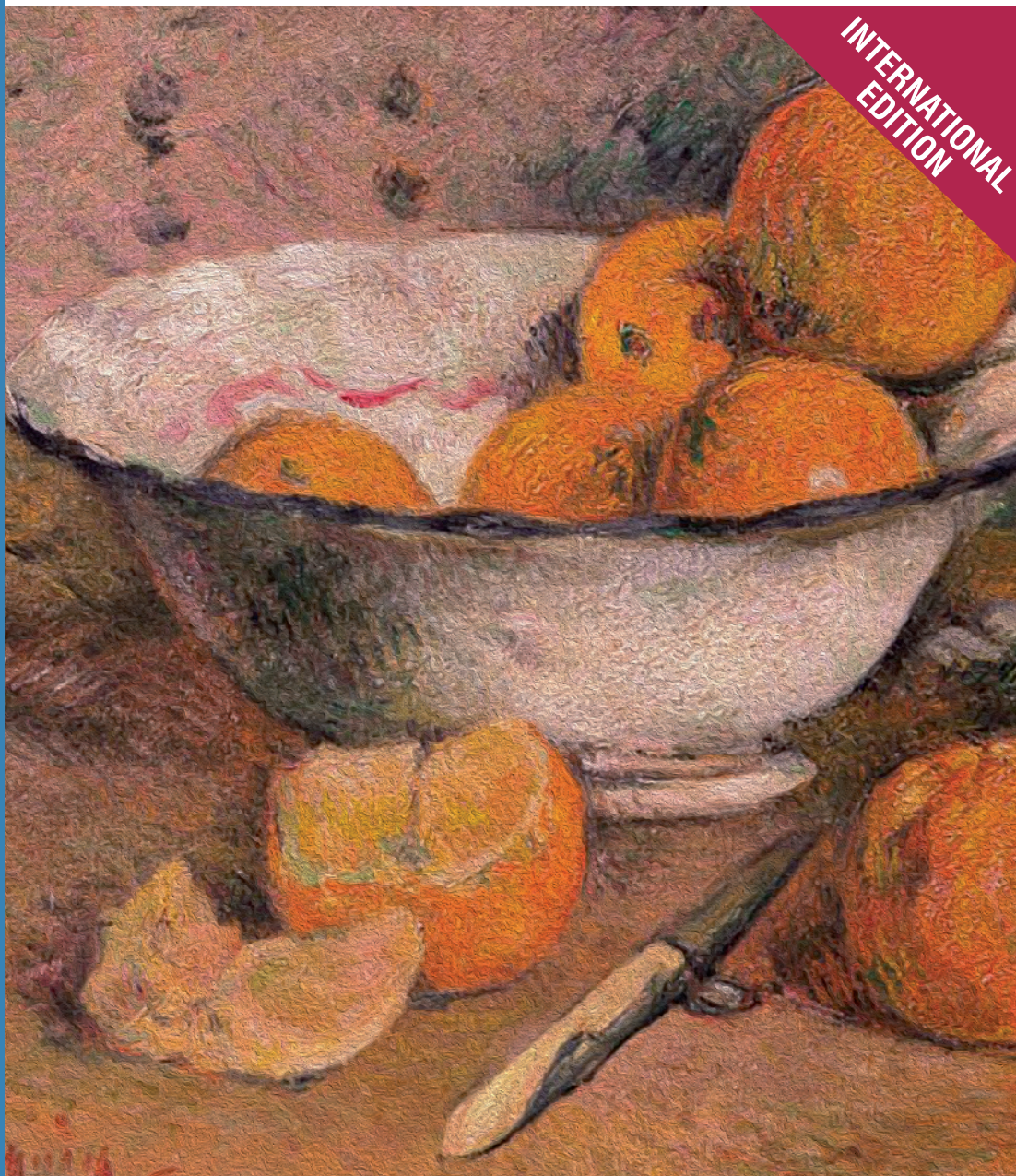


CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

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WHIT MASSIMO ALBERINI AND VINCENZO BUONASSISI.

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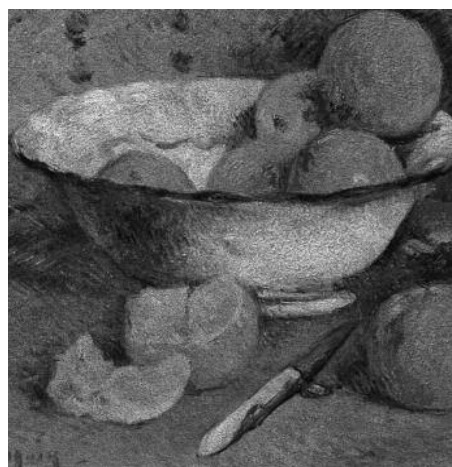
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On the cover: Graphic reproduction of a detail
from the painting *Still Life with Oranges* (1881) by
Paul Gauguin. Musée d'Orsay, Paris

The great chefs no longer live in the kitchen

How do they manage to stay away from the environment where their passion was born?

