

# C'est la vie!

This year's French Annual Gala, organised by France Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCIFB), took place at Le Méridien on 28 November. It was an effortlessly glamorous affair, the epitome of French style - classy and chic - from start to finish, with an atmosphere that was abuzz with conversation and laughter all night.

The evening started with cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, which were a good indication of the level of sophistication we were to expect for the remainder of the event.

The main event started off with a few words of welcome from the director of CCIFC, Rifat Rashid, as well as some other distinguished guests. The aim of the gala, and annual trade show, is to strengthen business ties between Bangladesh and France, and encourage trade growth.

The trade show itself had a large number of French companies present, selling everything from makeup and cosmetics to electronics and pharmaceuticals.

For the entertainment, the attendees had the honour of watching a performance by renowned mime artist Laurent Decol, one of the students of Marcel Marceau, a pioneer of 'the art of silence'.

Decol's performances took place in small skits throughout the night, revolving around simple themes such as 'the circus' and 'rockstar', but were elevated into something extraordinary by the mere removal of speech. His performances had the audience enthralled and hanging on to every word - or lack thereof!

Next on the line-up was stand-up comedian Naveed Mahbub, who brought his refreshing observational humour that was reminiscent of Russell Peters.

Mahbub had the audience in stitches, occasionally pausing in order to engage with some of the guests, inevitably turning them into the subject of his jokes.

It was a different form of entertainment to that of Laurent Decol's, for sure, but it captivated the audience nonetheless, and added an element of levity to the atmosphere that seemed to put everyone at ease.

The band 42 provided the music for the evening, with a jazz and blues fusion being the genre of choice, and the dulcet tones of the guitars and saxophone lent an elegant musical backdrop to the five course dinner that was provided.

The dinner itself was served in between performances, and the French-inspired menu was beyond mouth-watering.

The appetiser was a chicken terrine with duck pâté, served with honey almond bread - a beautiful contrast of flavours and textures.

A seafood bisque followed shortly after, and then came the main course - beef tenderloin served with asparagus and fondant potatoes and a rich, thick gravy.

After the main course, we were served cheese plates, with a variety of international cheeses such as brie and gorgonzola served in the traditional style, with walnuts and grapes.

The ultimate decadence came from the dessert, however, an incredibly creamy pistachio crème brûlée, with delicate lemon madeleines and a tart berry compote that offset the richness of the brûlée.

French cuisine is known for its finesse and elegance and this was apparent consistently throughout the dinner.

To dine on such luxurious food in a glittering ballroom, with smooth jazz playing in the background - one might believe one is in France itself.

Thanks to the joint efforts of all sponsors, this year's French Annual Gala was a resounding success and will only grow bigger and better in the years to come.

By Zahrah Haider



## Up-close with chef Magnus Albrektsson

### UP-CLOSE WITH CHEF MAGNUS ALBREKTSSON

A master in the art of cooking, Magnus formed a love for food at a very young age and went to culinary school in Sweden.

Initially he worked with the first ever celebrity chef in his country and soon established himself in Stockholm, working in many restaurants including the highly rated Lux Stockholm. His career exploded in 2007 when he started his own company which offered cooking classes both for consumers and professionals.

Responsible for the main course in the actual Nobel Dinner in 2007, the chef was invited to cook for two events hosted by the Swedish Embassy in Dhaka to celebrate 10 December - the day of the Nobel Prizes and Banquet in Sweden - and 13 December - the day of Lucia, more commonly known as St. Lucy's Day.

Despite his tight schedule the Chef sat down with us at Lifestyle to talk about his life, food and much more!

### HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR STYLE OF COOKING?

I am really passionate when it comes to cooking. I am also open to learning new things. I always want to push myself to my limit. But if I had to narrow it down, I guess I am kind of like a neo-classic.

### DO YOU HAVE A GUILTY FOOD PLEASURE?

I have just one word for you, cookies!

