EARNING HER INDEPENDENCE

TWENTY YEARS AFTER SHE MADE HER MARK IN INDEPENDENCE DAY, VIVICA A. FOX HAS DEFIED THE ODDS IN AN INDUSTRY THAT OFTEN FAILS WOMEN, ESPECIALLY WOMEN OF COLOR

BY APRIL WOLFE
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CORRECTION:
In “The Man Who Mixed Sinatra” (June 17-23), we incorrectly listed recording engineer Lee Herschberg’s age as 86. He is 85. We regret the error.

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“Sri Sri Ravi Shankar’s approach to inner peace is like fresh air to millions.” —The Washington Post
When hundreds of Angelenos recently were asked a fairly open-ended question — “What do you think the most important issue facing the residents of L.A. is that you would like the city government to do something about?” — the most popular response was homelessness.

“Traditionally, when you ask people in L.A. their top concerns, it’s things like traffic or crime,” says Adam Murray, executive director of the Inner City Law Center.

But 19 percent of the 600 respondents said homelessness or poverty was their top concern; 12 percent said crime and 11 percent said transportation and parking.

“There’s no doubt that homelessness is significantly higher than it’s been at any time that I can remember,” Murray says of the poll, which was taken by United Way (and made public by the Los Angeles City Council).

A similar poll, taken by the county, found that homelessness was the No. 2 issue, after jobs and the economy.

Homelessness is on the rise in nearly every major city throughout the United States. But that rise has been especially pronounced in Los Angeles, where encampments can be seen all over the city, seemingly under every bridge and freeway overpass. According to the latest homeless count, there are 47,000 men and women sleeping on streets and in shelters in L.A. County. That’s a less than 0.5 percent increase from the year before, though the city’s homeless population increased 5 percent.

It’s unclear exactly why homelessness in the city is growing at that pace, though experts generally agree that the rising cost of housing is a significant factor.

L.A. City Council is weighing a bond measure that would raise between $1 billion and $2 billion to pay for housing and other services for the homeless. The measure must be approved by the full City Council before July 1 in order for it to be placed on the November ballot, where it will need two-thirds of L.A. voters’ support.

When the United Way poll asked voters if they would support a $2 billion “homelessness/poverty reduction bond,” 84 percent said yes. Another poll, provided to the Weekly by Murray, showed 74 percent support for a $1 billion bond measure for homelessness and poverty reduction.

“The voters want something done, and they’re willing to pay for it,” Murray says. “I think it’s important that we seize this opportunity. It’s pretty rare that you see voters saying, ‘We’re willing to pay for this.’”

But will the homeless bond measure, which is effectively a delayed tax, be such a slam-dunk?

According to a survey conducted by the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, nearly a third of L.A. residents have worried about becoming homeless in the last few years. Nearly as many have worried about crime and about becoming homeless in the last few years. Nearly as many have worried about crime and about becoming homeless in the last few years.

But there’s a third group, and the fate of the bond measure may actually rest with them.

George Palaziol is one of the administrators of the Saving San Pedro Facebook group, where homelessness is a common topic. Members frequently post photographs of homeless encampments and individual homeless residents, with comments that are, shall we say, less than empathetic. For instance, Palaziol posted a photo of a man with a shopping cart getting arrested. “I’ve seen this guy all over Gaffey,” Palaziol wrote. “When is he going to get real help?” One of the commenters wrote: “Jail jail jail!”

“We have people defecating, urinating, committing some sort of public crime or spectacle that shouldn’t be allowed,” Palaziol says. “This kind of public behavior is not OK. If you’re going to do this stuff in public, you’ve gotta get called out on it.”

“It’s disturbing the way that a lot of people talk about homelessness,” says Becky Dennison, executive director of Venice Community Housing. “It really harkens back to the ugly days of segregation, and fear of the perceived ‘other.’ Unfortunately, those messages pick up steam on blogs, and even well-meaning people are wondering if they should be scared by this.”

Dennison has experienced neighborhood opposition to homeless services firsthand. Her group has been running a pilot program that provides homeless residents with locker space. Venice city councilman Mike Bonin wanted the program expanded and proposed, as a site for the lockers, the now-vacant Westminster senior center.

But the Venice Stakeholders Association is threatening to sue over the plan. The group says the conversion would violate the deed to the facility, which it claims can be used only for recreation.

The group’s leaders also said that they think the lockers would attract more homeless people to Venice.

“Transients tend to want to stay near their stuff,” Mark Ryavec, president of the Venice Stakeholders Association, told KPCC. “It would only become worse with a storage facility.”

The desire to rid the homeless from one’s neighborhood — out of sight, out of mind — could, however, actually help the homeless bond measure. Palaziol, for one, says he’s in favor of it — “as long as it’s permanent supportive housing and comes tied with services, and maybe some sort of job training, something where they’re continually monitored, like weekly checkups.”

He adds: “I want to spend our government money on something that’s not going to go away in a year or two.”

Murray says he’s seen a lot of this kind of sentiment.

“People come at this problem for different reasons, and [with] some of them it’s from a place of anger,” he says. “But when you sit with them down and ask, ‘What would it mean to make it different?’ people get that it means more housing and services. That’s a good bit of consensus about that.”

Getting the money may actually be easier than figuring out how to spend it. Many people who vote for the measure could end up revolting if the city tries to put homeless services in their neighborhood.

“There’s a huge amount of NIMBYism,” Murray says. “That’s a political battle we have to take head-on. This is too big of an issue to just have it dealt with in Skid Row. We need to have affordable housing in all communities throughout Los Angeles.”

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Women in their best walking shoes, wallets at the ready, weave their way into the airy atrium of the Los Angeles Convention Center for the Ultimate Women’s Expo, a chaotic carnival of consumerist girl power. Vendors hawk their wares from hundreds of booths, demonstrating contour makeup techniques and dispensing anti-aging serums. Speakers such as Phaedra Parks from The Real Housewives of Atlanta deliver audience-rousing aphorisms. Two sisters dressed alike in crochet berets wait for their mother to haggle over the price of teeth-whitening treatments, while another woman relaxes in a plush leather lounger, light blasting her teeth.

Nearby, a line wraps around a corner booth displaying hot pink Tasers, brass knuckles and pepper spray, while a soundtrack by two Power 106 DJs pumps hip-hop into the room. The expo has everything femme you could ever think of, including Vivica Fox Hair Collection wigs.

For Fox, the hair game is just a side hustle for her real day job. She’s a prolific actress whose career was launched by the alien-invasion blockbuster Independence Day in 1996. In Kill Bill, Quentin Tarantino cast Fox as Black Mamba to face off against Uma Thurman in what is one of cinema’s most brutal and breathless fight scenes between two women. On June 24, Independence Day: Resurgence hits theaters, a return to the role that started Fox’s career two decades earlier.

And here, at the Ultimate Women’s Expo, she’s the keynote speaker.

About 500 folding chairs face an empty stage where Fox will deliver her address. The chairs fill up with African-American women of all ages. The room is roughly three-quarters women of color.

Anticipation for her arrival is high, but Fox is running late. Her driver is lost.

Outside, it’s like waiting for a presidential motorcade to arrive. People in black suits with walkie-talkies are ready to usher Fox from her car to the stage. When her black SUV pulls up, Fox emerges in a cobalt-blue jumpsuit, a matching blue stripe woven into the tight bun at the top of her head. She asks everyone, “Do you have everything you need? Are you OK?” She detests being late.

As she waits at the foot of the stairs to take the podium, Fox shoots the shit with folks backstage. “The A stands for Angie, my middle name,” Fox says to a woman. “It’s what all my friends call me. A casting director early on told me I need to use my real name with the middle initial. Vivica A. Fox. They told me, ‘Watch, this is the name everyone will remember.’”

When Fox takes the stage, she’s introduced as an “inspiration to all women.” She’s so glamorous that people in the hall stand up at the sight of her. “Let me let y’all get your pictures,” she says, before striking and holding a variety of poses as flashes go off everywhere.

The woman is still getting her teeth blasted white in that dentist chair lounger. Only now she’s applauding.

When Fox hinted at a sequel to Soul Food, the dramedy about the lives and loves of a multigenerational African-American family, the woman next to me nearly
threw her nachos to the ground as she tried to stand up and cheer at the announcement.

Nearly every sentence Fox spins gets holders and applause. “I’ve been able to declare my Independence Day!” she yells into the handheld mic she chose because she likes to move around. It’s a nearly political moment.

The first question she takes from the audience is about Donald Trump and her time on Celebrity Apprentice. She’s measured but says, “Trump the chump. I would be so grateful if I could wake up and not see his face on the news anymore.” When she follows it up by revealing she often wears blue to support the Democrats, stumping for every candidate (and her disability charities in the process). When she says, “Hashtag, I’m with her,” the women in the crowd lose their shit.

After Fox wraps up her keynote, women stand in line, crying, seeking advice from the star onstage. Fox retorts with adages on work ethic. She’s already abandoned the stage, walking among the crowd. People want to touch her. They want things from her: a bless, a hug, a job, some “good hair.” The line to ask her a question stretches back to the teeth-whitening booth, but when a man gives Fox the signal, she must say her goodbyes.

She sneaks in a quick request of her own, asking the women to support her at the box office. “Stick together,” Fox says, “make good choices, and vote with your dollars, ladies!”

Fox is a Hollywood anomaly, which might somewhat explain the fanatical reception she received at the expo. Only 17 of the 100 top-grossing films of 2014 featured a nonwhite lead or co-lead, and women were only 12 percent of protagonists, with not one woman over the age of 45 cast as a lead or co-lead. Despite these grim statistics, Fox has been a continued and persistent presence in film — whether in blockbusters or in the low-budget indie black cinema she produces herself.

“She’s never had a down slide,” actress Jazsmin Lewis, from the Barbershop franchise, says. “It’s important to have a woman who says, ‘Whether you’re 20 or 50, you can still go to work.’”

While the industry might be complacent about the slim fraction of roles often stereotypical ones — available for African-American actresses, Fox thinks the key to success is knowing when and how to play the part you’re given or break out on your own.

“I’ve seen so many people come and go in this business over the years,” Fox says. “And those are the people who don’t know that it’s a journey, and you’ve got to find your next chapter. You can’t play the young, hot chick all the time. You’ve got to mature.”

Vivica A. Fox is a name everyone remembers. For some, it may take some time to coax her face from the memory, but for others, she’s a household name. When Lee Daniels, director of Fox Television’s hip-hop drama Empire, saw her on Celebrity Apprentice, he cast Fox as the older sister to the show’s bombastic central character, Cookie Lyon. In her first appearance as a guest star, Fox broke the show’s small ratings slump. Ironically, Fox says friends told her that doing reality TV would ruin her career, but she felt the itch to do something different. It paid off. Fox’s role on Empire was, as expected, epic, and rumors spread that there may be a spinoff. But the biggest rumor had nothing to do with the show. A short-lived Twitter feud erupted from some shade and a misunderstanding between Fox and her ex, 50 Cent, when the rapper disparaged her openly gay castmate, Jussie Smollett.

When the name-calling reports rolled in, news sites posted articles with headlines like, “All You Need to Know About the Ex-Girlfriend Who Called 50 Cent ‘Gay,’” giving cursory rundown of Fox’s career and focusing more on her breast enhancement than her film roles.

It was a bit mind-boggling for those reared in the heyday of ’90s cinema who grew up watching Fox in F. Gary Gray’s seminal all-woman heist film Set It Off (co-starring Queen Latifah, Jada Pinkett Smith and Kimberly Elise), or in family film Soul Food, or in ensemble comedy Kingdom Come, or in throwback action epic Kill Bill. These are all movies that made a lot of money — and, more important, made an impact.

Fox is so much more than Fiddy’s “ex-girlfriend.”

In 1997, Fox and Will Smith took home the little gold astronaut for Best Kiss at the MTV Movie Awards. It would mark the first and only time a couple of color would receive the honor.

Fox played Jasmine Dubrow, a single mother and exotic dancer, in Roland Emmerich’s Independence Day, which was the second-highest-grossing film at the time of its release. The role for Fox was huge. Her character wasn’t just the stripper-with-the-heart-of-gold cliché. It was a role in which Fox could shine, in an industry that all too often fails to offer nuanced parts to women, and especially to women of color.

