

YUM!

INSTRUMENTATION

CAST OF CHARACTERS

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SCENE SYNOPSIS AND LYRICS FOR TWO MUSICAL SELECTIONS

SCENE 1. *Calm down; you know I'm joking (Sam, Isabelle).*

SCENE 2. *Perhaps the time has come (Sam, Isabelle).*

YUM! Opera in One Act in Four Scenes (2008)

Music Sergio Cervetti

Libretto Elizabeth Esris

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YUM! celebrates friendship, food, wine, and the long-buried secrets that touch lives. It reflects with both humor and pathos the reality of life-long friendship and the way in which adults on the cusp of aging look back on moments forever lost. Sam and Isabelle are old friends and competitive cooks. Egos are tested when both plan to make a cake for the 40th birthday of Kenneth, who is to each, “my oldest, dearest friend.” They compromise and agree to collaborate on the cake. As they cook, verbally spar and reminisce—to a piquant tango, dissonant harmonies or quote from one of Debussy’s songs—both Isabelle and Sam reveal having secretly loved Kenneth as more than just a friend.

INSTRUMENTATION

Flute and alto flute, clarinet in B-flat, horn in F, bassoon, alto sax in E-flat, piano, violin, viola, cello, vibraphone/marimba 1 player.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Sam (baritone)

Accomplished chef, bon vivant, insightful master of life.

Isabelle (lyric/coloratura soprano)

Close friend, culinary disciple, and rival of Sam.

Kenneth (tenor) supporting role

Life-long friend of Sam and Isabelle, admired and loved by both for his ability to charm and engender loyalty in friends.

SYNOPSIS

SCENE 1

The interiors of two kitchens reveal Sam and Isabelle in their respective homes looking through cook books and searching for pans. Sam calls Isabelle to announce that he is making dinner for the 40th birthday of Kenneth, who is to each of them, “my oldest, dearest friend.” Isabelle is distraught, since she has been planning “to bake a very special cake” and was just about to call Sam. Sam invites her to help with the dinner but insists that he will bake the cake. After quibbling and cajoling, they compromise and agree to collaborate on the cake.

SCENE 2

Isabelle goes to Sam’s house where he is in the kitchen selecting china, flutes, and champagne for Kenneth’s birthday dinner, an annual endeavor. Isabelle is surprised when she sees a Bollinger 1990, a prized champagne that Sam has been “guarding for years.” Sam tells Isabelle that he has been waiting for a special moment to open it and that Kenneth’s birthday might be it. “Who but Kenneth could savor such a wine?” he asks. Isabelle remarks that wine is the one topic upon which she and Sam agree completely. They reminisce about the genesis of their love of wine—and the glorious vintages they have relished—in a joyful revel in the kitchen. The scene ends with a return to the reality of their mission as both cooks declare, “we have to bake a cake!”

SCENE 3

Finally getting down to baking, Sam and Isabelle spar about each other’s culinary idiosyncrasies. Sam warns Isabelle to hold the whisk properly while beating egg whites and infers that she is a good cook but not an inspired one. Isabelle retorts

that while he may be right about her methods, she has seen Sam's "intuitive designs" fail at times. She hopes that Kenneth's cake won't need "clever little shims, a mortar of buttercream and crumbs" like another cake that Sam once made. They declare a truce and Isabelle asks if Sam invited Kenneth to the birthday celebration. Sam tells her he called and left a message. He adds that Kenneth certainly suspects their plans since his birthday dinner is a yearly event. Isabelle wonders aloud why Kenneth's approval has always been so important to them both. Sam notes that Kenneth "has elicited that desire in others all his life." They discuss Kenneth's charisma and Sam asks if Isabelle ever felt more for Kenneth than just friendship. In an aria tinged with regret, she reveals that she loved Kenneth long ago but never let him know. Sam then confesses that he too loved Kenneth, but he "never spoke his heart." They muse that "perhaps he knew."

SCENE 4

The cake is baked and decorated. They admire it, bicker about china for the table, and discuss details for the "culinary romance" that will be Kenneth's birthday dinner. Sam realizes that he has not heard from Kenneth and he telephones him. He listens to a message in silence without reaction and then dials again, this time asking Isabelle to put the phone on speaker.

Kenneth, knowing that they will call, has recorded a message. He relates that he heard Sam's message that morning and he is recording his own message, intended for both Sam and Isabelle, while packing to go to Paris with "an incredible, impossible, extraordinary date" to celebrate his birthday with "a culinary feat beyond compare." He boasts about the "perfect birthday" that awaits him, complete with a "grand gâteau baked at Laduree!" The message ends and Sam and Isabelle erupt with fury, declaring Kenneth a "viper" and "insensitive prick." They castigate his disloyalty, recall his ego, and call his trip to Paris a "dirty trick."

