

MADRIGAL MOCKERY

by Janet Litherland



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MADRIGAL MOCKERY

By Janet Litherland

Written for . . .

***The Youth Choir of First United Methodist
Church, Thomasville, Georgia — with
love and thanks***

INTRODUCTION

The singing of madrigals around a table was a popular form of entertainment in 16th and 17th century England. Reviving the custom at Christmas creates a wonderfully festive atmosphere.

In a madrigal, each part is important, a melody in itself, and, though the counterpoint is intricate, the harmonic structure is simple. Madrigals reflect lightness, vitality, grace, and warmth, and are easily learned by amateurs.

A Christmas madrigal dinner is fun. It involves the entire audience for the entire evening. "Madrigal Mockery" is especially fun because, written for youth choir, it provides the experience of Old English performance without the pressure of being perfect.

The following is a sample program format you may find helpful:

(page one)

**Church or School Name
Youth Choir**

presents

"MADRIGAL MOCKERY"
(And Dinner, too!)

**6:30 p.m.
December 1986**

(page two)

To you who have come heere to take pleasure in the musicke of voyces, we expresse our appreciation. We pray that the swete harmonie and holy melodye of our Christ-masse carolles will warm your heartes.

What is a madrigal?

**"A kind of musicke made vpon songs and sonnets . . .
[It is] to men of vnderstanding most delightful."**

The Oxford English Dictionary

(page 2 of program continued)

The Madrigal Singers

LORDS

*(list male participants
by name)*

*(indicate role with
special marks:)*

***Senior High Ensemble**
+ Handbell Choir
#Madrigal Dancers

LADIES

*(list female participants
by name)*

(Name of Conductor/Director)

(page 3 of program)

Programme

THE WASSAIL

Here We Come a-Wassailing English Wassail Song
(name of soloist and vocal group)

Deck the Hall Old Welsh Air
(Senior High Ensemble & Singers)

I Saw Three Ships English Carol
(names of soloists and vocal group)

March of the Three Kings Provençal
(names of soloists)

Rocking Czech Carol
(names of soloists)

FIRST COURSE

Joy to the World Handel

(page three continued)

Masters in This Hall English Carol

The Holly and the Ivy French Carol
(Senior High Ensemble)

The Boar's Head Carol English Carol
(name of drummer)

MAIN COURSE

He Is Born French Carol
(The Madrigal Dancers and names of instrumental soloists)

Glad Christmas Bells Anonymous
(names of soloists, singers & handbell choir)

(page four)

DESSERT

Silent Night Franz Gruber
(names of soloists and accompanist)

We Wish You a Merry Christmas Yorkshire

Menu

Wassail
Cranberrie Cuppe
Porc Choppe
Dressing
Streng Bene
Bread
Tay/Caffa
Pompkin Pye

Serving Wenches

(list names of all serving participants)

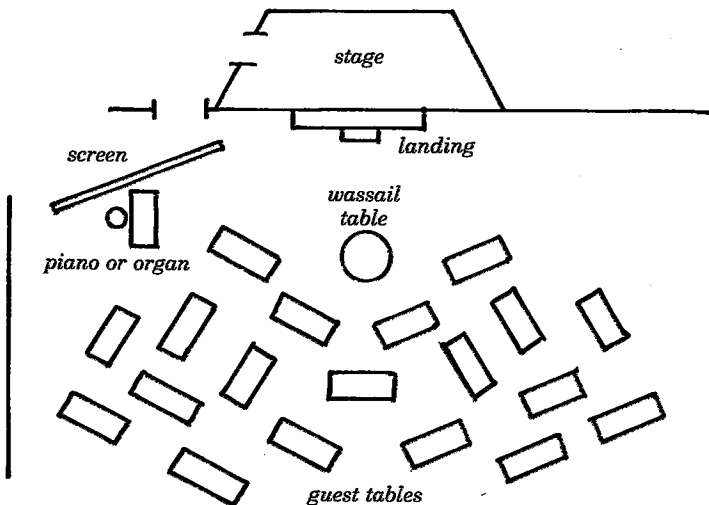
PRODUCTION NOTES

SETTING:

A large fellowship room with stage area. The room is a barn, transformed by a Christmas tree and beautiful decorations. Tables of six or eight are set within the large floor area. Silverware, napkins, and wassail cups are at each place. Front tables, closer together, are reserved for "Lords" and "Ladies," who are the choir members. A small table, Center Front, holds a wassail bowl, ladle, and one cup. It is not set for guests.

