**Pantomime** is a type of [musical comedy](file:///C:\wiki\Musical_theatre) stage production designed for family entertainment. It was developed in England and is performed throughout the United Kingdom, Ireland and (to a lesser extent) in other English-speaking countries, especially during the Christmas and New Year season. Modern pantomime includes songs, gags, [slapstick](file:///C:\wiki\Slapstick) comedy and dancing. It employs gender-crossing actors and combines topical humour with a story more or less based on a well-known fairy tale, fable or [folk tale](file:///C:\wiki\Folklore). Pantomime is a participatory form of theatre, in which the audience is expected to sing along with certain parts of the music and shout out phrases to the performers.

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**Pantomime** has a long theatrical history in Western culture dating back to classical theatre. It developed partly from the 16th century [commedia *dell'arte*](file:///C:\wiki\Commedia_dell%27arte) tradition of Italy and other European and British stage traditions, such as 17th-century [masques](file:///C:\wiki\Masque) and [music hall](file:///C:\wiki\Music_hall). An important part of the pantomime, until the late 19th century, was the [harlequinade](file:///C:\wiki\Harlequinade).