ANDY BALES’ SECRET WEAPON

The homeless advocate lost his leg walking the streets of Skid Row. He gained something in return

BY HILLEL ARON
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Splash of grenadine

**Instructions**

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BLACK LIVES MATTER PROTESTER SUES POLICE

A video captured the moment Rebecka Jackson-Moeser was injured

BY JASON MCGAHAN

On the evening of Nov. 25, 2014, Rebecka Jackson-Moeser marched with a crowd of thousands from Leimert Park to L.A. City Hall. She and the others were protesting a Missouri grand jury’s failure to indict the white police officer who shot and killed an unarmed black teenager in Ferguson.

At around 9:30 p.m., Jackson-Moeser joined a group of about 100 protesters that split off from the main rally at City Hall and managed to walk onto the 101 freeway downtown, blocking traffic in both directions. Within minutes, officers from the California Highway Patrol arrived in riot gear and began to disperse the protesters.

Jackson-Moeser originally is from St. Louis and was a master’s student in theater at the California Institute of the Arts at the time of the protest. (Currently, she works as a stage manager for a theater company in L.A.) She marched that day with her younger brother, the two of them part of a group of protesters the police were forcing to exit the freeway near Grand Avenue. “There was a whole line of them,” she tells L.A. Weekly. “It felt like a military action of them just like forcing us off the highway.”

A video captures the moment Jackson-Moeser had a violent run-in with authorities. She is exiting the freeway, walking backwards up the hill. After she turns her back to the skirmish line of police, an officer swings a baton with a backhand motion that strikes the left side of her face. The blow would split her left earlobe and open a gash on the side of her head, requiring 20 stitches altogether and leaving her with a concussion, according to a lawsuit. “He lashed out at her for no good reason. She was running away from him.”

Jackson-Moeser says she considers her lawsuit “the tip of the iceberg” of the harassment she has endured following the grand jury’s decision on Ferguson.

“The police started pushing us back, they were pushing girls, they were pushing really small people, they tried to grab my brother. I grabbed my brother, moving back the whole time holding him behind me. They swung around and hit me with a club in my ear. They would have taken me, too. We started running. We all got out of there.”

LAPD Chief Charlie Beck said at a news conference the day after the protest that his department and the California Highway Patrol were “extremely generous in allowing the expression of First Amendment activities” within the limits of the law.

“It’s very easy to demonstrate in the city of Los Angeles and not get arrested,” he said.

Jackson-Moeser says that she saw the highway blockade as an opportunity to bring attention to the issue of aggressive use of force by police.

“To get some sort of coverage and bring attention to causes, you have to take advantage,” she says. “There is always an element of danger, but what’s more important is that others have lost their lives... Hopefully your action will help to prevent more of those deaths.”

The complaint cites — but does not name — two CHP officers as defendants: the officer who struck Jackson-Moeser in the video and the officer who was standing beside him. Gonzalez claims the latter is at fault “because he failed to intervene and stop it.”

Gonzalez says he has filed a state public records act request on his client’s behalf to obtain the names of the two officers involved.

“We’d like to know who these people are,” he says.
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It’s a sweltering, 90-degree November afternoon, and the putrid smell of sweat and urine, punctuated by the occasional waft of cigarette or marijuana smoke, permeates Skid Row. The sidewalks are dominated by massive, festive colored tents — red, orange and blue. People are everywhere. The streets have a kind of manic energy about them, especially lately. Lots of shouting, lots of sudden movements. Everyone is packed together; there is no personal space. Homeless encampments have sprung up all over the city, but there is nothing like Skid Row, nothing that amounts to this concentration of human suffering.

“Cold water!” Phillip calls out. “Union Rescue Mission! Cold water!” He pushes a large cart loaded with plastic water bottles down the middle of San Julian Street. The tents have made the sidewalks impassable for anything wider than a skateboard. Smooth jazz is blasting from a speaker.

William, a large, muscular man with an L.A. Rams cap and a Band-Aid across the bridge of his nose, follows behind Phillip, hands out a bottle and informs the recipient, “Jesus Christ gave you that bottle of water.” He clutches a soft-cover copy of the Bible.

“Thank you, Jesus, for the water,” Phillip says, to no one in particular. Homeless since the age of 8, he has been staying at the Union Rescue Mission, a homeless shelter founded in 1891, for more than a year. “Beautiful day out here,” he says, and he looks as if he means it.

The Rev. Andy Bales follows close behind, gliding along in his wheelchair, a 24-pack of water balanced on his lap. He wears a gray suit and a red tie, black Ray-Ban Wayfarers and black, fingerless cycling gloves. What’s left of his right leg, which was amputated just below the knee, is propped up at a 90-degree angle. He has the calm, plainspoken demeanor of a Midwesterner. He seems to know half the people out here.

“You get a water, Elena?” he asks a woman sitting outside a tent. She did. “Good.” He rolls a little more and stops beside a man splayed out on the concrete, tucking a bottle between the man’s chest and arm. He stops to talk to another man and holds his hand, gingerly, for a few seconds. “When can I come to see you?” the man asks. “Tomorrow,” Bales answers. He doesn’t linger. There’s too much to do.

As CEO of the Union Rescue Mission, a privately run, Christian-based homeless shelter, Bales hands out water on Skid Row whenever it’s 85 degrees or hotter. He believes it was on one of these treks, around two years ago, that he came into contact with the flesh-eating bacteria that would eat away at his leg.

Bales had a history of health problems that made him susceptible to infection. He has Type I diabetes, has had two heart attacks and received a kidney transplant from his wife in 2013. Five weeks after the transplant, he competed in a triathlon, during which he developed a blister. The blister festered into a wound and, even though Bales wore a protective...
Andy Bales’ grandfather was homeless for much of his life. He moved his family back and forth from Des Moines, Iowa, to California, riding in freight cars. On the wall of Bales’ office hangs a photo of his dad, at the age of 14, outside the family’s home at the time — a tent in Azusa Canyon. They later moved to a garage in Compton, then a shed in Baldwin Park, then back to Des Moines. Bales’ dad did a bit better: He got a job and earned enough money to get his family off the streets before he was 18.

He joined the Army, married, started a family, went into business manufacturing parts and cleaning solution for car washes, and lost everything when Andy was 14.

“I remember him lying on his couch, depressed,” Bales recalls. “I was in the eighth grade, and I said, ‘Get off your butt and go to work.’ As kindly as I could.”

Bales, who was raised a nondenominational Christian, grew up wanting to be a preacher, but the first time he tried his hand at public speaking — in speech class at Biola College (now Biola University) in La Mirada when he was 17 — he fainted, passing out against a chalkboard. So he became a youth pastor. It was the tail end of the Jesus movement, which was sort of like Christianity’s answer to the 1960s. Burned-out flower children everywhere were turning to new-age religions (or in some cases cults). Some chose Christianity.

“I remember singing in a gospel team and having all these long-haired guys that were on drugs and in bands and turning to church,” Bales says. “I was like their young mentor.”

After graduating from college, Bales took a job teaching at a Christian school in Des Moines. One day, he witnessed a student being bullied. He went home, picked up his Bible and read from Matthew 25:40: “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’” The next day, he taught the lesson to all six of his classes — that which you do to the least fortunate, to someone who is hungry or who is hurting, you do to God himself.

That weekend, Bales went to his second job, taking tickets at a parking garage. He was married with four kids and was struggling to make ends meet. He was sitting in the glass booth watching the NFL on a small television, on a frigid winter’s night, and he heard a knock on the window. He looked up to find a man with a long, filthy beard, missing teeth, staring at Bales’ sandwich. The man asked for it.