BY PAOLO PETRONI
President of the Academy

An old television series aired in France back in 1997 is enjoying a revival: *Joséphine, the Guardian Angel*. In the show, Joséphine Delamarre is a benevolent angel that comes down to Earth from Heaven. With her outstanding sense of psychology, powers of persuasion and magical abilities she manages to help people with their problems. Mimie Mathy, a lovely French actress and singer afflicted by dwarfism is the only person who appears in all the episodes in the role of Joséphine. In one of the most recently aired episodes, clearly filmed a number of years ago, Joséphine goes off to help one of the most famous chefs in France at the time when, overwhelmed by the demands of his business (including the opening of new restaurants and putting his face and logo on baby food) he finds himself suffering from a crisis of identity and creativity. One evening the most famous restaurant critic in France comes to dinner at his resort. Naturally the critic is pampered and treated to the best dishes in the house, including dove with *foie gras*, but before dessert is served he walks out of the restaurant. Our chef runs after him, but the critic openly tells him that he doesn't even recognize him: one of the most talented chefs in France seems no longer able to excite his clients or create something new to stimulate their palates. Terrified by the thought that a negative review by the journalist will wipe out all his business in one fell swoop, he falls into a deep depression. We do not know if the writers were inspired by a true story, but the plot closely resembles an actual event. It took place in Saulieu in Burgun-



dy in 2003. The three-star chef/entrepreneur Bernard Loiseau (he had four restaurants), committed suicide by shooting himself in the face at the age of 52. He was a man ahead of his time, renown for his talent, decorated with the Legion of Honor, successful author of cookbooks and sponsor of gastronomic food products sold in supermarkets. The official motive? Apparently because the *Gault e Millau Guide* de-

moted him from a rating of 19 out of 20 to 17 and apparently Michelin was about to take away a star, which would result in the ruination of his economic activities. Or perhaps it was simply the intolerable humiliation of it all. Today everything that brought about the good Loiseau's depression is considered normal: the great chefs are seen on television more than in their kitchens. They have founded restaurant chains resembling those of beauty parlors, bakeries or even fast food franchises. But perhaps the question posted by that critic many years ago is still valid. How can chefs survive outside the environment in which they were born, where they discovered their life's passion? We may be traditionalists, but it is lovely thing to enter a restaurant and be greeted by a smiling chef who warmly welcomes you and offers you his latest creations. Today a name and a logo are all it takes. Certainly an artist or artisan can have their school and their students, but the master must be present to guide and teach them.

For the record: with the help of chef Patrick Bertron, Bernard Loiseau's wife still successfully runs the resort *La Côte d'Or*. And it has maintained its three stars.

Last minute news

We have just learned that Franco-Swiss chef Benoît Violier took his own life with a firearm. One of the world's greatest chefs at only 44 years of age, he was the owner of the three-star Michelin restaurant at the Hotel de Ville, in Crissier, near Losanne.



Pre-plated meals

Multi-course meals are an increasingly absent element from restaurant tables.

BY SIMONETTA AGNELLO HORNBY
*Academician, London Delegation
"Franco Marengi" Study Center*

In the past thirty years food and cuisine have been a central focus of the media and consumers. Italian cuisine became unified toward the end of the 1800s, first with Artusi and subsequently with Fascist movement's efforts with the magazine *Italian Cuisine*. In the past Italian families always ate together and this affected the way food was served. In the poorer families dishes were often served, and consumed, in turns when there wasn't enough room at the table. In the past two centuries, the food - often soup or pasta - was the same for everyone, with the possible exception of men who performed hard labor and therefore needed more protein. Well to do families ate differently. The French serving system, which prevailed until the beginning of the 19th century, called for all dishes to be placed on the table at the same time: hot and cold, sweet and spicy, so that diners could serve themselves. The waiter only brought in the food, while the wine steward was in charge of filling the glasses of those who asked.

