

## Food



TO MARKET | PAGE 3

## Club's new act

Now playing at the Empty Bottle rock club in Ukrainian Village: a monthly farmers market. No need to get up too early; it opens at 11 a.m.

AT THE CHEF'S TABLE | PAGE 2

## Pancake house

Cold winters called for hearty breakfasts when Nicole Pederson was a kid. The C-House chef hasn't stopped playing with her morning favorite: pancakes.

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## FOOD DETECTIVE



Sting sings of soul cakes on his new album of winter songs. | PASCAL LE SEGRETAINE-GETTY IMAGES

## Soul cake's bittersweet melody

BY LISA DONOVAN

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An editor and a recent episode of "Nightline" brought to my attention that the musician Sting has come out with a winter CD that includes a song titled "Soul Cake."

Calls to some of my favorite local bakeries left them stumped. Consulate staff couldn't share personal experiences of snacking on soul cakes, but referred to the lore and the history books about "souling."

But a review of British newspaper accounts shows that the cakes, best described as cinnamon buns or pastries studded with currants and other fruits do — or did — exist.

A century or more ago, they were the treat portion of a very different trick-or-treat ritual, when Snickers bars and Smarties were just twinkles in candymakers' eyes.

The act of going door to door, either on Halloween or All Saints' Day, and begging for soul cakes was done in exchange for offering a prayer for the dead of the household, the story goes. This was known as "souling."

An exhaustive account of Halloween's origins in London's Daily Telegraph newspaper points to a rhyme from the Welsh Marches that is echoed in Sting's song:

*Soul! Soul! For a soul cake!  
I pray you, good missus, a  
soul-cake!*

*One for Peter, two for Paul,  
Three for Him that made us  
all.*

But as Sting sings, "Go down into the cellar/And see what you can find/If the barrels are not empty/We'll hope that you'll be kind," we get the sense that he may be referring to the depressed town in England where he grew up, or reminding us of the poverty all around us.

In Cook County alone, some 500,000 people each year rely on emergency and supplemental food from area pantries, soup kitchens and charities, according to the Greater Chicago Food Depository.

"It's a winter record as opposed to a Christmas record and I have very ambivalent feelings toward the season," Sting said on Nightline recently, referring to his latest album, "If On a Winter's Night." "It's cold, it's uncomfortable. For a lot of people it's a tough time."

Indeed, the beggar's final yet simple plea in Sting's song suggests he's relying on the goodwill of the season to get by:

*We'll hope that you'll be kind  
With your apple and your pear,  
And we'll come no more a-soulin'  
Til Christmas time next year.*

## WINTER WARMERS

Escape the cold  
by taking the  
spice route



To add warmth to dishes, give these seasonings a spin (clockwise from top left): juniper berries, cinnamon sticks, candied ginger, sumac, nutmeg, cloves, star anise and paprika. They're colorful and versatile; try them out, as chefs do, on meat and in soups, desserts, even cocktails. | RICH HEIN-SUN-TIMES

BY SEANAN FORBES

Come winter, we lift the levers on the thermostats. People with fireplaces develop a serious interest in wood. From coast to coast, chefs break out seasonings that give food a warmth that has nothing to do with temperature.

Among the best chefs, comfort is a theme. Ask Bruce Sherman, chef and partner of North Pond, 2610 N. Cannon, what warms the winter table, and he'll chuckle before giving you a simple answer: "Love." Can't argue with that.

Sherman uses heartier spice mixes in the winter. Some of his changes are simple: using black pepper instead of white. Cinnamon, juniper and cloves appear on the menu.

"The stronger, more assertive flavors are more appropriate to the type of

cooking we do," Sherman says. "Darker meats, more comforting braises, not only fuller flavors but fuller textures . . . big purees, more fat."

What drinks stand up to winter's heat? "The bigger flavors will support bigger wines," Sherman says, "Cabernets, Merlots."

As to beers, Sherman recommends "fuller beers that go to heartier ales or stouts . . . winter brews, thicker and more intense."

With so many skilled brewers in the region, there's no reason not to buy local ales — and what a great reason to visit Hopleaf, 5148 N. Clark, or the Clark Street Ale House, 742 N. Clark.

For warmth on ice, try North Pond's Anjou Autumn cocktail. The drink features pear juice, Pommeau de Normandie, whiskey and housemade cinnamon syrup. It's every bit as warming in a snowstorm as in the first tumble of

leaves from trees — and the syrup is as useful in the kitchen as behind the bar. Drizzle it over baked apples or ice cream, or stir it into Irish coffee.

Sherman suggests using it for poaching — quince, for example — and, after a moment of consideration, adds, "It might be interesting with carrots, to poach or braise." It might indeed.

## Brighter flavors

In the drizzle of Seattle, at Tilt restaurant, Maria Hines uses sumac to brighten the table.

"That's what I'm looking for in the winter," she says, "a little sunshine."

