

# *Practical Presentation of the Eleusinian Rites*

by Jon Sewell, Presented at NOTOCON VII, Seattle WA. Saturday August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009 ev

Thrill with the lissome lust of the light,  
O man! My man!  
Come careering out of the night  
Of Pan! Io Pan!  
Io Pan! Io Pan! Come over the sea  
From Sicily and from Arcady!  
Roaming as Bacchus, with fauns and  
pards  
And nymphs and satyrs for thy guards,  
On a milk-white ass, come over the sea  
To me, to me,  
Come with Apollo in bridal dress  
(Shepherdess and pythoness)  
Come with Artemis, silken shod,  
And wash thy white thigh, beautiful  
God,  
In the moon of the woods, on the marble  
mount,  
The dimpled dawn of the amber fount!  
Dip the purple of passionate prayer  
In the crimson shrine, the scarlet snare,  
The soul that startles in eyes of blue  
To watch thy wantonness weeping  
through  
The tangled grove, the gnarled bole  
Of the living tree that is spirit and soul  
And body and brain - come over the sea,  
(Io Pan! Io Pan!)  
Devil or God, to me, to me,  
My man! My man!

Come with trumpets sounding shrill  
Over the hill!  
Come with drums low muttering  
From the spring!  
Come with flute and come with pipe!  
Am I not ripe?  
I, who wait and writhe and wrestle  
With air that hath no boughs to nestle  
My body, weary of empty clasp,  
Strong as a lion and sharp as an asp -  
Come, O come!

I am numb  
With the lonely lust of devildom.  
Thrust the sword through the galling  
fetter,  
All-devourer, all begetter;  
Give me the sign of the Open Eye,  
And the token erect of thorny thigh,  
And the word of madness and mystery,  
O Pan! Io Pan!  
Io Pan! Io Pan Pan! Pan Pan! Pan,  
I am a man:  
Do as thou wilt, as a great god can,  
O Pan! Io Pan!  
Io Pan! Io Pan Pan! I am awake  
In the grip of the snake.  
The eagle slashes with beak and claw;  
The Gods withdraw;  
The great beasts come, Io Pan! I am  
borne  
To death on the horn  
Of the Unicorn.

I am Pan! Io Pan! Io Pan Pan! Pan!  
I am thy mate, I am thy man,  
Goat of thy flock, I am gold, I am god,  
Flesh to thy bone, flower to thy rod.  
With hoofs of steel I race on the rocks  
Through solstice stubborn to equinox.  
I rave; and I rape and I rip and I rend  
Everlasting, world without end,  
Mannikin, maiden, maenad, man,  
In the might of Pan.  
Io Pan! Io Pan Pan! Pan! Io Pan<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Book 4, part 3 *Magick in Theory and Practice* Paris, Published for Subscribers Only, Printed at the Lecram Press, 1929 (actually 1930). Read at Crowley's Memorial, and incidentally, prior to the launch of many an American rocket.

This poem, originally titled *The Cast Party*, was first recited by Aleister Crowley in 1910 following the close of The Rites of Eleusis at Caxton Hall in London. But, we will be discussing the cast party later in the presentation.<sup>2</sup>

### **Overview:**

This workshop will begin with a brief history of the Eleusinian Mysteries in antiquity and the re-emergence of these mysteries under Crowley's direction in 1910 EV, before delving into the practical aspects of production of the Rites as ritual theater.

So, first we will delve briefly into the **History of Eleusis: Wine, Women & Song!** Starting with *The Rites in Ancient Greece*

In order to understand Crowley's interpretation of The Rites of Eleusis, it would be best to understand his exposure to the Rites as they are understood to have been practiced at ancient Eleusis. For this we turn to Frazer's *The Golden Bough*:

*The oldest literary document which narrates the myth of Demeter and Persephone is the beautiful Homeric Hymn to Demeter, which critics assign to the seventh century before our era. The object of the poem is to explain the origin of the Eleusinian mysteries, and the complete silence of the poet as to Athens and the Athenians, who in after ages took conspicuous part in the festival, renders it probable that the hymn was composed in the far off time when Eleusis was still a petty independent state, and before the stately procession of the Mysteries had begun to defile, in bright September days, over the low chain of barren rocky hills which divides the flat Eleusinian cornland from the more spacious olive-clad expanse of the Athenian plain. The youthful Persephone, so runs the tale, was gathering roses and lilies, crocuses and violets, hyacinths and narcissuses in a lush meadow, when the earth gaped and Pluto, lord of the Dead, issuing from the abyss carried her off on his golden car to be his bride and queen in the gloomy subterranean world. Her sorrowing mother Demeter, with her yellow tresses veiled in a dark mourning mantle, sought her over land and sea, and learning from the Sun her daughter's fate she withdrew in high dudgeon from the gods and took up her abode at Eleusis, where she presented herself to the king's daughters in the guise of an old woman... In her wrath at her bereavement the goddess suffered not the seed to grow in the earth but kept it hidden under ground, and she vowed that never would she set foot on Olympus and never would she let the corn sprout till her lost daughter should be restored to her... Mankind would have perished of hunger and the gods would have been robbed of the sacrifices which were their due, if Zeus in alarm had not commanded Pluto to disgorge his prey, to restore his bride Persephone to her mother Demeter. The grim lord of the Dead smiled and obeyed, but before he sent back his queen to the upper air on a golden car, he gave her the seed of a pomegranate to eat, which ensured that she would return to him. But Zeus stipulated that henceforth Persephone should spend two thirds of every year with her mother and the gods in the upper world and one third of the year with her husband in the nether world, from which she was to return year by year when the earth was gay with*

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<sup>2</sup> The author of this paper is, in fact, a liar.