“No, sir, I need my sandwich,” Bales replied. The man’s face fell, and he disappeared into the cold.

“And I realized, Andy, you missed your chance,” Bales says. “You had a chance to practice what you preached on Friday, and you missed it.”

“So I prayed and I hoped for another chance, and I found him on the street, and I fed him dinner.”

A few weeks later, Bales was offered a job at a mission in Des Moines. That was 30 years ago.

“Since that day, from the meal I failed to feed, I’ve fed millions of meals to hungry people,” Bales says. “Now I’m to the point of, I can’t bear to leave a precious human being on the streets.”

There are around 3,600 homeless people living within the roughly 50-square-block area known as Skid Row, according to the latest count by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority. Nearly half of them are unsheltered, inhabiting tents, cars or makeshift encampments, or simply lying out on the sidewalk. There is nothing else like it in America.

Back in 2005, then-Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa launched the Safer Cities Initiative, which put 50 additional LAPD officers on the streets of Skid Row, or about one on every block. This was before the “housing first” approach became the consensus solution. Back then, many officials still thought that one way to end homelessness was to make it harder to live on the street. Bill Bratton was police chief, and "broken windows" policing, by which signs of blight are eradicated in an effort to psychologically dissuade criminal behavior, was very much the order of the day. The effort to clean up Skid Row was lauded by business groups such as the Central City Association — and decried by social justice activists like the L.A. Community Action Network (L.A. CAN).

Perhaps surprisingly, Bales aligned himself with the Central City Association and LAPD. He favored a crackdown on the gangs that were terrorizing the streets of Skid Row.

“At times, Andy has taken what we would say is a problematic stance in allying himself with the approaches that criminalize homelessness,” says Eric Ares, spokesman for L.A. CAN. But Bales isn’t perfectly aligned with anyone — not the cops, not the business community and certainly not the supportive-housing providers. He’s spoken out against court rulings that have made it illegal for police to confiscate homeless people’s property, which he says have allowed the encampments to flourish, bringing with them crime and unsanitary conditions. He’s also been critical of LAPD’s reaction to those court decisions.

“The police became hands-off,” Bales says. “They retreated to their cars and gave up their walks.” The result, he says, has been chaos.

Then there’s Bales’ criticism of the “housing first” policy supported by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. The policy emphasizes permanent supportive housing — apartment buildings with on-site mental health services — to combat chronic homelessness. It’s a model that’s been proven effective, but it’s useful for only about 20 percent of the homeless population. Which is why Bales thinks it’s seriously flawed.

Homeless advocates, including Bales, say the people who make up the other 80 percent require more subtle and less expensive approaches — things such as housing vouchers, drug and alcohol treatment, job training, mental health care and other supportive services. The approach that utilizes these
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Says Bales: “I like to joke, I worked my whole life to end up on Skid Row — and I finally made it.”

When Bales took over as head of Union Rescue Mission in 2005, it was already the biggest shelter on Skid Row, in terms of size. But Bales didn’t think the facility was using the space well enough. Its fifth floor was virtually empty, reserved for volunteers and visiting VIPs. Bales turned the fifth floor into transitional living for recently released female prisoners. When the great recession hit, the floor filled with homeless women and children.

A few weeks ago, a group of women was sleeping on cots in the mission’s chapel. “We just don’t feel that we can leave women and children on the streets,” Bales says, “because it’s dangerous.”

The biggest change Bales made was expecting something from the “guests,” as he calls them. It used to be that guests would sleep at Union Rescue Mission at night and leave in the morning. Now, they don’t have to leave; they can keep their same bed and footlocker, but they are expected to stay sober. If they have any income, either from a job or a disability check, they are expected to pay $5 a day and to save, for themselves, another $2 a day.

“When I did that, a lot of people criticized me,” he says. “But we went from 300 guests who were really stuck and going nowhere to [at] 400 who are climbing and getting on their feet. It had the effect I hoped it would have. It affirmed people’s dignity, it taught responsibility, it caused people to feel [a sense of] ownership.”

Despite the sense of community that Bales has fostered, many advocates for the homeless bristle at the idea that more shelters should be built. “Sheltered is still homeless,” says Peter Lynn, executive director of the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority. “Investing in housing people is the key to ending homelessness.”

Bales doesn’t disagree with that. But investing in housing — building housing — takes time. And for him, people living on the street, particularly women and children, don’t have time. Living on the street is too damaging, too traumatic. He says homelessness can’t be treated as a long-term problem at the expense of treating it as a short-term one. It’s a problem that requires urgent care.

After all, if Bales can catch a flesh-eating virus walking around Skid Row, other people can — and have, he says.

After his recent amputation, Bales thought about retiring. “I sat on my back one day and just said, ‘Well, is it time to hang it up?’”

The answer, he decided, was no. “I’m just gonna keep going.”

“He loves what he does,” says David Dow, chairman of Union Rescue Mission’s board of directors. “It propels him. Occasionally, I will say, ‘Slow down, Andy.’ Well, that’s like talking to the wind.”

In a way, Bales’ amputation has given him a renewed purpose. Before, he was a witness to the degradation of Skid Row. Now he’s a casualty of it.

“Andy Bales’ case is a reflection of the fact that this is not just a discussion about living on the street and housing the homeless. It’s a discussion about health and welfare,” says Carol Schatz, who recently stepped down as president of the Central City Association. “He’s the most poignant example of it.”

But Bales’ injury is more than just a symbol of martyrdom. It’s allowed him to become closer to the people he helps. “They used to think I was a cop,” Bales says. “They used to say, ‘Officer walking!’ when I would walk around. And now they know I’m not a cop, and they know I’m not intimidating, and they just welcome me and fist-bump me.”

He says he considers his disability a secret weapon, one that allows him “to communicate with people without any barrier.”

“They know my story,” he says. “I am one of them.”
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Winsome in Echo Park is the all-day hipster diner you can’t resist

**BY BESHA RODELL**

D
id you ever know someone with a face so attractive, style so effortlessly perfect and a life so wonderful that it made you secretly hate them? Sometimes I think this basic human cattiness is a large part of why many people disparage Los Angeles — it’s too sunny, too breezy, too full of beautiful people. If you ever want to torture a particularly cynical New Yorker with just such a Californian fantasy, I recommend taking them to Winsome, the all-day Echo Park restaurant and cafe that materialized from mythical unrealities, some of them perfectly stubbled, sunglassed-inside Hollywood types, some of them looking as if they just came from a fabulous Laurel Canyon house party, circa 1972.

I suppose that’s what Echo Park looks like in 2016, at least the part of it built for its moneyed newer residents. Winsome is in the bottom of an apartment complex called the Elysian, where a $23-square-foot studio apartment rents for $2,350 a month. The restaurant obviously caters to the type of people who either live in the building or could see themselves living in such a building. The first I heard about Winsome was someone explaining about the cost of a single pancake on its breakfast menu — an $11 pancake doesn’t seem so crazy. (I interrupt this snark fest to inform you that the Elysian is part of the historic Metropolitan Water District campus, originally designed by acclaimed architect William Pereira; the studio apartment referenced above has a balcony with a looming, glittering view of downtown that’s undeniably astonishing.)

Winsome is put together by Marc Rose and Med Abrous, the guys behind the Rooftop Bar’s lauded Spare Room cocktail bar. The chef is Jeremy Strubel, who has worked in L.A. for years and probably is best known for having been the chef at Rustic Canyon between when Evan Funke left and when Jeremy Fox came on. Strubel is also a partner in Winsome; while he created the menus, he’s not executing them on a day-to-day basis. That’s being done by Matt Bollinger, who was previously at Trois Familia. Strubel’s style is to douse everything in lots of bright, herb-based and often creamy sauces, to throw a bunch of ingredients that sound fairly random into a bowl together and to create something harmonious and interesting and delicious.

