THE CULT OF DAVID SABASTIAN

IS THE UNDERGROUND RAPPER, FASHION DESIGNER AND VISUAL ARTIST AN INFLUENCE ON CELEBRITIES — OR IS IT ALL IN HIS HEAD?

BY PETER HOLSLIN
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MOVIE TO-DO LIST.

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THE CULT OF DAVID SABASTIAN

Is the 25-year-old underground rapper, fashion designer and visual artist an influence on celebrities — or is his mark on the mainstream a figment of his creative imagination?

BY PETER HOLSLIN • PHOTOGRAPHY BY AMANDA LOPEZ

It's after 8 p.m. on a Tuesday in March, and David Sabastian is running late for an orgy. He doesn't have a car — he doesn't even have a driver's license — but he's expecting to be picked up by a friend and whisked off to a house full of girls who like to paint one another while tripping on 'shrooms and LSD.

He can't leave yet, though. He has to finish his verse for “I'm Surfin.”

In a control room at No Excuses Studios in Santa Monica, a Persian rug is spread across the hardwood floor. Sabastian is standing in the recording booth, peering at the rhymes jotted into his iPhone; a lamp on a wooden stool emits a soft yellow glow. The studio is owned by Interscope Records, and it sits at the end of a winding alley off a main boulevard — a rarefied place where the likes of Kendrick Lamar and Selena Gomez have recorded. Sabastian settles in comfortably, ordering the engineer to turn down the reverb on the vocal monitors.

“I don't like my voice right now,” he says through Auto-Tune effects.
Hollywood is full of strivers. In music circles, you might spend a decade hustling in the background. Many never end up getting a shot, and that's just how it goes.

“That’s the sad part of it, kind of,” says John Seabrook, author of a recent book on pop music, _The Song Machine: Inside the Hit Factory_. “There’s only a few people who make it, of course.”

In this sea of aspiration, Sebastian has been working as hard as he can to break out. He lives with his mom in a townhouse apartment complex in Torrance, light-years away from Hollywood’s glitz and glamour. But he breezes past event cordons with confidence, and his phone is always ringing with opportunities for art commissions, modeling gigs, parties, events, video shoots and recording sessions with the ANTI Society crew.

“I don’t know if you know your purpose, but you probably have a divine purpose that is bigger than you could even imagine,” he says. “And it’s probably just gonna smack you in the head one day. Me, I know what my purpose is. I knew what it was since I was a kid, and I feel like me not living in that purpose — what am I doing? You know?”

In his junior year, Sebastian says, he started making DIY party outfits to pursue fashion full-time. Putting together a DIY portfolio of pen-and-Sharpie-drawn designs, he hustled his way to a Las Vegas fashion convention and then went door-to-door selling his wares to designers on Melrose and Fairfax. He’d sneak into parties and awards shows, blowing people away with his crazy outfits — looking like Johnny Depp from _Cruel Intentions_.

“I read in a book that the easiest way to become the person you want to become is to just become them,” he says. “Pick someone and then just mirror them. So that’s kinda what I did.”

In music circles, you might spend a decade hustling in the background. Many never end up getting a shot, and that’s just how it goes.

“THEY ARE REALLY BUILDING AN EMPIRE.” —INTERSCOPE A&R EXECUTIVE RAY DANIELS, DESCRIBING THE ANTI CREW
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Pirates of the Caribbean one day, popping wheelies on a BMX bike in a mink coat the next.

Sometime in the late ’00s, Sebastian was walking down the street with a group of rabbis — investors for a short-lived apparel venture he was working on — when he was approached by a tall, muscular fellow who introduced himself as Jonathan St. Gian (pronounced “Saint John” and styled as St.gian). He told Sebastian he’d been seeing him around town. He’d even spotted him at an exclusive “white party” put on by Sean “Diddy” Combs, where Sebastian had sported the dress code with the gold trim on his outfit.

St. Gian is 48 with enormous biceps, steely eyes and a taste for fashion-design outfits. In conversation, he’s a consummate name-dropper and commands an encyclopedic recall of music industry history. He recalls that he wanted to know more about this curious character.

“I think I can read most people’s stories quickly, because I’ve been all over the world. I’ve traveled everywhere,” he says. He’s a fan of author Malcolm Gladwell’s treatises on cool-hunting and success, and he has an eye for people who stand out.

“Sometimes you could be talking to a fake. … You could be a kid who’s emulating an authentic kid. So you go, ‘Take me to your leader,’” St. Gian says. But Sebastian? “He is definitely the leader.”

On a Monday afternoon in May, Sebastian sizes up a blank wall in his friend’s fashion showroom. He’s on the fourth floor of a building in downtown’s Flower District, and big windows open out to the city. The room has blank white walls — an ideal space for stylists, creative directors and social media “influencers” to stage photo shoots and scope out menswear fashion, and for Sebastian to fuck with their heads.

Sabastian’s tools are simple, just some black acrylic paints and oil-paint pens. He hasn’t made any sketches ahead of time, but in a matter of hours — including some follow-up the next afternoon — he covers the wall with an apocalyptic mural like something out of the Book of Revelation. A black Jesus, an anthropomorphic condom, a person in a KKK hood, a police officer, a Black Panther, a rabbi, an Arab militant and a demon with the words “THUG LIFE!” written on his back are all dancing in a circle in front of a flaming pyre of fashion logos and Yeezy sneakers. Little people are bowing down in front of a Space Odyssey–style monolith bearing the “Wi-Fi” logo. A Simpsons–style caricature of Donald Trump is raising his fists, his head bearing devil horns.

It’s an overwhelming piece of work — volatile, at times outright offensive, but also a fine reflection of Sebastian’s ethos. He’s so in tune with pop culture that he’s gained access to an exclusive fashion showroom, and once he gets inside, he cranks up the intensity 1,000 percent and fences everyone the bird.

“He lives it,” says his friend Luis Cano, who runs the downtown showroom/creative agency, when asked about the meaning of the ANTI Society to which Sebastian belongs. “He just saw the reality of life and doesn’t fuck with it.”

The challenge for Sebastian, though, is to get people to actually notice his particular revolution. Not everyone will feel mobilized by a picture of a KKK guy with “Black Lives Matter” emblazoned across his chest. Bringing Sebastian to a wider audience is where St. Gian comes in.

St. Gian’s official title is CEO for ANTI Society, which he runs as a management company and record label. ANTI recently acquired a lease for a studio and office space in Van Nuyas, and it represents three local hip-hop artists: Sebastian, FOREVER ANTi PoP and a three-member girl group named B.O.Y. (Better Off Young). St. Gian’s perhaps most promising client, FOREVER ANTi PoP, is a virtual unknown but one who was recently signed to Interscope on the strength of a handful of demos. He’s grown from a topline writer (working behind the scenes coming up with melodies for songs) into a rapper, singer and producer — with a strong command of pop forms and a taste for intuitive ingenuity.

Ray Daniels, an A&R executive at Interscope, has been working with ANTi PoP and the rest of the ANTI crew, and he’s stoked about their work.

“He is very focused on the small things, as well as the big picture,” Daniels says of St. Gian in an email. “He knows where he’s going. They are really building an empire with what they’re doing.”

St. Gian considers himself the man behind the talent, investing time and money to develop Sebastian and the other artists on the ANTI roster, hoping to pull off what Anthony “Top Dawg” Tiffith has done with Kendrick Lamar, or what Christian and Kelly Clancy are doing with Odd Future.

A former model from the projects of North Philadelphia, St. Gian spent the ‘90s walking runways for designers like Jean Paul Gaultier and Dolce & Gabbana. He got his start in the music business in the mail room for the parent company of New Kids on the Block, and in the late ’90s he assembled a multicultural boy band of his own, Youth Asylum, while working at Quincy Jones’ Qwest Records. The band did not last long — its best-known song was a flimsy acoustic/hip-hop hybrid ballad called “Jasmine,” and its run came to an unceremonious close when Qwest was shuttered in 2000.

When Sebastian first met St. Gian, he wasn’t making music. He was doing design and creative direction work for St. Gian’s artist J. Blue, a former member of Youth Asylum, who was trying to launch a solo career as a rapper. Sebastian would mention he could rap, too, and St. Gian would balk. But one day in 2011, St. Gian finally took the aspiring MC to a studio to record a single.

“I’m just really ready to fucking blow up. I’ve worked so hard. I’ve been poor. I’ve been homeless.” —DAVID SABASTIAN
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× 10 | the ensuing years learning piano,
improving his rap skills and slimming down
at the gym.

St. Gian says he’s now in talks to sign Sa-
bastian to another record deal, including a
possible one with hit-making producer Alex
da Kid’s label KIDinaKORNER. Sebastian
also recently recorded a new mixtape called
I Am ANTI; its most impressive track is “I’m
Fucking Hate You,” a bitter but intimate
dote to an ex-girlfriend. As FOREVER ANTI
PoPlays down warm organs and a ‘90s-style
break-beat, Sebastian issues a tirade of re-
criminations and reminiscences about ANTI
days past: “We created our own language/I
inspired you to start painting/All day we
would fucking get creative/Wo store your
momma’s car then took it to Las Vegas.”

These could be promising times for Sabas-
tian. But as he’s grown as an artist, he says
he’s also attracted enemies.

Every trendsetter needs an arch-nemesis,
and for the past four years Sebastian’s
been Travis Scott.

The Texas rapper of “Antidote” fame has
skyrocketed to the mainstream in recent
years, but he’s also faced accusations of
committing hip-hop’s worst sin: biting off
other people’s styles. Last year, writer Billy
Haisley went so far as to argue in an essay
for Deadspin that Scott is “worse than Iggy
Azalea,” because he’s been propped up by
the hip-hop establishment and embraced by
audiences who consider themselves “com-
mitted fans of hip-hop,” even as he lifts the
ideas of others, more original artists in the
creation of his radio-friendly (and, by some
accounts, less interesting) sound.

Sebastian and St. Gian insist that they,
too, have found Scott’s teeth marks on Sa-
bastian’s work.

St. Gian says that in early 2012, the Texas
rapper got access to a private SoundCloud
link of Sebastian’s music, which included the
song “Middle Finger to the World.” The
person who sent it, according to St. Gian,
was an A&R guy whom St. Gian declines to
name. He says the music was passed to Scott
because there allegedly were brief talks of
Scott and Sebastian doing some sort of col-
laboration (which never happened). That
year, Scott went on to work with Kanye West
on the GOOD Music album Cruel Summer
—and St. Gian says that when it came out, he
was shocked to find similarities between the
album and Sebastian’s recordings, namely
the lyrical similarities between Sebastian’s
“Middle Finger to the World” and the 2012
Kanye West song “To the World.” Scott co-
produced the song, which opens with R.
Kiley singing a similar line to Sebastian’s
“Let me see you put your middle fingers up/To
the world!”

A publicist for Travis Scott tells L.A. Week-
ly that he’s never heard of David Sebastian
or ANTI Society and says the allegations
are “preposterous.”

Sebastian says there are other examples of
his creativity being co-opted. He notes that a
series of custom-painted Timberland boots
he created for celebrities (which earned him
a shoutout in a Complex feature) inspired a
series of knockoffs and imitators. He also
says that creative directors working for
some of the biggest names in hip-hop have
trawled his Instagram and Tumblr, thirsty
for ideas.

And then there’s Rihanna’s 2016 album,
Anti. When I first meet St. Gian in January,
at a trendy bistro on the Sunset Strip, he
lays out a far-fetched theory: Scott (who’s
credited as a producer on the album and
was at one point rumored to be Rihanna’s
boyfriend) was behind the naming of that
album — all part of an effort to neutralize
Sebastian’s ANTI movement before he gets
famous and overthrows Scott on the charts.

