



*Written by
Cora Alley*

“The Summoning of Everyman”

*Adapted by Cora Alley
For the Christmas Madrigal Dinner*

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15: 55, 56

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Dramatic Category: Christmas Madrigal Dinner Theater

What is a “Madrigal Dinner”?

A "Madrigal Dinner" is a trip back in time. Twelve singers dress in 16th century, English costumes and herald in the Christmas season with a harmonious concert of traditional, acappella carols. The ten members of the royal court join the King and Queen as they sit on stage in a semi-circle that opens to the audience.

The guests are seated at festively decorated tables ready to enjoy a Christmas dinner with all the trimmings: the Wassail (hot apple cider), the "boar's head" (prime rib), and Figgie Pudding (bread pudding). The King's Jester serves as the "Master of Ceremonies" for the evening, as he delights and surprises the audience with toasts, jokes, and comic asides.

A troupe of the "King's players" join the Court and present a traditional play that dates back to the time of classic European literature. The scenes of the play are woven among the courses of the meal and set up the sweet message of the Christmas carols. The audience comes away from the evening having enjoyed a delicious holiday feast, laughed and cried at the players, and marveled at the vocal talent of the ensemble.

NOTE:

See the “Madrigal Checklist,” at the end of the script, to assist you in producing the wonderful evening of celebration.

Topic: The companionship of Jesus

Performance Time: 1 hour program + the concert and the meal = 2 hours total

Number of Players: 9 players, 12 singers, (with an option of 15+ entertainers)

Objective:

To illustrate that Jesus promises to be our one true companion, in this life, and forever.

Synopsis:

Tonight, the King's players tell the story of "Everyman," the 11th century classic morality play. It centers around the inevitable foe, Death, coming for Everyman (The Jester). He seeks company for his desperate journey as he goes to give an account of his life to God, but alas, all forsake him: his friends, his family, his riches, and even his good deeds. Finally, in desperation, "Wisdom," comes to him to share with him the good news that Jesus is the only one who will stand with us, not only while we live, but as we take our final journey as well. As we celebrate the birth of our one true companion, rejoice in Jesus for our life in Him is truly life everlasting!

Cast:

The Royal Players:

Jester: *A fun-loving, clownish fellow who conducts the fun*
Death: *An ominous man with a booming voice*
Merlin: *A magician who performs for "Death" and for the audience*
Fellowship: *The "best friend" of the Jester; he wants to have fun!*
Kinsman: *A rogue who has little courage*
Cousin: *A woman who complains profusely*
Goods: *A flamboyant, over-dressed, rich lady*
Deeds: *A feeble girl, dressed in rags; so weak, she cannot stand up*
Wisdom: *An ethereal woman, dressed in white*

The Madrigal Singers:

The King: *A regal gentleman in whose "castle" the evening is set*
The Queen: *A gracious lady who welcomes her guests*
Ladies 1, 2, 3, 4, 5: *Royal female members of the court*
 Lords 1, 2, 3, 4, 5: *Royal male members of the court*

Note:

These 12 singers, dressed in Renaissance costumes, make up the king's court. They are an acappella singing cast, which also presents a concert of Christmas carols during the program. Mix the vocal parts as you see fit. The parts sung do not have any bearing on the parts spoken.

Additional Cast (optional):

(The play does not require these people, but they add a wonderful dimension to the program)

1 Juggler:	<i>entertains at mealtime</i>
3 Mimes:	<i>perform antics during mealtime</i>
4 Minstrels:	<i>serenade with instruments at mealtime, at the tables</i>
Trumpeter(s):	<i>signal events with fanfare</i>
2 Beefeaters:	<i>armored knights who stand guard at the door</i>
2 Announcers:	<i>announce guests by name, at the door</i>
Serving girls:	<i>dressed as peasants, to wait on each table (as many as you need)</i>
2 Litter bearers:	<i>carry in the courses of the meal</i>
1 Magician:	<i>entertains guests during mealtime, at their tables</i>
4 Troubadours:	<i>sing to guests during mealtime, at their tables</i>

Dancers: *They add festivity to the evening. They perform a dance number dressed as “Merry Maids” with flowing dresses and flowers in their hair; like in the days of “Robin Hood.”*

Orphan children: *This is an opportunity for your “children’s choir” to get involved. They sing a song to the audience during the show. Dress these elementary-aged children in rags, dirty their faces, and give them bowls to beg at the tables. Then, put chocolate “gold coins” on each table and let the people give them to the children when they come by.*

Disgruntled Serving Girls: *An ensemble of six women who work up a few songs that are off-pitch, and silly in nature. They are generally irritated that their voices are not good enough to be one of those “uppity Madrigal Singers.” After all, “We clean up real nice, too!”*

Costumes:

Dress in Renaissance and medieval costumes. See specific cast descriptions above, for costuming suggestions.

