

Lifestyle & Culture



Maria D. Diary



The Istituto Italiano di Cultura and Accademia Italiana della Cucina: a winning team

Once again the cooperation between the two Italian institutions has struck a chord.

The opening of the *Prima Settimana della Cucina Italiana nel Mondo* (21-27 November), an event held under the patronage of the President of the Republic of Italy, featured an extraordinary virtual exhibition, curated by Davide Dotti (an art critic and curator of all the exhibitions held at Palazzo Martignano in Brescia) *Dalla Venezia dell'arte, all'arte della sua cucina* which was held at the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Valletta. It coincided with the presentation of a book published by the *Accademia Italiana della Cucina, La tradizione a Tavola, 3000 ricette dei paesi d'Italia* by Giuseppe Maserdotti, quite an achievement. He is the delegate of the *Accademia Italiana della Cucina* in Brescia and said a few words about this thick volume.

The presentation of the virtual exhibition was fascinating. Inspired by a strong passion that made his words come alive, Dr Dotti guided the audience over one hundred masterpieces, from public and private Italian and foreign collections. The works were by Canaletto, Bellotto, Guardi and the most important painters of the 18th and 19th centuries, celebrating the eternal myth of Venice. He hardly referred to his notes.

In the peak of its splendour Venice set a high standard not only in the laws of art but also in those of cuisine, turning cooking into the art of gastronomy. It was a splendid talk with not one single boring moment.

To complete this cultural journey through the art of Venice a gala dinner offered by the *Accademia Italiana della Cucina* at the *Bella Venezia* restaurant, in Ta' X-biex followed. This is owned by Signora Patrizia Aguzzoni who was present and was given the *Accademia's* award at the end of the evening.

The name of the restaurant itself is already evocative of the past and present splendours of Venice.

The tables, that evening, were napped in red and white and there were some splendid floral and fruit arrangements. Someone remarked that Italian restaurants in Malta put emphasis on the quality of the food rather than interior decoration, which is perhaps true.



The signora from the Ambrosini estate and Dr Dotti



Siga. Massimiliana Tomaselli, Delegate of the Accademia and Siga Aguzzoni



Dott. Schirmo and Sig. Tomaselli presenting the first part of the evening



A lovely arrangement at the restaurant



The main table



Dott. Davide Dotti



Dr Giuseppe Maserdotti

But then, I would rather eat very well and have nothing much to gaze on then have a splendidly designed restaurant with mediocre food. The Italians take their food seriously and are by and large particular what crosses their lips.

The name of the chef responsible for the delicious meal was Omar Rezgui however, the chef who presented the dishes was Alessandro Silvestri from Team Venezia Chef.

The chosen menu was rigorously Venetian, starting with the renowned *Baccalà Mantecato*. This is cod, soaked, poached and whipped until mousse-like. That evening it

was spread on slices of bread but one of the guests told me, more traditionally it is served on grilled polenta. It is not unlike France's *brandade de morue* but the Venetians think their recipe is superior.

This antipasto was followed with small servings of *Risi e Bisi, Pasta e Fagioli, Bigoli in Salsa* - the latter wholemeal spaghetti served with a delicious anchovy sauce the fourth dish being *Spaghetti alla Busara*. (with scampi and absolutely delicious). Throughout we were drinking Franciacorta wines from the *Tenuta Ambrosini e Bredasole*.

A very articulate lady spoke to us briefly about the Ambrosini family estate which is dedicated to farming eight hectares

of Chardonnay, white Pinot and black Pinot in the vineyards in Franciacorte. All I can say is 'thank goodness I did not have to drive myself back!' The wines were delicious.

The main course was *Seppia in Umido con polenta* (cuttlefish) and ending with the *Baicoli con Zabaione*, typical Venetian biscuits dipped in creamy eggnog.

These are dishes which belong to Venice alone, devised and nurtured there by the Laguna. Everything was served in special simple dishes.

The evening was one of great conviviality enjoyed by all present who included President Emeritus Dr Ugo Mifsud Bon-

nici and Mrs Emma Mifsud Bonnici and the Ambassador of Italy Dr de Vito and Signora de Vito. (I was rather hoping this smiling lady would burst into song but she didn't of course).

This *Prima Settimana della Cucina Italiana nel Mondo* was promoted by three Italian ministries: Foreign Affairs, Education and Agriculture. There was much more to it than this interesting evening including lunch on the *Costa Pacifica*, which I was unable to attend.

I agree with Dr Johnson, who insisted: 'I mind my belly very studiously, and very carefully; for I look upon it that he would does not mind his belly will hardly mind anything else.'