

IRVINE WEEKLY

OCTOBER 2, 2019 • NO. 25



GAME OF THRONES

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ENTERTAINMENT

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CELEBRATE CULTURE AT THE 18TH ANNUAL IRVINE GLOBAL VILLAGE FESTIVAL

THE EVENT, HOSTED BY THE GREAT PARK THIS YEAR, WILL BE EVEN BIGGER THAN ITS PREDECESSORS.

BY: RYAN NAJJAR

PHOTOS COURTESY OF: CITY OF IRVINE

From all around the world and from all walks of life, people gather to live, work and raise their families in this beautiful city. New people bring new ideas, perspectives and stories to share with each other, and it's that sort of blend that makes Irvine so beautiful in the first place. Sometimes, however, we need to take the time to celebrate the variety of people that've established their lives here, and all the cultures they bring to the table.

Irvine's city government, thankfully, shares this sentiment with us. In fact, to honor the diversity that spices up life in this town, they've put on the Global

Village Festival every year since 2002 (although the first was in 2000). As the years have gone by, each festival has been bigger than the last, and this year's celebration on Saturday, October 12 and Sunday, October 13 will be no exception.

There'll be a cornucopia of booths, live performances, speakers and other activities and events to help showcase every vibrant color and pattern on the quilt of Irvine. Admission is free too!

Live entertainment this year will include a wide variety of dance troupes and musicians from around the world performing across dozens of genres and styles. Guests can check out showcases

of everything from Chinese folk dancing and traditional Korean drumming to Cajun and Zydeco music, along with martial arts and Thai fruit-carving demonstrations.

In 1998, a small collective of residents first got the idea to bring the people a festival to promote the area's different cultures. It was called, fittingly enough, the Multicultural Festival, and interest began to pick up after the following year's celebration. People began to flood in after the festival was moved to a larger venue to encourage attendance.

For the year after that, they decided to take a new direction, branding themselves as the Irvine Global Village Festi-

val. They also celebrated their previous success by heading to the Irvine Civic Center, drawing approximately 4,000 people to the event as a result.

To keep the tradition going and growing every year, the original founders got together and formed the Irvine Multicultural Association, where they dedicate themselves to the task year-round. Their cooperation has paid off in spades.

Predictably, the proceeding years have brought about recognition for their efforts. Back in 2009, O.C. Weekly handed them the crown of "Best Festival," even though their best was yet to come.

They'd top themselves again in 2011,

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ENTERTAINMENT

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which marked the 40th anniversary of Irvine and the festival's 10th birthday. More than 20,000 attendees showed up, and a new tradition took root when they decided to take a stand to promote global peace with the United Nations Art Miles Mural Project, which allows younger attendees to create artwork included in a massive, beautiful display.

The time and effort they've dedicated to empowering the different nationalities, religions and cultures that make up the city is immense, and while local publications have taken note, it was about time for some attention on a larger scale. They ended up receiving exactly that when the National League of Cities honored the city of Irvine with a Cultural Diversity Award. Among other things, it recognized the creative efforts taken to start programs highlighting acceptance and celebration of diversity in the community.

With all this recognition and an established reputation, they still haven't slowed down. They've stuck to their original mission of continuous expansion, and last year saw their greatest array of offerings yet with over 115 performances, an array of cultural and religious exhibits, kid-focused activities, an expansive international market-



place, and a variety of global cuisines.

While the environmentally conscious might be wondering about the waste potentially created by all this, there's no need to worry.

The organizers are dedicated to creating a zero-waste environment, where even the T-shirts, signs and banners are intended for reuse, or at least designed to be biodegradable. They also utilize composting methods and make sure all

plates and utensils are either compostable or recyclable.

In keeping with this trend, they'd like you to utilize reusable goods whenever necessary, including water bottles and other beverage containers, bags, if you decide to go shopping, and considering carpooling in your friend's new electric car (or doing whatever else you can to decrease your carbon footprint).

