



*Written by
Cora Alley*

“Cyrano”

From *Cyrano De Bergerac*, by Edmond Rostand

*Adapted by Cora Alley
For the Christmas Madrigal Dinner*

Scripture: 1 Samuel 16: 7b

“... man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart.”

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 sacrifice of true love

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

Number of Players: 2 players, 12 singers, (with an option of 15+ entertainers)

Objective:

To show that true love produces a willingness to sacrifice for the sake of the beloved, as God did for His creation when He sacrificed Jesus for us all.

Synopsis:

Tonight's story is loosely adapted from Edmond Rostand's 18th century classic, *Cyrano De Bergerac*. It is a love story, presenting the age-old struggle of unrequited love! Cyrano, born with a nose that could be the grand prize in a lottery, loves the fair Roxanne; but her heart belongs to the handsome Christian, one of the young knights who has been handpicked by the King to enter a contest for Princess Roxanne's hand in marriage. What is the contest? Poetry!

The men bristle at expressing themselves in verse, but Cyrano's poetic soul finds wings! Cyrano's illusions of marrying his dear Roxanne are dashed, however, when he sees how much she loves Christian. Cyrano must now measure the true depth of his love. Will Cyrano help Christian win Roxanne by breathing his poetic soul into Christian? Will he write for Christian? Will he speak for Christian? Will Cyrano sacrifice his happiness to give Roxanne the desire of her heart?

Will Roxanne discover that "Beauty is empty entertainment, and she who finds entertainment in mediocrity reveals a bankrupt soul"? Let the merriment, the feast, and the melodies work their charm, as together we explore the depths of true love!

Cast:

The Royal Players:

Cyrano: *A gentle heart, a grand captain, and a large nose!*
Jester: *A fun-loving clownish fellow who conducts the evening*

The Madrigal Singers:

King: *A grand, hospitable, jolly man*
Queen: *A sympathetic mother to Roxanne*
Roxanne: *A fussy little miss who wants romance*
Christian: *A very "basic" man who is attracted to Roxanne*
Ladies 1, 2, 3, 4: *Royal female members of the court*
Lords 1, 2, 3, 4: *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: *entertains at mealtime*
3 Mimes: *perform antics during mealtime*
4 Minstrels: *serenade with instruments at mealtime, at the tables*
Trumpeter(s): *signal events with fanfare*
2 Beefeaters: *armored knights who stand guard at the door*
2 Announcers: *announce guests by name, at the door*
Serving girls: *dressed as peasants, to wait on each table (as many as you need)*
2 Litter bearers: *carry in the courses of the meal*
1 Magician: *entertains guests during mealtime, at their tables*
4 Troubadours: *sing to guests during mealtime, at their tables*

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
Rolled up “poems” with the letter “C” on them
A basket to collect the poems on the table
Feather pens for each of the “Lords” at the table
Parchment-looking sheets of paper for the “Lords” at the table
A sword for Cyrano
Gold-wrapped, chocolate coins (for “Orphan Chorus” option)

Lights:

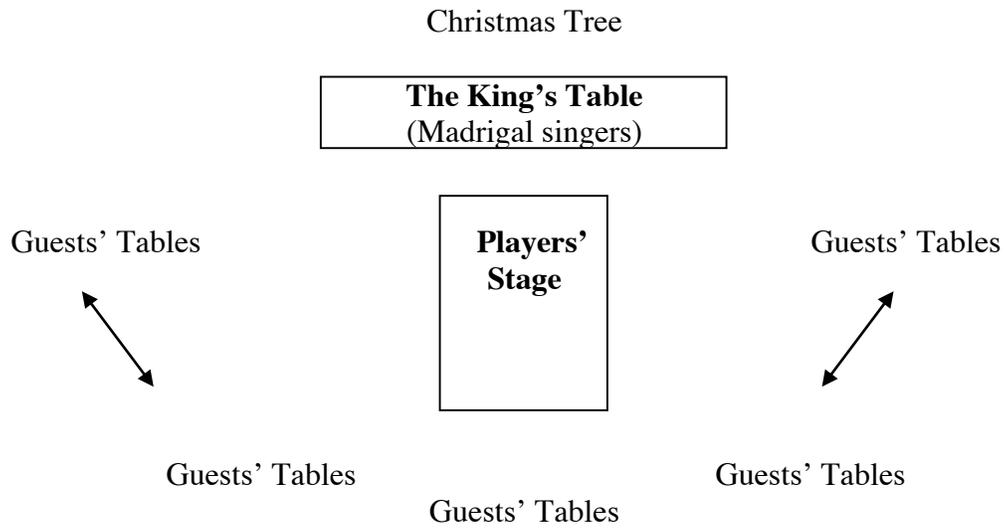
Design the lighting in such a way that the players and King’s Court are highlighted according to their dominance in the program.

