

# The Business

thebusiness@chicagoreader.com

## Starving Artistes

How come the world-class Chicago Opera Theater is still turning its pockets inside out?

By Deanna Isaacs

**W**anna grab a seat on what should be the hottest board in town? Chicago Opera Theater president Dorothy Osborn Walton is looking to fill a half dozen of them right now, as COT launches into its third season in the Harris Theater and sixth under resident genius and general director Brian Dickie. But Walton's unabashed about the requirements: she wants folks with a pipeline to deep corporate pockets. COT, whose provocative productions showcase flawless performances of some of the most esoteric material around, has an international reputation for high culture that pops but is still living paycheck to paycheck. With no endowment and no cash cushion it operates on a shoestring, one misstep away from extinction. This board, Walton notes, has not been a place for the fainthearted.

That was never more obvious than during the 2004 season. The company had just taken the dicey step of relocating from the 900-seat Athenaeum in Lakeview to the Harris's 1,400-seat venue on the north edge of what was becoming Millennium Park. But the park was still a hard-hat zone, people didn't know where the theater was, and the company had its own identity issues. ("There are still a lot of people in Chicago, even among those who love opera, who don't know about COT," Walton says.) Ticket sales fell short of expectations, and expenses at the Harris, where the rent was \$4,000 a day and union labor was mandated, were 30 percent higher than in the old location. They'd barely completed their season opener—an acclaimed production of *L'incoronazione di Poppea*—when they ran out of money.

At an emotionally charged meeting a faction of the COT board voiced concern about management and viability, citing everything from a failure to cut expenses to Dickie's attitude. They discussed shutting the company down unless drastic changes were made; when the rest of the board balked, five of them—including the chairman—resigned. According to a former board member they left in frustration. But Walton says she thinks there was a fear factor. "People didn't want to take the risk, personally or professionally, in case it didn't



Chicago Opera Theater president Dorothy Osborn Walton, the current production of *Dido and Aeneas*



CARLOS J. ORTIZ (PORTRAIT); LIZ LAUREN (STILL)

work. We lost some good people and I thought to myself, what do we do now? But the rest of the board kept calling, saying, 'Let's just keep going,' and I couldn't really picture folding. I know how to keep it going; I don't know how to shut it down."

COT racked up a \$290,000 deficit over its \$3.2 million budget that year and was able to stay alive only because several board members came to the rescue with loans—and it didn't get easier in 2005. While the product continued to knock everybody's socks off, attendance, which had risen from about 10,000 at the Athenaeum to more than 14,000 the first year at the Harris, dropped slightly. Determined not to have another deficit, Walton says, they took a knife to the budget and managed to close out the year in the black—though "just barely."

The 2006 season, which opened with a typically quirky double bill of 17th- and 18th-century works, *The Padlock* and *Dido and Aeneas*, and is budgeted at \$3 million, looks like a

turning point to Walton. The Millennium Park location has blossomed into a greater asset than anyone could have anticipated during those tough days two years ago, and the season's closer, *Nixon in China* (with composer John Adams present and a China-themed gala in the works), is expected to generate even more than the usual buzz. Still, Walton, a senior vice president at Northern Trust, is the only member of the COT board with a corporate affiliation, and after ten years as president she's ready to hand off the baton. She just needs to find someone with the pockets and guts for the job.

### Also Strapped

A brand-new name wasn't the only thing the Chicago Historical Society acquired last week. The day before CHS announced it would dump the snobby old S-word and henceforth be known as the Chicago History Museum, it took on \$51 million in

debt, about half of it new. President Gary Johnson says the museum issued low-interest bonds to refinance existing debt and raise money to cover the rehab of 75 percent of its public space, which began December 5 and is now pegged at \$27.5 million. CHS ran a \$1.5 million deficit last year and projects a \$1 million loss this year while everything but its research center is closed. But Johnson expects a surge of visitors when the museum reopens, which, along with a new-and-improved wedding and event space featuring the "longest unobstructed view of the lake in the city," he says will soon have the organization operating in the black. He says the budget for next year has been set conservatively at \$10 million, and adult admission—a suggested donation of \$5 before the museum closed—will likely jump to \$12.

A former securities lawyer with a reputation as a fund-raiser, and the first nonhistorian to head the museum, Johnson has been on the job since August. So far \$22 million has been

raised in a capital campaign with a goal that equals the rehab cost, \$2 million of it under his watch. The cash-strapped museum has been drawing money from its \$70 million endowment to cover construction bills, and Johnson says all of the donated funds will go to replenish and build the endowment. The Chicago History Museum will open September 30 with a new costume and textile gallery, a children's gallery, and twice as much space for the Chicago history galleries, which will thereafter be known as the Exelon Chicago History Galleries.

### Just Plain Busted

Left of Center bookstore is closing just two years after it opened in an Edgewater storefront. In spite of "a nice, solid group of regulars," owner Arlene Levey says she's "deeply in debt and can't swing it anymore." She's selling the stock and fixtures at deep discounts and expects to be out by the end of the month. ☐

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The New Reader Classifieds

# Restaurants

Listings are excerpted from the Reader Restaurant Finder, an online database of more than 3,000 Chicago-area restaurants. Restaurants are rated by more than 2,200 Reader Restaurant Raters, who feed us information and comments on their dining experiences. Web ratings are updated daily; print listings reflect the most current information available at publication time. Reviews are written by

Reader staff and contributors and (where noted) individual Raters. Though reviewers try to reflect the Restaurant Raters' input, reviews should be considered one person's opinion; the collective Raters' opinions are best expressed in the numbers. The complete listings and information on how to become a Reader Restaurant Rater are available at [www.chicagoreader.com/restaurantfinder](http://www.chicagoreader.com/restaurantfinder).

# R

## Transformations

# Kebabaholic? They Can Help

### Eat Your Veggies

Recommended vegan, vegetarian, and vegetarian-friendly restaurants

**Alice and Friends Vegetarian Cafe**  
5812 N. Broadway | 773-275-8797

F 8.8 | S 7.3 | A 6.2 | \$ (11 REPORTS)  
ASIAN, VEGETARIAN/HEALTHY | LUNCH:  
SATURDAY; DINNER: MONDAY-SATURDAY |  
CLOSED SUNDAY | SMOKE FREE

☘☘☘ The name refers to Alice in Wonderland; the menu consists primarily of vegan versions of pan-Asian food—Smoked Veggie Duck, Almond UnChicken, Korean BBQ, Japanese Don Ka Su—though there's also a veggie burger and UnChicken Drumsticks. Dishes that don't use soy products are available, but Raters rave about the meat substitutes. Most entrees come with rice and salad; there's a large selection of appetizers, drinks, and vegan desserts. The walls are covered with bright mosaics and inspirational sayings. Raters say service can be slow. **Holly Greenhagen**

**Amitabul**  
6207 N. Milwaukee | 773-774-0276

\$  
VEGETARIAN/HEALTHY, ASIAN | LUNCH, DINNER:  
SUNDAY, TUESDAY-SATURDAY | CLOSED MONDAY |  
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ONLY | SMOKE FREE

If you're looking to impress the vegan in your life, this is the place for you. Amitabul offers an eye-popping array of vegetarian and vegan maki, stir-fries, pancakes, and noodle soups prepared with organic vegetables, tofu, legumes, and minimal oil. Some Raters find the food too bland, but dishes such as Dr. K's Cure-All (spicy noodle soup touted as, among other things, a hangover remedy), Chef Dave's Energy Nut (almonds, peanuts, and walnuts stir-fried with honey and plum sauce over noodles), and Nine Ways to Nirvana (whole wheat noodle soup with nine-grain miso beans) illustrate the belief of owners Bill and David Choi in the healing power of food.