The dishes, served in plain sight on tall, raised platters, were kept warm by a complicated system of small burners called *réchaud*. In contrast, the Russian system, an innovation of Prince Alexander Borisovich Kurakin, called for a waiter to carry each serving dish on a tray and individually serve the amount of food requested by each diner. Diplomats, in accordance with the thinking of Anthèlme Brillat-Savarin, who at that time had published his reflections on the pleasures of fine dining and serving methods in his book *Physiology of Taste* (1825) created a system that avoided waste and allowed for enjoying tastes one at a time. This was also a period that saw the development of a new bourgeois culture during the post-revolutionary period. This culture was hostile to the excess, flagrant display of wealth and waste inherent in the French system. It was Kurakin who taught the great French chefs about the correct sequence of courses: appetizer, soup or pasta, fish, meat, salad, cheese, sweets, pastries and finally fruit. The passage from the French form of service to the Russian also had the advantage of allowing better pairings of food and wine. Diners were provided with a list, or menu, that indicated the order of the dishes. The Russian system is still the one used by most families, without, of course, the benefit of waiters.

Most Italians have been raised to respect food, condemn waste and to take only as much as they can eat. It is a good rule of thumb to pass each dish around the table twice so that diners can serve themselves a second time. Even in re-





restaurants the service was “personalized”; that is, the waiter brought vegetables and side dishes for everyone, but each diner selected the main dish they preferred. In the past there were only three reasons why diners were served differentiated dishes: illness, diet, or to give oneself airs by serving guests rare or exotic foods. Once thinness became synonymous with beauty, diets began to become popular. One of these, the Mediterranean Diet which was supposedly “discovered” by two Americans, has always been at the top of the list. But there are also incoherent diets, liquid diets, and even those that call for days of fasting. Such diets have led to the near disappearance of some ingredients: olive oil, which is lighter, has almost completely replaced butter even in the preparation of the classic veal chop, as I learned recently when I dined at *La Madonnina*, a well known traditional Milanese restaurant.

Much discussion is devoted to diets and ingredients, but little importance is given to *how* we eat, in addition to *what* we eat. In England it is traditional to use individual placemats, known as “American style”. Now it seems that the entire world is doing so, to the detriment of the tablecloth. The placement of silverware and glasses has remained more or less the same over time, but plate styles have changed. Today we use much larger plates (sometimes almost as big as serving platters), be they made from ceramic or delicate porcelain. One element that is disappearing from Italian, and perhaps European, tables, is the family style serving dish. Today we seldom see the common salad bowl, soup tureen or tray. This is because of the trend toward pre-plated meals, that is, dishing up an individual’s plate without previously asking what or how much they would like, has become the norm. On the contrary, I have always enjoyed having the power to choose what and how much I eat. It is an element of good judgment that should be taught to children: it means understanding moderation, and above all, learning to have a dignified rela-

tionship with food. Food waste is unjustifiable and downright sinful, and it is doubled when food is pre-plated (unless the portions are miniscule, which is not uncommon. In which case one goes hungry). On the one hand, serving even a small amount of food already plated give diners the right to just leave the food on their plates. But on the other hand, excessive importance is devoted to decoration and presentation. Foods are always carefully arranged to enhance their attractiveness. In the past this was only done with the actual food in the dish; today it is almost always carried out with ingredients put there strictly for their esthetics (sprigs of thyme, lettuce or bay leaves, fennel leaves, sad and lonely slices of tomato, large basil leaves or carrot or radish curls).

Pre-plated dining even changes the sense of conviviality, a term that refers to eating in company, enjoying food together, which also means enjoying the sight of a nice roast chicken, a turkey larded with crispy bacon, or a splendid filet mignon that is sliced at the table and served with sauce, of a fish cooked whole...instead of finding small unidentifiable pieces of food on our plate. The visual aspect of food is important and today’s cooks try to satisfy that requirement by plating foods in complicated ways. Even the description of a dish can be a triumph of confusion. Often, a plated dish is shaped like a tower: on a bed of some sort of puree rest slices of vegetable, then meat or fish. A few leaves of something are added and a cream or sauce is poured over all. Sometimes even a piece of fruit or vegetable crowns the creation. Modern pre-plated dishes are tiny masterpieces that have to be dismantled to be eaten. Because of the way the various elements are sliced the flavors are often amalgamated in a way that they should not be.

In Italian and European cuisine sauces play a fundamental role. But when dishes are pre-plated sauces are decoratively drizzled like doodles. Now I don’t expect that they be served in a proper

sauce boat, as would be appropriate, so that each diner can choose whether or not, or how much sauce to use on their own plate. But at least the sauce should be abundant. Sometimes the threads of sauce are so thin that one must use one’s finger to taste them because it is impossible to gather enough on one’s fork or spoon. And the sauce should always be accompanied by bread, which today is served separately in almost every English restaurant, while in some Italian establishments you have to order it. In my opinion, the pleasure of dining is greatly reduced by pre-plated dishes, especially if those gathered around the table have chosen different dishes. Even conversation is affected because I eat my food and just tell you if it is good, and you eat yours and just let me know if you like it.

