STAFF SPOTLIGHT: MUSICIAN AND BANDLEADER FRANCISCO FERREIRO

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By Leila Darabi

If you've ever encountered a man with curly brown hair, olive skin and a not-quite--placeable Australian accent calling out across the produce section or the loading dock as new deliveries arrive, you may be familiar with multipotentialite and Coop staff

member Francisco Ferreiro.

He is a band leader, guitarist and educator who has at various points explored many other areas and interests in life. He studied engineering and physics, worked as a seasonal farm worker on his grandfather's farm, completed compulsory military service in Spain at the age of 18, served in the Australian Air Force straight out of college for a year and a half and worked as a tutor and substitute teacher.

SEEKING FRESH PRODUCE

Born in Australia and raised between that country and his parents' native Spain, Francisco first found the Coop about four years ago while seeking out fresh produce in New York.

"In Spain, you can go out to the local corner store and buy a tomato that looks like the Lancaster tomatoes that we get—you know the really beautiful ones that we get [at the Coop]? I came from that," he said.

Moving from Europe to the U.S. and missing tomatoes that taste like tomatoes was a rude awakening. "But obviously the Coop is the next level, an oasis in the middle of the desert—a food oasis."

Francisco visited the Coop with his wife, Jazmine Arelis Catasús, a printmaker and papermaker. They had heard of the Coop through "Brooklyn folklore" and through a couple with whom they were close friends, Thomas and Jenny. "Thomas is French, and he kept talking about the cheese, the cheese, the cheese."

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FROM SHOPPER TO STAFF

Francisco and Jazmine became members but quickly found themselves on alert due to Jazmine's hectic schedule as a printmaker, working a nighttime bar gig and babysitting.

"She would never do her shifts," laughed Francisco. "So we always had makeups, and I was always at the Coop. And at one point I thought, why don't I just try to get a job here?"

He went full-time at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and now serves as a Receiving Coordinator in produce and receiving.

"I'm all over the place. I'm quite proud of that," said Francisco. "I've tried to learn as much as I can so far. And I just like to help out wherever I can. I like learning new things and meeting new people so that I'm always evolving."

DISCOVERING MUSIC

The pursuit of music—and acceptance at the prestigious Berklee College of Music in Boston—first lured Francisco to the United States.

After getting into some scuffles in Australia, his parents had sent him to live with his Spanish grandparents in a village outside of Albacete, a city between Valencia and Madrid. Francisco describes the place as a "stopover" between larger cities, a location to "water horses" and move on. "There wasn't much to do for teenagers."

There was, however, a thriving independent music scene as local independent bands had broken through and were touring throughout Spain and Europe. Francisco describes the sound as heavily influenced by the Manchester scene in England, evoking early Radiohead and Sonic Youth.

His grandfather—or *yayo* as he calls him—was a janitor at a music school, and from

an early age Francisco's family had encouraged him to play piano and guitar. They did not, however, encourage a career in music.

"The culture where I came from, [in] my family, music was a hobby. It wasn't something that you could really do [for a living]."

So while he started bands and began to play out at local venues in Spain, Francisco dipped his toe in other areas before accepting his fate as a professional musician.

FROM THE AIR FORCE TO THE STUDY OF SOUND

As a teen, he returned to Australia and spent a year studying for and passing the prerequisite exams to enter the University of New South Wales, where he studied engineering and science. Afterward, he immediately joined the Air Force.

While he loved flying and logged 150 military flight hours, he never saw himself as a soldier. "I remember I was ironing bed sheets in officer training school in Melbourne. It was about 2 a.m. on my first night there and I was like, 'What am I doing here?'"

After leaving the Air Force, he entered a master's program in acoustic physics, the study of sound waves. "I feel like acoustic physics was kind of like [my attempt to] mix music and physics."

But Francisco quickly found himself forming bands, arranging music, and playing shows, leaving little energy for the research demanded by his program. "I used to be surfing all day and playing music; it's just so far from who I am."

His supervisor, trained as a classical musician himself, one day pulled him aside and said: "Francisco, look, at one point I had to make a decision: I'm either going to do physics or become a musician."

Francisco made his choice and, as luck would have it, Berklee College of Music held

auditions in Australia soon after.

FROM GOSPEL CHURCHES TO AFRO-FUNK

After a year at Berklee, Francisco transferred to a school in New York, where he met his wife and made a permanent home. Over the past decade, he has taught physics and music and worked as a musician for a large gospel church in Queens.