Looking back, the 1990s feel, well, a little magical. Lower-budget studio hits with majority-black casts were a thing. Successful films like Boyz N the Hood, Friday, Waiting to Exhale, Love & Basketball, How Stella Got Her Groove Back, Above the Rim, Dead Presidents, Juice, Poetic Justice, Bad Boys, A Low Down Dirty Shame, Booterang, Booty Call and so many other black-led movies hit wide release for mainstream audiences (read: white). But it was just one of many boom-and-bust periods in the black cinema timeline.

“The 1990s is an interesting time, because you do see a resurgence of African-American representation on screen, but we’ve been here, we’ve done this before,” says Cornell University film scholar Samantha Shepard. “American cinema had a crossover of race films all the way back to the ’30s and ’40s, and in the ’60s, we had social-problem films and the ‘model Negro’ with Sidney Poitier. After that, Hollywood was breaking down because of its monopoly system, (14 »
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LONG BEFORE HER BIG BREAK, FOX WAITED TABLES FOR YEARS. SHE SAID HER MOTHER TOLD HER, “JUST BECAUSE YOU’RE CUTE DON’T MEAN NOBODY’S GOING TO HAND YOU NOTHING.” OVER THE PAST TWO DECADES, FOX’S DO-IT-YOURSELF CAREER AS AN ACTOR AND PRODUCER HAS BEEN INDICATIVE OF HOW AFRICAN-AMERICAN FILM AND TELEVISION MAKERS HAVE ADAPTED TO THE DEMANDS OF THE MAINSTREAM FILM INDUSTRY.

WHILE PROMINENT ROLES WERE RARELY IF EVER GIVEN TO BLACK WOMEN IN FRONT OF OR BEHIND THE CAMERA, AFRICAN-AMERICAN ACTORS DID FIND A HOME ON TV FOR A BIT IN THE 1990S, ESPECIALLY ON FOX, THE FLEDGLING NETWORK TRYING TO MAKE A NAME FOR ITSELF. VIVICA FOX, FOR EXAMPLE, APPEARED ON MARTIN AND WAS A LEAD ON NBC’S PATTI LABELLE SHOW OUT ALL NIGHT. WHEN MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL LEGITIMIZED THE FLEDGLING NETWORK, FOX TV HAD LITTLE USE FOR THE CREATORS AND AUDIENCES THAT GOT IT THERE, AND DROPPED THE SHOWS. SHEPARD SEES A SIMILAR PHENOMENON NOW WITH UPN AND THE WB MERGING INTO THE CW AND DROP- ping ALL THEIR BLACK-LED CONTENT.


FOX, HOWEVER, SEES PERRY IN AN OPTIMISTIC LIGHT, AS A SUCCESSFUL ROLE MODEL. “I WANT TO
be the female Tyler Perry?” she says. “Yeah, absolutely. With my production company, I’m getting a producer credit, and I need to get funding for my own work. I figure if I keep putting it out there, someone’s going to hit me. And now, I’m finally starting to get people asking me, ‘What would you like to do?’

She’s shown that there is a way forward without the studios. Perry’s example inspired Fox to produce her own material, even taking to the theater as Perry did, and slowly building her own empire in black cinema. Some of her films are direct-to-DVD, some VOD and limited theatrical release, and others made for cable networks such as Lifetime and OWN. But all are for her devoted audience. And yes, she works with women directors. As she told the hundreds of women in line at the Women’s Expo, clamoring to give Fox a hug, audiences vote with their dollars.

A recent MPAA Theatrical Marketing Statistics report says that blacks attend movies at a slightly higher rate than whites. That’s despite the fact that they rarely see someone like themselves on screen. In 2012, 81 percent of the movies seen by black audiences didn’t feature a black cast, storyline or lead actor, according to REEL Facts, a movie goer consumption study. And when they are shown an African-American in the lead, black audiences vote with even greater frequency. In 2015, The New York Times reported that black-led films dominated the box office with even greater frequency. The few upcoming black-led films inching their way onto our most prominent billboards are safe financial bets. This year, two wildly successful franchise offshoots, Barbershop: The Next Cut and The Best Man Wedding, are go. They’re also productions of a single director, Malcolm D. Lee. Most films will continue to be “crossover,” with only one or two supporting African-Americans in the cast, which is why indie black cinema—like the productions Fox helms—is so important.

Jazsmin Lewis, who has worked with Fox on four films, says it’s not just Fox’s productions that matter but what she actively does for others in the industry. “She takes a leadership role on set,” Lewis says. “She knows what she’s doing. She’s the one you want in your corner. She looks out for people coming up behind her. You want to run lines? She’ll do it. You want a glass of water? She’s on it. There are other African-American actors who’ve been around a long time—even longer than her—but they have not worked as consistently. They’ve taken breaks either voluntarily or involuntarily, but she has never taken a break.”

Actress Wendy Raquel Robinson. (The Game, The Steve Harvey Show) calls her longtime friend Fox the Norma Rae on set. “If there’s something not right or inorganic, she speaks up in a way that’s not insulting. I’ve learned through example that you don’t get the respect you deserve if you don’t speak up, especially as an African-American woman.”

“I’m getting a producer credit, and I need to work with women. I want the respect you deserve if you don’t speak up. I have a mantra.”

Fox sips a glass of white wine at Beverly Hills hot spot the Ivy. She says it’s her first day off in six months. She just filmed a Lifetime reality series based on her film Chocolate City with eight black alpha-male exotic dancers. She has 10 movies coming out in the next two years. Later that day, there’s an NBA playoff game, and she says she’s going to drink wine and watch the game “By. My. Self.” She’s not dating, because it’s too hard right now, she says. She wants an equal, like the one landed by Jasmine, her fictional character in Independence Day.

Underneath the good looks and diamonds, Fox is old-fashioned and Midwestern, a total bootstrapper. “Growing up in Indiana, I’m a Hoosier,” Fox says. “My dad used to take us to the Pacer games. When I’m hanging out with the guys, they’re always surprised.” She played sports herself—basketball, volleyball, track.

Fox trained for six months to do 95 percent of her own stunts in Kill Bill, and she says she’d like to do what Tarantino did with Pam Grier for Jackie Brown. “That would be a dream role for me. I wanna kick somebody’s ass!”

There are few actresses who can do their own stunts and make it look natural, and even fewer who can also do comedy, but Fox is decidedly goofy, often self-deprecating while crossing her eyes and contorting her face for the joke. Basically, she’s not about to get snooty. She still prays over every meal, thankful. When she first moved to New York City after high school, she’d called her mom and said, “I think I moved to Hell,” but she was saved by a friend and the late, great Prince, who let her stay in his penthouse. She says she learned her generosity from those early days in the big city. She even sent me home from the Ivy with three boxes of cookies.

While Fox will reprise her role as the heroic single mom in Independence Day: Resurgence, she isn’t a mother. Yet she’s a godmother to many of her colleagues’ children. She’s beloved in her community for being the matriarch, a unifier. She’s the one you want in your corner.

If studios want a piece of her indefatigable energy, it’s not surprising. But they should know, as Fox says, she’s already declared her Independence Day.
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ENJOY, BUT DON'T OVERDO IT.
I

a city infamous for vehicle-induced madness, it’s hard to categorize any one location as the “worst” when it comes to traffic or parking. But Saturday evening at the entrance to the Original Farmers Market and Grove parking lots has got to be a top-10 contender. Certainly there are a million places I’d rather be, a hundred restaurants I could think of patronizing, that wouldn’t require vehicular torture at this extreme.

Difficulty in parking and access may well have been what doomed Short Order, the upscale burger restaurant that previously sat in the semi-outdoor, two-story space at the outer corner of the Original Farmers Market. There are plenty of eating establishments in these parts, both at the Grove and the Farmers Market, that do just fine, but they peddle in a somewhat different breed from the diners I’d assume might be interested in Moruno, the new restaurant that’s taken over the Short Order space. There’s nothing easy about Moruno even when a bar for nerdy vermouth lovers does come about.

The menu takes its influence broadly from southern Spain, but it’s not concerned in any way with the pseudo-tapas we’ve come to expect from Spanish food in America. The rest of the world’s historic culinary interactions with Spain, particularly those of the Moorish, Middle Eastern and North African variety, are on full display here. And so, while the format — small plates, somewhat international influences — sounds familiar, the food itself is refreshingly distinct. I could eat a 100 percent vegetarian meal here and be totally satisfied. A wedge of roasted butternut squash is dense and fudgy with vegetal sweetness, set off with what’s listed on the menu as dukkah but is actually kind of deconstructed dukkah; the word, which usually refers to a mix of spices and nuts, means “to pound,” referencing the method used to make the stuff. Here the spices are mixed with whole roasted cashews and a flurry of sesame seeds, making for a dish whose mouthfuls are half sweet flesh and half two kinds of crunch, two kinds of nuttiness. This isn’t a concoction where the creativity comes in by way of clever contrasts; rather, the accompaniments and cooking method are there to amplify the squash’s original attributes.

Vegetable dish of the year, though, probably goes to the rotisserie cabbage served with pickled-mushroom yogurt. It comes blackened on the outside and soft on the inside, the leaves melting into a juicy wonder of funk and vegetal sweetness. Fish and meat dishes can be equally rewarding. The esqueixada, a Catalan salad of salt cod, tomatoes and onions marinated in vinegar, is juicy and summery and puckery and lives up to its nickname of Catalan ceviche. There’s a simple whole fish a la plancha that’s as lovely as any in town, and the squid stuffed with a force-meat made from squid is more delicious and elegant than it sounds. The morunos come as chicken or lamb, and you can get them one of three ways: on their own, in a sandwich or over rice studded with lentils. All of them are good, though I liked the rice bowl version best. But they also are one of the least exciting things to eat here, and I’d be likely to allot my stomach space to something more thrilling.

The butternut squash, the salt cod and the cabbage are all done in ways you’ve likely never encountered before unless you’ve eaten extensively and internationally — certainly never in Los Angeles. Add to that list the tripe, which here is stewed and then grilled, so it ends up crisp and chewy and unlike any tripe I’ve ever had. In truth, some of the dishes were so hard they were fully black. I’m not sure whether Feldmeier is aiming for this burnt quality, but I do know I preferred eating the pieces that were a little less done.

The element of surprise carries over to the wine list, which is chock-full of interesting and affordable finds, mainly from Spain and France, and also to the dessert menu, which is overseen by Mozza pastry chef (and recent Best Pastry Chef James Beard Award winner) Dahlia Narvaez. If you think you’re sick of chocolate desserts, I dare you to dislike the chocolate sesame tart here, which comes under drifts of halvah. It is glorious.

Even as I sat inside, protected from the scrun of cars and stores, I wished Moruno were somewhere else. The seats upstairs are comfy enough, but the downstairs dining room feels a little like you’re eating in a breezeway under someone’s garage. It’s a weird space all around, a jewel of a restaurant occupying two small spaces that just out on the corner of one of the worst parking lots in L.A. It’s still worth the hassle, which is saying quite a lot. And for those of us who just can’t face the pain of mall parking, they’re opening an outpost any minute at Grand Central Market downtown.
There are four signature dishes of Shaanxi cuisine, including what might be the original hamburger. Often appearing on menus in English as “Chinese hamburger,” rou jia mo is usually made from stewed pork and served on a split, dense bread. A much spicier version uses lamb meat liberally seasoned with cumin and topped with sliced green chili peppers.

Another distinctive dish in Shaanxi cuisine is ròu pào mó, beef or lamb soup with torn wheat flatbread (usually referred to as pita), which are sort of like a Chinese version of gnocchi. Then there’s liang pi, cold wheat noodles served with a small dash of vinegar, chili oil and drizzled with sesame sauce, which are good anytime of year but remarkably refreshing during summer heat.

One of the most unusual Shaanxi dishes is another noodle item, biang biang mian. Incredibly wide noodles, the width of a belt, are doused in chili oil and served in a bowl with scallions and bok choy. The name of the noodle, biang, also has the distinction of being the most complex character in Chinese, made up of 58 strokes.

Two terra cotta warriors sit outside Xi’An Famous Foods. But that’s not all. Since last fall, three more Shaanxi-style places have opened in the San Gabriel Valley. Although Xi’An Gourmet opened the second location, followed by the openings of Xi An Tasty and Shaanxi Garden. But that’s not all. Since last fall, three more Shaanxi-style places have opened in the San Gabriel Valley.

If you haven’t tried, or aren’t familiar with, Shaanxi-style food, it’s one of the most approachable of all Chinese regional cuisines, well suited even to the non-adventurous palate. While many of the dishes are spicy, they aren’t on a level of Sichuan or Hunan, and some of them have a dash of vinegar to provide another flavor note.
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**Drink at a Depression-Era Speakeasy and You May Become Part of a Live Play**

“Ever been here before?” the bar back asked as I took the first sip of my Monte Carlo, a Benedictine-kissed take on an old-fashioned.