Appropriation has long been a part of
American pop culture. As Seabrook writes
in The Song Machine, incessant swapping
and borrowing is even more central to main-
stream musicmaking these days, thanks to
sampling and digital technology, which has
led to disputes over sampling rights and
claims of plagiarism such as the recent case
over Robin Thicke’s “Blurred Lines.”

“A lot of times it’s not Pharrell, it’s not
Kanye and it’s not Rihanna’s fault,” St. Gian
says. “They all have creative directors, and
these creative directors are getting paid
stupid amounts of money from these stars
to be in the know and to give them the hip
ideas that help in their creative thing. We’re
fighting this fight [against appropriation]
for the whole underdog.”

But you have to wonder: Is St. Gian fight-
ing to protect the underdog from the main-
stream — or to catapult his own underdogs
to the mainstream under the guise of such
a fight?

“I would say a creative’s job is to inspire
people, period,” says Guillermo Andrade,
co-owner and head designer at streetwear
boutique FourTwoFour on Fairfax, where Sa-
bastian staged his first wave of “Custimbs”
painted boots. “What they choose to do with
it is kinda up to them. You can’t control that.

“But,” Andrade adds, “you also can’t take
credit away from where credit’s due.”

On a sunny March afternoon, the ocean
breeze is rolling through Santa Monica. Sa-
bastian was set to do some recording today
at a studio owned by songwriting team The
Stereotypes, but they had to cancel the ses-
sion last-minute. Now he’s walking through
the Third Street Promenade, resembling a
quasi-paramilitary leader in black boots
and cape-like jacket, a shiny badge pinned
on his black beret, standing out as he makes
his way down the faded green and maroon
sidewalk.

A teenage jazz band is fumbling through
instrumental elevator music. The Forever
21 and PacSun shops are devoid of the ex-
cessively stylized streetwear items you’d
find over at Sabastian’s haunts on Fairfax.

He stops and looks around. In this antise-
ptic environment, he clearly stands out. Yet as
the shoppers go about their business, most
of them don’t seem to notice this mysteri-
ous figure. Briefly, he indulges in a fantasy
of being recognized and, creating a frantick
mob scene as people crowd around in
awe, the kind of thing you’d see with mega-
stars like Michael Jackson or Taylor Swift.

He believes it’ll happen. In a way, he has
to, to keep himself motivated and always
pushing forward.

“You know, honestly where I’m at right
now, I’m just really ready to fucking blow
up,” he says. “I’ve done so much. I’ve worked
so hard. I’ve been poor. I’ve been homeless.
I’ve designed so much shit. Now it’s, like,
really time to just, like … to do it.”

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FIRST LOOK: SALAZAR

Chill with grilled tacos next to the L.A. River

BY GARRETT SNYDER

When a notable restaurant opens in Los Angeles, L.A. Weekly heads in for a First Look, a short review based on one visit. If you’re hungry for more, see our starred restaurant reviews at laweekly.com/food.

I

f you squint your eyes at the cactus-silhouetted sunset dropping behind the dusty patio at Salazar, you could almost pretend you’re in Tijuana.

The latest concept to hit the L.A. River–adjacent community of Frogtown, Salazar is a grill-centric, Mexicali-inspired restaurant from chef Esdras Ochoa, the taquero who co-founded Mexicali Taco when it was a smoky taco stand at First and Beaudry.

At Salazar, there is that same smell of wood smoke, slightly fainter, wafting out of a former auto body shop repurposed into a kitchen and small bar, the latter brimming with mezcal and tequilas.

Much of the restaurant's seating is located outside, on a sprawling, desert-themed patio with wooden tables and what look like chairs repurposed from your middle school auditorium.

Former Walker Inn/Normandie Club

barman Aaron Melendrez is slinging creative cocktails here, which range from a tart apple agua fresca made with celery-infused gin to a brown butter–washed old-fashioned variation made with corn whiskey, mezcal and huitlacoche. Fresh tortillas, patted out by hand, are filled with smoky carne asada, chicken, marinated adobada (another name for al pastor) or seasonal vegetables, which might be braised rapini and soft chunks of cheesy potatoes. House-made hot sauces — one crafted from chile de arbol, another from the darker chile morita — are on hand to add an earthy dose of spice.

But the most exciting aspect of what Salazar promises to offer goes beyond tacos. The kitchen will serve slabs of char-grilled rib-eye, thick-cut pork chops and whole grilled trout, piled on large wooden platters and served with sides like stewed pinto beans with pork belly and buttery mashed potatoes stuffed with chorizo. It’s further proof that L.A.’s modern Mexican scene — populated by places like Broken Spanish, Corazon y Miel and Guerrilla Tacos — is revealing a side of Mexican gastronomy that extends well beyond the humble taco. But hey, if you want to make tacos out of your steak at Salazar, they are more than happy to oblige.

Salazar | 2490 Fletcher Drive, Frogtown

FIRST LOOK: MIRO

The highlight is seasonal produce, but the fresh pasta and whiskey make Miro shine

BY HEATHER PLATT

With its large gold signage and asymmetrical structure, Miro, the new California-inspired restaurant on the edge of downtown’s financial district, is hard to miss. Perched on Wilshire Boulevard and South Figueroa Street, the large wooden door with M-shaped gold handles opens up into a high-ceilinged dining room. The design hints at a midcentury modern aesthetic that feels grown-up yet unpretentious. Vintage milk jugs that have been repurposed as water carafes and wine decanters that look as if they may have been purchased from yard sales are juxtaposed with the restaurant’s sleek interior.

The seasonally driven menu is helmed by executive chef Gavin Mills, whose stint as chef de cuisine at Suzanne Goin’s Tavern is evident in dishes such as the sweet grilled peaches drizzled with saba on a bed of burrata with smoked ham.

There’s also a roasted beet salad (again with burrata), grilled asparagus with a fried “farm egg” and roasted bone marrow.

While much of the menu is driven by ingredients native to the region, Miro also draws from Mediterranean and Middle Eastern flavors. There’s a lamb kofta tajine with green harissa and preserved lemon. Portuguese-inspired appetizers include bacalao and potato croquetas, served on a smear of spicy piri-piri with a side of garlic aioli.

The rib-eye, served with asparagus and duck-fat potatoes, is a large, well-cooked piece of meat that might be upstaged by the little dollop of marrow butter on top. You’ll wish you had an entire pint of the warm, unctuous white glob. Diners sitting at the bar or near the kitchen can watch as long strands of pasta are made and cut in-house — and when the server recommends the basic-sounding bucatini tossed with ramps, local olive oil and Parmesan, you should listen to him. The same thing goes for ordering from the lengthy house-made charcuterie list.

And be sure to set aside time for a nightcap in Miro’s basement, where you can sample from a 400-bottle collection of rare whiskey.

Miro | 888 Wilshire Blvd, downtown
(213) 988-8880 | mirorestaurant.com
Lunch: Mon.-Fri., 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m.; dinner: Mon.-Thu., 5-10 p.m.; Fri. & Sat., 5-11 p.m.
Lisa Hanawalt’s fantastical sophomore book, *Hot Dog Taste Test*, opens with a string of disclaimers. Among them: It is not a cookbook, you won’t find any recipes, and there is no actual food included.

What you will find are nonsensical baking tips (protect butter’s reputation); bizarre advice on how to choose a wine (merlot makes you ask strangers for piggyback rides); and obsessive hand-drawn lists about sassy foods (Cool Ranch Doritos), earnest foods (hot dogs but not the buns) and food with good intentions (pickles, which also happen to be one of Hanawalt’s favorite things to eat).

The collection of watercolor illustrations, comics and columns — some of which, like the Las Vegas food diary and the profile of New York City chef Wylie Dufresne, were first published in *Lucky Peach* — draws inspiration from the kind of mundane, middle-class American fare you likely won’t find printed on the glossy pages of food magazines: Jolly Ranchers, halal carts, soft pretzels, Subway sandwiches.

*Hot Dog Taste Test* is so much more than merely a book about cooking or food culture. With its 170-plus pages of art and writing — including a page intentionally left blank for the reader to stain with food — it is a playful critique of and a colorful contribution to the world of food writing.

Lina Hanawalt says, “Like, my boyfriend makes fun of me because if I’m eating a snack, it’s often like a pickle and then a hard-boiled egg and then crackers and then maybe a carrot, and it’s like I’m eating like a baby.”

The sad-looking, poorly lit food photos she occasionally posts on her Instagram account — reprinted in *Hot Dog Taste Test* — attest to that. In one image, a bunless hot dog shares a plate with pickles, olives, two strawberries and globs of ketchup and mustard.

“A hot dog cut up with ketchup is like lunch for me, so I just think it’s funny to Instagram it,” Hanawalt says. “I just don’t want to put that much effort into cooking.”

The illustrator thinks often about what happens to food before, during and after human consumption.

Food becomes both fuel and amusement — it is at times delightful and at others grotesque. Some foods, like the hot dogs walked on leashes like canines, take on petlike characteristics. Much of Hanawalt’s work, in fact, relies on the anthropomorphizing of objects and animals. This is in line with the Netflix series she designed and co-produces, *Bojack Horseman*, whose third season premieres next month; it’s based on a washed-up TV actor (played by Will Arnett) who also happens to be a horse. (His agent is a cat and his rival is a golden retriever.)

A Palo Alto native who grew up devouring food writing from former L.A. Weekly food critic Jonathan Gold, Hanawalt graduated from UCLA’s art program in 2006, where she jokes she subsisted almost entirely on boba tea.

After college, she went to New York, where she lived off pizza, hot dogs, takeout from Halal Guys at 14th Street and Second Avenue, vegan dosas from the Washington Square Park cart and tacos from Tacos Morelos trucks in the East Village and Williamsburg (all depicted in her book).

Early last year, she moved back to L.A. to work on *Bojack Horseman* full-time. “My next report will be from the quinnow-paved streets of Hollywood!” she wrote in a *Lucky Peach* column, reprinted in *Hot Dog Taste Test*. But in reality, Hanawalt lives up on a hill in Echo Park, and she prefers taco trucks to quinoa.

“We have taco trucks everywhere that you can just stop at on your way home late
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A New Pakistani Restaurant Picks Up Where Zam Zam Market Left Off

Zam Zam Market was once a Culver City staple. Long a favorite of the local Muslim community, it attracted a cult following of non-Muslim food obsessives drawn by biryanis and some of the best Pakistani cuisine in L.A. The appeal was enough to overcome the restaurant’s irregular hours and other quirks, including a menu that was inconsistent from day to day and a kitchen that routinely ran out of various ingredients.

But when the restaurant closed in December 2014 (it found a new home in Hawthorne a year later), it left a sizable void in the neighborhood. Now, Chargha House is stepping in to provide Culver City with a new spot for Halal Pakistani food. Located in a strip mall adjacent to a Big Lots, it offers many of the items that Zam Zam did, but the menu here goes much deeper. Not only that but it maintains regular hours, too.

Pakistani cuisine in L.A. is both underrepresented and widely scattered. A short stretch of Inglewood Avenue through Hawthorne and Lawndale is home to Al Watan, Al Noor and the relocated Zam Zam. There are two Pakistani places in the far northern and northwestern San Fernando Valley — and that’s pretty much it.

Pakistani food is generally more meat-intensive than regional cuisines from neighboring India, with beef dishes common. It’s also spicier than Punjabi-style Indian cuisine. Chargha House has familiar Indian dishes on the menu, particularly under the vegetable section, but you should order the Pakistani items. A highlight is its namesake, chargha, which is chicken marinated in spices and yogurt, then prepared in a tandoori oven. Available as a half or whole chicken, it has a spicy kick and a nice char yet retains its moisture. This is one of the best chicken preps in L.A., with a great price as well.

Nihari, considered the national dish of Pakistan, consists of chunks of beef shank in a spicy curry gravy. Haleem is a slow-simmered stew of beef, wheat, lentils and spices. Maghaz nihari and maghaz masala make use of cow brains, the latter stir-fried with onions, tomatoes, chilies and spices. These are all fine and well, but what of the biryanis? Chargha House has five different biryanis, with a weekend-only special of dum biryani, a bone-in chicken version. Kabobs are available as well.

