QUEENDOM
The Past, Present and Future of Drag in Los Angeles
BY MICHAEL COOPER AND LINA LECARO
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Punk History
Celebrating seven staunch rockin’ and rebellious years of punk rock recognition with films, art and music, the L.A. Punk Museum returns this Memorial weekend with a host of events representing hardcore, underground and anarchistic music and culture. Punk memorabilia and rare photography (from the likes of Ed Colver and Tomsonic) will be on display all weekend at the seventh annual Punk Museum Festival, along with original artwork by Anthony Ausgang, Stacey Wells, Bryan Tucker, Peter Wedel and William Brun. A special exhibit from the UCLA Punk Archives will also included. Films to be screened include The Maui Mau’s movie, Nervous Gender Reloaded and CBGB, but Tequila Mockingbird, curator of the event says more will be added. Live music is, of course, the most essential component here, and seminal acts including The Weirdos, Tupelo Chain Sex, the Gitane Demone Quartet (featuring former members of Christian Death and the Adolescents), Fifi (ex-Angry Samoans) and Mockingbird herself of Christian Death and the Adolescents): Fini Fiii, spanning three days and two venues, screening avant-garde shorts, biopics, compelling characters and direct inspiration. Part of Highways’ two-month long 30th anniversary celebration, the show’s elements and the special issues confronted by LGBTQI in Asian American communities give this show special significance. Part of Highways’ two-month long 30th anniversary celebration, a venue known since its beginnings for its commitment to including and showcasing LGBT performers and issues. Highways Performance Space, 1651 18th St., Santa Monica; Fri.-Sat., May 24-25, 8:30 p.m.; $25, $24 students & seniors. highwaysperformance.org/. —SHANA NYS DAMBROT

Honoring the Future
Straddling the intersection of Asian-American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month and LGBT History Month, this assemblage of Asian-American dancers tackles themes addressing their Asian heritage and their LGBTQIA identity by injecting traditional Asian dance and ritual into contemporary dance styles. Jasmine Lin mixes tai chi with hip hop and Ally Vega infuses Filipino dance with elements of voguing. Saturday includes a free workshop with a Butoh dancer from San Francisco who also performs both nights. Other performers include Gunita Collective, Min Yoon Paru Frances and Kyoko Takena who also directs. Despite the bland title, Asian America: The Future is Now, the show’s elements and the special issues confronted by LGBTQI in Asian American communities give this show special significance. Part of Highways’ two-month long 30th anniversary celebration, this venue knew since its beginnings for its commitment to including and showcasing LGBT performers and issues. Highways Performance Space, 1651 18th St., Santa Monica; Fri.-Sat., May 24-25, 10:30 a.m.-11 p.m.; The Loft, 410 S. Mesa St., San Pedro; Sun., May 26, 11 a.m.-9 p.m.; $12.50-$50. theheartoffilmfestival.com. —SHANA NYS DAMBROT

More details on the above events can be found at the LA Weekly website: www.laweekly.com.
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MON 5/27

**MUSIC**

**Kick off Summer Right**
The ritzy hippie crowd enjoys music and revelry like nowhere else at Topanga Days every year, and 2019 offers another stellar line-up on two stages over three days. Americana sensations Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real headline along with bluesy Grammy winners Fantastic Negrito and local funksters Orgone at the 46th annual gathering. Nelson’s music cred is solid; he was part of none other than Topanga resident Neil Young’s recent touring band, and oh yeah — his pops just happens to be country legend Willie Nelson. He also co-produced music and contributed to the Oscar-nominated soundtrack for the film A Star Is Born, collaborating with Lady Gaga and Bradley Cooper and appearing in the film as part of Cooper’s band. Other acts on the bill include Pearl, Venice, The Greenhorn Brothers, Pete Pidgeon & Arcoda and The Disparrows. Old country fair-style contests and games are also a draw at this relaxed family-friendly festival and there is a Fun Zone, arts and crafts, food vendors and a parade. All proceeds benefit the Topanga Community Center — one of the last remaining community houses privately owned and managed by volunteers in the state of California. Topanga Community Center, 1440 N. Topanga Canyon Blvd., Topanga; Sat.-Mon., May 25-27, 10 a.m.-7 p.m.; from $15 for single day member ticket to $80 for 3-day non-member pass. topangadays.com. —**LINA LECARO**

TUE 5/28

**POLITCI**

**She’s Running for President**
Writers Bloc hosts fascinating conversations with figures from the literary and entertainment world, as well as dialogue between the general public, thinkers and public figures. This week, they host a woman vying for the biggest public figure role in the country: president of the United States. Amy Klobuchar, the senior senator from Minnesota is ranked first among all 100 senators in backing legislation that became law. Elected in 2006, she is the first woman to represent Minnesota in the United States Senate and has sponsored bills to end human trafficking and fight the opioid epidemic. She also had some major moments during the Brett Kavanaugh hearings. And yet, the biggest buzz about her so far has concerned bad treatment of her staff and how she eats her lunch. Expect this Bloc talk to comb through significant topics. Writers Guild Theater, 135 S. Doheny Drive, Beverly Grove; Tue., May 28, 8 p.m.; $40. writersbloccomments.com/main/senator-amy-klobuchar. —**LINA LECARO**