That’s the thing about Winsome: Even if you’d like to resist the hipster fantasy it perpetuates, the food — and the drinks! — are likely to seduce you anyway.

Vibrant, blindingly green sauces are a specialty. At breakfast, tangy basil tahini pools around a potato rosti (a large, flat, crispy potato pancake) that’s draped in smoked salmon, and cilantro yogurt perks up a plate of “grains and eggs.” An addictive, deep green sludge of herb pistou tops a lunchtime dip of whipped feta combined with pureed shell beans — you slop the stuff onto grilled bread and wish they also served it at dinner. Underneath the beautifully cooked grilled rib-eye comes a layer of grassy but decadent creamed wild arugula. You get the feeling the chefs in charge could spend years thinking up new ways to combine leafy things and creamy things, and you hope they do just that.

Acid is another apparent muse. Maitake mushrooms over sauteed greens with a tarragon breadcrumb crunch are complemented by a wonderfully bracing hit of lemon aioli. A stack of lightly fried tofu cubes gets the exact amount of tang needed — from a dice of peppers and chili and puffed wheat berry — to bring out the creaminess of the bean curd.

Winsome is cooking a lot of food for a lot of people — breakfast, lunch and dinner is a big undertaking — and it would be weird if it was selling a thousand. I have some minor complaints: The wilted escarole chicken soup at lunch tastes a little too much like what I’d make from whatever was in my fridge on a night when I didn’t feel like shopping; the heirloom carrot “tagliatelle” and watercress next to a beautifully cooked beef cheek looked and tasted a bit too much like bunny food; desserts are uneven, some of them too wacky and some of them too clumsy. But for a menu with such breadth and personality, Winsome’s average is pretty impressive.

If there’s one place where Winsome plays to its own hipster cliché in a less flattering light, it’s in the service, which can be charming and neglectful, oftentimes because it seems like the waiters are having such an awesome time hanging out at the end of the bar flirting with one another. One of the owners often hangs out at that same end of the bar, leaving his perch to schmooze with the industry types who take meetings here all day, slapping them on the back a few feet away as I wait in vain for my man-bunned waiter to notice I’ve been done with lunch for 20 minutes. The drinks are great, both the cocktails and the short wine and beer list. But it can be a difficult task to get those drinks. Even after you’ve flagged someone down and ordered, the bartender won’t notice the order come in, and your waitress might be having such a good time chatting to him that she forgets to tip him off. Everyone on staff is so delightful and attractive, it makes me feel bad to want to break up their happy time. If that circle of chatty goodwill perpetuates, the food — and the drinks! — are likely to seduce you anyway.

There are some restaurants that present a fantasy that enrobes you when you walk in, that manage to make you feel as though you are fabulously simple for being there. Winsome is not that restaurant. Either you belong there or you don’t — you’ll know the answer as soon as you walk in. If you do, Winsome will be your new favorite spot to sip a cocktail or a macchiato and feel blessed to live in a city that provides such stylish quality in its restaurants and way of life. If you don’t, all this louche comeliness is a little hard to swallow. I suggest you ungrit your teeth long enough to eat. Unlike people or restaurants, it’s hard to hate food because it’s so effortlessly wonderful.

**CRITIC’S RATING***

★★★★★

= Very Good

★★★★

= Good

★★★

= Fair

★★

= Poor

★

= World-Class

PHOTO BY ANNE FISHBEIN

PHOTO BY ANNE FISHBEIN
Is L.A.’s Poké Craze Bad for the Environment?
FISH USED FOR POPULAR DISH IS RESOURCE-INTENSIVE

Poké was originally a minimalist, low-impact dish. It started in Hawaii, where for centuries fishermen simply cut their raw leftover catch into cubes and seasoned it with whatever they had on hand.

In modern-day poké shops, however, catch-of-the-day poké is virtually unheard of. The menus in Los Angeles follow a rather standard formula: yellowfin tuna (also known as ahi), salmon, albacore and maybe octopus.

The poké craze in Los Angeles is undeniable. But with a raw-fish store in nearly every neighborhood, it’s time to consider the implications of the trend. While fresh fish drizzled with ponzu and Sriracha in every neighborhood, it’s time to consider the environmental consequences of this craze?

For one, the growing demand for yellowfin tuna could put increased stress on worldwide fish stocks. Some salmon comes from farms in Canada, where certain open-ocean fish farms are known to generate pollution, disease and parasites. Also, fish used in poké restaurants are resource-intensive. More often than not, the kinds of seafood used in poké are at the top of the food chain.

It’s no secret that seafood is in a precarious situation. According to a 2011 report by the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch, nearly two-thirds of fish stocks worldwide require rebuilding. It is estimated that there will be more plastic than fish in the oceans by 2050. While the United States has some of the best-managed fisheries in the world, roughly 90 percent of our seafood is imported from abroad. And worldwide, only seven percent of coastal governments employ rigorous scientific assessments as a basis for their management policies.

One of the biggest issues is by-catch. According to a report by Oceana, global by-catch may amount to 40 percent of the world’s catch. Some fisheries discard more fish at sea than they bring in, which includes injuring and killing thousands of whales, dolphins, seals, sea turtles and sharks annually.

And while intensive aquaculture farms are sating our appetite for wild-caught fish and in part solving the problem of by-catch, aquaculture can be problematic for the environment as well. Fish farms produce enormous quantities of waste and release contaminated water into the natural environment.

“The main problem is that you don’t know what the fish is fed,” says Seth Cohen, co-owner of Sweetfin Poké.

Sweetfin Poké, with locations in Santa Monica and Topanga and more planned, is one of the few poké shops in Los Angeles that claims a commitment to responsible fish sourcing.

“The salmon we’re getting from Northwestern Scotland. This is a farm product,” Cohen says. “There’s a lot of misinformation about farmed versus wild, and when you want to get consistently great salmon, the only way to do that is to go with a farm product. And we wanted to make sure that if we were serving a farm product, we were serving the highest level of sustainably farmed product that we have. The farm product is certified by the Aquaculture Stewardship Council. Not only do they grow the fish but they also create their own feed. It’s antibiotic-free and there’s no growth hormones in the feed.”

All other fish on the Sweetfin menu is wild and line-caught. Line-caught means that the fish was caught with traditional methods of hook and line and that there is no unwanted by-catch.

Sweetfin’s albacore comes from just off the Fijian Islands and is managed by the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission, which keeps track of conservation and management of the highly migratory fish stocks in the region. Tai snapper hails from a small fishing village in New Zealand, where they have their own quota-management system. The village implements yearly catch limits for every fish stock in the region.

Yellowfin tuna, which can be a controversial fish because it was put on the near-threatened list by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, is sourced off the island nation of Kiribati.

“It’s really hard to find sustainably caught yellowfin tuna, and labeling it sustainable is a little bit difficult to do,” Cohen says. “With that being said, the fishery that we work with in that area is regulated by the Marine Stewardship Council. They are actively monitoring and making sure that the yellowfin tuna that we are receiving has a healthy level of population. We’ve spoken to them and it’s not an endangered species by any means especially in that area. It’s actually a very healthy stock.”

One of the main challenges of being a poké business is balancing price point with quality. Poké shops are fast-casual concepts, and their profits are a hallmark of that.