Props:

Set the King’s table for a traditional Renaissance Christmas feast
Gold-wrapped, chocolate coins (for “Orphan Chorus” option)
2 Swords

Lights:

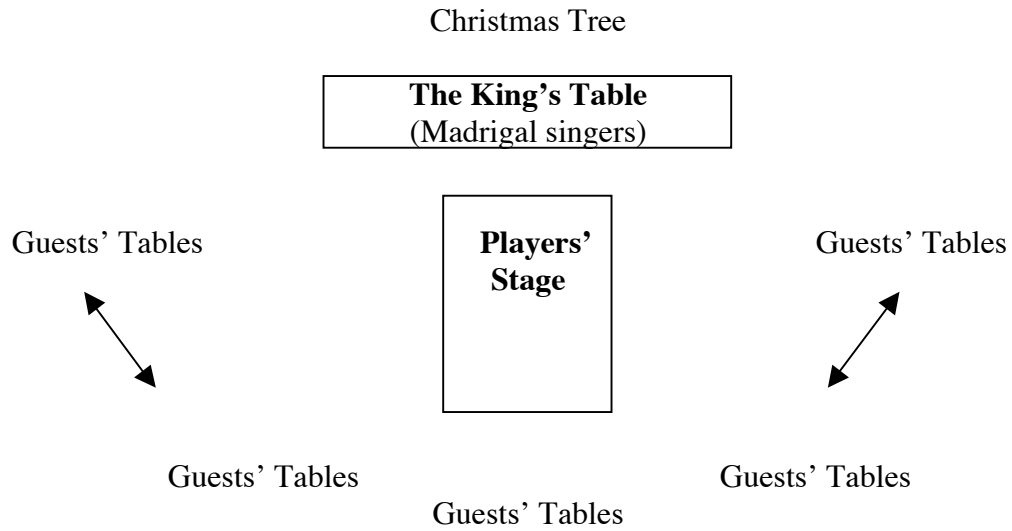
Design the lighting in such a way that the players and King’s Court are highlighted according to their dominance in the program.

Sound:

Microphones for the singers, at the table
Wireless mics for the actors with lines, who aren’t at the table

Staging:

If you can “transform” your room into a “castle hall” with “theater-in-the-round” seating, it will enhance the “ambience” of the evening. Here is a suggested diagram:



A Guide to 16th Century English Christmas Customs

Wassail - The festive holiday drink from the Anglo-Saxon, “Wes-hal,” means “be whole.” The old wassail bowls, usually of silver or pewter, were immense. It was the custom of the stewards upon entering the banquet hall to call out, “Wassail, Wassail,” and this was answered by the host and the guests alike with song or carol. A forerunner was “lamb’s wool,” a mixture of hot ale, sugar, spices, eggs, and roasted apples. Thick cream was sometimes added. It was served in the wassail bowl with pieces of toast floating on top. Hence, the origin of the drinking toast.

Boar’s Head - Traditionally, this is the heart of the Christmas feast. Its mouth propped open with an apple, the head was brought in on a silver dish, to a fanfare and a special carol. Its origin comes from Psalm 80, in which Satan is the “boar out of the wood.” The head of the slain boar, paraded about the Great Hall, showed the defeat of Satan by the newborn Christ child. The master of the house would take an oath upon it to perform some charitable deed, and often the other gentlemen seated at the table would follow suit.

Flaming Plum Pudding - Everyone in the household stirred the plum pudding and made a wish. If a trinket were found in the piece one ate, the wish would come true; consequently, it became known as “Figgie Pudding.”

The Twelve Days of Christmas - Known liturgically as Epiphany, representing the traditional time of the journey of the Magi to worship the Christ child. The twelve days were a time of great feasting, celebration, singing of madrigals and carols, plays and general merry making.

Madrigals - A vocal music idiom from the 14th and 15th century in Italy, the madrigals developed chiefly in the 16th century in England. The word has its origin in either Mandrialis (pastoral song), or matricials (in the mother tongue). English madrigals were variously called songs, sonnets, canzonets, and ayres.

Instruction for the beginning:

Do a cheery job of decorating the set like an old English castle. Use coats of arms, banners, swords, thrones, drapes of rich tapestry, etc. The Christmas tree should be magnificent, the wreaths and centerpieces should be studded with decorations and lights, and the entire mood should be magical.

Set all the tables with china and good glassware. No paper plates. Outfit each table with rolls and fill the water glasses. People want something to eat and drink the minute they arrive. Hungry people are generally grumpy!

Light the candles, dim the lights and instruct the minstrels to roam the house playing their instruments while the guests enter. The “announcers,” welcome each guest and shout out his/her name (i.e. “The Lord and Lady Parker”). Servers wait inside the hall near the door, with their guest list for their table in hand. When they hear a name called that is assigned to their table, they come to the door and escort them to their table. Mimes and the magician can entertain the guests.

Caution:

Assign the mimes, the musician, and the juggler, various parts of the house at various times, so they do not wear out their welcome by frequenting the same part of the house all night.

The Script:

Fanfare 1

(The trumpeters enter and march around the hall. They meet at the front of the King's table.)