Today, his main creative project is a seven-piece Afro-funk band called Turiya Electric, named in homage to jazz musician Alice Coltrane, who took the Sanskrit name Turiyasangitananda.

FINDING A CREATIVE COMMUNITY AT THE COOP

Francisco sees his role at the Coop as linked to his lifelong pursuit of the arts and science. “I feel like food is an empowering and enlightened tool. And for me, it really closely correlates to creativity. Food for me is an art form, too. What you eat is what you are, and it influences your spirit.”

He said he found like-minded creatives when he joined the Coop and then became staff.

“Everyone seemed really open and really cool, which they are. I feel like most of my coworkers are artists or musicians or just really open-minded liberal people. So it feels like a real creative environment.”

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CIRCLE OF LIFE

Though he has landed far from where he grew up, Francisco sees the Coop as a continuation of the appreciation for food and farmers that he learned from his Spanish grandparents.

“When I was little, I used to work on my grandfather’s land picking onions and stuff,” said Francisco. “I learned to ride a bicycle on the dirt track of a corn field. I remember the corn fields that day, and for me the association of food is so closely tied with who I am.”

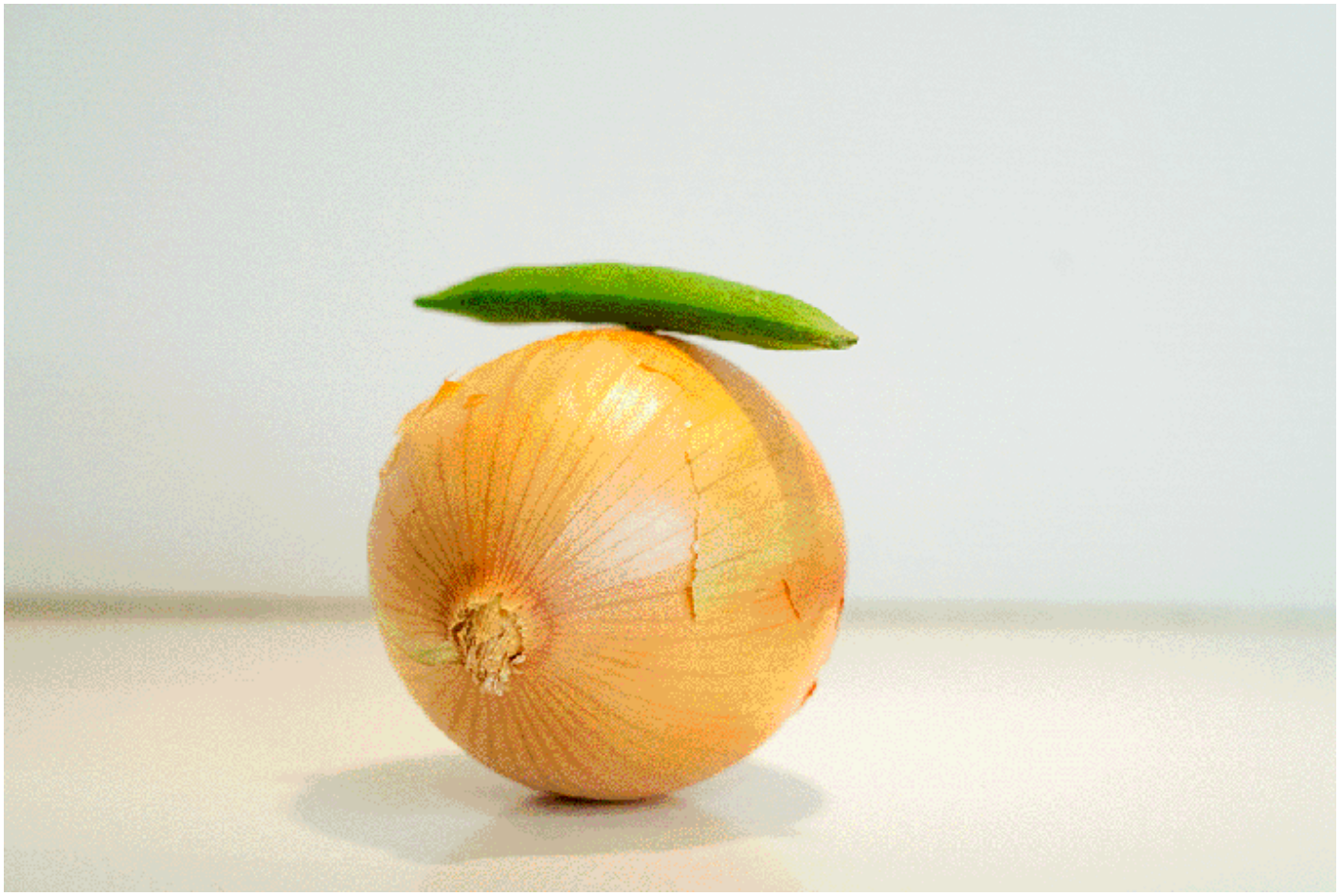
He also links these early lessons to the Coop’s mission of equity.

