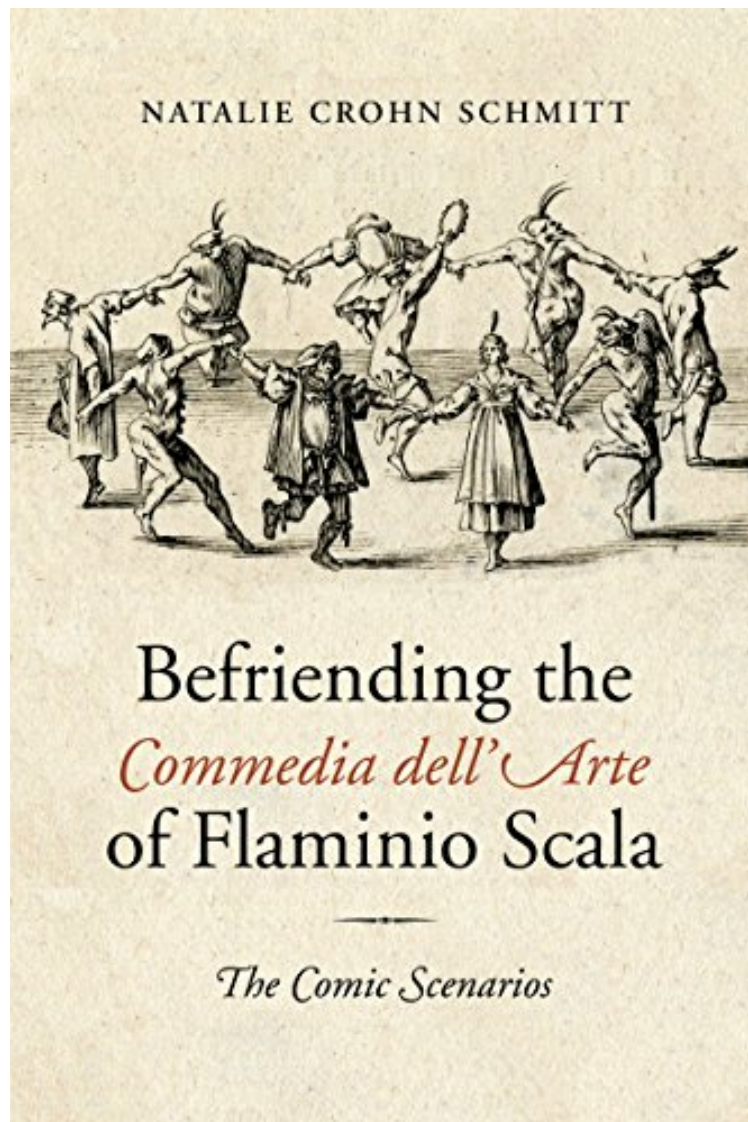


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Befriending the Commedia dell'Arte of Flaminio Scala: The Comic Scenarios (Toronto Italian Studies)

Natalie Schmitt

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Natalie Schmitt : Befriending the Commedia dell'Arte of Flaminio Scala: The Comic Scenarios (Toronto Italian Studies) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Befriending the Commedia dell'Arte of Flaminio Scala: The Comic Scenarios (Toronto Italian Studies):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Pleasing the (Renaissance) AudienceBy Dingbat McDougalFor any student of the Commedia dell'Arte, even if you don't buy this book, order it for your library, and get to read

it that way. It combines a first rate understanding of the nuances of performance within this tricky genre, with excellent deductive scholarship. The first publication of Flaminio Scala's scenarios by Henry Salerno, in the words of Louise Clubb, was a theatrical event of the first order but sadly contained a small amount of significant mistranslations. Richard Andrews's subsequent edition of the scenarios resolved this. Crohn Schmitt's edition, though not containing as many individual scenarios, is highly significant in that she invests half the book in, in her own words, "in making friends with Flaminio Scala", and makes a very strong case for specifically identifying the underlying morality and implicit cultural values present within the wider collection of scenarios. She clearly argues for, supported by extended and enjoyable quotations from such things as Venetian pamphlets on the "servant problem", an interpretation of the scenarios that reflects precisely the morals and values of the patriarchal, honour-based social grouping that composed the theatre-going class. Scala, she notes, was creating theatrical events for a clearly identified audience, and the cultural values within his scenarios pandered to them, as well as their human hopes and fears, with a gleeful and energetic panache. Despite many worthy recreations of Scala's scenarios, both professionally and within drama conservatoires, she makes the point that, before one re-interprets this group of scenarios as performances, one must understand that these scenarios are cultural artifacts from a very precise time in history. It is Crohn Schmitt's contribution to scholarship that she explains this in an accessible and clearly argued prose style. She helps us understand how very different Flaminio Scala's world is from our own. This is no mean feat of scholarship, and armed with these insights, they can now be applied both in performance and in understanding the phenomena of the Commedia dell'Arte scenario.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Great Guide For Commedia Troupes By John A Cross My troupe, i Sebastiani, has been focused on recreating Sixteenth Century style Commedia dell'Arte for the last twenty-something years, and I wish this book had been available when we started. It is almost like it was written for us, from the point of view we care about. Scala's scenarios do not always make sense on the first read, but knowing more about the culture from that period of marriage, honor, and related topics helps a lot. Prof. Schmitt's analysis of these four plays, including suggestions for gags, lazzi, and unifying humor are excellent, and from her examples, it is not hard to do the same for the other 36 of his comic scenarios (you are still on your own for the pastorals). I am recommending this book to every one I work with. Reading it is time well spent. Buy it for the wisdom, keep it for the footnotes.

The most important theatrical movement in sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Europe, the commedia dell'arte has inspired playwrights, artists, and musicians including Molière, Dario Fo, Picasso, and Stravinsky. Because of its stock characters, improvised dialogue, and extravagant theatricalism, the commedia dell'arte is often assumed to be a superficial comic style. With *Befriending the Commedia dell'Arte* of Flaminio Scala, Natalie Crohn Schmitt demolishes that assumption. By reconstructing the commedia dell'arte scenarios published by troupe manager Flaminio Scala (1547–1624), Schmitt demonstrates that in its Golden Age the commedia dell'arte relied as much on craftsmanship as on improvisation and that Scala's scenarios are a treasure trove of social commentary on early modern daily life in Italy. In the book, Schmitt makes use of her intensive research into the social and cultural history of sixteenth-century Italy and the aesthetic principles of the period. She combines this research with her insights drawn from studying with contemporary commedia dell'arte performers and from directing a production of one of Scala's scenarios. The result is a new perspective on the commedia dell'arte that illuminates the style's full richness.

In "this book, Schmitt reveals a unique point of view: to 'befriend' the text, as she explains, is to analyze sympathetically and give due deference to the author. But Schmitt does much more.... In contextualizing these texts within sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italian culture, Schmitt frames Scala's scenarios - material that is by definition incomplete - in a way that will open up new conversations about commedia dell'arte to both historians and practitioners. Certainly her cogent and engaging style will appeal to both." - Jenna Soleo-Shanks, *Comparative Drama*, 49, 2 240-242.