

Let's Call The Whole Thing Off

New Orleans Style

"Let's Call the Whole Thing Off" is a popular song introduced by Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers in the 1937 film *Shall We Dance*. A New Orleans version of the song follows below, with apologies to the renowned songwriting team of George and Ira Gershwin.



Ginger and Fred

George and Ira

But first a disclaimer: "Yat", a term derived from the local greeting, "Where y'at!", refers to a person in the greater New Orleans area that might speak in that fashion. In fact, not all New Orleanians are yats, and not all yats live in any one part of town or neighboring parish. Even the most eloquent among us have "been knowin'" that we all utter "yatisms" from time to time. So no disrespect, only love.

With that *mea culpa*, here's the song:

Things may seem like an awful mess
If the girl you love is a yat;
For you like this and the other
While she goes for dis and dat.
You wish you knew what the end might be;
For you don't know where you're at ...
It's plain to see you two will never be one,
Something must be done.

You say Chalmeetians and I say Chalmations,
 You say some swimps and I say crustaceans;
 Chalmeetians, Chalmatians, some crabs or crustaceans,
 Let's call the whole thing off!

Things that you cherish are all in da Parish;
 You're a bit garish and I'm simply squarish.
 Cherish, da Parish, you're garish, I'm squarish.
 Let's call the whole thing off!

But oh! If we call the whole thing off,
 Then we must split.
 And oh! If we call it quits,
 Then you might pitch a fit!
 So, if I like beignets and you go for donuts,
 I'll just eat donuts before we all go nuts.
 For we know we need each other,
 So we better call the calling off off.
 Let's call the whole thing off!

I shot a mallard, but you say a mallad,
 You think it's valid to order Wop Salad,
 Mallard, Mallad, valid Wop Salad,
 Let's call the whole thing off!

SERVE A DELICIOUS WOP SALAD



**THERE'S NOTHING BETTER
 Than a Wop Salad**

Slice lettuce, cut tomatoes to desired size add lots of sliced hard boiled eggs, black olives, green olives, cut up celery, sweet peppers, shallots, cocktail onions, anchovies, hearts of artichokes, vinegar, olive oil, salt and pepper to taste. Add Lea & Perrins sauce.

<p>Re Umberto Olive Oil 8-Oz. 48c <small>.....Bot.</small></p> <p>Schwegmann Eggs Grade B Large 42c <small>.....Doz.</small></p> <p>Progresso Imported Capers 2-Oz. 24c <small>.....Jar</small></p> <p>Heinz White Vinegar ... 2 Pint 33c <small>.....Bots.</small></p>	<p>Perfecto Salad Olives 10-Oz. 40c <small>Loose</small></p> <p>Black Olives Lb. 60c <small>Rialto All Green, Tips Included</small></p> <p>Asparagus 15-Oz. 28c <small>.....Can</small></p> <p>Large, Ripe, Fla. TomatoesLb. 18c</p>	<p>Iceberg Lettuce ... 2 Large 33c <small>.....Heads</small></p> <p>Progresso Imported Italian <small>Tuscan</small> Peppers 1/2 Pt. 22c</p> <p>Progresso Anchovies ... 2-Oz. 17c <small>.....Can</small></p>
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1963 Schwegmann's ad, Times-Picayune

I call it crab boil, and you go for crab berl,
I change my car's oil, you change da car's earl,
Crab boil, crab berl, car oil, car earl,
Let's call the whole thing off!



But oh! If we call the whole thing off,
Then we must part.
And oh! If we ever part,
Then that might break my heart!
So, just like Mayor Maestri, you like dem ersters,
I'll cancel oysters and order da ersters.
For we know we need each other,
So we better call the calling off off!
Let's call the whole thing off!

You say regatta, and I say regahta,
My muffuletta is your muffalotta.
Regatta, regahta, this surely is a lotta
Ways to call the whole thing off!

I call you darling, and you call me dawlin',
You take the boat out and love to go trawlin'.
Dawlin', Darling, it's just so appalling,
Let's call the whole thing off!



Muffuletta or Muffalotta?

But oh! If we call the whole thing off,
Then we'll be through.
And oh! If our love is through
Then that would make me blue!
So, if I like paella or dinner at Shaya,
It's Rocky & Carlo's and just jambalaya.
For we know we need each other,
So we better call the calling off off!
Let's call the whole thing off!

You say f'true and sometimes f'sure,
While I think *c'est vrai* has a certain allure,
F'true! Yeah you rite! What I must endure!
Let's call the whole thing off!

So let us not spoil it, or should I say spurl it
And say *au revoir* since our love's in the turlet
Spoil it, spurl it, toilet, turlet,
Let's call the whole thing off!



Wop salad at Rocky and Carlo's

But oh! If we call the whole thing off,
Then we'll be done.
And oh! If we've had our run
Then that would not be fun!
So if I prefer merliton and you opt for mellatawn
United we'll be like the Colors of Bennetton.
For we know we need each other,
So we better call the calling off off!
Let's call the whole thing off!



I'm stayin' out of this!

P.S. "Wop Salad", once a mainstay of so many Italian or Italian-Creole restaurants in and around the New Orleans area, is still extremely popular today but can be found on most menus simply as Italian Salad. Rocky and Carlo's is perhaps one of the last places to keep the name alive. Most New Orleans Italians and others were in no way offended over the years, even though its name derived from the perjorative term "wop". The ethnic slur comes not from the acronym for "without papers" but from *guappo*, a word in Sicilian and Neapolitan dialects meaning "handsome man," describing a bold, swaggering, cocky young punk trying too hard, perhaps, to act brave and be cool. So good lookin' rather than illegal.

Back in 1961, someone wrote to Maud O'Brien's column in the *Times-Picayune* to complain about the use of "wop salad", to whom she replied that "the term 'wop salad' has been used on dozens of New Orleans restaurant menus for the past 25 years." Even the Italian-Americans staging a local school's Italian Festival "find the term acceptable ... Everybody loves 'wop salad.' We Irish-English-German-Scandinavians all try to copy it." Self-described wagwit, and excellent observer of New Orleans' psyche, S. Frederick Starr thought that the city's acceptance of the term without offense for so many years was an indication of the city's overall good mental health. Yeah you rite!

P.P.S. Please check out two outstanding renditions of "*Let's Call the Whole Thing Off*" by New Orleans' own Louis Armstrong (in a memorable duet with Ella Fitzgerald) and another by native son Harry Connick, Jr.

NED HÉMARD

New Orleans Nostalgia
"Let's Call The Whole Thing Off"
Ned Hémard
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