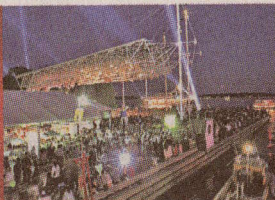


going out



Legendary American dance troupe Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company returns to Toronto this weekend as part of Harbourfront Centre's World Stage 2008. Visit harbourfrontcentre.com/worldstage.

METRO NEWS SERVICES

'Many different cultures on one plate'

Kultura

Address 169 King St. E.

Phone 416-363-9000

Hours: Mon-Sat: 5 p.m. – close,
Sun: 10 a.m. – 3 p.m.

Dinner for 2 w/tax & tip: \$100



By **RICK MCGINNIS**

Metro Toronto

Profile

THERE'S AN almost intimidating gloss to places like Kultura, a hint that something is being demanded of you when you take your seat bathed in the cool, underwater lighting on one of its two floors of dining rooms, something you won't have to think about over the linen table cloth of a hotel restaurant or some homely bistro. At Kultura, it's the concept of "social dining," based around the small, tapas-

like plates of chef Roger Mooking, which force the diner to order in consultation with his or her tablemates, or else appear unsociable.

Since Kultura opened two years ago, Mooking has enjoyed the sort of praise from critics and other chefs that marks a career on the rise to white hot, and the Trinidadian-born chef is already reaping the benefits of this notoriety, with his own Food Network show preparing to debut in the fall, at the same time that a food-themed album is due to come out on Warner Music. The album is actually an echo of Mooking's former career, when he was MC Mystic in the late '90s R&B/rap trio Bass Is Base.

He prefers to talk about his family's businesses back in Trinidad and in Edmonton, where he moved when he was five — a succession of bakeries, restaurants and catering businesses that gave him his start, making wonton wrappers when he was a child before he began working his way from truck stop kitchens to the dining room at the Royal York Hotel. His Chinese-Trinidadian heritage was, he says, the inspiration for the menu at Kultura, which skips lightly over a half dozen styles and tastes.

"When we were building that menu we started with the samosas," he recalls. "The kind of mandate and the profile of the restaurant was that we wanted

to do trans-ethnic tapas. What does that mean? The restaurant is called Kultura, so we wanted to create menu items that were definitively great but simple, and that diffused many different cultures on one plate. So the Mediterranean chicken samosa takes the shape of a samosa, but it's wrapped with a Chinese spring roll wrapper."

"Inside are the spices that you may find in a regular samosa with ground chicken, but we've infused it with Asiago and sage, and we've made a chutney with apple and gari, which is sushi ginger. And then we make a chai tea glaze to drizzle over the top. The key is to make it work in a way where it doesn't taste like a mishmash, but it's



RICK MCGINNIS/METRO TORONTO

Chef Roger Mooking, of Kultura restaurant, enjoys the quality of praise that marks a career on the rise.

still simple and executable and easy to share. Across the menu that was the thinking."

The marvel of Kultura is that it does work — the small plates do end up making for a satisfying meal, full of vivid flavours

like the mushroom orchiette, with its uniquely Canadian mix of sharp cheddar cheese and a wine-infused pear chutney, or the rich glaze on the ribeye steak, which comes sliced and ready to share.