

FOOD

Viennese: Winter Ball tradition dates back to the 1700s

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In all, the Westin will have 32 servers, 12 cooks, six people to clean up and four managers on hand to ensure the dinner goes smoothly.

"Serving 400 people is a challenge," says Philippe Wettel, executive chef at the Westin.

"We have to be exactly on time with every course — not too early, not too late. It takes a lot of planning; this menu, for example, was set 11 months ago."

By any measure, the Viennese Winter Ball is an extraordinary occasion — the finest formal event of the year in the nation's capital. Small wonder tickets at \$350 each are sold out well in advance (some corporate tables for eight cost \$6,000). Every year, 60 or 70 people put their names on a waiting list hoping for a cancellation.

"It has elegance, it has charm, it has beautiful scenery," says Roland Pirker, president of the Austrian Canadian Council and an organizer of the event.

"It's amazing, really, when it's like the Arctic outside and here you are, inside this grand hall, dancing in ball gowns and black tie."

In Austria, the winter ball tradition dates back to the 1700s when Emperor Joseph II decided that ballrooms in the Hofburg palace should not be reserved for just nobility. And so he made ballrooms available to the common folk, thus starting a tradition of public balls where each opens with a dance show usually performed by young people.

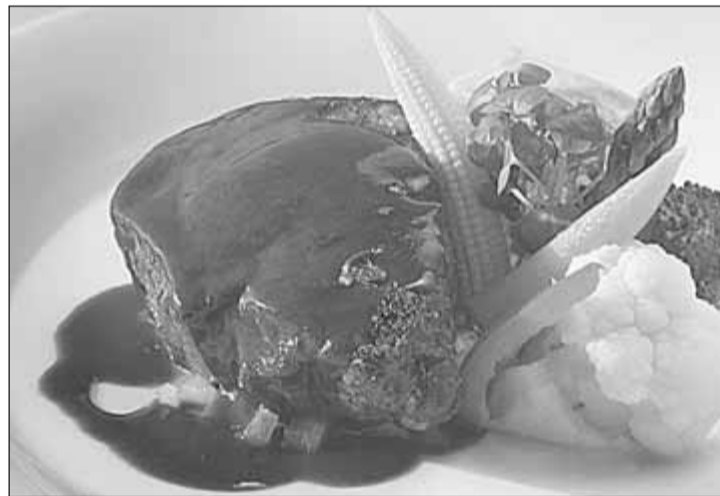
Today, there are more than 300 balls in Vienna from mid-December to February. Some draw attendance of up to 5,000 people in the city of 1.5 million. Some are hosted by the city, others by trade associations, churches and various organizations. Viennese balls are nearly all black-tie occasions with ladies' dresses required to be at least ankle length; ladies wear mostly modern ballgowns, and only debutantes wear white ballgowns.

"Ottawa really needs something like this in the winter,"



PHOTOS BY CHRIS MIKULA, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Executive chef Philippe Wettel has modified his recipes for the home cook, so you can try his Potato, Turnip and Chanterelle Gratin, above, and Maple Glazed Beef Tenderloin with Zinfandel Wine Sauce.



says David Wallace, co-chair of the ball steering committee.

"It's in the finest tradition of the Viennese balls of Austria; it's such a wonderful, elegant evening."

Each year the event raises up to \$60,000 for the Champions for Children Foundation and the Thirteen Strings Orchestra. Honorary patron is the ambassador of Austria, Otto Ditz.

"We know this is an extraordinary event," Mr. Ditz says. "The ball, the music, the *joie de vivre* is very typical of what you see in Vienna. And the nice thing is the contribution this

event makes to local philanthropy. It's a very Canadian thing to do."

For *Citizen* readers, Mr. Wettel has adapted three dishes for home cooks that will be served at the ball. "This is a very special event," Mr. Wettel says.

"It is very classic and traditional, so the food has to reflect this. It has to be elegant; the hors d'oeuvres must be simple yet exciting to look at."

Here and on page B9 are recipes for his entrée, a side dish and a fabulous chocolate dessert to complete the evening meal.