The stage is the barn loft. Bales of hay and strewn hay suggest this. Loft entrance is at Stage Right. Audience should be able to hear the singers enter but not see them until they appear Onstage. Portable screens can hide their entrance. Stairs lead from Centerstage directly into barn area where the tables have been set. There is an imaginary wall between stage and audience. A platform is placed between stage and floor for a "landing" or stopping area.

STAGING DIAGRAM



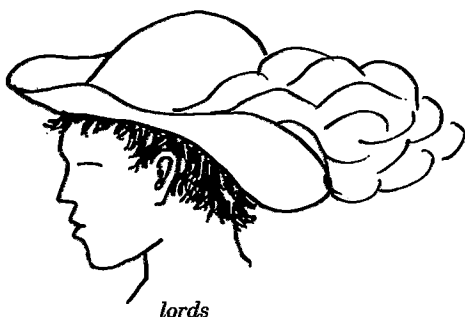
COSTUMES:

CHOIR MEMBERS are in casual, but nice, modern dress — boys in slacks and open-necked shirts; girls in colorful skirts and blouses and sweaters. Sneakers or casual shoes (no high heels).

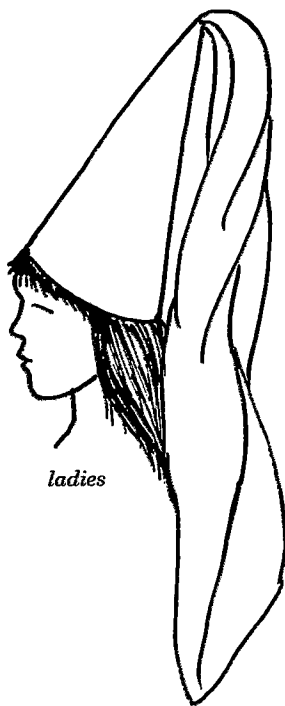
ACTOR #8 is a girl dressed in boy's clothing. Her long hair is tucked under a baseball cap; she carries a fielder's glove.

HOMEMADE HATS will transform choir members into Lords and Ladies. Hats are hung on the back wall of stage or are placed at random on the bales of hay. Ladies wear "cone" hats with scarves or streamers extending from end of cone. Lords wear soft hats with large plumes. Leafy branches may substitute for plumes. Hats, from colorful scrap material, should look as though they were made by choir members.

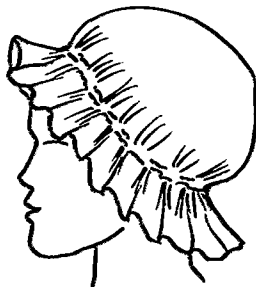
SERVING WENCHES (female nonchoir members or young adults) wear mob caps and aprons with regular, modern day clothing. Simplicity Patterns, #7650 and #7791, and McCall's Crafts Pattern #2626 will be helpful.



lords



ladies



wenches

VOCAL PARTS:

This is a play about a youth group presenting a madrigal and dinner program for their church. At the beginning of the play all choir members take the roles of the excited and nervous youth before their performance. Ten of the choir members will have speaking roles representing these boys and girls. They are designated as ACTORS #1 through 10. Once the madrigal/dinner program begins, the choir members become lords and ladies; five lords and three ladies have speaking parts. They should adopt Old English manners and accents as much as possible. At the close of the madrigal/dinner program, the choir members once more become the boys and girls of the youth group.

INSTRUMENTATION:

No accompaniment was indicated for early madrigals, but instruments were almost certainly used. First choice, of course, is the harpsichord; however, an acceptable substitute (since this is a "spoof") is a small pump organ. An alternative is an electronic keyboard, adjusted to play "harpsichord" — be sure to disguise the case with a screen or drapery. Another possibility is a piano attachment that makes a piano sound like a mandolin (or, if your imagination is good, like a harpsichord). It is called, "Rinky-Tink," and is available from Schaff Piano Supply Co., 451 Oakwood Rd., Lake Zurich, IL 60047. This attachment must be ordered through a dealer and be professionally installed.

