Elizabethan Madrigal Dinner
Renaissance Brought To Life
Joe Kastner, Student Research
Dr. Gary Schwartzhoff, Faculty Advisor

What is a Madrigal Dinner?
A madrigal dinner is defined as “An American form of dinner theatre... set in the Middle Ages and is generally comedic in nature. The meal is divided into courses, each of which is heralded with a traditional fanfare and song. A play is performed between the courses and a concert of choral music concludes the festivities.”

Historical Background
The madrigal style was influenced by the Italian frottola style with its repetitive rhythms and functional harmony. The madrigal acquired its lyric-driven and polyphonic influences from the French chanson. It was also one of the most important secular styles of music of the Renaissance Period (1400-1600).

Music
Music for the dinner is for mixed choir and dates back to the Renaissance Period. Christmas carols may be sung, along with the madrigal dinner repertoire, including the Boar’s Head Carol and the Wassail Song. Songs are a cappella and are written in a through-composed or strophic manner. Instruments from the period would include recorders, valveless trumpets, and sackbuts, an early form of trombone. Current dinners usually include a brass section, recorders, harpsichord, and occasionally bagpipes.

The Thespians
There are often plays or skits in between courses for entertainment. Characters in these plays include the King, Queen, and Jester most commonly. They are usually light-hearted and humorous. Audience participation is also heavily encouraged, with staged executions of audience members and dances led by the thespians to join along in the fun.

Costuming
In Renaissance times, clothes were often lavish and brightly colored. The color and type of fabric often defined the status of the person, due to the fact certain fabrics and dyes were more difficult to obtain. Hair is often worn in loose curls for the dinner, and ladies maintain a high forehead. Hair is also worn with stones, pearls, or ribbons.

The Meal
The food served follows a traditional Middle Ages meal consisting of various courses. It begins with wassail, a hot, spiced punch. Next, a soup or salad, followed by a main entrée of pork. Finally, a dessert of bread pudding or apple dessert concludes the meal.

Bibliography:
wikipedia.org
Katie Lebrun, hair stylist
thinkquest.org
musiceducationmadness.com
madrigaldinner.com