*spring flowers. Gladly the daughter then returned to the sunshine, gladly her mother received her and fell upon her neck; and in her joy at recovering the lost one Demeter made the corn to sprout from the clods of the ploughed fields and all the broad earth to be heavy with leaves and blossoms. And straightway she went and showed this happy sight to the princes of Eleusis, ... and moreover she revealed to them her sacred rites and mysteries. **Blessed, says the poet, is the mortal man who has seen these things, but he who has had no share of them in life will never be happy in death when he has descended into the darkness of the grave. So the two goddesses departed to dwell in bliss with the gods on Olympus; and the bard ends the hymn with a pious prayer to Demeter and Persephone that they would be pleased to grant him a livelihood in return for his song.***<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the ancient poet gave up his day job and set out to make a living as a writer.

Incidentally, the poet Homer to whom Frazier refers, the classical author of The Hymn to Demeter, is not *the* Homer who penned the Iliad and the Odyssey. “Homeric Hymns” is a misnomer, and it is widely understood that persons writing in the style popularized by Homer composed the works in question.

The Golden Bough was first published in 2 volumes in 1890, and according to Crowley it is to be considered a text book along side 777<sup>4</sup>, as it relates to the understanding of Gods and their relationships to the cultures that interacted with them. It was referenced many times in his early writing as well as his Confessions, and most certainly influenced his understanding of the mysteries of Eleusis.

For my own part, I am inclined to agree with Crowley’s assessment that Frazier’s work be regarded as a text-book, in that it reads like stereo instructions, as I have demonstrated.

I’d like to quote a little from a translation of the Hymn to Demeter, in order to compare it with some of Crowley’s ideas on the Rites. This portion takes place during Demeter’s lamentation among the Court at Eleusis:

**Then Metaneira filled a cup with sweet wine and offered it to her [Demeter]; but she refused it, for she said it was not lawful for her to drink red wine, but bade them mix meal and water with soft mint and give her to drink. And Metaneira mixed the draught and gave it to the goddess as she bade. So the great queen Deo received it to observe the sacrament.**<sup>5 6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The Golden Bough chapter 44, Demeter and Persephone, edited for length, and emphasis added.

<sup>4</sup> Magick Without Tears, Aleister Crowley Chapter LXXVI: The Gods: How and Why they Overlap. Written in 1943

<sup>5</sup> This Homeric Hymn, composed in approximately the seventh century BCE, served for centuries thereafter as the canonical hymn of the Eleusinian Mysteries. This was

Thus, we have a *song*, the hymn to Demeter, which revolves around desire and beauty and coming into *sexual maturity*, and it contains reference to a *strange drink*. Compare the tale of Demeter, Persephone and Hades with the following, from Aleister Crowley's *Energized Enthusiasm*, published shortly after Crowley's first presentation of his Rites of Eleusis, and you may get an idea of where the threads of the ancients were being rewoven by the modern poet:

The Greeks say that there are three methods of discharging the genial secretion of which I have spoken. They thought perhaps that their methods tended to secrete it, but this I do not believe altogether, or without a qualm. For the manifestation of force implies force, and this force must have come from somewhere.

The Greeks say that there are three methods of discharging the Lyden Jar of Genius. These three methods they assign to three Gods.

These three Gods are Dionysus, Apollo, Aphrodite. In English: wine, woman and song.<sup>7</sup>

Once again, Crowley distills the essence of the Eleusinian Mysteries into the mystical formula for the *cast party*. But I digress.

All joking aside, the magickal efficacy of rhythm and music, combined with sensual poetry and dance, and the imbibing of substances associated with the promotion of

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translated from the Greek by Hugh G. Evelyn-White and first published by the Loeb Classical Library in 1914.

<sup>6</sup> An act of communion -- the drinking of the potion (*kykeon*) here described -- was one of the most important pieces of ritual in the Eleusinian mysteries, as commemorating the sorrows of the goddess.

<sup>7</sup> This work was first published in *Equinox* I(9) (Spring of 1913) without a number or author credit. Crowley acknowledged his authorship in the "Index to volume I." In the "Syllabus" in *Equinox* I (10) it was said to be an 'adumbration' of *Liber IAO* an unpublished (believed lost) Class D text which supposedly describes meditation-practices based on the three 'enthusiasms' discussed above. The number 811 (IAO in Greek) was assigned in the Blue *Equinox*, though it may have been intended for inclusion in the 1913 *Syllabus* and only admitted through editorial inadvertance. The classification is as given in Yorke's *Catalogue and Key to the Technical Writings of Aleister Crowley*, based on correspondence between Crowley and various disciples. The four kinds of 'enthusiasm' or 'divine madness' (the first being poetic inspiration from the nine Muses) are discussed in Plato's *Phaedrus* and treated of by Renaissance writers such as Ficino in his commentary on the *Symposium*, Agrippa in *De occulta philosophia* lib. III cap. 45-49, and Giordano Bruno in *De gli eroici furori* (for which see Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*).

religious ecstasy was certainly key to the Ancient Eleusinian Mysteries, as it was to Crowley's Rites of Eleusis.

As a brief side note, I should like to mention a book entitled "The Road to Eleusis", by R. Gordon Wasson, Albert Hofmann & Carl A.P. Ruck, which puts forth the proposition that the kykeon consumed during the Ancient Rites may have been intentionally infused with certain types of ergot. These ergot are the building blocks of lysergic acid or LSD, and would have imbued the sacramental kykeon with a powerful hallucinogenic effect. This book points to Platos *Allegory of the Cave* as a possible testament to a hallucinatory experience of the Eleusinian Mysteries in antiquity, and it seems a plausible hypothesis.