WED 5/29

**ART**

**Support for LACE Comes from Senator Amy Klobuchar.**
Writers Bloc presents the first of four separate choirs — L.A. Master Chorale, Pacific Chorale, L.A. Children’s Chorus and The Pacific Symphony Orchestra — here to help answer. In her spare time, Senator Amy Klobuchar has been working on legislation around the opioid epidemic. She also had some major moments during the Brett Kavanaugh hearings. And yet, the biggest buzz about her so far has concerned bad treatment of her staff and how she eats her lunch. Expect this Bloc talk to comb through significant topics. Writers Guild Theater, 135 S. Doheny Drive, Beverly Grove; Tue., May 28, 8 p.m.; $40. writersbloccomments.com/main/senator-amy-klobuchar. —**LINA LECARO**

THU 5/30

**MUSIC**

**Choral Quartet**
Gustav Mahler’s stirring Eighth Symphony is more than just a symphony. It’s a massive orchestral work, but it’s also an ambitious choral opus about the transformational nature of love. It will take a large village to present this piece, and conductor Gustavo Dudamel will lead L.A. Philharmonic as well as the combined voices of four separate choirs — L.A. Master Chorale, Pacific Chorale, L.A. Children’s Chorus and The Pacific Symphony Orchestra — at Disney Hall. Featured vocal soloists include a trio of stellar sopranos — Tamara Wilson, Leah Crocetto and Erin Morley — along with Mihoko Fujimura, Tamara Mumford, Simon O’Neill, Ryan McKinny and Morris Robinson. Walt Disney Concert Hall, 111 S. Grand Ave., downtown; Thu., May 30, 8 p.m.; Fri., May 31, 11 a.m.; Sun., June 2, 2 p.m. (323) 850-2000, laphil.com. —**FALLING JAMES**

**ART INSPIRES ART**
When it comes to decoding art history, the manifestation of influence and inspiration is always a huge part of the story. How does an artist’s career, a community movement, or even just a single work of art trigger the imagination of a peer, student or admirer from up close or across centuries? Good question, and art journalist Jori Finkel is here to help answer. In her sparkling new book, *It Speaks to Me*, Finkel speaks to acclaimed artists from diverse mediums, styles, and nations about specific works of art that had unique impacts on their own creative development. She is joined in conversation at the Hammer Museum this evening by two artists from the book, Shinique Smith and Rirkrit Tiravanija, both socially engaged sculpture and installation artists whose powerful work was itself once the spark of an idea. Coffee and book signing post-conversation. Hammer Museum, 10899 Wilshire Blvd., Westwood; Thu., May 30, 7:30 p.m.; free. (310) 443-7000, hammer.ucla.edu. —**SHANA NY DAMBRO T**

Viewers like You
The LACE Auction benefiting Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions is one of those good-cause art sale parties that’s also always a terrific art show in its own right. Beloved to the city’s art community for its dedication to politically and socially progressive programs and focus on avant-garde performance art and intersectional curations, LACE is also known for throwing memorable fundraisers. This year they return to downtown jewel Vibiana to celebrate LACE’s 40th anniversary in the relevant culture biz, with cocktails, live and silent auction action, DJ Jihaeri and a performance by San Cha, who promises a music-based experience of edgy operatic spectacle. Vibiana, 214 S. Main St., downtown; Wed., May 29, 7 p.m.; $200. welcometolace.org. —**SHANA NY DAMBRO T**
DRAG IN L.A.

Dishing on our reigning drag performers and how the scene is changing as queendom goes mainstream.

BY MICHAEL COOPER

ashay away. Shantay, you stay. Good luck and don’t fuck it up. Condragulations. "Ru-isms" from the juggernaut reality show RuPaul’s Drag Race on VH1 have transcended television to become synonymous with not only drag, but popular culture in general. The show, which began in 2009 on Logo, has since aired all regular seasons, 4 All Star seasons, a companion series Untucked and a British version set to air in the U.K. On top of all this, DragCon was first launched in 2015 in Los Angeles and has only gotten bigger every year, even expanding to New York two years ago.

“When Randy [Barbato] and I started out, drag shows were on a tiny stage. We just thought, oh my God, the artistry is off the charts,” says Fenton Bailey, executive producer of RuPaul’s Drag Race and co-founder of World of Wonder, the production company behind Drag Race and DragCon. “I think it was always our dream to see this incredible work on a larger platform. And I think that’s what Drag Race and DragCon have been able to provide.”

Despite opening doors for drag in a myriad of ways, Drag Race can be a double-edged sword for performers who haven’t made it on the show. Many “local queens” complain about a huge disparity in booking fees, or more difficulties in getting booked, period. “The show is not the be all and end all of drag," Bailey concedes. “Hopefully the effect is to elevate drag everywhere. Sure, everyone wants to see the queens from Drag Race, but also I think people are interested to see the queens who are going to be on Drag Race.”

