

Harpax is the only *cacula* to have a role in an extant comedy of Plautus. His unexpected re-appearance at *Pseudolus* 1103 offers the playwright a chance not just to refresh the audience musically but also to develop the personality and comic potential of this laughable lackey. The audience has already met Harpax, the slave of a Macedonian soldier, in a scene (594–666, consisting primarily of trochaic septenarii) in which Pseudolus pretends to be Ballio’s slave Syrus and persuades Harpax to go back to the inn and stay there until Ballio comes home. Harpax, tired of waiting for “Syrus” to fetch him, now takes the initiative to return to the house of the *leno*, determined to get the girl whom his master has bought from Ballio. His arrival cuts short a conversation between Ballio and Simo, but gives the two characters the opportunity to eavesdrop on Harpax and form their own impressions of him. In my paper for this workshop I discuss the compromises that I had to make, and the goals that I tried to achieve, when I composed music for Harpax, Ballio, and Simo to sing in a modern production of *Pseudolus*.

While Moore (pp. 264–266) regards each accompanied passage in a Plautine comedy as the start of a new “unit of action,” Marshall (p. 216) views each accompanied passage as the end, or the falling portion, of an “arc” that begins with unaccompanied iambic senarii. Both agree, however, that the basic structural distinction in Plautus’ plays is between *DV* (*deverbium*) and *C* (*canticum*), and they argue against the further division of *C* into “songs” (*cantica mixtis modis*) and “recitative” (stichic meters other than iambic senarii) on the grounds that we have no evidence of any differences in the methods of performing all the diverse passages that the manuscripts classify as *C*. This is a reasonable stance for scholars to take, and one possible response to it would be to have actors not memorize songs at all, but instead improvise tunes as they sing their lines in *C* passages. In practical terms, though, this will simply not work: if the play is going to hold the attention of an audience ranging widely in age and background, last no longer than 60 or 70 minutes, and fall within the skill range of non-professional student actors, it needs full-fledged, catchy songs, and it needs them at fairly regular intervals. If theatrical success requires transforming even some *DV* passages into music, so be it. In the context of performance, every song serves simultaneously as a coda for the section that precedes it and as an overture to what follows.

In the case of Harpax’s *canticum*, I wanted to retain a sense of its varied meters, yet make the music accessible enough that the audience would have no trouble joining the actor on the refrain. I also wanted the song to present Harpax in an amusing yet sympathetic light. Although his *canticum* is often misleadingly lumped into the same category with other “good slave” songs (e.g., McCarthy, p. 131 n. 20), it is different from them since Harpax, as a soldier’s slave, combines features of the two character types. Slater (p. 141) declares that the very subject matter (virtues of the faithful slave) reveals Harpax to be “as much a fool as Ballio and Simo,” but in this instance Harpax’s fidelity proves not to be foolish at all; in fact it exposes the foolishness of others. Finally, I wanted to reflect in my song the way that the polymetric passage morphs from a solo into a trio and then into trochaic septenarii, recalling the first scene in which Harpax appeared, 500 lines earlier. From the perspective of this dutiful slave, nothing has changed since then, but the audience knows better and can enjoy playing—and singing—along.