The research is compelling, but much of it has taken place in the last 50 years. As such, this material was certainly not available to Crowley, and while he may have concluded independently that a hallucinogenic infusion was called for (as he did) I have found no reference, aside from the above quote from *Energized Enthusiasm*, to his holding the opinion that it was a part of the ancient celebrations at Eleusis. He may have expressed that somewhere, but I have not found the quote.

While Wine, Women and Song may have been the magickal formula employed in the Rites, the greatest key to the transformative experience of the Eleusinian mysteries, both ancient and modern, probably lies in the invocation of the God consciousness into the celebrants of the ritual. The regular invocation of, and identification with the divine on the part of the performers enhances the performance, and seems to translate directly to the audience.

The overarching point of my delving into this background of the ancient Rites, aside from giving some historical context, is to illustrate that Aleister Crowley had an understanding of what the more ancient Rites alluded to. With their seasonal mysteries and the identification of the twin Goddesses with the grain that they symbolized, these were the Rites of a pastoral people. Had he felt the desire, he could easily have built his Rites around the Hymn to Demeter, as it is widely understood to be a lyrical description of those ancient ceremonies. But, he did not. Clearly, Crowley desired to impart to the modern mind something similar in essence, yet largely distinct from these historical pastoral passion plays.

### **Crowley's Reinvention: The New Eleusis**

In order to gain the clearest indication of what Crowley was about in his revision of the Ancient Rites, we need only look so far as his own writing, in which he clearly lays out his intentions:

An essay entitled "Eleusis" was published in 1907 in his *Collected Works*:

"We are the Poets! We are the children of the wood and stream, of mist and mountain, of sun and wind! We are the Greeks! and to us the rites of Eleusis should open the doors of heaven, and we shall enter in and see God face to face. Under the stars will I go forth, my brothers, and drink of that lustral dew: I will return, my brothers, when I have seen God face to face and read within those eternal eyes the secret that shall make you free. Then will I choose you and test you and instruct you in the Mysteries of

Eleusis, oh ye brave hearts, and cool eyes, and trembling lips! I will put a live coal upon your lips, and flowers upon your eyes, and a sword in your hearts, and ye also shall see God face to face. Thus shall we give back its youth to the world, for like tongues of triple flame we shall look upon the Great Deep - Hail unto the Lords of the groves of Eleusis!"

-Aleister Crowley  
collected works 1907

And so it was...IN 1910 Crowley staged his Rites of Eleusis.

We all change, learn and grow over the course of our lives. In order to get an idea of what the Rites meant to Crowley, it is best to look at where he was in the arc of his own story when he crafted them. In 1898 he had initiated into the Golden Dawn and in 1904 received the Book of the Law. In the Autumn of 1909 he and Victor Neuburg engaged in the Enochian workings that would later be recorded in *The Vision and the Voice*.

Also during this time, Crowley began publishing the ceremonies of the Golden Dawn in his periodical "The Equinox". While some reference had been made to the initiations of the Golden Dawn in the London tabloids, it was Crowley's publication of the Adept Grade initiations that eventually lead Mathers to sue Crowley in open court.

The Equinox was to be the official voice of the A.A., Crowley's teaching order largely based on the Golden Dawn curriculum. Crowley's production of the Rites was originally intended to increase interest in the A.A. In the summer of 1910 he put together all 7 plays with the assistance of his compatriots in the fledgling teaching order. The Rites of Eleusis were presented in October of that same year at Caxton Hall in London.

Included in the Rites are some of the rituals of the Golden Dawn. They were published by Crowley in Equinox vol. I number 3, in 1909, and at the time of the presentation of the Rites in 1910, these rituals were still largely unknown. They were certainly not in daily use by members of dozens of neo-pagan and ceremonial disciplines. They had seldom been seen outside of the private practice of a few initiates, or within the confines of a Golden Dawn Temple. The Rites of Eleusis represented the public presentation of mysteries that were considered secret and most holy. In some way, these were the mysteries that were at the heart of Crowley's Eleusis, as opposed to the agricultural and seasonal Rites of the ancients.

Moreover, it was during a ritual with other A.A. members to evoke the spirit Bartzabel in May of 1910 that Crowley began to realize the potential of the incorporation of poetry and art in the direct evocation of a spiritual force into a material vehicle. Quoting Crowley from Confessions:

Here [in the use of a person as a "material basis" to evoke the spirit] was a startling innovation in tradition. I wrote, moreover, a ritual on *entirely new principles*. I retained the Cabbalistic names and formulae, but wrote

most of the invocation in *poetry*. The idea was to work up the magical enthusiasm through the exhilaration induced by *music*.<sup>8</sup>

While the incorporation of poetry and music was certainly an innovation, it is the direct invocation of spiritual energies into a human that can be seen as a turning point in the western magickal tradition. While ceremonies like the Headless ritual and the Eleusinian Mysteries themselves give ample evidence that the practice of invocation was or could have been in regular use among the ancients, as well as being employed by certain tantric and various African religions, it was not regularly employed as an aspect of ceremonial magick or western religion as understood in the modern era. To this day, many Golden Dawn schools teach that the magician must shield their minds from the direct contact with deity when assuming a Godform during initiation. Yet this is now more the exception than the rule. Pagan practices like “Drawing Down the Moon” and “The Great Rite” to say nothing of The Gnostic Mass incorporate this form of direct invocation regularly, and it’s roots in the west can be traced to Crowley’s Eleusis. The distinction here may seem subtle, but it is the difference between symbioses and synthesis, between cooperation and integration, a spiritual shift akin to the evolution from single cellular to multi cellular life.

