

11 nominations make for a most happy 'Fela!'

Tony nods for book writer, choreographer and director thrill Jones

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Bill T. Jones was choreographing a new piece at Bard College up the Hudson yesterday when producer Steve Hendel called with the news: "Fela!" their Broadway musical about Nigerian, composer, musician

and activist Fela Kuti, was nominated for 11 Tony Awards yesterday.

The revival of the Harvey Fierstein-Jerry Herman musical "La Cage Aux Folles" also garnered 11 nominations.

Jones' work as book writer, director and choreographer on "Fela!" was recognized with nominations.

"I was telling someone I don't take good news well," Jones said with a laugh. "I'm working on a new piece to premiere in Venice in June and suddenly this happens, like confetti raining out of the sky and the

phone is ringing. It's difficult to be in rehearsal and at the same time thinking about 'Fela!' but it's a wonderful problem."

The week of the Tonys will find Jones typically busy, leaving to load "Another Evening: Venice" into the theater, rehearsing it for a day and presenting it June 11, then jetting back to New York in time to take his seat at Radio City Music Hall.

Jones lives in Valley Cottage; Hendel in Larchmont, just two of the



Ruth Hendel, Bill T. Jones, center, and Steve Hendel stand together after a September preview of "Fela!" The Broadway musical was nominated for 11 Tony Awards.

File photo by Carucha L. Meuse
The Journal News

SEE TONYS, 2B

Corn fungus? That's right, corn fungus

Mexican delicacy is packed with flavor and nutritional benefits

Martha Mendoza
The Associated Press

It's now an established scientific fact: Smut is GOOD for you. Corn smut, that is.

For years, scientists have assumed that huitlacoche (weet-la-kochee) — a gnarly, gray-black corn fungus long-savored in Mexico — had nutritional values similar to those of the corn on which it grew. But test results just published in the journal Food Chemistry reveal that an infection that U.S. farmers and crop scientists have spent millions trying to eradicate is packed with unique proteins, minerals and other nutritional goodies.

And here's a bonus: agro-economists have found it can sell for more than the corn it ruins.

"We had no idea huitlacoche could actually synthesize significant nutrients that don't even exist in corn," says Octavio Paredes-Lopez, one of Mexico's leading food scientists.

"Who cares about the nutritional value? The flavors are amazing!" said Steve Sando, a grinning Napa Valley epicurean whose booming Rancho Gordo speciality food company grows and sells heirloom beans, corn and other indigenous "New World" ingredients.

He launched an expedition (or was that a vacation?) in Mexico in mid-April, researching the possibilities of adding huitlacoche to his product line in the lucrative, gourmet haven of Northern California.

We're talking about an epicurean wonder here, an exquisite delicacy both nutty and earthy with a hint of fruity sweetness.

When huitlacoche attacks corn, the insidious-looking pustules that bubble up don't just force the husk to explode, it forces the metabolic process inside the cob to change, creating new, healthier nutrients.

Take lysine, one of those "essential amino acids" that the body requires but can't manufacture. We need it to fight infections and strengthen bones. Bodybuilders pound lysine when they want to build muscle, and aestheticians recommend it to keep skin looking young.

Corn has virtually no lysine; huitlacoche is loaded with it. It also is packed with more beta-glucens — the soluble fiber that gives oatmeal its well-known cholesterol-cutting power — than, well, oatmeal.

Sando began his hunt in Xochim-



Photos by Tania Savayan/The Journal News

A sample of the menu, including vegetarian dishes, sits on a table at Lalibela in Mount Kisco, the first Ethiopian restaurant to open in the region. **Below:** Ethiopia's coffee ceremony is offered at Lalibela.



See video from Lalibela with this article at LoHud.com.



SEE LALIBELA, 3B

LALIBELA satisfies the senses

The region's first Ethiopian restaurant brightens Mount Kisco

Liz Johnson
ewjohnson@lohud.com

With spicy stews that tingle your tongue, tangy bread that tickles your taste buds, and refreshing salads and salsas that liven the plate with a big splash of color, a meal at the new Lalibela restaurant in Mount Kisco is a celebration of the senses.

It is the first Ethiopian restaurant in the region, and it opened on South Moger Avenue last week.

Selamawit Tesfaye, the owner, says opening the restaurant is something she's wanted to do for a long time.

"I got the chance to come here," she says. "And where better than in America to make your dreams come true?"

She may well be right, but her first challenge will be getting Americans to understand a cuisine that's little known in this region. There are a number of Ethiopian restaurants in the Washington, D.C., area, but in New York there are only a handful.