After a tirade in which they declare their hopes that his birthday dinner in Paris is a disaster with corked wine and foie gras like carrion, they look sadly at the cake that they have planned and created with such devotion. Sam suddenly instructs Isabelle to "grab the Bollinger" and announces that "it is time to celebrate." The two toast to "baking with a friend" and "tastes that tell us we're alive." They abandon their bitterness over the ruined birthday. They toast "to wine and to cooking" and ruminate about love and loss, deciding to "forgive the traitor" since "love is a banquet too sweet to deny!"

SCENE SYNOPSIS AND LYRICS FOR TWO MUSICAL SELECTIONS

SCENE 1. *Calm down; you know I'm joking* (Sam, Isabelle)

Sam has been bantering about being to the market just after dawn and teasing Isabelle about how he hopes that she can learn to cook. She declares him insufferable. Sam says he is joking and informs Isabelle that he has a purpose in calling. She is anxious to speak first, since she too has something important to say, but Sam insists that it is "his dime." He announces that he is making a dinner, including a cake, for the 40th birthday of Kenneth. Isabelle is distraught, since she has been planning "to bake a very special cake" for Kenneth's birthday and was just about to call Sam. Sam is firm in his insistence that the cake is his to bake although he tells Isabelle that she may certainly help with the dinner. Sam recalls how he has known Kenneth "since chemistry and choir" while Isabelle retorts that she can trace her friendship to "nursery rhymes and fairy tales...and hours of playing doctor in his room!" Sam is not moved by her sentimental musings and says "I, Isabelle, will bake the cake!" They describe their own visions of the birthday cake and each remains resolute. Isabelle suggests they compromise and bake a cake together, cajoling Sam with the notion that this would mean a great deal to Kenneth. Sam reluctantly agrees and in an aside calls Isabelle "an artful fox." He insists the cake be prepared at his house. Isabelle agrees and leaves immediately.

LYRICS

Two kitchens in two different homes visible at the same time. In one Isabelle is leafing through cookbooks. She stops at one that clearly reads "Great Cakes." In the other Sam is rifling through cabinets looking for something. He finds it: a large, spring-form cake pan. He picks up the phone. The phone in Isabelle's kitchen rings.

SAM

Calm down; you know I'm joking.

Turns on the charm.

Good morning, such a morning, what a day!

The sun is out, flowers bloom, a summer breeze fills the room.

Direct and calm.

How are you Isabelle?

I've called you for a reason.

ISABELLE

Oh: I was going to call you. I wanted to...

SAM

My dime: I'm on first.

ISABELLE

All right: go on.

SAM

Kenneth's birthday is two days away. Can you believe he's turning forty?

ISABELLE

Yes; I know. That's why...

SAM

I want to have a dinner and I'm going to bake a cake...

ISABELLE

No, you cannot! I was planning, I was looking, I decided, and I found. I want to bake a very special cake: I was calling you in a moment or two.

SAM

Firm.

Well, Isabelle that is very sweet; you can help with the dinner. The cake, however is mine!

ISABELLE

But I've been planning, I've been dreaming, he's my dearest, oldest friend.

SAM

Mine too, mine too. We have known each other since chemistry and choir.

ISABELLE

Wistfully.

I've known him since nursery rhymes and fairy tales and soaring on a swing on summer days. We spent evenings chasing, catching fire flies; two little shadows wishing on the moon. I've known him since licking cream from Oreos, and hours playing doctor in his room!

SAM

Charming. (not moved in the least) but I called you first: dinner and dessert are clearly mine. I want your help with elixirs and ambrosia, but I, Isabelle, will bake the cake! One with raspberries and chocolate dark and rich and sweet.

ISABELLE

I've made this cake in my dreams, a cake from a shop in Paris. With deep ganache a layer of jam, just the gift for my best friend. (Pause. Petulant) Sam, you can't do this to me. I'll cook any part of dinner, but I have to make this cake!

SAM

Out of the question. I have the menu all worked out.

ISABELLE

Thinking—a bit desperate.

Oh! Well...what about, what about, a compromise?

SAM

Like what?

ISABELLE

Let's both make the cake, let's dream it up together: Kenneth will surely love the thought. A special cake, a special day, forty years measured, mixed, whisked, baked, conjured up by his oldest, dearest friends. What about it, Sam?

