia to find Cosimo where they can see the stars.

Ep 8. PLAY DEAD: Cecilia recruits Diana and Giulio to put on a show that morning, against the advice of Pierra. Now short of Niccolo, the troupe does a short show and holes up for the night with a friendly landlady. Here, Cecilia learns of dark magic and finds the connection between the murders and Cosimo. She races to the Leaning Tower of Pisa, and nearly catches Cosimo before he disappears. Daniello searches for Niccolo.

Ep 9. MAGNIFICO: The actors arrive in Florence to the largest crowd of the season. Although no one is directly accusing them of murder, the reputation of the company is on the line. Pierra attempts to take control but is concerned about performing without Cosimo. Daniello and Niccolo return, Niccolo deeply injured by Cosimo. The trio find him in a huge mansion, surrounded by occult instruments. However, he is being held prisoner by Magnifico, whose face is finally revealed. Cecilia decides to free Cosimo, and the troupe leaves together in the hopes of outrunning Magnifico.



OUTLANDER's Claire Fraiser discovers practitioners of magic while undercover in the court of King Louis XV.

Future Seasons

Historically, there are a few different places this story can go. To get there, of course, they'll need money, which is why Season Two will really dig into the noble ties Cosimo has. There, we'll meet eccentric rich Italian people, including the infamous Catherine de Medici. (She spent much of her life in France and died in the late 1580s, so a quick progression through time is essential to making this make sense). This is also where we'll really see the influence of the Vatican affecting the company's plans.

For Season Three, there is also a lot to explore in the way of world travel outside of Europe. I'd love to spend a season on the road outside of Italy (think cities like Tripoli, Constantinople, Beirut, and Alexandria). This will require some help, meaning we will meet a charismatic multilingual tour guide. Upon hearing of Catherine's approaching death, the troupe races to France, where Cosimo ends up killing her.

As the Italian renaissance comes to a close, the acting troupe will travel to Elizabethan England where Shakespeare's company is forming. Season four will be spent visiting Shakespeare and Elizabeth I. Here, we can see how he modeled some of his characters around our Italian friends! It's also a place of great change as Protestantism takes over, and our Italians will have to learn to get along in this new place.

As far as Cecilia's arc goes, she has a lot of growing to do still after the first season. In season one she learns how to act, season two will be making her an actress. Fame comes with a price, and her tour of the riches of Italy will teach her not to let her pride get the best of her. Eventually, she will overcome Cosimo (I imagine late in season 4 or 5) and become the leader of the troupe. This means she will correspond directly with their donors, as well as fending off questions from the church. Although she may entertain some love interests, Cecilia's rise to power requires her to remain independent in a way that may be uncomfortable to her.

What Mask Do You Wear?

I admit to being a bit of a geek. The premise of the show is... oddly specific. I truly appreciate your smiling and nodding through the idea. Your college improv troupe in creepy masks isn't everyone's idea of a good time.

What is essential to the run of this show is the acknowledgement that sometimes the ridiculous can be as beautiful as the serious. In the renaissance, theatre poked fun at the dichotomies that ruled society: master or servant, husband or wife, naive or knowledgeable.

Now, we want to use it to strip down those tropes. The characters in this show are deeper than the parts they play. Behind the scenes, is the sassy maid as confident as she seems? Is the servant as stupid as he appears?

Definitely not.

Get front-row seats to this adventure full of intrigue, friendship, and *all* the drama.



With love,

The Company