Carpooling would also offer more

benefits for those attending the growing festival. Parking will be scarce for those who aren't able to arrive before it opens, or at least when it starts. If you want to do your part to make it easier for yourself and your fellow Irvine folk, we'd suggest you and your friends or family try to fill up every seat you've got. The festival's about bringing people closer together, after all.

The event is going to be held in Orange County Great Park this year, although if you're going to be taking an Uber or similar rideshare service, you'll need to direct them to the Great Park Tennis Complex Parking Lot.

Irvine is a beautiful place with an outstanding tapestry of lives that make it what it is. As parts of that tapestry ourselves, we owe it to those around us to celebrate each other and take pride in our unique spread of individuals.

You can do it every day by supporting local business and cultural institutions, but make sure you're really ready to take pride by checking in with the city of Irvine website for exact details on the festival and all sorts of other events happening in town this year. www.cityofirvine.org/irvine-global-village-festival



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- Jim and Carol Hoffman



SPOTLIGHT ON IRVINE BUSINESS: PARCEL PENDING

TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE RISE OF E-COMMERCE, THE COMPANY ENSURES RESIDENTS CAN BE CONFIDENT THEIR PACKAGES WON'T FALL VICTIM TO PORCH PIRATES.

BY: TARA FINLEY

PHOTOS COURTESY OF: PARCEL PENDING

With over 280,000 living in the city, Irvine is home to a thriving community of businesses and consumers. More than 17,000 companies operate within its borders, giving Irvine an impressive job-to-population ratio of 94.8 percent. Given how vital business is to Irvine's

impressive reputation, we at Irvine Weekly seek to highlight some of its best. This month we put the spotlight on Parcel Pending.

Parcel Pending provides our community with an innovative package management solution. Often seen in multifamily communities, retailers, corporate campuses, universities and more,

their locker systems help to improve package-receiving efficiency.

As the popularity of online-shopping skyrockets, so does the need for better management of packages. From "porch pirates" to restrictive pick-up times, consumer frustration has led to the creation of a growing market of solution-based shipping and receiving services.

So what sets Parcel Pending apart from its peers? We had a conversation with Lori A. Torres, CEO and founder of Parcel Pending, to get the answers.

"What sets us apart is our best-in-class customer service," shares Ms. Torres.

"Parcel Pending stands out amongst its competitors due to our unmatched 24/7 service teams that are dedicated to creating the best experience for all of our customers. Our specialized departments focus their time and efforts by going above and beyond, reaching out to their contacts and ensuring everything is running smoothly all day, every day. We pride ourselves on improving the security and accessibility of over 1.5 million packages monthly. We recognize the importance our lockers play at the communities we serve and that the packages people are excited to receive are our top priority and passion."

As the ordering of goods becomes the norm, we are now seeing more environmentally temperamental goods – such as food, wine and medications – being delivered. However, with rising summer and fall temperatures, this creates a problem for consumers that are not able to immediately receive their orders. Parcel Pending has a solution to this problem.

"In addition to phenomenal customer service, we also are committed to offering the most technologically advanced electronic lockers. That's why our product line has expanded from indoor lockers to outdoor and refrigerated – the first in the industry – lockers. We are always pushing the envelope when it comes to new features and strive to provide state-of-the-art lockers that suit the needs of our diverse audiences. For example, our new BOPIL™ solution is designed to help retailers drive in-store customer engagement, improve the customer experience and increase revenue opportunities with their BOPIS solution. We remove the chaos of package management by assuming all customer service responsibility for package delivery, notification and retrieval."

Parcel Pending provides a service to both the retailer and the consumer, shaping their business model to best serve the Irvine community and beyond.

Ms. Torres knows the needs of our city well, having moved to Orange County from Long Beach in 2000 for a career advancement role at The Irvine Company, a real-estate investment company and master planner based in Newport Beach.

