

## He's Singing for Your Supper

### Musical chef a hit with hosts

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Each bite of the authentic Italian cuisine of Singing Chef Francesco Milana packs a symphony of flavor according to those fortunate enough to be guests at one of the private parties he caters.

They feel transported to another place where they are part of a warm Italian family and nothing matters but good food, friends and entertainment.

#### **RECIPE FOR CONCHIGLIE RIPIENI**

Sauce ingredients:

2 tablespoons of olive oil

3 cloves of garlic

2 cans of pureed whole plum tomatoes

1 teaspoon sugar

salt and pepper to taste (Milana uses about 1/4 teaspoon)

1 package dried porcini mushrooms (soaked in warm water for one hour and diced)

1/2 cup smoked salmon diced

1 cup heavy cream

Stuffed shell ingredients:

2 pounds ricotta cheese

1 cup grated mozzarella cheese

1/2 cup grated parmesan cheese

3 tablespoons chopped Italian parsley

salt and pepper to taste (Milana uses about 1/2 teaspoon)

1 teaspoon nutmeg

1 bag fresh spinach chopped

1 box sea shell or manicotti pasta

To make the sauce, sautee the olive oil and garlic, taking care not to brown the garlic. Then, add the tomatoes and sugar, the soaked mushrooms the salmon and the cream to the oil and garlic. Simmer for 5 to 10 minutes but do not bring to a boil. Set aside for assembly later.

Cook pasta as directed on box and prepare pasta filling by mixing the ingredients in order. Use a pastry bag to stuff the pasta with the mixture. To assemble, pour a thin layer of sauce on the bottom of a baking dish. Set pasta evenly in dish, cover and bake for 20 minutes at 350 degrees. Uncover and bake for a few more minutes. For serving, spoon remaining sauce over each individual portion of pasta.

Francesco Milana said he created this recipe for his wife Susan who does not like traditional Italian red sauce.

Milana's Conchiglie Ripieni, a succulent dish of stuffed sea shell pasta served with a smoked salmon and porcini mushroom sauce, was served while he performed selections from his favorite Italian operas.

"Close your eyes and try to pick out all the tastes," he said. "It's fantasy."

Long-time friends and new acquaintances sighed as they recently gathered at the home of John and Penny Landergan for a private Italian feast with the singing chef.

Milana, the Landergans' neighbor, runs a home-based cooking business and specializes in catering private parties of four to 24 guests. He travels to clients' homes, where he prepares all the menus fresh in their kitchen. And, as he presents each course, he serenades guests with a repertoire of Neapolitan ballads and Italian love songs. The Italian experience is usually five to seven courses, spanning three hours.

A dinner for 10 people costs from \$725 to \$925, lunch prices are from \$425 to \$625. Milana's services include an at-home consultation, shopping, food preparation, a printed souvenir menu for each guest, white china, service and clean-up and entertainment. Milana caters many parties where the guests pay separately.

"It's just like going out to dinner," he said.

Over candlelight and roses, guests at the Landergans dined on creative combinations of song and food.

A citrus note woke up the flavor in Gamberie Rucola, a first course of sauteed shrimp served on a bed of arugula with balsamic wine sauce. Guests raved as Milana served Penne Gorgonzola, which he jokes is his version of macaroni and cheese. The rich, sharp Gorgonzola cheese blended with a light cream sauce and chopped chives.

Milana's signature salad dressing, a blend of maple syrup and tart balsamic vinegar was served with mixed greens and strawberries topped with toasted nuts.

But the encore-worthy piece was Milana's lemon basil cream sauce, which topped a filet of poached salmon.

"It was just exquisite," said Jan Davis, a guest at the party.

Don Davis, her husband, raved about the savory layering of flavors.

"How do you keep the cream from curdling?" asked another guest, who was invited to an impromptu cooking lesson from Milana.

Leigh Cort, a food and wine critic from St. Augustine, described the spectacular dinner and personalized concert as an "unforgettable evening."

"Every course was its own masterpiece and we loved your personal style, exuberance, talents and gracious, graceful service," she told him.

Milana and his wife Susan, a former human resources executive who now serves as his chief marketing executive, have wowed clients in Toronto, Dallas and San Francisco before relocating to Amelia Island. They are renting a home near the Landergans while they design a house for their lot at Amelia Island Plantation.

"We searched for over a year to find the perfect spot for our business, and to spend the rest of our lives," Milana said. "the people, proximity to the airport and a major city, a village-style downtown, the ocean, the weather and trees all make Amelia Island the ideal home for us."

Born in Alcamo, Sicily, Milana moved to Canada as a teenager. Trained primarily by his extended family, Milana often returns to his homeland to visit relatives and enhance his cooking skills. He's studied at the Lorenzo d'Medici Culinary Institute and apprenticed with Chef Stefano Innocenti of Aqua Al Due, and Chef Daniele Pescatore of L'Amorosa Visione in Florence.

And, although his singing sounds more like it belongs in La Scala, the famous Milanese opera house, Milana says he learned to sing in the shower and in the car. He didn't sing in public until he met his wife and combined his singing and cooking talents to win her love. It took a few months, he said, but soon the executive was won over and praised his talents.

He works the same magic, it seems, on his clients.

*Source: [http://jacksonville.com/tu-online/stories/082201/nen\\_6997581.shtml](http://jacksonville.com/tu-online/stories/082201/nen_6997581.shtml)*