Dressed in a dirty white thermal shirt and unbrushed yet dapper slacks, the bar back looked like a blast from the past. He carried a broom but he barely brushed it over the concrete floor. His eyes darted around manically as if searching for someone else. He leaned into my personal space as he spoke.

“I’ve been here since 8 a.m., and I always try to keep a smile on my face, you know. But you gotta watch out for the riff-raff here,” he said before I could answer his first question. “Especially that one in the red dress. She came in today and you know what she told me? She told me to smile. Can you believe that?”

As I started to scan the small wooden bar buried in the back of an Arts District warehouse for a woman in a red dress, the man disappeared back into the crowd. The immersive, site-specific theater experience we’d all come to see wasn’t supposed to start for another 10 minutes. But at the pop-up bar embedded inside the set, it had already begun.

*The Day Shall Declare It*, produced by L.A.’s Wilderness stage company, is a Depression-era theater installation that combines early Tennessee Williams one-acts with Studs Terkel’s oral history *Working*. After selling out its American premiere at the same Arts District venue last year — it premiered in London in 2014 — *The Day Shall Declare It* was renewed for a second run in May and recently announced a monthlong extension (with extra late-night weekend shows) through July 31.

This year’s production features a new, delicious addition: The Paradise, a pop-up speakeasy where you can pregame with the help of the mixology team known as Vagrant Bartenders (they also created the Paradise, which is a functioning bar again, this time open to the public on show nights after selling glass bottles full of milk, chocolate milk and egg nog freshly processed on site and made famous by visits from Huell Howser, is threatened by a proposed railroad construction project in the city of Montebello.

Dairy owner Ray Broguiere Jr., whose family has operated the beloved business for nearly a century, isn’t happy about it. “This has turned into a real mess,” he told us.

Though Broguiere said he’s been involved since the beginning of the planning stages, the problem is, plans keep changing — “three times in the last few months.”

The proposed underpass for Maple Avenue — where Broguiere’s is located — would leave the classic, drive-through dairy inaccessible from the street, which the city wants to make lower than it currently sits.

The project, which is still in the planning stage, is part of the Alameda Corridor East, a large-scale initiative to create grade separations between surface streets and the railroad via underpasses or overpasses. Several of these have already been completed across the San Gabriel Valley.

Broguiere said he was initially told the city would move the dairy to a nearby property owned by his sister, and it seemed like a reasonable enough solution. Then the city proposed building a 300-foot circular driveway connected to Mines Avenue —

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**Is This the End of Broguiere’s Dairy?**

In the 1950s, Los Angeles County produced more milk and dairy products than any other county in the nation. Now, one of the last remaining links to that history is facing an uncertain future.

Broguiere’s Farm Fresh Dairy, known for selling glass bottles full of milk, chocolate milk and eggnog freshly processed on site and made famous by visits from Huell Howser, is threatened by a proposed railroad construction project in the city of Montebello.

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**“MY FAMILY HAS BEEN HERE OVER 100 YEARS. I DON’T WANT TO MOVE.”** —JIM BROGUIERE
but that seemed unfeasible to Broguiere. There’s also the looming threat of eminent domain, which has been a hot issue in Montebello for more than 25 years. “It’s an ongoing thing,” Broguiere says. Ultimately, he believes the situation comes down to the city wishing to force him out and redevelop the property. Broguiere isn’t just crying over spilled milk. The property has a rich history dating back to the 1920s, when his grandfather converted his lemon orchard into the namesake dairy, where cows grazed freely — as they did in much of the southeastern portion of the county. “My family has been here over 100 years,” Broguiere says. “I don’t want to move.” And his family’s dairy isn’t the only business that could be affected by the Alameda Corridor East. Broguiere estimates that 15 to 20 properties will be impacted by the grade separations of Maple Avenue and Montebello Boulevard. For his part, he’s hired an eminent-domain attorney and vows to fight. The next — and perhaps most major — battle will take place July 13, when the city council convenes to discuss the project at 6:30 p.m. at Montebello City Hall. Broguiere hopes folks will show up in support of his dairy. For now, you can show your support by simply stopping by the dairy to pick up some milk — or chocolate milk, if you’ve got a sweet tooth. — Jim Thurman

Broguiere’s Farm Fresh Dairy, 505 S. Maple Ave, Montebello; (323) 726-0524. Mon.-Fri., 7 a.m.-7 p.m.; Sat., 7 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sun., 8 a.m.-2 p.m.

— Jim Thurman
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BOOKS
Bald Ambition
Book Soup at the Skirball hosts Moby, who discusses his new book, Porcelain: A Memoir, with KCRW’s Jason Bentley. The DJ-musician-producer achieved worldwide success with his 1999 record, Play, but Moby’s biography focuses on the 10 years before he became one of electronic music’s biggest stars. He writes about being a straight-edge, Bible class–teaching Christian while living in squalor and struggling as a DJ in New York clubs in the late 1980s and early ‘90s. There were career highs (1990’s single “Go,” meeting legendary artists, headlining European festivals) and lows (1996’s album Animal Rights).

Moby reminisces further about growing up poor in Connecticut, and how for him — like so many DJs — disco, in his case Diana Ross’ “Love Hangover,” was the music that changed his life. He also appears at Skylight Books on Thursday, June 30.

Skirball Cultural Center, 2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd., Brentwood; Fri., June 24, 8 p.m.; $5, $30.52 with book. (310) 440-4500, skirball.org.

—Siran Babayan

FILM
The Hills Are Alive
As far as we know, there’s no law that says participants in Sing-Along Sound of Music can’t substitute the film’s original lyrics with their own, perhaps more deeply felt thoughts and feelings, for instance: “DOUGH, a name, I call my cash, RAY, the creep who owes me some, ME, the guy, who needs it now, SO, hey fork it over, bum,” etc. On the other hand, the film’s die-hard fans — who are legion — will take delight in warbling along with Maria and those plucky von Trapp kids.


—John Payne

CATS
Here Kitty, Kitty
Even with 100 precocious kittens on hand for adoption, real felines will be outnumbered by thousands of their clumsy human fans at the annual CatConLA. The lines between species will be seriously blurred when “top celebrity cat influencers” Lil Bub, Pudge and Nala the Cat appear alongside human luminaries such as Mariel Hemingway and seemingly ageless Catwoman icon Julie Newmar, not to mention the cos-playful wannabes who’ll compete in the Furr-ocious Fashion Face-Off contest. Meanwhile, in the Escape Room, misbehaving humans can attempt to break out of a gigantic cardboard box. And for the first time, CatConLA founder Susan Michals joins forces with Will Braden, who will present the CatVideoFest (Sat., June 25, 6:30 p.m.) with host Andy Milonakis at the nearby Ace Hotel.

The Reef, 1933 Broadway, downtown; Sat., June 25, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sun., June 26, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; $25-$40 for adults, $15-$25 ages 5-12, $20 for CatVideoFest, $100 & $150 for meet & greets. catconla.com.

—Falling James

P O L I T I C S
The Body Politic
Politics and entertainment merge again at the second annual Politicon. Whether you’re trying to make sense of the election or of recent tragic events, the two-day, nonpartisan convention offers interviews, panels, screenings, podcasts and comedy shows on topics ranging from “Misogyny & Sexism in Politics” to “Islam in the 21st Century” to the rhetorically titled “Is Trump a Psychopath?” Leading the discussions will be politicians and political commentators from all over the spectrum, including former Alaska governor Sarah Palin, Sen. Barbara Boxer, former Mexican president Vicente Fox, Ann Coulter, James Carville, Glenn Beck and Larry Wilmore. Pasadena Convention Center, 300 E. Green St., Pasadena; Sat.-Sun., June 25-26, 11 a.m.-8 p.m.; $15-$275. politicon.com.

—Siran Babayan

ART PARTIES
Sherman After Dark
One Saturday a month, from June through September, the Broad is hosting a series of late-night events collectively called Nonobjective: Summer Happenings. The first one, titled “Magnificent Obsession,” features music and performances inspired by the museum’s current exhibit of Cindy Sherman’s photographs, including music from Perfume Genius, Cindytalk and Lotic,
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Are 18-60 years old

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- The option of a clinical research study.
- Trouble enjoying things?
- Energy, difficulty sleeping or trouble enjoying things?

If so, you may want to consider the option of a clinical research study.

Qualified participants receive study-related medical care and investigational study medication at no cost and may be compensated for time and travel.

For more information and to see if you qualify, contact CNS: 844-714-6464 www.cnstrial.com/depression

Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, 900 Exposition Blvd., Exposition Park; Sat.-Sun., June 25-26, 9 a.m.; $12, $9 seniors and students, $5 children, free for 2 and younger. (213) 763-3499. nhm.org. —Siran Babayan

FOOD AND DRINK

East Coast Meets West Coast
Despite our friendly rivalry with the Big Apple, far be it from Angelenos to turn our noses up at something cool just because it originated on the East Coast. The huge weekly market Smorgasburg, a spinoff of Brooklyn Flea, has been wowing New Yorkers since 2011 (Mario Batali called it "the single greatest thing I’ve ever seen gastronomically in New York City"). Located on the site of the Alameda Produce Market, Smorgasburg brings together a massive number of food vendors — from Raindrop Cake to Donut Friend to Ramen Burger — plus furniture, clothing and housewares vendors, too. Smorgasburg kicked off on June 19 and continues every Sunday. ROW DTLA, 777 S. Alameda St., downtown; Sundays, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.; free. la.smorgasburg.com. —Gwynedd Stuart

MUSEUMS

Urban Jungle
You don’t have to rough it to experience nature. Take a walk on the wild side and celebrate our city’s ecology at the Natural History Museum’s second annual L.A. Urban Nature Fest. Scientists lead tours of the museum’s bird collection, and local nature organizations will be on hand. Additional weekend activities include storytelling, interactive music, snake-feeding demonstrations and other live animals, as well as workshops on taxidermy, photography and silk screening. And say “evolution” during photo ops with “Charles Darwin.”

COMEDY

The Honeymooners
Natasha Leggero and Moshe Kasher are following in the footsteps of great comedy couples like Jerry Stiller and Anne Meara, Danny DeVito and Rhea Perlman and Nick Offerman and Megan Mullally, and they’re sharing the inappropriate details of their romance in the Honeymoon Tour. Married last year, the two have appeared together in Comedy Central’s turn-of-the-century spoof Another Period, recently renewed for a third season, and on Leggero’s hilarious hot-tub talk show on YouTube, Tubbin’ With Tash, in which she affectionately calls her hubby “Pig Bottom.” Tonight they’ll each perform stand-up.
and give out marital and relationship advice, which you may or may not want to take. Largo at the Coronet, 366 N. La Cienega Blvd., Beverly Grove; Mon., June 27, doors 7 p.m., show 8:30 p.m.; $30. (310) 855-0350, largo-la.com.

—Siran Babayan

tue 6/28

TELEVISION
The Night Shift
Just as mainstream intellectual curiosity withered in the throes of the Reagan years, a weekend variety program called Night Flight took off on the fledgling USA Network. A cornucopia of film, videos and animation, it was essential viewing for late-night weirdos who thrived on the grotesque and the profane. Tonight’s screening of Night Flight: Born Again, with Night Flight founder Stuart Shapiro and actor Larry Hankin, is a celebration of the launch of subscription channel Night Flight Plus, featuring clips of Wendy O. Williams, Bambi Meets Godzilla, Divine, a tribute to Prince and other treasures from the basements of interesting culture. Cinefamily, 611 N. Fairfax Ave., Beverly Grove; Tue., June 28, 7:30 p.m.; $12. (323) 655-2510, cinefamily.org.

—David Cotner

wed 6/29

DISCUSSION
Funny Money
Does the constant pursuit of material wealth — or at least stability and comfort — ever make your soul feel dirty? Come to terms with money and being a member of modern society when the Women’s Center for Creative Work hosts a Spirituality and Money group discussion. Together with discussion leaders Liz Armstrong, Eliza Swann and Grace Kreedel, attendees work toward answering the following question: “What do we think we truly need on the material plane and how can we better conceptualize our desires in accordance with a larger vision of collective financial health and well-being?” Does striving for wealth mean abandoning a greater good? The event is free, but attendees are asked to bring a dollar for an energy ritual. Women’s Center for Creative Work, 2425 Glover Place, Elysian Valley; Wed., June 29, 7-9 p.m.; free. facebook.com/events/582818621879693.