For those who miss some of the endearing randomness that used to define Zam Zam Market, there is a bit of that at Chargha House, too. Like its predecessor, Chargha House has been known to run out of some items and, as it’s essentially a two-person operation with an owner-chef, you should plan on a wait for your order. Fortunately, among the business types and Loyola Marymount academics on hand for lunch, no one seemed to mind either the wait or the level of spiciness. Gentrification — and the toned-down spicy food perhaps prepared as a result of it — be damned.

— Jenn Swann

Chargha House, 5571 Sepulveda Blvd., Culver City; (424) 228-4623.

An Underrated Gold Mine of Fresh Octopus and Oysters

Simi Valley probably isn’t the first place you think of when you’re craving sushi. But Sushi Tanaka, which opened in a suburban strip mall more than two years ago and has since built a devoted local following, could soon change that.

The unpretentious sushi bar has seven counter seats plus a few token tables. The restaurant’s namesake, chef Sai Tanaka, holds court behind the bar, meticulously cutting each morsel of fish to order. He works without an assistant and visits various fish markets in the early hours of the morning in order to buy the freshest, highest-quality fish available. His dedication to sourcing the best ingredients has paid off handsomely, as the restaurant has quickly gained a reputation for its exceptional sushi.

The menu at Sushi Tanaka is exclusively focused on fresh, sustainable seafood, with a particular emphasis on octopus and oysters. Tanaka’s octopus is aged and marinated in a mixture of sake, sesame oil, and soy sauce, resulting in a beautifully tender and flavorful dish. The oysters are selected from local suppliers and served either raw or grilled to perfection.

Sushi Tanaka’s commitment to using only the freshest ingredients has earned it a loyal following among sushi enthusiasts in Simi Valley. The restaurant’s small size and intimate atmosphere create a welcoming and relaxed dining experience, making it a perfect spot for sushi lovers to savor the city’s best seafood.

— Jim Thurman

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— Jim Thurman

Chargha House, 5571 Sepulveda Blvd., Culver City; (424) 228-4623.
morning to hand-pick the choicest fish for his customers. Which explains why the restaurant is open only for dinner and closed two nights of the week.

Over the last two decades, Tanaka has put in time at esteemed sushi restaurants including Nobu and Shunji. But this is a family-run operation: Tanaka’s wife doubles as host and server. She explains each dish in detail, setting newbies at ease. Chef Tanaka is more reticent, and somewhat diffident, yet still approachable. He pipes in if there’s a question his wife can’t answer.

After the server inquires about allergies and other food preferences, the procession of small dishes commences. Order Tanaka’s multicourse omakase (chef’s choice), and perhaps you will receive a single Kumamoto oyster resting in yuzu citrus broth. The dish comes topped with a dollop of Russian ossetra caviar paired with julienned jellyfish swimming in a sprightly vinegar broth. The oyster pops with the briny flavor of the sea while the jellyfish has the vibrant, toothsome chewiness unique to this fish. You’ll want to sip every last drop of the vinegar-infused broth.

Likely to come next is a sashimi plate of yagura (trumpet fish, which bears a striking resemblance to the brass instrument) dotted with red chili paste, sauced with a citrus charcoal water, and paired with an arugula salad laced with minced hearts of palm. The delicate white fish is a perfect foil for the light dab of chili.

If you’re lucky, you might have ama ebi (live sweet shrimp) next. The shrimp wiggle and twitch mere moments before becoming part of your dinner. Tanaka prepares a sweet shrimp tartare bound with white truffle oil, placing the tartare on top of a pickled Japanese radish, showering it with shaved summer truffles and a heft dollop of caviar. The shrimp tartare is deliciously infused with the sweetness of the sea; the truffles add a pungent earthiness and the caviar’s brininess brings it to life.

At this point, the procession of sushi will begin in the classic, traditional Edo-mae style: one piece, one bite. Tanaka will serve roughly a dozen pieces of sushi, one at a time, from lighter fish to heavier fish to end the meal. Highlights include the seared toro (fatty tuna belly) sushi topped with an oche-hued lobe of creamy sea urchin roe, which plays richness against richness to felicitous effect. The toro is blowtorched with a slab of bincho charcoal to impart smokiness to the richly marbled tuna.

But all good things must come to an end, and so too will this deeply satisfying series of plates. There are no desserts on the menu. Instead, the coda to each and every meal here is a piece of tamagoyaki (egg omelette) made in the style of the sponge cake made famous in the documentary Jiro Dreams of Sushi. The tamagoyaki here is expertly crusted on the outside with a spongy interior that’s ever so lightly sweet—it’s one of the best we’ve tasted.

When the bill comes, it will serve as yet another reminder that you’re not in L.A.—these aren’t Nobu prices. Simi Valley may not be a dining destination, but this place is well worth the drive. —Kayvan Gabbay

Sushi Tanaka, 3977 Cochran St., Simi Valley; (805) 306-1374, sushitanaka.com
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In Good Compagnie
At the Music Center, L.A.'s often oh-so-serious bastion of high culture, a four-day street-dance festival revolves around performances by Compagnie Käfig, a French/Brazilian hip-hop dance troupe that's having too much fun to be serious. After Friday's show, a ticketed after-hours event (11:30 p.m. to 3 a.m.) featuring roller skating, dancing, DJs and battles between local dance crews takes over Disney Hall. On Saturday morning, Compagnie Käfig dancers lead a free beginner hip-hop class before their evening show. Take a break from Sunday's free Beat Swap Meet, with dance competitions, freestyle dance and a vinyl record swap, to see Compagnie Käfig's finale. The Music Center, Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 135 N. Grand Ave., downtown; Fri.-Sat., June 17-18, 7:30 p.m.; Sun., June 19, 2 p.m.; $34-$138. (213) 972-0711, musiccenter.org/about/our-programs/1516-season/compagnie-kafag. —Ann Haskins

Koufax and Co.
For more than 25 years, Beth Lapidés' comedy and storytelling series UnCabaret has attracted the likes of Patton Oswalt, Kathy Griffin and Margaret Cho. In conjunction with the Skirball's “Chasing Dreams: Baseball and Becoming American,” which examines the history of American Jews and other immigrants and minorities in our country’s favorite pastime, the cultural center hosts UnCabaret: Out of Left Field, featuring more comics cracking wise “about baseball, And Jews. And Jews in baseball.” Tonight's incarnation includes Julie Goldman, Wayne Federman, Erin Foley and Jason Sklar. Skirball Cultural Center, 2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd., Brentwood; Fri., June 17, 8 p.m.; $15, $8 for students. (310) 440-4500, skirball.org. —Siran Babayan

Wall Writers: Graffiti in Its Innocence. See Thursday.

FOOD AND DRINK
Ale Yes
Since 2010, L.A.'s annual Vegan Beer & Food Festival has dutifully reminded us that, no, not all beer is vegan. Some breweries use fish byproducts in their filtering processes, others put milk in their stouts — basically, you might as well twist the head off a baby goat and drink its blood. Here attendees can rest assured that the suds and the grub are cruelty-free. Breweries including New Belgium, Ballast Point, Stone, Eagle Rock Brewery and Smog City fill your 4-ounce tasting glass, while vegan eateries from Little Pine to Dogfriend have food on offer. There's also cold-brew coffee, craft soda and a marketplace with vegan-friendly stuff from clothes to bath products. And there's kombucha, because of course there is. Rose Bowl, 1001 Rose Bowl Drive, Pasadena; Sat., June 18, 11 a.m.-7 p.m.; $40-$100. veganbeerfest.com/losangeles. —Gwynedd Stuart

If the Shoe Fits
Get your shoes dirty on the way to the museum? Fear not, fashionisto. At For the Love of Shoes, a special footwear-focused event that coincides with LACMA’s exhibit “Reigning Men: Fashion in Menswear, 1715-2015” — which features, among lots of other things, footwear by Jeremy Scott for Adidas, Rick Owens and more — the museum offers a complimentary sneaker-cleaning booth. Premium shoe caregiver Jason Markk will lavish upon your soles a solution that’s gentle and biodegradable, softly annihilating the filth with a dazzling brush, after which you should really have them buffed with a fine chamois — but I digress. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 5905 Wilshire Blvd., Mid-Wilshire; Sat., June 18, 1 p.m.; $25 adults, free for members and children 17 and younger. (323) 857-6000, lacma.org/event/love-shoes. —David Cotner

MUSEUMS

CULTURE

For nearly 25 years, the Pasadena Chalk Festival — the largest street-painting festival in the world — attracts more than 100,000 onlookers admiring some 600 artists as they create soon-to-be-washed-off masterpieces that pay tribute to everything from rock stars and cartoon characters to politicians and family mem-
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Major Boner
COMEDY
Gwynedd Stuart

in March, L.A.-based comedian Bobby
Slayton lost his wife of 30 years, Teddie
In Memoriam

L.A.-based comedian Bobby

In March, L.A.-based comedian Bobby
In Memoriam

1990’s Devil in a Blue
first in the crime novel series,
the character of Ezekiel
“Easy” Rawlins, the African-American
detective hero living in post-WWII Watts
who’s trying to solve the mystery of a
woman in a blue dress; later it was the
basis for the 1995 Denzel Washington
movie of the same name. Tonight, Mosley
and his guests, Khandi Alexander, John
Singleton and Gary Phillips, read pas-
sages from that book, as well as from
the newest in the series, Charcoal Joe:
An Easy Rawlins Mystery. Ann & Jerry
Moss Theater, New Roads School, 3131
Olympic Blvd., Santa Monica; Sun., June
19, 7:30 p.m.; $20/$43/$95. (310) 828-5582,
livetalksla.org. —Siran Babayan

You May Be Right
But what if we’re wrong? The question
endures within the human perception of
reality, making the entire concept a kind
of perpetual riddle. You remember — the
Earth was flat, and then it wasn’t. In his
new book, But What If We’re Wrong?
Chuck Klosterman (Sex, Drugs and Cocoa
Puffs) discusses our current reality with
some of the greatest creative thinkers
of our age, as if it’s the distant past. The
minds of David Byrne, Junot Diaz, Richard
Linklater, Neil deGrasse Tyson and others
indulge in a bit of imaginative retrospec-
tion on today’s ideas of time, gravity,
dreams and less abstract ideas such as the
future of sports and experience of tele-
vision. Klosterman appears for an in-store
reading and Q&A. Skylight Books, 1818
N. Vermont Ave., Los Feliz; Tue., June 21,
7:30 p.m.; free, book is $26. (323) 660-1175,
skylightbooks.com. —Neha Talreja

Meet
David Duchovny

Wednesday, June 22nd, 7PM
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The Japan Foundation, Los Angeles
(5700 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 100, Los Angeles)
Tel: 323-761-7510

In this novel from the TV star, a son plots to grant
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Musician Bob Villain wore dark sunglasses and had his face painted white when he performed at Circus of Books in early May. A small crowd squeezed around the merchandise in the back corner of the long-standing adult bookstore, located at Sunset and Sanborn in Silver Lake. Barry Mason, who co-owns the store with his wife, Karen, watched from behind the counter and, in the front half of the store, the regular fluorescents remained on. Circus of Books, which is technically still open for business, has hosted numerous concerts in the last two months, and art has been placed sporadically in and around the regular merchandise.

