



CLOSE YOUR EYES AND EAT AT BELLY SHACK

Sweet and Sour

By Michael Nagrant

THERE ARE A LOT OF THINGS about Belly Shack, the new Chino-Latino (technically the style is “Puerto-rean,” as chef/owner Bill Kim is Korean and his managing partner/wife Yvonne Cadiz-Kim is Puerto Rican, but that sounds like a bad stomach ailment) restaurant in Humboldt Park that I don’t love.

The menu with sections titled “SAMMICH” and “U KUD LIK THIS” (for the soft-serve ice cream—Is that “like” or “lick”?) which seems to be the literary collaboration of the dyslexic cow mascots of Chik-fil-A and Tony Soprano is pretty groan-inducing.

Then there’s the cutesy faux wall graffiti featuring Hallmark-card friendly protest aphorisms like “Enjoy More. Use Less” and “More Bike Lanes.” There’s also a painting of a dude grasping at a chain-link fence looking like he’s about to get frisked while sporting a t-shirt that says, “Eat it.” If this were a comic-style mural, I’m pretty sure the next frame would show that dude surrounded by rabid cops unholstering billy clubs and going in for a little Jon Burge-style Chicago Police justice.

I guess I’d really like to see a little more incisive commentary here, maybe a painting of a befuddled Mayor Daley caught in the cross-hairs, Public Enemy-logo style, or something slightly less, but still controversial like the phrase “Schools. Not Olympics.” After all, when you’re serving \$9 tofu and organic brown-rice jibaritos, probably the biggest invitation for a “Yuppie Go Home!” window tag from an anti-gentrification graffiti gang since the first Starbucks opened in this hood, you better come correct.

I also have mixed feelings about the reclaimed industrial interior design scheme at Belly Shack. The acoustic tiles plastered on the ceiling look kind of spacey and ensure you won’t have to scream your head off to be heard by your dining companions. The communal table made from 200-year-old reclaimed maple and the yellow articulating warehouse dock lights hanging from the ceiling also ring authentic.

However, the particle-board walls, cement floors, prison-grey color scheme and fake graffiti make the place feel like a movie-set design mash-up from “Colors,” “New Jack City” and “Boyz in the Hood.” While chowing down on an Asian meatball sandwich, you almost expect Robert Duvall and Sean Penn to smash through the door while collaring a cracked-out Chris Rock and a dope-slinging LA Raiders-hat-wearing Ice Cube.

To reinforce Belly Shack’s street cred, you’ll also find some gritty shots of Bill Kim and his “crew” chillin’ out in various urban locales on the restaurant’s Web site, bellyshack.com. The one of the Belly Shack posse all wearing faded jeans shot in the Western Blue Line CTA Station looks like an outtake from the lost Abercrombie and Fitch Urban Collection catalog. In another shot, an indie-band-style glossy promo shot of the kitchen crew hanging out near a graffitied wall, Kim maintains his deep cool calm stare, despite the fact that some dude is about to do a kick-flip ollie on his head with a skateboard. Hey, I’m all about tongue-in-cheek fun, but the Chipotle: Grand Theft Auto San Andreas Edition vibe seems too much like the contrived indulgence of an interior designer enamored with urban stereotypes.

My disappointment over design details is especially sharp because I wholeheartedly love Kim’s food at Belly Shack. His “Hot and Sour” soup—featuring rich corn perfume, mineral-tinged chunks of hominy, silken shards of chicken and a successful game of brinksmanship with the cumin and salt shakers—is more layered and deeper than any bowl of pozole I’ve ever had. The soulful soup is almost enough to elevate Kim into a Rick Bayless-like level in the pantheon of honorary-Latino cooks.

The Kogi plate featuring thinly sliced red-chili-paste-coated thin shavings of rich beef is paired with a delicate, nuanced garden-fresh kimchi that I prefer to the smack-you-over-the-head fizzy fermented mouth-searing chili-infused versions that you find in your average Korean market.

While the Boricua, the aforementioned jibarito, or fried plantains stuffed with toothsome organic rice (so creamy I thought it was Arborio risotto-style rice at first) and marinated tofu is one of the more delightful local vegetarian dishes I haven’t eaten at Shawn McClain’s Green Zebra. You got to eat it fast, though, as the rice and tofu exudes a goopy sauce that sogs down the plantains.

The marriage of Korean and Puerto Rican elements at Belly Shack, a reflection and product of Kim’s marriage to his Puerto Rican wife, is so effective, I’d love to take Keith Bardwell, the Louisiana justice of the peace who recently refused to marry a mixed-race couple because, as he said, “I just don’t believe in mixing the races that way,” here. After one slurp of the hot and sour soup, I’m pretty sure he might just change his mind about such matters.

READINGS

THU/5

→ **Adam Langer**

The author reads from “My Father’s Bonus March.”
Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State, (312)747-4300. 6pm. Free.

