

# Plenty of atmosphere and good food to boot

food

**Kalaloo Café**  
48 New North Road  
Kingsland  
815 1025  
Tuesday — Saturday  
5pm til late

Staggering to get through the jungle of merry patrons and up to the bar, I asked anxiously if a table for three was likely, fearing that the answer would be no. "Most certainly" said the relaxed, confident and borderline flirty host.

Within five minutes we had a table, or seats on the one, actual table in the restaurant. This was one of those tables where strangers sit together so dining alone seems a more acceptable sport.

Dining tonight were Helena (vegetarian articulate food critic), Theo (alternative and foreign food expert) and myself, Josephine (anything for a movie moment).

At Kalaloo's the atmosphere grabs you at the door and drags you in. Here you can be loud, crass and obnoxious and no one will notice or care — they may even join in.

The music wraps around you as soon as you enter and whisks



PHOTO: JOSEPHINE KNOWLES

you off to another place.

Our host brought our wine and left us the bottle to finish. It proved my theory that this restaurant was like being at a close friend's house. It was not just the wine — Theo's glass of cranberry juice was also accompanied by the carton.

We were starving. There was a huge range of pizzas and pastas and a good selection of vegetarian meals. A quick scan of

the menu and...Yes! They had my favourite — Penne with a tomato based sauce. It may sound simple but I have often been fooled. Theo went for the New York-style pizza and Helena (suddenly not so vegetarian) chose the Fettuccine Marinara.

Our meals arrived within fifteen minutes and were piping hot. The aromas hinted at a seriously good munch. Chunky

tomato pieces mixed with a solid serving of olives and good feta — none of that cheap crumbly stuff.

Helena wondered if she had chosen the right meal, but did take into account that she had been suffering from a blocked nose, so who knows.

Theo was cautious at first as he carefully checked the crispness factor of the base and was pleasantly surprised.

He also made mention of the generous serving of good quality olives.

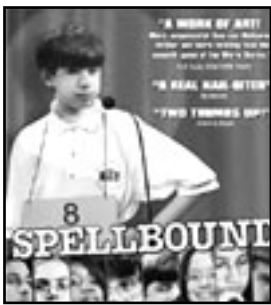
After a taste test of our meals he did comment that there seemed to be a very strong wine flavour in the sauces, however Helena and I questioned whether that was a problem or in fact a bonus.

On inspection the dessert menu looked a definite goer but being students, we couldn't afford coffee or desserts and besides we were chocka.... Next time maybe.

— Josephine Knowles

# Nerdy sidekick to Moore better than *Columbine*

dvd



**Spellbound**  
Director: Jeffrey Blitz  
Available: DVD retailers

Amidst the controversy that saw *Bowling for Columbine* win last year's Oscar for Best Documentary, *Spellbound*, also nominated in the same category, sat quietly like the nerdy kid in class everyone ignored.

I think we all secretly knew that nerdy kid would go on to achieve great things, and *Spellbound* is no exception.

The film follows the journey of eight children to the National Spelling Bee, that distinctly American phenomenon you might have spotted on the sports channel ESPN. It's a cheap shot, but for most of these children it will be the only time in their lives they will appear on a sports channel.

Unlike Michael Moore, *Spellbound* director Jeffrey Blitz prefers to let the subjects do the talking. Although this movie is packed with big words it is the

little moments and the expressions Blitz captures that say the most.

At the National Spelling Bee, Harry from New Jersey struggles for what seems like an eternity with the word "banns".

"You said it was a homonym, and you told me what it means, but am I allowed to ask what homonym means?"

The pain on Harry's face is evident and becomes increasingly comical as he mumbles his thought processes out loud.

It's torturous stuff to watch, considering I don't know the word either. Is he saying "bands"?

I find myself hoping Harry spells it correctly, although earlier I had written him off as the stereotypical geek.

He's the kid who uses the camera as his comedic platform, guffawing at his own unfunny

jokes and asking the sound guy if the boom microphone is edible before launching into a robot voice.

