



#SLOFF Film Capsule – Ella Brennan: Commanding the Table

Description

Posted by [Larry Gleeson](#)

Director Leslie Iwerks newest documentary film, *Ella Brennan: Commanding the Table*, recently opened the 23rd San Luis Obispo International Film Festival, now referred to as the SLO Film Fest. To go along with the screening 15 food chefs served up traditional and current New Orleans gastronomical fare in the art-deco styled Fremont Theater and in the adjoining VIP tent in downtown SLO. Cafe Musique provided live music to round out the Mardi Gras themed party with covers from ragtime composer Scott Joplin as well as Cajun and Zydeco tunes. Several Central Coast vintners provided complementing libations.





Iwerks amassed a copious amount of archival photos, footage, newspaper and magazine articles to complement current day interviews as she uncovers one of the most revered chefs and restaurateurs in the world. In addition, a snapshot of New Orleans from the 1940's and 50's is shown as the focus moves toward the Brennan family restaurant, Brennan's, and on into Commander's Palace.

Ella Brennan was reluctant initially to take on a role in the family business. Her oldest sibling, Owen, cajoled Ella and tasked her with important roles while increasingly adding greater responsibility. Eventually, Ella was traveling to the world's great cities and dining in fine establishments. All the while, Ella scoured cookbooks looking for new and innovative ways to create cuisines for her clientele which not only included a who's who of New Orleans Society but also world dignitaries and Hollywood entertainers.

Unfortunately, the family was dealt a severe blow as Owen suddenly passed away at 48. Ella and her siblings decided to keep the restaurant going with Ella at the helm. Soon after Owen's death, however, the bank removed its vote of confidence that a woman could manage a restaurant like Brennan's and called in the loan on the building. The family rallied raising money only to come up just short of the necessary funds. So the restaurant would have to move. The family found a location down the street. On the last day at the original location, the family served lunch and then moved to the new location led by a jazz band and served dinner in their new location without missing a beat.

The new location served the Brennan family well until a legal dispute with Owen's wife precipitated Ella and her sisters establishing a new restaurant, Commander's Palace. Under Ella's leadership Commander's Palace thrived. Soon Ella began a search for a Top Chef. Paul Prudhomme's name was mentioned and Ella took Prudhomme in and the two put Commander's Palace on the list of the world's finest dining establishments. Prudhomme decided he wanted a smaller restaurant and left to open K-Paul's. Following Prudhomme was Emeril Lagasse at age 23. Lagasse, too, would move on to start his own restaurant. Both became known as "celebrity chefs" with their own television shows. Next came Eddie Shannon, a tall Irishman with great flare. Eddie introduced farm to table to Commander's Palace and the restaurant continued its fine dining tradition with bold, new, fresh and innovative dishes.

Then, Hurricane Katrina hit devastating the city of New Orleans. With the city deserted, the Brennan's were unsure about the future of Commander's Palace but not Ella. The restaurant re-opened after a year of repairs. During this time Ella and sister Adelaide bought an historic mansion directly behind Commander's Palace. Today the sisters enjoy the finest take-out food, delivered by world renowned

chefs.

After the screening TV actor and New Orleans native, French Stewart, chatted with Commander's Palace owner Ti Martin (Ella Brennan's daughter) and filmmaker Leslie Iwerks.



Ti Martin, far right, owner of Commander's Palace, shares her experience being Ella Brennan's daughter.

Ella Brennan: Commanding the Table is a delicious treat. Iwerks gets behind the scenes with historical artifacts, Brennan family archives and present day interviews to reveal a formidable female figure who rose to the challenges presented to her and came out on top. Highly recommended for all audiences.

Category

1. #SLOFilmFest
2. Documentary

Tags

1. Commander's Palace
2. Ella Brennan
3. Ti Martin

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