Outside, beneath the pseudo-Western lettering that spells out “Circus of Books,” the words “Going, going, going, gone” have been stenciled on the wall near a “For Lease” sign. The Masons are searching for a good tenant to repurpose the Silver Lake space. Across town, in West Hollywood, the original Circus of Books — called Book Circus when it opened in 1967 — has no such sign, but the Masons say it probably will close soon, too, maybe within the year, as business at both stores has slowed. Much more art appears in the WeHo store than in the Silver Lake store, but it’s all part of an exhibition — on display until mid-June — called “Art Must Go,” an homage to the store’s impending closure. Glazed ceramic poppers, small bottles meant to hold alkyl nitrates, by artist Chris Bogia sit in a glass case near the front. A mug shot of 1970s porn phenom Peter Berlin hangs above bookshelves. Through the saloon-style doors in the “over 18” section, butt plug–inspired sculptures by Yeni Mao hang above bookshelves. Through the regular merchandise placed sporadically in and around the business, has hosted numerous concerts until mid-June — called “Art Must Go,” an exhibition organized by artists they knew. By April, they’d installed an exhibition in the West Hollywood space on the “edges of what was already there,” in Miller’s words. “It’s a very unconventional situation,” he continues, “putting together different worlds that are kind of incongruous.” All the art is for sale, and people take it home when they buy it, as they would anything else in the store.

Miller, who lives in New York, knew about Circus of Books before he met Rachel Mason through ar t-related circles. He had worked with the estate of Bob Mizer, the king of beefcake photos in the 1940s and ’50s and founder of Physique Pictorial magazine. Miller now also publishes iconic gay zine Straight to Hell, which Circus carries. When he began contacting other artists, Miller found that they, like him, had fond feelings for the store. Some had shopped there. “There are businesses that you assume will be there forever,” he says. “That store is one of a few remnants of another time.”

When he and Karen were looking for a space to open their own store, they found the former site of Circus of Books. “That gives it its charm,” Rachel reflects. “It’s a little chancy to be putting fragile art in the store feel open to anyone, and lessened the sense as adult retailers. They appear old-fashioned and speak with some skepticism about the success of certain merchandise. “I suppose not everyone’s into,” both say at various points during our discussions, and in other interviews they’ve given. They emphasize that, mostly, they want to run a good business. “I think when it started it was very, very unusual,” Karen says. “You’d come in and it was a clean, well-lit place. You could walk in there and find all the best-sellers. You had to go through these curtains or saloon doors to get to the adult content.”

The separation between the “regular” books and the risqué material made the store feel open to anyone, and lessened the shame associated with buying porn.

In the early aughts, when Rachel Mason was studying art at Yale and then living in New York, the L.A. art world and Circus of Books began a quirky relationship. The Chinatown gallery scene had just emerged and Rachel would visit it when in town. “I would go to all these little hole-in-the-wall galleries in Chinatown with her,” Karen remembers. “I thought, I have a better space, on Lexington.” That was where Circus of Books had its storage and distribution center. “It seemed to me art wasn’t a hard business,” Karen says. “So for a while we sold art,” Karen says. “We closed when the recession hit, but a lot of bigger galleries closed, too.” Maybe they could’ve continued, she muses, but the business had been more quixotic than she’d anticipated. Merchandise didn’t move. Foot traffic was sporadic. Prices for one-of-a-kind objects could be extravagant.

“She cares about running a really good business,” Rachel Mason, who recently moved back to L.A., says of Karen. “Her decisions are entirely business decisions. What she actually wanted was to raise her kids, and yet she’s done this so well.”

As a child, Rachel had been instructed to tell classmates and friends her parents worked in real estate. It wasn’t until she was older that she realized her parents knew players in a queer underground that would in many ways influence Rachel’s art. Artists like Vaginal Davis and Bruce LaBruce, who both push boundaries and have a raw, flamboyant aesthetic, had visited the store, and now their work hangs there. “She always let my friends do things at the store,” Rachel says of Karen.

Right now, in collaboration with producer-director Cynthia Childs, Rachel is working on a documentary on Circus of Books, tracing it back to the decades before the Masons took over, interviewing gay porn stars, publishers and others. Her parents hadn’t been interested in a documentary before — they’d had offers — but with their daughter on board, they agreed. “I’m happy these things can happen,” Rachel says. “All I am is a conduit.”

The Masons haven’t updated the store’s decor in years, because its appearance never affected business. The recognizable signage looks like a relic of a gentrified, less regulated moment. The soon-to-close store now seems fringier and defiant not because of its merchandise but because of its refusal to adapt to a digital, glossier world. “I’m friends with a lot of people who are nostalgic for this kind of gritty realness,” Rachel reflects. “That gives it its charm.”
THE WOMEN IN MAGDALENA KITA’S DRAWINGS AREN’T ASHAMED OF THEIR SEXUALITY

BY CATHERINE WAGLEY

Two L.A. artists stage a creepy Father’s Day film installation in Chinatown, and a German-based artist presents a sexualized SoCal fantasy.

In the long leadup to her show at Charlie James Gallery, Cologne, Germany–based artist Magdalena Kita binge-watched *Californication*, the show in which David Duchovny stars as an alcoholic sex addict who’s always driving up and down Pacific Coast Highway. But Kita’s version of *Californication* differs significantly. Women are the protagonists, and they’re much less self-conscious and confused than Duchovny’s character. One of Kita’s women stands on a Cadillac in the shower. Another sits on the toilet, wearing a lacy bra. One gives head to a man who’s almost small enough for her to hold in her hand. The women don’t always seem empowered or satisfied, just unembarrassed and fully engaged with their sexuality.

969 Chung King Road, Chinatown; through July 16. cjamesgallery.com.

DADDY DRAMA

On Father’s Day, artists Paul Pescador and Maura Brewer will re-examine and interpret an iconic father-son drama, *The Shining*. Pescador and Brewer call their film, which will play on three channels, *Dad Dad Dad*. One channel reinterprets the relationships between characters, including the alcoholic father and clairvoyant son, and the Steadicam that Stanley Kubrick used to film them in his 1980 film. The second channel uses puppets and Styrofoam props to restage scenes from the movie, and the third combines original footage with the artist’s hand-made doppelgängers, so live action and puppeteering overlap. The installation is up for five hours only.

410 Cottage Home St., Chinatown; Sun., June 19, noon-5 p.m. humanresourcesla.com.

HIPPIE AESTHETICS

The paintings in Sam Gilliam’s “Green April” have a lithe, psychedelic bigness that feels very new. But they were made in the 1960s and ’70s, when Gilliam was a young black artist involved in the civil rights movement and painting in D.C. Back then his hippie sensibility merged with an abstract expressionist’s boldness would have read differently. He wasn’t following the rules. His paintings still have some of their anarchic energy, and they feel happily outside of time. 5130 W. Edgewood Place, Mid-Wilshire, through July 16. (323) 935-3030, davidkordanskygallery.com.

BEDROOM ALTARS

Artist Carmen Argote collaborated on her current show with her sister, Alejandra Argote, arranging a collection of handmade altars and intimate objects across the floor of Commonwealth and Council’s main gallery. The show is called “Alex’s Room,” because so many of the objects in it are on loan from the room of Alejandra, who goes by Alex. The altars, based on façades of buildings near where Alex lives in Boyle Heights, are dollhouse-sized and covered in small figurines and souvenirs. On the walls, Argote has hung collages, photographs of herself or Alex in her room wearing a mask, duplicated and layered on top of one another so that images repeat — a leg or certain toy might appear three times. Looking at them is like having vertigo, seeing double and triple of everything.

3006 W. Seventh St., #220, Koreatown; through July 6. (213) 703-9077, commonwealthandcouncil.com.

ROMANCING A CAR

A snake hangs from a pole, casting a shadow on dry dirt, in one of Justine Kurland’s photographs. All of the images in “Auto Parts,” Kurland’s show at Kayne Griffin Corcoran, are romantic; they could be scenes from a Western mystery movie where dialogue is sparse. Mechanics would be the likely protagonists. In another of Kurland’s images, a James Dean look-alike caresses the underside of his red sedan as if it’s a lover. 1201 S. La Brea Ave., Mid-Wilshire; through July 30. (310) 586-6886, kaynegriffincorcoran.com.
WORLDS AND MUSIC
The intriguing new musical Parallel Worlds rocks — even if the acting doesn’t

BY BILL RADEN

It hasn’t been easy for musical-theater makers to harness the lightning-in-a-bottle power and presence of the live rock performance. In the nearly 50 years since Hair minted the genre, precious few rock musicals have convincingly navigated the vast reaches of cultural space that separate the very different planets responsible for the sublimating Dionysian power of rock and the structured poetic logic of dramatic narrative. As a rule, actors can’t rock, and rockers don’t act.

Which is why the significant revelation of Parallel Worlds, the intriguing experimental rock musical by Brandon Beckner (score and book) and Steve Sobel (lyrics, with an assist from Paola Jimenez) now playing in Sherman Oaks, is the exhilarating degree to which the half-film/half-live stage hybrid succeeds at delivering rock without necessarily cohering as the backstage meta-musical it strives to be. That’s because Beckner and Sobel, whose backgrounds straddle music and movies rather than the theater, turn out to be extraordinarily credible songwriters. The 20-tune original score of moody romantic ballads, swaggering anthems and high-octane rockers easily could grace a Viper Room set list on a Saturday night. Additionally, rather than using trained actors, director Matthew McCray has gone outside the musical-theater ranks to cast veterans from the local club scene as the story’s rock-world musicians/characters.

Real-life singer-songwriter Cassidy Catanzaro (formerly with New York’s all-female alt-country Antigone Rising) plays Tabitha, the lead belter of a struggling retro-metal band that has been hired to score the movie projected onstage (on designer Stephanie Kerley Schwartz’s assemblage of monitors and projection screens). Ryan Hudson, the real-life frontman for L.A. hard rockers Love and a .38, is Miles, Tabitha’s recently ex-lover and the band’s co-lead vocalist and rhythm guitarist. Braden Lyle (lead guitar), Angelica Abrams (keyboards and vocals), Julia Lage (bass and vocals) and Mike Odbashian (drums) fill out the ensemble.

The book’s supranatural conceit follows Tabitha’s discovery that, as the band sets down the movie score’s tracks, the emotional colorings of the songs alter the onscreen love story about aspiring artist J.B. (Shawn Reaves) and true love Ella (Marci Miller). J.B. wavers between becoming a New York art superstar or being with the stubbornly L.A.-rooted Ella. (Tim Gray directed the film, which was shot by Keith DeCristo.) Soon Tabitha and Miles are working out their own unfished personal business by dueling onstage to determine the onscreen lovers’ fate: Cassidy’s wistful, neo-folk romantic ballads bring the lovers together; Miles’ cynical and raucous, Zeppelin-esque rockers push them apart.

All the players have serious recording and club-rock chops, and both Catanzaro and Hudson prove themselves powerfully soulful and pitch-perfect song interpreters (Abrams and Lyle are equally impressive on their solos in act two’s “Anarchy.”) The band’s live concert is a tour de force.

And though Beckner has his music dueling for the soul of the onscreen narrative, the far more compelling duel is ontological and has to do with live presence and the fascinating overlap between the metonymic world of the onscreen fiction and the metaphoric “reality” enacted live onstage. In the end the battle is no contest: The band rocks, the acting does not. And what’s astonishing is the degree to which that doesn’t matter.

PARALLEL WORLDS | CAP Studio, 13752 Ventura Blvd., Sherman Oaks | Through June 26 | Parallelworldsexperience.com
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DOWN WHERE IT'S WETTER

Pixar dives under the sea again — and into memory itself

BY BILGE EBIRI

Finding Nemo may have been a cartoon about a clownfish traveling across the ocean looking for his son, but it was also one of Pixar’s first overt forays into the workings of the human mind. The film, from 2003, was haunted by lost love: The protagonist, Marlin (voiced by Albert Brooks), couldn’t shake the memory of his family perishing in a barracuda attack, which in turn fed his pathological protectiveness over Nemo, his sole surviving child, and his desperate efforts to save the boy. Joining Marlin on that quest was Dory (voiced by Ellen DeGeneres), a surgeonfish whose complete lack of short-term memory provided both comedy and thematic contrast.

