

SHERYL CROW
PACER CENTER'S 29TH ANNUAL BENEFIT

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FOOD + DINING

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Black Sheep Pizza



Photo by Craig Bares

APRIL 2009
By [Beth Dooley](#)

SHERYL CROW

PACER Center's 29th Annual Benefit

MAY 7

Minneapolis Convention Center

NOW ON | **Mar.**

Address

600 Washington Ave. N., Mpls., 612-342-2625

The Scene

Black Sheep Pizza, with its steam-glazed windows, is easy to miss. In this basement lair, guys shovel pizzas into a glowing mammoth oven as though feeding an insatiable beast. The tiny space, designed around an open kitchen, is minimalist and friendly. Aluminum lights hang over wooden booths, and art posters brighten the gray walls. (The open kitchen is bright, with fluorescent lights and a false ceiling, which is required by city code.) Like neighborhood joints in Brooklyn, it's all about the pie. Black Sheep features the Twin Cities' first coal-fired pizza oven (anthracite, actually), and its pies benefit because coal burns hotter, cleaner, drier, and more evenly than wood or gas. And like those tiny storefront gems in a big city, Black Sheep serves an assortment of families, guys just off a shift, singles, and couples from the apartments nearby.



Photo by Craig Bares

Our Take

Coal does make a difference. The crusts are prettily blistered but not burned, the pies are crisp yet substantial, toothy but not tough. I confess that the benefits of the "kiss of smoke" promised by wood-fired ovens is lost on me, but I can attest that the flavors of Black Sheep's robust toppings are fresh and true. The short menu offers smart variety, and there are plenty of optional toppings to add to the mix should you want to design your own. Notable options featured pizzas sans tomato sauce, allowing individual ingredients to shine.

The oyster mushroom-and-smoked mozzarella was a beauty. Lacy, woodsy mushrooms, slightly charred, top a thin layer of smoky cheese flecked with rosemary. Traditionalists will appreciate the hearty but not heavy

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meatball pizza. Dense, moist, marble-sized fennel-spiked meatballs balance on dabs of fresh ricotta under a homey marinara. A rendition with fennel sausage, hot salami, onion, and cracked green olive conjured up the streets of Brooklyn. An assortment of caramelized roasted vegetables (onions, cauliflower, carrots, parsnips, peppers) was earthy, sweet, and tender. An arrangement of roasted vegetables over greens was scattered with olives and small chunks of good Parm in a bright vinaigrette. The spinach-and-blue cheese salad, with just enough pungent blue, would make a fine meal. My only complaint is the music—raspy rock in this echoey space is just too loud. Did I mention Black Sheep is endearingly cheap?

Good Brew

Beer geeks, heads-up. Black Sheep's short list is nicely edited, featuring local microbrews in bottles and on tap. There's Surly Cynic and Bell's Two Hearted Ale, plus seasonal specialties throughout the year. The wine selection features a house red and white (available by the glass and half or full liters), blended to pair with the pies. At \$5 a big pour, it's a deal. Black Sheep is the brainchild of Jordan Smith, the affable chef who opened Mission American Kitchen, designed the menu for Downtowner Woodfire Grill, and worked with D'Amico & Partners for dozens of years. The focus and enthusiasm he brings to his place burns as bright as the coal that fires his ovens and infuses the staff with an appreciation for the method behind this delicious madness.

Fine Print

Getting There, Getting In: There is usually plenty of metered parking (free after 6 p.m.) on Washington Avenue and adjacent side streets. Reservations aren't taken (and are most often unnecessary).

Hours: Su-Th 4:30-10 p.m., F-Sa 4:30-11 p.m.

Noise Level: High

Kids: It's not Domino's with double crusts and stretchy cheese, but heck, it's pizza, right?

Cards: AmEx, MC, Visa.

Entrée Prices: \$6-\$24

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