

Tips for your Madrigal Dinner

Thank you for contacting Jest Scripts! We write our madrigal scripts so they can be performed well by actors who don't have much stage experience, but if you are still unsure, talk to your drama teacher and consider making this a joint event to showcase many fine arts students.

Students like being in comedies, and this event is a lot of fun. Once your event is established, we are certain your students will want to be a part of it. Here are some tips for your event:

When to schedule your dinner

Traditionally, most Madrigal Dinners are held in December. However, many are also being held in January and February, which has several advantages:

- December is very busy, and people are tight on funds. Having the event in December may affect ticket sales.
- Once Christmas is over, people are looking for things to do in the winter months, and they feel less strain on the budget.
- Those rich fabrics you need for costuming go on sale after Christmas, so if your event is later, you can save some big money on fabric and on decorations.
- Hold your event around the same time every year. You will likely develop a group of "regulars" who will plan for this annual event.

Staging

- The Royal Table can be problematic in that it takes up a lot of stage space. We have seen some dinners where the actors were, literally, trying to act on three feet of space in front of the Royal Table.
- We suggest that you have, at minimum, an 8' x 8' area in front of the head table for actors. A small thrust stage out into the audience builds an intimate atmosphere and also makes it easier for the audience to hear.
- The beauty of dinner theater is that the audience area is part of the stage. Don't be afraid to let actors enter from the back or from different doors or to let them deliver lines from the audience. (Just be sure they know how to be heard!)
- Depending on your facility and technical crew, you might consider an additional small stage somewhere else around the room.

Food

Keep it simple. Cornish hens may seem authentic, but they are expensive, hard to eat, and a lot gets wasted. Bread bowls with soup are labor-intensive, and much of the bread will get wasted. Chicken is easier, cheaper, and universally-liked. Consider your menu based on cost, ease of serving, and choices that won't waste food.

Costumes

- Over time, you'll want to build a stockpile of costumes so that you don't have to rent every year. McCall's and Simplicity both have plenty of costume patterns. Watch for sales at fabric stores, then buy a variety of costume patterns and keep an inventory of them at your school.
- Basic pieces like tunics can be worn by many sizes and shapes. Make these out of broadcloth, polyester, or other easy-care fabrics that can be machine-washed. Because pages and servants are usually serving the food, you want fabrics that will last, clean up easily, and not have to be dry-cleaned.
- For ladies of the court, consider patterns that are not close-fitting so that, again, they can be worn by several different sizes. Leave generous hems so that the length can be altered if needed.
- If you teach high school, you may have to convince the boys to wear tights. Knee-length tunics help considerably. Another option is to look for pirate costume patterns. Those patterns have a looser "balloon" style pants that can be used. Though these pants are not as accurate for the time period, you can get away with using them. My high school boys thanked me.
- *Shoes for noble ladies:* Stockpile dance/ballet shoes for the ladies if you can or have them buy black slippers, ballet shoes, or a plain black pump with a one-inch or less heel. *Shoes for noblemen:* Guys can get by with a boot-look or you can make spats to go over shoes. *Shoes for pages and servers:* Black or brown shoes or boots. If they are serving, they will be on their feet all night, so choose comfortable shoes.
- Be sure the guys know NEVER to wear their white athletic socks—they will show up quite clearly to the audience.

General Tips

- Keep the evening moving. Singing, entertainment, and acting can be happening while people are *finishing* eating, for instance. If you wait until everyone is done before you do the next thing, this can turn into a long evening. Try to keep the time under 2 ½ hours.
- Don't serve food or clear dishes while action is going on stage. It is distracting and makes it hard for the audience to hear.
- Everything about your Madrigal Dinner is a reflection on your school. The more you pay attention to the details, the better you will be represented. For instance, promotional materials will say something about the quality of your show. Design fliers, Facebook events, and programs that look professional and artistic.

More ideas can be found in our book *Hosting a Madrigal Dinner*, which can be found in our Jest Scripts store at www.jestscripts.com.