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LOLA GRAIN BOWL AND BRICK HOUSE GREEN SALAD

Rock Salad

By Danny Fairchild

Bryce Parks: How do you feel about salad?!

Danny Fairchild: I generally feel positive about salad.

Yeah, that's about all the enthusiasm I can usually muster when it comes to salad. Which thankfully was enough to get this assignment. But I mean look, I'm not one of those meat eaters who holds vegetarians or vegans in contempt. I don't refer to leafy greens and vegetables as "rabbit food." We even have a fairly regular salad night at our house. But come on. If I'm ordering off of a menu at a restaurant for a meal I really want to enjoy, I'm not even looking at the salad options. I'm not alone in this attitude, and that's a bummer. Sure, vegans and vegetarians can often be jerks about being vegans and vegetarians, but they've got nothing on meat mavens. These people think that there's no way that a salad can be satisfying. And I should know! I was raised to be a meat maven by one of the biggest meat mavens EVAR, my dad. It's a cycle we need to break. Because a salad CAN be delicious. A salad CAN be satisfying. We just need someone to teach us. Well, at Rock Salad, the latest off-shoot from the folks at Knockout Melts, you're going to get schooled, fool.

As an advertising copywriter, I have a deep appreciation for businesses who understand the importance of branding, and Knockout Melts (and now Rock Salad) is probably my favorite local brand. Credit co-owners and founders Kathy

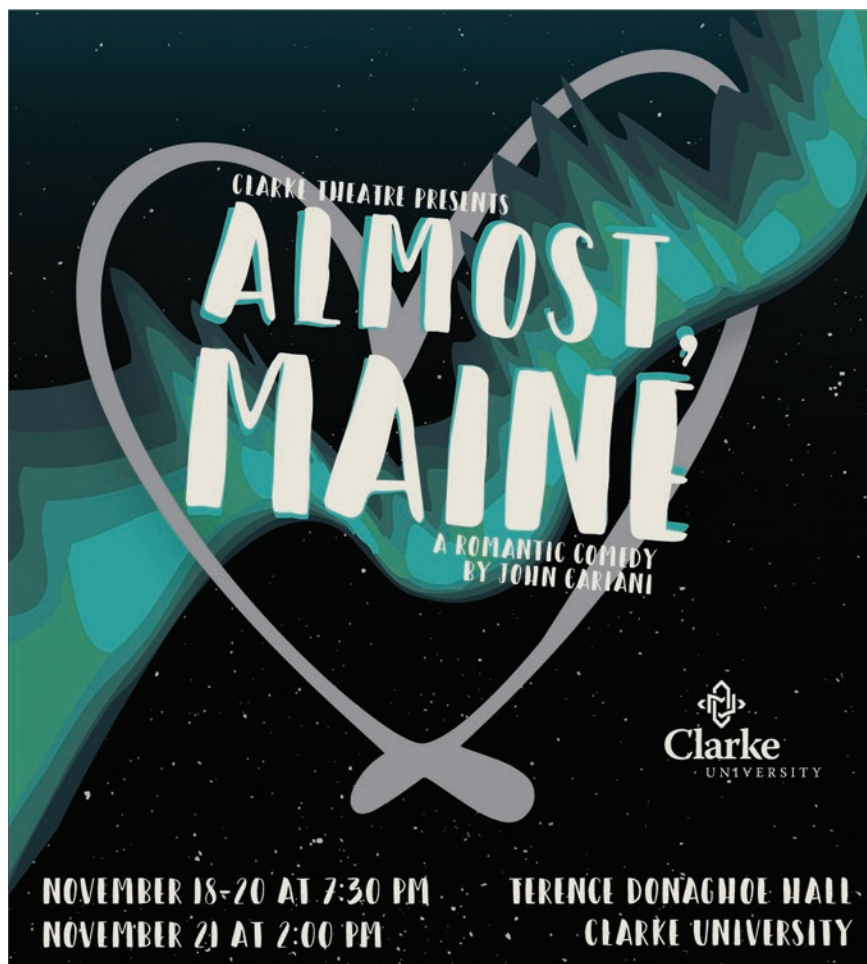
Conway and Teri Link. I love the progressive, empowering pin-up aesthetic of Knockout Melts. It's like the ghost of Betty Page is serving you a sandwich because she wants to, not because you told her to. Rock Salads also has that retro aesthetic, but it's more about classic rock. You have to appreciate boldly associating rock music... with salads.