Ninth Letter Reading

Two authors from the current issue of the Ninth Letter journal read their work.
57th Street Books, 1301 E. 57th, (773)684-1300. 6pm. Free.

FRI/6

Jeffrey Haas

The author discusses “The Assassination of Fred Hampton.”
57th Street Books, 1301 E. 57th, (773)684-1300. 6pm. Free.

→ **Margaret Atwood**

The author discusses her work. **See Feature.**
DePaul University’s Merle Reskin Theater, 60 E. Balbo, (312)922-1999. 7:30pm.

SAT/7

Howard Zinn, Dave Zinn

In a conversation entitled, “The Power of the People.”
Mandel Hall, 1131 E. 57th, 7pm. \$10.

TUE/10

Joseph Peterson

The author reads from “Beautiful Piece.”
57th Street Books, 1301 E. 57th, (773)684-1300. 6pm. Free.

Joy Harjo

The author discusses “For a Girl Becoming Co-sponsored by Literature for All of Us.”
Women and Children First Bookstore, 5233 N. Clark, (773)769-9299. 7pm. Free.

Ronda Kasl

The historian delivers a lecture entitled, “Sacred Spain.”
Instituto Cervantes, 31 W. Ohio, 6pm. Free.

WED/11

Funny Ha-Ha: Geek Love

With Maureen Ryan, Kevin Guilfoile, Claire Zulkey and more.
Hideout, 1354 W. Wabansia, (773)227-4433. 6:30pm. \$5.

→ **Jay Ryan**

Paul Hornschemeier
The two visual and graphic artists present their work. **See Tip of the Week.**
Quimby’s, 1854 W. North, (773)342-0910. 7pm. Free.

TIP OF THE WEEK

JAY RYAN



There may be plenty of people in this world who ignore the everyday reality that burdens the rest of us, who see and describe things as they choose, often with the assistance of irresistibly cute animals, but most are locked up, not making a living off it. Chicago artist and printmaker Jay Ryan, of The Bird Machine, not only makes a living off making up his own world, he makes the rest of us want to live in it. His rock posters and other commissions rarely make any literal connection to the band or subject matter at hand, but there’s a method to his madness. Well sometimes. Consider this description of one poster for a Stnng/Dianogah double bill in Minneapolis, from his forthcoming book on the Akashic imprint, “Animals and Objects In and Out of Water: Posters by Jay Ryan, 2006-2008”: “I was building a new bike while making this print, so I drew a bike. Then I drew a fat man being thrown from the bike, but replaced him with a dolphin, but soon felt the dolphin didn’t fill the space appropriately, and didn’t really make sense, anyway. I replaced the dolphin with an ichthyosaurus, and added a toaster to tie the whole composition together.” Who needs coherence when Ryan’s image combines his singular warm style with graphic and typographic virtuosity in such a way that you see the picture, and the band name, and somewhere, deep inside, a voice says, “Exactly. Perfect.” (Brian Hieggelke)

Jay Ryan discusses his work at Quimby’s, 1854 West North, November 11 at 7pm, along with comics maker Paul Hornschemeier, who’s just released “All and Sundry: Uncollected Work, 2004-2009.”

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MARGARET ATWOOD TURNS HER BOOK TOUR INTO A PERFORMANCE



Dystopia, the Musical?

By Fabrizio O. Almeida

"I HAVE SOME THAT I CLASSIFY AS TO whether or not they'd make good murder weapons," Margaret Atwood quips when asked about the many awards, among them the Booker Prize, that have graced her forty-year career as a novelist. The celebrated Canadian author is on the road in the United States promoting her latest novel, "The Year of the Flood," and speaking by phone from her hotel room in Washington, D.C., just a few hours prior to that evening's events. "The Dashiell Hammett Award, which is just beautiful, is a little thin man cast in bronze with the head of a falcon, and I keep that on my desk as it does look like one of the Egyptian gods. But there's [another] one that's sort of a plexiglass pointy thing, and that would be my weapon of choice." The almost septuagenarian—Atwood turns 70 on the eighteenth of this month—responds to this reporter's laughter with a mischievous chuckle, waits a beat and then goes in for the kill. "Well, I didn't win the Dashiell Hammett Award for nothing."

Could this be the same author whose novels have envisioned nightmarish dystopian views for the human race, as in 1985's "The Handmaid's Tale" and currently "The Year of the Flood" (a second book in a planned trilogy that began with "Oryx and Crake" in 2003)? The same Atwood whose dark thematic threads have included prostitution, rape and the abandonment of children by mothers?