Other instruments that might be used to enhance some of the carols are flute, recorder, autoharp, or classical guitar. Suggested "enhancers" are written into the following madrigals:

"The Boar's Head Carol" — drum

"He Is Born" — flute, tambourine, triangle

"Glad Christmas Bells" — handbells (5 ringers)

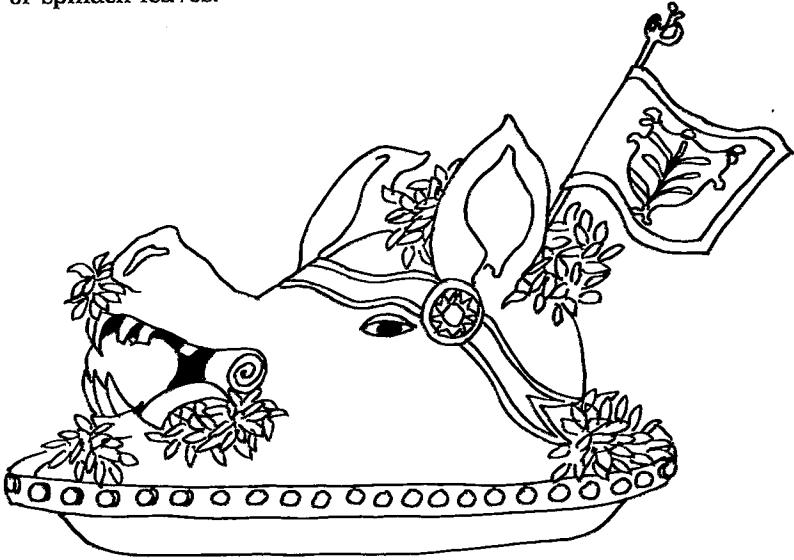
"Silent Night" — guitar

DANCE:

Let four youth choreograph their own dance to "He Is Born." With heads held high, it may consist of nothing more than stepping to one side and then the other, full- and half-circling, and bowing/curtsying to one another and to the audience. The "proper" nature of the dance combined with "doodle-ping" music and comic hats make this number a program highlight!

THE BOAR'S HEAD:

Make a "boar's head" from papier mâché or modeling clay. Put an apple in its mouth and set it on a tray decorated with lettuce or spinach leaves.



SUGGESTIONS FOR SERVING DINNER:

Engage enough "Serving Wenches" for each table to have one server. Post "cue sheets" in serving area so that servers will be ready to serve each course without delay. Serve audience during singing, as indicated in the script, but serve choir tables last, after madrigal is finished and singers are seated. Serving Wenches should greet and seat the guests, always referring to them as "My Lord" and "My Lady," remembering to curtsy quickly (a "bob") when spoken to.

CAROL SINGING:

This program features madrigal singers and soloists. It is possible as written that everyone present could join in to sing a chorus or two of some of the carols in addition to "Silent Night." This option is at the discretion of the Director. Additional carols could be added to the program for a large sing-along if desired.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

YOUTH CHOIR — (*or Adult Choir if preferred*)

MALE & FEMALE SOLOISTS — (*as available*)

MIXED ACTORS — (*ten teenage boys and girls*)

SERVING WENCHES — (*as needed*)

LORDS & LADIES — (*five Lords, three Ladies and other non-speaking Lords and Ladies*)

DANCERS — (*optional: "Lords and Ladies"*)

INSTRUMENTALISTS — (*as may be available*)

JESTERS — (*Optional: before the program begins it may add to the gaiety to have one or more jesters playing silly pranks on the guests as they arrive.*)

STROLLING MUSICIANS — (*Optional: if you have extra musicians they too could add zest to the setting before the program begins.*)

VOCAL & INSTRUMENTAL CONTENTS

CAROL

SOURCE

Here We Come a-Wassailing **English Wassail Song**
(*choir and male solo*)

Deck the Hall **Old Welsh Air**
(*a-cappella choir*)

I Saw Three Ships **English Carol**
(*three soloists*)