—Gwynedd Stuart

thu 6/30

COMEDY
O Canada
Tomorrow is Canada Day, the day the nation was officially born in 1867. No doubt you’ve been waiting all year to celebrate, but tonight you can pay tribute to the land of moose and Mounties at the Comedy Store’s fifth annual Canada Day Comedy Show, the only such event in town. Past big-name guests have included Harland Williams, Tom Green and Russell Peters. Canada’s Angelo Tsarouchas once again hosts a secret lineup of fellow comics from the Great White North, who’ll prove that Canadians aren’t too nice to be funny. The Comedy Store, 8433 W. Sunset Blvd., West Hollywood; Thu., June 30, 7 p.m.; $25. (323) 650-6268, thecomedystore.com.

—Siran Babayan

MUSEUMS
Holy Moses
Did people curse on the set of The Ten Commandments? Such questions may never be answered (at least, not honestly), but archaeology is a more concrete concern — one addressed at tonight’s program Excavating The Ten Commandments, a voyage into the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes, where Cecil B. DeMille filmed The Ten Commandments in 1923. In 2012, after years of legends that the massive sphinxes and statues remained beneath the sands, those “antiquities” were finally discovered. Explorer Daniel R. Small and the Corning Museum of Glass’ Jack Green will bring you up to date on where those artifacts stand — or lie buried, as the case may be. Hammer Museum, 10899 Wilshire Blvd., Westwood; Thu., June 30, 7:30 p.m.; free. (310) 443-7000, hammer.ucla.edu.

—David Cotner

Natasha Leggero and Moshe Kasher: See Monday.

PHOTO BY ROBYN VON SWANK
IT’S A-MAZE-ING

A maze maker’s biggest project ever has taken over Cartoon Network’s Burbank studios

BY LIZ OHANESIAN

Inside the old Burbank switchboard facility that Cartoon Network calls home, the “Mazeway to Heaven” climbs up the inside of a six-story stairwell. It creeps past the floor where Adventure Time’s artists plot quests for Finn and Jake and the one where the teams behind Steven Universe and Regular Show bring their own quirky characters to life. The maze-mural’s thick, cloudlike curves peek from behind exposed pipes and spread out onto landing walls. It scales to heights that can only be reached with the help of scaffolding, and winds to a finish near a door that leads to the rooftop patio where studio employees meet for lunch, drawing sessions and the occasional talent show.

Ian Anderson is the Glendale-based artist behind the mind-boggling work. In the hours before the official unveiling of the project, he notices remnants of the blue tape he posted when trying to solve the maze himself. Even though Anderson is its creator, it took him a few hours to navigate the complicated tangle of pathways.

“It’s not an easy maze. There are some dead ends, like the ones you may have encountered on the pages of activity books as a kid. More likely, though, you’ll end up running in circles. Anderson says he likes it that way: “You don’t really know that you’re lost.”

The piece is so large that Anderson recently submitted it to the Guinness Book of World Records for recognition in the hand-drawn maze category. Unfortunately, it didn’t meet the criteria, which stipulated that mazes had to be created on canvas or paper and that the paths had to be much more narrow than the ones Anderson made with an acrylic paint marker. He plans to submit again for a new category.

With a ski cap pulled over his longish hair, Anderson looks younger than his 24 years. He’s new to the professional art game. A part-time animation teacher and former bassist for local band Kan Wakan, Anderson only began pursuing his visual-arts career a year and a half ago. While the Cartoon Network project marks both his first mural and his first art show, Anderson has been making mazes for a long time.

Born in the Philippines, Anderson moved to Southern California with his mother when he was 10. He started drawing mazes as a young child — maybe 4 or 5, he estimates — because his mom wouldn’t let him play video games. As an adult, his love of creating mazes is central to his work.

A smattering of Anderson’s art is on display in a gallery off of Cartoon Network’s library. There’s a pair of Vans covered in multiple mazes that he drew with Sharpies. The ink is long-lasting, he says, pulling out a 3-year-old pair of sneakers covered in tiny cartoon characters as an example. The shoes are worn, but the drawings still pop.

He decorated a bike with a maze, too. It’s propped up inside the gallery and is still, technically, a work in progress. Anderson plans to cover the whole thing — “even the grip tape” — with mazes.

Time’s artists plot quests for Finn and Jake. While the Cartoon Network project would’ve let him play video games. As an adult, his love of creating mazes is central to his work.

Sorcher looks at the piece he commissioned from Anderson, still marveling at its fine details. “I love the playful feel of it. I love the whole concept of it,” he says. “I was obsessed with mazes myself as a kid.”

After Anderson completed “Very Difficult Maze,” Sorcher wondered if an artist so skilled in drawing small could go big. Anderson hadn’t created any large-scale works, but he was willing to give it a shot. He bought a bunch of sizable canvases and got to work, emailing photos of the results to Sorcher. Anderson says he wasn’t enthusiastic about those experiments — he was still trying to figure out a process for making something so grand — but Cartoon Network asked him to come in and take over the stairwell.

“I really didn’t know how it was going to turn out,” he says. “The voice inside of me was like, ‘You’re at Cartoon Network, man. Don’t mess this up. You can do this.’”

Anderson had estimated that the project would take three months to complete, but he finished it in half that time. Initially, he had planned to draw in the solution with ink that would only show under black light, but that didn’t work out so well. “When I tried to use the marker, it wasn’t so invisible,” Anderson explains. So he worked with a photographer to take a series of pictures of the maze with blue tape arranged like “Pac-Man dots” along the correct route. Anderson then used Photoshop to draw in the solution and gave those images to Cartoon Network to accompany the wall piece. It’s a fun, unusual work that makes sense at the studio that produced lots of fun and unusual shows.

To illustrate how Anderson’s artwork fits in with the animation studio, Sorcher darts across the complex to show off all the cool items here. There are paintings by noted artists of famed Cartoon Network characters, and the staff has scribbled graffiti on the walls. Despite its corporate ties — Cartoon Network is part of the Turner family of TV stations, which falls under the greater Time Warner banner — this is an art-driven office. Sorcher estimates that nearly 400 of the employees here are artists. The shows that come out of this studio start out as storyboards, not scripts, in a way that’s similar to how animation greats such as Tex Avery and Chuck Jones worked. Much of what exists inside the studio is there to help the artists create, which extends to the art shows that the company hosts on-site. Sorcher says Anderson’s style jells well with what’s going on at the studio.

“I was kind of a fine artist, I can see him being a fantastic character designer, working in animation,” Sorcher says of Anderson. “Whatever he wants to do, he can choose. He’s of a type of talent that I think generally fits in with what we’re doing here, and the work reflects that as well.”

IAN ANDERSON STARTED DRAWING MAZES AS A YOUNG CHILD, BECAUSE HIS MOM WOULDN’T LET HIM PLAY VIDEO GAMES.
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**This Is Growing Up**

**ESTHER PEARL WATSON’S UNUSUAL CHILDHOOD REARS ITS HEAD IN HER DARK PAINTINGS**

**BY CATHERINE WAGLEY**

This week, a painter mines her strange childhood in a group show in Koreatown, and an artist screens a film as long as a typical workday at MOCA.

**eccentric dad, kinky horse**

“We ran out of gas at the gas station,” reads the hand-painted text at the top left corner of one of Esther Pearl Watson’s semi-autobiographical paintings. “We had to wait until Dad sold all the tools out of his trunk for gas money.” In this painting, a black car sits in the foreground. Light from the car windows glows orange, and planets and shooting stars hover in the bumpily, thickly ground. Light from the car metal sculptures of tower cacti by Dennis Corse paintings, to make sure visitors maintain a proper distance. Glass and metal sculptures of tower cacti by Dennis Hollingsworth coexist with Gary Lang’s psychadelic target paintings. But this show is a bit different from past shows at Ace, since the gallery’s longtime, mysterious maverick founder has been “let go.”

**Variations on darkness**

It’s the last week to see “Black,” a three-man show at Blum & Poe that consists entirely of black paintings. Chinese artist Zhu Jinshi’s *Wall of Air*, heavier-looking than its title sounds, is a line of massive, leaning canvases on wheels, which together span 65 feet. They were leaking liquid on the day I visited, the puddles on the floor making them seem particularly toxic and haphazardly industrial. Quentin Morris, a Philadelphia artist who works in his basement, paints black canvas discs over and over again. For decades, he’s been fixating on the color black, exploring its nuances, textures and depths, as a way to get at its cultural loadedness.

**Japanese painter Kōji Enokura is perhaps the most overtly poetic of the three. One of his black cotton paintings hangs at an angle, stretching from wall to floor, and a wood beam with blue paint splattered on it leans against the black-stained canvas he called Intervention No. 1. 2722 S. La Cienega Blvd., Mid-City; through June 25. (310) 836-2062, blumandpoe.com.**

**ambiguous escape**

The set for artist Adam Linder’s performance *Rein Paradiso* is a dark room on the Hammer Museum’s ground floor with a blue, green and gray tiled floor and ambiguous podiums set up in it. Linder, a trained dancer, choreographed this abstract performance specifically for Made in L.A., the Hammer’s biennial. According to the PR, the performers endeavor to escape the universality of modernism and find their way back to a more specific, individual way of being. This sounds abstract, and it is, but Linder’s abstractions tend to be sexy and mysteriously meta. 10899 Wilshire Blvd., Westwood; Wed., June 29 & July 6, 6:30 p.m.; Sun., July 3 & 10, 2:30 p.m. (310) 443-7000, hammer.ucla.edu.

**long day’s work**

Artist Kevin Jerome Everson’s film *Park Lanes* lasts eight hours, as long as a typical workday. Everson, who lives in Virginia, filmed it in a factory there that makes bowling alley supplies. He spent a week there with his camera, but in composing the film, he broke it up in the way a day would typically break down: arrival, lunch, breaks, departure. He shows workers painting and welding objects. “You know, I’m an art dude,” he said in a Q&A after his film screened in Chicago. So he’s always drawn to the parts of the manufacturing process that seem sculptural or painterly to him. It’s the sort of film you can drop in and out of, catching parts of the process. 152 N. Central Ave., downtown; Sun., June 26, 9 a.m. (213) 621-1741, moca.org.

**another comeback**

Ace Gallery’s newly opened show, “Selections,” is as epic as every show at Ace’s labyrinthine Wilshire Boulevard space has been. Light installations and disco balls glow in hallways. Young attendants watch over shimmering Mary Corse paintings, to make sure visitors maintain a proper distance. Glass and metal sculptures of tower cacti by Dennis Hollingsworth coexist with Gary Lang’s psychadelic target paintings. But this show is a bit different from past shows at Ace, since the gallery’s longtime, mysterious maverick founder has been “let go.” Douglas Chrismas — who came to the gallery business in the 1960s and has been sued about 60 times since then, by artists and clients — handed over the reigns to a bankruptcy trustee earlier this spring. He lost all control of his operation after it appeared he’d diverted funds (almost $17 million) and artwork before filing for bankruptcy a few years ago. So it’s a new era at Ace, but the same ambitious artists are still on view in the same staggeringly ambitious space. 5514 Wilshire Blvd., Mid-Wilshire; open indefinitely. (323) 935-4411, acegallery.net.
Alexandra Gersten-Vassilaros’ chances are the play won’t be involving. vivid characters, meaningful social commentary or rich and textured dialogue, chances are the play won’t be involving. Alexandra Gersten-Vassilaros’ Big Sky, directed by John Rando at the Geffen Playhouse, unhappily falls within these negative parameters. Although it perks up in Act 2, with a strong performance by Jon Tenney as a wounded alpha male lashing out at his loved ones, the story is, for the most part, bland and forgettable. Big Sky takes place in an upscale condo (a handsome scenic design by Derek McLane) at a ski resort in Colorado where Jack (Tenney) has gone to meet with a wealthy Wall Street operative, hoping to secure a position with his company after losing another job in finance a few months earlier. He’s brought with him wife Jen (Jennifer Westfeldt), 17-year-old daughter Tessa (Emily Robinson) and Jen’s gay longtime friend, Jonathan (Arnie Burton), whose struggling enterprise — the manufacture of designer pillows — Jack has been funding. Straight off we learn that Jen is having an affair — so serious (to her mind, anyway) that she plans to leave Jack, who initially has no idea that she has strayed and is puzzled by her chilly response to his amorous inclinations, still sparking after 18 years of marriage. Act 1 addresses this disconnect between them, discovered (much to his dismay) by Jonathan after he accidentally spots a text from Jen’s lover. We also learn that the spirited Tessa has a secret boyfriend, the half Native American, half Latino elevator operator in the building where the family resides in Manhattan. (It’s telling that, in the world of the play, the young man’s employment status makes him entirely unacceptable.) Act 2 heats up after Tessa is involved in an auto accident, with consequences that threaten Jack’s prospects. At this point, it’s almost possible to become engaged in the plot, mainly because Tenney brings such authenticity to the beleaguered Jack, while Robinson invests Tessa with sufficient individuality to transcend what might have come off as a generically rebellious teen. Burton, whose character is mostly a plot device, also is successful in making Jonathan a developed and sympathetic presence. Throughout, however, Westfeldt’s shallow portrayal of a whiny self-absorbed person, convinced that she’s somehow been wronged despite a lifetime of privilege, is profoundly off-putting, and underscores everything that’s wrong with thisusty and not terribly funny comedy.