Quoting Crowley from his Confessions (chapter 67):

*[Presentation note: In order for this to make any sense, and in order for the audience not to be bored beyond reason, this section should be recited in the style of comedian Eddie Izzard, when he is playing multiple characters simultaneously.]*

My new methods of Magick were so successful that we became more ambitious every day. I wrote a ritual for invoking the moon. [This ritual was The Rite of Artemis, which became the frame-work for The Rite of Luna. -editor] The climax of the ceremony was this: Leila Waddell was to be enthroned as a representative of the goddess and the lunar influence invoked into her by the appropriate lyrics. (I wrote "The Interpreter" and "Pan to Artemis".) The violinist was to reply by expressing the divine nature through her art. She was a rough, ill-trained executant, and her playing coarse, crude, with no touch of subtlety to interpret or passion to exalt the sequence of sound. The most cynical critics present were simply stunned at hearing this fifth-rate fiddler play with a genius whose strength and sublimity was equal to anything in their experience. I quote from a half-article in the *Sketch* of August 24th. The writer is a financial journalist who thinks Magick a more brittle bubble than the most postposterous wild-cat scheme ever floated.

*Crowley then made supplication to the goddess in a beautiful and unpublished poem. A dead silence ensued. After a long pause, the figure enthroned took a violin and played --- played with passion and feeling, like a master. We were thrilled to our very bones. Once again the figure took the violin and played an Abendlied so*

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<sup>8</sup> Crowley, *Confessions* 630; emphasis added.

*beautifully, so gracefully and with such intense feeling that in very deed most of us experienced that ecstasy which Crowley so earnestly seeks. Then came a prolonged and intense silence, after which the Master of the Ceremonies dismissed us in these words: "By the power in me vested, I declare the Temple closed."  
So ended a really beautiful ceremony --- beautifully conceived and beautifully carried out. If there is any higher form of artistic expression than great verse and great music I have yet to learn it.*

The success of this form of invocation led me to develop the method. A large number of masonic rituals were at my disposal, and their study showed that the ancients were accustomed to invoke the gods by a dramatic presentation or commemoration of their legends. I decided to bring this method up to date, while incidentally introducing into such rituals, passages whose sublimity would help to arouse the necessary enthusiasm by virtue of its own excellence.

Some of the success of The Rite of Artemis may be due to the inclusion of Peyote in the cup of libation passed during the celebration. Those who might be shocked by Aleister Crowley offering the audience at a theatrical event a libation infused with peyote would do well to remember that heroin was a prescription medicine at the time, and cocaine had recently been an additive in soft drinks.

Here I must digress again from the history to note that, while this presentation contains a frank discussion of the use of perception altering compounds in the Ancient Rites of Eleusis, as well as Crowley's implementation of the same, that this is not a requirement for the presentation of these Rites. Furthermore, I am in no way suggesting that the Ordo Templi Orientis sanctions or condones such practices. Speaking for myself I would add that when I am the person leasing a theater, I don't want to hear about it, know about it and I certainly don't want it becoming my problem. If someone wants to play freelance psychedelic astronaut while attending a presentation of the Rites I would hope that they would take the personal responsibility to have some modicum of experience and self control. As opposed to locking themselves in the bathroom for 20 minutes after a presentation of The Rite of Luna, while their friends try to talk them down through the door and the theater staff a looking at me and talking about over-time. This makes it my problem. Don't do it!

While the preceding review of The Rite of Artemis sounds promising, the reality of the Rites themselves came as something of a blow Aleister Crowley. Perhaps it is best to allow him to describe his relationship to the Rites in his own words, from Confessions:

I throw myself no bouquets about these Rites of Eleusis. I should have given more weeks to their preparation than I did minutes. I diminished the importance of the dramatic elements; the dialogue and action were little more than a setting for the soloists. These were principally three; myself, reciting appropriate lyrics --- this involved, by the way, my learning by heart many hundreds of lines of verse every week --- Leila Waddell, violinist, and Neuburg, dancer. I sometimes suspect that he was the best of the three. He possessed extraordinary powers. He gave the impression that he did not touch the ground at all, and he would go round the circle at a pace so great that one constantly expected him to be shot off tangentially. In the

absence of accurate measurements, one does not like to suggest that there was some unknown force at work, and yet I have seen so many undeniable magical phenomena take place in his presence that I feel quite sure in my own mind that he was generating energies of a very curious kind. The idea of his dance was, as a rule, to exhaust him completely. The climax was his flopping on the floor unconscious. Sometimes he failed to lose himself, in which case, of course, nothing happened; but when he succeeded the effect was superb. It was astounding to see his body suddenly collapse and shoot across the polished floor like a curling-stone.

The Rites of Saturn and Jupiter, repeated and revised constantly in the studio among ourselves, were admirable.

But what was sublimely effective when performed in private lost most of its power to impress when transferred to unsuitable surroundings. I had no available spare money, no knowledge of the tricks of stagecraft, no means of supplying the proper atmosphere. I would not condescend to theatricalism. I was much too hasty in preparing the latter rites and they were not thoroughly rehearsed. It may seem impossible that any creature possessed of a grain of common sense should have failed to foresee failure; but my incorrigible optimism persuaded me that the public were gifted with reverence, intelligence, imagination; and the gift of interpreting the most obscure symbolism.

Unfortunately, the tabloids saw an opportunity, either for sensationalism or possibly blackmail that Crowley refused to pay. The reviews of the Rites in the London tabloids were scandalous, mostly consisting of character assassinations of Crowley. His associates demanded that he sue to defend his character, and by extension theirs, but he refused, and probably wisely, as George Cecil Jones filed his own suit, and lost.