Many poké shops won’t discuss their fish sourcing with reporters; some managers will hang up on a caller who asks where they get their product. Mainland Poké is one that says it’s committed to responsible sourcing. Its products are certified by Friends of the Sea, which promotes selective fishing methods and aims to reduce ecosystem impact. “The certification also ensures high quality standards in terms of energy efficiency and social accountability,” says owner Ari Kahan.

Certification can get confusing, though. Both Friends of the Sea and the Marine Stewardship Council have met with controversy in the past. According to chef Michael Cimarusti of Providence and Connie & Ted’s, the solution is to buy American.

“At my restaurants, we buy and sell American fish,” he says. “Buying and selling American fish is a patriotic act. More people should understand that. I’m pro-business and people making a buck, but we have to be responsible about our choices.”

Thanks to domestic regulations, which are among some of the best in the world, seafood from U.S. waters is more likely to be responsibly caught. However, one-third of American-caught seafood is sold abroad.

“A lot of these [poké] businesses are based on cost and not based on the sustainability of the fish,” Cimarusti says. “We either protect the fish in our ocean and think about climate change or we put into action a series of events that’s irreversible.”

Cimarusti has long been an advocate of sustainable fish sourcing. His businesses, considered the best seafood restaurants in L.A., are committed to transparency. He gets his seafood from a program called Dock to Dish, which connects chefs to local American fishermen.

“There are sources for wild, American sustainable fish,” he says. “Whether or not businesses make that switch is another issue.”

According to Ryan Bigelow, program engagement manager for the Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch program, this switch on the part of L.A. poké owners could have a ripple effect for the rest of the
You were born here 70 years ago, and still consider L.A. home. What are some of the biggest changes you’ve seen in your time here?

When I was a youngster, it was Mexico and now it’s America. The border crossed me. My grandmother, who died when she was 96, she was from Tucson when it was still Mexico. But the change is the diversification of a lot of different neighborhoods. And all of it’s sudden it’s going to be easier to get to places because you’re really expanding transit. So now I see interaction between communities more and more. People are not as isolated. They go to each other’s communities more and more. As each individual community gets more gentrified or integrated, or whatever that is, people are involved in each other’s food. Especially millennials, I see them appreciate that. There is a taco truck on every corner.

How do you feel now that gringos are embracing Mexican culture — particularly food and drink — more enthusiastically than ever?

Listen, my little blond-haired, blue-eyed friend, I think it’s a wonderful thing. Everybody’s trying more and more things, but not only getting to try them but getting to know them. Because it’s an ongoing process. My daughter, who’s 24, goes down to Silver Lake and experiences all different kinds of cultures. It’s pretty cool. You go to other parts of the country and it’s still just burgers and fries.

We just passed Proposition 64, legalizing recreational marijuana. Did you truly ever think you’d alive to see the day?

I did, I always thought that I would. But nothing is quite as simple as it seems; it’s like on my Instagram account … [I received this comment]: “You guys are the leaders of the movement, and you were out there fighting on the frontiers for so long, you represented the community, and now you voted for Proposition 64 to legalize marijuana … fucking sellouts!!” [Laughs] It just cracked me up, man. Like, OK, you can’t please everybody. But it was always a tool to lock minorities up. It’s gonna change. There’s always heavy pushback against any legalization efforts, no matter what state it’s in, people are involved in each other’s food. Especially millennials, I see them appreciate that. There is a taco truck on every corner.

Why mezcal as opposed to other spirits?

I like the smoky flavor, and I like that it blended well. For me it wasn’t at first a sipping kind of liquor, it was something that could be blended in so many different ways, and I was really attracted to that. And the fact that people were learning about it, and there’s always this intrigue when people are learning about something new.

Tell us about the unique design of the Tres Palate bottle, and how you had a hand in that.

I’m a collector of Chicano art, exclusively, since about 1985, and I put together this world-renowned collection. I kinda got onto the Chicano painters very early, and I thought they were really, really good. What emerged was this story of a community told in a lot of different ways. Not only are these great painters but this is an American school of art that has not been recognized as it should be. So I started collecting that, and it’s been wonderful, still doing it. It’s like a habit.

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**CULTURE**

**Russia Invades**

UCLA's departments of comparative literature, musicology and Slavic languages/literatures have joined forces for a three-day celebration of Russian arts and cuisine. *Far From Moscow* is a multidisciplinary look at what's going on in Russia right now, from comic books to music. The festival launches on Friday with events both on campus and around town. No knowledge of Russian is necessary; everything will be translated or subtitled in English. Head to the Fowler Museum for a free show of comics and graphic arts, most being displayed in the United States for the first time. For $15, check out a screening of *Queen of Spades*, a film derived from Tchaikovsky and Pushkin, at the James Bridges Theatre. Foodies might want to shell out $185 for a seven-course dinner from an all-star roster of Russian chefs at Verlaine in West Hollywood. Contemporary and classical music concerts at multiple venues also are part of the event. UCLA Fowler Museum, 308 Charles E. Young Drive N., Westwood; Fri.–Sun., Dec. 9–11, noon; free-$185. (310) 825-9212, ffmestival.com. —Liz Ohanesian

**DANCE**

**The White Stuff**

Come Jan. 1 (well, Jan. 2 this year, because Pasadena), the snowbound parts of this country enviously eye the Rose Parade and SoCal's sunny beneficence, yet throughout December artificial snow and ice spring up here as seasonally as Christmas trees and *Nutcracker* ballets. Recognizing this sun-drenched area's fascination with the snow L.A. lacks, Heidi Duckler, L.A.'s mistress of the site-specific performance, and her band of dancers, singers and musicians tackle the idea and object of snow in SoCal. Join Heidi Duckler Dance Theater as it exploits Culver City's temporary snowpack in *Snowed Under*. There's only one show; they have to be quick before it melts! Helms Bakery, 8685 Washington Blvd., Culver City; Sat., Dec. 10, 7 p.m.; $25-$50, $15 students. bit.ly/idisnowedunder. —Ann Haskins

**COMEDY**

**Oh, Sandy**

Let Sandra Bernhard drive as she premieres her latest show, *Sandra Monica Blvd: Coast to Coast*, a typically sardonic combination of stand-up comedy and musical performance, which she promises will be delivered, sentimentally enough, in “the muted colors of dreamy landscapes.” The longtime film and television provocateur and host of the satellite-radio program *Sandyland* envisions her new piece as “a journey to find the soul of America ... while weeping in the soundtrack you might hear on an AM radio station you pick up from Oklahoma.” In past performances, that soundtrack has included the New York comedian's surreally irreverent reinterpretations of such schlocky tunes as Gordon Lightfoot’s “If You Could Read My Mind,” interspersed with nostalgic storytelling, personal confessions and ruthless eviscerations of her fellow celebrities. Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, 9390 N. Santa Monica Blvd., Beverly Hills; Sat., Dec. 10, 8 & 10 p.m. (also Thu. & Fri.); $70. (310) 246-3800, thewallis.org/sortingroom. —Falling James

**MUSIC**

**Different Drum**

Linda Ronstadt is one of the most powerful voices in the history of popular music. Period. No arguments will be heard. The Stone Ponys frontwoman-turned–solo powerhouse retired from performing in 2009, and then in 2013 re-emerged with tragic news: She had been diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease and can no longer sing. *A Tribute to the Music of Linda Ronstadt*, old friends and plenty of admirers — Grace Potter, Jackson Browne, Dawes, Maria Muldair, Gaby Moreno, I’m With Her, David Lindley, JD Souther and Watkins Family Hour — honor her legend won’t be robbed of their gift when they could still be sharing it with the world. The Theatre at Ace Hotel, 929 S. Broadway, downtown; Sun., Dec. 11, 8 p.m.; $49.50-$250. (213) 235-9614, thewallis.org/losangeles/theatre. —Gwynedd Stuart

**BEAUTY**

**To and 'Fro**

Women’s magazines were abuzz last year when Maria Borges became the first model to walk in Victoria’s Secret's
Have you been diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder?

