

MAX-I-MIME

TEACHER'S STUDY GUIDE

ABOUT THE PERFORMER

Max Fomitchev, a native of Moscow, began his mime training at age thirteen and was the only deaf student in his class. Within one year, he surpassed his peers and advanced to the adult mime studio at Moscow Government University. He then found a new challenge at the Mirror Mime Company of Moscow where he won the *National Mime Award*, and from there attended the Schukin University where he earned his Master of Fine Arts Degree in Drama.

After University, Max joined the famed Zakutok Theatre with whom he toured throughout Russia as well as to Spain, Germany, Taiwan, England, the United States, and Canada.

While performing in Canada, he fell in love with the city of Vancouver and decided to make it his home. Since coming to Canada, Max has appeared in film and TV roles, performed at festivals and in schools. He also teaches both workshops and master classes.



THEMES

- Clowning
- Comedy
- Communication
- Gesture
- Humanity
- Irony
- Mime
- Movement
- Pathos
- Physical Theatre
- Problem-Solving



ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

Max's fifty-minute mime comedy show for schools appeals equally to students at all grade levels. Themes used in the show convey the experience of being on the outside of mainstream society looking in, and illustrate the common person's struggles with everyday problems through the liberal use of humour.

The performance consists of a series of sketches where Max finds himself in ordinary situations that he deals with in a most extraordinary way. There is a great deal of interaction with the audience, and some sketches will involve volunteers from the audience. Throughout the entire show an enormous amount of information will be communicated but not a single word spoken.



THE HISTORY OF MIME

Mime supposedly began in the Theatre of Dionysius in Athens, perhaps as far back as the third century B.C.E. These mimes were not entirely silent, as we think of mimes today, but the performers minimized the speech element. There was usually a chorus, typical of Greek theatre of the time, and the stories were most often tragedies that had a moral lesson. Well-known authors of early mime performances include Decimus, Laberius, Epicharmus, Sophron,

Publilius, Syrus, and Herodas.

By the time of the fall of Rome, mimes were performing at banquets and courts all over Europe. Roman mime artists were called *mimus* but the word "mime" by then was often used as a catch-all term for any sort of short dramatic or comedic acted entertainment, sometimes expanding to include sword swallows and jugglers. Roman mime was a mix of farce, dancing, singing and acrobatics from which stock characters based on

stereotypes evolved, such as the stupid husband, greedy pig, foolish old man, devious woman, etc. Various forms evolved from these classical roots, most notably the *commedia dell'arte* in Italy. This sort of mime – a non-silent, satirical, often political farce – is still used by artists today, and the British-style pantomime is a clear descendent of this sort of mime, though popular sketch comedy and TV sitcoms also carry elements of this genre.



Max at age 3.

MODERN MIME

Today, there are clearly two kinds of mime. The more traditional branch of mime in which the performer uses spatial and corporeal movement with little or no theatrical props is often called pantomime. Mime routines frequently involve pretending to touch something but not actually doing so, or

pretending to interact with imaginary objects. It is often, but not always, done in white face and the movements and expressions are heightened for greater effect. The best-known modern exponent of this type of mime is Marcel Marceau. More recently, a form of mime has grown from studies of people like Etienne Decroux

and Jacques Lecoq. Their aim is not to replace words by gesture, but to express with the body something complementary, something the text does not express. This branch of mime is still growing and has become more widely known as *physical theatre*.

**MARCEL
MARCEAU**



MIME IN CONTEMPORARY AND POPULAR CULTURE

Some of the moves in breakdancing, such as the moonwalk, rely on mime techniques.

Anyone who has played the

well-known party game of charades has been, however briefly, a mime artist.

Motion pictures in which live actors interact with animated

cartoons, require the actors to practice mime skills in order to convincingly push or pull an imaginary object or character that will be added to the film later.



David Bowie was a mime before he became a singer.

CANADIAN ARTISTS THAT USE PHYSICAL COMEDY AND MIME

Axis Theatre Company—www.axistheatre.com

Cirque du Soleil—www.cirquedusoleil.com

Dynamo Theatre—www.dynamotheatre.qc.ca

Trent Arterberry—www.trentshow.com

Vancouver TheatreSports—www.vtsl.com

ACTIVITY SUGGESTION — SILENT MOVIE

1. Discuss silent movies. Show a scene from Laurel & Hardy, Buster Keaton, or Charlie Chaplin. What makes us laugh and why? How do physical actions convey meaning when there are no words? Re-create one of the scenes.
2. Create a short silent movie scene involving a hero & a heroine.
3. Discuss mime techniques & slapstick. Add a simple storyline for the class with setting, characters etc.
4. Add the use of flashcards to introduce each scene instead of using words ("Oh no the train is coming", "My Hero" etc.) Use silent movie music to enhance the drama.
5. Rehearse your scene and develop an ending to it. Plan costumes.
6. Final dress rehearsal, performance or filming.



WORKSHOP SUGGESTIONS

Max has extensive experience teaching mime and physical comedy to young people of all ages. He can teach half-day or full-day workshops, or can put together a program for a more extensive residency. High schools may wish to consider a week-long residency that culminates in an evening student performance fundraiser. (Max would take his fee from the money raised, the school keeps the rest.)

Whether it be a large group, small group, skill-oriented, or performance-focused experience, Max can readily adapt to the needs of students at all skill levels.



READING SUGGESTIONS

The San Francisco Mime Troupe Reader, Susan Venata Mason, U of Michigan (2005)

Teaching the Three R's Through Movement, Prentice Hall (2002)

Be a Mime, Mark Stoltzenberg, Sterling Publishing (2001)

Bip in a Book, Marcel Marceau, Stewart, Tabori & Change (2001)

Comedy is a Man in Trouble, Alan Dale, U of Minnesota (2000)

All About Mime, Maravene Sheppard Loeschke, Prentice Hall (1982)

Websites:

Max-i-Mime: www.maximime.ca

ArtsLynx: www.artslynx.org/theatre/physical



HOSTING THE PERFORMANCE

Max will arrive thirty to sixty minutes before the scheduled show time. He will set up on the stage if you have one that is suitable. Such a stage must be well-lit from the front and have a solid-colour backdrop. If such a performing space is not available, Max will set up at one end of the gymnasium on the floor.

The only technical requirement is access to a functioning electrical outlet.

Naturally, as with all performers, a changing room near the performance area and fresh drinking water would be most appreciated.

Please have a teacher or the principal introduce the performance. The introduction can be very simple: "We are pleased to have with us today a performer who comes originally from Russia where he grew up and went to school, but now lives in Vancouver. He uses no words in his performance but relies instead on gesture and movement. Please welcome, Max-i-mime."

The performance will last approximately 50 minutes.



MIMIC BABY SIGN LANGUAGE



Max's son, Artem, says, "Please."

Using sign language with infants and toddlers empowers them to communicate before verbal language is in place. The benefits of early communication reduces frustration, encourages babies to talk earlier, develops the language centre of child's brain, and is a fun and bonding experience.

Max and his wife Selena Lohan have started the first Canadian business producing DVDs on Sign Language for Babies. With their combined backgrounds in the performing arts, teaching sign language, and experience as parents, they have created two DVDs: *Mimic Me - Babies & Beginners*, and *Mimic Me - Kids*.

For more info visit www.mimicbaby.com