Quoting from Confessions again:

I saw no objection to stating my position for the sake of sincere and worthy people who might, through ignorance of the facts, be turned away from truth. I accordingly availed myself of the editor of a high-class illustrated weekly, the *Bystander*, and wrote two articles explaining what the Rites of Eleusis were; how people might cultivate their highest faculties by studying them. I also published the text of the rites as a supplement to number six of [\*The Equinox\*](#). I could not condescend to reply to personal abuse.

The fallout from the publicity was disruptive to Crowley's plans for the A.A. Many of his friends no longer wanted to stand too close to him, now that he was "The Wickedest Man in the World". And so Crowley's Rites were remembered, lamented in his own words, until the 1970's when local bodies of the OTO in the United States began staging productions of the Rites of Eleusis. And to them, we are most grateful!

## **Our Modern Productions: Building on the History.**

Allow me to open this section with a blanket apology. I made an effort to contact many of the Brothers and Sisters in these modern photographs, but some were difficult to reach. None the less, all of these images are from the world wide web, and I am addressing a room full of initiates, so I suspect I am not outing anyone. On the other hand, since all of these photos were found via the internet, isn't it nice of me that I let you know they are out there? You're welcome.

Most of what I am going to share from here on is advise, ideas and suggestions for how to get involved with the Rites and manage a production with some measure of success.

It is going to sound less like an essay, and more like an advice column. So, if you're here for the historical part, well, go ahead and nod off now...on the other hand, if you found the history dry and were here to get tips on how best to produce these works, time to stretch and start taking note.

Modern productions of the Rites of Eleusis are a many splendedored thing! Some follow the scripts as though they are class A documents. Some involve singing banditos in sombreros!

Where-as there are rituals and initiations of the O.T.O. that are carefully, diligently followed in order to communicate specific ideas, The Rites have become the realm of experimentation. Usually produced as fundraisers for the O.T.O., they are also the vehicle for people who really want to play with the material.

Remember that Crowley produced his Rites as a synthesis of symbolic ideas that he wanted to express, and employed the talents of those available to express those ideas in an entertaining way. This is the best place to begin planning a production of any of his Rites. If you are ever going to study and present these Rites, I suggest you not treat them as Class A documents that must be performed as Crowley wrote them. Or, if you plan to do so, be prepared to lay out some serious cash for your talent. Not everyone, it turns out, is sleeping with a concert violinist. And if you are not sleeping with one, you may find it difficult to convince them to perform in your play. Those of you who are sleeping with concert violinists may still find it challenging.

I suggest starting out with a pen and paper, making a list of those whose talents you might draw upon, and any other useful assets or connections. Do you know fire performers? Jugglers? Do you have access to a useful backdrop? Video equipment? A Parachute? Do you have a barn on the back 40 where you can get together with your high school friends to raise the money to save the farm? Can you get Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney to help you?

An hour devoted to this list will be rewarded by many hours saved later, and I suggest you save this list, as you will certainly get the opportunity to add to it. Especially if you start to do the Rites habitually, as is often the case with those of us who perform the Rites.

Now take your list, and keep it next to you while reading through the Rite you have chosen, or several of the Rites of you have not made a choice. Maybe you do not know a dancer, but you know a juggler. Can one of Victor's dance solos contained in the script be expressed in another physical manner by someone on your list? Here is where we get into the genius of the symbolism, as you read through the text and find ways to

express the themes with the theatrical equivalent of found objects. After a fashion, this is what Crowley was doing.

Reading this list of talented people, assets and possible venues should also point out those areas where you may be lacking something. Start to think about what else you might want, and start your second list. Things you are wishing for. Don't be afraid to think big. Thinking big at this stage is best. Pencil and paper are cheap and wild imagining can inspire practical ideas.

Now, with you asset list in one hand, and your wish list in the other, annotate your script. Embellish! Exceed! This is where all of the great ideas, the inspiration and the big dreams come in. This is where you think about what you would like to do. Later, you will start thinking about whether you can do it.

For practical purposes I find it easiest to start with a soft copy that I find via the internet, but I must stress the necessity of checking your source material against the original published works. I'd like to quote from an example of an annotated version of The Rite of Venus I found on-line.

### *THE OFFICERS*

*VENUS. Blue lingerie.*

*TAURUS. Drag (orange items (like a feather boa) if possible).*

*LIBRA. As a leatherman; black leather vest, chaps, etc., flagged hunter green*

*PISCES. Little Red Dress (tm).*

*LUNA IN TAURUS. Silver bondage harness (with cock ring if we can talk him into it!).*

*SATURN IN LIBRA. I haven't decided yet.*

*PROBATIONERS. Fetish gear a piacere. (ah pi a cherri)*

*Venus is throned, and on her right are Libra and Saturn in Libra, on her left Taurus and Luna in Taurus, while at her feet lies Pisces (in bondage, as her footstool). Before her throne, a veil. Without, an altar; and without the temple, a further veil.*

I will confess, I might be the first in line to purchase tickets to this production, but it is not necessarily the version of the Rite you may be wanting for your area, and it certainly is not the version Crowley wrote. Check your sources before you email an "adulterated" version of the script to your cast, like I did with this one.

The last item I would like to include when it comes to interpreting the Rites in these early stages is the inclusion of personal perspective in your interpretation. Anyone reading the poetry of the Rites will find it filled with hundreds of evocative images, but which will you include in your production, particularly if you are trying to create a

comprehensible narrative? There are hundreds of ways to interpret the Rites, some humorous, some frightening, some evocative, while the best are all of these and more! Don't hesitate to explore them all. You will have the opportunity to develop your interpretation more fully working with your cast, and we will discuss ways of encouraging that level of personal devotion soon. Remember this:

**I admit that my visions can never mean to other men as much as they do to me. I do not regret this. All I ask is that my results should convince seekers after truth that there is beyond doubt something worth while seeking, attainable by methods more or less like mine. I do not want to father a flock, to be the fetish of fools and fanatics, or the founder of a faith whose followers are content to echo my opinions. I want each man to cut his own way through the jungle.**

#### Ch. 66 Confessions of Aleister Crowley

Once you have selected the Rite you intend to produce, and you have an idea of the direction you intend to go with it, with your list of assets and big dreams, it is time to start filling the holes.