"(Ethiopian cuisine) hasn't caught on (in New York) and I don't see it as a great



Share photos of your food!

Whether you're out to eat or cooking at home, we want to see your breakfasts, lunches and dinners. Above, Italian Cheesecake, with hints of fresh lemon and orange and a fresh raspberry coulis, submitted by Phyllis Kirigin. Upload your photos at:

LOHUD.COM/SNAP

Moms Like Me beauty giveaway

It's almost Mother's Day — you didn't think we'd let the day pass us by without a few surprises for Hudson Valley moms, did you? Log on through Saturday and enter for your chance to win spa goodies and treatments from Weleda Store & Spa in Palisades.

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Best of Small Bites

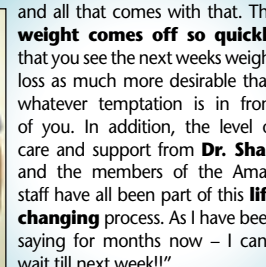
Food editor Liz Johnson is taking suggestions for your favorite restaurants in categories from cocktails to dessert. Visit her Small Bites blog to weigh in:

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-Katie O, Age 49, 100 lbs Lighter!

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'Top Chef' judge wins top chef award

Beard Foundation honors nation's culinary talent

J.M. Hirsch

The Associated Press

"Top Chef" judge Tom Colicchio passed a quickfire challenge of his own Monday when he was named the nation's top chef by the James Beard Foundation.

Colicchio, whose numerous restaurants include Craft, Craftsteak and the recently opened Colicchio & Sons in New York, was named outstanding chef during an awards ceremony that is considered the Oscars of the food world.

It's an honor for which he'd been a finalist seven other times since 2002, the same year the organization named Craft the nation's best new restaurant.

Though Colicchio drew many accolades early in his career, he rose to prominence in 1994 when he and partner Danny Meyer opened Gramercy Tavern, which earned Colicchio three stars from The New York Times and several Beard awards, including best chef in New York City in 2000 and outstanding restaurant service in 2001.

Colicchio's cookbook, "Think Like a Chef," earned him a Beard cookbook award

James Beard winners

The winners of the 2010 James Beard Foundation Awards for restaurants and chefs include:

Best New Restaurant: Marea in New York (chef-owner Michael White)

Outstanding Chef Award: Tom Colicchio of Craft in New York

Outstanding Pastry Chef Award: Nicole Plue of Redd in Yountville, Calif.

Outstanding Restaurant Award: Daniel in New York (chef-owner Daniel Boulud)

Outstanding Restaurateur Award: Keith McNally of Balthazar, Lucky Strike, Minetta Tavern, Morandi, Pastis, Pravda and Schiller's Liquor Bar

Outstanding Service Award: Alinea in Chicago (chef-owner Grant Achatz)

Outstanding Wine and Spirits Professional Award: John Shafer and Doug Shafer of Shafer Vineyards in Napa, Calif.

Outstanding Wine Service

Award: Jean Georges in New York (wine director Bernard Sun)

Rising Star Chef of the Year Award: Timothy Hollingsworth of The French Laundry in Yountville, Calif.

REGIONAL CHEFS

Great Lakes: Koren Grieveson of Avec in Chicago

Mid-Atlantic: Jeff Michaud of Osteria in Philadelphia

Midwest: Alexander Roberts of Restaurant Alma in Minneapolis

New York City: Daniel Humm of Eleven Madison Park

Northeast: Clark Frasier and Mark Gaier of Arrows in Ogunquit, Maine

Northwest: Jason Wilson of Crush in Seattle

Pacific: David Kinch of Manresa in Los Gatos, Calif.

South: Michael Schwartz of Michael's Genuine Food & Drink in Miami

Southeast: Sean Brock of McCrady's in Charleston, S.C.

Southwest: Claude Le Tohic of Joel Robuchon at MGM Grand Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas

in 2001. More recently, he's become known for his role as the lead judge on the Bravo television series, "Top Chef."

The Beard Foundation also named its top regional chefs around the country, including Daniel Humm of Eleven Madison Park for New York City (con-



Peter X. Kelly

sidered a separate region) and Clark Frasier and Mark Gaier of Arrows in Ogunquit, Maine, who beat out chef Peter X. Kelly of Xaviars at Piermont for the Northeast.

The award for outstanding restaurant went to Daniel Boulud's Daniel restaurant in New York, one

of only a handful to get four stars from The New York Times. Boulud, who has restaurants around the world and is known for his contemporary French cuisine, has won multiple previous Beard awards, including best restaurant service for Daniel in 2009 and outstanding chef in 1994.