I've been referring to Knockout Melts and Rock Salad like they're two separate locations. Nah. It's all wrapped up nicely at the Knockout Melts location at 3412 Pennsylvania Ave., near the corner of Pennsylvania and JFK. Rock Salads is what we in the biz call a sub-brand.

Anyway: The food. The dietary challenge most people cite for being anti-salad is that you can't get all the necessary amino acids from it. That's stupid of course. Do you not realize that soooo many salads have meat or egg on them? But even if you don't want the meat, Rock Salad still has you covered. Their salads come in two types: grain bowls and green salads. In either one you still get all the amino acids by adding meat, or by combining quinoa, brown rice, and/or chickpeas in their grain bowls (some of which also have meat).

And before you get all "Quinoa, brown rice, and chickpeas? How is THAT yummy?" Let me say... I know. I was skeptical, too. But let me tell you about Lola.

Lola is the name of the grain bowl salad I ordered this time. My guess is it's named after the classic song by The Kinks. It's described as Rock Salad's "rainbow grain bowl" and it features organic quinoa and brown rice, topped with corn, tomatoes, fresh avocado, chickpeas, lean grilled chicken, and crunchy sunflower seeds.



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Each salad has a suggested salad dressing, though you can choose from any of the following: Buffalo ranch, Sriracha ranch, ranch, Italian, Caesar, raspberry vinaigrette, balsamic vinaigrette, or blue cheese. The Sriracha ranch is suggested for Lola, which was a deciding factor for me. Anybody who has had a Mississippi Queen from Knockout Melts knows all about the Sriracha ranch. Nom! All this to say this: Eating Lola (sure, I'll stick with that phrasing) is like eating a spicy tuna poke bowl or something. The quinoa has kind of that raw texture that explodes on your tongue; this is aided by the crunchiness of the sunflower seeds. The rice is kind of like... the rice. The avocado is kind of like the avocado. The chicken and chickpeas kind of bring the umami flavor. And that kick ass Sriracha ranch ties everything together. This was the best salad I've had in years. And it was satisfying as all heck. I couldn't finish it. Because I was satisfied. By a salad. That I couldn't finish.

You know what else it's kind of like? Ever have a friend or coworker bring cowboy caviar to the potluck? Kind of like that, 'cept it's not called something dumb like cowboy caviar.

I will advise you to not pour the entire ramekin of Sriracha ranch on Lola. Add it to taste because it can have a lot of kick for our weak Dubuque tongues.

I foresee that the Lola will be to Rock Salad as the Mississippi Queen is to Knockout Melts. I'm sure I'll try other things, but I'll probably always come back to Lola.

So that's what them thar grain bowls are like. Now, onto the green salads. On this adventure, we tried Country Roads. Not sure how "Take Me Home, Country Roads" is a rock song, unless you count the punk cover by Me First and the Gimme Gimmes, but so damn what, right? Country Roads the salad features a crispy mix of organic spring greens and spinach topped

with diced Granny Smith apples, slivered almonds, shredded cheddar cheese, and lean grilled chicken. Raspberry vinaigrette is the suggested dressing pairing, and it does add to the country theme of the salad, but I think there are better options here. The raspberry flavor gets completely lost. I think the best option here is the balsamic vinaigrette. If you try it, let me know how it tastes, okay? I'm sure I will soon, but I like to know I'm right even when I know I'm right.

A word on sides: Salads come with a couple pita points, so, yay. From there, you can get crazy with some hummus with either carrots and celery or pita points. Or if you're fancying some chippies, they got all the usual suspects from Miss Vicki's.

A separate word on desserts: There are some pretty healthy options here. You're looking at a lovely parfait with light Greek yogurt, fresh berries, and granola called The Top 20 Parfait, or a lovely fruit cup with mixed berries, a drizzle of caramel, and white chocolate chips (The Gold Record Fruit Cup), or, hell, just a few squares of Ghiradelli chocolate (A Taste of Chocolate). It's like... fancy, but not like...FANCY!

Drinks? Coke products, sweet and unsweetened iced tea, Monster energy drink, or... wait for it... kombucha. On top of a business who knows what branding is, Knockout Melts/Rock Salad also knows who their customer is. Speaking of which, it's a pretty welcoming place for their customers. BLM and rainbow stickers prominently displayed on the door, but not in a just-for-money way. Well, I say that, but I'm a straight white guy, and it's probably not for me to say that. But I CAN vouch that Kathy and Teri are wonderful people who deserve your business not only because they know how to brand, not only because they know their customer, but because they know how to make awesome damn food.

Stop being stupid about salads and put it in you. ■

Rock Salad

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