Polish Babkas Pani Maria Zak

1 cup golden raisins

1/4 cup dark rum

2½cups milk

7 1/4 cups all-purpose flour

2 tablespoons (three 1/4-ounce packages) active dry yeast

¾ cup granulated sugar

1 teaspoon salt

12 large egg yolks

l ½ sticks (¾ cup) unsalted butter, cut into pieces and softened

1½ teaspoons freshly grated lemon rind

1½ teaspoons freshly grated orange rind

1 teaspoon vanilla

½ teaspoon almond extract

an egg wash, made by beating 1 large egg with 1 teaspoon milk

confectioners' sugar or vanilla sugar **(recipe** follows) for sprinkling the babkas

In **a small** bowl let the raisins macerate in **the rum, covered.** overnight. In **a saucepan** bring the milk to a rolling boil, remove the pan from the heat, and whisk in 1 1/4 cups of the flour, sifted. Whisk the mixture until it is the consistency of mashed potatoes and let it cool to lukewarm. In a large bowl proof the yeast in ½ cup lukewarm water with a pinch of the granulated sugar for 10 minutes, or until it is foamy. Add the flour mixture, the remaining granulated sugar, and the salt, stir the mixture well, and let it stand for 20 minutes. Transfer the mixture to the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the dough hook, beat in the yolks, 1 at a time, beating well after each addition, and beat in the remaining 6 cups flour. Beat the dough at moderate speed for *5* minutes, reduce the speed to moderately low, and beat in the butter (be sure it is softened), a few pieces at a time, beating after each addition until the butter is incorporated. Form the dough into a ball, put it in a well buttered large

bowl, and turn it to coat it with the butter. Let the dough rise, covered with • plastic wrap, in a warm place for 1 hour, or until it is double in bulk

To the raisin mixture add the rinds, the vanilla, and the almond extract and stir **the** mixture well. Punch down the dough and **knead** in the raisin mixture. Halve the dough, form each half into an 18-inch-long rope, and join the ends of each rope to form a circle. Transfer each piece of dough toa well buttered 12-cup *Kugelhup* pan and let the dough rise, covered loosely, for 45 minutes to 1hour, or until it is almost double in bulk. Brush the babka with some of the egg wash and bake them in the middle of a preheated 375° F. oven for 30 to 40 minutes, or until they are golden. Invert the babkas on to racks, let them cool, and sprinkle them with the confectioners' sugar or vanilla sugar, sifted. Makes 2 babkas.

Vanilla Sugar

3 or 4 vanilla beans, halved and split lengthwise

confectioners' sugar

Bury the vanilla beans in a large jar of the confectioners' sugar and let the mixture stand for 3 to 4 days, or until it is infused. Used vanilla beans, rinsed and dried, may be reused.

JohnG.7Awodzinslci has written articles on food, classical music. and musicians and hopes to tackle gardening next.