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Chef Francesco Valentini will prepare a Tuscan-style dinner for Hawaii Opera Theatre's "Ballo Italiano." The menu includes an antipasto course, followed by the grilled veal chop that Valentini is holding and a chestnut purée dessert, below.

'Ballo' to benefit opera

By Betty Shimabukuro

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CHEF Francesco Valentini is a bit concerned that the idea of an authentic Italian dinner will have people thinking "five pounds of spaghetti and meatballs."

He's not overly concerned, though, as "Ballo Italiano," Hawaii Opera Theatre's fundraising gala Nov. 12, offers him a chance to promote his mission before an audience of 700 diners. That mission being to disavow the notion that Italian food is all about giant plates of pasta drowning in sauce and burning with garlic.

"Little by little, one customer at a time — hopefully, I am trying," Valentini says.

He's been working for several months with the Sheraton staff to craft a three-course meal that reflects the simplicity of style and purity of ingredients drawn from his Tuscan heritage. Valentini was raised in the town of Sienna in Tuscany, but is now a personal chef in Honolulu, specializing in Italian menus for exclusive private parties.

His menu begins with an elaborate antipasto course, followed by Bistecca Di Vitello alla



Florentina con Porcini e Patate (Grilled Veal Loin Chop with Porcini Mushroom Sauce and Roasted Rosemary Potato). Dessert will be a chestnut purée with cream and Amaretto.

"Ballo Italiano" heralds the 2006 opera season and helps bridge the gap between ticket sales and the actual cost of putting on three operas a year (ticket revenue covers just 40 percent of costs). The event will include a silent auction that includes many Italian gift, dining and travel packages. Among items up for bid: two nights at a Tuscan farmhouse.

To pave the way for next week's dinner, Valentini offers this simplified version of his entrée course. He suggests finding veal chops at Costco. The chops look a lot like rack of lamb, he says, with each about 1-1/2 inches thick.

Bistecca di Vitello alla Fiorentina

4 veal loin chops, about 1/2 pound each
2 tablespoons minced Italian parsley, garnish

>> Marinade:

1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

2 tablespoons minced fresh rosemary
1 tablespoon minced fresh sage

1/4 teaspoon black pepper

>> Porcini sauce:

1-1/2 cups dried porcini mushroom

3 tablespoons minced red onion

1 tablespoon butter

1 cup vegetable stock

Salt and pepper, to taste

Combine marinade ingredients. Marinate veal at least 2 hours.

To make sauce: Soak dried porcini in 1-1/2 cups very hot water at least 30 minutes.

Sauté onion in butter until

BALLO ITALIANO

Benefit gala: Nov. 12 (cocktails at 6 p.m., dinner at 6:30 p.m., dancing until 11:30 p.m.)

Place: Sheraton Waikiki Hawaii Ballroom

Cost: \$300; up to \$10,000 for tables for 10
596-7372, Ext. 14

translucent, then add softened porcini with water. Cover and cook over medium heat about 5 minutes.

Add stock and cook an additional 10 minutes.

Purée in food processor. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Remove veal from refrigerator, add pinch of salt and let sit at room temperature about 45 minutes.

Preheat stove-top grill or barbecue. Grill veal about 3 minute each side for medium-rare. Remove from heat

Cover with foil and let rest about 4 minutes.

Serve veal topped porcini puree, sprinkle with Italian parsley.

Approximate nutritional analysis, per serving (not including salt to taste): 500 calories, 36 g total fat, 7 g saturated fat, 165 mg cholesterol, 330 mg sodium, 4 g carbohydrate, 1 g fiber, 2 g sugar, 29 g protein.