My thoughts go back to the daily family meal, where we talked and discussed how the food was cooked, with each diner contributing their opinion and sharing new recipes and techniques. Today’s youth probably have nothing similar as they have lost sight of the real fulcrum of the table: food.

Finally, I believe that artistically pre-plated dishes lead us to eating poorly. In an Italian restaurant in Chelsea, I recently consumed a chestnut soup with fried red onions. It was excellent, but I was unable to perceive the taste of the onion. Then I realized that there was a small clump floating in the soup. It was the fried onion, so stuck together that it was impossible to separate it even by squashing it against the side of the bowl with the spoon or vigorously stirring it. In the end I put the entire lump in my mouth as there was no alternative. We must have the courage to ask restaurants to offer us meals for two or three people served from a common serving plate. We should also encourage people to order the same dishes when dining out in order to be able to discuss and share our ideas, as often happens at our convivial Academic meetings.

SIMONETTA AGNELLO HORNBY



Frankenstein salmon

This is the nickname of the genetically modified fish that the United States FDA recently approved for sale to consumers.

BY MARINO DE MEDICI

Delegate, Washington DC-Maryland-Virginia

Against their will, Americans are getting ready to start eating genetically modified salmon. In Europe it's a different story. The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) recently approved "genetically engineered salmon" for human consumption and sale in supermarkets. It was a long battle, but in the end it was a small company that prevailed. AquaBounty Technologies applied for approval back in the 1990s. Environmental and consumer groups opposed genetically modified salmon with every weapon available to them, from advertising to legal challenges. Just a few hours after the FDA, a government agency charged with protecting consumers, made the approval announcement the first challenge was made in a Federal court. The

director of the Center for Veterinary Medicine, a branch of the FDA, responded with a rather huffy clarification: "The FDA has analyzed and evaluated the data presented by AquaBounty" - the press release stated - "and it has reached the conclusion that it is safe to consume this fish". The salmon produced by AquaBounty (the name *Bounty* is famous for its association with the historic mutiny, and also means "abundance") is actually an Atlantic salmon that has been genetically modified to make it grow faster than normal salmon and thus reach the market in half the usual time.

According to the FDA itself, GM salmon does not require the special labeling required for other genetically modified food. However the Agency does not op-





pose possible voluntary initiatives on the part of fish producers to label salmon as genetically modified.

We should point out that this is the first instance of a genetically modified fish being introduced on the market after years of analysis and debate. The delay in the regulatory process is attributable to the fact that the Obama Administration acted with extreme caution on the issue, fearing a political backlash. In addition, we now know that it will be at least two years before the modified salmon begins to appear in supermarkets and even then only in limited quantities. This is due in part to the fact that the production center located in Panama will initially only produce 100 tons of the modified fish. The United States imports more than 200,000 tons of salmon every year.

In any case, it remains to be seen whether or not genetically modified salmon, already nicknamed "Frankenstein salmon" will be successful in the marketplace. Many supermarkets have already declared that they have no intention of carrying the product. One of the main

objections put forth by environmentalists is that the modified salmon could wind up in open seas and genetically contaminate natural Pacific salmon. Large fish farms in Norway and Chile are often besieged by major storms or attacks by seals or marine otters, which create holes in the net housing allowing the salmon to escape. I have personally experienced landing a wild Atlantic salmon in a lake in Chile high in the Andes. That fish had traveled over 40 kilometers through the Puelo river from the Reloncaví estuary where fish farms are abundant.

The AquaBounty company maintains that modified salmon will be raised inland, in large metal basins, thus preventing these salmon from coming into contact with natural ones. It is a given however, that sooner or later the company will establish production centers in the United States, using salmon eggs harvested from Prince Edward's Island in Canada. Over time, other egg production sites will appear in the United States to supply the fish farmers using artificial basins in states where aqua-

culture or aqua farming is widespread. The expected markets for export include Argentina, Brazil and China. For the moment, Europe does not figure in these plans. Fearful that the appearance of "Frankenstein salmon" will have a negative impact on their state's image and their natural salmon such as the much prized northern Pacific King and Sockeye varieties, senators and members of Congress from Alaska have launched strong protests against genetically modified salmon. Their argument is refuted by experts who insist that production of modified salmon will not disrupt the ocean environment. In addition, these same experts maintain that the continued capture of natural salmon is not sustainable owing to over fishing. The environmentalists' only hope is that AquaBounty will fail financially in the event that European legislators and the major supermarket chains unite to oppose the sale of genetically modified salmon. Much will depend on how such salmon tastes, and obviously how much it costs.

