

Chopstix music and food a great combo

*By Anna Poole
Herald Restaurant Critic*

EVERETT -- Forget the hushed lapses between B-12 and O-65 at the old Lion's Bingo Hall near the Events Center. The new tenants are serving cold potatoes and great balls of fire while they take you down the yellow brick road.

Chopstix: a dueling piano bar and steakhouse has chef Joseph Miller in the kitchen creating exciting choices like white truffle mac and cheese or grilled chicken with a citrus vodka marmalade glaze, while Todd Dunnigan and Robert Baird mix it up on stage with selections from Elton John, Billy Joel and Ray Charles.

My friend and I decided to visit on a recent Sunday night because that's family night and I wanted to see how a piano bar-steakhouse entertained the whole family.

Although there isn't a cover charge on Sunday, we arrived before the music started, which is important on Fridays and Saturdays to avoid the \$7 cover. Originally, we were seated at a table away from the pianos, but our attentive and accommodating server moved us to a table nearer the stage and about halfway between the two pianos. When the music started after our meal, we had a terrific spot.

We began with a glass of wine (\$7 each). The restaurant's wines are mainly from Washington, Oregon and California and cost from \$16 to \$65 a bottle, with one California cabernet sauvignon going for \$125. Most of the wines fall in the \$25 to \$30 range.

My friend ordered the steak salad (\$14.99) with blue cheese dressing to augment the blue cheese crumbles. The daily fish special (\$18.99) caught my attention because the cream sauce laced with Dijon mustard sounded like a fresh take on a halibut steak. I added the house salad of European greens with candied walnuts and blue cheese crumbles, and shared my bread with my dinner partner.

The marinade complemented the steak and the salad greens in my friend's dinner salad, and the steak was grilled perfectly to medium while retaining its tenderness. My halibut was expertly cooked to that moment of done without crossing to dry. The sauce added a unique spark, as did the grilled tomato slices topped with Parmesan cheese.

It was hard to tell if the pianos or our dinners were the main event. Chopstix opened quietly in September, but the food and entertainment are so hot you'll wish the night was fireproof.

Herald restaurant reviewers accept no invitations to review, but readers' suggestions are always welcome. Reviewers arrive unannounced, and The Herald pays their tabs.

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