Los Angeles was a top destination for drag even before Drag Race, but with the show filmed here, and many staying here after their big break, the queen quotient is off the charts — and with the arrival of the 5th Annual RuPaul’s DragCon at Los Angeles Convention Center this Memorial Day weekend, even more so. It’s going to be a very queeny weekend in L.A. indeed, and to celebrate, we’re spotlighting a mix of “wo-men” who have been on the Emmy-Award winning show and some who haven’t. Either way, they’re all L.A. drag royalty.

For our full Top 10 List of queens (half Drag Race alumni, half not) go to laweekly.com. Here’s a few of our favorite fabulous creatures to start your engines.

THE BOULET BROTHERS

Perhaps the most well known queens around L.A. who haven’t been on RuPaul’s Drag Race, the Boulet Brothers — also known as Swanthula and Dracmorda — favor a darker aesthetic, stemming from their background in nightclubs. “We’ve sort of grown into these iconoclastic, mothers of darkness and debauchery,” says Dracmorda. “We’re more like overlords from a horror movie than beauty queens — our drag is not what most people think of when they think of drag queens.”

The Boulet Brothers first moved to L.A. from New York City’s East Village around 20 years ago, and five years later they “started their gender fuckery” (as Swanthula puts it) with the party Miss Kitty’s Parlour (which closed in 2011). In 2015, they brought their rock & roll alternative take on drag to downtown L.A. “It’s been a surreal experience to be able to help shape what the gay scene in DTLA has become,” says Dracmorda. The Boulet Brothers created Queen Kong as the flagship party for downtown gay bar Precinct in 2015. “Our shows usually involve a bit of violence,” says Swanthula. “If there isn’t a little blood spilled or some power tools involved, then we’re not really satisfied.”

In addition to Queen Kong, the Boulets are also behind the annual Los Angeles Halloween Ball and their New Year’s Eve DTLA Massive Party, both at the Globe Theatre.

The next step in the evolution of Downtown’s LGBTQ community was the invention of Downtown Proud in 2016, the community’s Pride celebration, which the Boulet Brothers sat as founding board members for. Dracmorda and Swanthula recently stepped away from the board so they can focus on the other project that has solidified their spot in the drag world: their TV show The Boulet Brothers’ Dragula, a reality drag competition that focuses on their brand of darker horror-like queens. The first two seasons can be found on streaming sites including, YouTube, WOW Presents Plus and Amazon. Season three is set to premiere this summer, and according to Swanthula, “get ready for some surprises” in terms of where it will air. “The new season of the show is going to be incredible.

It is 100 percent going to change the world’s perception of drag and drag entertainment. It’s bigger, scarier and really polished this year. People are going to eat it up," says Dracmorda.

Perhaps it’s fitting that DragCon also finds its home in the Boulet Brothers’ backyard. They’ve been involved on some level since year one and were the first non-Drag Race queens to be featured on a speaking panel. “Drag Race has elevated drag performers to a level of fame and fortune that would have been inconceivable before the show,” Swanthula says.

During this year’s DragCon, the BB’s are hosting their annual “Monsters Ball” which features alternative drag artists from around the world, including Drag Race and Dragula queens, at the Globe Theatre until 11 p.m. After that they’re hosting Queen Kong, which will be headlined by Nina West from the current Drag Race season. Fans can also catch the Boulet Brothers booth (#1143) on the floor of DragCon, which will feature exclusive merch as well as meet and greets with stars from both seasons of Dragula.

JACKIE BEAT

You can’t really call yourself a fan of drag if you’ve never heard of Jackie Beat. Sure she’s never been on Drag Race, but her charisma, uniqueness, nerve and talent pre-dates the show. Jackie, aka Kent Fuher, was actually born in West Covina before moving to Arizona when she was two. She returned to L.A. in the ’80s, where she’s lived until present, minus a five-year stint living in New York City in the ’90s. “I started [doing drag] around 1989, long before makeup tutorials on YouTube and back when certain gay bars — especially leather bars — wouldn’t even let drag queens in the door,” Jackie says. “Now they all have their weekly Drag Race viewing parties hosted by the local clown du jour. In one way, I am happy that drag is more mainstream and accepted, but I also miss the days when it was underground and cutting edge. It’s all a little too family-friendly and all ages for my taste. To quote my friend Bradley Picklesimer, ‘Keep drag scary!’”

L.A. fans can most often see Jackie at the theater in the basement of Casita Del Campo, which she calls her “home away from
and told her to take off the mask, to which she responded, “I’d like to keep it on please.” She got her re-demption though when she returned for All Stars 4 and won a lip-sync to a different Ariana Grande song.