**Martha Bayne**

**Arya Bhavan**  
2508 W. Devon | 773-274-5800

F 8.0 | S 7.7 | A 5.8 | \$ (13 REPORTS)  
INDIAN/PAKISTANI, VEGETARIAN/HEALTHY |  
LUNCH: FRIDAY-SUNDAY; DINNER: SEVEN DAYS

☘☘☘ "Friendlier and more relaxed than Mysore Woodland and Udipi," says one Rater, while another gives Arya Bhavan points for serving southern as well as northern Indian dishes and a buffet that's "amazingly fresh." The lunch spread is offered Friday through Sunday, the dinner buffet nightly. Some favorite dishes include the garlic naan, mixed-vegetable pakora,

"I know now that cooked food is an addiction," Mehmet Ak says, explaining his decision to shutter his successful restaurant, Cousin's Turkish Cuisine, last summer. The previous fall he'd done a raw-food detox at some friends' urging—they claimed it could prevent cancer, but Ak, topped out at 235 pounds, was simply desperate to lose weight.

**Cousin's Incredible Vitality**  
3038 W. Irving Park  
773-478-6868

gone 100 percent raw (or "living," the term preferred by raw foodies).

For eight months after his conversion Ak continued to run Cousin's, but he felt increasingly guilty. "Why should I try to make money on something that is not healthy?" he says he asked himself. Plus his heart just wasn't in working with meat any longer: "I lost my passion to go behind the grill and make the kebabs," he says.

This wasn't the first time Ak's life dramatically changed course. He left Turkey at 20 to "discover the world," he says, and landed in New York after months on the crew of a cargo ship. He got his feet on the ground, then set off again with plans to drive cross-country, but halted in Chicago one sunny spring morning. "I said, you know what, I'm going to stay here, just like that," he says. In 1990, having worked for several years at Italian Village and other restaurants, he opened the first incarnation of Cousin's in Lakeview. By 1994 he'd opened three more locations. Business was good, but four years later Ak was burned-out. "At the time I said, this is too much work, it's no good," he says. He sold all four restaurants and started over as a general contractor.

In 2002 he signed up for a personal development seminar called the Landmark Forum, a descendant of est, where he came to feel he'd been wrong to leave the kitchen. "Being a chef and serving people lights me up," he says. He opened a new Cousin's, with all-new recipes, on Irving Park in October 2002. It did well over the next two years, becoming a favorite of Reader Restaurant Raters. Regulars were disappointed to see the place shut down last July.

Ak spent the next several months educating himself about raw foods and developing a menu for what would become Cousin's Vitality. He attended Living Light International, a raw-food culinary institute in California, where he learned to make things like "tuna" simulated with sprouted almonds, sunflower seeds, celery, spices, and kelp powder. Afterward he tweaked the spices in certain dishes and converted some of his old Turkish recipes: in his hummus, for example, he swaps pureed zucchini for chickpeas, which have to be cooked; his tabbouleh uses soaked and sprouted quinoa rather than bulgur. To test-drive dishes and drum up excitement for the new place he hosted a series of potlucks for other raw-food enthusiasts.

At one of these an energetic young woman named Lisa Persico introduced herself. She told Ak she'd been raw for three years, and had also converted after years of struggling with her body image. "I would just drink coffee and smoke cigarettes; I was on that diet," she says. A few years earlier Persico's sister had badgered her to attend a lecture by raw-food guru David Wolfe. "I was like this the whole time," Persico says, raising an eyebrow and crossing her arms over her chest. "He comes out and says, 'Today's the best day ever!' and I was like, What? Is he kidding?" But a few things Wolfe said that day clicked with Persico. She bought his book and started reading it, cigarette in hand. Eventually she canceled all her subscriptions to



Mehmet Ak and Lisa Persico at Cousin's Incredible Vitality, Mediterranean "pasta" made from zucchini

beauty mags, quit her corporate PR job, and signed on to work as an independent contractor for Wolfe's line of living foods.

Ak, as it turned out, was already using Wolfe's raw cacao powder and nibs in his desserts, such as a chocolate mousse made with pears and figs. Persico offered to be his wholesale supplier. She also suggested the addition of "Incredible" to the restaurant's name and threw out some ideas for fresh decor. Before long she was part of the Cousin's makeover team. "It evolved very quickly into a closer-knit relationship," she says.

Ak gave Persico free rein. She replaced the mustard-colored walls, white table linens, throw pillows, and Turkish kilns with a color scheme of earth tones. The tables are now bare except for a shock of bright nut grass in a petite yellow vase on each; the chocolate brown walls, accented by aqua molding, are also currently bare. The ultraminimal look is temporary, though: Persico plans to hang shelves of thick ivy. "I want it to be almost like a jungle," she says, "that feeling of oxygen. My goal is to have it be a place with a lot of energy and life force."

The menu still nods to Ak's Turkish heritage, with "living mezes" like stuffed grape leaves, shepherd's salad, and house-marinated olives alongside new creations like "not tuna" wraps and minipizzas with avo-

cado, mushrooms, olives, and almond cheese on flaxseed crackers that Ak makes with the help of two dehydrating cabinets. Mediterranean "pasta" has angel-hair made from zucchini, raw marinara, and "Parmesan" made from pine nuts; Ak makes mock feta and other cheeses with other ground seeds and nuts, which are as key to raw cuisine as veggies. A delicious wild cherry cheesecake contains cashews, dates, and raw agave nectar for sweetness; its crust is made of walnuts. Persico contributes rich hand-rolled raw-chocolate truffles.

Ak and Persico want to make Cousin's an education center, emporium, and juice bar in addition to a restaurant. "Forget Cooking" classes and demos are scheduled to start at the end of the month, and Persico's offering weekly and monthly prepared-meal packages. The picture wouldn't be complete without yoga, Saturday and Sunday mornings.

