

Lifestyle & Culture



maie d. Diary



Good food is the spur of the Accademia Italiana della Cucina

On the occasion of the third edition of the *Settimana della Cucina Italiana nel Mondo* the Malta branch of the *Accademia Italiana della Cucina* participated in a number of events which ranged from nutrition, to wine and the art of eating.

There were some outstanding participants in this yearly event which took place last month. One of them was the delegate of Parma, Professor Gioacchino G. Iapichino, who participated in the conference held at the *Istituto Italiano di Cultura*. Professor Iapichino spoke of the "Theobroma Cacao" the tropical evergreen tree grown for its edible seeds, the source of chocolate, whose scientific name means "food of the gods" in Greek. He also spoke of the difficulties of combining chocolate with wine, nevertheless not an impossible combination but which continues to divide many experts of taste, he said.

The key event of the week was the lecture, introduced by Massimiliana Tomaselli *L'Ottocento e la cucina borghese: due mondi, uno stile* in which, she explained, art and gastronomy meet. This was followed by a power-point presentation of the exhibition *Da Hayez a Boldini, anime e volti della pittura italiana dell'Ottocento* which took place at Palazzo Martinengo in Brescia last year and which was visited by some 105,000 visitors.

The curator of the exhibition, Davide Dotti, presented a selection of paintings which relate the extraordinary artistic period which Italy lived through in the 19th century, an artistic period which converged into all aspects of contemporary social and cultural life as explained by Giuseppe Masserdotti, the delegate from Brescia. Prof. Masserdotti explained that it was from the food consumed by different social strata of society that a style of cooking which became known as "stile Borghese" was developed.

A celebratory dinner followed the lectures at the *Istituto* and took place within walking distance, in the ornate ballroom of the Casino Maltese. This is an elegant event enhanced by a refined menu and ambience to which members look forward.

Present at this dinner were President Emeritus Dr Ugo Mifsud Bonnici and Mrs Gemma Mifsud Bonnici; the Italian ambassador to Malta and Signora Federica Sammartino and the Director of the *Istituto Italiano di Cultura*, Dr Massimo Sarti, who arrived in Malta in July. Other guests included Angelo Tamburini, the



Architect Tiziana Leopizzi, president of ARTOUR-O, an organisation in support of Art, conferring the silver plaque in recognition of activities carried out in support of art and culture

On the staircase of the Casino Maltese: (back row): Professors Davide Dotti, Gioacchino Giovanni Iapichino, Giuseppe Masserdotti
Front row: Maria Virginia Ghillani, Massimiliana Tomaselli, your Diarist and Mariano Paolucci'

delegate from Siracusa as well as Italian and Maltese members of the *Accademia*.

Dinner was a reconstruction of a typical dinner of the high bourgeoisie of the 19th century. The long table looked splendid with opulent flower arrangements and



President Emeritus Ugo Mifsud Bonnici and Signora Tomaselli



Delegate Signora Tomaselli thanking Chef Gordon Amato of the Corinthia Group



silver settings. The huge chandelier of Murano glass added to the elegant ambience. There were about 66 guests altogether attending dinner.

The delegate for Malta, Massimiliana Tomaselli, explained the criteria followed when it came to the meal. The oldest bourgeois traditions, she told diners, are combined

with constant research aimed at healthy but pleasurable dishes.

Dinner started with *Zuppa di Zucca* accompanied by an *Insalatina di carciofi e anatra affumicata*. This was followed by *Ravioli di Orata al Profumo di Gambero Rosso su letto di pasti-*

naca - and here I learned that *pastinaca* is parsnip. Then came the stuffed, glazed quail as a main course. I must add that this was the most delicious quail I have eaten in my long life.

Quail eggs were very common in Mauritius and one could pick them up at any supermarket. Quail were raised like poultry even in private homes. Hard boiled quail eggs, yellowish-green with brown markings were used as a cocktail snack and cracking them was almost as pleasurable as eating them.

Allow me to add that bird fanciers no longer have much say in the preparation of menus today, but in the 16th century things were very different, birds were very much appreciated.

At a banquet given to Catherine de Medici by the City of Paris in 1549, 30 peacocks, 21 swans, 33 pheasants, 13 partridges, 9 storks, 33 turkeys, 33 flamingoes, 33 geese, 80 spring chickens, 90 quail, 99 pigeons and 99 doves were consumed.

Let me say no more. There was no Birdlife then.

Dessert that evening was a frothy Mont Blanc followed by coffee and petit fours.

Appropriate Italian wines were served.

Thankfully it was not a huge meal but well balanced and satisfying. This was a blessing with Christmas just round the corner when it is difficult to escape over indulging.

Marino Egisto Paolucci who has been informally pronounced poet laureate of the *Accademia* recited in his elegant way, his latest creation: *Cera: una volta*.

"The objective of these events is to promote the wine and food heritage of an Italy which is second to none when it comes to civilisation, beauty and that pinch of disorderliness which makes the genius of Italy so unique," the delegate for Malta, Massimiliana Tomaselli, told us. What she did not tell us was that she had overseen everything before dinner took place - the flowers, the table settings making sure that everything was going well in the kitchen. She is not one to tolerate sloppiness.

I can only say Brava, nay, Bravissima.

A last word: I take my hat off to Chef Gordon Amato of the Corinthia Group and his team who managed a perfectly synchronized and delicious meal for some 60 demanding and knowledgeable diners.