“I think it’s extremely important in a big city like this that we are building community, so that we’re supporting each other, supporting small businesses, more farms, and growing together as a force,” said Francisco.

“Because we’ve all seen the other option. We’ve all seen monopolization. And we see what it does to the land, to the people, or to the communities. [We need to] make sure we’re reaching all parts of the community and giving everyone opportunities to access the food.”

@FOODCOOP ON INSTAGRAM CONNECTS MEMBERS THROUGH THEIR COOKING

May 3, 2022



Photos by Caroline Mardok

By Leila Darabi

In the new Netflix series, *Inventing Anna,* a reporter assisted by several colleagues uses Instagram to piece together the social network and international movement of her subject, Anna Soroken (a.k.a., Anna Delvey). This fake heiress scammed acquaintances into paying her lavish hotel bills and to vouch for her as she applied for a $40 million loan. In dramatized scenes, the reporters print out selfies, scouring the background for location clues and potential people to interview as they piece together Anna's world travel and luxury hotel hopping.

A deep dive into the Coop's Instagram feed tells a far more wholesome but no less intricate story. At the time of writing, @foodcoop on Instagram had more than 14,200 followers. Scrolling back through the 6,383 posts and the more than 100 highlights folders of past posts shared as stories, one can track shifts in the Coop's community

of members.

PRE-PANDEMIC BLISS

Several years before the pandemic reached Brooklyn, the Coop's Instagram largely featured newly stocked produce and the occasional store announcement. Peppered between those posts, @foodcoop regularly reposted photos members shared of the foods they were cooking at home, showcasing the people behind the cooperative.

These posts of members' cooking showcased diverse palates and a mix of professional and amateur creations. There were personal chef Jeffrey Mason (@chefjeffreynyc)'s homemade granola bars; Megan Davidson (@brooklyndoula)'s test run of three new bundt pans; chef and teaching instructor Michelle Doll (@chefmichelledoll)'s declaration of "watermelon radishes for life"; and tuba player Matthew Cain (@matthew_cain)'s savory tart.

Looking back now at Deb Etsten (@citychiclet)'s Meyer lemon and rosemary focaccia, posted just before the pandemic lockdown started in New York, the @foodcoop feed recalls a simpler time before trips to the Coop and sourcing of yeast, flour and specialty items required more complex planning.



Shortcut spring risotto

INCREASED ENGAGEMENT

After March of 2020, the Coop's Instagram posts garnered more comments. For example, Dough Ashford (@deashford)'s post celebrating his last Coop shift pre-retirement received 273 likes and only one comment on February 25, 2020. Whereas a typical post on April 7, 2020, which featured a selfie of Autumn L. (@autumng0tstamina) in line to get into the Coop, received 61 comments as members pooled intel on line lengths ("Ok in line at 2:45. Abt five down from 7th ave on President. Will update when I get to door."); safety regulations ("anyone knows if my toddler needs to wear a mask? She will probably not keep it on…"); and messages of gratitude ("thank you food coop workers!!!").

The same period saw a shift in members' whereabouts. While Instagram continued to provide a space to peer into one another's kitchens, several of the home cooks most

reposted by @foodcoop left the city. The anonymous chef behind @clintonhilltestkitchen put their membership on pause. Nutritionist Sydney Greene (@greenehealth) moved to Colorado. Food blogger Smita (@hakunasmitata) left Brooklyn. And Kaori Goto and her family moved to her home country of Japan (@kaori_brooklyn).

