

The View review

Rosemary Staal
takes a serving of jazz
with her meal



The Lemon Tree • 92 Crane Street • Salisbury • 01722 333471 • thelemontree.co.uk

The blinds are down, the door is shut and there's a 'Closed' sign on the door. 'But surely . . .?' I splutter at D. 'Surely the place can't have gone out of business? Not in the ten days since we booked . . .?'

We push at the door, not expecting it to open, but it does. The place is teeming with people. Quickly we tumble: this is a night when every table is booked at The Lemon Tree and so there isn't any point someone coming along on the off-chance. Sorry, sir,



we're full, they'd have to say, you should have booked.

This is a Friday night so it's music night – jazz on this occasion from the Avon Valley Jazz Band – and, boy, it's popular. There's a set menu of four courses for £23 and I'm sure I can speak for all 70 or so of us seated in the main room and beyond in the elegant conservatory, that by the time the first of the four makes its appearance we are very glad to see it.

Since our arrival I have observed some of our fellow diners: a couple of pretty teenagers probably celebrating the end of term, a family table of different generations in very best bibs and tuckers, a rather glum couple absorbed by the pictures on their mobile phones, and another husband and wife apparently engrossed in the music.

I also see bare floorboards, white walls, small, candle-lit tables laid with white paper tablecloths and green paper napkins, and a supercharged mine host who, Biro tucked behind his ear, goes from 0-60mph between tables and from Us in the stalls to Them in the conservatory at twice the speed of sound. He is *extremely* busy.

The band plays a handful of sets with occasional 20-minute breaks. This gives a chance for normal conversation to resume for those of us in the stalls because, being only two metres from the enthusiastic musicians, we find it impossible to make each other hear without shouting ourselves hoarse. Background music it is not!

Never mind. We like jazz, we like the buzz

it generates and we appreciate the fact that everyone is under its spell. The food plays second fiddle on this occasion. Tonight is about being in a lively restaurant with a crowd of people who appreciate a little something extra with their meal.

To start us off, we choose French onion soup (for D) and roasted tomatoes filled with goat's cheese (for me). The soup is so hot that ten minutes pass before D can put a drop to his lips, but, thanks to the jazz, he's pretty laid back about it. My tomatoes are less roasted than lightly warmed, but I will happily eat tomatoes in any form, raw or cooked.

Then comes a large blackcurrant sorbet to prepare our palates for the main course which, for D, consists of lemon chicken on ginger couscous and for me a salad Niçoise. D also gets two small bowls of veg: some sauté potatoes and a mix of carrot, courgette and sugar peas. Actually, he doesn't get them all, because I take some when he's not looking.

For pudding I choose a fresh fruit salad and D opts for a crême brulee, which has him licking his lips appreciatively.

The musicians perform a final set while coffee comes round. As we walk back to the car (there's a public car park 200 metres away) the music drifts through the open door to follow us up the street, as if anxious we should not break the spell of an evening spent under the influence of jazz.

Our four-course set-menu dinner, excluding wine: £46 V