

# An operetta about Julia Child, with servings of chocolate cake at the end? It's happening at The Rendezvous | Art Outings

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Welcome back to Art Outings — an occasional [series](#) in which writers for The Seattle Times try out local cultural happenings paired with drinks and food. In this installment, Seattle Times Pacific NW Magazine columnist and freelancer [Tantri Wija](#) and arts freelancer [Gemma Alexander](#) attend “Bon Appétit!: The Julia Child Operetta” at [The Rendezvous](#), where family stories about Julia Child combine with opera, and the result is a (literal) chocolate cake.

### The setting

**Tantri:** Walking into The Rendezvous is like stepping onto a faded theater set, musty and eerily authentic, with remnants of the trappings of the Roaring '20s flashing through the gloom in the carved bar, the embossed wallpaper and the dramatic chandelier. The whole effect is made all the more trippy by the strange, housepet-themed outsider art on the walls, and I half-expected to turn around and see Gloria Swanson from “Sunset Boulevard” moldering picturesquely in her dusty sequins in one of the high-backed leather booths.

**Gemma:** At the same time, I half-expected to see the flannel-clad cast of “Singles” lounging in those booths. The restaurant and adjacent theater are classic Seattle shoebox venues, and the gone-to-seed feeling is very evocative of early '90s Belltown. Grunge bands used to perform on the same stage where Julia Child is now operatically baking cake. Somehow, those two uses of the stage don't seem incongruous — there is something very Seattle about both performances.

### The drinks

**Gemma:** It was hard to pick a cocktail, because they all sounded like really weird, incompatible flavor combinations. I finally settled on the Late for Tea (\$12), which turned out to be really good. Whiskey, lemon and mint is a generally safe bet, but I had to look up the final ingredient — Kashmiri Amaro. It's a bitter made from Assam black tea and a mix of Italian and chai spices.



The Late for Tea cocktail at The Rendezvous. (Tantri Wija)

**Tantri:** I had the Chai Mule (\$9) partially as an experiment because I was convinced none of the flavors on the somewhat haphazard-seeming cocktail menu would work, but was pleasantly surprised. The chai spices were subtle and enhanced the ginger and lime rather than overwhelming it. I also sipped Gemma's Late for Tea, which turned out to be a well-balanced sonata of spiciness.

## The dinner

**Gemma:** We took our time with dinner in the restaurant before the show, but saw they were clearing plates in the theater when we took our seats for the performance, and we could have eaten during the show if we'd wanted to. There's a three-course prix fixe

dinner for \$45 (the items on the prix fixe menu are also available a la carte if you don't want all three). The menu for the dinner changes, depending on which chef is there that night. On the night we went, everyone got the same first and second courses, which were ratatouille and polenta. There was a choice of main — either chicken or cauliflower. I got the cauliflower in red pepper coulis with salsa verde and hummus to dip it in. It was tasty but still felt like a large serving of a side dish. The polenta, on the other hand, which sandwiched cheese, greens and mushrooms inside, was as rich and satisfying a main course as you could want.

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**Tantri:** I had the poulet chasseur (aka hunter's chicken, aka chicken cacciatore, \$18 when ordered a la carte), which arrived in a dish with ample tomato sauce, but, sadly, no starch to soak it up. The chicken itself was buttery and soft, everything chicken should be, but the dish was a bit staid and fusty — actually, all the food was. Or maybe, given the evening's entertainment, it was intended to be vintage. If so, bravo.

### The show

**Gemma:** The one-act operetta by Lee Hoiby casts soprano Anne Allgood as Julia Child baking a chocolate cake in an episode of her cooking show. Sung in English, the arias about melting chocolate and testing for doneness aren't going to give Verdi any competition, but they do leave a lot of room for acting. Allgood sings over an electric mixer and winkingly engages in a bunch of Julia-isms like licking the spoon before she's done stirring with it and drinking wine while the cake bakes. It's cute and funny, and goes on just long enough.