Kaori and Smita share that they both miss the Coop and enjoy the vicarious glimpse into produce and organic offerings they get by staying connected through Instagram. Both were generous enough to share spring recipes, and we included one further down in this article.

TIPS FOR HOME FOOD PHOTOGRAPHERS

The account's contents are currently monitored, shared and maintained by a lone Coop member. Other Coop staff have limited involvement.

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>
> *FOOD WRITER CATHEY ERWAY*

When contacted for comment (via Instagram direct message), the staff member who manages the Coop's Instagram account seemed to prefer remaining anonymous.

The Coop's Instagram manager did, however, offer tips for members posting photos of what they make with Coop-sourced ingredients:

- **Tag @foodcoop.** We love to share your grocery cart, your refrigerator contents, your shift, and occasionally your dinner.

- **Avoid kids.** We don't want to share other people's children, no matter how

cute they are, unless the guardian has agreed (we try not to share any pix taken without the subject's explicit consent.)

- **No self promotion.** Sometimes people try to publicize themselves through the Coop, like their fitness or nutrition business, or a cause the Coop is not explicitly signed up for. We can't do that. There's no way to do it equitably for all members, so we avoid this sort of repost altogether—unless it's directly related to the store or a co-operative endeavor that we're officially connected to, e.g., a food drive or another Coop we're helping out. Otherwise, we're not reposting it.

- **Set to public.** Your post has to be set to public for us to share it. We've had people tag us and not realize their account and posts are private, and so unshareable. So, tag us if it's a Coop thing, and make sure your post is shareable!

- **Focus.** We usually don't re-gram blurry pictures, and we tend to re- gram fewer videos than still pictures, and almost no boomerangs.

When reached by email for additional guidance, cookbook author and food writer Cathey Erway (@cathyerway) offered this advice:

"Shooting in natural light is a must for me—I'm someone without a lot of fancy lighting equipment. I like shooting backlit images of food, preferably in the morning when the sun is lighter."





Kaori's Chirashi-zushi

TWO SPRING RECIPES

Recipe 1: Shortcut Spring Risotto (full recipe)

Recipe 2: Kaori's Chirashi-zushi (full recipe printed below)

3 – 4 servings

This is a popular rice dish for Hinamatsuri or Girls' Day Celebration (March 3) in Japan. It's also commonly made for gatherings and picnics and eaten throughout the year.

Ingredients:

Sushi Rice

- 1.5 cups sushi rice (uncooked)
- 3 – 4 Tbs sushi vinegar (5 Tbs vinegar, 2 Tbs sugar, 2 tsp salt)
- (Optional) 2 – 4 tsp roasted white sesame seeds

Vegetables to mix in the rice:

- 3/4 cup shiitake mushrooms, thinly sliced
- 3/4 cup chopped carrot
- 3/4 cup chopped burdock root
- 2.5 Tbs soy sauce
- 2 Tbs sugar
- 1 Tbs Mirin or sake
- 1/4 cup water

Toppings:

- 1 cup snow peas, loosely packed
- (optional) 2 eggs + a pinch of salt
- 1 sheet of nori, cut thinly with scissors or ripped in small pieces

Steps

1) Cook the vegetables with the seasonings and water until soft and flavorful. Let cool, drain the excess seasoning broth, and set aside.

2) Cook the sushi rice. (If you are cooking rice in a pot, soak the grains for 30 minutes or more and drain once. Cook with exactly the same volume of water, e.g., 1 cup of rice + 1 cup of water, at medium low heat with the lid on. Once it starts boiling, turn the heat to low, let it cook for another 2-3 minutes, turn it off and let the residual heat cook the rice thoroughly for 10-15 minutes.)

3) Blanch the snow peas in lightly salted water and cut them thinly.

4) Beat the eggs with a pinch of salt and make a few thin egg “crepes.” Slice them thinly like spaghetti.

(If you roll up the “crepes” together, it’s easy to slice them.)

5) Sprinkle the sushi vinegar on the warm cooked rice and sesame seeds. Mix thoroughly but lightly. Once well mixed, mix in the cooked vegetables.

6) Spread the snow peas and eggs on top of the rice, and it’s done! Sprinkle the nori on top right before serving.

Other topping ideas: Shelled edamame, lightly salted cooked salmon pieces, sliced avocado, mayonnaise (Japanese-kind recommended) or anything else you can think of!

Enjoy!