

by Col S. NEMETH, ACOS G9

HUNGARIAN CUISINE

It is a popular, though inaccurate view that Hungarian food is simply hot and fatty. As a result of the many different assimilated peoples in the region, Hungarians could safely regard their cuisine as a blend of Balkan and German cooking, in which onion and sour cream meets with hot paprika and fat, not to mention tomatoes picked fresh from the vine and the meeting of sour cabbage with Italian-type ragout.

Hungarian produce is characterised by a wonderfully pleasant and intensive range of flavours, especially the vegetables, the fruit, the outstanding quality of beef from the indigenous "grey" herds on the **puszta** (the Hungarian Plain), the goose liver, and the paprika and salami. These are the very ingredients, of character and individuality.

In one of his works Antonio Bonfini, the Italian historian, who lived in the 15th century, noted that the most characteristic feature of the Hungarian cuisine was the richness of its flavours.

A WORLD OF FLAVOURS BASED ON HISTORICAL TRADITIONS

In the late 9th century, when the Hungarians arrived in the Carpathian basin to occupy their new homeland, they prepared food by chopping the ingredients, the meat and the vegetables, and cooking them in water with fine herbs. When they roasted the meat, on spits or ovens, they served it with spicy sauces.

Perhaps the most famous Hungarian meal is abroad the **GULYÁS (pron.GOULASH)**. This dish is one of the few authentic contributions of Hungarian gastronomy to international cuisine, even so, **it usually resembles a stew, whereas it is supposed to be more like a soup**. It is a traditional herdsmen's food, hence the name as cooked by them, it is prepared with the beef

Hungarian Goulash Soup (Gulyásleves)

Ingredients:

- 1,5 kilogram beef (chuck or other stew beef)
- 6 Tablespoons lard (or other cooking fat, or oil)
- 2 to 3 medium onions
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1 teaspoon caraway (optional)
- 2 Tablespoons hot (preferable Hungarian) red paprika
- salt to taste
- 10 cups (2.5 litres) beef stock (or water)
- 4-5 medium new potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch square (1-1.5 cm. square) cubes
- 2 banana peppers, chopped
- 2 medium tomatoes, peeled and chopped (or a 15-ounce can of tomatoes, seeded and chopped)
- a bunch of celery leaves, tied in a bundle with string.

Garnish: homemade pasta bits (made from 1 egg and about 3/4 cup-or 10 decagrams-flour) and finely chopped green onions.

Method:

- ◆ Prepare the meat by cutting away all fat and cubing it into small pieces-about 1/2-inch square (1-1.5 cm. square). Set aside.
- ◆ Chop the onion finely and saute in hot lard in a dish until golden brown. (If there is any cooking on open fire, the best is to use a **kettle**. Otherwise use a Dutch oven.) Stir in the crushed garlic. Sprinkle with caraway and stir in.
- ◆ Remove the pot from the heat and let cool down. Sprinkle on all the paprika and stir in well-then mix in the meat cubes and salt. Return the pot to a medium heat and let roast, mixing from time to time and adding stock, if needed, to keep it from drying out. When nicely roasted, moisten again, cover, and let stew.
- ◆ When the meat is soft, add the potato cubes, the chopped peppers, chopped tomatoes, and the remaining stock, then plunge in the bundle of celery leaves. Bring soup to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer until the vegetables and meat are tender.
- ◆ Prepare the pasta by kneading the flour into the beaten egg. This is especially easy in a food processor. The dough will be stiff. Cover with plastic and let rest for at least an hour. Knead again briefly, then roll into a pencil shape and cut into pea-size pieces. Sprinkle with a little flour to keep from sticking.
- ◆ When 10 minutes away from serving, bring the soup to a boil. Add the pasta pieces, reduce heat, cover partially, and leave alone for about 5 minutes or so. Mix carefully. Remove celery bundle. Then ladle into bowls and top with finely chopped green onions.
- ◆ "So easy to do, so tempting to the appetite!"