The back-and-forth between Marlin and Dory anchored their adventure through a universe populated by surfer-dude sea turtles, wise stingrays and 12-stepping sharks. This time, returning co-writer/co-director Andrew Stanton dives even further into the emotional undercurrents — into the world of memory, trauma, loss and existential dread. And it’s harrowing. Finding Dory is one of the most devastating things Pixar has made — all while often being even bouncier than Finding Nemo.

As the title suggests, it’s now that sur-geonfish who needs to be saved. The film opens with a flashback to scenes of young Dory’s mother and father (Diane Keaton and Eugene Levy) worrying about how their daughter’s memory problem will affect her ability to fend for herself. They play hide-and-seek and try cute little rhymes to help her remember things like how to get home and to steer clear of the undertow that runs nearby. Young Dory is no airhead; she understands what’s happening to her, and is terrified: “What if I forget you?” she asks, then adds, tearfully, “Would you ever forget ... me?”

We’re still talking about fish, of course, but the film doesn’t try to hide its blunt appeal to very human concerns. Anybody, especially a parent, who has ever lost sleep over a loved one’s limitations and challenges will find some of their darkest fears reflected in these early scenes. But the story also hints at a universal fear of loss — at the idea that life often forces us to forget the people who were once closest to us.

The bulk of the film’s plot follows Dory in the present day, as a brief recollection of some words from her past prompts her to go off in search of her parents. So she, Marlin and Nemo journey to a California aquarium called the Marine Life Institute, where they’re accidentally separated. As the father and son try to find Dory, and as Dory attempts both to find her parents and to reunite with her friends, we get the escalating hijinks and new characters that you might expect — including a near-sighted whale shark (voiced by Kaitlin Olson), a neurotic beluga (Ty Burrell) and a crotchety octopus (Ed O’Neill). Amid all that fun, however, Finding Dory enters into an interesting dialogue with its predecessor. In the first film, Dory’s forgetfulness was often the (gentle) butt of jokes, so by plunging us into a story where this memory loss is now a cause of grave concern, the sequel subtly interrogates the original. When we see flashbacks to young Dory’s separation from her parents, we feel her terror and loneliness. The movie’s signature shot, repeated several times, shows her in a vast, empty underwater seascape, dwarfed against cold, blue nothingness.

As she grows up, Dory learns to live with her disability: She starts to make light of it, even as she continues searching the seas for — well, she can’t really remember what. The first part of Finding Dory works its way up to the Finding Nemo scene where she first runs into Marlin. But now we have a new perspective on their initial dynamic. If in Nemo her eagerness to help the distraught father was charming, this time it’s poignant: It’s the first time anyone has needed Dory and hasn’t turned away from her.

All this might make Finding Dory sound like an emotionally grueling slog, but it’s easier to please, sometimes even too much, with wilder characters and bigger, insistently sillier set pieces. It’s also messier: Gone is the tight, sharp wit of the earlier film, replaced by a looser style of comedy and an occasional over-reliance on shtick. The rules have changed, too. In the first film, a group of underwater creatures had to exert tremendous effort to escape one small aquarium, but now such creatures leap in and out of tanks, ride shooting geyser of water and navigate the outside world of humans with surprising ease; they can even read faster. Or, put another way: This is a movie in which an octopus drives a truck.

But through it all, Stanton and his team never lose focus of the deeper themes at the story’s heart. They’ve done something structurally savvy. As they build up to their big comic moments, they also cut repeatedly to Dory’s childhood and her distraught parents. This makes narrative sense: As our heroine slowly recalls more, these flashbacks offer clues to where her family might be. But these glimpses of the past also undercut the exuberance and suspense of the film’s present, returning us to the character’s unpeacably sad memories. But facing that darkness also allows her to start coming to terms with her heartbreak. Finding Dory might be messy, but through its central interplay — between present and past, light and dark, joy and pain — it manages an emotional complexity that puts most supposedly grown-up movies to shame.
BONKERS NEW DOC *TICKLED* DIGS INTO THE STRANGEST OF COVER-UPS

**BY APRIL WOLFE**

In a stark white room, four boys huddle on a mattress, addressing the camera. They’re athletic, the picture of youth and every Abercrombie & Fitch catalog. A blond boy says, “We want to thank Jane O’Brien Media for this opportunity,” and they all smile and wave. They’re about to take part in something dubbed “Competitive Endurance Tickling,” and they seem willing participants. One boy is strapped into chains at his ankles and wrists while another tickles his underarms. The others join in, straddling him at the waist, manning his feet, wriggling fingers along his bare belly, and you think, “Oh, great, this is some creepy video from deeply closeted Christian kids.”

But this is the exact video New Zealand journalist David Farrier stumbled upon before embarking on a strange investigative journey for his documentary *Tickled*, which would take him all over the United States, tracking down an elusive woman who has endless cash, an empire of tickle-fetish videos and a penchant for revenge. Farrier’s simple request to Jane O’Brien Media asking for more information about the purported “sport” of tickling depicted in the video is met with a homophobic all-caps rant calling out “gay kiwis.” That only stokes Farrier’s curiosity, so he and co-director Dylan Reeve decide to make a doc, going far down the rabbit hole of Jane O’Brien’s psyche and finding a story that might have played as even scarier if it weren’t filtered through Farrier’s genial humility.

Nobody has met O’Brien, but high-powered thugs are at the ready to bring Farrier down with costly lawsuits and ridiculous threats (“You will be dealt with”) — and that’s nothing compared with what O’Brien has done to others.

An athlete named T.J. reveals he was paid $2,000 to appear in a video just like the one Farrier first watched. T.J. and company were told Jane O’Brien was doing private research to see if tickling could be used as a military tactic. When O’Brien released the video, T.J. asked for it to be taken down, but all he got in response was an all-out trolling attack to ruin his life. Other men — victims on video and former associates of O’Brien’s — talk about robocalls targeting friends and family with accounts of deranged fantasies ascribed to the tickled. One associate shows a Hallmark greeting card his mother received that says, “Bet you wish it was your other son who died” — referencing the victim’s dead brother. Another was falsely embroiled in an attack on the White House.

Around every corner, Farrier unearths something more sinister — it’s a total mindfuck to watch it unfold. He and Reeve don’t just document, they report, offering evidence of the guilt and innocence of those involved. (That’s why Farrier’s still getting served with papers at every screening of the film.) O’Brien’s web of harassment is presented as so far-reaching in *Tickled* that anyone who touches the topic is subject to abuse. One victim states that he got harassing phone calls from a number in Jamaica; as I watched that scene, a Jamaican number lit up my phone, and I wasn’t so sure it was just a coincidence. I hope it wasn’t.

*Tickled* is sometimes reminiscent of Alex Gibney’s Scientology takedown *Going Clear*, because of the harassment the filmmakers endured for trying to uncover the truth about bizarre organizations. Gibney knew what he was up against, and his doc was doing the work to prove its long-standing allegations. Farrier and Reeve’s doc differs, as they’re only discovering these atrocities along the way. They’re as surprised as the audience is.

For all they knew, *Tickled* easily could have been a weird little piece of ephemera, but instead it evolved into a deeply felt crime thriller you have to see to believe.

*TICKLED* | Directed by David Farrier and Dylan Reeve | Magnolia Pictures | Nuart
KITTY GENOVESE’S BROTHER ASKS WHETHER NEW YORKERS TRULY IGNORED HER MURDER

For 50 years now, the murder of Kitty Genovese has been held up as evidence that Americans—and New Yorkers especially—are monsters of apathy and self-involvement. Long before dawn on the morning of March 13, 1964, Winston Moseley murdered Genovese outside her apartment building in Kew Gardens, Queens. As The New York Times told the story soon after, precisely 38 people witnessed the crime but nobody intervened or even reported it to the police.

News of this set off media concern-trollism: What does such indifference say about us as a people? As James D. Solomon’s compelling and sometimes frustrating doc The Witness makes clear, it turns out that what the case actually tells us is that we’re gullible as hell.

Solomon follows the efforts of Genovese’s brother—William, to track down witnesses. He quickly discovers the original reporting exaggerated the reality. Some of those “witnesses” report hearing a scream, looking out the window and seeing nothing. Another says she did call the police—and was told that it had already been reported. None of that is verifiable, of course, especially now that the witnesses have endured a half-century of being shamed in the name of anecdote-driven sociological editorializing. And William Genovese’s current quest sometimes plays more like performance than reporting—The Witness is structured along the lines of a Hollywood mystery, with one driven man digging into the past for truths some might prefer to remain un-dug. His day-to-day wanderings solve the problem many documentary filmmakers face: What footage can the interviewees be cut around? Still, The Witness is persuasive on the main point, that the murder couldn’t have been “witnessed” the way we’ve been told.—Alban Scherschulz

THE WITNESS | Directed by James D. Solomon
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ART BASTARD
Art Bastard boasts exhaustively
access to its subject, NYC painter
Robert Cenedella, but Victor Kanevsky’s
documentary nonetheless manages to
be as cursory as it is intimate, skimming
over so much of Cenedella’s life and
career that it imparts only a hazy impres-
sion of who he is and what he believes.
A jovial, bearded figure who’s naturally
comfortable discussing his process, his
politics and his upbringing, Cenedella
is an artist whose paintings burst with
busting, combative life, be it his crowded
Manhattan cityscapes or his enormous
1998 mural for the restaurant Le Cirque.
His work has a full-bodied vitality that,
no matter its visual exaggerations,
captures that feeling of something like
reality. (And, as with “Father’s Day,” the
movie soon abandons that angle almost
entirely, focusing instead on a plucky tav-
ner who, incredibly, seems to have
found its subjects revealing themselves
again serving as eager ally. But Dass’}
nonconformity a generation’s norm is an
acknowledgment of who he is and what he believes.

two horny single guys from Serbia; a
hash dealer from Turkey; pretentious
Germans whose accents curiously come
go; and a Libyan who literally just fell
off the boat. Mainly, you’ll probably wish
they’d stand aside so you can just stare
at the beautiful beaches. You may even
hope for the apocalypse to actually hap-
pen by movie’s end, but Bourouk instead
offers the communal eating of the spin-
ach pastry for which the film is named,
and the whole cast doing a curtain call
that they have not by any means earned.
(Luke Y. Thompson)

DYING TO KNOW: RAM DASS & TIMOTHY
LEARY Gay Dillingham’s introductory
biography of psychologists-turned-phi-
losophers Timothy Leary and Ram Dass
finds its subjects revealing themselves
for consciousness expansion, with Dass
again serving as eager ally. But Dass’
immersion in Eastern religions shifts
the dynamics of their relationship, allowing
the former protegé to offer guidance to
his mentor. Within this sketchy profile
of influential thinkers who helped make
nonconformity a generation’s norm is an
interesting discussion of death and its
reverberations among the living. Dying
to Know is built upon the spiritual beliefs
of Dass, whose comforting presence
is the antithesis of the dynamic Leary.
He espouses that life and death are a
continuum, and it’s a fitting construct
for men who’ve already lived so many
lives that dying just becomes part of the
trippy counterculture, took drastically
different paths after an intense period
together, and their 1995 reunion (filmed
by Dillingham and the centerpiece of
her debut documentary) is both testy
and conciliatory. Diagnosed with cancer,
Leary sees dying as another opportunity
for consciousness expansion, with Dass
again serving as eager ally. But Dass’
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ART BASTARD
Art Bastard boasts exhaustiv-
e access to its subject, NYC painter
Robert Cenedella, but Victor Kanevsky’s
documentary nonetheless manages to
be as cursory as it is intimate, skimming
over so much of Cenedella’s life and
career that it imparts only a hazy impres-
sion of who he is and what he believes.
A jovial, bearded figure who’s naturally
comfortable discussing his process, his
politics and his upbringing, Cenedella
is an artist whose paintings burst with
busting, combative life, be it his crowded
Manhattan cityscapes or his enormous
1998 mural for the restaurant Le Cirque.
His work has a full-bodied vitality that,
no matter its visual exaggerations,
captures that feeling of something like
reality. (And, as with “Father’s Day,” the
movie soon abandons that angle almost
entirely, focusing instead on a plucky tav-
ner who, incredibly, seems to have
found its subjects revealing themselves
again serving as eager ally. But Dass’
nonconformity a generation’s norm is an
acknowledgment of who he is and what he believes.

two horny single guys from Serbia; a
hash dealer from Turkey; pretentious
Germans whose accents curiously come
go; and a Libyan who literally just fell
off the boat. Mainly, you’ll probably wish
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BY FRENCH DIRECTOR
EVA HUSSON”

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“BEAUTIFUL DEBUT FEATURE”

SCREEN DAILY

“DELIVERS ON ITS PROMISE OF
MODERN LOVE”

THE FILM STAGE

Artist: Robert Cenedella

Art Bastard
Saturday, June 18

If, as far back as you can remember, all you ever wanted was to see Goodfellas at a cemetery, then allow Cinespia to grant you a favor that totally won't end with you owing them protection. Easily the best gangster movie to lose its Best Picture Oscar to Dance With Wolves, Martin Scorsese's 1990 masterwork glamms up the mafioso lifestyle before reminding us that even made men can end up living the rest of their lives like schnooks. Hollywood Forever Cemetery, 6000 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood; Sat., June 18, 9 p.m.; $16. (323) 221-3343, cinespia.org.