March of the Three Kings **Provençal, 13th century**
(*boy's trio: 1 tenor, 2 basses*) **Lyrics: M.L. Hohman, 1937**

Rocking **Czech Carol**
(*girl's trio*) **Lyrics: J. Litherland**

(continued from preceding page)

CAROL	SOURCE
Joy to the World <i>(Choir)</i>	Handel, 1742 Lyrics: Isaac Watts, 1719
Masters in This Hall <i>(male & female voices and complete choir)</i>	French Carol
The Holly and the Ivy <i>(soprano solo and choir)</i>	English Carol
The Boar's Head Carol <i>(choir and snare drum)</i>	English Carol
He Is Born <i>(flute, keyboard, triangle & tambourine)</i>	French Carol
Glad Christmas Bells <i>(choir and handbells)</i>	Anonymous
Silent Night <i>(choir, audience & guitar)</i>	Franz Gruber, 1818 Lyrics: Joseph Mohr, 1818
We Wish You a Merry Christmas <i>(choir)</i>	Yorkshire

SERVERS' CUE SHEET

I. Stage Play

II. Introduction of Lords and Ladies

WASSAIL

Pick up pitchers as players are introduced.

Be pouring while last few couples are being introduced.

Return pitchers to kitchen.

FRUIT CUP

Follows "Rocking" (*girls trio*)

Cue: "Serving Wenches — bring on the fruit!"

(Choir servers wait for "Joy to the World")

MAIN DISH

Begin serving as the "Boar's Head" is paraded.

(Choir servers wait until carol is finished.)

Clear fruit plates at the same time.

Clear main dish plates as guests finish.

DESSERT

Follows dance.

Cue: "Serving Wenches" — bring the dessert!"

Serve coffee to those who want it.

III. Stage Play

Enjoy!

(See sample program for suggested menu)

- 1 (CHOIR enters barn, Down Right, and stays behind screen. They
2 sing unaccompanied, stanza 1 of "Here We Come a-Wassailing."
3 They are heard but not seen.)
- 4 **ACTOR #1:** (From Offstage, as song ends) Shhh! We don't want
5 them to know we're here yet. Let's climb up to the loft
6 and make sure everything's ready. (They start moving to
7 stage area.)
- 8 **ACTOR #2:** Are you sure this is going to work?
- 9 **ACTOR #3:** I think it's crazy — Lords and Ladies in a barn?
- 10 **ACTOR #1:** Of course it's going to work. Wait until you see
11 the decorations. (CHOIR arrives Onstage and sits casually on
12 bales and on floor as conversation continues.) Our guests will
13 be treated to the time of their lives!
- 14 **ACTOR #4:** (At Down Right) Elegantly!
- 15 **ACTOR #3:** In a barn?
- 16 **ACTOR #1:** (To ACTOR #3) Look through that hole in the
17 wall. You'll see.
- 18 **ACTOR #3:** What hole?
- 19 **ACTOR #1:** (Points to ACTOR #4 who stands facing audience.
20 ACTOR #4 thrusts left arm out to side with two fingers splayed.)
21 That one.
- 22 **ACTOR #3:** Oh. (Looks through "hole" between #4's fingers.) Hey!
23 That's terrific! And so many people out there! (Turns away.
24 #4 lowers arm.)
- 25 **ACTOR #5:** People? You're kidding. (#3 shakes head.) I'm
26 nervous.
- 27 **ACTOR #1:** Come on now. If we all know what we're doing,
28 there's nothing to be nervous about.
- 29 **ACTOR #6:** Just what are we doing?
- 30 **ACTOR #1:** (To ACTOR #7, using #7's first name) _____,
31 there are a few of us who haven't had a chance to practice.
32 Will you explain to them?
- 33 **ACTOR #7:** (Moves Centerstage.) As you all know, we've planned
34 a madrigal dinner for our families and friends this
35 Christmas. We wanted to do something really special for

