

THE SINGING CHEF

Andy Lo Russo Brings the Joys of Family and Food to the Spencer Theater

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Photography by Kathleen McDonald

In our fast-paced world, it is often easy to get caught up in our busy lives and neglect what is really important. It is therefore refreshing to meet a man who has dedicated himself to bringing back what truly matters in life: creating cherished moments with loved ones.

Author and chef Andy Lo Russo says, "Families should sit and eat together as much as possible. My mission is to get the family unit back together."



Growing up in New Jersey with his large Sicilian family, Andy remembers spending time in the kitchen with his maternal grandmother, Nona Grace. She enjoyed listening to the great tenors and sopranos while cooking, and this eventually inspired Andy to combine his two passions of music and food. The Singing Chef was officially born in 1991 and his first cookbook, *Sing and Cook Italian*, was released less than two years later. Now, he travels all over the world sharing his love of family, cooking and singing in his cabaret dinner shows.

I was fortunate enough to see Andy's show when he performed at the Spencer Theater near Ruidoso this past August. While enjoying a glass of wine in the lobby,

I was told by those with behind-the-scenes access that it was going to be an exciting show with a lot of audience participation, and it was readily apparent upon entering the auditorium that this would be the case. The seating for guests was around tables set up right on the stage; the audience was literally a part of the show!

The classic red and white table settings, dimmed lights and crusty bread with saucers of olive oil made it easy to get into the Italian spirit. A table was prepped for cooking at the front and a large screen overhead allowed us to easily follow along as Andy (and his helpers throughout the show) cooked up our menu, which included a tart and creamy chicken scaloppini and a tender bracioli with red sauce

served over polenta. We finished off with Nona Grace's own ricotta cake, which is flavored with vanilla, orange and chocolate.

As promised, throughout the night the audience really was involved. Andy led us all in rousing renditions of Italian songs, many of which I was delighted to recognize, and he personally stopped by each table to talk and enjoy the company of his guests. Couples celebrating anniversaries danced while Andy treated them to a special serenade and a lucky few were chosen to help him cook. He even gave me some great tips for creating an authentic Italian meal. His absolute musts are excellent extra virgin olive oil, red wine in good wine glasses and fresh ingredients. "Fresh ingredients are key," notes Andy. "The sun

in the Southwest is perfect for growing tomatoes in your garden and fresh herbs, like parsley and basil, on your windowsills."

By the end of the night, the sense of family that Andy had been promoting was evident. Our table was talking, laughing and singing together like old friends. As Andy says, "Everybody is family. Wherever, whenever, blood doesn't matter...after we share a meal, we are all family." ■

FYI

Be sure to visit Andy's website, www.singingchef.com, which includes listings of his upcoming performances and more than 50 of his favorite recipes!

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