



The Bracebridge Dinner 2011 Fact Sheet

A snow-blanketed Yosemite Valley provides the perfect backdrop for [The Bracebridge Dinner](#), an annual, American theatrical and culinary tradition that transforms the historic Ahwahnee Hotel into a 17th century English manor for an elaborate feast of food, song and mirth.

BACKGROUND:

Based on Washington Irving's 1820 tale *The Sketch Book* about Christmas Day at Bracebridge Hall in Yorkshire, England, *The Bracebridge Dinner* was established shortly after The Ahwahnee opened in 1927 and features a seven-course meal synchronized with the music and drama of the festivities. 2011 marks the 85th anniversary season.

Dr. Donald Tresidder, then president of the Yosemite Park & Curry Co., and later president of Stanford University, played the first Squire Bracebridge, the pageant's main character. Famed Yosemite photographer Ansel Adams and others later rewrote the original program, which remains to this day true to Adams' score of classic carols, Renaissance-inspired rituals and music.

THE MENU:

The typical *Bracebridge* menu is far from typical, requiring The Ahwahnee's executive chef, Percy Whatley, to plan months in advance. The menu for the 2010 dinner series included a Relish of Savory Chevre Cheesecake with Arugula Pesto and Crispy Root Vegetables, Roasted Kobocho Squash Soup, Smoked Salmon and Dungeness Crab Timbale, Endive Salad with Candied Pecans, Shaved Fennel and Blood Orange Vinaigrette, Braised California Pheasant and Chestnut Pithivier and Roasted Brandt Beef Tenderloin. The traditional Plum Pudding and Wassail represent the final course of the dinner, served with Mignardises.

THE EVENT:

The evening celebration transports guests to Old England, where more than 60 professional singers, court characters and other performers tell the story of a Christmas feast with Lord Merrick, Squire of Bracebridge Hall, and his entertaining household. During each of eight performances, up to 300 guests enjoy a lavish, seven-course dinner inspired by elaborate Old English Christmas cuisine by The Ahwahnee's Executive Chef Percy Whatley, with service meticulously choreographed as part of the show.

At The Ahwahnee, the main dining room serves as the dining hall at Squire Bracebridge's manor. It is decorated with wreaths framing roundels of Yuletide traditions, an elaborate buffet behind the Squire's table and banners suspended from the massive ceiling beams. The Ahwahnee dining room is called the Great Hall during the pageant and may have been the original inspiration for the dinner promotion in 1927. The entire room is a stage, crowned by an elaborate Squire's table and decked with holiday decorations, many of which are restored originals from the first productions in the late 1920s.

At the beginning of each performance, heraldic trumpets announce the arrival of Squire Bracebridge and his family at the Great Hall and his guests rise to pay him honor. Accompanied by songs of the Bracebridge Singers, the Squire and his family enter the Hall and proceed to their table. At this table, the house servants present each dish to the Squire so that he may give his approval before offering them to his guests.

The serving folk make four presentations to Squire Bracebridge, each carried on fantastically elaborate platters. Again, the Bracebridge Singers add their voices to the processions, which include The Fish, The Peacock Pie, The Boar's Head & Baron of Beef, and the Pudding & Wassail.

Chauncy, The Lord of Misrule (a jester) entertains the diners throughout the dinner while Pierre, The Chef, and Augusta Billingsly, The Housekeeper humorously interact with each other and Lord Merrick's household. Nathaniel, The Woodsman, Lady Delphinium and many other characters and soloists round out the cast and add to a vibrant, operatic Christmas atmosphere. A band of forest folk (all played by Yosemite residents) arrive towards the end of the show and are warmly received by Squire Bracebridge, who invites them inside to partake in the feast.

The presentations of food from the kitchen are made on cue by the sounding of chimes given during the performance. Within minutes after the call, all 300 diners are served in a flourish of Lord Merrick's hospitality. After the wassail bowl and flaming pudding have been removed and the feast ended, the Squire and his family pass from the Hall, greeting guests as they go.

Locals originally played the chief characters, including Ansel Adams, who played The Lord of Misrule for several years. Later, a chorus of professional singers, directed by Eugene Fulton, assumed the roles. Today Eugene's daughter, Andrea Fulton, is not only Executive Producer of *The Bracebridge Dinner*, but also plays the starring role of The Housekeeper. Outstanding soloists who have performed with the group include Keith Purdy, a fine professional tenor, Joan Jacques, an operatic soprano and Pedro Rodelas, a featured tenor soloist with opera companies worldwide. Music is a professional vocation for most of the group, and many perform frequently throughout California and nationally.

The Andrea Fulton Chorale also performs in free concerts each year in the Great Lounge of The Ahwahnee, on nights alternating with *The Bracebridge Dinner*.

2011 BRACEBRIDGE TICKETS:

The 2011 *Bracebridge Dinner* performances will take place on December 13, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24 and 25, starting at 6 p.m. Tickets to the dinner are \$425 per person, inclusive of tax and gratuity, not including alcoholic beverages. One and two-night lodging packages are also available at The Ahwahnee, Yosemite Lodge at the Falls, and the Wawona Hotel.

Those interested in making a reservation should call 801-559-4903 and visit www.YosemitePark.com. Of special note, the reservation lottery system previously used to award seats was eliminated in May 2002, allowing unprecedented access for those wishing to attend this unforgettable event.

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