But not all the children are classic nerds.

Neil from California is an athlete and enjoys hanging out with his friends and playing basketball. He does push-ups while practicing his spelling.

Neil's parents are Indian and believe that nothing valuable in life is easy to achieve, so Neil is put through a rigorous training schedule of 7000 words per day plus French, Spanish, German and Latin tutoring so that he understands the foreign roots of words; and a spelling coach.

April from Pennsylvania enjoys riding rollercoasters in her spare time when she isn't studying the dictionary. She is a vegetarian and likes drinking coffee. April is 12 years old.

You can't help but cheer for all these kids as they work towards the National Spelling Bee.

But of the 249 contestants, 248 will spell a word wrong.

At times, the suspense surpasses that of a big-budget thriller, and I found myself anticipating a single letter with bated breath.

Unfortunately the children who carry the movie inevitably become one-trick ponies, but it's a pretty cool trick at that.

*Bowling for Columbine* may have been the loud and pushy popular kid at school, but *Spellbound* is the quiet achiever in the front row — clever, sometimes funny, and a lot more likeable than you think.

In a word, *Spellbound* is S-C-H-E-E-R-A-Z-A-D-I-A-N — that is, strangely fabulous.

— Tiana Miocevich

# Tempting the tastebuds with sichuan seasoning

food

**The Sichuan Genius**  
115 Onehunga Mall  
636 4284  
Mon-Sat 11am - 3pm  
5pm - 10pm  
Sunday 4pm - 10pm  
BYO - no corkage.

While the nights are still cold enough for winter feasting take a walk on the wild side and discover Onehunga's best kept secret, The Sichuan Genius restaurant.

Don't be put off by the fluorescent lights, peeling vinyl and formica tables as the food will make you forget it all.

On the night our family of four dined we were surrounded by an eclectic clientele that provided great scope for people watching. The lonesome man with a wine cask and a copy of *Trade and Exchange* provided fertile ground for speculation.

Green tea and menus were served promptly by our waitress. The table is laid with small serving bowls and chopsticks. The idea is to serve small portions from the large main dishes, allowing easy sharing.

The menu is extensive. Beef, chicken, pork, seafood and vegetables, each have a variety of ten dishes to choose from.

We chose Sour and Hot Dumpling Soup (\$6.50) to start followed by Beef and Pickles (\$9.50), Fish Flavoured Chicken



PHOTO: KATE PALMER

You can be sure of a warm welcome at The Sichuan Genius

(9.90) and Gong Boo Chicken (\$6.00) for the two children to share. Rice is \$1 per person.

Sichuan food differs from standard take-away fare. It is a province in south west China where the food is famous for its rich flavours and peppery hot bite.

Hot red chili is used in most dishes to stimulate the taste buds so the palate can distinguish several flavours at once.

When ordering, point at the menu as the staff don't have a

strong command of English, and be sure to specify the intensity of the dish. Intensity options start at not hot and finish at v.v.v.hot. Unless you have a death wish don't order stronger than a medium.

Menu options that didn't appeal included the Fiery Hot Pork Intestine (\$14) and the Numbingly Hot Bean Curd (\$9.50).

When our food arrived it was steaming hot and aromatic. It tasted even better than it looked

with a complex range of sensations that zing around the mouth.

The soup had eight plump pork and vegetable dumplings in a stock floating with peppercorns and chili. The beef with pickles was delicious — small tender beef strips mixed in with salty pickled vegetables. The children were more than happy with the huge bowl of chicken, peanuts and noodles in a tasty stock. The rice crust chicken had us fascinated as the waitress served it by pouring hot sauce over fried rice crisps sending a cloud of steam over the table. Pleasantly the fish flavour came from oyster sauce — not a fish head in sight. This was the star dish of the evening. The rice crisp was crunchy and the chicken succulent.

We didn't eat, we devoured. Make sure you've got on your fat pants, tight waistbands are dangerous when the food is this good.

The Sichuan Genius isn't fine dining but at only \$35.90 for four it's excellent value.

— Kate Palmer