The first step is venue. [WRITE venue for someone taking notes...] It is always venue. Before you have a cast, have a venue. You need a venue and a date before you cast. If you don't have a place and time you intend to perform, then you need to find one, before anything else. This seems simple, but if you cast your Rite before you select your date and location, you will almost certainly lose cast members when you do! And you will find that with almost any sizable venue, the lead time is as much as a year for any string of dates! If you are using a theater, be prepared to put down a deposit. As magicians you may be concerned about magickal days and hours, and it is good to have something in mind, but you should walk into this with the understanding that you may need to be flexible with your symbolism if you want a specific venue. That is what a deep understanding of astrology and the quabalah is for: finding methods to justify your performance of one of the Rites in a fantastic theater venue during the only time it was available.

If you are planning to do a production for the first time, a smaller venue would be optimal. Of course if you are in the O.T.O., and have a dedicated temple, that can be an easy choice. Masonic Temples are well appointed for the Rites. There are local nightclubs that might be happy to host your event. I've done a Rite under the canopy of a picnic shelter in the rain. Some of the best I have heard of have been in garages! While it is great to dream big when planning your productions, it is even more important to be able to scale back when you get to the reality of your situation.

At the same time you are planning your venue, you need to be scouting for rehearsal space. The requirements of your rehearsal space will depend largely upon how elaborate your production will be. Plan your rehearsal schedule in advance as well, with a little more room for flexibility. A good rule of thumb for a quality production is 2 hours of rehearsal for every 10 minutes of stage time, plus two rehearsals start to finish prior to opening the show. The Rites tend to run just over an hour, so that would be eight 2 hour rehearsals for a conventional run. Obviously, if you are encompassing some more elaborate elements your requirements will reflect that. For example, for our presentations

we can run as many as 20 rehearsals, with different elements being rehearsed in various rooms and brought together in the last 30 minutes.

**Casting:** Once you have secured your venue and planned your rehearsal schedule, make this part of your pitch to your perspective performers. It makes you look professional, and sets the tone that the performance date is not flexible. I know that this may sound strange, but I must stress the importance of inflexibility when it comes to the performance date! Once you start adjusting your timeline to accommodate one cast member, you start to alienate the rest.

And this brings us to working with volunteers.

Since most of us do not have the means to hire a troop of professional actors and musicians and stage hands and set builders and lighting designers and promoters to perform these Rites, and since many of us would rather do these things ourselves anyway, we'll need to work together with volunteers.

First you have to find them! Start with your list. Call the people you had in mind when you wrote your list of assets, and see how many of them you can get involved. Chances are, if you are close to them, you've already been talking. But that may not be all of the help you need.

Obviously, if you are involved with a group like the O.T.O., you would think that would be the natural place to find volunteers. Yet, you may be surprised at how many people are hesitant to take on more responsibilities! It's almost as though they already have a great deal to do!

Do not be afraid to recruit from outside of the O.T.O. or any other local group you are working with, as casting talented people in the Rites who have an interest in the material is a great way to get talented people involved with your group. This material is available for people to use, and there is no initiation requirement for involvement, unless you choose to make that a restriction.

An added benefit to encouraging involvement from outside of the groups you are closest too is that it broadens your market appeal. In the end, you are going to want to experience these Rites with an audience, and the best way to reach a large audience is to draw your talent from a large pool.

There are pagan groups and study groups and choral groups and belly dance troupes and any number of other areas you can recruit from that may resonate with your theme. And if that were not enough, there is the internet.

Online resources for talent include Tribe, Craigslist and to a lesser extent facebook and myspace. They can be useful in finding people with specific skills who might be interested in working on a project. I have had great success finding audio and video engineers through online resources who were willing to volunteer their time in order to enhance their portfolio. This is also how I met several skilled belly-dancers.

Keeping that in mind, word of mouth is still the best. Let people know what you are doing, and what you are looking for, and they will recruit their talented friends for you!

Once you have your group, you need to manage them. I cannot go into all of the ins and outs, so I am distilling this to a simple list of three rules. Please feel free to copy them down, and give them to potential cast members. I do!

### **1. During rehearsal always listen to suggestions—Never engage in debate!**

This is always an important rule when dealing with magicians! Everyone has good ideas. Everyone has input. Everyone has some portion of the key to the mystery, and a desire to express it, or they would not be involved. But there must be one person, in charge, who listens to the ideas, allows people to have their say, briefly, and then decides to incorporate the idea, or not. Afterward, you must move on. Anytime a discussion about motivation or symbolism goes on for more than five minutes, it has become a debate, and it is wasting the time of every other person present. Debate is the enemy of rehearsal. End it diplomatically, but end it! If you *can* make an appointment to discuss it later, and you *want* to, then do so. But, if you waste time of your cast, their attention will wander and their behavior will deteriorate. These are actors and volunteers...fear and respect them. Turning your back on them is like turning your back on the ocean!

