



“We even have a recipe for edible blood, in such cases as Strauss’ *Salome*,” says Master of Properties Lori Harrison

There are also times when the prop department must resort to cooking things themselves. This was the case of a production of Strauss’ *Der Rosenkavalier*. In Act Three, the protagonists enjoy *Leberknödel*—a traditional Austrian soup with dumplings made of liver, breadcrumbs, and eggs. Harrison herself writes in the cookbook that the dish was specifically requested by the director, but it proved impossible to find a Bay Area restaurant that could make it. The hardship of this task did not stop members of the prop department: they learned how to make the dumplings from scratch, to the great excitement of the cast and profound admiration of Mansouri. “Nowhere else in the world,” he declared, would he find “such care, such attention, and such an effort to come up with the right things.”

When perusing further the pages of the cookbook, one can’t help but pause over a 1988 production of *La Bohème*. It’s a well-known fact that the Café Momus scene in Act Two requires an extensive shopping list. In this case, the celebrated tenor playing Rodolfo, Luciano Pavarotti, decided to contribute to it with his own specific gastronomic suggestions: salami, chicken, roast beef, cheese, bread, ragù, lobster, grapes, bananas, and, intriguingly, a little dish of vanilla ice cream—not for himself but for the soprano playing Mimì, Mirella Freni.

There was an important detail to consider: the tenor was on a strict diet. He was only allowed to eat specific foods with one single loophole: onstage, he could eat whatever he pleased. During each performance, nobody would give much attention to the tenor, as Rodolfo is featured less prominently in Act Two. Only the lighting crew working at a higher stage level had a view of the entire scene, and they witnessed the tenor devouring the sumptuous meal... and Mimì’s ice cream first!

As Harrison reminds us, funny episodes such as this one are part of the secret culinary pleasures of opera: “Once the performance is live, nobody can touch the singers... not even if they want to eat all that’s on the menu!” A triumph of the senses indeed. ✨

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A Puccini Family Recipe

Cooking for friends such as composer Pietro Mascagni was one of Giacomo Puccini’s greatest pleasures. His modest origins and financial struggles in his youth turned him into a clever chef who could conjure tasty dishes from the humblest of ingredients: pasta with eels and herring with radish are counted among some of his most original creations. A passionate hunter, Puccini also enjoyed cooking the birds that he hunted near his Torre del Lago home at Lake Massaciucoli.

There was one recipe that he guarded with utmost secrecy, a unique way to cook *folaghe* (coot). Sometimes mistaken for ducks or geese, *folaghe* are small birds with predominantly black plumage. They are now a protected species in most of Italy, but during Puccini’s time they were common in the area of Lake Massaciucoli. The composer would not disclose his recipe to anybody. Finally, from a private collection in Milan—a letter by Puccini dated December 9, 1903—details emerged of his culinary creation.

Puccini’s version differs from the typical way of cooking *folaghe*. With its intense flavors, this dish has been received enthusiastically for generations—so much so that nowadays, Tuscan restaurants serve *tagliatelle* or risotto with Puccini-style coot.

FOLAGHE ALLA PUCCINI

(If coot is not readily available, substitute duck or Cornish game hen.)

First, carefully remove the coot’s skin. Marinate the meat in cool water and vinegar for one to two hours. Rinse, then cut the meat in quarters.

Warm a pot on the stove and place the meat quarters in the pot with a bit of olive oil, carrots, plenty of onion, some basil, marjoram, *mentuccia* (lesser calamint), bay leaf, salt, and green or red bell pepper. Cover the pot and let the meat simmer on low heat for approximately an hour.

Remove the lid and sear the meat until slightly browned. Then, add a cup of water mixed with a little wine. When the water is absorbed, add some chicken broth and cover the pot again. Let it cook on low heat for 30 more minutes, while adding some flour to thicken the sauce. Once the meat is ready, the sauce can be strained and used as a spread on *crostini*.