Also known as James Andrew Levy, her strength has always been her looks, both her make-up and fashion — she’s been featured in Vogue México and has shot a makeup tutorial for Vogue’s YouTube channel. “I was Lipsyncing with me from a young age when it came to my mom getting ready for work. I used to love to play with Barbies,” says one of Drag Race’s most popular beauties. “I have a natural gift and talent... a sense of style that tends to be more glamorous and classic, and I definitely curate my image completely as Valentina.”

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Mayhem Miller

Dequan Johnson, known by fans as Mayhem Miller, was born near West Hollywood at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center and grew up in South Central and Riverside. "I tell people I was born gay, from the hood, with a big country heart," she says. Mayhem had been a fixture in the L.A. drag scene way before she appeared on season 10 of RuPaul's Drag Race. "The L.A. drag scene is night and day if you compare it from when I started to now," Mayhem says. "With the popularity of RuPaul's Drag Race, we have seen an influx of people who have embraced the art of drag. It's more accessible to people."

Mayhem headlines and hosts a weekly '90s theme party called "All That '90s" on Tuesdays at the Abbey and she also appears there for Saturday afternoon's "Brunch Service."

Raja

Originally from Baldwin Park, Sutan Amrull, better known as Raja Gemini, lived in his father's home country of Indonesia for six years before returning to the U.S. when he was 9. Raja first appeared on television on America's Next Top Model from 2005-2009 as a makeup artist. In 2011, the Angeleno won season three of RuPaul's Drag Race, impressing the judges with unconventional, un-pageant-like punk-inspired looks, from her famous recreation of Carrie to her chocolate lava inspired cake couture dress.

Being the first Los Angeles queen to win RuPaul's Drag Race, Raja showed the rest of the country that the L.A. drag scene should be taken seriously. And she's kept on carrying that torch for this town ever since. As Raja wrote in an exclusive essay for L.A. Weekly about her experience at last year's DragCon, "I was there representing as one of the few (game show) winners and I was also representing Los Angeles, the city I am so fortunate to have lived in, doing and being inspired by the nightlife here. It never got the focus NYC did, but we were like, 'Who cares, let's party!'"

Raja can often be seen performing at LGBTQ venues throughout the city, as well as co-hosting World of Wonder's Fashion Photo Ruview, where she helps break down the looks on current episodes of Drag Race. To this day, Raja is the only queen originally from Los Angeles to have won Drag Race, so we're definitely lucky to have her.
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ARTIST AND SPORTSMAN

CAAM’s new exhibit highlights Ernie Barnes’ contributions on the field and in galleries

BY SIRAN BABAYAN

Professionally, Ernie Barnes was a football player for the NFL. Creatively, he was a painter. He switched careers and reinvented himself in the 1960s; the civil rights movement was breaking through, but few African-Americans were visible in mainstream museums and galleries. He would not only become a successful artist and break down racial barriers, but create one of the most recognizable and beloved works of modern art.

Ten years after his death in 2009 in L.A., the California African American Museum pays tribute to Barnes in its new exhibit, “Ernie Barnes: A Retrospective.” The display’s paintings, drawings, photographs and memorabilia chronicle Barnes’ 40-plus-year trajectory, from offensive guard to artist with a celebrity clientele, and spotlights his twin loves: sports and African-American culture.

Born in 1938 in Durham, North Carolina, during segregation, Barnes was shy and bullied as a child; he found escape in painting, and his mother worked as a domestic for a white attorney, whose art books further fueled Barnes’ passion.

In 1959, while a student at then all-black North Carolina College at Durham (now North Carolina Central University), Barnes was drafted into the NFL by the Baltimore Colts. The following year, a group of North Carolina students protested the South’s discrimination laws at a Woolworth’s in Greensboro, leading to a chain of nonviolent sit-ins. Though he majored in art, Barnes knew a black man making a living as an artist in the south was impractical.

Barnes played for the New York Titans, San Diego Chargers and Denver Broncos. In his 1995 autobiography, From Pads to Palette, he described making art during his five seasons in professional football, saying the two weren’t mutually exclusive. “The rewards are similar,” he wrote. “Recognition, celebrity, wealth, the admiration and envy of others in the field.”

Sports art has long been a medium, and it was while playing football that Barnes developed his signature style, often called “Neo-Mannerism.”

Sports taught him discipline, says exhibit curator Bridget R. Cooks of the iconic painting. “It gave artists permission to be more expressive and exaggerated, and you can see it everywhere, “The Sugar Shack” that’s had the most enduring influence, and you can see it everywhere, from singer/rapper Anderson Paak’s video for “Come Down” to Southside with You, the 2016 romance-drama that recounted Barack and Michelle Obama’s first date.

“It’s a big part of our national memory,” says Cooks of the iconic painting. “It gave artists license to be more expressive and exaggerated in terms of movement.”

Football taught him discipline,” says exhibit curator Bridget R. Cooks, a UC Irvine associate professor of African-American Studies and Art History. “It helped him as a player and a spectator. It had tremendous impact on his style: the effort, the reach, the curves, the gestures.”

