



Food for Opera Thought

*A collaborative recipe book
to accompany and enhance
the viewing of opera online*

This book is inspired by the many months of Zooming into Opera in the Tuning into Opera Course, for Nillumbik U3A. Defying those who dreaded virtual courses, we have enjoyed the different ways of connecting online and relished the safety from Covid. Not to mention the ability to discuss, debate and enjoy refreshments during a performance!

All we needed to enhance the last mentioned advantage was good food to accompany our long conversations and operatic travels. So to celebrate the end of our second term, 2022, and midwinter, we contributed recipes for food to accompany opera-viewing. This collection is freely available to the world [on our blog here](#).

Enjoy!

In Praise of Zoom

Dear U3a friends, don't presume
Our group is in virtual gloom.

We're blessedly maskfree.

A RAT test? Don't ask me!

We're happier meeting on Zoom!

We don't have to think Covid Doom,
Or worry that others assume

That it's safe to sit close

With a snuffle (that's gross)

So long as there's air in the room.

We enjoy seeing everyone's faces
In their comfy and personal spaces.

Their pets are our friends

And no one offends

Skipping check-in to thwart contact tracers.

Other positives? One of the best
Is inclusion of those who are stressed

By risk - comorbidity

Or merely timidity.

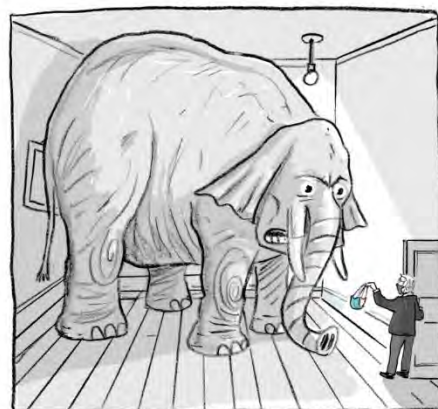
And there's no need to be fully dressed!

We admit there are times when we fume
At regrettable features of Zoom.

But (thanks, U3a!)

Online, we will stay

While the elephant's still in the room.



“Can't you find something else to talk about?”

Cartoon by Peter Kuper – [visit his blog here](#).

Lyn Richards 2/2022

From Dawn

CARAMEL SQUARES

125 g butter 3/4 cup sugar
1 egg 1 teaspoon vanilla
1 cup SR flour 2 teaspoons cinnamon
1 cup sultanas 3/4 cup white chocbits

(I mixed sultanas and cranberries in your batch)



Melt butter with sugar, then cool.

Beat in egg and vanilla

Stir in sifted flour and cinnamon, sultanas and chocbits.

Spread into a small greased slice tin, lined with baking paper.

Bake in a moderate oven 20 to 25 minutes.

Cut into squares while warm and leave in the tin to cool.

EASY BISCUITS

Beat 1 cup sugar with 1 egg

Add 125g melted butter

185 g S R flour.

Flavour with either vanilla

or 1 Tablespoon cocoa

or grated rind of 1 orange or lemon.

Stir in 1 cup of one of the following or a combination of two:

chocbits, sultanas, crushed nuts,

Rice Bubbles, peanuts, walnuts or coconut.

Drop in teaspoonsful on a greased oven tray.

Bake in a moderate oven for 15 minutes.

Loosen while hot, but allow to cool a little before removing from the tray.

Enjoy.



From Pat

Drop Scones.

I am contributing an old favourite. I think it's an easy to prepare snack for a zoom session. Not much preparation, very little cooking and minimum presentation. What more would you want?

1 cup SR flour
1/4 tsp salt
1 egg
3/4 cup milk
1 tsp sugar

Sift the flour and salt. Make a well in the centre and beat in the egg and milk. Add the sugar and beat well. (Actually I usually put e' thing in the blender and mix for a minute.)



Heat a heavy based frying pan and rub with a little piece of butter.

Put dessert spoonfuls of the mixture in the pan .

Cook until the top begins to bubble slightly.

Turn and cook the other side. Cool a little and serve with butter and jam – preferably raspberry which you have made in summer.

