

Foreword

When I was invited to be Restaurateur at the City Hall Restaurant in 1989, the Nobel Banquet was the great challenge but also a great cause of alarm. Would I be able to manage this huge responsibility or should I decline the offer because of the Nobel Banquet? How is it possible to cope with the 330 staff or more in this gigantic show? How do you keep the food hot, keep to the strict serving timetable, manage to work together with all the other people involved, meet all the wishes for special diets, provide drinks for about 1,350 guests and organise all the porcelain and cutlery, which has to be shining clean? Will I cope with the stress and publicity and how will my family cope with having me shut away in my own little world for months before the event? There were many questions to think about, but I quickly realised that it is thanks to all the fine, competent staff and other organisers that everything works perfectly. I am both glad and proud that I accepted the post and that I had the honour to organise the Nobel Banquets until 2002.

During all these years, with the climax in 2001 of the centenary celebrations, I have faced many problems and had many thoughts about my role as restaurateur for this famous banquet.

Is there any banquet, national or international, that is more well-known than the Nobel Banquet? Have the Nobel Banquet menus influenced other similar arrangements over the past 100 years, and if so, how? What is served at the Royal Palace on December 11 when their Majesties the King and Queen of Sweden invite the laureates and other honorary guests to dinner?

These reflections of mine have now found answers, thanks to all the time and effort that Ulrica Söderlind has devoted to collecting information, not only about 100 years of Nobel Banquets but also about the dinners that the King and Queen give at the Royal Palace on December 11. Ulrica's never-ending research in the archives of both palaces and more humble abodes has benefited us all. We now have fresh knowledge about the first 100 years of the Nobel Banquets.

Ulrica, whom I first met when she started to work as the cold buffet manageress at the City Hall Restaurant in 1990, has fulfilled a dream that I



Alfred Nobel photographed the year he died, 1896. ©Nobelstiftelsen.

and many others have had for a very long time: to present all the menus from 1901 that were missing from the archives, with facts and comments, to read what was written about the Banquets from the beginning of the 20th century onwards and to see how, year by year, what began as a smallish dinner at the Grand Hotel for 118 gentlemen, who paid 15 kronor each, has grown into the world-famous Nobel Banquet. Fantastic!

Producing the menu for a Nobel Banquet is a long process. The contents should have a Scandinavian character in which, as far as possible, Swedish ingredients form the basis of the menu.

An important factor that has to be taken into account is that the kitchen is a long way away from the Blue Hall, where the food is served — in fact, it is four floors above. We are grateful today to Ragnar Östberg, the architect who designed the City Hall, that he included lifts between the kitchen and the Golden Hall, but to let a lift go down to the Blue Hall would have helped us greatly in our work. Those of you who are familiar with the City Hall will know that there is, in fact, a lift down to it, but Östberg had the floor in the Blue Hall's



Lars-Göran Andersson and Ulrica Söderlind conversing in the Golden Hall, Stockholm City Hall. © Torbjörn Boström.

south cloakroom made of cobblestones. Any of you who have tried to push or pull trolleys loaded with glass and porcelain across a cobbled passage will know that it is no easy task; in all probability most of the glass and porcelain will get broken. Another not insignificant factor is that the distance between the Golden Hall's serving counter and the Blue Hall, via the Blue Hall's great staircase built of Kolmård marble or the staircases in the north and south stairwells is a considerable way for the waiters and waitresses to have to walk, carrying in heavy, shining silver serving dishes full of food or carrying out dirty porcelain and cutlery. That's a lot of walking before the day's work is done.

In addition, the menus have to be designed so that about 1,350 people can be served in as short a time as possible, without any unnecessary and time-consuming serving problems. After months of pondering and a number of different proposals presented to the Nobel Foundation, it is time to decide on the contents of the menu at a trial dinner held early in the autumn. Twelve people, sometimes a few more, representing the Nobel Foundation, the City Hall Restaurant, the Catering Academy and others involved in designing the menu sit down to eat, enjoy, discuss and comment on the dishes before finalising the menu and returning to their daily chores. Remember, the menu is kept a secret until 4 p.m. on Nobel Day.

You are now holding in your hand the results of Ulrica's work, and her efforts give us a splendid insight into the first 100 Nobel menus and the menus served on December 11 at the Royal Palace.

I, and so many others who have been involved with the Nobel Banquets, are deeply indebted to Ulrica for her work. It is extremely gratifying that the first 100 years of the Nobel Banquets have now appeared in print, and we look forward to yet another 100 years of Nobel festivities, with the Banquets at the centre of attention.

Lars-Göran Andersson
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