Another Barnes exhibit, "The Beauty of the Ghetto," toured the country in the ’70s and helped popularize the “Black is Beautiful” movement. It also caught the attention of famed TV producer Norman Lear, who approached Barnes about his new comedy about a working class African-American family. In Good Times, the character of eldest son J.J. Evans is a aspiring artist, the "Picasso of the projects." Barnes made all the art that appeared in the series, including the painting of the Evans family and the more famous “The Sugar Shack.”

“The Sugar Shack” was inspired by Barnes’ memories of watching a dance at the Durham Armory in his teens. The painting captures men and women dancing to lively music with their eyes closed, another Barnes trademark. Barnes adapted “The Sugar Shack” for the cover of Marvin Gaye’s 1976 album, I Want You, which made his work even more popular. The painting in the museum is one of two versions of the original; Gaye later sold his copy to Eddie Murphy. (Barnes also painted album covers for B.B. King, Curtis Mayfield and The Crusaders.)

Barnes didn’t just illuminate African-American life. For a time, he lived in the Fairfax district and the exhibit highlights a section of paintings and drawings that depict the neighborhood’s Jewish community.

“He was interested in celebrating Jewish culture and people,” says Cooks. “It was a major inspiration for him. He was also interested in the teachings of Judaism.”

Focusing on motion, Barnes illustrated all types of athleticism, from boxing to surfing, even ballet. The collection includes “The Rhythmic Gymnast,” one of five commissioned paintings for the 1984 L.A. Olympics. In 1987, Barnes was also commissioned to create a painting for the Lakers after winning the NBA Championship.

Barnes’s art still resonates today. Cooks points to a drawing of “A Life Restored,” a mural Barnes was asked to paint for Kanye West in 2004 after the rapper survived a car crash. But it’s “The Sugar Shack” that’s had the most enduring influence, and you can see it everywhere, from singer/rapper Anderson Paak’s video for “Come Down” to Southside with You, the 2016 romance-drama that recounted Barack and Michelle Obama’s first date.

La Weekly | May 24 - 30, 2019 | www.laweekly.com

Ernie Barnes: A Retrospective is on view at the California African American Museum through Sept. 8; 600 State Drive, Exhibition Park; caamuuseum.org.
Passion and love are the essential ingredients and approach to cooking linking Italy and Peru, whose equally rich culinary traditions are embodied in Michelangelo “Miguel” Aliaga, the new executive chef at Los Balcones in Hollywood.

Aliaga follows a simple cultural philosophy learned from his native Peru and nearly a decade spent developing his innate culinary talents in Italy: “How the people say, ‘I love you’ and ‘thank you,’ is to prepare something and feed you,” he says in his deep, baritone voice.

In the kitchen he not only channels his culinary foundations, but carries with him a striking, heartfelt fondness for his grandfather.

“He was my father,” says Aliaga, “he was an old man with strong ideas and was really tough. It was difficult for him to express his feelings.”

Aliaga was raised in the small town of Celendín in the Cajamarca region of northern Peru. His grandfather was the patriarch of the family.

The inspiring figure played a larger-than-life role in Aliaga’s adolescence. But his grandfather’s inability to express his love for his family could only be manifested through the passion that he brought to his cooking. This unspoken language of love that transpired inside the family’s kitchen was not lost on Aliaga.

After moving with his mother from Peru to Spain in 1994 when he was 14 years old, he secretly funneled the entirety of his savings from his grandfather, to pursue culinary school — instead of university — in Barcelona.

His motivation to pursue a culinary career stemmed in large part from those family meals prepared by Aliaga’s grandfather. Despite his grandfather’s protests on this pursuit — “he was pissed,” says Aliaga — the aspiring chef got his start in the kitchen working at Trattoria 4 Leoni in Florence after finishing up his culinary studies. He started out at the bottom, washing dishes, mopping the floors and cleaning the bathrooms.

Aliaga spent six years at 4 Leoni and moved up the ranks to eventually become chef de cuisine.

“Everyday I’m making Peruvian cuisine I love — Peruvian cuisine, spent the next two weeks in a quasi-state of cultural reimmersion. ‘All the ingredients you see in Italian cuisine [are] very, very similar to the ingredients I find in my town [Celendín]. Lentils, beans, polentas, low-temperature cooking for a long time with real passion. I see my grandpa cooking all this stuff.’

Despite cooking traditional Peruvian meals for his wife and two children, Aliaga nonetheless reacquainted himself with the flavors and tastes that have been etched into his memory from family and friends’ recipes.

“Ajis (chiles) are the base of Peruvian cuisine,” explains Aliaga. “The difference between chiles in Mexico or America (U.S.) with Peru is that ours are less spicy and more aromatic. A lot of aromas, a lot of flavor in our chiles.”

Though Aliaga incorporates top-grade frozen chiles shipped to the U.S. from Peru in the menu, he said that he and the Rodriguez brothers (owners of Los Balcones) are encouraging Mexican farmers along the border with the U.S. to grow the variety of chiles found in Peru.