If Cousin's sounds similar to Karyn's Fresh Corner, Chicago's current raw-food mecca, that's fine with Ak and Persico. (And apparently with Karyn Calabrese, whose letter of welcome hangs on a bulletin board in the entry.) "We're not trying to reinvent the wheel here," Persico says. "We're trying to get people closer to what I like to say the truth is. They weren't kidding when they said eat your fruits and vegetables." —Susannah J. Felts

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# Restaurants

chana masala, tandoori paratha, and *tandoori gobi* (marinated cauliflower cooked tandoori style), and the *dosai*, enormous crepes filled with potatoes, onions, and chiles. **Laura Levy Shatkin**

## Blind Faith Cafe

525 Dempster, Evanston | 847-328-6875

**F 7.6 | S 7.2 | A 6.8 | \$** (15 REPORTS)  
VEGETARIAN/HEALTHY | BREAKFAST, LUNCH,  
DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | SMOKE FREE

"Vegetarian and Proud" is the motto at this Evanston establishment. While the menu is chock-full of favorites like tempeh, seitan, and tofu, the light seasoning tends to keep the food unfortunately true to its natural flavor; in other words, pass the hot sauce. There's self-service, with a case of tasty baked goods—including a vegan cake—and the dining area, adorned with handmade quilts and other colorful local art, is bright and cheerful. Breakfast is pricey but good, with innovative takes on standards like eggs Benedict (mushrooms and spinach take the place of Canadian bacon); tofu and egg scrambles with potato, onion, and

pepper hash; huge portions of fluffy French toast; and nondairy Mexican scramble with tofu, soy cheese, and salsa. If you're on a budget and can live without a hot breakfast, the homemade corn or blueberry muffins are a meal on their own, as is the granola, especially when topped with fresh berries. To drink there's freshly brewed coffee, tea, and a longish list of fruit smoothies. **Laura Levy Shatkin**

## Bongo Room

1470 N. Milwaukee | 773-489-0690

**F 8.2 | S 7.4 | A 7.9 | \$** (19 REPORTS)  
GLOBAL/FUSION/ELECTIC | BREAKFAST, LUNCH:  
MONDAY-FRIDAY; SATURDAY & SUNDAY BRUNCH |  
RESERVATIONS NOT ACCEPTED

РРР Raters love this Wicker Park place, which serves breakfast and lunch only. The decor is appealing: vibrant tones of eggplant, chartreuse, and mustard accented by exposed brick, original artwork, and flea market accessories. The weekday menu offers what seem to be standards—pancakes, omelets, and sandwiches—but the pancakes might be cranberry butter-

milk (with tangerine macaroon butter) or pumpkin spice, and the omelets may have roasted red peppers or fresh basil inside. The brunch menu adds specials including eggs Benedict, black bean burritos, and French toast. On weekends it's a mob scene, so plan to wait. The bustling pace and blaring music will not be everyone's morning cup of tea. **Laura Levy Shatkin**

## Chicago Diner

3411 N. Halsted | 773-935-6696

**F 7.9 | S 6.7 | A 6.5 | \$** (21 REPORTS)  
VEGETARIAN/HEALTHY | LUNCH: MONDAY-FRIDAY;  
DINNER: SEVEN DAYS; SATURDAY & SUNDAY  
BRUNCH | OPEN LATE: FRIDAY & SATURDAY TILL  
11 | RESERVATIONS NOT ACCEPTED | SMOKE FREE

"Vegetarian heaven—so many choices, so little time," says one Rater of this north-side meatless mecca. Chicago Diner offers creative veggie and vegan dishes in a comfortable space lined with old-fashioned wooden booths. Dishes made with eggs and dairy are indicated on the menu, and vegan substitutions are often available upon request. Weekend brunch,

served till 3:30, is very popular, though Raters warn that the always laid-back service gets even more erratic as the place fills up. **Martha Bayne**

## Crofton on Wells

535 N. Wells | 312-755-1790

**F 8.9 | S 7.1 | A 8.0 | \$\$\$** (11 REPORTS)  
AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY/REGIONAL | DINNER:  
MONDAY-SATURDAY | CLOSED SUNDAY | SMOKE  
FREE

РРР Chef-proprietor Suzy Crofton presents a well-balanced and innovative menu in a small, urbane setting. Subdued music playing in the background of the minimally decorated room keeps the conversation level down and the focus on the food. The menu changes seasonally, but staples include appetizers like crab cakes with Creole mustard sauce and a cassoulet of seasonal mushrooms. Entrees include a stack of grilled portobellos with rosemary and caramelized garlic-balsamic jus; buckwheat soba noodles in an organic ginger-miso broth with roasted vegetables; barbecued pork tenderloin with sweet potato

grits and apple chutney; and grilled salmon with asparagus, mushrooms, and braised chard. Half a dozen desserts are offered, including a warm blackberry crisp with chevre ice cream. One Rater sums the place up with a simple imperative: "Go." **Paul Schoenwetter, Rater**

## Dharma Garden Thai Restaurant

3109 W. Irving Park | 773-588-9140

**F 8.5 | S 6.8 | A 7.5 | \$\$** (8 REPORTS)  
ASIAN, THAI, VEGETARIAN/HEALTHY | LUNCH:  
TUESDAY-FRIDAY; DINNER: SUNDAY, TUESDAY-  
SATURDAY | CLOSED MONDAY | BYO | SMOKE FREE

Catering to a health-conscious crowd, all the dishes are prepared without MSG, processed sugar, fish sauce, or artificial ingredients. Though there are chicken and beef offerings, menu items are mostly meatless versions of Thai classics: vegetable pot stickers, a "garden" roll filled with tofu and vegetables, an imitation duck curry (the "meat" is made with soy and wheat). Other dishes incorporate nuts for protein. Cold options include a tofu-and-oyster-mushroom salad and a tangy chilled seafood salad; a standout soup

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is the kow tom, seasoned with ginger, garlic, and lime and made substantial with a choice of seafood or tofu. **Laura Levy Shatkin**

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6120 N. Broadway | 773-338-6100

F 7.5 | S 6.4 | A 6.7 | \$ (11 REPORTS)  
AFRICAN | LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS |  
OPEN LATE: FRIDAY & SATURDAY TILL 11

At this large Edgewater storefront recently spiffed up by a chartreuse paint job there are savory *watts* (stews) with beef, chicken, lamb, and fish, but vegetarians never need feel deprived. Vegan options include a spicy red lentil watt; yellow split pea watt; *gomen* (oniony collard greens); slightly sour *tikil*

