



DIANA HELFAND

Authentic Italian cuisine will be among the highlights of Hawaii Opera Theatre's annual sold-out Ballo Italiano benefit, inspired by the upcoming all-Italian opera season.

Chef Francesco Valentini, one of the collaborating chefs for the event, says the secret to success in creating authentic Italian dishes is simplicity and freshness.

Born and raised in Siena, a historic city located in the heart of one of Italy's most celebrated regions, Tuscany, Francesco is a full-time personal Italian chef. He says growing up in his family's countryside farmhouse most influenced his approach to his authentic Italian cuisine. "I have still fresh in my

memory the olive groves, the lush vineyards and the horses running down the silky Tuscan hills," he explains. "In my cuisine I am reviving all the simple, genuine flavors I grew up with. I am rediscovering Italian traditional recipes and blending them with new contemporary gourmet tastes to bring to the table Tuscany with all its charm, and a touch of Italian creativity."

Here he shares with



Macedonia Di Frutta Con Chianti

MidWeek readers two authentic recipes — low in fat and cholesterol — as the final course to complement any Italian meal.

MACEDONIA DI FRUTTA CON CHIANTI *Mixed Fruit Salad With*

A Sweet Taste Of Tuscany

Chianti Wine

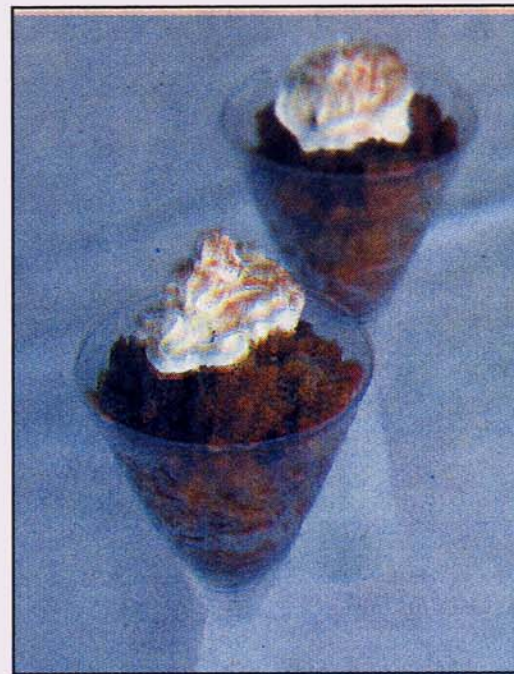
- 1 cup **peaches**, 1/2-inch dice
- 1 cup **banana**, 1/2-inch dice
- 1 cup **pear**, 1/2-inch dice
- 1 cup **red or green seedless grapes** (cut in half)
- 1 cup **strawberries** (slice in 1/4-inch pieces)
- 1 cup **orange** (peel, cut in half, and slice in 1/4-inch pieces)
- 2 cups **Chianti wine**
- 1/4 cup fresh **lemon juice**
- 5 tablespoons **sugar** (if the wine mixture is not sweet enough, add more)
- fresh **mint** (for garnish)

Mix all ingredients together in a large bowl and marinate in refrigerator for at least two hours. Serve in glass cups with the wine sauce; garnish with mint leaves with stem.

Makes eight servings.

GRANITA DI CAFFE CON AMARETTO E PANNA *Espresso Granita With Amaretto And Whipped Cream*

- 4 cups **espresso coffee**
- 2/3 cup **sugar**
- 1 1/2 tablespoons **Amaretto liquor** (optional)
- splash of fresh **whipped**



Granita Di Caffè Con Amaretto E Panna

cream (for garnish)

In a large bowl, mix the hot espresso, Amaretto and sugar. Pour the mixture into a glass 9-by-13-inch baking dish and freeze.

Using a fork, stir the ice into the center of the baking

dish. Continue freezing and stirring every 30 minutes. Total freezing time is about three to four hours, until the mixture is fluffy and crystallized. Cover with foil and keep in the freezer until you are ready to serve.

Frozen large martini glasses would make a beautiful presentation. Top the granita with some whipped cream.

Makes eight servings.

(Diana Helfand, author of "Hawaii Light and Healthy" and "The Best of Heart-y Cooking," has taught nutrition in the Kapiolani Community College culinary arts program.)