"She gets this rep for being very serious," says Anne Clark Bartlett, English Department chair and professor at DePaul University. "A recent article said something about her [Atwood] having a 'pitiless' eye. And while she doesn't take any prisoners or suffer fools, I think happily she has a hilarious sense of humor and a real knack for physical comedy." A self-confessed "Margaret Atwood fiend," Bartlett, whose throaty laugh and frequent use of the words "cool" and "yeah" in conversation belie her 48 years ("Mentally, I'm 29" she jokes), considers Atwood a literary "rock star." "She's a larger-than-life force, her vista is so vast, and her gaze is so penetrating. She's always made the bold step, and she's always taken on the subjects that are huge, like rape. Still, this is a big risk for her."

The risk to which Bartlett refers is the performance that will end up on the stage of DePaul's Merle Reskin Theatre Friday evening. Atwood will act as "narrator," reading passages from "The Year of the Flood," and DePaul faculty members (including Bartlett, who describes her upcoming acting debut as "remotely terrifying") will bring to life the novel's main characters through excerpts that dramatize some of the book's conflicts. (The "flood" of the title is actually a waterless plague that has wiped out the human race, and the 400-page story concerns its scattered survivors on a quest to find one another.) A choir will belt out California singer-songwriter Orville Stoeber's original score (music and lyrics) inspired by and produced for the novel (and available as a recording), and an imaginative set—leftover from a children's play running daytimes in the Merle Reskin—will offer Chicago audiences a Technicolor-mountain backdrop to the imaginative proceedings. In other words, there's *risk*, like the kind involved when any writer embarks on a public-speaking book tour. And then there's risk, like being 69 years old and signing on to an "all-singing, all-acting" book-tour-cum-musical-radio-play-dramatization-performance-piece.

Of course, Atwood makes it sound simple, and humorous. "It's like Mr. Potato Head. You send whoever's putting it on the script and the music and then they interpret it any way they want." Indeed, from Edinburgh, Scotland, (where the tour started) to Ottawa, Canada to Boston, Massachusetts, this "hybrid book tour" (Ms. Atwood's preferred moniker) has proved a chameleon of a show limited only by its presenters' rich imaginations and a suggestion or two from Ms. Atwood and Mr. Stoeber, who arrive a day early to work with the cast and crew in each city, thus minimizing the tour's "carbon footprint" and staying true to the author's environmentalist roots. It's been performed by seasoned pros, by young schoolgirls and in one instance by a "company" that consisted of two bookstore workers and a customer ("It went fine," swears Atwood). It's been seen in magnificent cathedrals, intimate churches and old movie houses, with decorations and without, and sometimes with costumes or just evening wear. In other words, the Merle Reskin performance will be unique, or as Atwood puts it, "The Chicago show will be the Chicago show and it won't be seen anywhere else." And although "Flood" tour events will continue throughout the year before wrapping up in Canada in December, Chicago will be the last of the musical and dramatic hybrid presentations. "So last-chance saloon! Catch it now or that's it, folks," trumpets Atwood.

The 69-year-old writer has also picked up Blogger and Twitter like gangbusters, writing about the tour from city to city and offering a backstage pass to all the circuses. "Do you know how many followers I suddenly have? My new best friends? Starting cold from August I've now got 10,200 and counting," she says with the glee of a kid in a candy store. When asked if she's familiar with the Facebook page "Margaret Atwood is Awesome," however, she confesses, "My goodness. Well, I'm afraid to look at it. I've never gone on Facebook." And will she feel the need, as an author in the twenty-first century, to stick with the blogging and tweeting? "I'm not sure about that. I'm old enough so I could just dump the whole thing and say forget it." But where would this leave her 10,200 "new best friends"? She considers this a moment, before declaring with a laugh, "No, no, I couldn't dump them. I mean, you're stuck with them. I'll have to keep up."

Margaret Atwood's dramatic reading, with music, from her new novel "The Year of the Flood," will be performed at DePaul's Merle Reskin Theatre, 60 East Balbo, on November 6 at 7:30pm. Tickets are \$20. (312)922-1999.

Lecture by Ronda Kasl "Sacred Spain"

Instituto Cervantes Auditorium
Tuesday, November 10th, 6 pm
FREE & open to the public. Limited seating,
first come first served. The lecture will be in English.

Ronda Kasl, curator and art historian specializing in the art of Spain, organized the exhibition Sacred Spain: Art and Belief in the Spanish World, Indianapolis Museum of Art October 11th - January 3rd with more than 70 works from Spain and Latin America. www.imamuseum.org

Spanish Authors in America book presentation series

Instituto Cervantes Auditorium
Thursday, November 19th, 6 pm
The lectures will be in Spanish with English translation available. Free Admission.



Best-selling Spanish authors share their works and writing experiences with the public. The series will conclude with lectures by Susana Vallejo and Care Santos.

Concert by the Chicago Cervantes Orchestra

Friday, November 20, 7:30 pm
Merit School of Music, Gottlieb Hall
38 South Peoria Street, Chicago, IL 60607
Tel: 312.335.1996
<http://chicago.cervantes.es>
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