*gomen* (cabbage and carrots); and a mild watt made with potatoes and large chunks of carrot, all served on *injera*, the large, spongy pancake made with flour from *teff*, a tiny grain indigenous to Ethiopia. For appetizers there are *sambusas*, samosalike pastry triangles stuffed with meat or vegetables and served with lemon and a tamarind sauce. Meat dishes include the classic *doro watt*, chicken stewed in a spicy red sauce with a hard-boiled egg; *kitfo*, described on the menu as "Ethiopian steak tartare"; and *tibs*, cubes of various meats or seafood available in a range of preparations and spice levels. There are African beers, served in frosty mugs, and *tej*, Ethiopian honey wine; service too is hon-

eyed—the staff couldn't be more genuinely welcoming. On Friday nights from 7 to 10 Chicago legend Kelan Phil Cohran, a cofounder of the AACM and a member of Sun Ra's band back in the day, dreamily plays jazz and ambient horn and harp to a synthesized backing. **Kate Schmidt**

**Flying Saucer**

1123 N. California | 773-342-9076

F 7.3 | S 6.3 | A 6.1 | \$ (14 REPORTS)  
AMERICAN, VEGETARIAN/HEALTHY | BREAKFAST,  
LUNCH, DINNER: SUNDAY, TUESDAY-SATURDAY |  
CLOSED MONDAY | BYO

The owners gave an artistic makeover to an old diner with teal and pistachio walls and

chairs upholstered in a patchwork of pastels. They've kept some of the more charming fixtures: the milk shake machine, a Kellogg's cereal rack. Weekend breakfast is a popular meal here, though the menu offers mostly standards: eggs, pancakes, and sides, plus a few Mexican-influenced contenders like the *huevos volando*—eggs with tortillas, black beans, cheese, guajillo sauce, and pico de gallo. The lunch and dinner menus aim slightly higher, with salads, sandwiches, and several vegetarian and vegan options (the meat is hormone free, and they'll substitute tofu for meat in many dishes). Nightly specials include meat loaf with tomato chutney, and a tofu-spinach-brown-rice concoction called the Flying Tofu

Bowl. Desserts change regularly, but they're always good. **Laura Levy Shatkin**

**Green Zebra**

1460 W. Chicago | 312-243-7100

F 8.9 | S 8.2 | A 7.1 | \$\$\$ (19 REPORTS)  
AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY/REGIONAL,  
VEGETARIAN/HEALTHY | DINNER: SUNDAY,  
TUESDAY-SATURDAY | CLOSED MONDAY | OPEN  
LATE: FRIDAY & SATURDAY TILL 11 | SMOKE FREE

It's been two years since chef Shawn McClain transformed a dilapidated East Village storefront known to me and my neighbors as the "pigeon palace" into a sleek haven for vegetarian dining, and for the most part the kitchen has settled into a

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# Restaurants

comfortable groove. On a recent visit the seasonally changing menu of generous tasting portions showcased a rainbow of winter veggies: roasted beets wrapped around tiny cylinders of goat cheese; butternut squash gnocchi; crispy sweet potato dumplings and water chestnuts in a dandelion miso broth. A rich parsnip panna cotta served with braised endive, blood orange wedges, and a few teeny biscuits packed an amazing amount of flavor, a surprisingly tangy kick following each initially sweet, smooth mouthful. A small crock of artichoke casoulet tucked 'chokes, beans, and braised kale beneath a buttery puff pastry crust. A substantial savory crepe, stuffed full of curried apples, was a standout, and typical of Green Zebra's playful attitude toward flavor—as my friend noted, perhaps half the dishes we tried were sweeter than your average entree, while our desserts—brown butter millet cake and a coconut risotto pudding served with roasted pineapple and marinated avocado (!)—were so nutty and mild you could have 'em for breakfast. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the only real misstep was the roasted skate wing, one of two nonvegetarian items on the menu. The pricey wine list is heavy on crisp whites and a few lighter, brighter reds. After-dinner options include French-press coffee and some wildly exotic teas, including one that according to the menu was once harvested by monkeys. Servers are well informed and helpful, and with the exception of the small, stoolless bar area I'm still impressed with the number McClain and company did on the space, all cool earth tones and warm low lights punctuated by bursts of greenery reaching for the sky. **Martha Bayne**

### The Handlebar

2311 W. North | 773-384-9546

**F** 8.4 | **S** 7.2 | **A** 7.8 | **\$** (23 REPORTS)  
GLOBAL/FUSION/ELECTRIC,  
VEGETARIAN/HEALTHY | DINNER: SEVEN DAYS;  
SATURDAY & SUNDAY BRUNCH | OPEN LATE:  
FRIDAY & SATURDAY TILL 1, OTHER NIGHTS TILL  
11 | RESERVATIONS NOT ACCEPTED | SMOKE FREE

**YYY** Former Goose Island brewer Josh Deth and his partners wanted to open a brewpub but instead ended up opening this cyclist-friendly restaurant, with bar stools built out of old tire rims by Blackstone Bicycle Works director Andy Gregg. A basement lounge outfit with couches and a long coffee table is intended to serve as a meeting place for any group that wants to use it. The eclectic, veggie-friendly menu is “imaginative without being overdone,” says one Rater: there are samosas and stuffed mushroom caps, fish tacos and African groundnut stew, tofu and seitan sandwiches, and unusual desserts like plantains Foster. There's seating on the back patio all summer. **Laura Levy Shatkin**

### Heartland Cafe

7000 N. Glenwood | 773-465-8005

**F** 6.9 | **S** 6.2 | **A** 7.0 | **\$** (25 REPORTS)  
AMERICAN, VEGETARIAN/HEALTHY | BREAKFAST,  
LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | OPEN LATE:  
FRIDAY & SATURDAY TILL 11 | RESERVATIONS  
ACCEPTED FOR LARGE GROUPS ONLY

“Unfortunately there are not many places to get a really good buffalo burger,” quips

Food (**F**), service (**S**), and ambience (**A**) are rated on a scale of 1-10, with 10 representing best. The dinner-menu price of a typical entree is indicated by dollar signs on the following scale: **\$**=less than \$10, **\$\$**=\$10-\$15, **\$\$\$**=\$15-\$20, **\$\$\$\$**=\$20-\$30, **\$\$\$\$\$**=more than \$30. Raters also grade the overall dining experience; these scores are averaged and **Ys** are awarded as follows: **YYY**=top 10 percent, **YY**=top 20 percent, **YY**=top 30 percent of all rated restaurants in database.

one Rater. The Heartland, however, serves up a mean one, plus salads, sandwiches, and enough hearty vegetarian entrees to satisfy the pickiest eater, from veggie chili to tofu scrambles, barbecue seitan, and a macrobiotic plate. Fine dining it's not, but it is a north-side sanctuary for hungry bohemians of all stripes, with live music (funk, folk, and jazz) almost every night and a poetry open mike on Wednesday evenings. While service can be erratic, most who frequent the Heartland know what they're getting into. It also has a left-leaning general store and a full bar serving a limited menu into the late hours. **Martha Bayne**

