**By Lorraine Mallinder**

**Patrick Williams**

You might say celebrity chef Patrick Williams is one of life’s characters. Whether on the telly or on the streets, where he used to cook up a storm at London’s Borough Market, it’s obvious that this man has a big personality.

His journey is atypical, taking him from the lofty heights of haute cuisine to the Caribbean soul food of his childhood. It all started in home economics classes at his modest East London comp. Soon, he was working in some of the city’s finest restaurants - training under Marco Pierre White, no less.

‘Working in a kitchen is a bit like a prison sentence, but the prisons are posh,’ he says. ‘Normally, you’re working in basements, not getting fed, constantly being yelled at, running around like an idiot, with burns up your arms that make it look like you’re self-harming …’

Having proven his mettle, Williams set up his own restaurant – The Terrace in Lincoln’s Inn Fields. And there, the story might have ended. But the call of William’s Jamaican heritage was strong, filled with evocative flavours like jerk chicken, ripe mangoes and fresh coconut milk.

These are the foods he grew up with in East London, cooked by his parents, his aunts and uncles. To this day, they still come together for special occasions, bringing traditional fare like patties, mac and cheese or curry – ‘as well as a container to take stuff away!’

Not for them, the fancy French fare that Williams used to serve up at The Oxo Tower and The Ivy. ‘Nobody in the family will eat anything pink. If I served them a duck breast medium, they’d try to kill me,’ he laughs.

Going back to basics, he set up shop at Borough Market, the city’s mecca for gourmet global cuisine. It was a mission of sorts for the chef, keen to spread the word about Caribbean cuisine, still largely unknown in the UK.

‘There’s such a variety of food that nobody ever talks about,’ he says.

If you’re ever in Jamaica, Williams recommends a trip to Walkerswood in the north of the island. There, locals cook chicken in a pit, sparking up the pimiento bark with some coals before throwing a sheet of corrugated iron over the top and leaving it to do its thing. Hearing him describe it, you can almost taste it.

But it’s not all about the food. Williams is currently aiming to set up a mentoring scheme for disadvantaged teens in North London. Even before Covid hit, mental health issues among kids were a growing issue. Now, he wants to give them a leg-up, offering training in a self-contained cookery school.

‘We want to get the kids ready for action,’ says the chef. A big personality - with an equally big heart.

**Brown stew fish**

A taste of childhood from Patrick Williams. Serves 4.

**INGREDIENTS**

2 6-800g Seabass - cleaned and portioned

4 cloves garlic - crushed & chopped

2 tsp fresh ginger - chopped

1 yellow pepper - chopped

2 spring onions – sliced

1 medium Spanish onion – sliced

1 scotch bonnet - whole

2 tsp picked thyme

3 dsp soy sauce

1 dsp tomato ketchup or curry ketchup

100ml rapeseed oil

**Spice mix – grind together**

2 tsp pimento seeds

1tsp black pepper corns

3 cloves

Salt - pinch

**METHOD**

Ask your fishmonger to clean and cut fish into portions. Keep the heads – they give the dish depth of flavour.

Mix the spices together for spice rub. Season fish using half the mix and leave for 24 hours, if possible.

Heat oil in a frying pan. When oil is hot, colour all the fish, including the heads, until golden brown. When ready, remove everything all portions except the heads from pan and leave to one side.

Reduce heat slightly, add remaining dry spices, thyme, garlic and ginger. Cook out for a minute, then add remaining vegetables. Gently brown, being careful not to split open the scotch bonnet.

Now add soy sauce and ketchup. Cover with water, bring to the boil and simmer.

Add pre-fried fish and continue to simmer for 10-15 minutes or until fish is cooked.

Correct seasoning if needed and serve with rice.

*For more of Patrick’s recipes, read The Caribbean Cook for a modern twist on dishes from the West Indies, from jerk chicken to tamarind ice-cream.*