

TEEN

for and about young people

EVEN WHEN NOT IN ROME . . .

By FIFI GORSKA

Star Staff Writer

Something, at last, is successfully baiting teen-agers into studying Latin.

They are known as Roman banquets. Complete with trimmings which Nero himself would recognize, the affairs, usually held at school, are even dethroning the beatnik idea as a party theme.

At most of the schools, you have to be a Latin student to attend these "banquets of the gods." The boys wear tunics and togas and the girls are draped in stolas and pallas. It's a bring-your-own pillow affair where the menus (written in Latin on scrolls) feature everything from "eggs to apples." The food is eaten without utensils from a comfortable position on the floor and the grape-juice flows from jugs like wine.

Sherwood High School in Sandy Spring, Md., held its first Roman banquet last year, and as a result "some kids signed up for Latin just so they could go to the banquet this year," says Student Martha Biggs. "We fixed a little pool with shrubs around it and made tiles out of black and white paper for a Roman effect. Two Latin IV students were Queen Juno and King Jupiter." Martha adds.

But this year in particular, the Old Rome idea has caught on "big."

Western High in the District and Mount Vernon High and Stratford Junior High in nearby Virginia held their first Roman feasts this spring. Stratford stuck to Roman customs until dessert, when strawberry shortcake with ice cream lent a homey American touch.

The banquets also have proved popular at Annandale, Loudoun County High and Washington-Lee High in Virginia, as well as at Northwood and Northwestern Highs in Maryland and Woodrow Wilson and Sidwell Friends Schools in the District. Each time, the participants are in togas and pallas.

The "Romans" at Friends include an altar



At a Roman Banquet at Bladensburg High, only the vestal maidens have male slaves. So Junior Ralph Eckert pours for Lynn Arnold.

ceremony and drink toasts around the "wine" bowl. Especially baked loaves of bread (made by mothers) are on hand for the diners to dip in honey as they're entertained by dancers.

Perhaps the most elaborate of this year's affairs is the one at Bladensburg (Md.) High.

The scene is the school's cafeteria. The banquet starts with a triumphal procession. About 200 Latin students dressed as heralds, senators, gladiators, slaves and vestal dancers parade with spears, lyres and chariots around white columns made of cardboard. Parents are allowed to sit on the periphery and watch.

Student officers of the Junior Classical League, the banquet sponsor, sit at a low-slung table in front of the sprawling diners. Six to eight "citizens" are grouped around four-inch high tables laden with grapes, apples and oranges. The groups buy their servant waitress for the night at a slave auction.

"Don't let this beautiful maiden go for \$2,"

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Most "Romans," however, like Pete Gordon, boast a girl slave like smiling Mary Jamie.



Janet Thot, Karen Gilbert and Sue Robinson with sustenance for mortals.



Officers of the Junior Classical League "reign" over the banquet.

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calls out Auctioneer Bruce Davis. From under a laurel wreath comes a \$5 bid and the girl in the blue palla scurries to the kitchen to fetch trays of food for her "buyer."

"This is a cheap year for girls," explains the auctioneer as the 30 slaves, all sophomores and Latin I students, bring only \$4 and \$6 each. Last year we were getting \$10, \$12 and \$14," he explains.

Food—\$320 worth—in the form of rolled roast beef, chicken, deviled eggs, celery, olives, radishes, carrots, raisins, nuts, honey and bread (all authentic Roman dishes) disappear rapidly.

Tunic-clad Kenneth Block is disappointed. "My slave isn't worth \$9. I have to pour her wine," says the 15-year-old.

"I peeled your oranges," says Slave Jackie Hierling, indignantly.

Lights are dimmed and the entertainment commences. To the tune of "Almost Paradise," the vestal maidens dance in flowing gowns as the spotlight turns red.

A special robing ceremony puts the Bladensburg principal and three vice principals in togas under the careful eye of the Latin teacher who is already in a peach chiffon palla. The "citizens of Rome" are in togas, predominately purple, light blue and white. "Steadies" wear matching tunics and pallas, made by the girl. But most of the boys credit their mothers with their fancy stitching. Ernie Wiltsey, a 17-year-old junior, wears a white toga with black borders and carries a matching black and white pillow in the same design.

Spectators cheer two performing wrestlers, reminiscent of many an entertainment offered the Caesars. Then it's time for the discus throwers.

There are chariot races, too, with the vehicles pulled by the youths.

Agrienne Sheridan, JCL president, places a laurel wreath on the head of Earl Nelson, the winner of the foot race. She then does the same to the champion charioteer. Broken swords (wooden) and shattered shields (cardboard) are strewn about the "arena" by 11 gladiators who leap into combat after reciting to the JCL monarchs in Latin, "We who are about to die salute you!"

Then there's a skit, Caesar's death scene.

For four hours, it's a panorama which escapes no one: "When in Bladensburg, do as the Romans."

But reality still prevails, and the banquet ends on a modern teen-age note. The students, still in their togas and pallas, jump into cars and head for the nearest Hot Shoppe.



Human horses pull charioteers Bob Dalley and Mike Barnes in a chariot race. The red metal

chariots with bike wheels are used each year to entertain the "citizens of Rome."



At the slave auction, Bonnie Cartwright draws the highest bid of the evening—\$10.



Gladiator Bill Reilly is triumphant in combat.—Star Staff Photos by TOM HOY.