### Karyn's Cooked

738 N. Wells | 312-587-1050

**F** 7.9 | **S** 8.4 | **A** 8.8 | **\$\$\$** (5 REPORTS)  
VEGETARIAN/HEALTHY | LUNCH, DINNER:  
MONDAY-SATURDAY | CLOSED SUNDAY | SMOKE  
FREE

**YYY** As at Karyn's Fresh Corner, the food here's all vegetarian—the difference is that most of it isn't raw. It's just as pricey as its predecessor, though—\$45 per person for lunch is steep, heat or no heat. Much of the raw side of the menu lacks flavor, a common problem with uncooked food. The kitchen seems to be overcompensating for the lack of meat by dousing everything with salt: the split pea soup and the guacamole (an \$8.50 appetizer with a tiny scoop of guac, store-bought chips, and a few florets of broccoli) were overwhelmingly salty. The spinach-and-tofu lasagna came out cold—when we complained our server shocked us by sticking it in the microwave. Maybe they should call it Karyn's Nuked. **Laura Levy Shatkin**

### Karyn's Fresh Corner

1901 N. Halsted | 312-255-1590

**F** 8.2 | **S** 6.8 | **A** 6.8 | **\$\$** (5 REPORTS)  
VEGETARIAN/HEALTHY | BREAKFAST, LUNCH, DIN-  
NER: SEVEN DAYS | BYO | SMOKE FREE

When they yanked my rotten tooth last spring, I lived on beer and Potato Buds for a week; when I forgot where my house was and became dizzy with nausea, it seemed like a decent excuse to duck inside Karyn Calabrese's raw food restaurant. I scarfed down a slightly sweet, soft sea-lettuce-and-macadamia-filled crepe made from dehydrated young green coconut meat. It was strange and delicious, and after a few minutes I realized that I didn't have a stomachache and—what ho?—my hangover was gone! When I could chew I came back, curious about the firmer stuff on the menu. Nuts and legumes are soaked in water and pureed, sprouted, or fermented to make “cheeses,” pastes, sauces, even a delicate

cashew “sour cream”; grains are soaked, sometimes sprouted, and dried to make dense, cakelike bread products. Calabrese's pasta primavera with rich, savory nut sauce and mushrooms is a favorite among her waitstaff (the “pasta” is julienned vegetables). If you'd rather not gamble on the \$11-\$15 entrees at the sit-down restaurant, there's a take-out joint and juice bar on the side, offering organic salad for \$8 a pound, sandwiches, and prepackaged meals that cost between \$9 and \$13. There's also a Sunday brunch buffet from 11:30 AM to 3:30 PM for \$24.99. One week the embarrassment of choices included turnip ravioli, carob cake, two soups, three salads, pizza with sprouted-barley crust, garlic bread sticks, stuffed bell peppers, kale chips, avocado dim sum, mock meat loaf, sandwiches with “mayo” and walnut spread, zucchini “pasta” with red sauce, samosas, and oatmeal cookies. **Ann Sterzinger**

### Lula Cafe

2537 N. Kedzie | 773-489-9554

**F** 8.4 | **S** 7.3 | **A** 7.8 | **\$** (40 REPORTS)  
GLOBAL/FUSION/ELECTRIC | BREAKFAST,  
LUNCH, DINNER: SUNDAY, MONDAY,  
WEDNESDAY-SATURDAY; SATURDAY & SUNDAY  
BRUNCH | CLOSED TUESDAY | OPEN LATE:  
FRIDAY & SATURDAY TILL 11 | RESERVATIONS NOT  
ACCEPTED | SMOKE FREE

**YYY** At this point I've taken dozens of people to Lula Cafe, and I don't say this lightly: it may be the best neighborhood restaurant in Chicago. One side of the menu is dedicated to cheap, surprising, delicious entrees in the \$6-\$12 range, like the Moroccan tagine: warm cinnamon chickpea stew with chunks of sweet potato over couscous, with fresh greens strewn on top. The Tineka sandwich is —of all things—a spicy peanut butter sandwich with cukes and red onion and lots of other veggies, plus something they call “Indonesian sweet soy sauce.” There's beet bruschetta, and peanut sesame noodles, and a great roast turkey sandwich. Appetizers include a shiitake-spinach quesadilla and vegetarian maki. Then there's a more expensive menu (\$12-\$24), as if the owners just thought, “What the hell, this'll be fun too.” These items change constantly but have included a scallops appetizer that makes vegetarians very sad to be vegetarians, a roast leg of lamb with sherry-braised mission figs and cipolini onions, and an ocean trout served with brandade-stuffed peppers. I brought a friend who's a professional chef in New York, and he stuck around for hours to order nearly everything on the menu. And then we came back the next night. **Ira Glass**



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**Mysore Woodland**  
2548 W. Devon | 773-338-8160

F 7.3 | S 6.6 | A 6.0 | \$\$ (10 REPORTS)  
INDIAN/PAKISTANI, VEGETARIAN/HEALTHY |  
LUNCH, DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | BYO | SMOKE FREE

The all-vegetarian fare here is intriguing. Among the Mysore appetizer assortment are *medhu vada* (fried lentil doughnuts) and vegetable samosas. An impressive array of sauces that accompanies many dishes includes sweet tamarind, coconut curry, classic masala, and spicy cilantro. The pancakes—the base of many dishes—are outstanding. There's the *uthappam*, thick and doughy, available with toppings such as tomatoes and peas or onions and hot chiles, and the *rava masala dosa*, thin and lacy with crisp edges, stuffed with onions, chiles, and potatoes. An interesting and very unusual house special is the *pongol avial*—mashed rice and lentils served with stewed vegetables in a masala sauce. The *paratha*, whole wheat flatbread, is a treat, as are the refreshing lassi drinks, which come plain, salty, or with mango. Service can be chaotic, but nobody seems to mind.  
**Laura Levy Shatkin**

**Pick Me Up Cafe**  
3408 N. Clark | 773-248-6613

F 6.6 | S 7.4 | A 6.7 | \$ (7 REPORTS)  
AMERICAN, VEGETARIAN/HEALTHY | BREAKFAST,  
LUNCH: SATURDAY-SUNDAY; DINNER: SEVEN DAYS |  
OPEN LATE: FRIDAY & SATURDAY OPEN 24  
HOURS, OTHER NIGHTS TILL 3 AM |  
RESERVATIONS NOT ACCEPTED