MARINO DE MEDICI

GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE MAGAZINE

Academicians' contributions to the magazine are not only welcome, but essential. However Academicians should keep in mind some important guidelines so that their contributions, which are the fruit of their passion and dedication, are expeditiously published.

● **Articles:** it is essential that the **text of articles be sent via email**, in MS Word format (not pdf) to the following address: redazione@accademia1953.it

● **Article length:** it is important that articles are **between 3,500 and 7,000 characters** (including spaces); this is the best way to avoid cuts that are bothersome for both the editors and those submitting the texts. All computers should be able to provide character counts..

● Each issue of the magazine is printed one month ahead of the cover date so that it can be delivered to the Academicians by that date. Those submissions that are time sensitive should be sent in ample time.

● **"From the Delegations" Section:** In order to facilitate reading, please **limit articles to a maximum of 2,500 characters including spaces.**

● Please remember that in the "From the Delegations" section as well as elsewhere, **descriptions of meetings held outside the territory of the Delegation or in the homes of Academicians, unless they are associated with an important event, will not be published.** Also, **please do not include a list of dishes and wines.** Such listing should appear on the appropriate rating form regarding convivial meetings.

● **Rating forms for convivial meetings:** should be sent to the Secretariat (segreteria@accademia1953.it). It is also important to limit remarks in the "notes and comments" section of the form to **800 characters** (maximum 1,000) spaces included in order to avoid cuts. Rating forms that reach the Secretariat more than 30 days after the event will be discarded.

● We also request that you not submit reports on convivial meetings held **outside the territory of the Delegation**, or that take place in the **homes of Academicians**, or are otherwise not held in restaurants or public venues, as they will not be published.

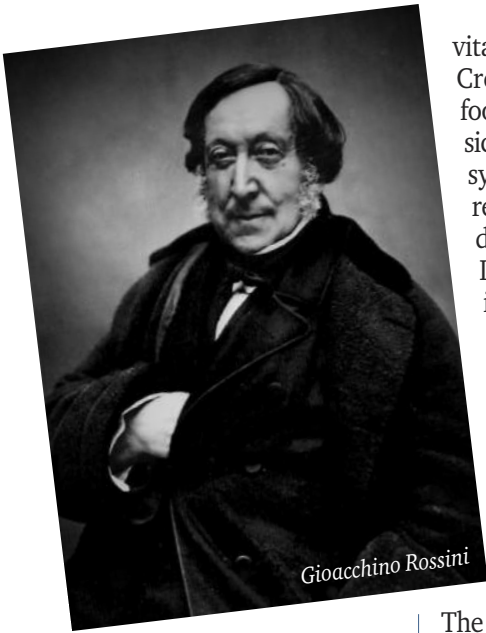


Food and music: a perfect union

Both are expressions of arts that promote wellbeing, evoke memories and help us share emotions.

BY ROSALIA SORCE

Academician, Siracusa Delegation



Gioacchino Rossini

The perception of food should be considered to be one of our multi-sensory emotions *par excellence*. Foods are something we can look at, touch, smell and taste: thus we use many senses, including hearing (when we chew and swallow). Since we have a unity of mind and body, that which passes through all our senses has the same impact as that which passes through our stomachs. Music is good for us because it nourishes the mind just as food nourishes our bodies. The Neurological Institute of the University of Montreal has demonstrated that the good music activates pleasure centers in the human brain by raising the level of dopamine. In the same way, when eating good food our brain “responds” in the exact same way as when we hear a pleasant piece of music, so much so that it can affect various

vital function of the human organism. Creativity is another element that food and music have in common. Musicians compose or reproduce musical symphonies just as cooks create or reproduce dishes that are like melodies for the eye, nose and palate. Like the weather, music can also influence our perception of several fundamental flavors: spiciness, acidity, sweetness, saltiness and bitterness. Certain symphonies are also known to enhance or alter the flavor of some foods. For example, jazz amplifies our perception of chocolate.

How many sounds are produced during the preparation of a dish?

The kitchen becomes an incredible musical stage where forks, spoons, knives, whisks and pots constitute the primary instruments. And of course “the singing cook makes the kitchen a happy place”. Indeed, many women enjoy humming their favorite tunes while going about preparing a meal.

Both its opera and cuisine have brought Italy worldwide renown. The music of Giuseppe Verdi represents the musical pillar of the Italian Risorgimento, while Artusi united the Italian population around the table.