SAM

Oh, I don't know. (Contemplates) Perhaps.

ISABELLE

Come on, Sam; it will be fun!

SAM

Aside

Artful fox: I think she's won!

ISABELLE

It will be fun.

SAM

Why not? It would make Kenneth happy. But my kitchen. When can you come?

ISABELLE

Over the top.

Now!

END of SCENE 1.

SCENE 2. *Perhaps the time has come (Sam, Isabelle)*

Amidst the wonderful aromas in Sam's kitchen both cooks verbally spar and prepare to bake the cake. Isabelle notices the bottle of Bollinger that she knows Sam has been saving for years and asks if he is considering opening it for Kenneth's birthday. He tells Isabelle that he has been waiting for a special moment and that Kenneth's birthday might be it. "Who but Kenneth could savor such a wine?" he asks. Isabelle remarks that wine is the one topic which she and Sam agree upon completely and asks if he remembers their first tastings. Sam reminds her of the Burgundy he bought years ago with five dollars "scrounged from who knows where." He remembers predicting the pleasures that awaited their senses and recalls that Kenneth declared him a genius after tasting the Burgundy. Isabelle chides that only a month earlier he had been drinking wine from a bottle of Chianti wrapped in straw. Sam retorts that it was before he met Diego who changed him and his palate forever. He claims "I remember every wine I ever tasted" and Isabelle admits that Sam brought wonderful flavors—"enticing, arousing into our lives." Sam takes Isabelle by the waist to dance as he revels in the Latin rhythms and flavors to which Diego introduced him. They joyfully reminisce about the glorious vintages they relished through the years, including a 1937 Gewurztraminer that they declare "was Biblical!" Finally they return to reality and both Sam and Isabelle proclaim, "we have to bake a cake!"

LYRICS

Sees the champagne and walks to the counter.

SAM

Perhaps the time has come. Perhaps the time is now. After all, who but Kenneth could savor such a wine, luxurious, balanced, tinged with gold? Just a hint of marzipan, with tiny, mellow bubbles and a docile hint of pear as it unfolds.

ISABELLE

Affectionately

You know, Sam, wine is the only thing we agree on completely. Do you recall our first tasting?

SAM

Nostalgic.

Indeed. I told you and Kenneth what awaited our senses: delight beyond compare. I invited you to dinner with a Burgundy bought with five dollars scrounged from who knows where. A flower bloomed in your mouth. (Proudly) Kenneth toasted Bacchus. He declared me a genius.

ISABELLE

Playful.

And just a month before our favorite wine was Chianti, in a bulbous green bottle wrapped in straw. Empty a bottle, put in a candle: dine and decorate!

SAM

With exaggerated passion.

Well, that was before I met Diego. He changed me and my palate forever. Where I led, you and Kenneth followed.

ISABELLE

Sam you are so full of yourself! We were on the road to our own discoveries.

SAM

I remember every wine I ever tasted.

ISABELLE

You did bring, you did bring wonderful flavor, enticing arousing into our lives.

SAM

Takes her by the waist to dance.

Yes. From Diego came a taste for all things Latin. The tango, the samba, the carimbo; pollo borracho y dulce de leche. And that first Carmenere he brought from Chile.

ISABELLE

Tannat from Uruguay!

SAM

Malbec from Argentina!

ISABELLE

With tannins that taught me how to kiss!

Purses her cheeks. Puckers her lips and kisses Sam on the cheek. They continue to dance about the kitchen.

SAM

Diego came and went, but wine is eternal. Do you recall La Tache, its overture of cherries?

ISABELLE

La Lagune with toffee on the nose?

SAM

Nuit St. Georges, with an earthy hint of truffle?

ISABELLE

Cassis and mocha in that ancient Haut Brion? What about the whites? Vouvray, Sancerre, the Trockenberen Auslese? Puligny Montrachet, that charming white Lirac?

SAM

Napa and Sonoma, Cabernet from Mendocino. Violets bloom in Pinot-Noir, cherries pepper Zinfandel.

ISABELLE

Like a prayer.

The Gerwurztraminer nineteen thirty-seven, we found in a cellar that opened like a tomb. Nectar! Elixir! History in a glass.

ISABELLE and SAM

It tasted like the future: it tasted like the past. It was Biblical! It was Biblical!

SAM

The dance is over. Reality sets in.

Enough! Close the Bible shut the cellar.

ISABELLE and SAM

We have to bake a cake!

END of SCENE 2.

END of OPERA info.