

Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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Gala feasting

Rack of lamb is a featured favorite year after year

By Ethel Simmons staff writer

FOR THE LAST 10 years, Michael J. Agius has been preparing rack of lamb for Le Gala de Cuisine at Cranbrook Kingswood School in Bloomfield Hills.

"Do people think, 'Is this all Agius can do?'" he said with a smile. Rack of lamb is one of the most popular entrees at Le Gala, and that's why he prepares the same dish every year. "I don't want to disappoint anyone."

Agius, who is executive chef at Sky Chefs at Detroit Metropolitan Airport, is also the chairman representing 20 chefs from the Michigan

Chefs de Cuisine, who take part in the big benefit party each year. Between 20 and 30 more restaurants, caterers or other food-related participants are also invited separately by the Le Gala committee.

This year, close to 50 chefs in all will present appetizers, hot hors d'oeuvres, cold hors d'oeuvres, entrees and desserts at Le Gala. The event will be held 5-7 p.m. Sunday at the Cranbrook Campus Quadrangle.

IF YOU HAVEN'T already got your tickets (at \$125 general, \$150 patron and \$200 benefactor), it's probably too late. Le Gala, with tickets limited to 1,000 persons, is always a sell-out.

Agius said rack of lamb, persillade, is what he serves. Persillade refers to "the coating we put on it — bread crumbs, spices and fresh chopped parsley." Butchering the lamb is part of the preparation he makes.

"It's a lot harder to butcher it than cook it," he said. "I always like to butcher it myself. I don't want any fat. I finish very well. I want it to be chop ready. People eating it can grab the little French bow and eat it like hand food."

The butchering is done on Saturday, the lamb is grilled Sunday. Pre-cooking is at Sky Chefs, with seasoning and finishing at Le Gala. "Final touches, in the oven for 20-25 minutes," are done in Cranbrook's kitchen.

The rack of lamb is taken to the dining area where it is carved and served.

Four other chefs from Chefs de Cuisine also have participated in Le Gala since its inception 10 years ago. They are Milos Cineka of the Golden Mushroom in Southfield; John Vandewou, who owns Cuisine Moderne caterers in Southfield; Leo Korstjens, president of Michigan Chefs de Cuisine, and master pastry baker at St. John's Hospital in Detroit; and Leopold Schaeffl of Machus Pastry Shops in Birmingham.

Agius, who now lives in Northville, formerly lived in Livonia for 15 years. An executive chef for the last 25 years, he has worked at private country clubs such as Franklin Hills and Plum Hollow and now is employed by Sky Chefs doing quality control. He develops menus and does presentations for overseas airlines.

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— Michael Agius



Tasting parties a popular way for organizations to raise funds

Mike Agius, who was invited by Cranbrook to bring members of the Michigan Chefs de Cuisine into the very first Le Gala de Cuisine, calls the spectacular outdoor-indoor party, "a very prestigious event. This is the opening of the summer events."

Tasting parties are favorite fundraisers throughout metropolitan Detroit, although not all tasting parties are planned for this purpose.

Cranbrook's event, said Agius, was the inspiration for all the others in

the Detroit area. "Cranbrook is the one that started this trend. Since they've been so successful, any institution trying to raise money is copying the trend," he said.

Only last weekend the Michigan Restaurant Association held its annual Fine Foods Festival at Hart Plaza in Detroit. Other tastings coming up include:

- Taste of West Bloomfield, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sunday, May 15, at

Henry Ford Medical Center in West Bloomfield. For more information, call the West Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce at 626-3236.

- Taste of the Nation, 6-10 p.m. Tuesday, May 17, at the Top of the Pontich and the Ontario Room at the Hotel Pontchartrain in Detroit. For more information, call the Whitney at 825-5700.

- Chef's Fest '88, 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Friday, May 20, at the Community House, Birmingham.

FOR LE GALA, Agius asks each of the chefs to figure portions for 1,000 people — the entire numbers of guests — and then go 20% over. Maybe everybody won't sample everything but, "You have to be ready for it." At the end of the party, committees, students, chefs, assistants and helpers also join in the testing.