Sunday, June 19

Not every movie about the movies is an uplifting tale of cinema's transformative power. In some of them, people simply want to watch a film and be sad. That's the case in Tsai Ming-liang's Goodbye, Dragon Inn and Lisandro Alonso's Fantasma, both of which are set in movie theaters (in Taipei and Buenos Aires, respectively) and center around a single screening. King Hu's Dragon Inn is the "star" of Tsai's film, while Alonso's own Los Muertos is an elusive presence in his. UCLA's Billy Wilder Theater, 10899 Wilshire Blvd., Westwood; Sun., June 19, 7 p.m.; $10. (310) 206-8013, cinema.ucla.edu.

Tuesday, June 21

One of the most renowned stage-to-screen musicals of the 1930s, Show Boat screens as part of LACMA and Outfest's Classically Queer: LGBTQ Directors in Hollywood's Golden Age. James Whale — best known for directing Frankenstein, The Invisible Man and Bride of Frankenstein — helmed the production, partly as an attempt to rid himself of his association with genre fare; Show Boat excepted, that endeavor was largely unsuccessful. Set over the course of 40 years and prominently featuring an actual boat on which shows are performed, it stars Irene Dunne as the new focus of her family's floating stage show. LACMA, 5950 Wilshire Blvd., Mid-Wilshire; Tue., June 21, 1 p.m.; $5. (323) 857-6000, lacma.org.

Thursday, June 23

We may not be spending four years with Bernie anytime soon, but you can at least spend a couple of hours with a different one at the Aero Theatre. Weekend at Bernie's plays alongside the original Fun with Dick and Jane as part of the Aero's ongoing tribute to Ted Kotcheff, who directed both comedies. He'll be joined by Weekend at Bernie's star Jonathan Silverman for a discussion between the films, both of which screen on 35mm. Aero Theatre, 1328 Montana Ave., Santa Monica; Thu., June 23, 7:30 p.m.; $11. (323) 466-3456, americancinemathequecalendar.com.

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Cinefamily's screening of The Blood of Heroes answers the question we've all had on our minds for years: What is Silicon Valley star Thomas Middleditch's favorite pool of the late '80s? Rutger Hauer and Joan Chen star in the gladiatorial genre picture, about a dystopian society in which the hoi polloi engage in a blood sport called "juggling"; as you might imagine, sportmanship isn't a key factor. Cinefamily/Silent Movie Theater, 611 N. Fairfax Ave., Fairfax; Sat., June 18, 10:30 p.m.; $14. (323) 665-2510, cinefamily.org.

Cinefamily's screening of The Wicker Man and Valley Girl, Together at Last Friday, June 17

They Live has come here to chew bubble gum and kick ass — and it's all out of bubble gum. John Carpenter's 1988 cult classic feels as cutting as ever (if not more so) in the current election cycle, with "Rowdy" Roddy Piper's greatest screen performance serving as a populist yawn for all disenfranchised Americans to echo. The Nuart Theatre's screening on 35mm is appropriate of the film itself, which always felt like a secret the Man didn't want you to know about. Nuart Theatre, 11272 Santa Monica Blvd., West L.A.; Fri., June 17, 11:59 p.m.; $11. (310) 473-8530, landmarktheatres.com.

Sunday, June 19

They Live's Jordan (Keith David) — the Man didn't want you to know about. Nuart Theatre, 11272 Santa Monica Blvd., West L.A.; Sat., June 18, 11:59 p.m.; $11. (310) 473-8530, landmarktheatres.com.

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over whether Dressed to Kill was “derivative or dazzling.” (The articles make a brief appearance in this doc.) De Palma’s films were confrontational and controversial, filled with indulgent technique and provocative levels of gore, violence and sex. To some, it was sleaze and style devoid of content. To others, the sleaze and the style were the content. But compare the contentious reception of Dressed to Kill to that which greeted the director’s most recent release, the deliberately paranoid 2012 erotic thriller Passion. The kind of ridiculous and breathless exercise in high style that would have once torn critics apart, Passion was regarded as a quaint throwback—a beloved film-maker taking his favorite genre out for another spin. The film was neither loved nor hated, but its reception gave you the sense that De Palma had finally become (gasp) respectable. I realize I’m making it sound like the poor guy is dead. Hell, he’s not even retired. Garrulous and good-humored, De Palma presides over Jake Paltrow and Noah Baumbach’s film, taking us through his life and career step by step, title by title, in chronological order. The documentary is essentially one long interview, peppered generously with clips and montages that illustrate his points. Paltrow and Baumbach don’t get fancy with the filmmaking. They’re smart enough to let De Palma’s own images—his gorgeous compositions, his smooth camera moves—do much of the work. (After all, if you can’t make an awesome clip reel out of Brian De Palma films, then what good are you?) (Bilge Ebiri)

GO LOVE & FRIENDSHIP Whit Stillman remains true to himself—and exhibits new mastery—in Love & Friendship, his adaptation of Lady Susan, an impressively biting work that Jane Austen never finished. With the plotting and the epigrams in her hands, Stillman seems liberated: Never before has one of his films been so crisp, so tart, so laugh-out-loud funny. The story centers on a figure more familiar from Wharton than Austen: a brilliant, bewitching schemer (Kate Beckinsale) whose manipulation of a system in which she has little official power proves dazzling, even heroic. For all Lady Susan’s glittering lies, decorum prevails, as it does in Stillman and Austen, with conflicts hidden beneath filigreed politesse. But the film itself isn’t decurious in that Merchant-Ivory English-class way. Stillman lets Tom Bennett, as a doof of a suitor, sometimes push it into irresistible sketch comedy. And Beckinsale will reel through a paragraph of Austen’s richest prose, and her scene partner will blink at her, overwhelmed, waiting for the CliffNotes. This is more heist film than romance, with Beckinsale’s Susan plotting to steal that rarest jewel of all: a life in which she is comfortable, in charge and sexually fulfilled. This pits her against the drips of the landed gentry of the 1790s, but don’t fear for her: She’s a marvel of graceful falseness, called by her handsome first mark (Xavier Samuel) “the most ac-

FROM AFAR IS WANN AND FAMILIAR, BUT ALFREDO CASTRO LIGHTS IT UP

The feature debut of Venezuelan writer-director Lorenzo Vigas, From Afar is less a fully realized and inhabited project than a set of symmetries snipping into place. Middle-aged and resolutely middle-class Armando (Alfredo Castro), a denture specialist, cruises Caracas for rough trade, waving wads of bolivars to lure young men back to his putt-putt-filled apartment. He prefers to look, not touch or be touched—an arrangement violated when brooding brute Elder (Luis Silva, in his first role) bashes Armando and runs off with his wallet and one of those tacky angel figurines. He hits him and it felt like a kiss: The bruised prosthesodontist grows more ever intrigued by his feral assauliant and soon the two are sharing Armando’s flat.

The psychosexual dynamic between the men, with its feeble intimations of Genet and Pinter, becomes further over determined by Armando’s oblique backstory involving his titan of industry father. Vigas’ fondness for arthouse bawdies (excessive back-of-the-head shots, shallow depth of field) makes an already leaden allegory on the class chasm in his economically ravaged country more turgid. Despite From Afar’s lumbering solemnity, Castro, a Chilean actor best known for his collaborations with compatriot Pablo Larrain, proves ever supple: When Armando breaks into a smile for the first (and only) time, the performer’s saturnine face suddenly seems to emit light. —Melissa Anderson

FROM AFAR | Written and directed by Lorenzo Vigas
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The Man Who Mixed Sinatra

Luck had little to do with the magic behind Sinatra’s partnership with Lee Herschberg, the engineer responsible for the masterful sound of Strangers in the Night.

By Greg Renoff

In the mid-1960s, Frank Sinatra’s recording career had begun to falter. It was the age of Beatlemania, and the crooner’s sound, rooted in jazz and big band music, was no longer in vogue.

Eager for another shot at topping the pop charts, Sinatra lined up a session in the spring of 1966 with Jimmy Bowen, a staff producer for the singer’s label, Reprise, who had a knack for producing hit singles. Even though he despaired the song, Sinatra took Bowen’s advice and cut “Strangers in the Night.”

Bowen knew what he was doing. Released just over 50 years ago, in April 1966, “Strangers” shot up the charts, eventually knocking The Beatles’ “Paperback Writer” out of the No. 1 spot and giving Sinatra his first chart-topper in a decade. Sinatra was supposed to go in there an hour early with his piano player, Bill Miller, and go over the arrangements. In the meantime, Herschberg and Burke would be in the control room, adjusting levels on the studio microphones and balancing the control room’s monitors while the orchestra ran through the session’s compositions.

But not infrequently, the impeccably dressed Sinatra would walk into the studio some minutes ahead of schedule, raring to go. “Sinatra loved the live orchestra, and was the biggest fan of the musicians,” Herschberg says. “It was like a family reunion when he would get into the studio. He knew all of the guys, and they all loved working with him. He’d hear them playing, and he’d say, ’That sounds great! Let’s record this!’ So a lot of times I didn’t even have time to run down the orchestra, start listening to mics and sections of the band to get a balance on anything. You had to be ready on your toes, all the time.”

Even though Sinatra’s eagerness to record raised the degree of difficulty for Herschberg, he lived for these moments. “To me, being in the studio and having a huge orchestra and getting it all together and making it sound like it’s supposed to sound and doing two or three songs in three hours, that was a great high for me. It required total concentration.”

Sinatra, too, was in his element, and most typically in a jovial mood. Herschberg says, “He was at his friendliest and nicest when he was in the studio. Sinatra loved to work standing out next to the rhythm section, right next to the conductor, with the orchestra spread around him, with the brass on one side, the saxes on the other, and the strings in the back. So there was no going into a vocal booth or anything like that. Never. He’d stand there and sing.”

While in later decades artists often spent weeks or months working in the studio, the American Federation of Musicians rules for session musicians, along with Sinatra’s own interest in getting things recorded quickly, left Herschberg with no such luxuries. “You could only record up to 15 minutes of music in those three hours,” Herschberg recalls. “If you ran over, say, 30 seconds, the union would charge everything else. You’d have to get everything done in three hours.” This meant that all the songs for Strangers in the Night, except the already released title track, had to be cut in a pair of breakneck, three-hour sessions.