"I first developed the idea for Parcel Pending while working at The Irvine Company. During my 13-year tenure ... I held various senior positions, including Senior Vice President of property operations. I was responsible for the operational oversight of the company's multifamily portfolio, consisting of 1,200 property management associates operating over 44,000 apartment homes."

It was during this time that Ms. Torres became aware of a developing resident need.

"While at The Irvine Company, I regularly walked through many of their multifamily communities. Initially, package delivery was not a major issue. It used to be that property managers only took a few minutes out of their day to manage a small amount of deliveries for residents. However, as time went on and online shopping became increasingly popular, I noticed that property managers were struggling to devote enough space, time and money to properly manage the influx of deliveries. At the same time, residents were becoming overwhelmingly frustrated with having to pick up their packages during office hours, disappearing packages, and tracking packages that never arrived. I knew there had to be a better way and set out to find a solution."

That solution was Parcel Pending. As founder, Ms. Torres has built the company from the ground up, from the formation of an initial idea to the management of the successful business it is today.

"My extensive real estate experience has allowed me to truly understand the diverse needs of property owners, property managers, couriers and residents. As a result, I have been able to conceptualize and develop completely customizable indoor, outdoor and refrigerated digital smart lockers that provide seamless package management solutions for residents, employees, retailers and shoppers nationwide."

Headquartered in Irvine, it employs many of the city's residents. What makes Parcel Pending a great place to work?

"As an innovative and customer-centric company, we are invested in a culture of service and collaboration. Parcel Pending is powered by our people and our leadership team firmly believes that the key to our continued success is celebrating the achievements – both big and small – of our entire team. We not only recognize the contributions of each employee but also work hard to

maintain an environment that gives our team members the opportunity to thrive through open communication practices and programs to help them achieve positive results. And above all, we are committed to having fun!"

They plan to continue to grow their job creation as the company encourages a positive work environment.

In addition to employing many of our neighbors, Ms. Torres and Parcel Pending are deeply involved within the community. The company supports many of the local nonprofits and organizations that fight homelessness.

Ms. Torres herself has served in various community roles over the years, including stints as the president of the South Coast Apartment Association, Orange County in 2009, as a board member of the California Apartment Association from 2010 to 2012 and as a board member of the CAA South Coast Apartment Association, Orange County from 2005 to 2011. She was also a board chair of Grandma's House of Hope, a nonprofit dedicated to ending homelessness, poverty and hunger, from 2010-2014.

Currently, Ms. Torres sits on the board of Families Forward, an Irvine-based nonprofit that aims to provide affordable housing for homeless and at-risk families.

From her experience, it remains important to Parcel Pending's founder that the company be committed to giving back to its home. As such, Parcel Pending has provided school supplies, scholarships, food and relief efforts to underprivileged children and families in Orange County.

So what does the future hold for this fast-growing company?

"The company will continue its expansion in retail, grocery, corporate campuses, commercial office buildings, multifamily apartments and universities. We anticipate innovative new products and will continue to be the first-to-market with these new 'make life easier' solutions. We have great things in store."

Lastly, we must ask: Why choose Irvine as your headquarters?

"Irvine is a great place to run a business. The city offers a thriving, collaborative community with vibrant access to top talent. Everyone in Irvine is also very supportive of local businesses. There is a great deal of support for startups and entrepreneurs in Irvine. There is no better business community!"

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"THANK YOU BAGS," 2018, REED VAN BRUNSCHOT

"ARTIST STATEMENT" AT THE GREAT PARK GALLERY ELUCIDATES THE RANGE OF CONTEMPORARY ART TODAY

FROM ABSTRACT ART, HOMAGES AND RENAISSANCE-ERA PAINTINGS TO SCULPTURES, VIDEO AND PERFORMATIVE ART.