International Food

cut into cubes, placed in a kettle and cooked on a slow heat for 2-3 hours with lots of water, onions and paprika, and served with potatoes cut into cubes or small-size noodles added near the end of cooking time.

PÖRKÖLT (pron.POWRKOWLT), stew, the most easy to prepare, ubiquitous Hungarian meat speciality which can be made from veal, beef or pork, even pork's feet. The meat, cut into cubes and liberally salted, is browned, then stewed in lard and onions, and is seasoned with paprika, it is served with **galuska** (small dumplings), boiled potatoes or **tarhonya** (egg barley).

BABLEVES, bean soup, the indispensable item on the menu of every Hungarian restaurant, and especially roadside inns (**csárda**), it is the favorite Hungarian one-dish meal, and is therefore usually done well in even the most modest of places. The recipe calls for onions, pinto beans, smoked pork, especially smoked butt or flank, and paprika, and is said to taste even better reheated than freshly made. Some people like to eat it with the addition of a spoonful of sour cream or dash of vinegar.

Again we know from **Antonio Bonfini** that by the Middle Ages, shepherds living on the Great Hungarian Plain, were already preparing Hungarian goulash soup in the cauldron, much as today. The finely chopped meat was cooked with sliced onions, and then flavoured, except that at the time paprika, tomatoes and potatoes were not available.

THE FLAVOURS OF THE DOMESTIC CUISINE

The domestic cuisine follows traditional Hungarian taste, in which the role of braised and steamed dishes takes precedence over that of the roast. Hungarians cannot

do without soup. Thick and thin ragouts and pasta are also very much in favour. We Hungarians like to prepare vegetables in a special way, and these dishes are called braised vegetables (**f_zelék**). They are finely chopped and then thickened with sour cream, flour or perhaps grated potatoes. The most savoury braised meals are made of spinach, pumpkin, cabbage, potatoes, cauliflower, bean, lentil and kohlrabi. Boiled pasta is also frequently served with vegetables. Popular dishes are the cabbage, potato, spinach and French bean pastas.

HUNGARIAN WINES

The pleasures of the table are not complete without the wines appropriate to the food. The wines from the historical Hungarian wine regions provide a wonderful and attractive „framework of flavours” for characteristic Hungarian dishes. The volcanic soil of the Tokaj Hill produces the world-famous **Tokaji Aszú**, which one of its most renowned advocates, the Sun King (Louis XIV), called the „**wine of kings, and the king of wines.**” The world of flavour given by the overripe, wrinkled grapes is wonderfully complemented by long, elegant and fruity acids.

There are lots of different famous wines across the country.

Excellent white wines, such as **Egri Leányka**, are fermented in the cellars on the hillsides around city **Eger**, but the region is best known for its excellent red wines, **Egri Bikavér** (Bull's Blood).

The fertile soil in the **lake Balaton** highlands and the **Somló** wine area is volcanic in origin, which has a favourable influence on the elegant flavours and aromas found in the local wines.



Ingredients:

- 400 Fresh goose liver
- 2 Tablespoons finely Chopped shallots
- 2 Tablespoons fresh tarragon
- 5 Tablespoons lemon juice
- 5 Tablespoons walnut oil
- A little flour
- Salt and pepper

Goose liver slices in tarragon Sauce

Method:

- ◆ Cut the goose liver into eight 1.5 cm thick slices, season with salt and pepper and sprinkle with a little flour.
- ◆ To prepare the sauce, put following into a heated Teflon dish: lemon juice, pickling onions and tarragon, spiced with a little salt and pepper.
- ◆ Steam for one minute, then after adding the walnut oil, take off the heat and keep it warm.
- ◆ In another Teflon dish, cook the liver slices on both sides for approx. 40 seconds without oil or grease, and then pour the hot tarragon sauce on top when serving.
- ◆ The dish should be served with a **Tokaji Aszú**.