

SOUL ON A PLATE

Jovan Radomir was just a small boy when he left his native Bosnia and went to Sweden with his parents. Unlike many of our children who slowly started losing their identity, he managed to become a real and well-known Swede and at the same time to remain a true Serb. His book "My Balkans – Food and People" has had two editions in Sweden. The book is a remarkable mixture of genres: Jovan's Balkans is at the same time a cookbook and a travelogue. Humorous, sometimes laced with nostalgia, this book is a balm for the negative image that our region has. And more than that.



Jovan Radomir is a well-known journalist and anchor of the Swedish national television. The Serbian public remembers him as the presenter of Sweden's voting results at the 2004 Eurovision Song Contest, and also as the author of lyrics for the English version of Marija Šerifović's "Prayer", the winning song of this contest in 2007. His biography includes a long list of interviews with legends of the international music scene: Bono from U2, James from Metallica, Celine Dion, Madonna... It is little known that Jovan is an honorary ambassador of Katrineholm, a small town in Sweden where he grew up. The mayor of Katrineholm played a crucial role in helping Jovan publish the first edition of his book "My Balkans" in 2011. Today, the second edition of the "autobiographical cookbook" is on the shelves of Swedish bookstores side by side with the world-renowned celebrity chef Jamie Oliver. We talked with Jovan about the book's creation and its content in Belgrade, on the terrace of a restaurant overlooking the confluence of the Sava and Danube rivers.

The Balkans is a pretty broad term – why did you decide to name your book like that?

"I simply did not want to impose any restrictions. The Swedes are familiar with the term "the Balkans", and our cuisine is not only Serbian. Hungarians, Romanians, Macedonians, Greeks... we all share similar traditions. Also, this is my Balkans, and in the book I describe the tradition of our region, our customs, where our food comes from... 'My Balkans' is a kind of travelogue mixed with the memory of a pleasant childhood. I took advantage of my popularity so that the Swedes could see a different picture of the Balkans, and especially of Serbia. We managed to open wide the door to this region. People were really curious, many newspapers, especially travel magazines wrote about the book, we did some great stories, which proves

that the Swedes are interested in our region, and especially in Belgrade.”

The photographs of a rustic flask from the long-disappeared folk arts and crafts shops, the tractor ‘made in Yugoslavia’, your house in Srbac. Once upon a time there was a country... That’s how you begin your story.

“I quoted Kusturica, his title, ‘Once upon a time there was a country’ was perfect as an introduction to the story. I very briefly describe the old Yugoslavia, but it was important for me to write a tribute to a beautiful country that is no more. I worked with Bojan Stanić, a young photographer from Belgrade. The two of us travelled together for a month and a half. We photographed the food, people and places. We followed our hearts; this was a kind of our graduation paper, we were redrawing the maps of childhood. I wanted the Swedes to see who and what we were and at the same time to have the nostalgic spirit of our people awoken.”

What is on your list of national recipes?

“For starters, I give a brief description of sarma and I explain how it’s served. By the way, all of my recipes are spiced with a little bit of humor. The menu also includes *leskovačka mučkalica* (Leskovac beater), and the photo is taken at the Belgrade restaurant ‘Zaplet’. I wanted to show how a traditional dish can be served in a fashionable way. I also gave a recipe for our Bosnian bread *kuruza*. Under the headline ‘A happy piglet’, I wrote the entry on our *mangulitsa* pigs, and alongside the incredible scenery of the Danube, I described how to prepare grilled carp. I gave the recipe for ‘army style’ beans – and made it more lively with the story of my military service in the Yugoslav People’s Army. I described our spices, and I made a special note on *Vegeta* that has been on the market in Sweden for a long time. Swedes use a lot of sauces and dressings, and this is contrary to our cooking ‘logic’, which is based on the original taste of food. Food and identity are strongly connected. Everything that we put on the plate shows where we are from and that’s our connection with our parents and ancestors. Of course, the list of recipes includes *ćevapčići* (grilled minced meat, a type of kebab), *kaymak* cream cheese, *ajvar* (a type of relish, made principally from red bell peppers), baked beans with onions and paprika, pastries, sweets made following the recipes by my mom Mira and my aunts.”

You devoted special chapters to Belgrade and to the wines and brandies from this region.