BY: LIZ GOLDNER

PHOTOS COURTESY OF: "ARTIST STATEMENT" EXHIBITION

While "Artist Statement," the exhibition currently on display at the Great Park Gallery through

November 10, empowers graduate art students to display their evolving expertise in painting, photography, video, installations and other media, its predominant feature is their understanding of the range, depth, conceptual aspects and significance of experimentation in art-making today.

Sydney Walters' (Claremont Graduate School) "Crumpled Wall" (2018), as an example, is a large acrylic painting of floral patterns, appropriated from the background of a 1427 Giovanni di Paolo devotional painting, "Branchini Madonna," in the Norton Simon Museum.

While the floral designs may not be immediately apparent as religious iconography, the patterned images, set against a deep yellow background (representing gold leaf), possess elegance, grace and beauty. Then, rather than hang the completed canvas against a wall, the artist draped it loosely from two pins, affording the painting a crumpled look, and imparting three dimensionality or a slightly sculptural look to it. On a conceptual level, this work explores how devotion relates to women, Walters explains.

"China Factory" (2019) by Chloe Jo-eongmyo Kim (Otis College of Art and Design) is comprised of several large sculptural pieces created on Plexiglas sheets and adorned with brightly colored paint and digital images. The artist describes this series as a response to her sensory experiences of industrial and humanistic patterns that she perceived while visiting manufacturing plants in China. Yet each individual work appears more like an abstract painting, albeit with bold hard-edge aspects.

And as Kim's individual sculptures are created on transparent Plexiglas, and lit to display their painted and digital patterns, they assume the appearance of contemporary stained glass. The artist explains that the penetrating light flowing through her pieces helps create phenomenological effects within them.

Ivy Guild's (UC Irvine) two-piece "Docile Bodies" (2018), of two muscular male torsos, challenges what the artist refers to as "the cold, inhuman hardness traditionally associated with sculptures of the muscular male form." By creating her torsos from the traditional

female materials of cotton, batting and thread, dyed in pale pinks and blues, the completed pieces take on decidedly feminine aspects.

Observe these works more closely and the viewer will see fuzzy, pixelated landscapes, imprinted in checkerboard fashion onto the cotton material. The total look is that of sculptural pieces, combining masculine forms with traditional feminine fabrics and sewing techniques. These “docile” sculptures further suggest that the artist is exploring established male and female roles, which are today increasingly questioned and even muddled.

One of the more surprising artworks in this exhibition is Justin Rightsell’s (Cal State University, Long Beach) “Untitled (what lies outside, beneath the horizon; violence; gesture; thaumoto)” (2018), three part chromogenic print. This long narrow photograph, taking up much of a side gallery wall, is a stunning example of cameraless photography. That is, a photo created only with photographic paper, natural and artificial light, images and chemicals, and without a camera.

This striking abstract image, with its vague landscape features, in black, deep blues and white, further manifests the role of chance, or the artist’s penchant to let natural elements (the light) and human-made components (the photographic paper and the chemicals) control the finished piece. Rightsell explains that his disregard for traditional photographic practices is replaced by a curiosity driven by his metaphysical and existential obsessions.

Relevant to today’s consumer-driven world are two enormous, floor-to-ceiling plastic “Thank You Bags” (2018) – the type of shopping bags that are filled with canned and bottled goods from the 99 Cents Only Store. These handmade sculptural works illuminate what USC graduate student Reed van Brunschot’s wall didactics describes as, “the overuse of plastic and its environmental impact, as well as the dualities we face in capitalism.” The labels go on to explain, “The desirable lure to constantly buy more, the ever positive ‘Thank you’ and ‘Thank You for Shopping With us!’ becomes subliminal, encouraging a consumption-based cycle.”

Michele K. Sauer’s (California Institute of the Arts) large, darkly colored acrylic paintings “Kitchen Wake” and “Floodlight” (both 2019) possess modern art

figurative aspects, and are perhaps influenced by the populist style of French painter Fernand Léger (1881-1995). Sauer’s “Kitchen Wake” depicts two bold androgynous figures, inhabiting the far left side of the painting, while preparing meals with determination. The bulk of the painting, illustrating an askew, illusionistic kitchen with sink and range, helps create an artistic environment that, Sauer explains, travels between past and future.