Anne Allgood in "Bon Appétit!: The Julia Child Operetta" at The Jewelbox Theater at The Rendezvous. (Diana Cohen)

Bookending the operetta are monologues by Julia Child Prud'homme, the great-niece and namesake of chef Julia Child. Prud'homme references the "[Saturday Night Live](#)" sketch about Julia Child (which her aunt apparently memorized) but with all the singing about food, "Bon Appétit!" felt more like the "Chopping Broccoli" sketch to me. That might sound dismissive, but I loved that sketch.

**Tantri:** This is a show that only makes sense if you've seen a fair amount of "The French Chef," Julia Child's groundbreaking cooking show that ran from 1963-1973 and introduced Americans to the idea that food did not have to come from a can, and should involve as much butter as possible. If you have seen the show, Allgood's performance is delightful, her broad faces and droll winks crafting the already-fraught activity of baking an egg-risen chocolate cake into high drama. And in case you forgot how delightful Julia Child was, the show will remind you; a half-hour after I got home I was checking out Julia videos on YouTube and lusting after her comically oversized whisks.



Julia Child Prud'homme, actor and great-niece of chef Julia Child, dishes up memories of her great aunt in "Bon Appétit!: The Julia Child Operetta." (Diana Cohen)

The Prud'homme monologues were sweet, although I was a bit befuddled by the mind-bending meta-ness of casting someone who is related to (and the namesake of) the subject of an opera in said opera to comment on said opera. Prud'homme at times also seemed to get teary as she spoke, which made me squirm — but I'm a lizard who hates feelings, so to normal people it likely resonated as heartfelt.

**Gemma:** When I first heard of "Bon Appétit!," the "remembrances by a relative" aspect struck me as awkward, too. But then I realized, if you are a performer named after an already famous relative, you almost have to use that as material.

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## The cake

**Gemma:** Chocolate cake is included with the theater ticket. At the end of the show, everyone gets one of those tiny personal cakes that restaurants always serve instead of cake slices these days. It's supposed to be baked from the actual recipe in the show. My favorite line from the operetta was, "See that lovely soft texture, almost like a soufflé. But it's nicer than a soufflé, because it doesn't fall." I don't know if the cake was soufflé-like, but it's chocolate cake, so I have no complaints.



Chocolate cake, based on the recipe featured in the show "Bon Appétit! The Julia Child Operetta," is served to audience members at the end of the show. (Tantri Wija)

**Tantri:** The cake was a scrumptious way to end the event (I can be induced to go to anything if it involves free cake) although it would have been a lot more intimate and fun to be served slices, some of them perhaps a bit jagged and uneven, with crumbs on the plate. Allgood and Prud'homme spent so much energy breaking down that fourth wall with the family stories and egg-throwing; those little pre-prepped restaurant pastries built it back up again.

## The overall experience

**Gemma:** If an operetta about baking a cake just sounds weird to you, this show probably won't change your mind. But if you think it sounds like fun to hear Julia Child sing a cake recipe and then eat said cake, you're right. For me, the combination of The Rendezvous' sort of stage set décor and the quirkiness of singing about food was a little nostalgic. It's not stylish and social media-worthy at all. It's the kind of art outing I thought Seattle didn't offer anymore — a little bit homespun and not afraid to be silly; far from perfect, but plenty of fun.

**Tantri:** Nothing about this show made sense on paper, but in practice everyone (including me) had fun, and Allgood's performance was well worth the price of admission. It was also refreshing, in an era when so much art is slicked-up and commoditized with "optimal run times" and "deliverables" in mind, that someone would simply come up with a funny idea for an evening's entertainment and leave it at that. It was more of a musical skit than an operetta, like a live version of something millions would watch on YouTube, the show unafraid to let the material stretch only as far as it would go and then ending at exactly the right time, on a sweet note.

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"Bon Appétit! The Julia Child Operetta," 8 p.m. Mondays in July; The Jewelbox Theater at The Rendezvous, 2322 Second Ave., Seattle; \$28 (cake included; dinner and beverages extra); 206-441-5823, [therendezvous.rocks](http://therendezvous.rocks)

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