

Quality Chinese food complete with fake meat

Emerald staffers went out on the town in pursuit of vegetarian Chinese food

By Rebecca Wilson and Mason West
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The Bible says that it's OK to eat meat. It's in there somewhere after the flood. But there are those who have made the conscious decision to renounce dead flesh from their diets, and that's OK, too. Many of these people live in Eugene.

From here, we encounter two problems: lack of good meat substitutes and lack of good Chinese food. Almost like a heavenly endorsement of vegetarianism, the Lotus Garden appeared 10 months ago in downtown Eugene.

Not only does the Lotus Garden provide tasty Chinese cuisine, but it does so without the use of animal products. Instead of using meat, the cooks synthesize meat textures and flavors with wheat gluten, bean curd and other substitutes. While these may not sound appetizing on paper, when properly prepared they can taste just like chicken ... or pork, or beef, or shrimp.

But how far can their deceit go? Could they fool a veteran carnivore? We decided to find out in a recent visit to the establishment. The Lotus Garden is located downtown on Charnelton Street, between 8th Avenue and Broadway. We decided to review the restaurant from two angles: how the meat tastes to Mason, a meat-eater, and how the meat tastes to Becca, a vegetarian. Oh, and Dave Depper, another vegetarian, also came so we could get more food.

Mason — I ordered the mu shu beef, thinking that beef is the most difficult to imitate. Well, actually I think the shrimp would be the hardest, but I wasn't willing to risk that.

Rebecca — I ordered pork with lemon grass. I felt a little worried when it came to table — it looked really pork-like. Dave had ginger sausage, the riskiest order in our party.

Dave — I like to live on the edge.

The "beef" in the mu shu was more of a beige color than the standard red-brown shade of beef. But upon consumption, it passes the test quite well. However, its gluten roots are easier to conceal when

mixed with the mu shu sauce and other vegetables. Aside from the "meat," there were more than enough pancakes to wrap the mu shu, and they were of high quality — something that can not be said of all Chinese restaurants.

As mentioned above, the pork passed the visual test with flying colors. It REALLY looked like pork. As per the taste, opinions differ. Becca, who has been meat-less for six years, was quite impressed. It was so good that she felt naughty eating it. Dave and Mason noted a distinct taste difference from real pork, but Dave said it subsided after a while leaving only porky goodness. Mason was the toughest to please and could not accept the dish as a substitute for pork. While it tasted good on its own, anyone expecting pork will not be pleased.

Mason — I felt cheated. The visual proximity to pork encouraged higher expectations for the flavor.

Rebecca — I only noticed that it seemed chewier than actual meat. But I didn't mind; the novelty was worth tolerating questionable texture.

This brings us to the sausage.

What was brought to our table was very unlike the "British bangers" often found on breakfast tables. Nevertheless, they were good. The "sausage" was actually sheets of bean curd rolled into log shapes and then cooked with some ancient Chinese vegetarian secret that we will never know. The texture was very similar to the chewiness of real sausage, and was an acceptable flavor substitute. Sure, they're not going to invade barbecue grills on the Fourth of July, but vegetarians will be thrilled to say, "I ate sausage last night."

Rebecca — I really appreciate the fact that I can go to the Lotus Garden and choose anything off the menu. I was almost intimidated by all the options. But most importantly, it is some of the best Chinese food I've eaten in years.

Mason — Eating fake meat makes me feel healthier, even though I'm sure its nutritional value goes down with all the frying and other preparation. All in all, the Lotus Garden is an easy compromise to make when dining out with vegetarian friends.

Dave — I just write CD reviews, but it tasted good.



Courtesy Bakers Digest
Wheat gluten in its natural state looks nothing like the tempting variety of gluten-derived dishes at the Lotus Garden.

Latest Orb album sends listeners on a trip to Mars

'Cydonia' offers electronica fans the Orb's classic sounds plus some musical surprises



Orb 'Cydonia'
MCA
★★★★☆

By Dave Depper
for the Emerald

According to legend, Cydonia was an ancient city on Mars. Various evidence of this fabled land supposedly exists; the most famous example is the eerie Martian "face," which satellites have photographed while in orbit. There is a huge faction of die-hard believers in Cydonia, who say that it is incontrovertible proof that we are not alone in the universe.

"Cydonia" is an apt title for the sixth studio album by a leading force in ambient electronic music, the Orb. Long known for epic, chilled-out albums of relaxing beats and otherworldly sounds, it seems only natural for these guys to embrace the Cydonia legend.

The Orb has gone through a lot of line-up changes throughout the years, but this time around it consists mostly of mainstay Dr. Alex Paterson and frequent collaborator Thomas Fehlmann. "Cydonia" is the first we've heard from the Orb since 1997's excellent "Orblivion." Has anything changed?

Well, the answer is yes and no. Perhaps the most immediately shocking thing about "Cydonia" is the presence of female vocals. Previous Orb albums have been heavy on sampled spoken voices and the like, but there has never before been an actual Orb "song," with lyrics. "Cydonia" features a whopping four vocal tracks.



As a longtime Orb listener, I must admit that I was initially taken aback by the seemingly uninvited presence of a singer. However, this new facet of the Orb quickly grew on me, and I realized that the songs were in fact beautiful pieces of work that fit comfortably into the Orb canon.

New sounds for the Orb pop up elsewhere on "Cydonia." The track "Thursday's Keeper," a drum 'n' bass-inspired noisefest, is without

a doubt the most uptempo track that the Orb has ever released.

Fans of the old Orb sound should take heart, though. There's plenty to love about "Cydonia." Past Orb albums were famous for including long, dubby instrumentals that completely enveloped the listener (and by the way, if you haven't heard the 17-minute long "Slug Dub" from 1995, you're missing out). "Cydonia" does not disappoint in this department.

"Promis" is a mesmerizing piece of work, seamlessly blending together a skittering hip-hop beat with a string section that sounds like it could have been lifted from any number of late '70s disco records. Even better is "Ghostdancing," a downright eerie track featuring vocals from Nina Walsh. Building slowly upon a dub loop, "Ghostdancing" is simply hypnotizing, and it seems to go on forever.

The Orb is also well known for its trademark humor. In the past,

the group has been known to stick absurd samples into the most serious of songs, which sets it apart from most of the straight-faced "serious artists" who seemingly control the electronic music genre. "Cydonia" is perhaps the least "funny" of Orb albums, but that doesn't mean that it is humor-free. The track "Egnable" is two minutes of some confused-sounding announcer simultaneously advertising foreign-language tapes and mattress pads over a background of circus music. It simply has to be heard to be believed. And how seriously can you take a song called "A Mile Long Lump of Lard"?

"Cydonia" is a great album and a worthy addition to the Orb catalog. I would venture to say that it is the Orb's most accessible album to date. For my money, it doesn't top 1995's "Orbus Terrarum," but that's a lofty goal. So go out and grab "Cydonia," turn the lights down low and prepare for lift-off.

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