Sumac is versatile. Try it on chicken, in risotto and soup, on broiled steaks and roasted potatoes. The tart, astringent taste will break Chicago's chill.

Johnny Iuzzini, executive pastry chef

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## FROM THE COVER

## SPICE UP WINTER

of New York City's Jean-Georges, makes desserts to suit the seasons. For him, good winter spices are "warm, not as in heat or temperature, but warm as in a warm, fuzzy feeling — spices that warm you from the inside out. It's an emotional warmth," Iuzzini says, harking back to his mom's cooking.

Iuzzini's spice tasting menu features star anise, ginger, cubeb pepper and curry. You'll also find cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves — the stuff of mulled ciders and wine.

**Preserved peppers**

Traditional mulled wine is yours for the asking (and \$10) at the Palmer House Hilton, 17 E. Monroe. Beaujolais, citrus zest, cloves, anise, cinnamon, nutmeg, vanilla and honey — it's a liquid spice trail.

You can mull (heat and spice) almost anything: cider, juice, mead. Buy cider and honey from the farmers market, and grate the nutmeg fresh. Local ingredients make good flavors brilliant.

Nobody knows that better than Josh Adams, chef and owner of June in Peoria Heights. Months before winter, Adams gears up for the cold, preserving, among other things, espelette peppers.

The fruit's floral notes complement its warmth. At June, Adams serves pork shoulder cooked sous vide for 14 languorous hours with preserved espelettes: a taste of summer in the cold heart of the year.

Adams, who finds five-spice comforting, also serves acorn squash soup with five-spice creme fraiche and housemade candied ginger.

The soup is an easy composition in squash, cream, salt and thyme. Taken together with the creme fraiche, five-spice and candied ginger, it's as intricate as a snowflake and as bright as a bonfire.

Adams likes to crush the candied ginger and use it as a seasoning.

"It's really, really good with duck," he says.

**Same spice, new spin**

Andrew Zimmerman, chef of Sepia, 123 N. Jefferson, observes that many hot country recipes incorporate warm and hot spices "for exactly the opposite reason of why we use them. You eat hotter food in a hotter climate to help cool you off."

Same spices, different purpose: It's true of Indian food, Thai, Szechuan, Mexican. Pick a hot country, nick a spice and turn its use around. Hot chocolate's good. Hot chocolate with mole spices is even better. It's warmth building on warmth.

Zimmerman purposefully twists traditions. Carbonnade has brisket, beer and onions. Some recipes use gingerbread to thicken the sauce and, Zimmerman says, "temper some of the bitterness of the beer."

Zimmerman's spin — short ribs with spice bread spaetzle — incorporates old-school spices in a new way. Acids, as bright as sumac, also come into play at Sepia.

**Stick-to-ribs stew**

If medieval spices aren't doing it for you, then look to Eastern Europe.

James Gottwald, who rules the kitchen at Rockit Bar & Grill in River North and Wrigleyville, learned to cook from his grandmother, his babchi. She came from Romania,



Josh Adams, chef and owner of June restaurant in Peoria Heights, uses preserved espelette peppers and candied ginger to warm up dishes on his menu during the winter months.

where winters are a serious business, bringing her traditions with her.

Remembering his childhood winters, Gottwald says, "We had goulash every day." It was adaptable. Whatever was at hand — potatoes, dumplings, onions, parsley root — went into the pot. Paprika added depth of color and spicy warmth.

The stew appeared at every meal. Even in the morning? "Yes," Gottwald grins. "It was



James Gottwald

goulash for breakfast with an egg on top. That was the best. Underneath there would be a buttermilk biscuit, potatoes, pasta — any kind of starch to stick to the guts. You could go out and play in the snow all day after that."

Or, for that matter, survive the morning walk to the train station.

Goulash isn't a standard on Rockit Ranch's menu, but Gottwald plans to add it for a week, to celebrate his grandmother.

And that brings us back to Sherman's observation. If you want to bring warmth to the table, it's all about love.

*Seanan Forbes is a free-lance writer based in New York and London.*

**ANJOU AUTUMN**

MAKES 1 DRINK

- 1½ ounces Jameson whiskey
- 1½ ounces pear cider or juice
- ½ ounce Pommeau de Normandie
- ½ ounce cinnamon syrup (recipe follows)
- Coarsely ground dried apple chips (optional)

Pour all liquid ingredients into an ice-filled cocktail shaker, cover and shake until chilled. Strain into a chilled martini glass. If desired, garnish with a pinch of dried apple chips.

**CINNAMON SYRUP**

MAKES ½ CUP (ENOUGH FOR 8 DRINKS)

- ½ cinnamon stick, broken
- 3 orange slices
- 2 whole cloves
- ¼ cup sugar
- ½ cup water

In a heatproof container, muddle cinnamon, orange and cloves. Set aside.

Combine sugar and water. Bring to boil and pour over cinnamon mixture. Cover with plastic wrap off the heat and let steep 30 minutes.

Return mixture to boil, then immediately remove, cover and steep for additional 30 minutes.