Are you currently taking medication to treat your Bipolar Disorder?

If so, you may want to consider participating in a clinical research study.

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

Moonlight

Night Magic is perhaps the most lauded film of the year, and rightfully so. Barry Jenkins’ first feature in eight years (following 2008’s Medicine for Melancholy) is gorgeous and gripping; it’s a film that clutches your heart long after you’ve left the theater. Three incredible leads offer us potent, often painful fragments of an African-American man’s journey of self-discovery, from boyhood to manhood. The film is likely to continue sweeping up awards and well-deserved exposure for Jenkins, so don’t miss this unique opportunity to explore its complex humanity at the Hammer’s Moonlight screening and Q&A with the director. Hammer Museum, 10899 Wilshire Blvd., Westwood; Mon., Dec. 12, 7:30 p.m.; $12. (310) 443-7000, hammer.ucla.edu. —Neha Talreja

If so, you may want to consider participating in a no-cost clinical research study. The Afro-licious Hair & Beauty Expo celebrates, educates & demonstrates natural haircare. The daylong event features hair demos and discussion panels, as well as a Little Miss Afrolicious Pageant for 5- to 12-year-olds, a fashion show and music from DJ Looney. A portion of the proceeds goes to My Friend’s House, a charity dedicated to helping downtown L.A.’s homeless. Los Angeles Convention Center, 1201 S. Figueroa St., downtown; Sun., Dec. 11, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; $20-$50. (424) 262-AFRO, afrolicioushairaffair.com. —David Cotner
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The human beings behind the bizarro Saturday night puppet show/religious service almighty Opp just want you to know that “It’s OK that it’s not OK”

BY MARNIE SEHAYEK

O

n a nondescript street corner a hair north of Koreatown, an infectious five-note diry emanates into the night repetitiously. The melody is sickeningly sweet and like a maddening loop of ice cream truck music, recontextualizing what would otherwise be an unexciting patch of urban real estate nestled amid closed businesses, strip malls and fast-food joints.

It’s the Saturday before Halloween, and a group of relative strangers, some costumed, has huddled around the source of the music, a black shrouded stage erected by masked characters who have arrived on bicycles with a dollhouse full of equipment in tow.

Unsuspecting attendees soon discover that they’ve stumbled upon almighty Opp, a monthly streetside puppet show. But returning patrons are quick to explain that “puppet show” is shorthand for something the initiated invariably describe as a religious service. This makeshift outdoor performance space at the intersection of Western and Elmwood is their “rebirth place.”

I sit next to Solomon Rivera, chief of staff to City Councilman Marqueece Harris-Dawson (whose district doesn’t encompass this particular spot). He tells me he’s an atheist but has been coming to the Opp since 2011, when he was in search of a “different kind of church.”

A narrow metal box is passed to me with a note on it that reads, “Please snip a lock of your hair and place it into this can. Thank you.”

Rivera prods, as I skeptically consider the box: “You gotta be a part of the community.” I reach inside the box and feel a matted tuft and scissors. I snip. He does, too. Then it begins.

The ice cream truck riff gives way to a tinny voice on a microphone: “almighty Opp is completely safe. You can terminate this session at anytime. You cannot be made to do something against your own will. Almighty Opp can be a safe, relaxing and enjoyable experience.” The chorus multiplies, instilling the message over and over before breaking into a discordant fuzz of microphone feedback and radio frequencies that lasts five minutes, long enough to weed out anyone unsure they’d like to continue. It’s uncomfortable.

Suddenly, an acoustic guitar breaks through the fuzz and a voice croons, “It’ll all be over soon.” The crowd erupts with applause and cheers over the pleasant melody. “You think this is a puppet show—la ha!” a high-pitched voice says. It continues, “While your brain is occupied, we slide something in the other side, la da da da…”

The show that follows isn’t a linear narrative but rather a series of vignettes set to loops of music, created live, featuring acoustic guitar, synthetic drum beats, synths, whistling and whimsical sound effects.

Handmade puppets are deftly maneuvered with intention or manipulated so that they flail and jitter to the music. There’s a puppet snail that wanders aimlessly on the stage; a punk-rock, curbstomping clown; a bikini-clad dancer. One puppet has a balloon for a head that alternately inflates and deflates, floating upward and downward before launching into the sky and exploding into a cloud of blue and white confetti. There’s also Kate, the perfectly normal-looking fat lady, and Smeej, a baby with a distorted face that crawls on all fours. There’s a puppet in a wheelchair, and Little Jimmy, the dancing man on a tin can. There’s a clown puppet whose marionette hands manipulate strings attached to a smaller identical version of himself. As wind-up toys flutter to a halt on the pavement, audience members crawl forward to crank them to life again.

Jeffrey is the puppet with the white face, black hat and elongated nose whose visage is emblazoned on almighty Opp memorabilia, T-shirts and stickers. Jeffrey’s Human Persona, on the other hand, is the master of ceremonies; he wears a white mask with a red dot for a nose and candy-red lips. He’s accompanied by puppeteer Kranko Human Person, whose bald head and face are painted white save for exaggerated black lips and a red foam nose. Since the show’s inception in 2003, their guises have become familiar sights for attendees of almighty Opp, which they describe as “a rapidly growing friendship network.”

“It has very little to do with puppets and music,” Jeffrey tells me from behind the scenes. “It’s the closest I’ve come to feeling good about religion … letting in this spirituality that doesn’t feel fake,” he says. Despite being so enmeshed, he still doesn’t know the true identities of the puppeteers.

For someone so shrouded in mystery, Jeffrey’s correspondence with me is disarmingly earnest, but there are clever instances of evasion. When I ask why he and Kranko perform as personas, he writes, “I think the transformation aids in surface aspects of our personalities that we normally keep hidden,” adding, “This is probably a more suitable question for a Catholic priest.”

“We are people!” he replies. “We’re another average set of nobodies standing in line behind you at the courthouse waiting to pay for traffic violations.”

Ultimately, it’s not about him or Kranko. Jeffrey reiterates that the goal of the service is bringing the community together. “As far as I’m concerned, almost every aspect of almighty Opp is disposable/interchangeable, except for the community that it has created.” Remember the hair collection? Before each show, he impresses the smallest clippings in gelatin capsules. “I feel that this somehow connects me more closely to our family of friends and supporters,” he writes. Responses like these make me question whether I’m communicating with a real person or a puppet alter ego. Which is more contrived, I wonder. And does it matter?

Though the Opp has spawned a loyal following with its off-kilter approach to spirituality, it turns out that DIY noise-music puppet shows aren’t everybody’s cup of tea. Occasionally the cops show up to address noise complaints or to needlessly corral people to one side of the sidewalk or to shut down the show altogether. It’s hard to imagine that after a 13-year tenure, during which time almighty Opp has twice been recognized by the city of Los Angeles for its altruistic community achievements, it’s still subjected to this law enforcement charade. I guess we all have a role to play.

“My favorite puppets are the police, random drunks and homeless who show up and alter the course of a service,” Jeffrey writes. “They help remind everyone that life is out of our control and as unfair as it is fair.”

