

Diverse dish New York

Preface
Meet Laurie Anderson: musician, director, artist, composer and inventor. Here she holds forth on dogs, violins, cheese and Lou Reed.

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“I was forced to play the violin; not at gun-point or anything. We had a family orchestra and we needed violins. We were eight kids and we all played – flute, cello, clarinet, piano and violin. It was like the Von Trapp family. We wore matching outfits: red turtleneck sweaters, with navy pants for the boys, navy skirts for the girls.

I grew up in Chicago and didn’t appreciate it like I do now. It’s a generous place and the people are genuinely friendly. But I like New Yorkers; people are very awake here.

My mother was a terrible cook – and by terrible I mean monotonous. Sometimes we had liver, which we would scrape off the table onto our laps and down into our shoes, and then we’d squish out to the woods to get rid of it. Have you ever had liver in your shoes? It’s not a good feeling.

I played the violin until I was 16 and then stopped for a decade. When I was 26 I was really lost and I decided to stay in bed until I could think of a good reason to get up. And so I stayed there for a year. It was near here, between Avenues B and C. I wasn’t depressed; I just decided I didn’t know what I was going to do so I was going to wait until I did. I made the same food every day for that year: a pie. I would go out after I’d taught night class and buy the same things: cornmeal, black beans, broccoli and cheese. At the end of that year I had a lightbulb moment: I wanted to make singing sculptures.

I moved to New York in 1966. When I began as an artist in the 1970s it was still idealistic. I was part of a group. I did a lot of street stuff, a lot of operas and I did sculpture. I was in Soho; it was messed up. We kept our lights off at night because we lived there illegally.



Menu

To start:
Baked kippered salmon and Scottish smoked salmon spread, with waffle-cut crisps

Main:
Smoked whitefish chowder with dill, espelette pepper and matzo (flatbread)

To drink:
Tap water and a Lower East Side cocktail (Tanqueray gin, lime juice, dill, cucumber)

Profile

Laurie Anderson was born in Chicago in 1947 and moved to New York in the 1960s to study sculpture; since then her work has branched out into performance art, music and film. Her eccentric career includes becoming Nasa’s inaugural artist in residence, inventing several musical instruments and playing violin on top of a block of ice until it melted – while wearing skates. She met Lou Reed in the 1990s and was married to him from 2008 until his death in 2013. She has made seven albums, had a number two hit in the UK with “O Superman”, hosted concerts for dogs in Sydney and New York and garnered critical acclaim for her 2015 film *Heart of a Dog*.



Recipe

Smoked whitefish chowder
Serves 4 to 6

Ingredients
1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
1 tbsp unsalted butter
2 leeks, diced
1 carrot, diced
2 small stalks celery, diced
1 clove garlic, chopped
1 large russet potato, peeled and cut into cubes
2 tsps fresh thyme, finely chopped
55g flour
60ml dry white wine
475ml vegetable stock
1 bay leaf
475ml whole milk
250g smoked whitefish meat, cut into small pieces
180ml full cream

To garnish
Handful dill, chopped
Few espelette pepper flakes

The method

- 1 Heat olive oil and butter in large stockpot over medium heat. Add leeks, carrot and celery and cook for 5 minutes, until soft.
- 2 Add garlic, potatoes, thyme and cook for 2 minutes.
- 3 Sprinkle flour over vegetables and stir to create a dry roux.
- 4 Stir in the wine, stock and bay leaf. Bring to a simmer for 30 minutes. Stir in milk and whitefish and return mixture to a gentle simmer.
- 5 Discard bay leaf. Stir in cream and season with salt and pepper. Garnish with dill and espelette pepper. Serve.

- 01 Laurie Anderson preparing to tuck in
- 02 Russ & Daughters’ open kitchen
- 03 Wares on display
- 04 Cocktail ready for consumption
- 05 Smoked whitefish chowder
- 06 Russ & Daughters Café is on the Lower East Side
- 07 The Hattie Platter: smoked salmon and cream-cheese bagel
- 08 Lower East Side cocktail
- 09 Preparing the Hattie Platter
- 10 Anderson’s starter

Venue

Russ & Daughters Café, located on Orchard Street in New York’s Lower East Side, opened in 2014. It’s an offshoot of the original appetising shop a few minutes’ walk away that dates back to 1914 and does a roaring trade in smoked fish and takeaway sandwiches. The sit-down café serves the same east European-inspired Jewish food – smoked salmon, herring, whitefish, chowder, bagels et al – alongside revived 19th-century soft drinks and punchy cocktails. The latest addition to the mini-empire, run by the fourth generation of family owners, is an outpost in the city’s Jewish Museum that opened earlier in 2016.



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I met my husband [Lou Reed] at a music festival based on Kristallnacht that John Zorn [composer] did in Munich. It was wonderful to meet someone who was never boring. We loved the Russ & Daughters shop [around the corner on Houston Street] and Lou would have loved it here at the café but it opened a year after he died. Have you had the horseradish cream cheese? They take something really sharp and put it into something humble.

I’ve done too many things in prisons recently to think about a last meal. But I can talk about my *best* meal. Who would be there? Lou, his cousin “Red Shirley”, John Zorn; people who would enjoy this food. Socrates might have been good to have there. I’m interested in the Socratic method and would ask him if he imagined Plato naming that concept after him.

I’m guest director at Brighton Festival this year and I’m going to do another concert for dogs. I swore I’d never do it again but they’re so fun. The first time I did it was in Sydney. It was an invocation to whales because they hear in the same frequency range. I couldn’t believe it: there were all these Aussie dogs that wanted to rock.

Speaking of dogs, *Heart of a Dog* [Anderson’s 2015 film] is about stories, not dogs. *Habeas Corpus* [a New York installation last year], with ex-Guantanamo detainee Mohamed el Gharani, is the work of which I’m most proud. It was political in a way that was weird and gave people room to make up their own minds.

I’m not that ambitious; I’m not someone who wants to open the Munich office. I just don’t care. I’ve asked myself if that’s just a bullshit thing that I say as I’ve said it many times. I love working and I love making stuff – I’m doing some things now that I have no idea about!” — (M)