The artist’s “Floodlight” is more obscure and identifiable primarily by its title. Two human figures, who appear to be staring at each other, seem to have had their personal space interfered by a random floodlight.

The dramatic wall-sized “Hold On” (2019) of Velcro and yarn by Zi Zhuang (Claremont Graduate School) depicts “the imagery of magnetic fields to

create metaphors for relationships between humans, animals, objects and substances,” according to the exhibition’s wall didactics. Yet this abstract piece, in bright reds, black and white, with fragments of yarn woven throughout, and even holding it up, appears to be influenced by abstract expressionism with its gestural brushstrokes, spontaneity and biomorphic shapes.

Rounding out this dramatic, groundbreaking exhibition is an eight-minute video, “Erasure” (2018) by Stephanie Mei Huang (California Institute of the Arts). The video, presumably shot by the artist and starring only herself, is set in a Southern California field with mountains in the distance. Set in the field are a chair, an old TV, a lamp and an easel, the latter displaying a canvas that the artist is painting on. Throughout the

short video, she replicates on the canvas the various objects in the field, as well as the larger landscape, seeking to have the objects blend in with the background and perhaps disappear.

Mei Huang’s artists statement, appropriately descriptive to the video, reads: “Through personal experiences of diaspora, her work is rooted in the nuances of fragmented upbringing in terms of physical location and culture and how these forces affect changing perceptions of home, nationhood, loss and identity.”

“Artist Statement” is on view through November 10, 2019. Great Park Gallery, Palm Court Art Complex, Orange County Great Park, Irvine; Thu. & Fri., noon - 4 p.m., Sat. & Sun., 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; free. cityofirvine.org/orange-county-great-park/arts-exhibitions.



“CHINA FACTORY,” 2019, CHLOE JEONGMYO KIM



GAME OF THRONES CONCERT PREVIEW

FOR THE CONCERT'S FIRST OUTDOOR TOUR, THE SOUNDTRACK OF WESTEROS WILL FILL FIVEPOINT AMPHITHEATRE.

BY: SCOTT FEINBLATT

PHOTOS COURTESY OF: JAMES DICKS

The soundtrack music of any wildly successful film, TV show or series goes hand in hand with the love its fans feel toward the program itself. The score to *Game of Thrones*, the popular HBO fantasy series based on George R.R. Martin's fantasy book series *A Song of Ice and Fire*, is no exception. The composer responsible for creating the soundtracks that have accompanied the fantasy battles, political intrigue

and complex character development is Ramin Djawadi.

Other significant entries on Djawadi's resume include the films *Iron Man*, *Clash of the Titans*, *Pacific Rim*, *Warcraft* and *A Wrinkle in Time*, as well as the HBO series *Westworld*, the FX series *The Strain* and the Amazon Prime Video *Jack Ryan* series. Additionally, Djawadi has won multiple Emmy awards for his *Game of Thrones* scores and has taken the *Game of Thrones*

Live Concert Experience on global tours since 2017. Following the conclusion of the series, the maestro has been on the road with the updated version of the concert experience and will wrap up the tour with three stops in SoCal – including in Irvine and Hollywood, on October 4 and 5, respectively. In advance of the show's stop at Irvine's FivePoint Amphitheatre, *Irvine Weekly* had an opportunity to ask Djawadi about his music-writing process, how the concert

has been updated, and what fans can expect to see at the show.

There are a number of ways in which composers will receive their input from a show's producers and directors. Djawadi explained some examples of the direction his collaborators will take when discussing a project with him. "I always ask right away, 'What do you hear?' Many times they already have some kind of vision of what they want to do with the overall project, and



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music is part of that," he said. "[Sometimes they say,] I want this to be very emotional driven.' Sometimes it's even just finding out what instruments. ... You know, some people say, 'I really want

this to be very percussion driven,' or 'I like trumpets.'"