At the end of the service, we are encouraged to collectively send healing to a little girl named Holly, who has cerebral palsy. Jeffrey tells me that she is his niece. “I believe very strongly in the power of focused intention, and I know that the closing ceremonies have affected her and all participants in a positive way,” Everyone participates because, three hours into an evening of absurdity, only the die-hards remain. The group spends last moments together, emitting an even-keeled hum that closes the portal of Opp space until the next time.

Though he sees no end in sight, Jeffrey says, “It’s a fact that every service could be the last,” in which case he hopes the people will gather and sing regardless, “forever in Koreatown.”

Almighty Opp takes place the last Saturday of every month at 9 p.m. at the corner of Western and Elmwood.
ARTIST PAUL THEK CALLED HIMSELF THE “MEATMAN,” AND HIS CURRENT SOLO SHOW IN HOLLYWOOD SHOWS WHY

BY CATHERINE WAGLEY

This week, the replica of a war-ravaged Game Boy appears in a Hollywood show, and an idiosyncratic, makeshift ship lights up a Los Feliz window that doubles as a gallery.

Meatman’s rabbit
Paul Thek once described himself as the “meatman.” The nickname stuck. The late New York-based artist’s solo show at Hannah Hoffman features some memorable meat pieces: Untitled (Meat Cable) is a steel cable that stretches across a corner, with slabs of red-brown wax meant to resemble raw meat attached to it. Thek was good at being simultaneously gross, childish and skillfully virtuosic. One of the show’s highlights is Untitled (Ferocious) from 1971, a plasticine sculpture of a rab-

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Creator of a beloved early-20th century comic strip gets his due in Krazy: George Herriman, A Life in Black and White

BY TONY MOSTROM

In the current era of comics-saturated American pop culture, there’s yet to be a consensus on who takes the prize for the greatest comic strip of all time. But a likely candidate is a long-gone, syndicated newspaper comic strip that ran for decades (from 1913 to 1944), which irritated and baffled so many thousands of readers that it was often on the brink of being discontinued by its editors (who also hated it), had it not been for their boss, newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst. This classic comic, the “beautiful loser” of America’s popularity contest, was Krazy Kat. And its creator was shy artist and longtime Angeleno George (he pronounced it “Garge”) Herriman.

What made Krazy Kat? A strange little “love-hate” triangle, played out against desert backgrounds, wherein a naïve cat of indeterminate gender (Krazy Kat) loves an indeterminate race (a white mouse) who takes the prize for the greatest comic strip of all time. But a likely candidate is a long-gone, syndicated newspaper comic strip that ran for decades (from 1913 to 1944), which irritated and baffled so many thousands of readers that it was often on the brink of being discontinued by its editors (who also hated it), had it not been for their boss, newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst. This classic comic, the “beautiful loser” of America’s popularity contest, was Krazy Kat. And its creator was shy artist and longtime Angeleno George (he pronounced it “Garge”) Herriman.

What is Krazy Kat? A strange little “love-hate” triangle, played out against desert backgrounds, wherein a naïve cat of indeterminate gender (Krazy Kat) loves an irreverent (Ignatz, white) change and/or swap colors. Tisserand also recounts some of Herriman’s early, racially stereotyped comics, like his character Musical Mose (dark) and Ignatz (white) change and/or swap colors. Tisserand also recounts some of Herriman’s early, racially stereotyped comics, like his character Musical Mose (dark) and Ignatz (white) change and/or swap colors.

As Michael Tisserand makes plain in his new biography, Krazy: George Herriman, A Life in Black and White ($35, HarperCollins), Krazy Kat never lacked for fans, but they were always a relatively select group. “Krazy Kat might not have had universal appeal,” Tisserand writes, “but it was beloved by people whose account of Herriman’s “residency” in a small studio room he’d set up for himself on the Hal Roach movie lot in Culver City, where he drew the strip while near some good friends, such as Beanie Walker, a gag writer for Laurel & Hardy. This rich biography is illustrated with rare samples of Herriman’s pre-comics work, which he churned out like a little steam engine for various turn-of-the-20th century newspapers. By charting Herriman’s early, bicoastal career, Tisserand, a diligent detective, gives us a glimpse into the world of early-20th century newspapers, full of in-house artist bullpens, early star cartoonists like Herriman’s buddies Jimmy Swinnerton and Tad Dorgan, and cigar-chomping editors.

For many years the most intriguing mystery about George Herriman was his race. In 1971 it was discovered that his birth certificate listed him as “col.” (colored), which surprised his surviving friends. (Herriman’s fellow cartoonists had always known him as “The Greek.”) He was, properly speaking, Creole, and Tisserand dutifully includes some comic panels where Krazy (dark) and Ignatz (white) change and/or swap colors. Herriman’s pre-comics work, which he churned out like a little steam engine for various turn-of-the-20th century newspapers. By charting Herriman’s early, bicoastal career, Tisserand, a diligent detective, gives us a glimpse into the world of early-20th century newspapers, full of in-house artist bullpens, early star cartoonists like Herriman’s buddies Jimmy Swinnerton and Tad Dorgan, and cigar-chomping editors.

When he died in 1944, Herriman’s daughter received a note from Walt Disney, praising him as “a source of inspiration to thousands of artists,” echoing a 1920s journalist who had described him as “a cartoonist’s cartoonist.” Few comic strips ever maintained an introspective, self-consciously poetic feel the way Krazy Kat did. My gut feeling is that Herriman’s love for the Western desert instills the strip with this timeless Zen quality, which might explain its appeal to bookish, gentle souls such as e.e. cummings, an early champion. I strongly recommend picking up Krazy as a companion to any one of the readily available Krazy Kat reprint volumes. Read both at night. Even for those of us who hate real cats, Tisserand’s Krazy is the Kat’s pajamas.
TRIAL AND ERROR
Devil’s Salt clumsily attempts to revisit the Salem witch trials from a more enlightened perspective

BY BILL RADEN

A lot of gender theory has passed under the bridge since Arthur Miller dramatized the Salem witch trials. In a sense, the stage has been begging ever since for a compelling feminist corrective to The Crucible’s somewhat phallocentric apology for what many now see as a foundational injustice of New World patriarchal power.

Unfortunately for Devil’s Salt, the revisionist period drama by Los Angeles playwright Jovanka Bach, getting the theory right is only half the battle. The other half — a convincing sense of what everyday life looked and sounded like in a world as alien as the 17th-century Puritanism — is where director John Stark’s otherwise handsome production comes up short.

Tom Groenwald stars as Hooker Wainwright, the fictional albeit censorious governor of Plymouth Colony, whose public piety masks an unhealthy preoccupation with the citizenry’s sexual pursuits, both real and imagined. But the person who most arouses both his ire and his unreciprocated desire is the fetching Hannah Mulwray (Katharina Magdalena), the town’s guileless and saintly midwife and herbal healer.

Hannah makes an unusually vulnerable target for Hooker’s lethal combination of sanctimony, obsession and vindictiveness. Her careless proclivity for showing a little too much ankle in public is only aggravated by her after-hours hobby of advocating an alt gospel of love and tolerance. In a society where women are thought to have a sinful nature and where a consort of Satan is seen behind every crop failure and skin rash, Hannah is primed for a downfall.

That comes when Hooker exhumes a deformed stillborn baby, which Hannah secretly buried in order to shield its parents (Erin Hammond and Joseph Michael Harris) from diabolical accusations. The incriminating remains persuade colony elders (Alexander Wells, Dana Kelly) to join Hooker in prosecuting Hannah for witchcraft. Act 2’s trial, in which Hannah claims to be the anointed prophetess of God, goes no better for her than a similar defense did for Jesus or Joan of Arc.

