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Deadline: 10am, Fri 22nd November



**RESTAURANT REVIEW**

**MIRCH MASALA**  
137-139 Cowley Road

Habitues of the Cowley Road with an interest in reasonably-priced exotic cuisine will have noticed the recent metamorphosis of the Mirch Masala at numbers 137-139. Closed for some time, the restaurant recently reopened with a distinct party-venue feel to it, and this is obviously having the desired effect. When my dining partner and I asked for a table, we were greeted with the incredulous response "Only two?!", and as we ate, two groups arrived to take up their pre-booked tables amongst the flowing pot-plants (one being a party of young Asian professionals celebrating a birthday). The background music kept the atmosphere lively, with everything from classical to indian pop, and this vivacity seemed reflected in other touches about the place (such as the small model people posing like the Blues Brothers on the roof of the ornate beach-style bar).

Service was prompt and extraordinarily amiable. We were informed immediately of the existence of the £7.95 all-you-can-eat buffet, which occurs 6 days a week (Mirch is closed Mondays) between 6.30 and 11pm. This was indeed the reason we were there. No sooner had our drinks orders been taken than they had appeared magically before us, and we were being urged to make a foray over toward the food counters.

A glorious array of stuff was on display, and if you are the sort of person who goes to indian restaurants with friends to share all the dishes, this will of course be your dream come true (as it was mine). In the separate compartments of the steel canteen-style main course trolley could be found vegetable korma, chicken korma, vegetable, lamb and chicken baltis, chicken madras, chana and tarka dhals (yellow split peas and lentils respectively), Bombay aloo (spicy dry potatoes), aubergine, okra, muttar paneer (peas and fried milk curd), sag aloo (spinach) and possibly more. On the end of the trolley were stacks of warm poppadums, piles of meat and vegetarian samosas, onion bhajis and an enormous plate of small round fluffy patty-type things and a huge container of sweet halva (worth saving for later - details to follow). In another vaguely refrigerated trolley could be found all the typical sundries, including an evil lime pickle (which my dining friend described as "quite limey" as I attempted to quench the fire in my mouth with beer), runny mango chutney, raita (cucumber, yoghurt and onion dip), traditional Indian restaurant salad (chopped up onion, cucumber, tomato), pickled vegetables (gherkins, carrots, beans) - and a couple of dessert fruits (lychees and guavas).

Rather overcome by this abundance of foodstuffs, I visited almost every container to collect a small portion and pile it greedily onto my plate. Chastised by the kindly manager for eating the wrong way round (I suppose I could have had starters followed by mains...), I made my way slowly through the first plate, pacing myself. The chana dhal was a little salty according to my co-diner, but I like salty lentils; the spinach was deliciously sloppy, the muttar paneer splendidly chewy, the fluffy patties soft and tasty, the mango chutney sweet and mangoey, etc, etc. The peshwari naan deserves a special mention. Freshly cooked to order (as are all the naans), it was pink, light, crispy and delicious, a revelation compared to the featureless carbohydrate curry-mops one often receives in less salubrious establishments.

A rather tiny pint of Kingfisher later and I was back to the food counter, shovelling halva (not the Greek-style, super-sweet sesame-seed fibreglass, but the asian version: a deliciously squidgy cake of almond and sultanas) onto the edge of my plate (for which I was jovially chastised by the restaurant's proprietor - I could have had a pudding plate, you know). Feeling finally stuffed with savouries, we had a short digestive break before embarking upon the finale. Of course, no proper and fully investigative review is complete without experimenting with desserts (!), and so two ice creams were called for (extra to the buffet price, but worth it). I had pistachio and almond kulfi in a delightful little lidded cauldron; laden with condensed milk, it was the perfect end to a spicy meal. Sorbets and other kulfis are also available. Resisting coffee and finally calling for the bill, we were told that we could not possibly leave, as it was not 11 o'clock yet! If only we'd had the time to stay.