For his *Game of Thrones* work, Djawadi was asked to go against expectations. "[There's a] running joke where they

particularly said for me to stay away from flutes because they didn't want anything to medieval sounding. And so there was just a good guideline right away, and I'm going, OK, I won't touch any flutes." When asked about this irony, he explained the rationale was to resist the instrumentation of another popular fantasy series, "That's why we laugh about it ... they particularly wanted something that was not in the direction of some other fantasy shows, especially *Lord of the Rings*, which was obviously such a popular score. Howard Shore's amazing score had such a distinct tone, and [for] some of that he used medieval flutes." He continued, "So they particularly said, 'We don't want to go in that direction. We have to find our own way.'"

Djawadi finally arrived at a solution that then became a distinctive trait of his *Game of Thrones* scores. "We ended up with a lot of solo cello, and we felt it was a fitting sound and instrument and mood for *Game of Thrones*. That's why the cello, in particular, is the most dominant instrument in the show," he concluded.

For the touring show, Djawadi had an opportunity to create new variations and arrangements of the music, so not everything fans hear will be exactly as they recalled it on the show. "I had a lot of fun with that actually because I realized I'm not bound to the picture anymore," he said. "In fact, it's the other way around; I can create pieces and the [accompanying] footage around it because, obviously, we have only two [to] two and a half hours to tell a story."

As far as updating the show after the series had concluded, this was not new territory for Djawadi, as the tour has been updated in this way before. "I reworked it, yet again, for the third time to include season 8, and it gets quite tricky because you're obviously trying to tell a lot of information in very little time," he explained. "My approach was really from [wondering:] 'What are the big beats in each season?' and 'What are the big character arcs that I need to touch upon?' And I tried my best to really capture it all ... there are pieces that we know from the show, like for example, 'Mhysa,' which is the finale in season three, that is fairly similar to how we hear it in the show, but then there are other pieces that are particularly arranged just for the live show." Djawadi pointed out that audience reception to the show's incorporation of both original arrangements of some pieces with variations of other pieces has been good.

The music has not been the only thing to change in the years that the concert experience has been touring. Djawadi recalls, "The first tour was in the round, [so the stage] was in the middle and it had a huge stage and it had a lot of stuff going on. [For] the second tour, we updated it with season 7, and we took it away from being in the center because we felt sound-wise and stage-wise, we wanted to try something different," he explained. "Now [for] this new tour, we want to try something new yet again, which is [why] these concerts are all outdoors; that's something we have never done before. We thought that could be fun to take it to these open air venues. Before, when we were in the arenas, we would actually come with our own stage and set it up. When you are at open air arenas, [the stages are] already there. So you [just have to] bring your stage design."

Game Of Thrones Live Concert Experience will be at FivePoint Amphitheatre in Irvine on October 4, at 8 p.m. Ticket prices range from \$32-\$521 (plus fees) and are available through Live Nation.



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FROM FRESH CHRYSANTHEMUM TEA TO THEIR SOUP DUMPLINGS, THE DUMPLING HOUSE OFFERS AN OCEAN OF EXCELLENT FLAVORS.

BY: RYAN NAJJAR

PHOTOS COURTESY OF: RYAN NAJJAR

Bret and I always end up back at Diamond Jamboree. Who can blame us, though? It's a stone's throw away from Bret's office, right off the freeway for me, and we seem to stumble upon something new to end our diets every time (we're not actually on diets because, you know, they don't actually work, but you get what I'm trying to say).

We lead busy lives, but it's funny how quick a plan can come together when dumplings are involved. We had to reschedule once or twice, but we found

ourselves seated for lunch at Paper Lantern Dumpling House not too long after the thought to go was conceived. The more we looked around, the more warm and comfortable we felt, even with the sleek, modern decoration. Sitting near a window, we watched people idly pass by and go about their day, acting like they weren't only feet away from the sweet embrace of dumplings.