### DO YOU HAVE ANY KITCHEN DISASTER STORIES FOR ME?

There are so many that it's tough to pick just one. I actually had a major one when I was working at a Michelin-starred restaurant. We had a group of people coming in and I was about to start frying the fish but the frying table wasn't working properly. It almost killed all the fish. When you are standing there and you know that you overcooked the fish, there isn't much you can do. I messed up on that one but it serves as a reminder and I can laugh about it now.

### YOU ARE STRANDED ON A DESERT ISLAND. WHAT FIVE FOODS WOULD YOU WANT WITH YOU? WHAT WOULD YOU MAKE?

The thing that I always have in my fridge is parmesan cheese. I would also want good olive oil, butter, eggs, a few pieces of ham and tomatoes. I think that's six items! I could make a prosciutto omelette with parmesan and a tomato salad.

### TELL US SOME OF YOUR FAVOURITE SWEDISH CUISINES.

I really love pickled herring. I like everything smoked, like a smoked salmon. This is something that exists in the heritage of our basic cuisine. I also like shrimps, crayfish, lobsters and oysters that are available in Sweden. You can do a lot with these items. It is really hard to pick out one dish that I could live without. I really love yellow pea soup as well as traditional food like cabbage rolls and meatballs.

### DO LINGONBERRIES REALLY GO WITH EVERYTHING?

No, not really. I wouldn't say it goes with everything. But it does go with a lot of things. It's actually a classic but it depends on what you do with them. If you make it jam, it

doesn't go with everything. If you put them in sugar and make them sugar infused then it goes with a little bit more because then you have a sweet and sour sensation going on as opposed to the jam which is just sweet. If you do meatballs for instance, with cream sauce, I would rather have them sweet and sour. Sourness from the berry itself and the sugar mixed in.

### WHAT'S IT LIKE COOKING FOR A NOBEL INSPIRED DINNER? WHAT KIND OF A MENU DID YOU HAVE IN MIND?

The hardest part - coming into a country for an event - is to get all the products you want. I brought a smoker with me. The menu was smoked salmon with a cream of cauliflower and pickled cauliflower florets. So, I had to bring the alcoholic vinegar with me that we used for the pickle. For the main course we used local lamb. I used the fillet, the loin as well as the shoulder. The fillet and loin was roasted with

garlic and the shoulder was braised together with tomatoes and wrapped in cabbage leaves. We also made a small tart with onions, cream of mushroom and we also had some oven baked tomatoes and potato terrine. For dessert we did caramelised apples with butter and sugar. It was basically an open pie with caramel cream and apple granita. I was really pleased with how the food turned out and it was received very well.

### FOR A FIRST TIMER VISITING SWEDEN, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE DISHES THAT WE MUST TRY OUT?

You must definitely try the pickled herring as well as the toast skagen! You should also try out our lobster and a stew called veal-in-dill. We also have a hash brown with salted pork which is really nice and finally try out Lingonberries.

### TELL US ABOUT THE NOBEL BANQUET.

The Banquet in 2007 was pretty crazy. It took place inside the Stockholm City Hall and there were around 40 chefs,

including me who worked for over a week to prepare everything. The logistic around it was crucial. You actually get the ingredients from the Nobel Committee who gives you choices on what you want to cook. We decided to go with veal with a sole fillet and shellfish as the starter. We made it work. But there are always slight hiccups. For instance, the veal was a little bit thicker than we wanted it to be. We had to reoperate to make it work. But it was an amazing experience and something that I learned a lot from.

### DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR AMATEUR CHEFS OUT THERE?

Yes, I do. Always try to keep it simple. Don't overdo anything. I know people who can whip up three course meal in an hour but then they get exhausted and they don't do it again. Cooking in my words, should be fun because it is a creative process so take your time and master your skills. If you keep it simple and keep learning and you'll get there!

By Naveed Naushad

Photo credits: Photo 1 - Carolina Romare, Photo 2 - Helena Wahlman, Photo 3 - Jakob Fridholm, Photo 4 - Joel Wareus. Photos taken from imagebank.sweden.se

