

The History of Mime

Mime all began in Greece, at the Theatre of Dionysus in Athens. Actors wore masks and performed outdoors, before audiences of 10,000 or more, at festivals to honour the God of theatre, Dionysus. When the Romans conquered Greece, they took mime back to Italy, and found ways to make it their own. This is when comedy and tragedy developed.

Mime continued to grow throughout the Middle Ages, and in Italy early 1500's, Commedia dell'Arte emerged. Acrobatic street performers began wearing masks with exaggerated comical features, made to draw attention to the performers. The characters they created became known as Zanni. In 1576, a company of Italians led by Flaminio Scala travelled to France, where mime became extremely popular.

Nearly two and a half centuries later, in 1811, Jean Gaspard Batiste Deburau - an acrobatic street performer - introduced the lovesick character Pierrot to French theatre, which changed mime from what it was then to the art form it is known as today. After the WWI, many other famous mime artists found fame, including Charles Dullin, Etienne Decroux and Jean-Louis Barrault, with Marcel Marceau coming around after WWII.

The silent film era began in the 1890s, before it was replaced by 'talking film' in the late 1920s. A lot of the time in silent films they used title cards so they could tell the viewers what was happening in more detail.