It is the play’s miscarriages of drama, however, that prove more troubling. Magdalena has the thankless chore of retrofitting human dimensions into a character that is little more than a hagiographic abstraction. And both Groenwald and Wells strain to reconcile their characters’ contortions of arbitrary flip-flops over the question of Hannah’s guilt. Meanwhile, the production’s grasp of period detail is flaccid enough to have Hannah and her followers sing a Shaker hymn 150 years before it was composed and to imagine a 17th-century Puritan congregation in which female preaching of any kind wasn’t an excommunicaible offense.

Despite some delightful supporting performances, such careless yet crippling flaws ultimately flatten the dramatic impact and blunt the point of Bach’s gender-savvy argument. The squandered opportunity is good news only if you’re Arthur Miller’s literary executor; it leaves The Crucible unchallenged in its 63-year-old blast of misogynist libel from the prestigious redoubt of the literary canon.

DEVIL’S SALT | Odyssey Theatre, 2055 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Sawtelle | Through Dec. 18 | johnstarkproductions.com

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Damien Chazelle’s glittering throwback can’t measure up — but that’s its charm

BY ALAN SCHERSTUHL

The cussedness of La La Land is almost enough to recommend it. Damien Chazelle’s sumptuous tribute to romanticism trying to keep lit the fire of a guttering culture is defiantly old-fashioned in form and style. It is, among other things, a throwback to the great MGM musicals of the Gene Kelly era, just starring people who haven’t devoted their lives to the talents such musicals demand.

That failure to live up to the past is, in its way, Chazelle’s subject. Everyone involved in La La Land is plucking up their grit and striving to pull off the impossible, no matter the gulf between Hollywood as it was and what we’ve got left. His musical numbers explode with so much color and movement that to watch them is something like sticking your head into a confetti cannon. The best dancer in the movie is the camera operator, who Steadi-snakes through platoons of hoofing extras, more often capturing the idea of a dazzling musical than performances that truly dazzle.

The second big song, about the thrill of a Hollywood party, features several actresses swapping lines of the verses, and their voices are so indistinct you might think it’s just one person singing. The soirée is a Gatsby lulu, wild and pleasurable. Still, there’s much to celebrate here. Chazelle’s championing of jazz is touching, and he even demands we listen to and enjoy some, which is something even documentaries about jazz musicians have lately not dared to do. The air percolates between Stone and Gosling, and while neither has a strong voice, both know how to get a plaintive ballad across. Again and again La La Land cuts to some vibrant performance, and it’s often funnier about its outsize old-school ambitions than any cutting critic could be. My favorite scene is one of the simplest: Mia and Sebastian sitting down to dinner, before a glowing curtain the color of lime Jell-O, facing at last everything that’s not working out in their lives. The camera settles down, and for once we’re watching something that could unfold on an actual theater stage — we’re watching performance.

This is 2016, a year that devours dreams as Galactus does planets, so of course their wishes can’t all go the way they hope. But this is also a deft movie musical, musical, meaningful that those wishes do flower, eventually. Complicating the eventual triumphs is the reality that the movie itself is the product of the same Hollywood that almost crushes Mia, so it’s weirdly right that La La Land — like her — reaches for the stars, doesn’t quite grab them all and then is still kind of OK in the end.

LA LA LAND | Directed by Damien Chazelle | Summit Entertainment | Century City, ArcLight Hollywood, Landmark

AN AFGHAN GOES MYSTERY SOLVING IN THE CALIFORNIA WOODS IN WOBBLY ECCENTRIC NOIR BURN COUNTRY

Ian Olds’ loose local-color thriller Burn Country works from the thesis that rural America is as complex and dangerous to justice-minded visitors as the most contested regions of Afghanistan. As Afghan national Osman (Dominic Rains) gets to know his new town, taking over the police blotter beat at the local newspaper, the incidental violence of a backwoods Northern California meth cartel gets intercut with desert airstrikes and insurgent attacks, which maybe is meant to tell us something about how people are all the same everywhere, poor and desperate, incapable of seeing other ways of resolving conflict.

But the movie — at first scrappy and strange but an increasingly tough sit as it goes — never fixes its gaze on any singularly compelling idea. Osman is staying in the home of the mother of a journalist he guided through the tricky local politics of his homeland. That mother, played with a weary, low toughness by an excellent Melissa Leo, is her town’s sheriff, and through Osman becomes embroiled in California strangeness: First, he is enchanted by a local theater troupe’s hilariously inscrutable production. Then, on a domestic disturbance call during a ride-along with Leo’s Gloria, he angers up the blood of a creepy flannelled ne’er-do-well in a scene of queasy menace. That ne’er-do-well is played by a ridiculously bewigged James Franco. Until this point, the film works as an outsider’s study of the American grain, with promising hints of a criminal conspiracy plot. But Olds’ hand proves less steady from there, the balance uncertain between the eccentric comedy, noir dread and existential sea-gazing. —Alan Scherstuhl

BURN COUNTRY | Directed by Ian Olds | Written by Olds and Paul Felten | Samuel Goldwyn Films | Monica Film Center
Pablo Larraín is having a good year. The Chilean director, Oscar-nominated a few years ago for his 2012 political drama No, has just released Jackie, featuring a striking Natalie Portman as Jackie Kennedy in the immediate aftermath of her husband's assassination. Also about to be released is Neruda, his complex, semifictionalized drama about the Chilean poet-politician Pablo Neruda. Both titles are among the most spellbinding and fascinating films of the year.

2016 also saw the U.S. release of The Club, the director's unsettling 2015 Berlinale prize winner about a house filled with priests guilty of molestation. The movies may be quite different in size, subject and scope, but with their dreamlike narratives and constant stylistic invention, all of Larraín's films defy expectations. He sat down with us recently to talk about his work.

This has been an incredible year for you, with Jackie and Neruda, as well as The Club earlier this year. It seems like you went from one project to the other very quickly.

How it started was, we were about to make Neruda, and then we had to wait for Gael [García Bernal], who was working with [Werner] Herzog. Then Luis Gnecco, the guy who plays Neruda, had to gain some weight — you know, you can't have a skinny Neruda — and then we had to finish the financ- ing. So the movie got pushed, which was very disappointing. My brother, who is a producer on everything I do, just showed up and said, “We can’t shoot it. We have to wait six months.”

So I started working with Guillermo Calderón, who had also written Neruda. We wrote The Club really quickly and shot it really quickly. It went to Berlin, and there Darren Aronofsky [president of the jury at Berlin that year], at the afterparty, said, “Why don’t we make a movie together?” I admire him a lot. I think he’s one of the greatest filmmakers of our time. He called me a week after, and sent me the Jackie script. So one thing led to another in a very unexpected way.

You’ve talked about how odd it was for someone who isn’t an American to be approached to make a film about Jackie Kennedy. I’m curious about your position specifically as a Chilean, since you’ve made films that address the destructive effect of U.S. foreign policy on Chile over the decades. So now you’re suddenly going into the belly of the beast.

When we were shooting in the Oval Office, or in front of the White House, I was like, “Ohh! Here we are!” But I was doing a movie about a woman, about a mother, about someone under an extreme amount of risk and danger. That tension that might have existed between the U.S. and my country, I filtered it and sort of tried to transform it. When I met Noah Oppenheim, who wrote the script, the first thing I asked him to do was to wipe away all the scenes that were not focused on Jackie. I didn’t want to deal with all the other characters, because I might have issues with them.

It was better to stay on her, someone I was so attracted to. And then I saw the White House tour that she gave [in 1962], and I see this woman who is melting on screen, who seems like she’s about to explode. It was so human and beautiful, and also a fore- shadowing of what would happen later in the film — she talks about Lincoln and how he was assas- sinated, and what happened to Lincoln’s widow afterward. If it had been political, it would have been a totally different movie.