- 1 them, since they've been special to us all year.
- 2 **ACTOR #4:** *(Helping)* Something different from a plain old
- 3 concert.
- 4 **ACTOR #7:** Right. So we decided on an "Old English" dinner
- 5 where we could treat our guests like royalty.
- 6 **ACTOR #4:** It's perfect, because we can use the madrigals
- 7 we've learned at choir rehearsals.
- 8 **ACTOR #7:** OK, those of you who haven't learned to walk
- 9 and bow, step up here for a quick lesson. *(Two BOYS and*
- 10 *two GIRLS move Center.)* Hold your partner's hand at
- 11 shoulder height. *(#7 helps them.)* Now stand straight and
- 12 keep your head high. Good. To bow, you first face front.
- 13 Girls curtsy. *(They do.)* Boys bow from the waist. *(They do.)*
- 14 Now do it at the same time. *(They do.)* Now face your
- 15 partners and do it. *(They do, but one couple bump heads while*
- 16 *bowing and BOY yells, "Oww!" Others laugh.)* Try again. *(They*
- 17 *do.)* Other than that, all you have to do is follow the rest
- 18 of us and sing the madrigals we've already learned. Any
- 19 questions?
- 20 **ACTOR #8:** *(Dressed in boy's clothing and carrying a baseball glove.*
- 21 *Gestures to costume hats.)* Yeah. What are these goofy hats
- 22 for?
- 23 **ACTOR #2:** *(Calls #8 by her name.)* _____! Why did you
- 24 come dressed like that?
- 25 **ACTOR #8:** Like what?
- 26 **ACTOR #2:** Like a boy!
- 27 **ACTOR #8:** You know I'm not comfortable in skirts.
- 28 **ACTOR #2:** *(Picks up a "cone" hat.)* Well, you're going to wish
- 29 you'd worn one, because you are going to be Lady _____,
- 30 *(#8's last name)* not Lord _____. *(Removes #8's baseball*
- 31 *cap and tosses it aside.)* And your "very proper" hat is going
- 32 to look funny with those pants! *(Plops the cone onto #8's head.)*
- 33 **ACTOR #8:** Ughh!
- 34 **ACTOR #2:** I'll take the glove. *(Takes it from her and tosses it aside.)*
- 35 **ACTOR #9:** Will our guests understand what's going on? Do

1 they know what a madrigal dinner is?

2 **ACTOR #4:** That's all taken care of. They have programs,
 3 and some of us have memorized parts to help them
 4 understand.

5 **ACTOR #10:** If we're going to be singing, shouldn't we warm
 6 up a little first?

7 **ACTOR #1:** Good idea. Let's sing "Deck the Hall" — but softly
 8 now. We don't want them to hear us.

9 **MUSIC:** "Deck the Hall" (*ACTOR #1 leads the a cappella carol,*
 10 *one stanza only. When finished, a couple of audience "plants"*
 11 *begin applause.*)

12 **ACTOR #8:** (*Grumbling*) They *heard* us. This is not going to work.

13 **ACTOR #2:** It's going to work. Straighten your hat and
 14 pretend you're a lady.

15 **ACTOR #1:** OK everyone, on your feet. Grab a hat — it's time
 16 to get started. (*ALL stand. They begin putting on hats, helping*
 17 *one another, softly commenting on their looks.*)

18 **ACTOR #10:** (*To ACTOR #1, over the murmur*) One more
 19 question. Some of our madrigals need accompaniment.
 20 What do we do about that?

21 **ACTOR #1:** Not to worry. We borrowed an instrument and
 22 moved it in this afternoon. Any more questions? . . . Good.
 23 Those of you who know what you're doing come up front;
 24 the rest of you follow along. You'll catch on. (*ALL line up*
 25 *two-by-two, hands clasped at shoulder height. If there are extra*
 26 *boys or girls without partners, they walk last in double file, hands*
 27 *at sides.*)

28 **Ready? I'm opening the door.** (*Pantomimes opening a*
 29 *large door, which swings out Center, at top of stairs. ACTOR*
 30 *#1 descends to "landing" and steps Left, as accompanist begins*
 31 *playing "Here We Come a-Wassailing." FIRST COUPLE moves*
 32 *down to landing, their stately steps slowly and perfectly*
 33 *synchronized, one step per musical measure.*)

34 (*ACTOR #1 in Old English accent to audience*) **Ladies**
 35 **and Gentlemen, you are our honored guests this evening,**



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Thank you for reading this free excerpt from:

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