

The Library Cafe – food for thought

The Library Cafe opened when the library did in April 1996, and I discovered it a year later. To reach it, use the Grove Street entrance and walk down the stairs to the right just before you pass the metal detectors. There's usually a sign with an arrow pointing down the stairs' that reads "Cafe." Or you can use the elevator to the left, if you have a problem with stairs, like me. It's on the lower level, kind of tucked in under the upper floor's entrance.

My friend Larry had suggested it. We often got together for lunch – back before Larry became a big-time PBS producer – and it was halfway between his office and mine. Since he was offering to pay, I agreed with alacrity.

I liked it right from the start. The Danish-style booths and round tables are made with blond wood and the chairs are bright polished aluminum. The restaurant seats about 60, and there is a small counter where you order and pay for your selections. They give you a small aluminum triangle thingy with a number on it and your order, except for your drink, is brought to your table.

The food is tasty and wholesome, with an emphasis on

fresh salads, crunchy vegetables, tasty meats, whole-grain breads and spicy soups.

The Library Cafe is not for people with hearty appetites, unless you're prepared to spend \$10 or more for lunch. It's for people who like to make lunch the light meal of the day. Such people find the Cafe's combinations appealing and economical. I've often had their cup of soup and half of a sandwich combination for \$4.50. Other combinations include soup and salad for \$4.75, soup and Caesar salad for \$5.95, chili and salad for \$5.25 and chili and Caesar salad for \$6.25. The last is a good deal if you like Caesar salad, hard to find in Tenderloin restaurants.

Each day the Library Cafe features two soups from a list that includes tomato lentil, wild rice and pesto turkey, tomato cabbage, split pea and cream of mushroom. The two choices available the day Lola and I ate there were red potato leek and vegetable barley soup. I had a cup of vegetable barley (\$2.35 sold separately); the broth was clearer than I would have expected, but quite tasty – thick with barley and vegetables. A bowl costs \$3.60.

Lola chose a turkey and

Gouda cheese sandwich served on focaccia bread. It and all the other sandwiches on the "Specials" board were priced at \$4.95. Lola had to ask for mayonnaise, since none came with the sandwich (a true sin where turkey is concerned) and what she got was a plastic pouch, never a good sign where mayonnaise is concerned. However, she found the turkey moist and tasty, the Gouda tangy and pronounced the sandwich enjoyable.

I ordered the steak and cheddar cheese with grilled peppers, also on focaccia. It was quite tasty, and needed no adornment. We both had iced tea made from tea bags for \$1.25.

Other sandwiches being offered on the "Specials" board, which doesn't change – therefore bringing into question the Cafe's understanding of the word "special" – included Monterey jack and chicken, roast beef and cheddar, pastrami and Swiss, avocado and melted cheese.

The board boasted additional entrees: a brown rice burrito with vegetables or chicken, a pesto spinach quiche,



The morning time routine at the Library Cafe.

pesto spinach lasagna, and a vegetarian lasagna, each at \$5.95. There was also a Greek salad for \$4.95.

Most people order off the "Specials" board since it's one of the first things that greets you and sits directly in front of a truly spooky hologram of our beloved mayor; demonic is the word that pops to mind.

The printed menu heralds a selection of salads that range from \$3.50 for the house salad to \$6.25 for the Caesar with chicken. Turkey walnut salad costs \$5.50 and the Cobb salad \$5.95 – both are standouts. Other sandwiches on the menu are Black Forrest ham, honey mustard chicken and smoked turkey with blue cheese, all priced at \$4.75. Our two sandwiches, my cup of soup and the two iced teas totaled \$15.45.

The Library Cafe is run by Tony Kim, who is the manager and cook. He leases the space

from the library and is the third owner. Tony ran the Viking Submarine shop on Ocean Avenue for many years, but found the 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. pace too taxing and sold out. He bought the lease and furnishings in December 1999. The original owner was responsible for the cafe's look.

The Library Cafe's hours mirror the library's except on weekdays it opens around 8 a.m. to accommodate library staff, who arrive then. It serves a variety of pastries, cookies and bagels (80¢ plain, \$1.90 toasted with cream cheese) and six types of mostly Italian coffee. It also sells a meatless breakfast burrito for \$2.50.

If you're looking for a light meal in pleasant and quiet surroundings, the Library Cafe is just the place. And when you're through, you can go check out a book. Free. ■

'Freaks' at the library – check it out

Rita Lukatsky

We associate libraries primarily with reading. The library, the main fortress of the civilized world, preserves the fruits of human mental activities. Reading allows us to step out from the turbulence of living and stop, think and

PHOTO: FREAKS.CINEPHILES.NET



Harry Earles and Olga Baclanova play Hans and Cleopatra in *Freaks*.

acquire different perspectives on life. At the Main Library you see a variety of people, from individuals pursuing scholarly goals to homeless folks seeking a quiet, safe place to hide for a moment from their miseries and indulge themselves in the imaginary world of fiction, or get entertained with some curious documentary sources.

What happens when we come to a library and it offers us

not only books but movies? Movies excite and give joy. They make us laugh and feel serious. Their magical power woos us to them again and again. Movies endlessly supply us stories from an inexhaustible well of inspiration. They lead beyond our casual feelings into the invisible river of the subconscious.

The Public Library's Large Screen Videos program shows movies in the Koret Auditorium for free. Last month Large Screen Videos featured "Under The Big Top," an ongoing exhibition dedicated to the circus. Large Screen Videos, with its own unique agenda, is an influential event in the Tenderloin's cultural life. It is an oasis of fun and enjoyment for local residents and an excellent example of success in entertaining and educating the audience. Movies are shown each Thursday at noon.

Blaine Waterman, main

PHOTO: WELL.COM



Blaine Waterman

branch AV librarian, is the driving force behind Large Screen Videos, and his creativity, artistic vision and personal initiative keeps the program sound and alive. Waterman chooses the movies, writes their brief descriptions for the program flyers and introduces each movie to the audience. Waterman said that in each month's set of movies he strives for diversity within some thematic unity. He looks for documentaries and fictions, American and foreign movies, within the broadest possible time frame. Each listing has been thoughtfully selected and clearly aimed at educating and entertaining, exactly what the library is about. May's circus theme included the melodrama *Trapeze* and the dark comic tale *Circus Palestina*.

I went to see *Freaks*, a movie that Europeans rejected back in the Thirties and Americans still call controversial. Fifty people were there. Not bad for noontime. *Freaks* made quite a stirring impression on me. I talked afterward with Herbert Chew and Irwin Tam, peer counselors with a city-funded mental health program. I spotted them in the audience during the show.

We all agreed that *Freaks* still has artistic charisma. It goes along with our unsatisfied love of folk tales and adven-

ture stories. Tam mentioned the strong element of surprise in the story about physically deformed people. He said: "These people don't ponder the unbearable difficulties of their lives, they act." Chew wondered about the real people who performed in *Freaks* and "what their life was like." We all felt that the finale of *Freaks* is uplifting, when disabled men acted heroically, finding unthinkable power over their nature and social pressure, defended their existence and remained unconquerable and sovereign.

Waterman said that at the Koret in June the subject is Gay Pride. In July, the leitmotif will be summer. ■

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