“I wrote about why I love Belgrade so much. I described the life and traditions of taverns, and I dedicated a special section to coffee with Turkish delight served at Belgrade’s oldest pub ‘Question Mark’. Food is an important ritual for us, and drink comes with food. I presented our brandies through the smile of my uncle Boško: plum brandy *šljivovica*, apple brandy *jabukovača*, grape brandy *lozovača*, walnut brandy *orahovača*... and authentic wines *prokupac* and *smederevka*... I also explained to the Swedes our toasting customs. Also, for them, an environment-friendly approach to food is particularly important, and our cuisine is healthy and the ingredients are natural.”

You had your book promotion at the Gothenburg Book Fair. How did that go and what are your future plans?

“First of all, I would like this book to be published in Serbia, but I have not yet found a publisher in

Serbia. The promotion in Gothenburg was well-observed and the reviews were positive. I asked for support from our organisations for the first edition of the book in Swedish, but they initially saw no benefit in it. I have an offer to publish the book in English, but it is more important for me to have the book published in Serbia. I made an excellent ‘live’ presentation of ‘My Balkans’ and our food in the famous Swedish Grand Hotel. That’s how I finished the last chapter of the book.”

Jovan Radomir, a boy from Srbac and Bajinci, went all the way “from a village to the Grand Hotel.” His book “My Balkans – Food and People” offers a key to understanding the Balkan mentality. It’s a warm story about us, and the carefully inserted snapshots of family harmony from Jovan’s growing up years album are its special spice.

■ MILENA MIHALJIĆ



DUŠA NA TANJIRU

Jovan Radomir bio je sasvim mali kada je s roditeljima iz rodne Bosne otišao u Švedsku. Za razliku od mnoge naše dece koja su polako gubila identitet, on je uspeo da postane pravi i poznati Šveđanin i ostane istinski Srbin. Njegova knjiga „Moj Balkan – hrana i ljudi“ doživela je u Švedskoj dva izdanja. Reč je o jednom izvanrednom žanrovskom miks: Jovanov „Balkan“ istovremeno je kuvar i putopis. Duhovita, na trenutke protkana nostalgijom, ova knjiga je melem za negativnu sliku naših prostora. I više od toga.

Jovan Radomir je poznati novinar i voditelj Švedske nacionalne televizije. Domaća javnost pamti ga po saopštavanju rezultata glasanja na „Pesmi Evrovizije“ 2004. godine i kao autora stihova engleske verzije pesme „Molitva“ Marije Šerifović, koja je 2007. godine pobedila na tom takmičenju. U njegovoj biografiji zapisana je poduža lista intervju sa legendama svetske muzičke scene: Bona iz „U2“, Džejmsa iz „Metallice“, Selin Dion, Madone... Malo je poznato da je Jovan počasni ambasador Katrineholma – malog švedskog grada u kojem je odrastao. Gradonačelnik Katrineholma odigrao je presudnu ulogu i pomogao Jovanu da 2011. godine objavi prvo izdanje knjige „Moj Balkan“. Danas se drugo izdanje tog „autobiografskog kuvara“ nalazi na policama švedskih knjižara rame uz rame s kuvarima svetski popularnog Džejmija Olivera. O nastanku knjige i njenom sadržaju razgovarali smo s Jovanom u Beogradu, na terasi jednog restorana s pogledom na ušće Save u Dunav.

Balkan je prilično širok pojam – zašto si se odlučio da tako nasloviš svoju knjigu?

- Jednostavno nisam želeo da se ograničavam. Pojam Balkana je poznat Šveđanima, a naša kuhinja nije samo srpska. Mađari, Rumuni, Makedonci, Grci... svi imamo sličnu tradiciju. Takođe, ovo je moj Balkan, u knjizi opisujem tradiciju naše regije, naše običaje, odakle nam dolazi hrana... „Moj Balkan“ je vrsta putopisa protkanog sećanjem na lepo detinjstvo. Iskristio sam svoju popularnost kako bi Šveđani mogli da pogledaju jednu drugačiju sliku Balkana, pogotovo Srbije. Otvorili smo velika vrata ka ovoj regiji. Ljudi su stvarno bili znatizeljni, mnoge novine, pogotovo turistički magazini, pisale su o knjizi, radili smo velike reportaže, što je sve dokaz da Šveđane zanima naš prostor, a posebno Beograd.