### **2. There is one set of standards for behavior. No amount of talent excuses rudeness.**

A theatrical production is a finely tuned machine. Do not allow anyone to throw sand in the gears! Time is tight. Tempers flair. But rude behavior is not acceptable. When your diva shouts at the cast to quit grabbing his ass through his tight leather pants...not that I have ever done that...it must be impressed upon that diva quietly and swiftly that an apology is in order so everyone can let it go and get on with the show. Allowing one person to treat the rest of the cast poorly will always result in that one person feeling more entitled and being more and more rude, while the rest of your cast dwindles. Soon, you have a one person show, featuring someone who no one would ever want to work with, playing to an empty room, because everyone formerly on your cast told their friends not to come!

Never be afraid to axe the incurable diva! (filk...Incurable Diva!)

### **3. No show, no call is a resignation. The first time.**

Rule number three is a subset of two, but it deserves it's own number, because it happens all the time. There are those who think that not showing up and not calling is o.k., if they say they are sorry next time. It's not. It wastes everyone else's time, and set the tone that cutting rehearsal is acceptable once in a while, if you say you are sorry. Just save yourself the sorrow and cut them the first time. Feel free to politely ask them to leave in front of the rest of the cast. This will make your point very clearly.

**If you make sure that everyone on your cast is aware of these standards going in, and enforce them diligently, your production will go much more smoothly.**

(Practical example: Raise your hand if you want to help. Everyone with their hand up, get up and go to the wall. See how many didn't get up? That is the difference between the number who will say they want to be involved, and the number who will...Don't take it personally, or you will soon find you don't like anybody anymore.)

As to the areas to focus on during the major portion of your rehearsals, well much of that will go back to how you are interpreting your presentation, as rehearsal is the forge wherein the interpretive vision will be tempered with reality! If you want a list of places where best to apply your energies when interpreting these works, let's listen again the authoritative critic of the Rites of Eleusis, the author:

*I throw myself no bouquets about these Rites of Eleusis. I should have given more weeks to their preparation than I did minutes. I diminished the importance of the dramatic elements; the dialogue and action were little more than a setting for the soloists.*

This can be read as a clear admonition to devote significant time to enhancing the dramatic elements of the Rites, particularly the sections of dialogue, which can be accomplished through the inclusion of intense or lyrical recitation, the addition of evocative or iconographic blocking, dramatic lighting or changes in lighting, or music!

Later Crowley states:

*I had no available spare money, no knowledge of the tricks of stagecraft, no means of supplying the proper atmosphere. I would not condescend to theatricalism. I was much too hasty in preparing the latter rites and they were not thoroughly rehearsed. It may seem impossible that any creature possessed of a grain of common sense should have failed to foresee failure; but my incorrigible optimism persuaded me that the public were gifted with reverence, intelligence, imagination; and the gift of interpreting the most obscure symbolism.*

Aside from the fact that this is a reminder of the importance of regular, productive rehearsal, (and the need for money) it also gives us another hint to ways in which we can enhance our blocking. We can plan the movements and character interactions with an eye toward imbuing our audience with some of the reverence, intelligence, imagination and gift of interpreting obscure symbols that they will require to comprehend the narrative.

Once again, using the actors to recreate iconic images is the easiest way to accomplish this, as these images resonate throughout our over-culture.

At other times there are more obscure concepts that are deeply tied to the narrative and difficult to capture in a simple tubule. In such a case, the best way to communicate the concept with an audience who may not follow the subtle dialogue reference is to re-enact that subtle reference as a part of the narrative of your Rite.

As an example, "The Dance of Syrinx and Pan" is preformed by the Satyr in the Rite of Luna...but who were Syrinx and Pan? What is their story, and how does it relate to the narrative of The Rite of Luna?

When we produced the Rite of Luna in 2005, we had some of these same questions. Our choreographer, Amanda Hauk, did the research on the Greek myth, and incorporated an interpretation of the story into her choreography, which the nymph and satyr performed during the staging of the Rite. This took the reference from something obscure, to something fully incorporated in the production, as a vital aspect of the narrative. It allowed the audience to gain some understanding of the subtle message

Crowley had referenced in the dialogue. This is one example of countless opportunities to incorporate ideas into the blocking that communicate the essence of the symbols employed, no matter how obscure, and each of these opportunities, when explored, makes the Rite more accessible to the audience.

Another way we have found to improve our understanding of the material and the characters is cast essays! I know it sounds corny, but giving your principal performers a little homework goes a long way. Have each one prepare a 2 or 3 paragraph report on the history of the God or symbol they are to portray, and how these forces evolve and are transformed during the course of the Rite. Then, gather together, preferably somewhere with a hot tub, and read your reports to one another.

*We call these reports "Hot Tub Tickets" and nobody gets in without one. Of course, someone will be scribbling theirs on a napkin while everyone else is relaxing, but that can be fun, too.* The results are funny, thought provoking, and above all, they get everyone thinking about the character they will portray, and how those characters will interact with each other on stage, and more importantly how that energy will interact with the personalities of the actors!

These reports are tools to enhance the rehearsals, which in turn enhance the performance, which are ultimately opportunities for the cast to broaden their understanding and experience through devotion to the study and interpretation of the material. This is the key to some of the most profound aspects of the magick. The effects of prolonged public invocation of a God cannot be overstated. And your production will thrive as a result!

So your cast is working like a fine oiled machine. Everyone is pulling together. There are two weeks left until the performance. Then, someone comes up with the best idea ever, and all you have to do is rewrite the blocking for half the show...good idea?

Yes, for the next time you do a production! NOT FOR THIS TIME!

As the production date approaches we have a New Rule [write for someone]:  
**SIMPLIFY, do not embellish.**

This is so important, I would like you to say it with me:  
**SIMPLIFY, do not embellish.**

There comes a time when realism should rule vision, when pragmatism is the law, when being ready is more important than being creative. 2 weeks to show-time, nothing should be changing! If you do need to change something, you **MUST** simplify!