Open nonstop from Friday afternoon through the wee hours on Monday, with shorter hours the rest of the week, this homey cafe serves a varied menu that includes a whole page of coffee drinks; vegan sundaes, shakes, and cakes; and lots of vegetarian options—tofu burritos, a hummus plate, stir-fry. Breakfast is always available, including vegan French toast (“It tasted like a big sticky cinnamon bun, but fluffier,” says a Rater) and a dish called the Humboldt County: tofu, mushrooms, spinach, and potatoes. The mazelike layout of the place creates lots of cozy nooks, and there are a few kitschy knickknacks on each table.  
**Laura Levy Shatkin**

**Pizza Rustica**  
3913 N. Sheridan | 773-404-8955

F 8.4 | S 8.3 | A 7.0 | \$ (6 REPORTS)  
ITALIAN, PIZZA | LUNCH, DINNER: SUNDAY,  
MONDAY, WEDNESDAY-SATURDAY | CLOSED  
TUESDAY | OPEN LATE: FRIDAY & SATURDAY TILL  
11 | BYO

Every Italian restaurant likes to think that its food is the real thing. Pizza Rustica just may be. The caprese salad, for instance, is the kind of dish you see everywhere, but rarely does it taste as good as these huge slices of tomato and light, creamy fresh mozzarella finished with a misting of good olive oil. The minestrone, too, seemed made to order, with *al dente* vegetables in a finely spiced tomato broth. For entrees we ordered half a pizza and a linguine dish, both of which were more than excellent. The pizza is thin crust—not the dense, soggy kind you get most places, but light, crispy, and golden brown, almost like a slightly soft cracker. The toppings—thinly sliced potatoes, fresh rosemary, olive oil, and cheese—decorated the surface of the crust without compromising its integrity. The pasta was *al dente* and tossed with a conservative ladle of tomato cream sauce with none of the cloying sweetness or overspicing that ruins similar dishes. Desserts were great too: the panna cotta, with flecks of vanilla bean and a drizzle of caramel sauce, was subtle, milky, and barely sweet. Pizza Rustica is absurdly cheap: most of the pasta dishes cost between \$7 and \$8, half a pizza costs about \$9.50 (more or less depending on toppings), and dessert was \$3.50.  
**Chip Dudley**

**Que Rico**  
2814 N. Southport | 773-975-7436

F 7.1 | S 7.4 | A 7.1 | \$ (7 REPORTS)  
MEXICAN/SOUTHWESTERN | LUNCH: SUNDAY,  
FRIDAY, SATURDAY; DINNER: SEVEN DAYS |  
SMOKE FREE

Que Rico is a Mexican restaurant with Argentinean and vegetarian influences that come together in, for instance, an empanada stuffed with spinach or other

veggies. *Berenjenas al ajo* is like an Argentinean *baba ghanoush*—bright green eggplant chopped with a little garlic and lemon. *Balitas de fuego* are jalapenos stuffed with Chihuahua cheese, batter dipped, and fried—in other words, poppers. Alongside Tex-Mex chimichangas, burritos, and fajitas, the menu is heavy with predictable traditional Mexican selections, but what it lacks in originality it makes up for in freshness, though seek ye elsewhere for Scoville units. I asked our server to bring us the hottest item on the menu, and he recommended the *enchiladas picosas*; honestly, you couldn't break a sweat eating this dish unless you consumed it sitting on a sunny day in front of this restaurant's charming French doors. Margaritas are available by the glass or in pitchers, whipped up with regular, super, or superpremium tequilas (as you might suspect, such quality distinctions hardly make a difference when you mix your tequila with lime, sugar, and salt).  
**David Hammond**

**Satay**  
936 W. Diversey | 773-477-0100

F 8.5 | S 8.0 | A 7.6 | \$\$ (11 REPORTS)  
ASIAN, THAI | LUNCH: TUESDAY-SATURDAY;  
DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | OPEN LATE: FRIDAY &  
SATURDAY TILL 11 | BYO | SMOKE FREE

Pan-Asian food under the Diversey el stop. Head through the bottleneck hallway and you'll find a spacious, stylish back room where chartreuse walls, recessed lights, nicely spaced tables, and soft music create an inviting place in which to eat. A range of Asian influences shows up in every category on the menu: appetizers include chive dumplings in sweet soy sauce, fried plantain, spinach pot stickers, and *roti* with yellow curry; soups range from vegetable miso to Thai coconut to a hot-and-sour variety full of eggs, tofu, and veggies. A grilled salmon dish in the “chef's specialties” section came on a bed of sauteed cabbage with grilled vegetables, grapes, and rice in a sauce of red curry and coconut milk; vegetarian options include spinach noodles with sesame peanut sauce and spicy Thai basil eggplant. To drink there are freshly squeezed juices, smoothies, and dairy-free freezes in flavors like mango, strawberry-banana, and green tea. The menu is available online at [grubhub.com](http://grubhub.com).  
**Laura Levy Shatkin**

**Schwa**  
1466 N. Ashland | 773-252-1466

AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY/REGIONAL | DINNER:  
TUESDAY-SATURDAY | CLOSED SUNDAY, MONDAY |  
BYO

The tiny kitchen at this modest storefront is putting out some seriously big food. Chef Michael Carlson, who cooked under Paul Bartolotta at Spiaggia and Grant Achatz at Trio and has done stages in European kitchens including the Fat Duck, combines classical and contemporary techniques to produce progressive American cuisine that's remarkably creative and refined. On a recent visit we had a tasting menu, available by request most nights for \$85 and in my book definitely the way to go. A brioche-crustured soft-boiled egg is served with a tiny spoon of caviar, *creme fraiche*, and potato puree—a daring dish, beautifully presented. Our salad was a study in the possibility of beets: wedges of roasted and pickled red and golden tubers with a swoosh of powdered beet and dressed with a brilliant green parsley leaf puree, a parsley root puree, and foamed goat cheese. The influence of kitchen scientists like Achatz shows up in surprising flavor combinations like an amuse of car-damom-dusted marshmallow skewered by a dehydrated carrot chip and a palate cleanser of sunchoke-raspberry parfait, served in a tiny wobbly glass and dressed with a single sunflower sprout. Rich, ethereal quail egg ravioli explodes like egg-flavored Freshen-Up gum on first bite. The pork entree pairs juicy slices of tenderloin with dark caramelized belly; it's plated with sauerkraut, raisins, and supercrisp strips of house-made bacon. There's also always a vegan entree on the changing menu—currently it's a seitan roast cut into diamonds and decorated with fresh peanuts and ribbons of basil. Dessert was pumpkin ice cream, pumpkin puree, a smear of pumpkin oil, toasted

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Fresh cucumber and onion with house sweet & sour dressing. 2.50

**Tom Yam Soup**  
Hot & Sour soup with straw mushrooms, tomato, seasoned with lemon grass, citrus leaves and fresh limejuice. chicken, tofu or vegetables 3.50 (shrimp 4.00)