Raspberry Jam.

2 kg raspberries
2 kg sugar
2 Tbsp lemon juice

Place the berries in a large saucepan with the lemon juice and bring slowly to the boil.

Simmer gently until the fruit has softened and then add the sugar and stir until dissolved.

Bring to the boil and boil rapidly until setting point is reached. The mixture should appear to be starting to thicken. Test by putting a small amount on a cold saucepan. It will be jelly-like and move slowly when tilted.

Cool slightly. Pour into sterilised jars and seal.



Bon Appetit. Pat.

Jam Tarts

From Brenda.

Shortcrust pastry.

8 oz. Plain flour sifted.

4 oz. lard or margarine.



Combine lightly with finger tips.

Add very cold $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of water, mix and then place in the fridge to cool, for an hour.

Roll out on a floured baking board.

Meanwhile heat the oven to 180 degrees fan baked.

Grease a tray and cut 2 dozen round pastry cases.

Fill each tart with a spoon full of jam.

Place the trays in the oven for about 10 minutes.



Ready to eat, whilst viewing Tchaikovsky's 'The Queen of Spades'

Yes, I know it should be 'The Queen of Hearts she made some tarts all on a summer's day'.



No tarts in this opera! [The Met stages Pique Dame](#)

Mrs Atkins' fruit slice

From Stephanie Alexander via Lyn!!!!



Ingredients

- 125g unsalted butter
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- 225g mixed dried vine fruit
- 150g self-raising flour

Method

Preheat oven to 190C and butter a 28cm x 18cm baking tray.

Melt butter in a saucepan large enough to hold all ingredients.

Add brown sugar, stirring over low heat until dissolved. Remove from heat and cool for a few minutes.

Stir in egg, then add fruit and sift in flour. Stir well to mix.

Press into tray and bake for 20 to 22 minutes.

The slice should have developed a caramel crust and will still move slightly when you rest your hand in the centre. If it is positively liquid, cook another three minutes.

Cool a little and mark into 4cm squares with a sharp knife. Allow to cool completely in tray, then cut into squares and store in an airtight tin.

Nigella's Choc Chip Cookie recipe

From Angela: *it's easy and delicious. You. can whip them up in 10 mins. I use dark choc chips rather than milk choc.*

INGREDIENTS

Makes: approx. 14 cookies

METRIC CUPS

- 150 grams soft unsalted butter
- 125 grams soft light brown sugar
- 100 grams caster sugar
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- 1 egg (fridge-cold)
- 1 egg yolk (fridge-cold)
- 300 grams plain flour
- ½ teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
- 1 x 326 grams packet milk chocolate morsels or chips



METHOD

1. Preheat the oven to 170°C/150°C Fan/325°F. Line a baking sheet with baking parchment.
2. Melt the butter and let it cool a bit. Put the brown and white sugars into a bowl, pour the slightly cooled, melted butter over them and beat together.
3. Beat in the vanilla, the cold egg and cold egg yolk until your mixture is light and creamy.
4. Slowly mix in the flour and bicarb until just blended, then fold in the chocolate chips.
5. Scoop the cookie dough into an American quarter-cup measure or a 60ml/quarter cup round icecream scoop and drop onto the prepared baking sheet, plopping the cookies down about 8cm/3 inches apart. You will need to make these in 2 batches, keeping the bowl of cookie dough in the fridge between batches.
6. Bake for 15–17 minutes in the preheated oven, or until the edges are lightly toasted. Cool on the baking sheet for 5 minutes before transferring to wire racks.

What's that: you don't want to cook???

Fig and Black Olive Crackers

From Shirley

- Step 1. Go to the local Woolies supermarket.
2. Purchase Olina's Artisan Fig and Black Olive Crackers.
3. Hide the packet from family 'grazers' in the back of the pantry.
4. Open and consume during Opera Zoom.

Recycle cardboard box.