In his interesting book *Food at the Opera: Music and Food in Emilia Romagna*, Giancarlo Fre states that “the frequent travels of various musicians and operatic performers provided an excellent opportunity for convivial encounters and encouraged understanding and exchanges of different gastronomic practices”. Some famous dishes bear the name of celebrated artists: eggs in the style of

Auber, Berlioz and Bizet. The Elvis Presley Sandwich (made with peanut butter). Beatles Apple Cake. Then there are “Mozart Balls” made of chocolate and marzipan. The composer attributed great importance to food and fine dining (see his letters to his cousin). And then there is *Risotto alla Verdi*, since that composer enjoyed food made with local country products. Pietro Mascagni adored the traditional doughnut and his famous peach Melba. And Arturo Toscanini believed in the power of a good bean soup.

Gioacchino Rossini was also famous as a gourmet: indeed, he created marvelous dishes, including the famous “tornedos Rossini” made with truffles and *foie gras*. It is said that at the tender age of six he was known to finish off bottles of holy wine in the sacristies of Pesaro, thereby demonstrating an early desire to satisfy his palate. The first production of *The Barber of Seville* in 1816 at the Argentine Theater in Rome was a huge debacle owing to envy on the part of the musical world. In describing the event to the love of his life, the singer Isabella Angela Colbran, he explained: “But what interests me much more than the music, dear Angela, is the discovery I made of a new salad, for which I will shortly send you the recipe”. He joined music and food in this metaphor: “The stomach is the musical master that both controls and stimulates the great orchestra of passion; the empty stomach plays the bassoon of resentment and the flute of envy; the full stomach shakes the sistrum of pleasure and the beats the drum of joy”.



Oranges in history and in health

From the gardens of the Hesperians, the long journey of a fruit with great biological and gastronomical value.

BY PUBLIO VIOLA
Delegate, Rome Appia



The word “orange” most likely derives from the Persian word *narang*, but there is no dearth of scholars that maintain that the word comes from the Latin *aurantium*, meaning golden fruit. At any rate, legend has it that the three Hesperians Aretusa, Egle and Hesperia, daughters of the night, together guarded the “golden apples” given by Zeus (Jupiter) to Hera (Juno) as a wedding gift from the perils of the dragon Ledone. And one of the labors of Hercules was to steal the apples from the Hesperians by killing the dragon and therefore encouraging their diffusion not only as an ornamental flower but a flavorful fruit. Their symbolic meaning commemorating the wedding of Juno still exists. *Zagare*, the Italian word for orange blossoms comes from the Arabic *zahar*, meaning splendor. These flowers are still carried in bridal bouquets to sym-

bolize a happy marriage. The orange supposedly had a long, slow migration from its origins in China and Japan. It first appeared in Europe at the beginning of the first century A.D. thanks to the Romans after they managed to enter the kingdom of Alexander the Great where they first encountered oranges and lemons. However it appears that they were appreciated more as an ornamental plant than as a fruit. Current wisdom has it that the Silk Road was the path followed by the orange on its journey to Europe. Owing to their commercial and trading activity, the Portuguese can take credit for their importation and diffusion -- so much so that the citrus was also known as a “*portogallo*”. We think it is only fair, however, to point out that some scholars attribute European knowledge of the orange to the Genoese, who supposedly introduced citrus fruits after their long

voyages along the Black Sea coast, where they met up with the caravans coming from India and China. However, setting aside the interesting discussion of their origin, provenance and name, we can state that there are two species of citrus: *Citrus Aurantium*, which is bitter orange, and *Citrus Sinensis*, the sweet variety.

The earliest known oranges were actually bitter and therefore only eaten sporadically. We would have to wait until the 8th century when the Arabs introduced them to Spain and Sicily. At the beginning of the first millennium, the sweet variety, as we know it today first appeared. Sicily was foremost in continuing to produce oranges and studying their cultivation and diverse characteristics. Studies continue today and in recent years significant progress has led to the development of new varieties, some of which are destined to



produce the juice that is increasingly gaining in popularity.

From a nutritional point of view, oranges are of notable biological value. However this is not related to their energy producing power (from sugar content), which equals 35 calories per 100 grams of the edible fruit. Their biological value is in fact tied primarily if not exclusively to the presence of vitamin C (ascorbic acid) contained in all citrus but present in especially high quantities in oranges. They also have other important components, including vitamins A, B₁, B₂ and B₆, some polyphenols, and a balanced mineral content. They are high in potassium and low in sodium.