Strain, chill and reserve.

*Bruce Sherman, North Pond*

**ACORN SQUASH SOUP WITH FIVE-SPICE CREME FRAICHE AND CANDIED GINGER**

MAKES 10 TO 12 SERVINGS

**FIVE-SPICE CREME FRAICHE**

- 1 cup heavy cream
- ⅓ cup buttermilk
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons five-spice powder

**CANDIED GINGER**

- 1 large knob ginger root
- 2 cups sugar
- 2 cups water

**ACORN SQUASH SOUP**

- 4 medium-size acorn squash, halved and seeded
- Fresh thyme sprigs
- 4 cups heavy cream
- Sea salt

For five-spice creme fraiche: Combine the heavy cream, buttermilk and lemon juice; leave out at room temperature for 48 hours.

Stir in the five-spice powder. Keep chilled until ready to serve. (If it becomes too thick, add a little cream and stir very well.)

For candied ginger: Peel and slice ginger root paper thin. Bring a quart of water to a boil and submerge ginger root for 30 seconds. Drain ginger and repeat the process three more times, using fresh water each time.

Combine sugar and water in a saucepan and simmer until dissolved and liquid turns golden.

Add the ginger to the simple syrup mixture and simmer for 2 to 3 minutes. Remove ginger and place in a dehydrator overnight, or in the oven on the lowest setting or the warming drawer.

Break candied ginger into small



pieces with your hands. Store in a dry, cool place.

(This makes more candied ginger than you'll need for the soup, but it's worth it to make the full batch. The crisp ginger chips are tempting nibbles and would be tasty additions to sundaes or custards. Save the leftover syrup and use in cooking, cocktails or as a spicy sweetener.)

For the soup: Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Place squash cut side up on a baking sheet and scatter a couple of thyme sprigs on each half. Cover squash with aluminum foil. Roast for 1 hour and 15 minutes.

Remove thyme sprigs, scoop out flesh from the skins and place in a

blender or food processor. Puree, slowly adding heavy cream until a smooth, creamy texture is achieved.

Pass puree through a fine metal strainer to remove any lumps. Salt to taste.

To serve: Ladle soup into individual bowls or one large serving bowl. Drizzle with cooled creme fraiche and sprinkle on a ½ teaspoon of candied ginger per serving.

*Josh Adams, June*

**Nutrition facts per serving:** 535 calories, 37 g fat, 23 g saturated fat, 137 mg cholesterol, 52 g carbohydrates, 3 g protein, 66 mg sodium, 2 g fiber

**BABCHI'S HUNGARIAN GOULASH**

This recipe comes from Maria Boicesco, grandmother of Rockit chef James Gottwald. "This is not a dish that can be rushed," Gottwald says. After a day or two (if it lasts that long), it makes a hearty breakfast. As a morning dish, serve it over toasted bread with a fried duck egg on top.

MAKES 4 TO 6 SERVINGS

- 1 pound beef shank, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- Black pepper
- 1 heaping tablespoon Hungarian paprika (hot or mild)
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 medium to large onion, julienned
- ¼ teaspoon ground caraway seed
- 1 garlic clove, chopped
- 1 bell pepper, medium dice
- 1 stalk celery, medium dice
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 tomatoes, large dice
- 2 to 3 cups water, beef stock or chicken stock (enough to barely cover)

Season the meat with salt, black pepper and paprika. Set meat aside at room temperature, to allow it to absorb the seasonings.

Heat a heavy-gauge pot on the stove. (Traditionally, Babchi would cook it in a Dutch oven over a wood-burning fire.)

Heat the oil. (Butter or lard may be used, if you prefer.) Add the onions and cook over medium heat

until lightly brown, not dark or crispy. Pull the pan off the heat and add the meat. Stir well and let the flavors get happy.

Place back onto medium heat and lightly toast the paprika-laced meat. The paprika can burn fast, so turn down the heat or pull it off the fire and stir constantly. This should take 10 to 15 minutes.

Next, add the caraway and cook for 2 more minutes. (Caraway is not always used and not necessary, but it's a nice spice if you have it.) Add the garlic, bell pepper, celery, bay leaf and tomatoes. Cook for 5 minutes, then add water and bring to a boil.

Reduce heat and slowly simmer for 3 hours, or until the meat is fork tender. You may need to add more water. You also may cover the pot; it's your choice. The collagen in the meat will lend viscosity to the broth.

Serve over buttered noodles or spaetzle.

Note: There are many variations. Parsnips, carrots, potatoes can be added halfway through the cooking process. Boicesco was very fond of using parsley root. Visually similar to parsnip, parsley root is sweeter.

Half of the water can be replaced with beer or white wine. It all depends on what you have on hand.

*Maria Boicesco*

**Nutrition facts per serving:** 301 calories, 13 g fat, 3 g saturated fat, 48 mg cholesterol, 16 g carbohydrates, 30 g protein, 745 mg sodium, 3 g fiber