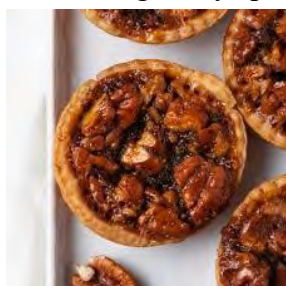
From Sue

As I do not do the cooking and never make sweets my favourite food for opera and footy is a platter of cheese, especially havarti cheese, seaweed biscuits, red grapes and avocado dip and of course a must is a glass of white wine to wash it all down.
What more could a girl want?

From Hilary

I'm busy looking after my two grandsons, a new puppy, a dog and a cat.

I haven't got any special treats for the opera, but I can absolutely recommend the pecan pies from Brents patisserie in Eltham.



They need to be warm and served with sour cream!! They also have pretty good vanilla slices!

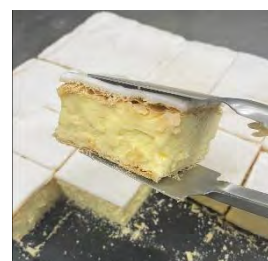
I'm looking forward to seeing what others have to offer, whether it's a recipe or a place to get something yummy



Hilary

And from Jann: I can recommend Brents patisserie in Dudley Street Eltham where they have small individual rich chocolate cakes as well as their famous Vanilla slices.

*Editor's note: The things I do for Opera Group!!
I searched the whole of [Brents' Facebook page](#) for an image of their pecan pies – and there isn't one. O what I suffered, viewing the glories of their baking! –
But I did find the famous vanilla slices, in case you see Sheila's recipe (to follow) as too challenging.*



Lemon Drizzle slices

From Lyn

Real simple when you have lemons and lemon curd. (Not your own or your friend's lemon curd, of course. Don't waste homemade. Just purchase Barker's Lemon Curd when it's on special at Woollies. The cake doesn't know the difference.)

For the cake

- 70g softened unsalted butter
- 120g caster sugar
- 2 medium eggs
- 140g self-raising flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- finely grated zest 1 lemon
- 1 tbsp lemon curd (I pile it up)
- 2 tbsp milk

For the drizzle topping

30g granulated sugar
juice 1 lemon

Heat oven to 180C/160C fan/ gas 4. Line a 20 x 20cm square baking tin with baking parchment.

Beat the butter and sugar together until pale, light and fluffy. Add the eggs and mix again. Add the flour, baking powder, lemon zest, lemon curd and milk, and mix with a wooden spoon until all the ingredients are thoroughly combined. Pour the mixture into the prepared tin and bake for 25-30 mins or until a skewer comes out clean.

Mix the sugar and lemon juice together and pour over the hot cake. Leave to cool in the tin. You can eat the cake as it is, (we do) or for a fancy finish, add feather icing.

If you want fancy to increase sugar hit or show off on Zoom.... the icing

250g icing sugar
3 tbsp water
splash of yellow food colouring

Mix the icing sugar with just enough water to give a runny, but not watery, icing. Spread on the cooled cake. **Or for really fancy...** Add a few drops of food colouring to a splash of icing and pipe with an icing bag – (or just dribble) thin lines across the cake. Drag through the lines in opposite directions to create a feathered effect.



From Kaye

An oat biscuit for dunking by Juilia Busittil Nashimura

Makes about 35

An ideal biscuit for dunking into hot tea – crunchy and buttery with a thin coating of chocolate

300 g (2 cups) plain flour, sifted
300g (3 cups) quick-cooking oats
150g (2/3 cup finely packed) brown sugar
100 castor sugar
1 tsp baking powder
1 tsp salt
270g unsalted butter, roughly chopped
1 TBSP golden syrup
½ tsp bicarb soda
3-4 TBSP full cream milk (if needed)
200g dark chocolate



Pre-heat oven 180C

Line 4 baking trays with baking paper

In a large bowl mix flour, oats, sugars, baking powder and salt, breaking up any lumps with the back of a spoon.

Melt butter and golden syrup in a small saucepan over medium heat. Stir in bicarb and allow it to foam for a few seconds. Pour into the dry mixture and stir to incorporate. Take a piece of the mixture and roll it into a ball – if the mixture is too dry, add some milk until it all comes together. Roll tablespoons of the mixture into golf ball-sized balls and flatten into discs about 6cm diameter and 4mm thick. You can do this with a rolling pin or simply press them.

