

Lifestyle & Culture



Marie D. *Diary*



Accademia Italiana Della Cucina's banquet at Casino Maltese

The second edition (in Malta) of *Settimana della Cucina italiana nel mondo* was held in a week brimful of events which started on 20th November, each event looking more 'appetizing' than the previous one. But of course I could only attend two of them much as I would have loved to spend the week concentrating on food, winetasting and other delightful 'guilty pleasures.'

I attended the two events which took place in one evening: The illustrated talk *Dal Cibo nell'Arte all'Arte del Cibo* at the Istituto Italiano di Cultura followed by a *cena conviviale* organized by the Accademia Italiana Della Cucina a few yards away, at the Casino Maltese.

The talk by Dott. Davide Dotti and the commentary by Dott. Giuseppe Masserdotti were inspiring. It was a virtual journey of an exhibition *Il Cibo nell'Arte dal Seicento a Warhol*, held in Palazzo Martinengo, Brescia in 2015.

There's nothing like an expert to help you discover a new way of looking at paintings, and both these gentlemen certainly, were experts. So we spent an hour or so looking at classical, modern and contemporary paintings - executed by extraordinarily gifted artists, while Dott. Dotti, curator of the exhibition, helped us discover how the artists of the last four centuries created paintings which combined typical food in their region together with current artistic trends, Dott. Masserdotti, delegate from Brescia gave us a running commentary about the paintings and the vegetables, flowers but above all fruit etc. depicted. Fruit was a symbol of abundance and wealth we were told. Some paintings represented the food of the poor, too. These artists painted dishes which are still present today on our tables. The exhibition concentrated in particular on the 16th century, as in those years the food also represented power.

Following this theme as we entered the Presidential suite of the Casino Maltese, with its portraits of now dead and gone personalities on its walls, the banquet table was truly a sight to behold, laden with fruit and vegetables, interspersed with



Ms Jean Borg, Ms Zoe Chomerat and Ms Mariella Zarb



Siga. Frederica Modena, President Emeritus Mifsud Bonnici, Sig. Marino Paolucci, Chef Gordon Amato, Siga Tomaselli, Italian Ambassador Mario Sammaritano



Signor Tomaselli, the Ambassador of Italy & Mrs Mifsud Bonnici



The Baroque table ready for the banquet



Flowers, fruit and vegetables looking their best



Dessert was sumptuous

flowers. I have to mention here Massimiliana Tomaselli whose hard work and perfectionism were clearly on display that evening. As head of the Maltese delegation she works hard to keep the dinner evenings of the Accademia as enjoyable as possible. The idea, she told me that evening, was to create a baroque banquet respecting the criteria of the time. She certainly achieved her aim.

Present that evening was President Emeritus, Ugo Mifsud Bonnici and Mrs Mifsud Bonnici and the new Ambassador of Italy HE Mario Sammartino and his wife, Signora Frederica Modena. His Excellency was born in Naples and graduated in Law in Milan in 1983. He entered the diplomatic service in 1985. His career abroad

began in 1986. He has an interesting and varied career between a career at the Farnesina and diplomatic appointments in various countries. He was at one time Ambassador to Libreville and in 2012 he was appointed ambassador to Kuala Lumpur.

We wish them both a happy and productive stay in Malta.

I mustn't forget the several foodies present - both Italian and Maltese among them Mr Joe Grioli and his partner Jean Borg.

With a table like that the food had to be exceptional, and it was. *The Piatto di Prima Creanza*, what I suppose we call hors d'oeuvre, consisted of many small dishes, my favourites being *Fiocchi di Pesce al sale dolce su Limoni Canditi*, *Uova di Quaglia in Agrodolce*,

the delicious *Pan Croccante alle Erbe* (one has to leave one's diet at the door on these occasions - no I will never be slim, let alone thin), *Zucca in Camicia con Porri e Parmigiano* (I discovered that porri are leaks) and much as I dislike polenta and have never understood what the Italians, such refined eaters, like about it, that evening I enjoyed the *Polenta Fritta Aromatizzata al Timo*. It was more than just edible but I will not go as far as saying it was delicious.

First course was a pasta - *Strigoloni Asparagi e Pancetta Croccante* beautifully served in the crust of a Maltese loaf. I must say I have eaten much pasta in my life (in Mauritius where you couldn't get lasagne we used to carry back cartons-full when we visited the

nearby island of Reunion), but I had never eaten Strigoloni. Well, pasta is pasta and it is only the shape which varies after all. But the Strigoloni were delicious with asparagus and pancetta, displayed in the crust of a Maltese *hobza*.

The main dish was quail stuffed with *succo di carruba*, which, I am guessing, is carob juice. Whatever it was I loved it especially as it was served with beautifully prepared onions.

Now I have eaten many a quail egg in my years in Mauritius, bowls of them, unpeeled, were presented at every occasion. However, since almost everything there was curried, my experience of quail has not been happy. Much as I love curry dishes I simply never took to curried quail. (Nor did I ever want to even try fruit bat which was popular.)

A few months ago there was an offer at one of the supermarkets - a BOGOF (buy one get one free - the sort of offer for which I have a very soft spot - and I rashly bought six quail. I finished up roasting them and having to eat them myself as they did not seem to entice anyone in my household.

Now at the baroque banquet it was a totally different experience and I shall stuff them next time round, even if not with carob juice.

Dessert was in fact, four desserts and it was impossible not to try all of them: dates stuffed with marzipan, walnuts, special biscuits - the choice was bewildering but I must not forget to mention the *Bicchierino di Cioccolato*, so Italian, so irresistible - and to hell with the statins. What is the point of taking them if I cannot indulge now and then!

I was very careful with the wines (yes, its come to that!) and drank a *vino tinto* slowly throughout the meal - doctor's orders.

I must not forget to mention the chef Gordon Amato from the Corinthia group. He was inventive and must have followed Massimiliana's instructions but gave his own twist to this baroque banquet.

When is the next banquet please Massimiliana?