

**METROLIFE****GIG**Indie godmother Kristin Hersh sings like a star **22****FILM**The artistic world of director Dito Montiel **23****NON-FICTION**Alex Kuczynski puts Beauty Junkies in the spotlight **24**

# Authentic yet modern

**FOOD AND DRINK****Curry Lounge**

★★★★☆

**E**ver since the former Co-Op department store closed a few years back, there's been speculation about what will happen to this handsome listed building on Nottingham's Upper Parliament Street. Sadly, neither Selfridges nor Harvey Nicks are coming to town (not yet, anyway), so what we have instead is The Axis, one of the largest new developments in the city centre. For the moment, The Axis remains a work in progress: a new buffet-style restaurant called Big Wok opened late last year and has proved a hit. Other future tenants include a new casino.

However, the big news has been the opening of a flash new Indian restaurant called Curry Lounge, a 100-seat-plus venue aiming to offer authentic Indian cuisine in swish surroundings. If you're someone who hankers after a traditional curry house with flock wallpaper and red curtains, this isn't the place for you. Curry Lounge is thoroughly contemporary, hence the show-stopping ceiling-high water feature, the booth areas with angled leather banquette seating, and fibre-optic lighting strands hanging from the ceiling that gradually change colour, from warm reds through to cool blues.

There wasn't a huge crowd here during our Thursday night visit, but business seemed fairly brisk. The number of black-uniformed staff milling around rather aimlessly showed they expected to be busy; we lost count of how many times they asked for our drinks order.

With a couple of chilled bottles of Kingfisher lager (£2.75) in hand, we were eager to get stuck into an admirably flexible and nicely balanced menu. You can choose the spiciness of all the dishes, vegetarians are well catered for, and there are even options for children.

Before we'd had time to be hypnotised by the colourful Bollywood bumping and grinding taking place on the numerous small plasma screens, our starters arrived. My friend opted for paneer tikka (£4.50), a kebab of Indian cottage-style cheese. Here it was mildly spiced and made a satisfyingly light starter. My choice of tandoori bhar (£4.95) also arrived with some of that delicious paneer, which complemented the charcoal-grilled mix of mushrooms, bell peppers, onion and tomato marinated in a delicately seasoned spicy blend.



Swish: The show-stopping decor at Curry Lounge takes it a step above the traditional

► We felt quite jealous of those ordering the gigantic naan breads, which are served, theatrically, hanging on a metal rack, so you can tear off pieces easily ◀

Our mains were also dispatched speedily. I had wanted to order the fantastic-sounding lobster pepper fry (£15.50) – fresh lobster drizzled with lime, sautéed with cracked peppercorns and onion masala, and curry leaves – but sadly it was off the menu. It would have been interesting to compare it to the fabulous curried lobster dish that won a national award for Geisha last year (before it closed its kitchen and concentrated on the bar/club side of the business). Instead, I switched to another imaginative fish supper: sea bass musallam (£14.50), served medium hot. A whole sea bass fillet roasted in a rich blend of spices arrived at the table. The tender flesh sizzled with spicy taste sensations, including lime and a fenugreek-infused yogurt gravy. Accompanied by a heaped mound of fluffy pilau rice with peas (£3) and a large pundina (a fresh, clean mint flavoured paratha bread, £2.90), this was a truly gourmet Indian meal.

My companion's badal jaam (£6.95) also demonstrated some creative flair.

Aubergines were shelled then filled with a spicy roast aubergine mash before being topped with minted sour cream and tomato chutney. This could have been an overly rich combination, but it seemed to work perfectly, with the succulent vegetable filling enveloped by contrasting sweet and sour flavours.

**A**s we continued sipping on draught Cobra beer (£2.75 a pint), this was turning into a memorable meal. Although the Bollywood soundtrack was starting to grate after an hour, we were happy to people-watch a wide range of diners, from large parties of students to fortysomething couples. In fact, you need quite a number to create any atmosphere here. We felt quite jealous of those ordering the gigantic naan breads, which are served, theatrically, hanging on a metal rack, so you can tear off pieces easily.

We weren't totally stuffed, so ventured into the desserts menu. To its credit, Curry Lounge, unlike many ethnic

restaurants, offers a selection of home-cooked puddings, although two of the six options weren't available. We eventually took a punt on sharing the jamun o gul (£3.50) which neither of us had tried before. This turned out to be two large fried dumplings with a filling not unlike semolina. There was a bit of a school-dinner vibe to the creamy contents, but the nuggets of pistachio and hint of cardamom gave it an exotic edge.

Prices overall seemed reasonably fair. We were mistakenly charged for a pickle tray (£2.50), but after the correction the bill stayed just under £60.

Surrounded by other top curry contenders such as Mem Saab, Laguna and 4550 Miles From Delhi, all of which have loyal local followings, Curry Lounge will have to work hard to establish itself. But then you can never really have too many good Indian restaurants in one city. *David Sandhu*  
110 Upper Parliament Street, Nottingham, Mon to Sat 9am to 11.30pm, Sun 5.30pm to 11pm. Tel: 0115 941 8844

■ More food and drink news page 22

**IN TOWN TONIGHT****JAZZ JOHN ETHERIDGE**

The jazz guitarist with an impressive résumé performs a solo set as part of the Cultural Exchanges festival

Tonight, Trinity House Chapel, De Montfort University, Leicester, 8pm, £7, £3 NUS. Tel: 0116 250 6229. www.johnetheridge.com

**CLASSICAL SINFONIA VIVA**

Nicholas Kok conducts a performance of Bach's monumental St John Passion

Tonight, Royal Concert Hall, Royal Centre, Theatre Square, Nottingham, 7.30pm, £8 to £26. Tel: 0115 989 5555. www.royalcentre-nottingham.co.uk

**BOOK NOW ALASDAIR ROBERTS**

The skilful Scottish folkster tours in support of his recent Drag City LP, The Amber Gatherers

Apr 13, The Social, 23 Pelham Street, Nottingham, 7pm, £8 adv. Tel: 0115 950 5078. www.alasdairroberts.com

**RATINGS GUIDE**

★★★★★ Excellent  
★★★★☆ Very good  
★★★☆☆ Good  
★★☆☆☆ Adequate  
★☆☆☆☆ Poor