Takeaway is starting soon, and I can't wait.

Su Jordan, 21.11.02

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**THEATRE REVIEW**

**SHOPPING AND \*\*\*\*ING**

Provelan Theatre Co.  
Old Fire Station Theatre, 19-23.11.02

A little while ago, Zadie Smith's "White Teeth" was the novel to be seen reading on the tube. In the late nineties, "Shopping and Fucking" was the play to go and see in London. Along with the work of Irvine Welsh, James Kelman, Sarah Kane, Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin and all the other young(ish) artists of their ilk, this play by HIV-positive Mark Ravenhill seemed to speak with the truly fucked-up voice of the modern age. If you were middle class, slightly self-destructive, had ever taken drugs, had bizarre or disturbing sex or handled stolen goods, this was the play for you.

What is the message we are supposed to get from this play? Most of it is contained within the title, if you are willing to put a little time and thought in. Without witnessing the frankly hideous scenes which are contained within it, we can guess that there might be what is loosely described as a moral contained therein: the two functions of the title, both necessary and enjoyable, have become sordid, defining and strangely similar in today's evil, capitalist world. Where love comes in pill form, money forms the fundament of paradise and real personal relationships endanger the self and must be avoided. Like the hellish futures envisaged for us in science-fiction, but without the shiny space suits, we can hop into an orgasmatron, or we can pay to lick each others' arses, hoping we don't catch anything. As consumers, the choice is ours.

Any Hayes, looking like a character straight out of Hollyoaks, is splendid in her role as Lulu, the play's doll-like, understandably neurotic straight woman (in both senses). Behaving like a character straight out of Brecht, Lulu seems almost an innocent in the terribly depressing proceedings which take place around her, resorting to theft and drug-dealing through the need to keep herself and her uninterested boyfriend alive. After a slightly nervy start, Hayes stands out in the production - along with American Brian Stewart - as possessing considerable acting talent. Stewart's is the best mockney accent you'll ever hear from someone from Chicago, and something in his dead-eyed leer and doglike tongue make him the most plausible cockney gangster I've seen on stage or film for some time. Lulu's boyfriend - if you can call him that, seeing as he is in love with the snakelike Mark, and can no longer bear even to kiss her - is a loser, played with clubber-bimbo-chic by Ollie Meech, and their lover Mark (though what love Lulu gets from him is unclear) is - well - snakelike. Vacuous, co-dependent, witty and searching for himself (finding only psychobabble and a return to drug addiction), Mark is a burnt-out yuppie who is lost, lost, lost. The male-model-esque Peter Orlov (not shy of getting his washboard stomach out for the audience) makes an intriguing Mark, bouncing well off Meech's angry and ignorant Robbie. Praise goes too to Ben Van Der Velde for his hapless Geordie rent-boy, Gary, a walking corpse from the moment he appears on the stage.

Like the product of any decent fin-de-siecle movement worth its salt, this "in yer face" play may well be more a cry for help than anything else, putting any message it intends to communicate across in a non-committal way - as if it were a petulant child - and making us laugh out loud in between. In so crying, however, it may unwittingly serve to shock us into the thought that life doesn't have to be so wrong, so lacking in meaning or real values. The play's most valuable gift may well be the feeling of disgust it leaves with the audience as they realise they have become paying voyeurs, making a sordid transaction just like the characters before them.

Su Jordan, 19.11.02

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Come and meet Jeremy Paxman, who will be signing copies of his new title "The Political Animal" on Monday 25th November 11.30am at Blackwell's Bookshop, 50 Broad Street.