To get a balanced sound on tape, Herschberg started with Sinatra. “I always tried to mix around his voice,” he explains, “so we’d have something that would fit the track. You didn’t have to do a lot to it. All you had to do was leave him enough room for his dynamics. That was pretty much it. You could make adjustments.”

Lee’s a master engineer, one of the few who could work with an imposing figure like Sinatra and coax out a performance that would be remembered years later.

—Steve Hoffman, who has remastered Sinatra albums from the Herschberg era.
RADIOHEAD

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Herschberg understood that, like the other musicians in the room, Sinatra was playing an instrument: his microphone. “He was great on the microphone. He probably worked a microphone better than anybody I’ve ever seen in my life. He never missed a syllable.”

The results of those two May sessions, as documented on the Strangers LP, are sonically stunning. Sinatra sounds ebullient within the sparkling Herschberg mixes, his rich baritone alternately gliding and booming over Nelson Riddle’s now-iconic arrangements. The instrumentation, too, presents an updated Sinatra sound. Riddle, wanting things to really swing, featured a Hammond B3 rather than a piano. Along with the organ, the drums occupy a relatively prominent place in the mix, giving the album a touch of a rock feel in places.

Upon its release in June, the album performed like the “Strangers” single, galloping up the charts over the course of the summer, on its way to platinum sales. Frank Sinatra had come back in a big way. The album was likewise a career maker for Herschberg. For his marvelous technical work on Strangers, Herschberg, along with Eddie Brackett, who’d engineered the title track, would win a Grammy for the Best Engineered Recording for the year 1966. “That was my one and only,” he says with a smile. “People ask me, ‘Did you ever win a Grammy?’ A lot of people who ask weren’t even born in 1966!”

As the ‘60s drew to a close, Sinatra showed little signs of slowing down as a recording artist, and remained as eager as ever to work in the studio. Herschberg, who worked dozens of his sessions, came to the studio focused, ready to roll tape at a moment’s notice.

Still, for 1969’s My Way, Herschberg confesses that he nearly missed getting the take of the title track, perhaps Sinatra’s best-known song, recorded during a December 1968 session at Western. “It’s a long song. I only heard about a minute and a half of the arrangement being run down” before Sinatra walked to the microphone, Herschberg recalls. With producer Sonny Burke at his side, the engineer quickly rolled tape.

As the song built to its magnificent crescendo, he noticed something amiss. “About halfway through, I looked over at the tape machine, and the meters were kind of pinned.” The recording levels on Sinatra’s microphone were set too high, distorting the singer’s voice. “I thought, oh my God. My second engineer had made a little mistake in setting up the tape machine.”

When he mixed the song, however, the ever-resourceful Herschberg found a fix. “His voice did have a little bit of an edge on it in spots, but in the mix, with the orchestra, you never heard it. It was a very dynamic arrangement. It went from very soft to huge-sounding at the end.”

For Herschberg, the experience was just another reminder of how Sinatra liked to work. “It was done in one take, but that wasn’t unusual at all for Sinatra. You had to be prepared to go from note one when he walked in.”
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<td>THU. JUNE 16</td>
<td>SKYLAR SPENCE ROBONKO, 2TONEDISCO, TIDYE &amp; GOJIRA</td>
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<td>SAT. JUNE 18</td>
<td>A CLUB CALLED RHONDA JXXY, NAZE &amp; OTDIESY, PARRIS MITCHELL &amp; MORE</td>
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<td>SUN. JUNE 19</td>
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<td>6/23 TRAP KARAOKE: L.A. EDITION</td>
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<td>7/28 THE LIVING SESSIONS AND SUNSET ELECTRODO PRESENT: GIRL ROCK LA! 4TH EDITION</td>
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<td>8/24 TENTH DIMENSION</td>
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UNION

Los Globos

Los Globos

Club Rituals W/ Athletixx
Trapped Karaoke: L.A. Edition
Soundpieces Thursdays W/ Amit
Special Duties
Shame and the Astral Plane Present: Eaves
Mr. Fjlnjui
La Banda Skalavera and The Return of Hierba Mala
BrotheL B2B Divine
Soundpieces Thursdays W/ Scratch DVA + IkoniKa + Taso

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THE GREATEST

Of all the notable passings this year, Muhammad Ali’s might be the most profound. In our lifetime, he’s perhaps the country’s most recognizable and globally loved individual. He was a lot of things to a lot of people. Not always good. He made some people’s heads explode. In that way, I think he got everything right. He made the right people mad and gave inspiration, courage and hope to those who needed it most.

Many years ago, I was on a public bus in Washington, D.C., coming home from school. I heard two men behind me in a conversation that was rapidly increasing in hostility. One said, “His name is Muhammad Ali.” The other loudly spoke over him, “You mean CLAY?!” They went back and forth like this a few times. It took me years to understand what this exchange was about.

I spent years of my youth knowing that Muhammad Ali was a heavyweight champion boxer, but I didn’t know much else about him. I knew what the Rumble in the Jungle and the Thrilla in Manilla were. I knew who George Foreman, Joe Frazier and Howard Cosell were, all lumped together in my mind. My father never spoke of Ali. His conversion to Islam, conscientious objection to the Vietnam War and banishment from boxing were never taught to me in school. It was as if a major part of Ali’s life had simply never happened.

As a young adult, I started learning about the daunting challenges that Ali faced, and his incredible activism, and it occurred to me that his greatest achievements happened outside the ring. In the late 1980s, I rented video documentaries on Ali and, when opportunity allowed, bought copies so I could watch them over and over. The footage captured him fearlessly taking on members of the press, who showed equal signs of respect and consternation as this young man, who spoke a mile a minute, used his platform as an athlete to promote civil rights. It wasn’t what they wanted to hear, but it absolutely needed to be said. I always liked the scowl Ali had when he was schooling people, as if he was admonishing them for their bad behavior and knew they knew better.

The Watergate burglars made their infamous entry on March 8, 1971. This was the night of the Ali-Frazier fight. They figured it was a good distraction. The plumbers got busted, Ali lost by decision.

If you get a chance, watch the footage of Ali on The Mike Douglas Show from 1974 and imagine his American history lesson going into thousands of households all over the country — and how fast the channel was changed. Just these few minutes of footage from a little over 40 years ago, which seem like such a vastly different version of America, show how evolution this conversation has become and how much more evolved it needs to get. Ali is a large part of why things are, in many ways, better than they were.

I think one of the most amazing things about Ali is that he wasn’t assassinated. If you read what he was saying when he was saying it, it’s almost unbelievable that a bullet didn’t find him. Unsurprisingly, Ali was targeted by J. Edgar Hoover’s Counter Intelligence Program, or COINTELPRO. It would be amazing to read the files the FBI had on Ali.

If high-minded ideas and great songs could lead to momentous change, everything would be different. Dylan’s music would have prevented future wars, Marley’s would have made peace the law of all humanity. What Ali was laying on people was, at its most palatable, quite a wake-up call — and at its most severe reactionary, alienating and self-defeating.

Not to defend bad behavior, but I can understand someone getting frustrated. A good example of Ali taking his logic up a dry creek can be heard on a British TV talk show hosted by Michael Parkinson. Ali appeared on the show in June 1971. It’s worth watching because his delivery is so great, but what he’s saying isn’t attempting to bring people together:

“There are many white people who mean right and in their hearts wanna do right. If 10,000 snakes were coming down that aisle now, and I had a door that I could shut, and in that 10,000, 1,000 meant right, 1,000 rattlesnakes didn’t want to bite me, I knew they were good ... should I let all these rattlesnakes come down, hoping that that thousand get together and form a shield? Or should I just close the door and stay safe?”

I’d like to think that I would be one of the 1,000 rattlesnakes. I can understand Ali’s anger and exasperation, but if you push away those who are on your side, you won’t get far. To try to put Ali’s statement in context, the Kent State shootings had happened the summer before, the Vietnam War was still raging, Nixon’s resignation was imminent. Just these few minutes of footage could lead to momentous change, everything would be different. Dylan’s music was a good distraction. The plumbers got
THE MUST-SEE ROCK EVENT OF THE YEAR!

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"GROUNDBREAKING INSPIRING... I've NEVER seen ANYTHING LIKE THIS!"
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Whiteside
Dove just keep getting better.

soundtracks of
classic
culture
John Carpenter does all three and more. From the

gloriously irrefutable proof that Lovey

misanthrope John S. Hall, the album is

crushed CELLARS and ex–King Missile

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hop acts sampled his tracks, and early

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sound. Carpenter’s music has influenced

and
directors who also compose the scores for

films. Then there are directors who write

directors who produce their

John Carpenter

—Sam Ribakoff

LoveyDove

@ TAIX

LoveyDove, the madly mushy brainchild of lo-fi empress Azalia Snail and multi-

faced, ferociously gifted musician Dan West, never fail to flabbergast. With their

new album, Showstopper, a 13-bonbon blast of harmonious psych-pop con-

fections, the local trio have outdone themselves. Sweet, savory, gorgeously

rendered and painstakingly arranged,
every track is a masterly example of their

complex bubble-gum simplicity — a cun-

ning, stunning contradiction that reliably

engages the brain as it reaches deep into

the soul. It’s an approach the pair has

long since perfected, but on Showstopper, it’s displayed in even fuller, richer form

than ever. With guest turns by synth-pop princess CELLARS and ex–King Missile

misanthrope John S. Hall, the album is

gloriously irrefutable proof that Lovey-

Dove just keep getting better. —Jonny

Whiteside

John Carpenter

@ THE ORPHEUM THEATRE

There are directors who produce their

films. Then there are directors who write

their own movies. But there are few

directors who also compose the scores for

their works. Horror auteur John Car-

penter does all three and more. From the

iconic Halloween theme to the synth-y

soundtracks of Escape From New York

and Assault on Precinct 13, Carpenter set

a precedent for how 1980s movies should

sound. Carpenter’s music has influenced

many outside the film world, too, as hip-

hop acts sampled his tracks, and early

video game designers elaborated on the

sonic template he designed. In recent

years, Carpenter has turned away from

films and returned to music, creating new

soundtracks to the movies in his head.

He has recently released albums featur-

ing new keyboard-driven rock songs on

Sacred Bones Records. And for the first

time, he has begun to perform his music

live, backed with a band including his

rocker godson, Daniel Davies. —Drew

Tewksbury

Maya Jane Coles

@ INCEPTION AT EXCHANGE L.A.

Maya Jane Coles is tearing around the

globe. She hits three continents in a 10-
day span in June. Luckily, one of those is

North America, at Exchange L.A.’s fiery

Saturday party, Inception, which she tore

up a little over a year ago. Coles includes

a generous number of her own original

productions and remixes in her sets —

her rework of Sia’s “Alive” is on regular

rotation everywhere — while maintaining

a dark and tech-y approach. At times,

it feels as if the pint-sized dance-music

superstar is single-handedly holding

things down for female artists. She won

DJ Mag’s Best of British Best Producer

Award twice, in 2010 and in 2015. She

released a full-length last year under her

I/AM/ME label.

Thee Midniters, The Premiers,

Thee Commons

@ THE REGENT

Thee Midniters are one of the definitive

bands to come out of not just East L.A.,

but all of L.A. They’re a mercilessly versatile

group as happily adept at rousing Northern

English soul (“You’re Gonna Make Me Cry”) as they were as frothing-at-the-
mouth rockers (“Jump, Jive and Harmonize”) or Sunset Strip-style psych-garage

excursions (“Breakfast on the Grass”). Of course, their many heartbreaking ballads

are unbeatable, too. Really, there’s never a bad time to take a trip down Whittier

Boulevard, and this Midniters appearance at DJ Jonathan Toubin’s Soul Clap

night promises to be one to remember.