The James Beard awards honor those who follow in the footsteps of Beard, considered the dean of American cooking when he died in 1985. The awards ceremony was held in New York, where the Beard Foundation is based.

This year's outstanding service award went to Chicago's Alinea, where chef-owner Grant Achatz is known for his ultramodern, often deconstructionist approach to cooking. He is considered at the forefront of the so-called molecular gastronomy movement. Achatz received the Beard Foundation's outstanding chef award in 2008.

The outstanding restaurateur award went to Keith McNally, whose New York restaurants include Balthazar, Minetta Tavern and Pastis. Best new restaurant went to chef Michael White's Marea in New York, which serves the seafood-rich cuisines of Italy's coastal regions.

Rising star chef of the year went to Timothy Hollingsworth at Yountville, Calif.'s much-lauded The French Laundry.



File photo/The Associated Press
A woman prepares a huitlacoche quesadilla in a market in Mexico City, Mexico.

CORN: Farmers turn bane into opportunity

CONTINUED FROM 1B

ilco, a community on Mexico City's south side, where huitlacoche-munching Aztecs first built floating fields atop rafts of wood and soil — and where the chaotic market smells of garlic, bananas and raw meat. His intrepid leader was cultural culinary tour guide Ruth Alegria, a bilingual chef who coordinates the International Association of Culinary Professionals in Mexico.

There they find baskets overflowing with clumps of huitlacoche.

"Amazing, beautiful, wow," said Sando, delightedly turning over a handful of huitlacoche, which quickly stains his fingers black. He talks to proprietors, examines the fresher, bluish-white cloudy carbuncles selling for \$1.45 per pound and the ashier, aging ones, a few hours older, discounted to sell quickly for \$1.18 per pound before they get slimy.

"It's gorgeous today," says Alegria. "My mouth is watering!"

They make their way to food stands where they savor steaming, thick corn patties filled with chopped huitlacoche, onions and corn kernels washed down with mugs of hot coffee.

Warm and delicious, this exquisite meal — eaten today on greasy paper amid the grimy chaos of the bustling marketplace — would get rave reviews on a china platter at the world's finest restaurants, the connoisseurs agree.

Indeed it has, periodically, appeared on some of the finest menus, including once at the James Beard House in New York City. Other chefs include it as a speciality on the rare days they manage to obtain some: There's huitlacoche stuffed chicken breasts at La Cocina Michoacana in Cedar Park, Texas; huitlacoche quesadillas at Tu y Yo in Boston; and at La Casita Mexicana in Los Angeles, they blend the huitlacoche into a tamale masa, then stuff the entire tamale into a large, roasted chili.

The name huitlacoche (also cuitlacoche) comes from two indigenous words: cuitlatl (excrement) and cochi (sleeping). In the U.S., farmers call huitlacoche "corn smut" in polite company and "devil's corn" among themselves. The fast-moving blight can wipe out 5 to 10 percent of a crop and the black dusty spores gum up harvesting equipment. Corn growers, along with the federal government, have spent millions

of dollars eradicating it and developing smut-resistant strains, with only partial success.

Even Sando has tossed blighted sections of his organic heirloom corn fields. Tasting what was once a bane to his business, he now sees new opportunity: "I am SO excited! I am definitely going to give this a try. It would be easy to infect one of my fields and start growing this," said Sando.

Researchers at University of Wisconsin convinced a local organic farmer in 2007 to deliberately infect a field of corn with the fungus, and then harvest and sell it.

Their findings: An ear of huitlacoche costs about 41 cents to produce and sells for about \$1.20. By comparison, an ear of sweet corn costs about less than a dime, with profits of just a few cents per ear.

Sando has few competitors in the fresh market, even though gourmet chefs pay \$20 or more per pound for a chance to add the delicacy to their menus. But there are several Hispanic food companies, including San Marcos and Del Fuerte, who sell canned huitlacoche in the U.S.

"Our consumers are either of Mexican origin, or foodies who have traveled in Mexico and enjoy the taste," said Joseph Perez, senior vice president of New Jersey-based Goya Foods, the largest, Hispanic-owned food company in the U.S.

Huitlacoche is a niche product, overshadowed by beans and chilies, salsas and sauces. But Perez said sales are steady — and profitable.

Still, if fresh huitlacoche has an image problem, the canned product — slimy, black and gooey — has even more to overcome.

"It's safe to say this is the first time I've ever paid for an infection," wrote "The Sneeze," a blogger who bravely sampled canned huitlacoche recently for his "Steve, Don't Eat It!" website.