Before the Rodriguez brothers brought Aliaga on, the Italian transplant by way of Peru was already making a name for himself elsewhere in Southern California’s culinary circles.

Aliaga had moved the U.S. in 2008 and went to work at All’ Angelo on Melrose and Cecconi’s in West Hollywood, before moving onto La Spiga in Palm Desert and then executive chef at Primo, an Italian restaurant in Torrance.

Fusing his binational culinary upbringing in an assertive, yet traditional menu at Los Balcones, Aliaga is proud of the dishes being served.

They include oveja la nortena con chuchoca, which he describes as "lamb Shank braised, really small, in Peruvian herbs with Peruvian po-

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A WHOLE NEW WORLD

Aladdin latest animated classic to get live-action treatment

BY NATHANIEL BELL

Welcome to L.A. Weekly’s Movie Guide, your look at the hottest films in Los Angeles theaters this week — from indie art house gems and classics to popcorn-perfect blockbusters and new movies garnering buzz. Check here every week before you make your big screen plans.

Opening wide
Friday, May 24

Disney’s Aladdin, the latest live-action transcription of a cherished animated property, has been meme-fodder ever since the first images of Will Smith as the big blue genie surfaced on the Grammys. From a certain angle, it seems appropriate that the once venerated auteur of Snatch, a film about a group of thieves, would take on a project about the most famous thief in Middle Eastern folklore — indeed, in all of literature. Besides a mo-capped Smith, still fit and youthful at 50, the cast features Mena Massoud as the hunky thief, Naomi Scott as the princess who doesn’t want to be a princess anymore, and Marwan Kenzari as a more culturally sensitive Jafar.

In Brightburn, a pubescent boy (Jackson A. Dunn) comes into the knowledge that he is in fact an alien from outer space with spectacular abilities. But what if instead of using those powers for good he is tempted in the opposite direction? The movie is being sold as a superhero-horror hybrid, and it’s a family affair: James Gunn (Guardians of the Galaxy) produced from a screenplay by his brother Brian Gunn and cousin Mark Gunn. David Yarovsky, whose only previous feature is a 2014 sci-fi breakout called The Hive, directed. The film stars Elizabeth Banks and David Denman as the rightfully concerned parents.

Booksmart, the feature directorial debut of Olivia Wilde, is a sassy coming-of-age comedy about two high school seniors (Kaitlyn dever and Beanie Feldstein) who decide to rebel against their bookish personae and party hardy on their last day of classes. The four-person writing team consists of Emily Halpern, Sarah Haskins, Susanna Fogel and Katie Silberman. Will Ferrell and Adam McKay serve as executive producers. The film has accrued almost unanimous positive reviews since its premiere at South by Southwest in March.

Limited/art-house
Friday, May 24

Echo in the Canyon is an unabashed celebration of the fucund music culture of Laurel Canyon, the mountainous burg in the Hollywood Hills that became a hotbed for hippies and innovative folk rockers in the mid-’60s. Jakob Dylan converses with scores of musicians who lived through that period, uncovering stories and anecdotes guaranteed to pique the interest of even the most casual rock fan. Director Andrew Slater mixes in archival footage featuring performances and interviews with Brian Wilson, Ringo Starr, Michelle Phillips, Eric Clapton, Stephen Stills, David Crosby, Graham Nash, Roger McGuinn and Jackson Browne. If those names produce even the faintest shiver of excitement, then you are the audience for whom this film was made. ArcLight, 6360 Sunset Blvd., Hollywood. Fri. May 24. various showtimes; $16-$18; (323) 615-2550, arclight cinemas.com.

Avenge belongs to that subgenre of ultraviolent British crime films pioneered by the likes of Mike Hodges, Alan Clarke and John Mackenzie. Scott Adkins stars as a criminal lowlife on furlough from a hefty prison sentence. His first order of business is to shake off the guards that accompany him and return to the London neighborhood to locate the guys who set him up. Endowed with Jackie Chan–like powers, he proceeds to punch, kick, slice and fire his way through a roster of scum in an all-out rampage of revenge. Jesse V. Johnson directed. Monica Film Center, 1332 2nd St., Santa Monica, Fri., May 24, various showtimes; $9-$12. (310)-478-3836.

Saturday, May 25

Get ready for Godzilla-Thon, a six-film marathon of Japanese sci-classics starring everyone’s favorite radioactive lizard. The program begins, as it must, with Ishirō Honda’s 1954 original Gojira, which launched the kaiju craze and exercised the demons of a country recovering from a decisive defeat during WWII. The five remaining films include Destroy All Monsters (featuring no fewer than 11 giant creatures), Godzilla’s Revenge (aimed mainly at youngsters), Godzilla vs. Monster Zero (in which the adversary is the three-headed Ghi-dorah), Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla (wherein the big green guy fights a robot version of himself), and Godzilla vs. Megalon (which had the distinct honor of being spoofed on Mystery Science Theater 3000). $25 buys you a seat for the whole shebang. Egyptian Theatre, 6712 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood. Sat., May 25, 7:30 p.m.; $25. (323) 466-4546, american cine-mathequecalendar.com.