Place onto prepared trays with space for spreading. Bake for 10-12 mins until golden. Transfer to a rack to cool completely.

Once biscuits are cooled, melt chocolate in heatproof bowl over simmering water, stir occasionally until smooth. Cool chocolate for about 5 min, then, spread chocolate over top of each biscuit. Once chocolate is dry to touch, biscuits can be stored in airtight container in fridge for up to 4 days – if they last that long.



Editor's note: as in all our group work, you may wish to consult some authoritative sites on this topic. [I recommend this one](#), which supplied my illustration to the left, and refers you to the controversial claim by Heston Blumenthal that scientifically, [biscuits taste better dunked in tea](#).

From Jill K – a choice!

Inspired by Hilary, I think I would follow the current trend to eat take away food on all possible occasions. But the food should fit the opera! So for Carmen, we would order tapas from the Little Drop of Poison in Eltham, accompanied by a glass of sangria, while La Boheme needs some excellent chocolates from Xocolatl (in East Kew - a long way, but they are worth it). I recommend the toffee apple. Wagner deserves a slice of good German sausage and a glass of Pilsner. Perhaps for Madama Butterfly we could order a Bento Box from Maki Sushi, and so on....


Finally, if you insist on slaving over a hot stove, you can't beat home made churros, accompanied by cup of Mexican hot chocolate. It's a traditional treat from my Mexican recipe book.




DESSERTS

CHURROS


Doughnuts



1 Cut the butter into pieces and put in a large saucepan with the water. Heat the water gently until the butter melts and then bring to a rolling boil.




2 Sift the flour at least twice and, as soon as the water boils, tip it into the pan all at once. Remove from the heat and beat in the flour. Continue beating until the mixture forms a ball and leaves the sides of the pan clean. Cool a little and then beat in the eggs, the extra yolk and the orange rind.



3 Spoon the mixture into a piping bag fitted with a large star nozzle. Pipe it into 15cm/6 inch lengths, cutting between them. Heat the oil for deep frying in a large saucepan.

150g/5oz butter
300ml/1/2 pint water
150g/5oz flour
3 eggs
1 egg yolk
grated rind of 1 orange
vegetable oil for deep frying
1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
150g/5oz caster sugar

PREPARATION: 20 MINUTES
COOKING: 10 MINUTES
SERVES: 4-6



4 Deep-fry the churros, a few at a time, until they are golden brown, turning them once. Remove and drain. Mix the cinnamon and sugar together and roll the churros in this mixture. Serve with some fresh fruit.

102

From Dorothy – a choice of slices!

SEVEN CUP SLICE.

1 cup S.R. Flour
1 cup shredded coco nut
1 cup cranberries
1 cup diced apricots
1 cup pepitas (I use 1/2 cup)
1 cup brown sugar
1 cup milk

Mix together and press into a lamington tin.
Bake for 30-35 minutes @ 180 degrees.



NOUGAT SLICE.

125 g. Butter, melted
185g caster sugar
1 cup mixed fruit
1 egg
1 cup coconut
125g S.R. Flour

Place all dry ingredients in a bowl.
Add beaten egg and melted butter.
Press into a lamington tray.
Bake in moderate oven(180-190) for 25-30 minutes.



*Hope this pleases all the sweet tooths !
The first one is fairly healthy, the second not quite so!*

Vanilla Slices

From Sheila –



A very quick and easy recipe!

Vanilla Slices

2 sheets of butter puff pastry. Cook and then press down to flatten.

Filling

2 pkts of vanilla pudding

600 mls cream

1 tablespoon spoon icing sugar

1 teasp vanilla essence

300 mls milk

Mix till smooth.

Put filling between flattened pastry and cool in frig till set.

Cover with sifted icing sugar. Cut with serrated or electric knife.

Enjoy the result! Sheila

... and from Lyn: *maybe turn off your image on Zoom before devouring these?*