"The gratin is a classic dish, but instead of using only potatoes I've included turnip and chanterelle mushrooms to add a depth of flavour," Mr. Wettel says. "It's easy to do at home; to enhance the presentation I suggest cutting the servings in decorative shapes while the gratin is cold. At home, you can simply reheat it in a microwave."

I made this gratin at home last week and, even without the mushrooms, it was a hit as a side dish to chicken roasted on my rotisserie.

While Mr. Wettel will be smoking the beef tenderloin over smouldering maple chips for the ball, he suggests home cooks might instead use a maple marinade. He has adapted the recipe, here.

As for the luscious chocolate ganache, well, I've tried it and it's certainly all of that.

"This is a very high-profile event that attracts the who's-who of Ottawa," says William Verhey, director of catering sales at the Westin.

"It's fun to get dressed up and get out for a break during winter. It's like a light in the dark month of February."

And who couldn't use a break from winter right about now?

POTATO, TURNIP AND CHANTERELLE GRATIN

(From: Philippe Wettel, executive chef, Westin Ottawa)
Serves 4

- 2 tablespoons (25 mL) unsalted butter
- 1 medium-size onion, peeled and sliced thin
- 1 cup (250 mL) clean, sliced chanterelle mushrooms (may substitute white mushrooms)
- 4 cups (1 L) equal mixture of turnips and potatoes, peeled and sliced very thin
- 1 cup (250 mL) heavy 35-per-cent cream
- Pinch, grated nutmeg
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 cup (250 mL) Swiss cheese, grated

1. Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C).
2. In a large frypan or saucepan, melt butter and sear onion, mushrooms, then toss together with thinly sliced turnips and potatoes. Place in lightly buttered 9-inch (23-cm) square baking dish. Cover tightly and place in preheated oven for 30 minutes.
3. In a small saucepan on medium heat, combine cream, nutmeg, salt and pepper; bring to a boil, then immediately remove from heat. Remove turnip-potato from oven, remove cover and mix in half the cheese. Pour cream mixture over turnip-potatoes and sprinkle with remaining cheese.
4. Return dish, uncovered, to oven for 20 to 25 minutes. Gratin is ready to serve when golden-brown. If not, place gratin under oven broiler about 3 minutes to brown before serving.

MAPLE GLAZED BEEF TENDERLOIN WITH ZINFANDEL WINE SAUCE

(From: Philippe Wettel, executive chef, Westin Ottawa)
Serves 4

- 4 beef tenderloin medallions, each about 6 ounces (170 g)
- 1 tablespoon (15 mL) butter
- For the marinade:**
- ¾ cup (175 mL) maple syrup
- 2 tablespoons (25 mL) brown sugar
- Juice from 1 orange
- 1 tablespoon (15 mL) cider vinegar
- 1 tablespoon (15 mL) Worcestershire sauce
- ½ teaspoon (2 mL) salt
- ½ teaspoon (2 mL) dry mustard

For the sauce:

- 2 shallots, chopped
- 1 sprig fresh thyme
- 2 cups (500 mL) zinfandel red wine
- 2 cups (500 mL) veal stock (may use powdered gravy mix)
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 tablespoon (15 mL) butter

1. In a small saucepan, combine all marinade ingredients and bring to boil. Remove from heat and cool to room temperature; place beef tenderloin in a resealable plastic freezer bag along with half the marinade; seal and refrigerate 2 hours. Reserve remaining marinade.

2. Preheat oven to 300°F (150°C). Remove beef from marinade; discard marinade and plastic bag. Preheat ovenproof saucepan with 1 tablespoon (15 mL) of butter and sear beef on both sides until golden brown. Place into preheated oven about 5 minutes, then turn medallions over and cook another 5 minutes for medium to medium-rare (135°F/57°C on an instant-read meat thermometer). When done, remove beef and set aside on rack to rest 5 minutes.

3. To make the sauce, in the same saucepan add shallots, thyme and sear until brown. Deglaze with red wine and the remaining reserved marinade. Reduce on medium-high heat to half liquid volume, about 6 to 10 minutes, then add veal stock. Reduce again to obtain a flavourful sauce, about 6 to 10 minutes. Add salt, pepper if necessary, to taste.

4. Before serving, bring sauce to boil and stir in 1 tablespoon (15 mL) of butter. Serve sauce over tenderloin medallions.