His reaction? "So, how does huitlacoche taste? Does it matter?? LOOK AT IT! I guess it would be fair to say it doesn't taste as truly horrible as it looks. The flavor is elusive and difficult to describe, but I'll try: 'Kinda yucky.'"

Sando knows he's got an aesthetic challenge, if not culinary.

"The real question is how to market this. People might freak out at the sight, I mean, it's kind of like this grayish, black brain," he said, "but if we can get them to taste it, we'll have them."

LALIBELA: Ethiopian cuisine has arrived

CONTINUED FROM 1B

big trend," says Bret Thorn, food editor of Nation's Restaurant News, a trade publication. "But I think in general Americans are a lot more experimental now than they were 10 or 15 years ago. That means that different concepts have more of a chance than they would have earlier."

The first custom: No cutlery. No forks, no knives, no spoons. Instead, food is served on top of a giant crepe-like, fermented bread called injera. You tear off small pieces of the bread, then use them to pick up your food.

The second custom: Communal eating. Like in Indian and Asian restaurants, you and your tablemates will choose a few dishes, then all of them will be served on one big platter.

The foods are familiar — beef, chicken, lamb and vegetables are on the menu — but some of the spices are indigenous to Africa. Ethiopian cuisine is known for two spice mixtures: berbere, which is made with ginger, garlic, cloves, coriander, allspice, rue berries, ajwain black peppercorns and salt; and mitmita, which is made with African birdseye chilis, garlic, cardamom, cloves and salt. Neither is burning hot — they just give you a sense of spice and depth.

It's these spices — coupled with the sour flavor and spongy texture of the bread, and the sometimes unappealing color of the stews — that makes Ethiopian cuisine polarizing, says Thorn. You either love it or you hate it.

"They use clarified butter and make a lot of rich stews that are similar to the way



Tania Savayan/The Journal News

"I got the chance to come here. And where better than in America to make your dreams come true?" says Selamawit Tesfaye, owner of Lalibela restaurant in Mount Kisco.

curries are made," he says. "But the tastes are even less familiar than Indian food. It doesn't have that cumin-curry flavor."

It may not be familiar, but — from the one meal I had there — it is very tasty. Nunu Wegbezaw, the chef, cooked at The Ethiopian Restaurant in Manhattan. On her menu are wats (pronounced wets), which are like stews, made of beef, lentils and peas. They are spiced with berbere. The signature dish is called Doro Wat, and it's chicken legs cooked with onion, ginger,

garlic, butter and berbere spice. It's served with a hard-boiled egg.

There are also kitfo dishes, which are more like the Thai dish of larb: chopped meat sauteed with spices, usually the mitmita blend. The menu also has several salads: the avocado with onion and tomato is like a terrific Mexican salsa, all zippy and fresh with citrus.

Tesfaye came here when she was 15. She followed her sister, Yodit Tesfaye Walker, who came by herself at age 17.

If you go

Lalibela Ethiopian Cuisine, 37 S. Moger Ave., Mount Kisco. 914-864-1343.

lalibelamountkisco.com

Open for lunch and dinner daily.

"When they get a visa to go to America, it's like, OK, we have to make it happen," says Selamawit. So the Tesfaye family contacted a neighbor's daughter who was a nanny for a family in Elmsford, and asked if Yodit could stay there while she got settled. The family generously agreed.

Yodit went on to become a graphic designer. Selamawit ended up working design, too, but at Kohl's department store from 2006 to 2010. She did graphics and set up displays before she moved on to work in bookkeeping.

At the same time, she was also working at Crabtree's Kittle House in Chappaqua. She was bartender, waitress, hostess and then was promoted to maitre d' for parties.

"She's a lovely person, an elegant and wonderful lady," says John Crabtree, the owner. "She really understands the principle of hospitality. It just comes naturally to her."

Tesfaye has painted Lalibela a golden color, and set up simple wooden tables. She decorated the walls with a few photos of Ethiopia, including one of Lalibela, the holy city the restaurant is named for.

"I just like the name and the place," she says. And the word is simple to say, she says, and easy to understand.

And, after one visit to the restaurant, the customs of Ethiopian cuisine will be, too.

Check out how to create a dazzling paella dish that's quick and easy, too

Linda Gassenheimer

McClatchy Newspapers

Paella, probably the best-known dish of Spanish origin, is as beautiful as it is popular.

I remember a Spanish friend taking an entire morning to shop for the very freshest ingredients and then working the rest of the day getting everything ready.

Since most of us don't have the luxury of spending a day making one dish, I created this quick and easy paella.

In Valencia, the home of paella, short-grain Valencia rice is used. It gives the texture and flavor needed for the dish.