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 filled our hall!
Our King welcomes you, one and all!

So gaily clad in handsome dress,
(aside) No doubt this royal mob you'll impress.

Unstick thy mind from present day,
Let it come with us, let it fly away,

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

Turn back the clock a thousand years,
To knights and ladies, toasts and cheers!

(to a man seated with his lady)
Good sir, is this your lady love?
This precious gift from God above?

Hold her man! Show her your heart;
(He puts the man's arm around her.)
For this is life's delicious part!

Tonight, on love, I also feast;
While you're just gumming roasted beast.

LIGHTS: SPOTLIGHT ON CYRANO

(With admiration)
His love is daughter to the King,
Roxanne, her name his heart could sing!

He's loved her since their childhood days,
He's mesmerized by all her ways.

(snapping out of his dream-like state)
Our feast is but a grand contest,
Roxanne will see whom she loves best!

The bravest men of valor and wit,
Tonight at our King's table sit.

Roxanne will put them to the test,
Who shall win? Who is the best?

Alone, he's killed a hundred men,
Then patched them up to fight again!

He's grace, honor, and civility,
Cloaked always in perfect humility.

(Cyrano bows.)

(peering at someone in the audience)
You are staring, and it shows!
Are you marveling at his nose?

It's but an indicator, you understand;
For the soul of him is equally grand!

LIGHTS: OFF ON CYRANO

(The Jester mounts the stage.)

(changing the mood)
Well, let's be on with it, I pray,
Our cook has labored all the day.

Hear me now guests, and don't forget,
My simple rules of etiquette!

(unfurls his scroll)

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.

Do all you are told by the King and his Queen
Don't cross him, just don't...If you know what I mean.

There, of rules, there are no more,
But if you break them, you're out the door

Speaking of the door, our evening begins!
Our Madrigals enter; enjoy them, my friends.

(drawing the attention of the audience again)
The fairest Roxanne floats on the air,
See her, oh look, she's right over there!

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:

(All Madrigals remain standing; The King opens his arms wide as he welcomes his guests.)

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 tarry!

Though cook has labored all day long,
Let us thank our God in gracious song.

SONG: "The Blessing" (Or a prayer-like song or a spoken prayer)

Scene 1: "The Contest"

King: Tonight you witness a grand selection,
My daughter, Roxanne, will choose perfection,

From among the young men assembled tonight,
She'll decide on a husband, right?

Roxanne: Right!

Queen: Good husband, love is not a thing you can hurry;
She's not an old maid; there's no reason to worry.

King: Dear wife, the fruit on her tree is ripe,
The pickers are here, now enough of this tripe!

(to Roxanne)

My daughter, they all have wealth, brains and brawn,
Please make it simple; just pick one.

Queen: She'll live with this choice for the rest of her life;
It's no easy thing to be a man's wife!

King: I have wealth and brains and brawn;
So advise her wife, for you weren't wrong.

Queen: *(playfully staring at her husband)*
Wealth, and brains and brawn, you said;
Well, I guess two out of three's not bad.

Roxanne will glean ample advice,
Her handmaidens will report on each man's vice!
(The ladies nod in agreement.)

King: *(recovering from the insult and addressing Roxanne)*
Tell us, how shall these men compete?
Jousting, fencing, or some brute strength feat?

(All the knights at the table flex their muscles.)

Roxanne: *(rising to her feet and addressing the crowd)*
Love is a matter of the heart,
It is here such noble emotions start.

So this is what the contest shall be:

(All of them eagerly lean in.)

Poetry!

(Each woman sitting beside each knight produces a quill and a scroll. The knights grimace.)

Letters of love; rhymes of verse!

(The men stare at Roxanne in disbelief.)

I could have thought of something worse!

(They shake their heads.)

(The knights grumble to each other and to the ladies. The girls turn a deaf ear.)