Opening acts include The Premiers, most famous for their version of “Farmer John” —

and venerated for their impeccable attention to
detail, it should come as no surprise that

many years, the prolific jazz-rock group

have introduced their sound to a new
generation of fans. Touring aside, what

has made Walter Becker and Donald

Fagen so respected in their 40-plus years

of writing, composing and performing

is the careful intricacies of their song

structure and harmony. Known as much

for their revolving ensemble of musi-
cians as for their impeccable attention to
detail, it should come as no surprise that

Thee Midniters — armed with hits like “Do It

Again” and “Reelin’ in the Years” — will

be backed by an orchestra at their second

Hollywood Bowl gig in as many years.

—Daniel Kohn
I called them. And I wonder who would answer if my phone book is filling up with dead song “Falling,” where she observes, “Now hollow tone. The best example may be the what remains consistent is her wrenching, instrument from guitar to synthesizer, but folk-based sound, which in its early days electronic strain to Orton’s primarily time is timeless. Via Fuck Buttons’ Andrew music with sticks — once again proves Or —

Britta Phillips’ recent solo debut, Luck or Magic, on Double Feature Records, finds the singer/multi-instrumentalist best known for her work in Luna and Dean & Britta in a wondrously atmospheric space of pure pop bliss. The album’s a bit of a rarity. It’s chock-full of genuinely original and memorable melodies, all powerfully acted out by Phillips. They’re also given gorgeous, finely crafted synth/guitar arrangements that harken back to a time when attention to sonic detail was considered a virtue, not a vice. Her taste in arrangements is of a high standard, too: The album includes a very like-minded take on The Cars’ “Drive” that is so right and true that, well, the tears just might splash right down your face. Beautiful stuff. Pop trivia nerds note: Phillips was the starring voice of Jem & the Holograms. —John Payne

Beth Orton @ TERAGRAM BALLROOM
Beth Orton’s music is often the soundtrack to quiet moments, break-up moments, introspective moments. Any kind of interaction with the singer-songwriter, be it face to face or during a performance, and it’s clear she is disarmingly goofy with an irreverent sense of humor. It’s been a few years since her last album, but her freshest one, Kidsticks — referring to kids playing music with sticks — once again proves Orton is timeless. Via Fuck Buttons’ Andrew Hung, Kidsticks reintroduces a distinct electronic strain to Orton’s primarily folk-based sound, which in its early days was tagged with the painful “folkronica” label. Orton has swapped her primary instrument from guitar to synthesizer, but what remains consistent is her wrenching, hollow tone. The best example may be the song “Falling,” where she observes, “Now my phone book is filling up with dead friends/And I wonder who would answer if I called them.” —Lily Moayeri

Clit Kat, West America @ THE SMELL
If you were among those upset by news of the Smell’s potential destruction, seize the beloved venue while you can. Luckily, the true invention of dub reggae music. Perry’s wizardry way of splicing/smearing a thousand sounds and kaleidoscoping them all into four magnetic-tape tracks also has had a massive influence on recent generations of electronic mixmasters and chill-out chiefs. —John Payne

Lee “Scratch” Perry @ ECHOPLEX
Since the 1970s, Jamaican producer-mixer-songwriter Lee “Scratch” Perry has loomed as large for his twingly-eyed stage persona and deep-fried life story as he has for his colossal achievements in the true invention of dub reggae music. Along with fellow giant King Tubby, Scratch was there at the beginning, when the time and tides seemed ripe for the 1960s bluebeat, ska and rockers sounds to get slowed down and “surrealed” out. His original productions and numerous re-versionings of tracks by Bob Marley and the Wailers, and the Congos, among about a billion others, at his legendary Black Ark Studio in Kingston created this dub form itself. Perry’s wayward style of rock & roll, who understands that and the Wailers, and the Congos, among about a billion others, at his legendary Black Ark Studio in Kingston created this dub form itself. Perry’s wizardry way of splicing/smearing a thousand sounds and kaleidoscoping them all into four magnetic-tape tracks also has had a massive influence on recent generations of electronic mixmasters and chill-out chiefs. —John Payne

Case/lang/veirs with special guest Andy Shauf on sale now
Case/lang/veirs are a supergroup consisting of Neko Case, k.d. lang and Laura Veirs. Where each of these artists individually mastered the art of writing great, vivid and emotionally honest songs, case/lang/veirs combine those talents, Voltron-style, to produce some of the best country pop rock-flavored music this side of the Nashville hit factories. The songwriting of case/lang/veirs takes as much style and attitude from L.A.’s punk rock past, especially X’s flirtation with country music, as it does from the Great Ole Opry. It’s country you can wear your Misfits patch to. —Sam Ribakoff

Sonny & the Sunsets, Will Ivy @ THE ECHO
Sonny Smith is like some lost son of Jonathan Richman, Lenny Kaye and Harry Smith: a true believer in the church of rock & roll, who understands that the sound can take many forms, spanning the Great American Songbook. Past efforts — and they are frequent and great — include “Sonnyfication” of sunny, baby moods, which was produced by Clive Jardine/Chris Ziegler.

Angela's, June 17, 9 p.m., $5-$10. Shark Muffin, The Tissues, Sat., June 18, 9 p.m., $5-$10. Vagina, Robby Bloodshed, Scarlet Harlot, Cadaver Pudding, Sun., June 19, 9 p.m., $5-$10. Trixie, DJ Cholo Canawish, Mon., June 20, 9 p.m., $5-$10. Wild Year, Cold Violets, Middle Child, Thu., June 23, 8:30 p.m., TBA.


The Troubadour: The Teragram Ballroom: Taix French Restaurant: Saint Rocke: The Rose: Resident: The Orange: The Rock:

Have You Detoxed and Relapsed Again? And Again? If So, We Have an Alternative.

Are You Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired?

UPCOMING EVENTS at AMOEBA!
All shows are FREE and ALL AGES.
For a full calendar of events, visit AMOEBA.COM

Thursday - June 16 - 8pm
RADIOHEAD

PRE-RELEASE PARTY
Be one of the first to buy the new album, A Moon Shaped Pool. Listen to the entire album! Get a free Radiohead button and poster while supplies last. Cookies and trivia too! AND swing by Friday, June 17 at 6pm for a live stream event from the band. Details on amoeba.com.

Saturday - June 18 - Noon-4pm
SIDEWALK SALE
Shop amazing deals right outside the store! DVD box sets: $5 each or 2 for $8; DVDS: $2 each or 3 for $5; Blu-ray: $4 each or 3 for $10; CDs: buy 1 get 1 of [same or lesser value] free; 45s: huge, fresh batch of 45s for $1 each; Magazines, books & comics 3 for $1; $1 LPs plus other great deals.

Tuesday - June 21 - 7pm
ROGER GOULA DJ SET
Celebrating the launch of the new contemporary Classical label, Cognitive Shift Recordings, with a special event in our Jazz & Classical Room! Roger Goula's EP, Something About Silence, will be available for purchase and signing.

Thursday - June 23 - 6pm
THE NEON DEMON SOUNDTRACK SIGNING

Director Nicolas Winding Reinh and composer Cliff Martinez sign copies of the soundtrack and meet fans!

6400 SUNSET BLVD. (323) 245-6400
MON-SAT 10AM-11PM • SUN 11AM-10PM
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**And Again?**

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MAKE MUSIC DAY:
CAGE THE ELEPHANT:
BJ THE CHICAGO KID:
GO
WHILK & MISKY:
CONFLICT, A GLOBAL THREAT:
GO
GO
GO
OZOMATLI:
NO DUH, GREEN TODAY, THE 182'S:
MUSIC ON THE MEADOWS:
MONICA:
MAXENCE CYRIN:
LEGENDS OF SOUL:
THE L.A. VEGAN BEER & FOOD FESTIVAL:
EMBLEM3:
TUESDAY, JUNE 21
MONDAY, JUNE 20
SUNDAY, JUNE 19
Collapse, 7 p.m., $20. The Observatory, 3503 S. Harbor Blvd., Santa Ana.
Forgotten, Homesick Abortions, Death March, Grand Sunflower Bean, 7 p.m., $29.50-$45. Shrine Room, 9 p.m., $12. The Observatory, 3503 S. Harbor Blvd., Los Angeles.
Yost Theater, 307 N. Spurgeon St., Santa Ana.
Grim, The Penetrators, 8 p.m., TBA. The Yost Theater, 307 N. Spurgeon St., Santa Ana.
Social, Yoya, Gateway Drugs, 4 p.m., $15. The Autry, 4700 Western Heritage Way, Los Angeles.
WAVVES, ALLAH-LAS, KAKI KING, THE BIG PINK, TRAPDOOR SOCIAL, YOTA, GATEWAY DRUGS, 4 P.M., $15. THE AUTRY, 4700 WESTERN HERITAGE WAY, LOS ANGELES.
THE ADICTS, THE CROWD:
JOE JACKSON:
THEE MIDNITERS, THE PREMIERS:
SUNSTOCK SOLAR FESTIVAL:
RHYTHM & RHYME MUSIC & ART
EXPERIENCE:
WITH EARTH, WIND & FIRE, ZAPPA, BROTHER ALL, THE GASLAMP KILLER, DOOMTREE, GRIEVES, OPEN MIKE EAGLE, 2MEX HOMOLOGAR, 9 P.M., $35-$100. THE BELASCO THEATER, 1050 S. HILL ST., LOS ANGELES.
STEELY DAN:
WITH EARTH, WIND & FIRE, ZAPPA, BROTHER ALL, THE GASLAMP KILLER, DOOMTREE, GRIEVES, OPEN MIKE EAGLE, 2MEX HOMOLOGAR, 9 P.M., $35-$100. THE BELASCO THEATER, 1050 S. HILL ST., LOS ANGELES.
SUNSTOCK SOLAR FESTIVAL:
WITH CULTS, WAVVES, ALLAH-LAS, KAKI KING, THE BIG PINK, TRAPDOOR SOCIAL, YOTA, GATEWAY DRUGS, 4 P.M., $15. THE AUTRY, 4700 WESTERN HERITAGE WAY, LOS ANGELES.
THEE MIDNITERS, THE PREMIERS:
WITH THEE COMMONS, 8:30 P.M., $15.50. THE REGENT THEATER, 448 S. MAIN ST., LOS ANGELES. SEE MUSIC PICK.
TOP SHELF VOCAL:
8 P.M., $10-$15. FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF LOS ANGELES, 540 S. COMMONWEALTH AVE., LOS ANGELES.
SUNDAY, JUNE 19
CONFlict, A GLOBAL THREAT:
WITH CLIT 45, THE FORGOTTEN, HOMOSEX ABORTIONS, DEATH MARCH, GRAND COLLAPSE, 7 P.M., $20. THE OBSERVATORY, 3503 S. HARBOR BLVD., SANTA ANA.
JOE JACKSON:
WITH FOX PERFORMING ARTS CENTER, 3801 MISSION INN AVE., RIVERSIDE.
WHILK & MISKY:
WITH VOKES, IN THE CONSTITUTION ROOM, 9 P.M., $12. THE OBSERVATORY, 3503 S. HARBOR BLVD., SANTA ANA.
MONDAY, JUNE 20
DISGORGE:
WITH LETUM ASCENSUS, CREMATORIUM, INVADER, MUTAGEN, 7 P.M., $5. THE REGENT THEATER, 448 S. MAIN ST., LOS ANGELES.
TUESDAY, JUNE 21
THE ADICTS, THE CROWD:
THE CHICAGO KID:
WITH EARTH, WIND & FIRE, ZAPPA, BROTHER ALL, THE GASLAMP KILLER, DOOMTREE, GRIEVES, OPEN MIKE EAGLE, 2MEX HOMOLOGAR, 9 P.M., $35-$100. THE BELASCO THEATER, 1050 S. HILL ST., LOS ANGELES.
CAGE THE ELEPHANT:
WITH PORTUGAL THE MAN, 8 P.M., $20-$50. THE REGENT THEATER, 448 S. MAIN ST., LOS ANGELES.
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THE SONGS OF CARL WAGNER & JOSÉ CABAL:
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