**Tom Kha Soup**  
Coconut soup with straw mushrooms and tomato spiced with galanga root, citrus leaves and fresh limejuice. chicken, tofu or vegetables 3.50 (shrimp 4.00)

**Noodles**  
Chicken, Beef, Tofu or Plain Vegetable (Shrimp 8.00)

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**Pad See Eiw**  
Stir-fried wide rice noodles with egg, broccoli and sweet soy sauce. 6.50

**Lard na**  
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Stir-fried wide rice noodles with basil leaves, carrot, green beans, baby corns, tomato and hot pepper. 6.50

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# Restaurants | Movies

pumpkin seeds, and creme fraiche gang-ing up on a poor defenseless brownie. Schwa is BYOB—and BYO glassware unless you like drinking out of tumblers.  
**Martha Bayne**

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**F 8.1 | S 6.3 | A 6.3 | \$ (7 REPORTS)**  
SOUTHERN/SOUL FOOD, VEGETARIAN/HEALTHY | BREAKFAST, LUNCH: MONDAY-SATURDAY; DINNER: SEVEN DAYS; SUNDAY BRUNCH | OPEN LATE: FRIDAY & SATURDAY TILL 11 | SMOKE FREE

**RRR** Raters agree that this unique restaurant—in business for 25 years—is worth the trip. The menu offers vegan and vegetarian soul food—barbecued wheat gluten, stir-fried meatless “steak,” jerk tofu, and many other unusual, reasonably priced dishes. But while it’s all veggie, it’s not necessarily healthy—many of the dishes are fried. Still, “The food made me want to kiss the cook!” one Rater testifies.  
**Laura Levy Shatkin**

**Southport Grocery & Cafe**  
3552 N. Southport | 773-665-0100

**F 7.4 | S 6.5 | A 7.5 | \$\$ (8 REPORTS)**  
GLOBAL/FUSION/ECCLECTIC | BREAKFAST, LUNCH: SUNDAY, TUESDAY-SATURDAY; DINNER: TUESDAY-FRIDAY | CLOSED MONDAY | SMOKE FREE

Tastefully packaged condiments, pasta, herbs, and the like are displayed on chrome shelves, white tables line a wall, and downtempo ambient grooves play at a conversational level at this upscale food shop. The store also has a small assortment of reasonably priced wines and microbrews and a cooler of gourmet cheese and butter, plus carryout items like sandwiches and ginger-carrot bisque. Then there’s the cafe, which features owner Lisa Santos’s nonstandard takes on the standards: her grilled cheese, for instance, is Brie, spinach, and mushrooms on ciabatta with a couscous-fennel-apple-walnut salad (\$8). Also on the menu: braised chicken with sun-dried tomatoes, caramelized onions, and green

olives (\$9), and pasta with asparagus, peas, pancetta, and basil in a creamy sun-dried-tomato sauce (\$10). For breakfast there are a handful of carefully made savory dishes like a spinach, grape tomato, and white-cheddar omelet and lots of exceedingly sweet concoctions like apple-stuffed French toast with cinnamon-sugar butter and vanilla custard sauce. The children’s menu offers such mother-approved standbys as buttered noodles and PB&J with the crusts cut off, both with sides of applesauce and steamed veggies and served on ceramic TV trays.  
**Kathie Bergquist**

**Think**  
2235 N. Western | 773-394-0537

**F 8.2 | S 8.6 | A 8.0 | \$\$\$ (36 REPORTS)**  
ITALIAN, AMERICAN, GLOBAL/FUSION/ECCLECTIC | DINNER: SEVEN DAYS | OPEN LATE: FRIDAY & SATURDAY TILL 11 | BYO | SMOKE FREE

**RRR** Omar Rodriguez spent close to a decade cooking for the Carlucci restau-

rant group before opening this charming Bucktown storefront. In one popular appetizer a generous portion of sauteed sea scallops rests on a bed of fresh spinach with a lemon butter sauce on one side and a roasted red pepper coulis on the other; entrees include free-range rack of lamb and chicken marsala. Raters also recommend the cheese-stuffed gnocchi special, the huge salads, and the “simply amazing” white asparagus appetizer. Considering that it comes out of a one-man kitchen, the food is seriously impressive—Rodriguez even makes his own desserts. The *zuccotto* (a variation on a bombe) is a work of art, filled with layers of white and dark chocolate mousse (rather than ice cream), then drizzled with dark chocolate and set on a plate of fresh apricot sauce. The room is simple and welcoming, with blond wood floors and chairs, white linen tablecloths, and fresh flowers.  
**Laura Levy Shatkin**

**Victory’s Banner**  
2100 W. Roscoe | 773-665-0227

**F 8.2 | S 7.8 | A 7.1 | \$ (23 REPORTS)**  
VEGETARIAN/HEALTHY | BREAKFAST, LUNCH: SUNDAY, MONDAY, WEDNESDAY-SATURDAY | CLOSED TUESDAY | SMOKE FREE

**RRR** Victory’s Banner is one of the best breakfast houses in Chicago, period; the owner told me he learned how to make his omelets from Lou Mitchell himself. Satisfaction Promise is a scrambled-egg dish with spinach, sun-dried tomato, and feta. But the killer is the French toast, in a batter made with cream (not milk) and orange marmalade, served with peach butter and real maple syrup. There are also pancakes, waffles, and *uppama* (an Indian hot cereal). Lunch items include homemade soups, salads, and wraps. The restaurant is owned by a student of meditation master Sri Chinmoy, and the menu says that it exists for one reason: to give joy. They have certainly succeeded with this customer. Don’t worry, you won’t miss the meat.  
**Jeff Koltan, Rater**

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**Film listings are compiled from information available Monday. Occasionally bookings change after our deadline; we suggest you call ahead for confirmation. Most films are screened in 35-millimeter and most videos are projected. Where possible, exceptions are noted below. Submissions to the film listings are always welcome, but**

**must include a phone number for publication. Commentary by Jonathan Rosenbaum (JR), Lisa Alpector (LA), Fred Camper (FC), Don Druker (DD), Pat Graham (PG), Andrea Gronvall (AG), J.R. Jones (JJ), Joshua Katzman (JK), Dave Kehr (DK), Peter Keough (PK), Hank Sartin (HSa), Henry Sheehan (HS), and Ted Shen (TS).**

# M

**American Movie** Wisconsin filmmaker Mark Borchardt tries to raise money for a feature by finishing a short called *Coven* in this intimate 1999 documentary directed and shot by Chris Smith (*American Job*). Smith and producer Sarah Price, who recorded the sound, are unseen as they capture what appears to be the raw experience of the sometimes depressive Borchardt and his troupe of wavering supporters. Yet the filmmakers' presence is felt in the movie's refusal either to dismiss Borchardt's ambitions or exalt them. Often coming across as simultaneously self-possessed and out of control, Borchardt can't have been an easy target, but the filmmakers nail him. R, 107 min. (LA) ▶ Sun 2/19, 7 PM, Morseland, 1218 W. Morse, 773-764-6401. DVD projection. **USA**

**Annapolis** This rehash of *An Officer and a Gentleman* may be a good showcase for James Franco, who's in every scene, but it's a disappointing choice for director Justin Lin, who made his name with the daring and original *Better Luck Tomorrow* (2002). Franco plays a shipyard worker whose father frowns on his dream of attending the U.S. Naval Academy; after he enrolls, a steely-eyed superior (Tyrese Gibson) decides that he's not officer material—but of course we know he is, and so does willowy love interest Jordana Brewster (*The Fast and the Furious*). Screenwriter Dave Collard overlooks no cliché as Franco plods through test after rigorous test, getting buff and tough while other plebes bite the dust. With Roger Fan, Donnie Wahlberg, and Vicellous Reon Shannon. PG-13, 108 min. (AG) ▶ River East 21.