Also opening Friday, May 17: Diamantino; Funny Story; The Poison Rose
CELEBRATING THE OUTLANDISH
88Glam take full advantage of hip-hop’s freedom
BY BRETT CALLWOOD

Things seem to be happening fast for Toronto rap duo 88Glam. They only formed in the middle of 2017, the brainchild of Derek Wise and 88 Camino (formerly known as Drew Howard), but they’ve already released a self-titled mixtape and then, in November, the 88Glam 2 album. It all saw them nominated for “Breakthrough Group Of The Year” and “Rap Recording Of the Year” at this year’s Juno awards.

They have every reason to be utterly delighted and proud of themselves. And they are, but these artists are also perfectionists. They don’t want to settle, and they’re keen to learn. That’s the approach that they’ve taken thus far, and it’s how they aim to continue in order to grow.

“I think it’s an organic feel for ourselves and our fans,” says Wise. “We’ve been taking it really steady, taking our time with the music, evolving our sound, creating a story for our fans, whether it’s sonically or the actual background story. Just taking our time with this, and allowing everybody to see the growth that comes with being a musician in the industry.”

“I definitely think we’ve just had the opportunity to go through a lot of hardships and grow through our different experiences, molding us into the artists that we have become,” adds Camino. “Just like how we perform on stage to the time we take to make music, it’s all a part of the growth and the story.”

It’s an interesting story too; 88Glam was born out of the ashes of Toronto band Get Home Safe Crew, though the pair are not keen to revisit that period of their professional life. 88Glam, they say, is completely collaborative in a way that their previous outfit was not. Both men produced their own work, with Wise releasing a series of mixtapes tagged Glam Wave. That’s where the 88Glam name comes from.

“A year and a half, two years ago, I started a series of mixtapes called Glam Wave,” Wise says. “It was a sound that I wanted to create and give people. Pretty sounding chimes and synths but then heavy basslines. I put out three mixtapes called Glam Wave. People started identifying me with that and calling me Glam, and it became a part of identity.”

“We started calling him Glamboy after that,” continues Camino. “He was like the glam king. That became his moniker. It was a cool thing to watch from a distance when we were doing our own thing. For me, I made a song about a car I really like. I didn’t even have an Instagram and when I got one, I needed a handle. The latest model they made was in ’87, so I thought it would be cool if they made a new model of my favorite car. Then we fused our names.”

The 88Glam 2 album dropped in November and both men feel that the process was an important learning experience, though, impressively, they both feel that they could have done better — and they’re not afraid to say so.

“I feel like we have high expectations,” says Wise. “I don’t feel like hip-hop musicians are afraid to do anything anymore, whether it’s crossing into different genres, or a specific piece, do outlandish shit for publicity, it’s really fearless right now, kind of like [how] rock & roll was back in the day. It’s sitting in a really good place, and it’s also bringing people together that wouldn’t have been in the same room ten years ago.”

“Yeah, the diversity is one thing I’ve noticed in 2019,” adds Camino. “There are certain stigmas that the artists used to have to be confined to in the early 2000s or late ’90s. You don’t have to be a gangsta rapper. You can talk about your emotions, or you can talk about absolutely nothing. I feel like there’s just so much more to choose from now.”

The guys are promising a lot of rage from their L.A. set, and then they’ll spend the rest of the year producing as much music as they can.

“Just more music, more content,” says Camino. “We have a lot of shows coming up too. We just want to keep offering more and more to the fans. We want to build our fanbase and produce more music.”

88Glam plays with D33J at 8:30 p.m. on Tuesday, May 28 at The Roxy.
**MUSIC**

**GO HEAR**

**FRI 5/24**

Sloppy Seconds

**@ ALEX’S BAR**

Indianapolis punks Sloppy Seconds have, quite shockingly, been around since 1985. That’s 34 years of Ramones–influenced trash punk with lyrical subjects bouncing between horror movies, dumb TV, booze, comic books and porno. They’ve caught some shit in the past due to some undeniably dubious and insensitive lyrics, but then trying to get these chaps to be sensitive might be the ultimate exercise in futility. It’s been 11 years since 2008’s Endless Bummer album, and one would hope that there’s more to come soon. After all, that was a snotty beast and it came 10 years after the previous effort, 1998’s More Trouble Than They’re Worth. Most likely, we’ll get tracks from those and much more in Long Beach. Sidekick and Ten Foot Pole also play. —**BRETT CALLWOOD**