It is important to point out that in addition to combatting scurvy, vitamin C has many other protective health benefits, including high antioxidant powers. These properties actively combat the negative effect of free radicals which are responsible for some serious health problems to which we are constantly exposed. In addition to vitamin C, this antioxidant activity is carried out by the above cited phenol compounds, constituted primarily by flavonoids, including anthocyanin present in all citrus fruit but which is especially high in blood oranges. Polyphenols, in synergism with vitamin C carry out

an efficient protective action, intervening favorably in the face of many pathologies, including cardiovascular and infectious diseases and malignant tumors, by reinforcing the immune system. We should also recall that vitamin C performs an important function in the intestines by encouraging the absorption of iron that, at the metabolic level, protects and restores vitamin E when its supply has been exhausted. In addition to the noteworthy health benefits of oranges and citrus fruits in general, we should examine their important role in terms of gastronomy. The orange is an easily digested food that is enjoyed for its fruit and its juice, but it can also be used to produce marmalades or sauces for special dishes. Its nutritional importance is thus associated with an organoleptic one that is especially pleasant - it allows us to eat something healthy while at the same time satisfying our taste buds. To be precise, there are no substantial nutritional differences between bitter oranges and sweet ones, or regular and blood oranges.

Before closing the discussion, I would like to recall the serious illness that is caused exclusively by a vitamin C deficiency. Scurvy, which fortunately today has been eradicated, was responsible for many major health problems and

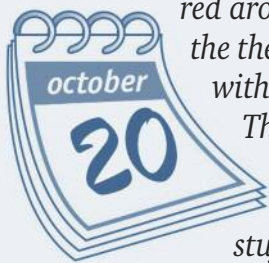
even led to death. In this regard it is interesting to note that in while at sea aboard the ship *Salisbury* in 1767 the physician of the British fleet James Lindt, faced with several cases of scurvy among the sailors decided, from among the various therapies available at the time, to try administering some oranges and a lemon. To his great satisfaction he was able to note that unlike the other members of the crew, those who had been dosed with citrus improved rapidly. So much so that they were able to resume their work, and one of them was considered completely cured. The news spread rapidly throughout England, and on the basis of this finding, in 1795 the British Admiral ordered all war ships to carry enough citrus fruit on board to allow each crew member to have a daily ration. The same provision was not followed by other countries, such as France, and therefore one might believe that history may have more to do with nutrition than the genius of generals and valor of troops. Perhaps the consumption of citrus fruits themselves played an important role, thereby contributing to weakening the naval power of Napoleon.

So maybe we should ask ourselves who actually won the battle of Trafalgar: Nelson or the oranges?

PUBLIO VIOLA

ECUMENICAL DINNER 2016

The Ecumenical Convivial Dinner that finds all Academicians in Italy and around the world gathered around the same virtual table will be held on October 20, 2016 at 8:30 pm, with the theme "The cuisine of Reuse. Against Waste, the Family Tradition Offers Leftovers with Gusto and Imagination".



This theme was chosen by the "Franco Marengi" Study Center and approved by the President's Council, with the purpose of retrieving, within the traditional cuisine, those preparations that while originating from partially used food-stuff go on to create new recipes and diverse tastes.

The Delegates will take great care that the Ecumenical Dinner will be accompanied by an appropriate report of cultural character to illustrate the important theme of the convivial whose menu will offer and honor the chosen food.



Caruso's sauce

The great Neapolitan tenor was also a good cook.

BY CLAUDIO NOVELLI
Academician, Naples-Capri Delegation

DIt was said about Enrico Caruso, the great Neapolitan tenor, that he was a passionate cook endowed with an exceptional appetite. This is the case with all opera signers. As a good Neapolitan, he was a great lover of pasta. In addition, he was an expert cook. During his life in the United States, from November 1903 to December 1920, a rumor spread that he endeavored to obtain American citizenship for fifteen Neapolitan cooks and that he helped them financially to open restaurants and pizzerias in order to secure for himself the logistical familiar support away from his home city.

It was said that "The Spaghetti Dinner was sponsored by Caruso more than

any other person...". Being a Neapolitan and a typical Italian male, Caruso also boasted that he was a great cook. His vanity was in full view when he strived to show restaurant owners how to cook pasta and prepare sauces (G. Prezzolini).

