

Lifestyle & Culture



maie to. Diary



The Accademia does it again

The Accademia Italiana della Cucina held its last gourmet dinner for this season at Ristorante Papannis in Strait Street, Valletta.

The visit brought back memories which date back to the '60s when I had proposed to the then editor of *The Sunday Times*, Lawrence Grech, an article on that notorious part of Malta, Strada Stretta. What gave me the idea was the following. The Vice-Chancellor at the time, at the University of Malta, was the late Prof. E. Borg Costanzi. He called me up at the library, where I worked, and asked me if I would take a British Vice Chancellor round Valletta that morning. So, we both hopped in my yellow deux cheveux, which someone had baptized The Yellow Peril, and once in Valletta (so easy to park in those days), I asked him which of the sights he was interested in seeing first. This respectable Englishman, in a three piece suit and cuff links, immediately replied, to my utter astonishment, 'The Gut'. And that is what gave me the idea to write about it. Lawrence suggested I take Terence Mirabelli with me, I suppose, to protect my virtue, and off we went one late afternoon, me wearing a checked yellow shirtwaister with sleeves, vetted by my father, before I left home. When I told him where I was going, I have to give it to him, he did not forbid me but simply said 'Be careful'. He must have spent that evening praying and saying not one, but a dozen rosaries.

So back to Papannis, an under-

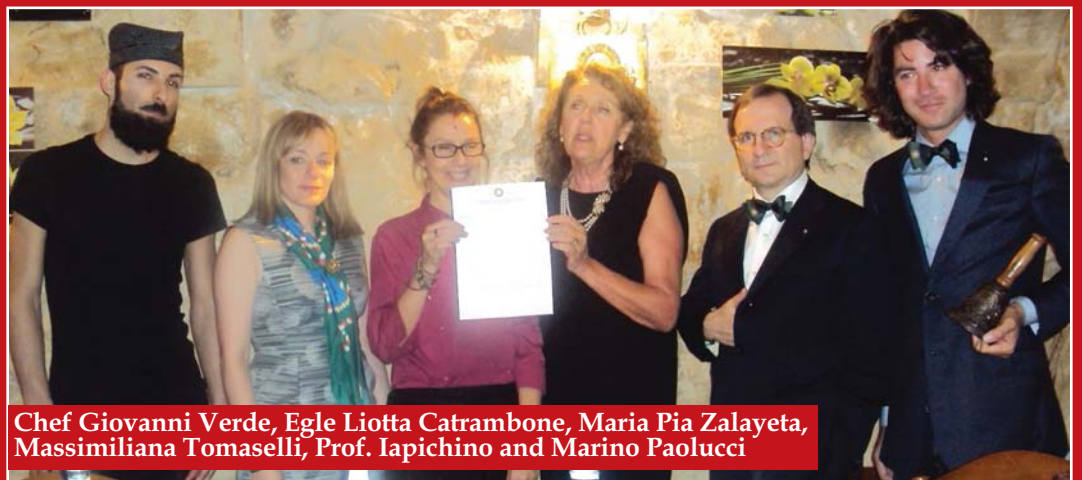
ground restaurant with plenty of ambience. As far as location goes, it is probably a restaurant in the oldest premises in Valletta. It belongs to Gianmarco and Maria Pia Zalayeta whose pretty daughter, Angelica, who was helping out, is studying medicine at our University. Maria Pia and Giovanni Verde were the ones producing delicious food throughout the evening.

I was happy to renew my acquaintance with Claire Bodonyi, here on holiday, who was at the French embassy for a number of years and is now, brave woman, ambassador in Sarajevo. Also present were Egle and Maria Luisa Liotta Catrambone and her mother Egle who are busy saving refugees from drowning. Guest of honour that evening was the delegate of Parma, Prof. G.G. Iapichino, who was to give a talk at the Istituto Italiano di Cultura the following day: *Parma, c'era una volta il maiale. Dalla cultura del prosciutto alla sicurezza alimentare Europea*, yes, that Parma ham which has made the city famous all over the world. Malta's vivacious delegate with her bell to keep everyone in order, Massimiliana Tomaselli, was of course presiding.

The slim and tall chef Giovanni Verde, commented on the dishes. How does a chef remain slim when he is surrounded by delicious food almost all day long?

I sat between Mauro, Massimiliana's husband, an ex-officer and gentleman and a man of few, but significant words and the clever and simpatica Jeanne Borg.

I enjoyed above all the *Torretta*



Chef Giovanni Verde, Egle Liotta Catrambone, Maria Pia Zalayeta, Massimiliana Tomaselli, Prof. Iapichino and Marino Paolucci



H.E. Claire Bodonyi and Felice Napoletano



Nadya Felice and Charmaine Zammit



The chefs



Dott. Alessandro Marroni and Jeanne Borg



Massimiliana and Dott. Salvatore Schirmo



Dr. Isabel Stabile and Dr Ramiro Cali Corleo



Mauro Tomaselli, Joe Grioli and Teresa Sette



Maria Luisa Liotta Catrambone, Christian Peregrine and Maria Luisa's mother Egle

di Mediterranea di Melanzane e mozzarella, yet another innovative way of using eggplant and mozzarella. But what held pole-position in my affections that evening was the home-made tagliatelle with lobster served in a lobster shell. How elegant too.

I was relieved to see that the main dish was fish and not some thick, pink, steak: Ah *Pagello in salsa di limone di Sorrento*. I didn't like to ask whether the lemons had actually come from beautiful Sorrento or whether from Malta or nearby Sicily. But it really does not matter. It was delicious and it sounds good on a menu, Sorrento, as it conjures up so many layers of emotions.

Nowadays hardly anyone serves just one desert. They come in threes mostly. If it is ice-cream it is usually three blobs, same with sorbet which I often order as I feel virtuous because surely it must have less calories than, say, chocolate gâteau or three blobs of ice-cream. So we had tiramisù al caffè, alla fragola and also, to give me a chance to feel virtuous, sorbetto di limone.

A splendid evening rendered more splendid and nostalgic by

Marino Paolucci who, this time round, did not read a poem, but played 'Na sera in Maggio' an old Neapolitan song. Marino, on his iPhone, played the one most of us know and like best, sung by the inimitable Roberto Murolo. Let me remind you:

Quanno vien'a 'appuntamento guard'e mare, guard'e ffronne, si te parlo nun rispunne, staje distratta comm'a che.

The following day I hunted down my old vinyl record of Robert Murolo, bought decades ago, when my heart was young and gay, and played it for the rest of the week. This is real music and not these awful Rappers and noisy combos to which our children become addicted thanks to MTV.

I am now on diet as I know, come October the Accademia's splendid dinners will start once more. It is salads and gazpacho for me for three months. Only wishful thinking I know. I am now in the widow-and-granny trough and I have no illusions left. I am a serial offender when it comes to eating.

mboenit@independent.com.mt