Serve it with a tossed green salad.

Helpful hints:

■ Boneless, skinless chicken breasts can be used instead of thighs.

■ Arborio rice can be used instead of Valencia. If neither is available, use long grain white rice.

■ Turmeric or bijol can be used instead of saffron.

Shopping list

Here are the ingredients you'll need to make this recipe.

To buy: 1 package frozen diced onion, 3/4 pound boneless, skinless chicken thighs, 2 large tomatoes, 1 package Valencia rice, 1 jar/can roasted red pepper, 1 package frozen peas and 1 small package saffron strands.

Staples: Olive oil, garlic, fat-free, low-salt chicken broth, salt and black peppercorns.

Countdown:

- Prepare ingredients.
- Make paella.

This meal contains 627 calories with 21 percent of calories from fat.

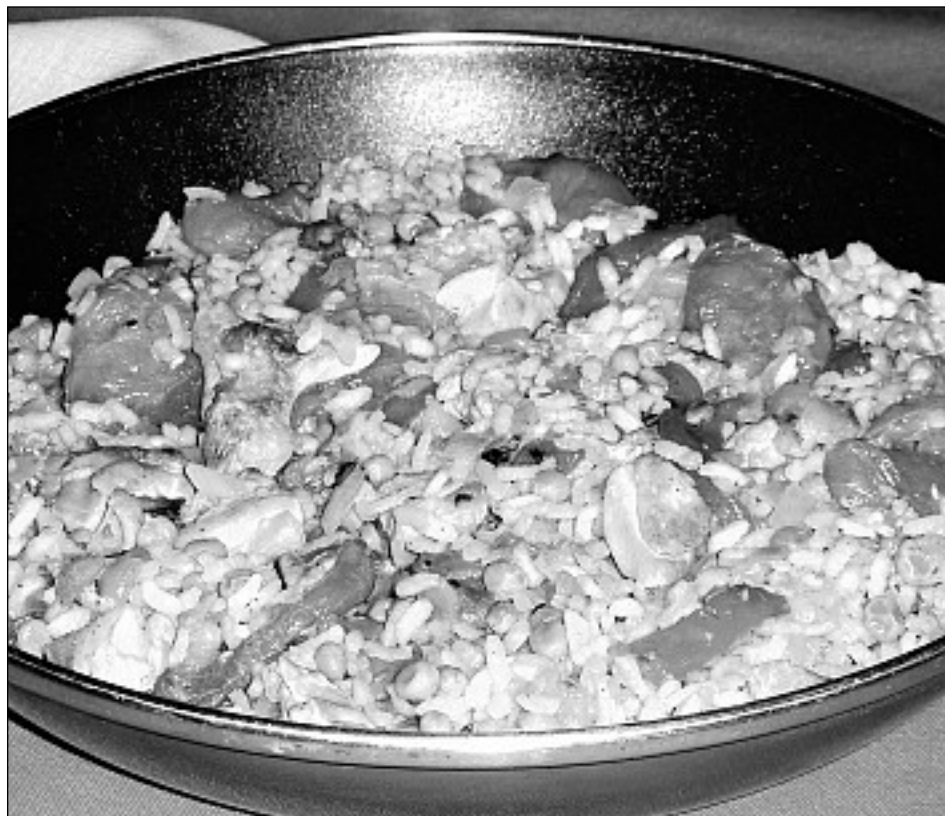
Paella Valenciana

1 tablespoon olive oil
2 cups frozen diced onion
4 medium garlic cloves, crushed
3/4 pound boneless, skinless chicken thighs
1/2 cup Valencia rice

1 1/2 cups fat-free, low-salt chicken broth
2 large tomatoes cut into eighths
1/2 cup sliced, canned roasted red pepper
1 cup frozen peas
1/4 teaspoon saffron strands
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Heat oil in large nonstick skillet. Add the onion and saute 1 minute. Add the garlic and cook 1 minute. Add the chicken thighs and brown on all sides, about 2 minutes. Add rice and saute 1 minute. Add the chicken broth, tomatoes, roasted red pepper, peas and saffron. Bring to a simmer and cook 15 minutes. The liquid should be absorbed and the rice cooked through. Add salt and pepper to taste. Makes 2 servings.

Per serving: 627 calories (21 percent from fat), 14.6 g fat (2.9 g saturated), 7.2 g monounsaturated, 138 mg cholesterol, 48.0 g protein, 76.1 g carbohydrates, 10.3 g fiber, 674 mg sodium.



Paella, probably the best-known dish of Spanish origin, is as beautiful as it is popular.

MCT