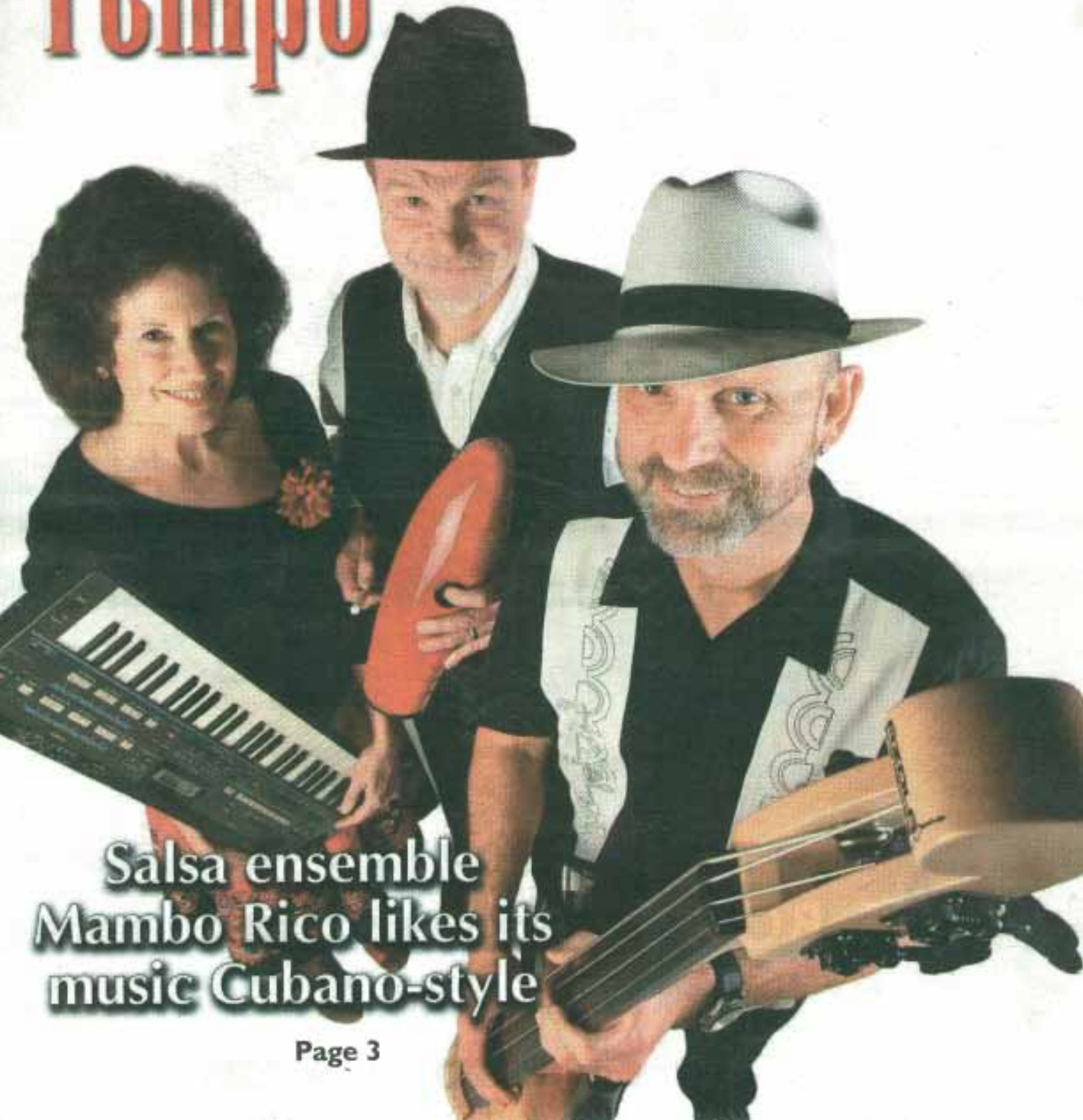


# Tempo



Salsa ensemble  
Mambo Rico likes its  
music Cubano-style



## Dining review

# Larks Home Kitchen Cuisine

Caught up as we were in the spirit of the holidays, my wife and I decided to stop into Larks for dinner.

We did so bravely, without a reservation, and were seated just before the larger parties arrived. Apparently, we weren't the only local diners who had chosen Larks that evening. We spotted four other couples having dinner, and three of them had brought guests with them.

We always enjoy our dining experience at Larks and like our friends that night, often recommend it to visitors. As we settled into our cushioned wicker settee, we perused the menu before our waitress arrived to describe the day's specials.

Larks describes its philosophy as "farm to table," pairing fresh foods from local farms with chocolates, wine and a relaxing ambience. The 1940s decor is meant to complement the Ashland Springs Hotel where the restaurant is situated. The colors are light pastel shades of sage, olive and mustard, which give the room a sunny feel, even with low lights and candles.

Casual elegance is what the restaurant strives to achieve, and

they did a great job the night we were there.

We started with warm rosemary bread and a bowl of olive oil with a sprig of rosemary in it. We ordered the organic spinach salad with shaved sweet onion, roasted red peppers, pine nuts and sheep's milk feta with a kalamata olive-balsamic vinaigrette dressing for \$9.50.

The spinach was fresh, beautifully dark and crinkly, rather than the flat leaves we usually are served. The dressing was fabulous and managed to lightly coat every spinach leaf without overpowering the salad. For the rest of the evening, my wife kept repeating, "This is the best salad I have ever tasted." And she's tasted a lot of them.

The soup of the day (\$5) was tomato leek, to which chef Damon Jones had added a little zing. By evening's end, my wife and I deemed

## Word of Mouth

### Dining out with the Mail Tribune

Larks Home Kitchen Cuisine,  
Ashland Springs Hotel  
212 E. Main St., Ashland

488-5558

Open 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.  
daily for lunch,  
5 to 8 p.m. daily for dinner  
and 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. weekends  
for brunch

sure how you smoke marinara sauce, but it ends up tasting not as acidic as regular marinara sauce can taste. And the grits — something you don't often see on the menu in this part of the country — were quite tasty.

Something you also don't see in other elegant restaurants but you will find at Larks are meals such as homemade meatloaf and gravy, pork chops, fish and chips and fried chicken with mashed potatoes. Comfort food. The prices, however, belie the down-homey casual side of things and are more like what you

the chef to be very imaginative and talented.

My wife's entree was a portobello mushroom on a bed of grits cooked with cheese and accompanied by grilled asparagus spears — lots of them — and topped with a smoked marinara sauce for \$19. I'm not

would expect to pay for the elegance.

My dinner was blackened filet of steelhead with couscous and walnuts and vegetables for \$23. The fish was grilled to perfection, its light flavor augmented with just the right touch of spiciness.

For dessert we passed on the lemon chiffon cheesecake and decided to share the warm upsidedown Comice pear cobbler on top of a ginger biscuit and served with vanilla bean ice cream for \$8. Our waitress kindly informed us, "I'll put it in. It takes about eight minutes." That was good to know. While she was obviously busy with many other customers, we never felt neglected.

When we tried the dessert, we found that, like our meal, it had other interesting tastes that were delightful surprises. The pears were not too sweet, and a slightly liqueur flavor added to the ginger. Wow.

Even the coffee, a strong, rich brew, had its own distinctive flavor. Just what you would expect from a place that was designed to celebrate Oregon, its farms, orchards, vineyards, chocolate and charm. We'll be back.

— Richard Moeschl



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