**SAT 5/25**

Femfest 2019

**@ PROGRAMME SKATE & SOUND**

Ever think you’d find a transformative moment in a skate park in Fullerton? If not, then clearly you’re not clued in to the nature of transformative moments. If so, then you owe it to yourself to aparate over to this year’s edition of Fem Fest — a growing movement to foster, inspire and motivate a community of creative fem artists, sculptors, photographers, authors, producers and, of course, musicians. What you’ll hear: the Epitaph-soundscapes. In the past, Connors has collaborated with John Fahey, Suzanne Langille, Alan Licht, Keiji Haino, Cat Power, Jim O’Rourke, and Kim Gordon and other members of Sonic Youth. At Zebulon, in his first local appearance in more than 20 years, the guitarist performs solo and also as a duo with L.A. guitarist Clint Heidorn. The night begins with the U.S. premiere of Gestures, director Vincent Guibert’s documentary about Connors. —**FALLING JAMES**

**SUN 5/26**

The Avengers, The Dills

**@ ECHOPLEX**

What a bill this is. Penelope Houston’s Avengers were only together for two years (77–79) back in the day, but since 2004 they’ve been reunited and absolutely killing it in the live environment. It’s worth remembering that they never put out a studio album — just two EPs and, later, a few collections. But that material is some of the best of the era. The Dills split and reformed a few times down the years, but it looked like their time was up when Tony Kinman tragically died a year ago. You can’t keep a good Dill down though; his brother Chip Kinman has assembled a strong band of young bucks, and they’re doing the classic material justice. Fellow old school Cali-punks The Alley Cats open a show that is essentially a celebration of the life of recently deceased original Avengers bassist Jimmy Wilsey. —**BRETT CALLWOOD**

**Phil Ranelin & Tribe Renaissance**

**@ ZEBULON**

It’s hard to quickly summarize the wide-ranging musical career of Phil Ranelin, but the new three-album set on Wide Hive Records, **Phil Ranelin Collected 2003-2019**, is a good place to start. The Indianapolis native has been based in Los Angeles since the late 1970s, and over the course of his career the straight-ahead trombonist-composer has worked with such musicians as trumpeter Freddie Hubbard, pianist Freddie Redd, vocalist Sarah Vaughan, saxophonist Art Pepper, vocalist Ella Fitzgerald and trumpeter Gerald Wilson. His music slips in and out of funk, jazz and more experimental passages on such classic releases as Vibes From the Tribe, Inspiration and Reminiscence. Ranelin celebrates the new anthology and his 80th birthday with the support of his nine-piece band, Tribe Renaissance, which

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**MON 5/27**

**Supersuckers**
*The WayFairer*
There are few more invigorating live experiences than a Supersuckers show. Eddie Spaghetti formed the band as The Black Supersuckers in Tucson, Arizona, back in 1988, although it was only one year later that they relocated to Seattle and shortened the name. Since then they’ve released a strong of awesome rock & roll records with a mildly rockabilly, cow-punk tilt, the highlight being ’99’s *The Evil Powers of Rock ’N’ Roll*, although last year’s *Suck It* is also a beast. Spaghetti is an incredible frontman, and the Supersuckers’ live show never fails to hit the spot. Riotous Dallas rockers Speedealer (previously known as REO Speedealer) and Alpine Spirit also play. Also, Saturday, May 25 at The Echo. —BRETT CALLWOOD

**TUE 5/28**

**The Specials**
*House of Blues, Anaheim*
It seems somehow poetic that one of the great British ska pioneers, *The Specials*, is playing in Orange County, arguably the home of contemporary ska-punk. The Coventry band will forever be best remembered for late ‘70s/early ‘80s albums such as *The Specials* and *More Specials*, as well as the international hit single “Ghost Town,” but this year’s *Encore* is well worth a listen. It’s the band’s first album of new material since 1998’s *Guilt In ‘Ill Proved Innocent!* (they released two cover albums in the meantime). Key members Terry Hall, Horace Panter and Lynval Golding are back in the fold, and all looks rosy in Specials Land. —BRETT CALLWOOD

**WED 5/29**

**DaBaby**
@ NOVO
Born in Cleveland, Ohio but raised in Charlotte, North Carolina, rising MC DaBaby blew up with the *Baby On Baby* project’s standout single “Suge,” which is currently taking over airwaves, clubs and functions all across the world. While the beginning stages of his career involved him rocking an adult diaper around town, his hundreds of millions of streams across all platforms speaks for itself. Most recently, he shut down Rolling Loud, throwing bags of marijuana into the crowd (later revealed to be fake). Regardless, his energy is nothing short of turned. —HIRLEY JU

**THU 5/30**

**The Undertones**
*The Observatory*
Yeah, Fearsal Sharkey hasn’t fronted The Undertones since 1983, but the rest of the lineup has stayed intact since 1976. That means all of the musicians that recorded classic pop-punk anthems “Jimmy Jimmy,” “It’s Going To Happen,” and one of the most perfect songs ever recorded by any artist of any genre, “Teenage Kick.” Singer Paul McLoone joined the Northern Irish band in 1999, so he’s been in there for 20 years at this point — surely long enough to lose the “new boy” tag. Plus, the two albums he’s recorded with the band — 2003’s *Get What You Need* and 2007’s *Dig Yourself Deep* — are genuinely excellent slices of work. Teenage dreams are hard to beat, but they gave it a go. —BRETT CALLWOOD
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