These were to be the main event, of course, but there were a few opening acts that were determined to make

their impression. The first, surprisingly enough, wasn't a food item at all. Rather, it was a cup of fresh, warm chrysanthemum tea Bret ordered to start things off. The sight of what looked like small bulbs floating in the cup was confusing at first, but a closer inspection cleared things up. You see, over a couple dozen of the little chrysanthemum flowers were floating in the tea and blooming as time went on, which made us that much more optimistic. It tasted even more refreshing than it looked, and each sip brought a wave of calm

along with it. It was light on the tongue, but it made a statement nonetheless.

After a bit, we elected to put the rest of the tea to the side, agreeing it might pair well with our food. First to the table was an enticing bowl of egg soup, which greeted us with a pleasant and balanced visual before we even got to know how it tasted. Once Bret took the first spoonful, though, they noted that the theme of balance remained strong. Savory notes came in waves, as did umami, and while the right amounts of salt and seasoning were probably the

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FOOD

root of the savory taste, the source of the latter was a mystery until we found pieces of shrimp in our later bites. The chives played their part beautifully as well, and the chef was careful to ensure they didn't bring an overwhelming flavor.

Since it's in the name, though, it only made sense that the real star of the show was the lacy and perfectly cooked egg, offering a satisfying texture and a great deal of heartiness to the dish.

Not to say it felt unhealthy by any means; in fact, I almost felt like I lost weight while eating it. It's a filling dish on its own, yes, but it wouldn't hurt to pair it with another appetizer, or even a main dish, if you have the stomach space.

How do we know it pairs well, you ask? Well, we paired it. Coming in to help us put our theory to the test, I had a good feeling the scallion pancakes would be making a case for themselves, and by God did they do exactly that. The first thing I noticed was a smattering of darker, crispy spots atop the light, flaky outside, which clued me into the texture variety I'd enjoy upon munching. I could see the scallions peeking at me from behind the pancake; with no mercy, I tore into their warm home and took a generous bite. A light crunch was the first sensation I noted, followed by a fresh, savory, soft pancake that evoked images of clouds in my mind. Alternating between bites of pancake and spoonfuls of soup, I felt like I found the perfect harmony. This was exactly when I remembered the tea, still warm and ready to be enjoyed. As I guessed, even though a cold tea might have paired better with warm food, the refreshing sensation of the tea was an ideal palate cleanser.

Last – but perhaps most, rather than the least – an order of steamed shrimp and pork dumplings landed on the table to catch my heart in less than an instant. The song "Can't Believe the Way We Flow" started playing in my head. I noticed the shrimp, looking straight out of an advertisement, nestled on top of what I presumed was some equally beautiful pork, and the song in my head grew steadily louder. I reached for my chopsticks, took the one closest to me, and let it fall into my mouth whole. The song in my head erupted into glorious crescendo as I bit down. Nothing else mattered. The soup rushed in like a tidal wave, bringing some of the best pork I've ever had along with it. All that,

teamed up with the umami brought by the shrimp ... it was almost too much to handle. Almost.

The dumplings even lasted the 90-minute journey with me to the recording studio later that day, where my friends dug in and had nearly the same reaction. We didn't have a microwave, or any other way to heat them, by the way. Even lukewarm, their power is nothing to be ignored. Obviously we recommend eating them fresh, but if life comes at you fast, just know these descendants of the Flavor Gods will help you slow things back down, as will any of the culinary blessings we were given at that table.

If there's anything I should note at this point, it's that this might not be the best spot for your vegetarian friends, since there's only one noodle dish, one dumpling option, and three appetizers for them to choose from. It's also unclear whether any of these options are vegan, but it never hurts to be safe and ask.

You can learn more about them, check out their menu, and get directions on their website:

www.paperlanterndumpling.com



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