**THE STUFF OF SOAP OPERA**

Big Sky is ultimately a play about well-to-do white people, minus any constructive social commentary.

**THE MARITAL PROBLEMS OF AN UPPER-MIDDLE-CLASS COUPLE ARE THE STUFF OF SOAP OPERA.**

The marital problems of an upper-middle-class couple (with particular focus on the vague discontent of an adulterous wife) are the stuff of soap opera. Without unique or vivid characters, meaningful social commentary or rich and textured dialogue, chances are the play won’t be involving. Alexandra Gersten-Vassilaros’ Big Sky, directed by John Rando at the Geffen Playhouse, unhappily falls within these negative parameters. Although it perks up in Act 2, with a strong performance by Jon Tenney as a wounded alpha male lashing out at his loved ones, the story is, for the most part, bland and forgettable.

**SOME LIKE IT ROUGH**

The action of Kim Davies’ wryly unsettling dark comedy takes place amid the rigidly constructed sexual role-playing of New York’s BDSM subculture. But the subject of Smoke, having its West Coast premiere at Rogue Machine Theatre, is the bobbing and weaving that characterizes the adversarial dynamic of power that Davies suggests is at play in any interpersonal relationship.

THE STORY OPENS IN THE KITCHEN (ON STEPHANIE KERLEY SCHWARTZ’S SLEEK, STAINLESS STEEL SET) OF A stylish Harlem apartment as a party is heard raging offstage (via Christopher Mosaicelli’s filtered sound). John (Patrick Stafford), who has slipped away from a gruesome-sounding bodily mutilation in the next room, is surprised while sneaking a cigarette by the younger Julie (Emily James), a novice to what is revealed as a sex party of bondage and domination coghonscenti.

Part of the surprise is that, although they’ve met by chance, John is an aspiring artist who works as the studio assistant to Julie’s father, a renowned if temperamental downtown fine-art photographer. But the two soon get beyond the awkward circumstances of the coincidence and begin aggressively flirting as John instructs Julie in the finer points of BDSM sex games and the consensual exchange in which a submissive gives a dominant partner power and authority over the submissive’s body. “People can get manipulative... sketchy,” John warns ominously. “Sometimes mistakes happen, shit happens.” But Julie proves game for anything and is undeterred even after she discovers the roll of very real kitchen knives stashed in John’s knapsack — his toys of choice for what turns out to be a particularly harrowing form of vaginal intercourse that few would be advised to try at home. As flirtation gives way to physical savagery and verbally abusive foreplay explodes into something more shockingly violent, the lines between what is only being enacted and what might be real increasingly blur as the two jockey for control of the game.

Both actors are persuasive in what plays as a tightly choreographed Apache dance of seesawing psychological subjugation and humiliation, and director Lisa James effectively ratchets the suspense by underlining the ever-present potential for real violence in her confident and charged production. While Davies’ script is choked with clever ironies, the coup de grace is ultimately how it uses the very spectacle of actors acting a stage fiction to underscore a broader allegorical representation of the performative and self-deceiving nature of all relationships. —Bill Raden

“PITCH-PERFECT CAST... SENSATIONALLY GRIPPING!
Akhtar’s riveting play thrusts us into an escalating global debate, humanizing the way we see the world.”
—Charles McNulty, Los Angeles Times
ENOUGH WITH THE RAPE, DUDES

Refn’s Neon Demon is a stylish giallo jolly until it tries to get real

BY APRIL WOLFE

et me tell you all the good things about Nicolas Winding Refn’s high-art, lowbrow horror film The Neon Demon before I tell you what I will not tolerate.

After Drive, Refn seems obsessed with his idea of Los Angeles, one where there’s always a full moon and no traffic, and everyone is speeding in sports cars with the tops down. The Neon Demon is different, though now Refn’s focused his energy on motels and modeling. Jesse (Elle Fanning) arrives in L.A., newly 16 and aware that she’s pretty enough to make some money from it. With only moths in her metaphorical change purse, she holes up in a seedy motel, where manager Hank (Keanu Reeves) is aggressively creepy and aggressively creepy and bluntly pedophilic. Here you have the central fairy-tale dilemma of Refn’s L.A. stories: Will wholesomeness win out over corruption? Naw, probably not.

Jesse’s a quintessential innocent in a breezy goddess dress, while veteran models — and frenemies — Gigi (Bella Heathcote) and Sarah (Abby Lee) wear an armor of form-fitting haute couture as they hazzle the new girl with talk about sex and “red rum” lipstick in a dance club’s vintage ’30s French Baroque bathroom. The many-mirrored restroom (borrowed from the historic Los Angeles Theatre) also reflects a multitude of velvet walls framing Jesse and her new makeup-artist friend Ruby (Jena Malone), while a hypnotic dance-beat soundtrack from Cliff Martinez drowns them in sound.

Whether or not you connect with Refn’s brand of over-the-top violence, you can’t deny that his attention to color, texture and music is nearly unmatched by other directors working today. Meticulously composed, each scene reveals a deep richness of production design, the camera lingering in slow motion (albeit sometimes a bit too long) to allow details such as the peeling, sickeningly floral wallpaper in fresh-meat model Jesse’s dingy motel room to sink in. There are dual realities present: Jesse’s gritty, dilapidated living situation and the abstract surreality of her modeling work, where the world is literally filled with seductive shapes and colors.

At a “show” where a naked body bound in a few leather straps levitates, suspended in black nothingness, strobe lights splash purple and pink on the beautiful bodies of these women, but in the surreal modeling world, that’s just par for the course. Refn is inventive with his choices to, say, depict a runway scene as Jesse in a black space barren but for neon triangles and a cave of mirrors where she can make out with herself. He’s also working within a tradition begun by the giallo directors of the 1970s, especially Mario Bava, whose fashion-themed horror flick Blood and Black Lace even shares a hypercolor palette with The Neon Demon.

And, just like giallo, Neon Demon eschews a cohesive story in favor of a “what if?” principle that moves it from scene to scene; Refn’s concern is the emotion of a moment, much like Dario Argento’s Suspiria, where the director has a naive ballerina wander into a roomful of razor blades. Refn’s concern is the emotion of a moment, much like Dario Argento’s Suspiria, where the director has a naive ballerina wander into a roomful of razor blades. Whether or not you connect with Refn’s script to screen.

Bidegain alters that dynamic bit by bit before upturning it entirely with a beautifully shot, out-of-nowhere set piece halfway through that shifts the focus from one character (and continent) to another; in the mire of unexpected appearances, John C. Reilly shows up for a hot minute as a maybe-helpful fellow searcher.

The strange, ever-changing result is, at times, as original as loose remakes come, with Bidegain using his lauded source material as a springboard for something rare: a “writer’s movie” that loses nothing in the jump from script to screen. —Michael Nordine

FRENCH WESTERN

LES COWBOYS UPDATES

THE SEARCHERS ITSELF

– AND PULLS IT OFF

Past is prologue, meaning that the directorial debuts of acclaimed screenwriters should be regarded warily — not everyone makes the transition as gracefully as Charlie Kaufman. In the case of Thomas Bidegain, who wrote A Prophet and Rust and Bone for Jacques Audiard, the result is a reimagining of The Searchers that transposes the story to the France of today, where a teenage girl has absconded with the Muslim (and potentially radicalized) boyfriend her parents didn’t know existed. Les Cowboys opens with aGallic hoedown in which the girl’s father (François Damiens), a Stetson-wearing Frenchman, pulls off a perfect country-Western twang on stage before realizing he doesn’t know where his 16-year-old daughter has gone.

The manner of her departure complicates her parents’ very idea of the girl, not least because her dad is given to calling Muslims “ragheads” — this incident brings out his true colors, which apparently do run.

Bidegain uses his lauded source material as a springboard for something rare: a “writer’s movie” that loses nothing in the jump from script to screen. —Michael Nordine

LES COWBOYS | Directed by Thomas Bidegain | Cohen Media Group | Royal

THE NEON DEMON | Directed by Nicolas Winding Refn | Written by Refn, Mary Laws and Polly Stenham | Amazon Studios and Broad Green Pictures | Citywide
“Eat That Question’ collects disparate concepts and perceptions and unifies them into a riveting film, delivered in my father’s own words. It’s a remarkable history lesson and serves as a gateway into his musical mind.”

-Dweezil Zappa

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NEEDS MORE LIGHTNING
GARY ROSS’ FREE STATE OF JONES CAN’T QUITE BRING ITS FASCINATING HISTORY TO LIFE

By Bilge Ebiri

Woodrow Wilson described D.W. Griffith’s notorious Civil War epic Birth of a Nation as “writing history with lightning.” Gary Ross’ Free State of Jones, which covers roughly the same period as Griffith’s film, is more like writing history with index cards. Diligent and informative but also fragmented and inert, it plays like a series of scenes and notes for a longer, more fleshed-out movie.

It’s easy to see the appeal of the story. In 1863, poor Mississippi farmer Newton Knight (Matthew McConaughey) led a rebellion of deserters and escaped slaves against the Confederacy, waging guerrilla warfare from the swamps and eventually declaring their county the “Free State of Jones.” After the war, Knight moved away from white society with his new wife, a war ally and former slave, Rachel (Gugu Mbatha-Raw). He also tried to help with the Reconstruction effort, but soon saw that the old racist laws were simply being replaced by new racist laws. The real Knight lived well into the 20th century; he died in 1922 having fathered 14 children.

On its surface, Free State of Jones seems like yet another story of a Great White Savior. That said, it’s a fascinating piece of history, and it’s to the filmmakers’ credit that they don’t falsely portray Newton Knight as a warrior for racial justice straight out of the gate — we watch his consciousness develop. This was a man enraged at first not at the racial politics of the South but at its class inequities. (By most accounts, this is factually accurate: Most of the residents of Jones County were much too poor to own slaves, and thus skeptical of the Confederacy.)

When we first meet Newt, he’s serving as a reluctant nurse in the Confederate army in 1862, immersed in the horror of the battlefield. He’s suspicious of the war (“I’m tired of helping them fight for their cotton,” he rails to his comrades, amid protestations that the war is really about “honor”), but he winds up deserting almost by accident, trying to save his fresh-faced nephew Daniel from the savagery of combat.

Upon returning home, Newt discovers Confederate soldiers have raided his and other families’ lands, seizing grain, hogs and corn, condemning the farmers to starvation. Meanwhile, a recent “20 Negro Law,” saying that anyone who owns 20 slaves can avoid military service, confirms to Newt that this is a case of “a poor man’s fighting a rich man’s war.”

After a run-in with the bounds of the local military police, Newt finds himself hiding out in the woods with a band of escaped slaves, secretly ministered to by Rachel, still in the service of her abusive white master. Among the runaways is Moses (Mahershala Ali), who jokes of a dog that bit Newt, “You must taste like we do, the way it latched onto you.” Slowly, the group becomes self-sufficient, as others find their way to them; after the Southern defeat at Vicksburg, their ranks swell seemingly overnight.

Ross’ career has encompassed both soft-focus Oscar bait and franchise fare. But as he proved with the first Hunger Games, he’s better with action movies than with prestige pictures. (Some will disagree: Seabiscuit and Pleasantville, for all their dusty reverence, were critical and awards-season successes.) Early on in Free State of Jones, as the story remains grounded in Newt’s experiences of combat and the urgency of his desertion and initial rebellion, we’re immersed in this world. McConaughey’s wide eyes and tense gestures express a compelling mixture of bewilderment and fear.