"We allow them to sample the goodies," Agius said. Other members of Chefs de Cuisine in Le Gala this year include Joseph Decker, Awrey Bakery; Gary Gryzwacz, Clarkson Cafe; Greg Upshur, Cousins' Heritage Inn; Glenn Williams, the Detroit Club; Tom

McGlone, Hogan's; Dennis Lindinger, the Kingsley Inn; Marcus Haight, the Lark (serving rack of lamb, Genghis Khan); Dan Lowry, Lowry's; Ed Janos, the Money Tree; Mark Sherman, Norman's Eten Street Station; Brian Polcyn, Pike Street Company; Lou DeCillis, Savino's Ice Cream Co.; and Mike Russell, Travis Pointe Country Club.

Agius said there are 15 more members of Chefs de Cuisine waiting to become one of the association's 20 participants at Le Gala.

Among other Le Gala participants, not affiliated with Chefs de Cuisine, include the Apple Tease; Bernard's, the Bijou, Bonnie's Pastisserie, Chez Raphael, Chocolaterie, the Coffee Beanery, Confettis, the Double Eagle, Gayle's Chocolates, the Hotel St. Regis, Jacques, Les Autours, MacKinnon's, Merchant of Vino, the Midtown Cafe, Musash, Periwinkles, Pizza Gourmet, R.I.C.A., Sebastia's, Sweet Endings of Bloomfield, Treats, and Wagon Eatery.

Perseverance leads to drama's premiere

By Brian Lyaght staff writer

THIS IS THE STORY of the autistic boy who inspired the clown who became a psychologist, and of the playwright who recorded the story.

The story is true. Writer Jim Burnstein of Plymouth molded reality into theater. Titled "Learn to Fall," the play will premiere Friday at Detroit's Attic Theatre.

"Learn to Fall" has been hailed by many, says Burnstein, but many Hollywood deals have failed. He is hopeful of success this time.

"I'm nervous as hell except that I don't believe the audience won't like this play," he said. If the play succeeds here, it could move on to other cities.

The play stars Howie Buten, a psychologist, novelist and clown — as himself. Buten struggled for many years around Detroit. He used to play the Raven Gallery as Buffo the Clown. But he now lives in Paris, where he and his eight books are well-known.

Another character in the play is based on a child named Adam, now 19 and a student at Burger Center for autistic students in Garden City.

With 240 students, Burger is the largest autism center in the country and has been honored nationally.

The play is about Buten, and deals with his relationship with Adam.

AS BUTEN tells the story, he met Adam when he volunteered in a school for autistic students in Detroit. Buten said he volunteered because he was feeling depressed and wanted to stop thinking about himself.

But, "It was obvious I had some sort of affinity for these children," said Buten now, 37.

Burnstein and Buten met as kids on the playground. "He was captain of everything," Burnstein said. Burnstein describes Buten as a kid who wrote novels, researched a cure for cancer, and painted pictures and sold them — all as a youngster.

The talk at high school — Burnstein graduated from Birmingham's Groves — but both attended the University of Michigan. Buten quit after two years and went to clown school.

His career as a clown never seemed to take off. American. He struggled, got depressed and met Adam. He began working with

Adam, who is described in the play as an aggressive child. (Autism is a disability that affects behavior, and learning and communication abilities. It is something of an enigma for researchers.)

BUTEN, WHO who is a talented mime, began imitating Adam and Adam learned to speak a few words and to imitate Buten.

This began Buten's work with autistic children, which has lasted 14 years. Along the way he earned a doctorate in psychology.

"I think what attracts me . . . is that those children are so abnormal it's fascinating."

Eventually, Buten left Adam and went to California. There, in Los Angeles, he said the autistics "were the only ones worth knowing."

He moved to France, where he continued to clown and write, as well as do research at a French institution. He continues those very different pursuits today.

His novels became cult best sellers, and Buten is well-known in Europe.

He asked Burnstein to write his life story after a producer suggested it would make a good movie. "Jim said he spent his entire life explaining me to people. He might as well get paid for it," Buten said.

The story was well-received in Hollywood where Burnstein traveled to sell it. He heard much encouragement, but a deal to make it a television movie starring Timothy Hutton fell through, causing disappointment and a trip back to Plymouth.

"I didn't know what hit me. Hollywood bit me," he said.

The screenplay was then revised for stage, and moved to the Attic.

Burnstein got help on the project from his next-door neighbor, Colleen Presley, a Burger teacher.

THEY HAD conversations over the fence of their backyards. Presley saw the play during rehearsals.

"It made me cry," said Presley. "I sat back and said, 'That's our kids.'"

Burnstein is hoping for a good reception from his friends and relatives. A preview performance of the play was given Wednesday. Another will be presented tonight. Performances continue through Sunday, May 22.

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