Even if you think an embellishment will only affect one or two cast members, it undermines the confidence of the rest of your cast and draw your focus from the full and final production at a crucial stage. Late changes in the blocking are more likely to destroy the performance of everyone on the stage than changing the venue!

Of course, if you really feel that the change **MUST** be included, you could always change your performance date...and lose your venue, your audience and half your cast! Please, short of the theater burning down, don't do this!

And did I say that everything was running smoothly? Nothing in theater ever really runs smoothly. You will need to replace cast members. You will need to call in

favors when someone quits in a huff. You may even need to hire a professional actor in order to perform the show and not let the rest of the cast down when your star moves to Istanbul.

And you will find that problem solving becomes the rule of the day. There will be time to be irritated with your star in Istanbul, when that girl dumps him and he moves back to town next month and wants to sleep on your sofa. For now, solve the problem, find the replacement and get them rehearsed. Understudies for the big roles are a good idea, but for small productions they may be impractical, so just be prepared to train someone up quickly. And when all else fail: **SIMPLIFY, do not embellish.**

...And to these rules I will add just one more, as the date approaches for the performances and people are getting the most frustrated, you are almost there. Keep practicing!

I was told when I first did this presentation that I should expand this section. We call these the horror stories. During the course of a production:

I have seen a bleeding performer take the stage trying to hide the wrapping on the wound.

I have seen a Microsoft screen saver pop up on the projection screen behind the actors.

I have seen a major vocal role lose their voice on the day of the performance.

I have seen one cast member cut another cast member out of her knotted costume with a ceremonial knife for a quick change back stage.

On several occasions I have seen pieces of props fly across the stage, from the hands of a zealous actor.

I have seen a hair application has fall off during a dance solo

I have seen an understudy who was advanced to a principal role, but could not learn his blocking, so all of the other blocking had to be changed to accommodate the other cast members man handling him around the stage.

I have seen an extra coming on in her street cloths because a critical piece of costuming was misplaced backstage.

I have seen a ten foot obelisk run into one of the theater lights during the show.

I have seen a principal character quietly sneak offstage between lines for a restroom break, and make it back before his next cue.

And I have seen about a hundred other things both odd and hilarious, except when they are happening.

All these, we must endure unto the end! And if it is all so crazy, why do it?

Well, that is the easiest question to answer. To perform these Rites is to know what it means to be the voice of God.

**The magical impact these Rites can have on individuals and communities cannot be overstated.**

On the face of it, this would seem in some ways self evident, but performing these Rites has a profound effect on individuals and on communities. That is, after all, what they are designed to do. They are based on the powerful formula of magical experiments that Crowley found to be both inspired and inspirational, and this is after the

reception of the Book of the Law, and just after his Enochian workings. This is powerful stuff!

And with an emphasis on public presentation, and all the possibilities of divine invocation, performing in the Rites has a tremendous impact on the egos of those taking on God roles.

It is not unheard of for cast members to build altars to the Gods they will be invoking, and spend month, or in some cases years, in devotion to the deities. It is also not unheard of for the devotion to lead to a little bit of megalomania!

Does this mean you get to blame your infidelity on your invocation of a lusty satyr? Well, you can if you would like, but I suspect you would not get much traction with that!

Which means that the wiser among us will plan for the fallout. If you have chemistry on stage, expect it to carry over into personal life. If you are doing the Rite of Mars, assume that there will be some radical change in your future. During our most recent production of Venus, there were several huge relationship changes, including one couple who met at our audition, and who I and Melissa had the honor of handfasting one and a half years later.

Anytime a great deal of energy is directed into the embodying of an archetypal force, it is going to have a profound effect. This effect is increased even more when it is designed to culminate in a specific celebration on a specific date and time. Planned in advance, attended by celebrants, it becomes the synthesis of ritual and theater, as the actors suffer the ecstasy of embodying the Gods, and the happy sorrow of letting them go.

### **And this brings us, at last, to the cast party!**

Little can be said about the cast party, as they can vary as widely as the Rites, themselves.

But, a little fore-thought goes a very long way. I would suggest planning the venue for your cast party at the same time you are selecting the date and venue for your event. More to the point, if you do not plan it, it will sneak up on you! Several member of the cast will arrive at your home, others will be called, someone will order pizza, and then you will be running to the liquor store.

The Gods are not ones to miss an opportunity to get exuberant with one another! The chemistry will be there, so plan accordingly. An unplanned cast party can erupt like mentos in a 2 liter of diet coke! So, here are some simple rules:

If you want to keep things low key, plan your event for a public place, in daylight, like a picnic in the park the day after the show closes. Bring a camera, and some pie. Make it a potluck. It will be nice. Everyone will laugh, tell stories and generally ground out the energy, and those who have a need to get their freak on will sneak off to do so.

If your tastes are more to the exotic, a private home with a hot tub is in order. Camera and pie are optional.

In either event, most of the members of the cast will feel a need to interact with one another as themselves, and revel in the magick of the shared experience. This, in some ways, is the most moving part of the experience, the afterglow of a divine consummation.

I'd like to close with a quote by Antonin Artaud from *The Theater and its Double*

“There is a mysterious identity of essence between the principle of the theater and that of alchemy. For like alchemy, the theater, considered from the point of view of its deepest principle, is developed from a certain number of fundamentals which are the same for all the arts and which aim on the spiritual and imaginary level at an efficacy analogous to the process which in the physical world actually turns all matter into gold. But there is a still deeper resemblance between the theater and alchemy, one which leads much further metaphysically. It is that alchemy and the theater are so to speak virtual arts, and do not carry their end-or their reality within themselves.”