But as events accelerate — as the Confederacy is defeated and Reconstruction begins, along with the violent rise of the Ku Klux Klan — Ross loses the thread. The movie is overwhelmed by onscreen title cards doling out historical context, along with the occasional informative and/or inspirational speech.

I applaud the director’s thoroughness — he doesn’t want this to be another Hollywoodized bulldozing of complexity and veracity. But I gladly would have given up all those onscreen facts for made-up scenes of Knight and his brethren interacting, demonstrating what this rebellion and freedom meant for them.

The clutter doesn’t end there. Ross often cuts to a 1948 court case, when Newt and Rachel’s great-grandson was convicted under Mississippi’s miscegenation laws for marrying a white woman. That’s also an interesting story, but it’s doled out in flashes — grace notes, really — so that these characters, too, are denied their agency and individuality, becoming momentary.
pawns in the film’s attempt to illustrate a historical process instead of a human fact. It’s a bold move narratively, demonstrating that the past is never really past. But why choose the 1940s? Why not show history in dialogue with today?

Ross does throw in an occasional shot or moment that suggests what Free State of Jones had the potential to be: a group of mothers calmly walking to cut down the bodies of their hanged sons; a quiet exchange right after the war, when Rachel, now finally able to live with Knight, admires the feather bed she’ll sleep in for the first time in her life. And even as the film loses McConaughey’s physicality, relegating him to the background, it’s no surprise that the most effective dramatic imagination required is a noble one: He forsakes the attempt to illustrate a historical process instead of a human event to witness the slaughter of innocents by the usual movie-hero badass who can drop everyone in a single jump-scare with a couple minutes of such on-the-nose chatter that one figures it’s bald-faced exposition. It is, but that’s also just how people talk in this rainy Portland neighborhood, where every conversation is so bland you really have to concentrate just to pick out the nouns. Zariwny is a student of Alfred Hitchcock’s notion of suspense; instead of a bomb under a coffee table, he gives us an intruder hiding in a concert cellist’s apartment, but even as that looming threat can’t make riveting the plodding folky-jigging in the foreground. The cellist, Elizabeth (Louise Linton), wants her boyfriend to go to London with her while she takes a residency with... argh, it doesn’t matter, it’s all as bland as a milk sandwich. Meanwhile, the lurker lurks, and ludicrous distractions prevent Elizabeth from spotting him. Most of Zariwny’s credits as a production designer, so maybe it’s no surprise that the most effective scene shows the intruder interacting with the set, idly messeng with Elizabeth’s possessions while she’s asleep. A false ending makes the dawdling even more infuriating.
Misconception

and care for his parents, but also glean keen pressure on him to marry, reproduce as men, when there aren’t enough women. Yu is both messy and effective. First we think; educating women is the key) by

Talk–esque bits on the statistical realities of Rosling’s winning personality. It’s mates them for easy consumption. Yu’s presents a woman crying in a tranquil,

losing a loved one is hard enough without

Challenges of losing a loved one fit into

subtly captures changes in the relation-

couple, in matching traditional Korean outfits, is hugely endearing, and Moyoung doesn’t explicitly tell us how much time passes; the universal challenges of losing a loved one fit into a fleet 86 minutes in a way that feels

reasonable. But Yu redeems his pro-choice set: a too-easy display of clue-

is the worst kind of pornography for the

Ugandan journalist Gladys Kalibbala, who

pro-life work, educating women is the key) by

and talking heads in favor of watching the

Jo and Gye-yeul Kang have known each

and talking heads in favor of watching the

challenges of losing a loved one. The opening shot of the dramati-

committed to his competitive edge. The

into a fleet 86 minutes in a way that feels

the L.A. premiere of Collectionneuse.

A cerebral take on mourning, set

Anguish

He goes to the mound to cope with pressures off the

Pros and Cons of a Friend

The Phenom

swanning around in a top hat and tails. Cinematographer Ryan Samul’s masterful widescreen long shots reluctantly work their way to close-ups, the camera seeming to follow Hopper’s dictate that distance is vital to his competitive edge. The Phenom serves as an antidote to athleticism with calm discipline and a bullying dad (Ethan Hawke) who demands that his son master the rigor and relatability he lacks. The Phenom unfolds as a series of quiet, inclusive conversations that showcase subtle, insightful performances. Even Hawke’s blustering career criminals slide from bragadocio to awareness in a heart-

Hollywood's Golden Age.

Blue to A Clockwork Orange, Cinefamily/Silent Movie Theatre, 611 N. Fairfax Ave., Fairfax; Sat., June 25, 4 p.m.; $12 (323) 655-2510, cinefamily.org.

Jo and Gye-yeul Kang have known each

The Phenom

to their name than any other filmmaker, the most mov-

er had in some roles. The meticulous filmmaker’s

The Phenom

the Egyptian /Theatre opens its doors

and talking heads in favor of watching the

Jo and Gye-yeul Kang have known each


director, epitomized by the brainy girl-

nerve, epitomized by the brainy girl-

We privy to the keen pressure on him to marry, reproduce and care for his parents, but also glean

our how China’s one-child limit prizes male children but leaves them a pickle as men, when there aren’t enough women to go around. Yu lingers, following 29-year-old Bao until his self-imposed wife-finding deadline, his birthday. We’re privy to the

with calm discipline and a bullying dad (Ethan Hawke) who demands that his son master the rigor and relatability he lacks. The Phenom unfolds as a series of quiet, inclusive conversations that showcase subtle, insightful performances. Even Hawke’s blustering career criminals slide from bragadocio to awareness in a heart-

a sweet yet tragic portrait. (Abbey Bender)

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a cerebral take on mourning, set

Anguish

The opening shot of the dramati-

called My Love, Don’t Cross That River

One of the couple’s two dogs dies, and the other becomes pregnant and gives birth to adorable puppies, all while Byong-man approaches death. By focusing on the small details of Byong-man and Gye-yeul’s lives — from their humble, secluded home to their daily routines and glories — the film paints a sweet yet tragic portrait. (Abbey Bender)

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SEOUl SEARCHING

Let’s pretend the character of Long Duk Dong in John Hughes’ Sixteen Candles got to be the hero of his own movie, but he was placed in a Breakfast Club–like summer camp in Seoul for international Korean youth to learn their home culture. In writer-director Benson Lee’s Seoul Searching, unruly Westernized kids clash with their stoic, rules-driven faculty at just such a summer camp, rewriting — or rather correcting — history to include Asian-Americans in the canon of 1980s teen comedies. Justin Chon, best known from the Twilight franchise, plays Sid Park, a Sid Vicious–type bad boy with a good heart underneath it all. He leads the dorm of boys, who embody every teen caricature ever presented in Before I Die, but with the twist that everyone is Korean. Sergio (Esteban Ahn), a Korean-Mexican, is the Rico Suave of the bunch, while Korean-German Klaus (Teo Yoo) is the straitlaced guy. On the girls’ side, Grace (Jessika Van) is the over-sexualized, Madonna-worshipping bad seed who’s really just a mixed-up teen looking for a deeper connection. Every character gets to learn a lesson, and while the humor is nothing new, the situations are. A visit to the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea, for instance, is fraught with tension much stranger than the sticker that Isaac’s childhood friend, the movie’s opening character, left for him to find. (Pete Vonder Haar)

SEPTembers of Shiraz

It’d be easy to criticize the didacticism of Hanaa Weg’s screenplay (adapted from Dalia Sofer’s novel), the awkwardness of Adrien Brody’s and Salma Hayek-Pinault’s lead performances (with her attempt at an Iranian accent especially laughable) and the generic bombast of Mark Isham’s score in Wayne Blair’s Septembers of Shiraz. But its issues cut much deeper than these surface inadequacies. In post-revolutionary Iran, well-off Jewish couple Isaac (Brody) and Farnez (Hayek-Pinault) become the target of resentful, working-class revolutionaries. While the film aims for humane even-handedness, recognizing both Farnez’s lower-class condescension and the revolutionaries’ hypocrisy, the characters are so skin-deep that we never respond to them as people. Thus it’s difficult to fully buy into Isaac’s awakening of class consciousness when he offers to give up his assets to the revolutionary cause; it has been so little built up that the act seems more dictated by the script than Isaac’s wishes. The fact that the non-Iranian leads command most of the attention while real Iranians such as Shohreh Agdashloo (playing a maid with increasing revolutionary sympathies) and Iranian-American Anthony Azizi (as her hothead son) are relegated to supporting roles increases a discomfiting cultural-imperialist subtext to this well-meaning enterprise. Only when it decides to follow in the footsteps of Ben Affleck’s Argo and turn into an action thriller in its last act, though, does Septembers of Shiraz rise from dubious to truly offensive. (Kenji Fujishima)

SWISS ARMY MAN

People made a stink about the walkouts during the Sundance premiere of Swiss Army Man, the first feature film from music video–and-advertising geniuses the Daniels. It stars Daniel Radcliffe (Manny) as a farting, rotting corpse with superpowers and Paul Dano (Hank) as a sad-sack suicidal stomping through a forest. The easiest conclusion to jump to — and the one the filmmakers did — is that those walkouts didn’t like all the farting, or that they were uncomfortable with the talk of masturbation, death and pornography side by side with more emotional material. As a human who’s totally comfortable with all of those things, I’m pretty confident that people actually left the theater because the story is one-note and the movie is about 75 minutes too long. The Daniels (Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert) are some of the most inventive and inspired video-makers working today. Their tongue-in-cheek humor and bizarre, mismatched story elements have made for gorgeous musical accompaniment for artists like Battles, Tenacious D and Chromeo. Unfortunately, that mastery of the short form doesn’t do many favors for their first longform venture, where the story has to justify its length. Throughout, it’s as though the Daniels aren’t confident enough in their dialogue’s — or actors’ — ability to tell the story, so they jump around with insert and aside shots when they could be building character by keeping the camera on the protagonists. It’s admirable that they brought their always-interesting, never-boring renegade aesthetic to this movie, but there’s no need to Mountain Dew every scene. The film is beautiful, however, moody with sun-kissed lighting, Radcliffe is endearing, and Dano sells his weirdo in the woods with panache. (April Wolfe)

VIGILANTE DIARIES

Vigilante Diaries is based on an obscure TV series canceled after seven episodes in 2014 by the USA
**Neighborhood Movie Guide**

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**AMC UNIVERSAL CITY 30** (5930 Universal City Plaza) (818) 449-9260
A young Asian sidekick whose introduction is a cat-besuited Asian torturer and portrayal of women — including a harem sunglass. The stubbornly retrograde international cities in expensive suits and the Daniel Craig Bond, who strolls around wants to be James Bond — specifically and unable to pick a goddamn lane, also Sloan, clearly inspired by the Punisher midtier octane 89 with engine detergent. Glasgow and Armenia — it's more like expenses — including shoots in London, "high-octane" action, but after travel apering score suggests an aspiration to in chess metaphors. The Hans Zimmer–mastermind figure who talks exclusively cane sword—and–pinky ring variety, and a including a rich Armenian gangster of the generic as Sloan's knockoff Punisher, wav) Jason Mewes. The villains are as also wrote it, as a black-ops agent who calls himself "the Vigilante," a generic name for a character who's the store-brand version of Marvel's the Punisher. The film is less a story than a jumble of brand version of Marvel's the Punisher. name for a character who's the store-

The Vigilante can arrive. It's like the only thing to save herself and her baby before the filmmakers allow a kidnapped woman broken by a single scene in which the dog everything he wants out of his mom, who's got her own hang-ups, and that's how it goes from owner to owner, this dog becoming everything people need it to be. Greta Gerwig gets the chance to play grown-up Dawn Wiener, the desperate to poke holes in liberal culture and have it come from the right place, and wrapping it all up in the disarming charm of a little wiener dog, (April Wolfe)

**WIENER-DOG** A wiener dog is the perfect mascot for Todd Solondz's films. Dachshunds are ridiculous, but that zero-dignity waddle belies a much fiercer purpose: to hunt and kill small prey. Solondz's body of work, stretching from coming-of-age cringefest Welcome to the Dollhouse to his newest, Winner-Dog, has the look of cheesy, innocuous after-school drama, but his dialogue is set to destroy hypocrisy. Winner-Dog has some sharp teeth and stands on its own awkward little legs. The film follows a dachshund pup from owner to owner as a vehicle for spying on the humans’ lives. First up is a cold yuppy family, with mom and dad played by Julie Delpy and Tracy Letts. Their son projects on the dog everything he wants out of his mom, who’s got her own hang-ups, and that’s how it goes from owner to owner, this dog becoming everything people need it to be. Greta Gerwig gets the chance to play grown-up Dawn Wiener, the desperate to save herself and her baby before the Vigilante can arrive. It’s like the only M&M in a trail mix of methyltestosterone tablets, cut-up Slim Jims and goatee hair. (Chris Packham)
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PEACH, LOVE AND UNDERSTANDING
RIFF RAFF IS SERIOUS ABOUT HIS AMBITIOUS NEW PROJECT AND PERSONA, THE PEACH PANThER

BY JEFF WEISS

There are at least 10 people in the world who could successfully pull off the outfit that Riff Raff wears when he saunters into this Koreatown restaurant on a May afternoon. Even the professionally flamboyant Bishop Magic Don Juan would have to remove his top hat in tribute to the gummy worm-braided, snakeskin-shoed rapper.