The situation, however, is a bit complicated because some food historians are convinced that it was Caruso himself who invented spaghetti with a sauce of mushrooms and chicken livers while others maintain that the inventor was a Neapolitan chef who dedicated this course to the great tenor. Still others attribute the specialty to the chefs of well known restaurants where Caruso regularly came to dinner. Someone pointed out that the pasta





dish, invented no later than 1920, did not appear on the menus of New York restaurants before the 1950s. How come? When Caruso was roaming about the city, the presence of that dish on the menu would have made great publicity. And then there is another issue to be considered, the inclusion of chicken livers. They are rather disliked by the American public, just like much organ meat, no matter how much Caruso enjoyed them. Nothing else is known about another passion of our tenor, for poultry thighs, breasts or wings, and any other use of free ranging chickens. The “American” recipe calls for a pound of chicken livers, well cleaned, dried, dredged in flour and quickly sautéed in a pan with a spoonful of olive oil. After that, they are set aside and cooked with one and a half ounces of butter, 14 ounces of mixed mushrooms to be cooked until water is extracted. A glass of dry red wine should be added until it evaporates, a 30-ounce can of peeled tomatoes must then allowed to simmer gently. The chicken livers should be sliced and added to the gravy. Cooking should take no more than half an hour. Once a pound of pasta (either *spaghetti* or *perciatelli*) has been cooked, dish it out onto the plates and pour the sauce over it and sprinkle with parsley. Parmesan should be available to top the dish.

The story is not over yet, as historians in Uruguay tell us that in 1915, following a series of concerts that brought the people of Montevideo into delirium, the owners of the restaurant “*El Aguila*”, adjacent to the prestigious Solis theater where Caruso often performed, decided to prepare a special sauce to welcome the tenor, “an exponent of world stature”. The recipe thus created had to be based upon a mixture of Italian gastronomic traditions imported by immigrants. Reportedly, the sauce scored a great success and was dedicated



to Caruso; needless to say, there is a legend that tells us how Caruso, his face still made up for the stage, entered in the restaurant and dived into the spaghetti. The food quickly disappeared. In 1950, Raymundo Monti, the chef of the restaurant “*Mario & Alberto*” in Montevideo, dusted off the recipe with a few variations and married it with *orecchiette* pasta. Since then, the dish has taken over in the entire South America landmass as one of the principal sauces that accompany pastas, especially those that have fillings. The *Asociación Uruguaya de Gastronomía* went as far as declaring it a National Patrimony. The Uruguayan recipe is clearly different from the one in the United States in that it calls for milk, butter, cream, meat extract, diced cooked ham, *mushrooms à la julienne*, grated cheese, salt, pepper and grated nutmeg. There is also a “*Principe de Nàpoles*” version, that calls for sliced mozzarella to be set over the boiled pasta and baked in the oven. It is not known whether this version was dedicated to the Prince of Savoy or to don Enrico Caruso.

The *new wave* of cuisine writers in the United States resurrect the whole matter in a truly “Mediterranean” style, even though apparently it may be less exciting. In *Good Living with Maccheroni*, Noura Korsch tells this story: “Don Enrico was famous for his ‘*bucatini alla Caruso*’, a dish that literally made Americans and Italian-Americans

crazy”. At any rate, the recipe did not offer anything that was particularly new: lightly sauté the garlic in oil, add hand mashed fresh tomatoes, basil, parsley and some pepper. The *bucatini* with this sauce were then covered with fried slices of *zucchini*”. Arthur Schwarz, in his *Naples at Table*, supports this recipe and shares it.

The question is: chicken livers or *zucchini*? *Tertium non datur*? Not so fast! Louis Diat, the chef of New York’s

Ritz from 1910 until its closing in 1951, author of several cookbooks and acclaimed inventor of “*Crème Vichyssoise glacée*”, describes “*Spaghetti alla Caruso*” but eliminates the *zucchini* and replaces it with slices of artichokes hearts to be lightly fried in a pan with a few ounces of mushrooms and chicken livers, all to be covered with parmesan cheese. Diat enjoyed the reputation of a chef with great sobriety, for his attention to the choice of ingredients, and his constant desire to teach Americans not to overdo it and to avoid industrial sauces and powdered spices. Most of all, within the scope of the times, he was known for the lightness of his cuisine. The knowledge of his work is such that one should recognize the primacy of his recipe. The use of *zucchini* is indeed a mere banality. Some recognition however is due to the work of a cook to whom Caruso tried desperately to explain the composition of “*finanziera*”, with dubious results. The fame of Caruso, who gave that cook his inspiration, unquestionably helped the spreading of Italian cuisine in the United States.

Just to complete the history of the great tenor in gastronomy, one should recall the creation of a “cocktail Caruso”: 1/3 dry gin, 1/3 dry vermouth, 1/3 cream of green crème de mint, to be shaken with small ice cubes for a few seconds and then served in Martini glasses.

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