Fotografija rustične četurice davno nestale Narodne radinosti, traktor made in Jugoslavija, tvoja kuća u Srpcu. Bila jednom jedna zemlja... Tako počinje tvoja priča.

- Citirao sam Kusturicu, njegov naslov „Bila jednom jedna zemlja“ bio je idealan kao uvod u priču. Ja sasvim kratko opisujem staru Jugoslaviju, ali mi je bilo važno da napišem omaž lepoj zemlji koje više nema. Sarađivao sam s mladim beogradskim fotografom Bojanom Stanićem. Nas dvojica smo zajedno putovali mesec i po dana. Fotografisali smo hranu, ljude i predele. Radili smo srcem, ovo je bio naš maturski rad, ponovno crtanje mape

detinjstva. Želeo sam da Šveđani saznaju ko smo i šta smo i da istovremeno probudim nostalgiju kod naših ljudi.

Šta se sve nalazi na tvom „indeksu“ nacionalnih recepata?

- Na početku dajem kratak opis sarme i objašnjavam kako se služi. Inače, svaki moj recept začinen je s malo duhovitosti. Na meniju se nalazi leskovačka mučkalica, a fotografija je iz beogradskog restorana „Zaplet“. Želeo sam da pokažem kako tradicionalno jelo može biti moderno servirano. Dao sam recept za našu bosansku pogaču „kuruzu“. Pod naslovom „Jedno srećno prase“ napisao sam tekst o našim mangulicama, a uz neverovatne pejzaže Dunava, opisao sam način na koji se priprema „Šaran na šišu“. Dao sam recept za pasulj – army style – i oživeo ga pričom o mom služenju vojnog roka u Jugoslovenskoj narodnoj armiji. Opisao sam naše začine, a napravio sam i posebnu belešku o „vegeti“, koja u Švedskoj postoji dugo godina. Šveđani koriste dosta preliva i sosova, a to je suprotno našoj kulinarškoj logici, koja počiva na izvornom ukusu hrane. Hrana i identitet u jakoj su vezi. Sve što stavljamo na tanjir pokazuje odakle smo i to je veza s našim roditeljima i precima. Naravno, na listi recepata su ćevapčići, kajmak, ajvar, prebranac, peciva, slatkiši po receptima moje mama Mire i mojih tetaka.

Posebna poglavlja posvetio si Beogradu, vinima i rakijama našeg podneblja.

- Napisao sam zbog čega toliko volim Beograd. Opisao sam kafanski život i tradiciju kafana, a poseban deo posvetio sam kafi s ratlukom koja se služi u najstarijoj beogradskoj kafani „Znak pitanja“. Nama je hrana važan ritual, a uz nju ide i piće. Uz osmeh mog ujka Boška predstavio sam naše rakije: šljivovicu, jabukovaču, lozovaču, orahovaču... i autentična vina: prokupac, smederevku... Objasnio sam Šveđanima i naše običaje nazdravljanja. Takođe, njima je posebno važan ekološki pristup hrani, a naša kuhinja je zdrava i namirnice su prirodne.

Imao si promociju na Geteburškom sajmu knjiga. Kako je to prošlo i kakvi su ti dalji planovi?

- Pre svega, želeo bih da ova knjiga doživi izdanje na srpskom jeziku, ali još nisam našao domaćeg izdavača. Promocija u Geteburgu bila je zapažena, kritike pohvalne. I za prvo izdanje na švedskom tražio sam podršku naših organizacija. Međutim, one u početku nisu videle dobro od toga. Imam ponudu za objavljivanje knjige na engleskom jeziku, ali mi je značajnije da knjiga izađe kod nas.

Napravio sam izvanredno „živu“ prezentaciju „Mog Balkana“ i naše hrane u čuvenom švedskom Grand hotelu. Tako sam i završio poslednje poglavlje knjige.

Jovan Radomir, dečak iz Srpa i Bajinaca, prošao je put „Iz sela do Grand hotela“. Negova knjiga „Moj Balkan – hrana i ljudi“ nudi ključ za razumevanje

balkanskog mentaliteta. To je jedna topla priča o nama, a njen poseban način su pažljivo udelili detalji porodičnog sklada iz Jovanovog albuma odrastanja.

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