When you bestow upon yourself the nickname Jody Highroller, you can’t show up in basketball shorts, unkempt hair and a cut-off tee. And if there’s anything we know for certain about Riff Raff, it’s that he doesn’t condone middle-of-the-mall shit.

His bespoke suit comes from Marc Jacobs; it’s got the animated glow of a psychedelic sunset, a Bellini or a Claude Monet masterpiece. The Laffy Taffy fluorescence is to be expected from a man whose latest alias is the Peach Panther, which doubles at the title of his latest album, released this week as part of a $4 million joint venture with the Neon Nation imprint, Stampede Management and BMG.

“It feels like this is my first real project,” Riff Raff says, taking a bite of a pizza and Stampede Management and BMG. If Riff Raff didn’t exist, not even Harmony Korine could have invented him. “I know people get it, but there are those who want to say that just because I’m having fun or ‘funny’ that I’m not an artist,” Riff Raff adds. “That doesn’t make sense. Whenever Jamie Foxx was on In Living Color and then you saw him sing, it didn’t take away from either of those things. I can’t change everyone’s perception of me, but I can change the quality of the work — and this album and movie are of undeniable quality.”

It features guest verses from Danny Brown, Gucci Mane, G-Eazy and Lil Durk. There are tributes to the Bay Area and Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim.

As he says himself, “There are a lot of party songs, and what’s wrong with a party?” It’s Riff Raff being Riff Raff — and not even the best James Franco impressions can compete.

An L.A. native, Jeff Weiss edits Passion of the Weiss and hosts the Shots Fired podcast. Find him online at passionweiss.com.

**FRI. JUNE 24**

**SPRINGFIELD LOCALS**

**SAT. JUNE 25**

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- **6/30** BROTHER B2B DIVINE
- **6/30** SOUNDPIECES THURSDAYS W/ SCRATCH DVA + IKONIK + TASSO
- **7/1** NIGHT BASS: SUMMER PHASES 2016 W/ KILL FRENSY, AC SLATER
- **7/2** KLRU LA - LA BLACK PROUD
- **7/2** LASER THING
- **7/2** CED
- **7/3** THE BONDAGE BALL
- **7/5** BLITZED
- **7/7** SOUNDPIECES THURSDAYS W/ COMPRA + GREAZUS + SIRENTASS + TICKLISH
- **7/8** KILLAHURTZ
- **7/8** TARRUS RILEY
- **7/9** THE DEFECTS (1ST LA APPEARANCE), TOTAL CHAOS
- **7/9** “REMEMBER” ALL VINYL ALL NIGHT (HOUSE & DISCO CLASSICS EDITION)
- **7/14** SOUNDPIECES THURSDAYS W/ MIKHAIL, MICHIE B, NICO LUMINOUS
- **7/21** SOUNDPIECES THURSDAYS W/ X&G + HUXLEY ANN
- **7/28** THE LIFE AND DEATH TOUR 2016 W/ TERROR, POWER TRIP, HARMS WAY
- **7/3** LATIN INDEPENDANCE PARTY
- **7/7** L.A. DRONES
- **7/16** DESTROYER 666
- **7/20** NAIVE THIEVES
- **7/24** THE LIVING SESSIONS AND SUNSET ECLECTICO PRESENT: GIRL ROCK LA! 4TH EDITION
- **8/24** TENTH DIMENSION
- **7/3** LATIN INDEPENDANCE PARTY
- **7/7** L.A. DRONES
- **7/16** DESTROYER 666
- **7/20** NAIVE THIEVES
- **7/24** THE LIVING SESSIONS AND SUNSET ECLECTICO PRESENT: GIRL ROCK LA! 4TH EDITION
- **8/24** TENTH DIMENSION

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- **TUESDAYS**
  - TUESDAYS
  - LOS GLOBOS LOCALS FOUNDATION REGGAE

**SAT. JUNE 25**

**SAT. JUNE 25**

**COMING SOON:**

- **7/3** LATIN INDEPENDANCE PARTY
- **7/7** L.A. DRONES
- **7/16** DESTROYER 666
- **7/20** NAIVE THIEVES
- **7/24** THE LIVING SESSIONS AND SUNSET ECLECTICO PRESENT: GIRL ROCK LA! 4TH EDITION
- **8/24** TENTH DIMENSION

**SUN. JUNE 26**

**COMING SOON:**

- **6/23** REVERIE
- **6/23** PRISM SOUNDS
- **6/23** JUST JENNY’S LOCAL TRIP
- **6/25** BEAUTIFUL: A ONE WOMAN PLAY BY JOZANNH MARIE
- **6/27** AN AFRICAN CITY
- **6/29** SOULS: A MUSIC COMPETITION
- **6/29** SKITZO SERIES
- **6/30** SHOWTIME ENTERTAINMENT GROUP PRESENTS: THE PLAYGROUND
- **6/30** JUST JENNY PRESENTS LOCAL LUSH
- **6/30** SUMMER SAVAGE WAVY LIT PARTY
- **7/1** LA INEDITA
- **7/2** HANG TIME
- **7/3** COMEDY CRUSH

**TUE. JUNE 28**

**COMING SOON:**

- **7/3** LATIN INDEPENDANCE PARTY
- **7/7** L.A. DRONES
- **7/16** DESTROYER 666
- **7/20** NAIVE THIEVES
- **7/24** THE LIVING SESSIONS AND SUNSET ECLECTICO PRESENT: GIRL ROCK LA! 4TH EDITION
- **8/24** TENTH DIMENSION

**THE MOB**
Wrangling you from the Isle of Wight. I never thought I’d get here!
I first heard of the place because Jimi Hendrix played one of his last shows at the Isle of Wight Festival in August 1970. Hendrix was set to play on the 30th. His sets have the feel of a celebration and tribute and work quite well. The audience is into it. What a score! Two members of The Who (all of them) played, “Somebody to Love” is filling the air and Adam Lambert is showing off with his vocal gymnastics. The man can sing his ass off. The audience is into it.

In the festival setting, I have become used to hearing bands whose careers never seem to end. The night before, The Who (all two of them) headlined to great approval. It’s almost as if festivals are the gateway to dreams of the past, partially realized for an hour or two.

I reckon it must be a hell of a thing to be in Brian May’s shoes. You were in one of the greatest bands ever, with a singer who was beyond belief, and then he was gone. You are sitting on one of the best catalogs of recorded music and the only people playing it are in tribute bands. No wonder you might decide to get a new singer and get back out there.

There are probably thousands of people watching who weren’t alive when Freddie Mercury passed away in November 1991. Sounds like they’re having a great time. Now and then, a naked Brian May chord floats through the air and it’s just perfect.

There is a strange eternity and simultaneous rapid deterioration to rock music and its practitioners. The music lives forever, but the humans who make it are maturing and rotting gracefully, under far more scrutiny than regular folks. That these two bands still tour might strike some as a bit of an oversight, but at a festival, the sets have the feel of a celebration and tribute and work quite well.

I performed hours ago and it was fine, but not at all interesting compared to what happened the day before, when I got a fan boy thrice.

I had a day off. The band in our production is also Iggy Pop’s band, so we got here early yesterday for their set.

I was walking to the main stage when I first heard of the place because Jimi Hendrix played one of his last shows at the Isle of Wight Festival in August 1970. Hendrix was set to play on the 30th. His sets have the feel of a celebration and tribute and work quite well. The audience is into it.

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Cherry Glazerr, Sex Stains
@ TROUBADOUR
Led by singer-guitarist Clementine Creevy, young phoms Cherry Glazerr play deceptively simple, catchy songs that twist together strands of garage, punk, power pop and psychedelia. On the quartet’s 2014 album, *Hazel Princess* (Burger Records), Creevy transforms seemingly mundane subject matter (“Grilled Cheese,” “Bloody Bandaid”) into pleasingly enigmatic strangeness, and she’s positively chilling when she fully reveals her despair and anger (“White’s Not My Color This Evening”). Propelled by Sean Redman’s hypnotic bass line, Creevy finds unusual new ways to combine the same old influences on “Dollaz,” segueing from a languidly bluesy (“White’s Not My Color This Evening”).

Bassrush Presents Funktion
@ REGENCY THEATER
The cream of the Bassrush Experience from EDC’s BassPod stage makes its way to Los Angeles for Funktion with two nights of head-splitting, vomit-inducing drum ‘n’ bass — and yes, that’s the best kind. On Friday, Matrix & Futurebound cull from their sharply crafted, flawless productions, which includes Prototypes, CYANTIFIC and Inside Info. You can hear a taste of this on the Matrix & Futurebound-curated, 50-track Bassrush 1.0 compilation, available the day before the event. If your eardrums aren’t blown and your limbs aren’t entirely reduced to rubber, they will be by the end of Saturday’s separately ticketed lineup, which includes the return of inimitable DnB leaders Teddy Killerz and tech don Audio, who is repping his newly released, aptly titled *Beastmode* album. Also Saturday, June 25. —Lily Moayeri

The Roots
@ THE FORUM
The Roots’ incredible flexibility and ability to enliven every comedic drinking-game stunt or bizarre musical collaboration on *The Tonight Show With Jimmy Fallon* often obscures just how heavy of a band they can still be. Although lineups have steadily evolved since the days of *Things Fall Apart* and *Phrenology*, founding members Black Thought and Questlove continue to make ambitious records, including two multilayered and trippy concept albums in a row, *Undun* and ... And Then You Shoot Your Cousin. Characters wander through a dreamtime juxtaposition of sweet melodies and more chaotic sounds from the outside world, with jazz and soul and hip-hop tumbling down the same psychedelic staircase. Each album is a distinctly different interior travelogue through modern society. It’s difficult to imagine any other late-night talk-show band pulling off anything so artistically ambitious. —Falling James

Los Tigres del Norte, Café Tacvba
@ THE FORUM
Straight outta Sinaloa — by way of San Jose, California — norteño/conjunto kings Los Tigres del Norte rock the people with their “real-life” tales about life and love in a crazy-ass world. The multi-Grammy-winning band bunched themselves and the norteño genre into the stratosphere with shockingly scabrous corridos about the cross-border drug trade and illegal immigration, and they have a wicked way of turning lively party sounds inside out to explore the darker joys of love gone bad, then good, then bad again. A ferociously tight musical unit whose redefining norteño shreds a wild mix of bolero, cumbia, rock and waltzes, Los Tigres are also a right-on bunch whose success allowed them to create the Los Tigres del Norte Foundation, which recently donated $500,000 to the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center. Opening set by Mexico City’s finest, Café Tacvba. —John Payne

Reggae Night with Burning Spear
@ HOLLYWOOD BOWL
Burning Spear reportedly is billing this as his final concert in California. Of course, the legendary reggae singer has been talking about retiring for years, but the man also known as Winston Rodney is now 71 years old. Any chance to see him in concert is precious and mandatory, especially in an era when so much modern reggae is little more than escapist beach music or the soundtrack to sports videos. Then and now, Rodney has always been a truth-teller, cutting through the fog of history and social oppression with his landmark 1975 album, *Marcus Garvey*, an inspirational homage to the Jamaican visionary who worked for economic justice and racial equality. Throughout all of reggae’s ensuing changes over the decades, Rodney has remained positive and just as uplifting as his insistently unwavering rhythms. —Falling James

