

Written by



Renowned chef and culinary author Lidia Bastianich will set out on a lively cross-country adventure to celebrate culture through food in a new installment of her primetime PBS series—this time exploring diverse stories of hard-won freedom in time for summer fireworks. Notable guests join Bastianich on her journey, including actress Anna Deavere Smith, opera singer Renée Fleming, chef Jacques Pépin, folk-rock artist Martha Wainwright and actor-comedian Alec Mapa. Bastianich also candidly shares her own dramatic tale of escaping Europe's Iron Curtain as a girl to come to the USA after World War II.

"Lidia Celebrates America: Freedom and Independence" premieres Friday, June 28, 2013, 10:00 p.m. ET/9:00 p.m. CST on PBS.

The third documentary in the "Lidia Celebrates America" primetime series, this new one-hour program looks at freedom and the American immigrant experience through the food, festivities, customs and traditions of four unique cultural groups as they observe various kinds of independence day events: the Fourth of July swearing-in ceremony for new U.S. citizens at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello home in Virginia; a lively Bastille Day party at the Connecticut home of chef Jacques Pépin; the Juneteenth events in Texas commemorating Emancipation Day among African-Americans in the South; and a Philippines Independence Day celebration in New York.

"At the heart of the Lidia Celebrates America series is my own immigrant experience, so the subject of this special, in particular, resonates very deeply," said Bastianich. "When I came to this country at age 12, I had already spent two years in political refugee camps, so independence is not an abstract concept for me. America's diverse, multicultural free society truly is something to cherish and celebrate."

The film begins on the Fourth of July in Charlottesville, VA at Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson, where dozens of people wait to be sworn in as U.S. citizens. Among them is Faiza Jamil, an enthusiastic young Middle Eastern woman with a very compelling story who is eager to embrace her adopted homeland and register to vote.

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The second celebration marks French Independence with a full day of fun, food and festivities at the Connecticut home of Bastianich's good friend, celebrity chef Jacques Pépin. Together, Pépin and Bastianich host a Bastille Day party for a few dozen French-Americans, playing the French lawn bowling game *petanque*, singing classic French songs with folk-rock artist Martha Wainwright, and preparing an array of dishes.

The film's next stop is Texas, where actress Anna Deavere Smith joins Bastianich on a poignant journey to explore the historical events surrounding Juneteenth, in a powerfully moving story involving the freeing of Galveston's slaves two years after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Bastianich meets with "Dr. Barbeque," who demonstrates how to grill a traditional Texas dry-rub brisket to commemorate the occasion. Smith also talks openly with Bastianich about the oppression African-Americans have faced and how the promise of freedom is still slowly being fulfilled today.

In the final celebration spotlighted, Bastianich calls upon Filipino-American comedian and actor Alec Mapa to help her celebrate Philippines Independence Day in New York. Made up of thousands of islands and occupied by several world powers throughout its history, the country has a unique background and varied traditions due to its multiple cultural influences. Bastianich and Mapa help their host shop for ingredients at a local ethnic market and return home to prepare Kinilaw, a Filipino version of ceviche marinated in ginger and coconut milk, and pork adobo.

For more program information, visit pbs.org/lidiacelebratesamerica. To view recipes featured in the series, go to PBS Food: pbs.org/food.