

Steve Schirripa – It's All About the Sauce! 9-5-2015

Popular Actor Enters Healthy Food Arena with *Uncle Steve's Italian Specialties*

The popular actor, Steve Schirripa, attained world-wide recognition and instant stardom with his skillful portrayal of Bobby “Bacala” Baccalieri in the iconic HBO series, *The Sopranos*. But the enterprising Mr. Schirripa is a man of many talents who maintains a strong work ethic and always believed in perseverance. While acknowledging that *The Sopranos* put his career in high gear for which he is forever grateful, he refused to be typecast in the mobster genre. His talent and persistence eventually paid dividends, resulting in a long resume of diverse acting roles. The accomplished film, television and stage star is also a successful producer, voice artist and author of six best-selling books. He served as co-host on NBC's *Today Show*, and special correspondent on *The Tonight Show*.

With the drive and energy he delivers to all his projects, Steve is demonstrating the same passion in his latest endeavor: launching a specialty line of his own quality Italian pasta sauces. Proud of his Italian-American heritage and intent on honoring his mother who passed away two years ago, he began marketing these all natural, healthy, Italian products one year ago under the banner, *Uncle Steve's Italian Specialties*. There are currently three sauces in production: Marinara; Tomato and Basil; and the biggest seller, Arrabiata, with Vodka sauce to follow shortly.

I had the pleasure of speaking with the engaging Mr. Schirripa last month on a number of topics, including this latest venture and fond remembrances of Sunday dinners he enjoyed as a child.

So what differentiates *Steve's Italian Specialty* sauces from most other conventional jar sauces sold in the marketplace? The answer according to Steve is quite simple. His intent has always been to offer products from the Italian family recipes passed down from his grandmother and mother, and then duplicate those prized sauces and make them healthier and more nutritious.

“The name “Uncle Steve's” has no real significance. A close friend of mine came up with the name because he calls me Uncle Steve. He said, ‘Let's do something to honor your mom because she was such a good cook.’ So I got my mom's recipe and we decided to do the sauces. We made it healthier. My wife eats organic. She is a marathon runner. We made it organic, gluten free, and non-GMO.”

Special childhood memories come to mind when Steve remembers awakening to the wonderful smell of his mother making fresh sauce on Sunday mornings in their small Brooklyn apartment.

“My father's family came from Calabria and my mom is Jewish. She was adopted and raised more or less by Italians. She, and my grandmother, who lived around the corner from us, did most of the cooking. In those days you woke up to the smell of fried meatballs. It was the whole Sunday thing of eating. Dinner was either at my house or my grandmother's house. My grandmother ate at one o'clock. We ate later in my house... three o'clock. When we went to her

house, she made the homemade pasta...laid out literally on a big wooden board on the bed, in one of the bedrooms. We would start at one o'clock. She had the fried meatballs, then came the antipasto and the macaroni, then a roasted chicken or a roast beef or whatever, then dessert. Then come six or seven o'clock, it all comes out again. It was quite amazing, these marathons of food. People don't eat like that so much these days. This was every single Sunday. My grandmother was a cook among cooks in that neighborhood where everyone was a great cook. And that's what it was. You ate macaroni a few nights a week. And Friday night was pizza, but Sunday was a big deal."

Mr. Schirripa is convinced when customers try his sauces they will agree the taste is completely homemade. He is proud to state they are made with imported Italian whole peeled tomatoes and extra virgin olive oil. The sauces are free of sugar, corn starch, tomato paste and preservatives and suitable for vegan and vegetarian diet plans.

"My wife hasn't made sauce in eight months and I'm not lying. Our sauce is fresh and all the ingredients are listed on the front of the label. If it wasn't very good, I couldn't honestly promote it. I'm not that kind of a guy. There have been a lot of celebrity sauces. That was something we went up against because a lot of actors have tried sauces. Sinatra had one and it didn't work. I didn't consider doing a celebrity sauce, which is why my picture is not on the label. I made a conscious effort not to, because we're not a novelty. I don't want them to say, 'We're a "Sopranos" fan, and I got your "Bacala" sauce.' That's not what I was looking for, because we believe in the product. I would go to meetings and bring some Italian bread with me. And I would say, just open the sauce, taste it, and you will be surprised. That's all I ask you to do. Almost everyone who tastes it, takes home a jar. And if I said, come over to my apartment, John, and I made you sauce, and you never saw the jar, there's not a chance you'll ever know."

Uncle Steve's Italian Specialties is available in more than 2,000 stores and 41 states, including ShopRite, Stop & Shop, Kings, Foodtown and Whole Foods. Steve will be appearing and offering taste-testing demonstrations at the following New Jersey supermarkets: Kings, in Mendham, on September 12; Whole Foods, in Marlboro, on September 20; and Kings, in Garwood, on September 26. For complete product information, all U.S. store locations and more upcoming events please go to *Steve's Italian Specialties* website: www.unclestevesny.com

John Esposito is a freelance writer, who lives in New Providence, NJ with his wife and two children. The complete Steve Schirripa interview, excerpted for this article, is included in Mr. Esposito's website: www.PieceworkJournals.com on the "Arts, Music, Food & Entertainment" page. It contains Mr. Schirripa's commentary about his close connection to New Jersey; his entertainment career; and remembrances of Frank Sinatra.