**The Aristocrats** A gimmicky documentary by Penn Gillette and Paul Provenza built around the ultimate obscene joke, which depends on a performer's style and a certain amount of embroidery to achieve maximum impact. The idea is to set about 100 stand-up comics loose on this material, but the results are predictably so sound-bitey that only a few of them get to tell the joke all the way through, and many just offer commentaries. One sympathizes with Don Rickles's complaint that this is the sort of movie whose performers don't get paid. But with such participants as Hank Azaria, Shelley Berman, George Carlin, Carrie Fisher, Whoopi Goldberg, Eric Idle, Bill Maher, Michael McKean, Chris Rock, Jon Stewart, Dave Thomas, and Robin Williams, you won't be too bored. R, 92 min. (JR) ▶ Univ. of Chicago Doc Films.

**Big Momma's House 2** I hope the Academy seats Paul Giamatti and Terrence Howard together this year, so they can reminisce about the old days when they had to do junk like *Big Momma's House* (2000). Needless to say, neither returns for this ho-hum sequel, but Martin Lawrence is back as the intrepid FBI agent in obese drag. Screenwriter Don Rhymer keeps the potty humor to a minimum, though like the first movie, this is funny mostly for its brazen disregard of common sense—specifically, the idea that elaborate full-body prosthetic makeup could be slapped on in seconds by a cop on the run. John Whitesell (*Malibu's Most Wanted*) directed. PG-13, 99 min. (JJ) ▶ Chatham 14, Crown Village 18, Ford City, Gardens 7-13, Lawndale, Norridge, North Riverside, River East 21, 62nd & Western, Webster Place.

**Blind Shaft** Set in the blue gray gloom of industrial China, this cunning noir focuses on two ruthless coal miners who drift from one illegal mine to another, working the perfect scam: they recruit a sucker who's eager for work, pass him off to the mine owners as a relative, kill him in the darkness of the hole, fake an accident to cover up their crime, and blackmail the mine owners to keep quiet about the tragedy. Their web starts to unravel

when one of them takes pity on their latest mark, a naive kid whose older brother may have been one of their earlier victims. Director Li Yang adapted his compact script from a novel by Liu Qingbang. In Mandarin with subtitles. 92 min. (JJ) ▶ Univ. of Chicago Doc Films.

**The Boxer From Shantung** This 1972 kung fu adventure was a notable departure from the standard costume drama, setting its story in the early 20th century and replacing swordsmen with Shanghai gangsters. Another innovation was giving the lead role to Chen Kuan-tai; unlike the other kung fu stars of the era, he was a highly accomplished martial artist. Directors Zhang Che and Bao Xueli mine one of the gangster genre's most durable myths—the young hood who relies on guile to advance himself. The movie predated Brian De Palma's *Scarface* by more than a decade, and some scenes in the De Palma film are so similar that one wonders whether he studied this Hong Kong release more closely than the Howard Hawks classic he was remaking. With David Chiang. In Mandarin with subtitles. 126 min. (JK) ▶ Gene Siskel Film Center. Screening in a new print.

**Brokeback Mountain** Two cowboys (Jake Gyllenhaal, good, and Heath Ledger, exceptional) share a night of passion while working briefly as sheepherders in 1963, then spend the remainder of their otherwise straight lives tragically concealing their affair. Adapted by Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana from an Annie Proulx story and capably directed by Ang Lee, this is the kind of tasteful tearjerker that's often overrated and smothered with prizes because it flatters our tolerance and sensitivity. Lee focuses on the men's wasted lives and the heartbreak of their spouses and other relatives, but the movie makes one hanker for the sort of unabashed queer stories found outside the mainstream. R, 134 min. (JR) ▶ Century 12 and CineArts 6, Crown Village 18, Davis, Esquire, Gardens 7-13, Lake, Landmark's Century Centre.

**Cabaret** Bob Fosse pretends to be doing a Brecht-Weill while actually further sentimentalizing and glamorizing Christopher Isherwood's *Goodbye to Berlin*—adapted by Jay Presson Allen, and apparently closer to the play *I Am a Camera* than to the Broadway show. Whatever this 1972 feature is, it's entertaining and stylish, though maybe not quite as serious as it wants to be. Liza Minnelli stars at her near best, and Joel Grey is the caustic nightclub emcee; both won Oscars along with Fosse, cinematographer Geoffrey Unsworth, and music director Ralph Burns. With Michael York, Marisa Berenson, Helmut Griem, and Fritz Wepper; John Kander and Fred Ebb wrote the salty songs. PG, 128 min. (JR) ▶ Univ. of Chicago Doc Films.

**Caché** This brilliant if unpleasant puzzle without a solution about surveillance and various kinds of denial finds writer-director Michael Haneke near the top of his game, though it's not a game everyone will want to play. The brittle host of a TV book-chat show (Daniel Auteuil) and his unhappy wife (Juliette Binoche) start getting strange videos that track their comings and goings outside their Paris home. Once the husband traces the videos to an Algerian he abused when both were kids, things only get more tense, troubled, and unresolved. Haneke is so punitive toward the couple and his audience that I periodically rebelled against—or went into denial about—the husband's rage, and I guess that's part of the plan. In French with subtitles. R, 117 min. (JR) ▶ Century 12 and CineArts 6, Music Box.

**Campfire** New York-born Israeli filmmaker Joseph Cedar (*A Time of Favor*) combines romantic comedy and social criticism in this story of a widow (Michaela Eshet) in 1981 Jerusalem who seeks to repair her family by joining a settlement in the occupied territories—a prospect that appalls her secularized teenage daughters. There's also pressure from the myopic settlers, who view her single-mom status as a threat. Blind dates with middle-aged bachelors ensue, and Rachel's trouble with her increasingly unsupervised kids escalates when the youngest

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