

## Jeff Around Town – October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2025

**Jeff:** It's Jeff Around Town with Marty Skomal. Marty Skomal, retired director of programs for the Nebraska Arts Council, actor, director, teaching artist, and so many other things. Marty, thanks for being on Jeff Around Town.

**Marty:** It's my pleasure, happy to be here.

**Jeff:** Yeah, and this is airing on October 28th, which happens to be the birthday of someone who you've played on stage many, many times.

**Marty:** Yes, Georges-Auguste Escoffier. Escoffier is really considered the sort of father of modern French cuisine. And I became interested in him because I also am the president of the Alliance Francaise and have been a member for a number of years. So, I got very interested in him and read some books on him. And along with my partner, Barbie Davis, we wrote a one-man show that I performed. Started doing it out at La Voltaire restaurant with Cedric LaFreshpin, the former owner, and then actually took it to the Culinary Institute and have traveled it around to other Alliance places around the country. What many people don't realize about Escoffier is he really set up kitchens like they're run now. He was a chef in the army during the Franco-Prussian War. He lived at the turn of the century, so he really brought the idea of, in a kitchen, having a pastry chef, having a rotissier, a fromager, a sous-chef. He really regimented the kitchen in a way it had never been done before.

**Jeff:** Well, and in fact, it wasn't until I saw your performance that I learned all of this. You just, you don't even think about it. You think about modern kitchens. You think, well, maybe that's how it's always been, but it has been. So again, he was born October 28, 1846. So, before that, what were kitchens like then?

**Marty:** Before that, kitchens, there was one other chef, Carême, who was the chef to Napoleon, and he had a little bit of notoriety, but chefs were not celebrities. They were not at all considered, as we are today, a noble profession. And Escoffier really elevated that and made a change in the way chefs were regarded. And he became, as he was known, le roi de chef et le chef de roi, the king of chef and the chef of kings...

**Jeff:** Oh hahaha.

**Marty:** ...because he really became friends with many of the famous celebrities of the day. In fact, some of the dishes that we have, like Pêche Melba, Peach Melba, Escoffier created for the opera singer Nelly Melba. And Melba toast came from that.

**Jeff:** Oh! Interesting. And this isn't just relating to French cooking. This is across the board. All kitchens have been modernized because of Escoffier.

**Marty:** Exactly, exactly. Mostly hotel and professional kitchens.

**Jeff:** Yeah, I see. And then when you do this performance that you and Barbie wrote, so are you doing this, as I recall, it's a little bit of French, but maybe in English for a general audience.

**Marty:** Oh, bien sûr. En anglais. En anglais? Yeah.

**Jeff:** With a little bit of a French accent.

**Marty:** The performance picks him up in his later years, and he's been retired and has received an invitation to come back and create a menu for then the Prince of Wales, and spends the time debating in front of the audience, should I go back into the kitchen or not? I've been retired, but oh my goodness, let me tell you about this. Let me tell you about Sarah Bernhard and what a neck she was. And it just recants a lot of his adventures.

**Jeff:** So, I'm curious, for you, are you a chef? Do you cook? And did you before that, and if you did, did studying him change the way that you think about food?

**Marty:** Oh, it changed the way I think about food, of course, because it really lets you know that food is something that's to be enjoyed and shared, and it's the moment of what happens between people when they share a meal. And he also was very, very particular about fresh ingredients. The chefs before him would create these masterpieces that were modeled after temples and pyramids, and they would create these elaborate presentations, and he threw all that out and did very simple cooking. He also popularized service ruch, Russian service, where service is one course at a time. Famous banquets before then, everything would be laid out on these magnificent tables, and as he says in the play, you could only eat what you could reach. So, he really slowed it down and really created an ambience. His primary partner was Cesar Ritz, the hotelier. Cesar Ritz discovered him, they ate together, their stars rose together. And the Ritz-Carlton brand that you hear today is really kind of a legacy of their partners.

**Jeff:** It's très, très interesting.

**Marty:** Thank you, Jeff.

**Jeff:** Merci beaucoup, Maurice Gomeau.

**Marty:** C'est mon plaisir.