**BLACKWELL'S BOOKSHOPS**  
Saturday 23 November 8pm, Sheldonian Theatre. Oxford Philomusica. John Lill piano, Marios Papadopoulos conductor. Brahms Piano Concerto no 1 & Symphony no 1. Tickets 01865 305305

**THE ARCADIAN SINGERS** will be performing Howells Requiem and Purcell's Te Deum and Jubilate in D. Saturday 23rd November, Merton College Chapel, 8pm. Tickets on the door £8/£5(concs)/£3(OUMS)

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**Oxford University Chamber Orchestra**  
Conductor: Jonathan Williams  
Ravel: Ma Mère l'Oye (Complete ballet music)  
Brahms: Symphony No. 4  
Von Suppe: Light Cavalry Overture  
Tickets £7 (£4 concessions) on the door

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Andrea Hallam (Violin) Hiroko Sasaki (Piano)  
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£8.50-£21.50 See review at www.dailyinfo.co.uk  
**CANDIDE** Mon 25th - Sat 30th : 7.30pm  
Sat Mat: 2.30pm  
Oxford Operatic Society do Bernstein doing Voltaire. £9.50-£15

**The Apollo Oxford 0870 6063500**  
**THE ROCKY HORROR SHOW** Fri 22nd & Sat 23rd : 6pm, 8.45pm  
30th anniversary tour. See review at www.dailyinfo.co.uk  
**GARY MOORE** Sun 24th: 7.30pm  
Versatile British rocker. £20  
**THE HOBBIT** Tue 26th - Sat 30th : 7.30pm, plus mats Thu: 2pm Sat: 2.30pm  
The prelude to Lord of the Rings. £9-£15

**Old Fire Station Theatre 297170**  
**SHOPPING AND \*\*\*\*ING** Fri 22nd : 7.30 Sat 23rd: 2.30, 7.30  
A corrosive look at our disposable world. See review  
**LOOK BACK IN ANGER** Tue 26th - Sat 30th : 7.30  
Sat Mat: 2.30  
Revolutionary kitchen-sink drama

**Burton Taylor Theatre 305350**  
**DIDO AND AENEAS** Fri 22nd & Sat 23rd: 9.30pm  
Purcell's operatic tragedy. See review at www.dailyinfo.co.uk  
**ART OF FACT BY NICHOLAS PIERPAN** Tue 26th - Sat 30th : 7.30pm  
New writing: Fresh political theatre / £5/ £4

**Pegasus Theatre 722851**  
**INCOMPATIBLE YOURS** Sat 23rd: 8pm  
The ups & downs of the dating game. £7/£4.50/£2.50  
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Highly twisted future satire - deformed gang & pretty hostage.  
**AUSTIN POWERS IN GOLDMEMBER**(15) Fri: 7.15 Sat: 5.00, 7.15 Sun: 4.00, 6.15 Mon: 6.15 Tue-Thu: 7.15  
Third outing for the European-toothed one.  
**THE TIN DRUM**(18) Tue - Thu : 9.15  
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**28 DAYS LATER** (18) Daily: 1.45, 4.45, 8.00  
Clever British horror as rage-making virus escapes lab. See review at www.dailyinfo.co.uk  
**ANITA AND ME** (12A) Daily: 2.00, 4.15, 6.45, 9.00  
A young Asian girl and her dubious role model.  
**LILO & STITCH** (U) Sat & Sun : 11.30am  
Alien authorities capture the most dangerous of criminals...

**HARRY POTTER AND THE CHAMBER OF SECRETS** (PG)  
Daily: 12.00, 1.30, 3.45, 5.00, 7.30, 8.30 plus Sat & Sun: 10.00am  
Part two of seven....  
**DIE ANOTHER DAY** (12A) Daily: 11.45, 2.15, 2.45, 5.15, 5.45, 8.15, 8.45, plus Sat & Sun 11.15am. Friday 5.15 is subtitled  
The New James Bond. See review at www.dailyinfo.co.uk  
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Part two of seven.... will she write them all?

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Sat : Sun 1.15, Film 2.00

Horsely western freedom animation thing. No unaccompanied adults.  
**FRENCH CINEMA : 8 WOMEN** (U) Mon : 6.45  
Whodunnit comedy. Members preview.  
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