

The fish is raw (and so is the language) at DK's

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I have no idea how to begin writing about disco sushi karaoke night at Seoul Restaurant & DK's Sushi Bar. It was like a crazy Korean gong show with a Howard-Stern-meets-Pam-Grier emcee and a sushi-munching, sake-gulping audience. It was bizarre, funny, uncomfortable (warning: ethnic slurs reported below) and boring. All at the same time. Though I don't usually visit restaurants for this column, I went to DK's disco night because I'd heard it was a sushi and drinking fest. I'd heard that the whole restaurant did sake bombs together. I'd heard people sang karaoke and got gonged if they were bad, then did sake bombs with the emcee. I'd heard accounts of nights when sake-bombed karaoke singers had taken off articles of clothing. I'd heard the emcee had a foul mouth. All of which is pretty much true.

The emcee (restaurant owner DK) referred to himself as a pimp and wore an enormous Afro wig and a cell phone around his neck. He investigated one patron's breasts by pulling open her tank top, then commenting on what he saw. He fondled as many patrons as possible. He offered his own bottom for fondling. He called himself a Chink. He called my friend, the only nonstaff Asian in a restaurant full of white folks, a Chink lady. He had clearly absorbed a number of expressions from blaxploitation films, which I cannot repeat here. Also, he very courteously leaned in and whispered into another friend's ear that she should move closer to the mic because we couldn't hear her singing, right after she managed to fend off his grabs for her breasts. (DK did announce in advance that he'd grab anyone singing.)

Some of DK's shtick was funny. Some of it crossed the line, in the way that a teenager trying to be crass and cool might (that is, it was more irritating than offensive). Sometimes we couldn't quite understand what he was saying (his accent's thick) and sometimes the prattle was just long-winded and boring, largely because it took an unusually long time to get anyone to actually sing and he was trying to fill dead air. Even the boring stuff was foul. Actually, some of it was boring because it was foul. There's a real sense of community at Seoul Restaurant. DK kept calling out to various patrons, whom he knew by name, and thanking them for coming. He's been able to stay open for 10 years because of his regular patrons, he said, as he good-naturedly ribbed them -- and they ribbed him. One of the regulars gonged DK in the middle of his karaoke song, sung in Korean, and DK obligingly bought the guy (and himself) a sake bomb. DK's nonsense seemed intended to be good fun, and he's the first one to appreciate a jab taken at him.

But it wasn't good fun for everyone. Of the four people I went with, three were irritated. My friend Maria, who is Korean American, has enjoyed eating at the restaurant in the past and thought of it as "homey" and "friendly." But she was annoyed by the Monday night goings-on. "It was not funny and it was not a good time," she wrote me when asked. She did not appreciate being referred to by an ethnic slur. She also thought "the misogyny and groping were way out of line -- not acceptable under any circumstances, and

certainly not justified by the fact that he's a Korean guy in an Afro wig assuming the stereotyped pimp/gangster persona. . . It makes me sad."

Another friend, Jeff, a gangsta rap fan, wasn't bothered at all by the language used, but he too had a hard time with the groping. Though the regulars likely know it's part of the shtick, we newbies were surprised and discomfited -- I don't ever think that kind of behavior is funny or appropriate. Jeff said he would hit someone who tried to touch us. I was shocked. Jeff is not a macho guy.

Susan, who's been to and enjoyed performance art pieces that the mere discussion of discomfits me, thought the whole thing was creepy and wanted to take a shower afterward. But, she added, "I strangely managed to have an OK time. I guess because it was like watching a train wreck." When I called Brent to get his reaction, he simply said he didn't have much of one -- though he was also mildly irritated because he'd heard Monday nights were "rowdy parties with everyone participating," which wasn't the case when we were there. "It took an hour for anyone to get up and sing that night and most of them were more annoying to me than DK's act. When I did my karaoke thing, he was dancing on a chair, cheering me, and urging crowd response and participation. I think those 3 minutes were a more accurate representation of what Monday karaoke night is normally: a mildly entertaining party with a slightly un-PC theme."

So, dear reader, now you know. If "Girls Gone Wild" is your idea of a good time, by all means go. Otherwise, attend at your own risk.

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