(Prologue)

Jester: *(He enters the hall with exuberance)*
Alas dear guests, you've come again,
To escape life's sorrow, strife, and pain!
So gaily clad in handsome dress,
No doubt this royal mob you'll impress. *(aside)*

Unstick thy mind from present day,
Let it come with us, let it fly away.
On wings of laughter, wings of song,
Wings that carry each along
To a special time and a special place,
That magically, mystically, cares erase.

This room is now a castle hall,
And we are players--one and all.

Option: "Merry Maids" Dance

(They enter the hall, giggling. The Jester notices them.)

Oh what lovely things are girls!
Their beauty, like a rose, unfurls.

(He is obviously caught up in the show of lovely ladies. He slaps his own face, and comes to his senses.)

Well, let's be on with it, I pray
For all too soon comes morrow's day

This blessed night of feasts and mirth,
Will herald in our Savior's birth!

Oh merry night for Yuletide cheer,
Your long awaited time in here!

Now, least you seem like famished fools,
You must obey my simple rules,

(He takes out a scroll he finds on the royal table, and reads)

Please be cordial, never rude,
And do not steal your neighbor's food.

Eating with fingers will make a mess,
So, wipe them on your lady's dress.

And if you feel the need to spit;
Please wait until the singers quit.

(Death enters from the side of the castle and stands near the Jester; he unnerves the Jester)

Pardon, good sir, or I'll loose my place,
And these good folk will become a disgrace,

I'm instructing them in behaviors at table
Or the King will think them all born in a stable.

Death: I have come for Everyman.

Jester: And who might you be who has the gall
To interrupt my instructions in this gala hall?

Death: I am death whom you cannot ban,
I come for you, if you be Everyman.

Jester: Death! *(backing away)* No! You're quite the contestor,
I'm not Everyman! I'm Everyjester!

Death: Your Maker bids; it's you I summon!

Jester: *(disguising his voice to sound like a woman)*
I'm not Everyman;
I'm Everywoman!

Death: Prepare thy book of reckoning.
To set before the Lord Heaven King.

Good deeds so weak and sins so bad,
Your days, your nights, and goods you've had.

Jester: Good Sir, you 'err; I'm not a sinner
I must conduct this madrigal dinner!

I pray thee, go! Find some other sport,
Here come the singers! They enter the court!

(The Jester makes a wide circle around Death and moves to the furthest side of the room . He makes a quick escape while Death turns to follow at a distance.)

Processional:

(The madrigal singers enter as they sing a Christmas carol. “God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen” is a favorite. They line up at opposite doors as they enter, weave through the audience as they sing, meet at the front, curtsy and bow to each other, and finally the Ladies are escorted to their seats by the Lords.)

King: *(opens his arms wide, welcoming everyone)*

Welcome guests from far and wide,
From hill, and vale, and countryside,

My bounty is yours; eat, drink, and be merry!
With jests and fine song this party will terry!

The feast is before us beyond all compare,
Let us bow to our maker in most humble prayer

Opening Prayer:

(This could be a prayer that is sung. All madrigals remain standing.)

We thank Thee, Lord, for this fine feast tonight as we gather together to honor you.
In your beloved Son, you have given us hope, life eternal, and joy beyond measure.

(The madrigal singers take their seats at the table after the prayer.)

Queen: Good friends we begin tonight, not with ale,
But with my own exquisite wassail!
Right there on you table; pour it out hot,
Enjoy it, dear guests, it's all that all that we've got.

SONG: Wassail Song

“Wassail, Wassail all over the town...”

(A bowl of apple-colored gelatin that “looks like cider, but isn't” is carried by the pages on a litter. It is paraded around the house and stops at the king's table for approval. The King rises, survey's the cider and nods. He waves the pages on, and they exit.)

WASSAIL SERVED:

(The hot apple cider brought out by the servers.)

Scene 1: "Toasts & Death's Decree"

King: A toast, a toast, raise your glasses high!
To a season of cheer! Here's mud in your eye!

(The King & his court raise their glasses to drink, but the Queen stops him, and the others stop, too.)

Queen: Thy toast, dear husband, was really quite plain,
I pray thee, my love, try it again.

King: Plain? Again? Ah, my throat is too dry,
If it's wit that you want, ask the Jester to try.

Queen: *(She looks around for the Jester, claps her hands, but he does not appear.)*

Good husband, the prankster, so known for his chiding,
Is absent tonight, I fear he is hiding.

King: *(Standing up and looking around for the Jester)*
If our fool is absent, his head I will sever,
I want him here now, just as clever as ever!

Jester: *(enters and sheepishly bows before the King.)*
Your pardon, my king, I'll conduct your fun,
There was a nasty intruder, I had to outrun!

King: Begone with excuses, the queen wants some jests,

Queen: With wit and with rhyme,
make some toasts for our guests.

(The jester walks in among the audience and begins to chat with them. He runs quickly to several couples)

Jester: Our first toast will go, I am afraid,
To the cad who brought the youngest maid!

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