**Mon 6/27**

Steady Holiday, The Bulls, Water Slice, Honey Child
@ THE SATELLITE
Dreamy pop comes in several enchanting flavors tonight. Headliner and monthlong resident Dre Babinski, the brains behind *Steady Holiday*, creates a lulling mood through delicate murmurs and gently distant musical backing on her just-released debut album, *Under the Influence*. “Open Water” is an aptly shimmering trance of whispered confessions, while the title track is a curiously atemporal mingling of muted xylophone and Babinski’s soothing vocals. The Bulls’ Anna Bulbrook casts aloft similarly gauzy reveries that are anchored by former The Duke Spirit bassist Marc Sallis’ post-punk riffs, while Patrick Phillips vaporizes his hazy vocals as *Water Slice*. Honey Child chanteuse Claire McKeown calls forth a more lavishly dramatic melding of operatic grandeur and sugary girl-group melodrama as she pours her heart out on “Wrap You Up in Tomorrow” while backed by a 15-piece choir. —Falling James
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with JASON BENTLEY
Anderson .Paak
@ THEATRE AT ACE HOTEL

Even before his fantastic Coachella performance, which featured Dr. Dre and Kendrick Lamar, raising his profile to a larger audience, Anderson .Paak was building a strong local following. His terrific sophomores album, Malibu, was released in January and turned the 30-year-old Oxnard native into a name that quickly resonated with music fans. Of course, being endorsed by Dr. Dre, who featured .Paak prominently on 2015’s Compton, didn’t hurt, but the former marijuana farmer’s fusion of smooth, vintage R&B and steely hip-hop showcases a versatility that separates him from the rest of the 2016 XXL Freshman class. Working with the likes of DJ Premier, Flying Lotus, Madlib and 9th Wonder will do that, but it’s his performances that have proven .Paak to be worthy of his lofty stature as a rising star. —Daniel Kohn

Death Valley Girls,
Peach Kelli Pop
@ THE ECHO

On their new album, Glow in the Dark, Death Valley Girls have songs called “Disco” and “Death Valley Boogie,” but they might be more accurately titled “Loud Hard Rock” and “Even Louder Garage Punk.” Guitarist Larry Schmuel uncoils thick power chords as Bonnie Bloomgarden belts out her soaring vocals with a ramblerous defiance. The L.A. quartet have their occasional gentler moments — if only to prove they can, or perhaps to make up for so much otherwise unrelenting aggression — such as the blearily poppy “Pink Radiation,” a velvet-shrouded hymn that’s lit up by reverential keyboards before it passes through a subway tunnel of climactic reverber. Moments later, the band are rumbling again, as Bloomgarden claims her social dominance on “I’m a Man Too.” Peach Kelli Pop are indeed peachy and poppy but with a lot of punk energy. —Falling James

Betty Bryant
@ DESCANSO GARDENS

Musicians from Kansas City, Missouri, that swingin’-est of American jazz towns, ooze elegance and are masters of the bullent, blues-informed groove characteristic of piano titans Count Basie, Mary Lou Williams, Jay McShann and Betty Bryant. The KC-born jazz singer-pianist was mentored by McShann himself before she arrived here circa 1955, and Bryant has been enchanting Los Angeles audiences ever since. Her combination of a deceptively relaxed, light touch — both vocally and on the keys — and subtle, soul-deep sincerity invariably conjures a thrilling, atmospheric earful. Whether she is swinging through an upbeat rhythm number or selling a smoldering torch-song tour de force, Bryant is a glorius proponent of a singular jazz style, one that blends KC ka-pow with frosty L.A. cocktail-blues cool. —Jonny Whiteside

Sky Ferreira
@ EL REY THEATRE

If you were looking for some nice ‘n’ easy electro-pop fluff to brighten your day, then Sky Ferreira’s gnarled brand is going to scare you clean away. The young L.A.-born singer-composer (and sometime model) has found a matching sound for her trash-chic persona, flailing in whirlpools of fatalism; she sings most songs as if knowing that she’ll always be misunderstood, but she won’t be fucked with. If she and her music are not always exhilarating for their depth-plumbing and passionate cloud-clawing, they are supemely rewarding for their honesty and rare charisma, where all the hyperdrama merely amplifies something too true deep inside. Sky Ferreira has a million things to hide, but she seems tired of hiding them. You can hear that in most every track on her last album, 2013’s Night Time, My Time (Capitol). —John Payne

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Feel's
@ THE BOOTLEG

Hopefully you didn’t miss the now-sold-out full-length debut by L.A. foursome Feel’s earlier this year, because it’s just the kind of monster you’d wanna make part of your life. It’s produced with heretically sealed precision by local wild man Ty Segall — who has also featured Feel's' Laena Geronimo and her violin on his own recent projects — and it’s nothing short of ferocious from the first note, a stylistic zig-zag that takes punk and grunge and just a little bit of the no-rules art-pop of Sparks and Kate Bush and turns it into nine tight songs that never do exactly what you’d expect. Feel’s could’ve found a place on 120 Minutes back in the ’90s, but they sound great alongside Burger and Lollipop bands right now, simply because they do what they do with no distractions or hesitation, just total commitment. —Chris Ziegler
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9007 W. Pico Blvd., L.A. Mr. FujiWiji, Sat., June 25, 9 p.m., $10; Eaves, Violence, Abyss X, Dangell XXX, Maral, Sat., June 25, 9 p.m., $5. La Banda Skalavera, Hiera Mala, La Infinita, Blanco y Negro, Sun., June 26, 7 p.m., $5.

THE VIPER ROOM:


For more listings, please go to laweekly.com.
COUNTRY & FOLK

BOULEVARD MUSIC: 4316 Sepulveda Blvd, Rocky Neck Bluegrass, String Madness, Sat., June 25, 8 p.m., $15. The Noral Twins, Sun., June 26, 8 p.m., $4.

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- June 26, 8 p.m, $39-$51.50. The Forum, See Music Pick.

**DANCE CLUBS**

**CREATE NIGHTCLUB:**
6021 Hollywood Blvd., L.A. What So Not, Fri., June 24, 10 p.m., $30-$55. Unmrt Ozaan, Jack Novak, Sat., June 25, 10 p.m, $17-$55. Slander, Thu., June 30, 10 p.m, $49-$120.

**COUTURE:**
1640 N. Cahuenga Blvd., L.A. Butch, Fri., June 18, 10 p.m., TBA. Lila, Doc Martin, Blakaat, Wed., June 29, 10 p.m., TBA. Aaron Jackson, Freefall, Thu., June 30, 9 p.m, TBA.

**LOUISIANA:**
3040 Sunset Blvd., L.A. So Far Gone, with Gun Garcia, Magazzelle, Sean G, Fri., June 24, 10 p.m, DJ Cornbreeze, Noa James, Cam Gnarly, with Gun$ Garcia, Magglezzz, Sean G, Fri., June 24, 10 p.m, TBA. Shiba San, Motez, Dom Kennedy.

**SOUND NIGHTCLUB:**

**UNION NIGHTCLUB:**
4067 W. Pico Blvd., L.A. Brothel, Divine, White Katana, Noize, Sosul, Thu., June 30, 9 p.m, $3; Scratch DWA, Jiconka, Tasso, Juke Bounce Werk, Thu., June 30, 9 p.m, $10.

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**BETTY BRYANT:**
With Lawrence Taylor, 8 p.m., TBA. The Fonda Theatre, 6126 Hollywood Blvd.

**ANDERSON PAAK & THE FREE NATIONALS:**
6 p.m., TBA. The Theatre at Ace Hotel, 929 S. Broadway, L.A. See Music Pick.

**YELLOW SUN:**
Thurs., June 30, 9 p.m, $27. El Rey Theatre, 5515 Wilshire Blvd., L.A. See Music Pick.
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SPEARMINT RHINO CITY OF INDUSTRY
COME MEET XXX SUPERSTAR
Nikki Benz
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FLESHLIGHT GIRL

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11PM & 1AM EACH NIGHT

June
24TH & 25TH
Live on Stage!

Yuri Beltran
XXX SUPERSTAR
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This coupon is good for 1/2 off entry into Spearmint Rhino - City of Industry. Not valid during special events. One person per coupon only. Cannot be combined with any other offer.
LA WEEKLY Expires 07-31-16
Our summer comedy camps attract students from all over the world to learn improv, make friends, and perform on our stage.

Monday through Friday 9am - 5pm

Students are grouped by ages 8-15, 11-15, and 14-18. No previous experience is needed. Camp ends with a free show where the students show off what they’ve learned!

Each day students rotate through three subjects:

Improv: An intro to the rules of improv, saying yes, working together, listening, and having fun.

Sketch Comedy: An intro to the basics of writing sketch comedy scenes.

MUSICAL IMPROV: Learn to work together, listening, and responding through three subjects:

Each day students rotate through three subjects:

LEAD TECHNICAL WRITER

Innovative research market firm seeks f/t lead technical writer. Requires degree in information design or journalism with more than 2 years prior infographic or graphic design experience, plus experience with Adobe Creative Suite, MS Office, Adobe Premiere, Adobe After Effects, and Joomla. No travel or relocation job. Job is in Culver City CA. Send resume to: Cherry Blygh, Office Manager, Vital Findings, LLC, 5037 Jeffson Blvd., Ste. E, Culver City, CA 90232

Accountant: Analyze, ex-

amine & prep accounting records/tax returns. Req’d: BA in Bus Administration, Accounting, or 2 yrs of exp. Mail resume: CWA United, Inc. 5727 W. 6th St. #512 LA, CA 90020


Budget Analyst: Examine prepare budget in con-


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insider sales Reps. Earn 5% of each sale. M-F 9-5.5 part time positions also available please call 818-874-6750 ask for Dilan

Farmers Group Inc. Los Angeles, CA seeks Program Manager for Digital Marketing IT department, to plan/initiate/manage infor-

mation technology IT projects, lead/guide the work of technical staff, serve as liaison between business & technical aspects of projects, plan project staging, assess business implications of each stage, monitor progress to assure deadlines/standards/cost targets are met. Occasional travel in U.S. required. Apply at: Farmers.com Careers, Job ID: 160004GC

Graphic designer: Develop overall layout and produc-

tion design. Gachee Corporation, 500 Lakewood Center Mall, Lakewood, CA 90712 bachelor’s degree in Fine Arts, Graphic design or related.

Healthcare Market Development Analyst, Los Angeles, CA at Hospital. Req’s: Master of Healthcare Administration. Req for analyzing healthcare trends for planning/development of strategic goals & delivery of healthcare to the hospital patients. Resumes to: Melissa san-

bria@hpmedcenter.com

Help wanted live in assistance. 18+ Good w/ Windows 8 $800 per mo + car 713-583-8859 or Inda25miller6@hotmail.com

Seeking an experienced Toner Sales Closer!

Great working environment. Great Pay $550-557 Jennifer

Senior Graphic Designer

sought by Raap LLC in Los Angeles, CA. Apply the principles of graphic design to create designs for illustrated, woven, and printed fabrics. Send resume to: Sandi Balester, Raap LLC, 854 S. Broadway, Suite 700, Los Angeles, CA 90014

Senior Software Engineer

sought by Margasoft Corporation in Burbank, CA. Responsible for developing software for the company’s clients. Send resume to: Nare Verssenigan, Margasoft Corp., 290 E Verdugo Ave, Suite 207, Burbank CA 91502 or Email to career@margasoft.com

TELEMARKETING

Toner/cartridge co. exp. people needed in Santa Monica. FT/PT. Starts $12 -$15/hr + bonuses + Commission Call Gary Stevens 866-405-9651


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Religious Education Direc-

tor: F/T, Nonprofit Orthodox Church; Conduct pastoral activities. Master of Divinity. Resume: Los Angeles Sefi II Presbyterian Church # 760 S. Westminster Ave., L.A., CA 90005

sales manager: High School GED w/ Min. 2 yrs exp. 40 hr/wk. Mail Resume: Mega Sign, Inc. at 6060 Floilla St, Commerce, CA 90040

Senior Software Engineer in Los Angeles, CA. Analyze & write reqs to determine feasibility in time & cost constraints. Dev enterprise apps & integ w/ legacy sys. in house apps. Use Visual C# .Net Platform, MS SQL & Oracle. Send resume to: Newcom Corporation, 4711 Wilshire Blvd., Ste 205, Los Angeles, CA 90010

Telemarketers wanted 7:30 am to 1:00 pm Mon-Fri in Burbank. Pay starts at $10 per hr plus bonuses. No experience needed, will train on site. Call today! 818-861-8520

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Senior Account Executive - LA Weekly

Sales Manager

High School GED w/ Min. 2 yrs exp. 40 hr/wk. Mail Resume: Mega Sign, Inc. at 6060 Floilla St, Commerce, CA 90040

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