



The apéritif is served. The Sardanes band starts up. Strange, medieval-sounding music entices old and young on to the dance floor. These rituals are a mystery to those of us weaned on rock'n'roll and jazz.

The big festival of eating and dancing takes place over two days. It is organised to celebrate the end of a successful summer.

Close family and friends are invited for a four-course lunch at Pere's house and then it's on again to El Moli. One's only thought is for a siesta, but, alas, the non-stop activities don't accommodate that desire. Very soon dinner is served, again at Pere's house. Somehow we manage to consume another four courses, which we work off at the *bal de nuit*.

We sneak away exhausted, but no-one can sleep while the band is still playing. The next morning the unloading of clanking pots and pans, trucks coming and going, sound systems being tested and the chatter of busy people draw us out of our slumber and into another day of relentless partying.

The main event of the festival, the *Gran Arrossada Popular*, consists of providing traditional Spanish food – prawns and paella – for 850 guests and can be loosely translated as 'The Big Barbecue'.

For weeks the *Associacio de Veïns i Amics de Creixell* (the Association of Neighbours and Friends of Creixell) has been ferrying tables, trestles and chairs to the park. Stalls are erected to sell the dried veal pieces, Catalan salamis and other delights of the region. Villagers slice fresh peppers, tomatoes and lettuces for salads, while professional chefs bend over pans the size of children's swim-

ming pools to prepare massive paellas. They turn prawns with spoons the size of oars and the chicken grills are turned by two men. Dozens of bottles of wine, champagne and vermouth are unpacked.

'Beve, Walter, *todo va bien*,' says Pere as he thrusts a *cerveja* (beer) into my hand. 'Have a drink, all goes well.'

It's noon and hordes of smiling faces preside over the tables. Guests cast an eagle-eye over the pans. They find their places, and bottles rapidly lose their corks.

The moment has arrived. The coals are fired up and the prawns are added to the gravy. In goes the chicken. Men pour in bags of rice. The monumental stirring ritual gets under way.

Eating is obviously a favourite Catalan past time, and eating together is an almost religious experience. The huge main course is followed by coffee and cakes. Guests start to mingle and the festivities settle into a hum under the trees. Cigars are lit, cognac is passed around and the Sardanes band gets ready to strike up the first note.

The music starts, the circles of dancers are formed and once again, these strange sounds fill the late afternoon air.

Then the sun is gone and the music has faded. The pans are packed away, the fires are deadened, the tables and chairs are loaded onto trucks, the bar vanishes, the stalls are cleared. It's hard to believe the park was brimful only a few hours ago.

This page The 36 inhabitants of Creixell play host to a huge festival during which paella, fresh bread, beer and wine is served in huge quantities. Seating arrangements are provided for about 850 people