

Erasmo Aiello

1957

BAKER, PROFESSIONAL TENOR

AS TOLD BY ERASMO AIELLO

Erasmo Aiello--or as some know him, Orazio Aiello--is the owner of Palermo Bakery in Seaside, California, and a professional tenor. Erasmo got his start working in the family bakery in Sicily in the town of Isola delle Femmine, where he was born on December 10, 1957. The bakery had been started by his great-great-grandfather and was passed down from generation to generation.

Although that bakery is no longer run by Erasmo's family, it still stands in Isola delle Femmine, right next door to Erasmo's childhood home. At the age of eight, Erasmo was already a fully trained baker, providing the town with fresh bread every day, all the while being a full-time student.



Erasmo at his First Communion.

After several years of working in the bakery, Erasmo found time to join a local gym and began training to become an amateur boxer. Even though he had no days off from the bakery, Erasmo had a successful boxing career and became Sicilian Lightweight Champion by the age of 16. In 1982 he decided to emigrate to the United States, and he lived in Manhattan for two years.

During that time, Erasmo continued to work with bread, this time in the form of pizza. He "tossed" pies at a Mafia-owned pizzeria in Queens and served slices for members of the Mob. For obvious reasons, when the opportunity arose he took a job in a pizzeria on Wall Street. While living in New York, Erasmo met his wife,

Catherine, who introduced him to his future business partners, her brother-in-law, Rosario Zito, and her sister, Rosetta Zito.

Erasmus and Catherine decided to move to Monterey, California, to open Palermo Bakery with the Zitos. The bakery became a success and still operates today under Erasmus's management, primarily serving local restaurants, hotels and grocery businesses as well as non-profit organizations. The bakery generously provides supplies for meal programs, such as Meals on Wheels, Salvation Army, and the Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners at the Monterey Fairgrounds. Palermo Bakery also donates bread to various restaurants for fundraising events.



Erasmus at Palermo Bakery.



**Racks of panettone
behind Erasmus.**

Erasmus participates in several local charity events each year, not only donating time and bread, but also by sharing his operatic talent for the delight of others. When he was 11 years old Erasmus went to a seminary to become a priest, and that's where his talent was discovered and developed--he even won a singing competition over all the 150 students in the seminary. At such a young age, it was an honor for him to be chosen to sing at the Messina Cathedral for the ordination of 30 priests. Two years later when he left the seminary and returned home to continue going to school and working at the bakery, he only sang in the shower.



Erasmo performing with the Monterey Peninsula College Orchestra at the State Theater in Monterey, California.

Some years ago, after giving an impromptu performance at a private party, Erasmo was approached by Mike Marotta Sr., a local professional musician, who encouraged him to pursue his singing. The passion quickly returned, and he began studying and performing in a few operas (*La Traviata*, *Rigoletto*, *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Tosca*) in local venues. Although shy at first, Erasmo gained more confidence with each performance, and he has sung at hundreds of events, including weddings and funerals. He is also a fan favorite during the Santa Rosalia Festa Italia, singing for both the Mass that begins the festivities and during the festival itself in Monterey's Custom House Plaza.

When he's not baking bread and singing opera, Erasmo likes to cook for his family, work in his garden growing fruits and vegetables and read books about history. Erasmo and Catherine have four children--David, 36, is a CPA and lives in Salinas with his wife, DiAnn and daughter Isla; Christian, 33, is a project manager at UC Davis Medical Center and lives in Sacramento with his wife, Emily; Michaela, 29, is

a fourth-grade teacher living in San Diego, and Lauren, 20, is a student at the University of San Diego.



Son Christian's wedding: Erasmo, wife Catherine, son Christian with bride Emily, daughters Lauren and Michaela, son David and wife DiAnn.

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