The politics doesn’t feel absent; it feels sublimated. It’s a film about the myth of the White House, the myth of the presidency, the myth of the Kennedys. You don’t need too many logical leaps to get to the myth of American benevolence and supremacy, the idea of how American power is presented to the public. And how media does the job. You can’t understand contemporary politics if you don’t deal with media. It’s impossible.

Which is what No is about as well. And both Jackie and Neruda seem obsessed with the idea of myth and seizing control of one’s own narra- tive. Neruda essentially conjures up this playful, fictional cop character, who pursues him. Meanwhile, Jackie helps create the Camelot myth around the JFK presidency. Yes, there are interesting bridges, and ways you can connect them. When media — whether we’re talking Jackie or Neruda, or Donald Trump or Barack Obama — tries to shape a public image, there’s always a gap between the intent and the result, and that’s where an artist can work. Get in there and create fiction, because you don’t know what happens in between. It’s an open door, an indeterminate place. And it’s a dangerous place. Everything that’s been said, everything that you’re dealing with, is fiction.

Now I think I’m more conscious of what we did, because I am talking to journalists. I’m re- reading what has been said about [Jackie], and this subject is so important in this country. If I had all that information, maybe it would be intimidating for me. But when we were making the movie, it was just going to the set to make a film about this incredible woman. That gave us the freedom to do it. And in Neruda, we were fictionalizing so much, it gave us the chance to play with him.

But in trying to shape a public image, you can also get a very different result. That’s why we included the mannequin scene at the end of Jackie, where she’s looking at a store display and they’re putting up these man- nequins up of her.

Within the context of Jackie, where you’re focusing on such a limited period in a character’s.
**Harry Benson: Shoot First**

Harry Benson was a photographer who captured images of the world's most famous figures. His work is celebrated in the documentary *Harry Benson: Shoot First*, which chronicles his career and the impact of his photographs. The film features interviews with the photographers and celebrities he captured, offering a unique perspective on the power of photography.

**Contract to Kill**

Directed by Pablo Larraín and written by Noah Oppenheim, *Contract to Kill* is a thriller about a black-ops assassin John Harmon, played by Seagal. The film explores the character's journey as he tries to survive in a world of dangerous political deals and personal vendettas.

**Opening This Week**

- **Abattoir**
  - Directed by Pablo Larraín and written by Noah Oppenheim, *Abattoir* is a horror film about a family that moves into a house with a dark past. The film features Natalie Portman in the lead role.
  - Natalie Portman plays a woman who uncovers a local history far removed from her initial pursuit of closure.
  - However, the allusions to Satanism and some hefty psychological metaphors don't suit the absurd premise. After her sister's family is killed in their own home, Julia's mental torment. But the goofy special effects resemble Disneyland animatronics, about on par with the film's special effects. However, the film is a dreary espionage thriller that never lets

**Hat Trick**

- **Jackie**
  - Directed by Pablo Larraín and written by Noah Oppenheim, *Jackie* is a drama about the iconic first lady Jackie Kennedy. The film stars Natalie Portman in the lead role.
  - Natalie Portman's performance is one of the key highlights of the film. She brings a nuanced and layered portrayal of the first lady, capturing her vulnerability and strength.
  - Portman's work in *Jackie* has received critical acclaim, with many praising her ability to bring authenticity to the role.

**One Man Versus an Army**

- **Tom Hopper**
  - *Tom Hopper* is a film about a man who is hired to take out a notorious criminal. The film stars Tom Hopper in the lead role.
  - The story is a classic action thriller, with Hopper's character facing off against an array of dangerous adversaries.

**KILL RATIO**

- **Tom Hopper**
  - *Kill Ratio* is a film about a hitman who is hired to take out a powerful gangster. The film stars Tom Hopper in the lead role.
  - The film is a fast-paced action thriller, with Hopper's character facing off against a powerful enemy.

**La Weekley**

- **John Harmon**
  - Directed by Pablo Larraín and written by Noah Oppenheim, *John Harmon* is a thriller about a black-ops assassin who is hired to take out a powerful gangster.
  - The film stars John Harmon in the lead role.
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Baldwin. Almost 30 years after his death, there is still chatter concerned with who could possibly succeed him as a master of black social commentary. I Am Not Your Negro suggests that there is simply no viable replacement. Peck chooses as his jumping-off point Baldwin’s Remember This House, an unfinished work in which the author sought to discuss the assassinations of three prominent black leaders of the civil rights era, Medgar Evers, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. Baldwin knew all of them, and to his deathments “devastated his universe.” The daunting task of documenting their lives eventually took its toll on the writer, who had completed only 30 pages of this project before his death in 1987. I Am Not Your Negro presents a good chunk of this on its soundtrack, masterfully syncing Baldwin’s words to images binding past and present. Samuel L. Jackson brings Baldwin’s words to life, nailing the cadences in his speech, punctuating his words with humor, anger, exasperation and hope. At times, there’s an almost feminine quality to Jackson’s delivery, a softness that carries surprising power. This isn’t just narration — it’s a full-blooded, lived-in performance, one of Jackson’s best. (Odie Henderson)

**KILL RATIO**

Given a couple more drafts and a bigger budget, “Deirdre the Eastern European hotel during a Russian-backed coup” wouldn’t be such a bad idea for a movie — especially as we’re likely to see film critique the film for accuracy, Kill Ratio manages to be reasonably engaging for a while. Cellphone representative Gabrielle (Thresco’s Amy Huberman) and secret CIA guy James (Black Sails’ Tom Hopper) lack any clear path to safety or success when their hotel is swarmed by militia-men, an evil general and his KGB liaison; that inspires some effective tension as our heroes duck in and out of various rooms escaping capture. Once their cover is blown, though, the heroes’ lack of an obvious goal starts to feel like the screenwriters’ foot-dragging, and the bad guys’ propensity to pause the action periodically for rape attempts is distastefully dumb. Hopper looks like Patrick Wilson and Chris Pratt got mashed up and stuffed into a perfectly good body; his American accent is flawless but seems to be holding the English actor back a bit from really cutting loose. The Irish Huberman is equally adept at American-ness, which makes one wonder why the rest of the cast are so hard on the ears with their pseudo-Pottsylvanian.

**OLD STONE**

No good deed goes unpunished in Old Stone, which opens on an arresting, faraway shot of trees swaying in the wind before cutting to the immediate aftermath of a car accident involving a taxi and a motorcycle. Lao Shi (Chen Gang), the cabie, is our man here, and he makes the mistake of ferring the seriously injured motorcyclist to the hospital rather than waiting for an ambulance — an act that saves the other man’s life but goes against company policy and leaves the driver on the hook for the medical expenses. Worst of all: The accident wasn’t even Lao Shi’s...
Writer-director Matthew M. Ross’ debut feature, Frank & Lola, follows a Las Vegas chef named Frank (Michael Shannon) and a much younger woman named — you guessed it — Lola (Imogen Poots) who complicates his life. Poots imbues the initially sexy, confident woman with a toxic vulnerability as Lola reveals secrets that cause Frank to doubt the strength of their relationship — and compel him to dig deeper into her past. A top-tier supporting cast includes Michael Nyqvist as unrepentant slimeball Alan (he played a similarly sinister role in the excellent John Wick) and Emmanuelle Devos as the slimball’s wife. But the film’s success depends upon the tension between Frank and Lola, and even this cast can’t overcome what feels like an essential disconnect in the central relationship. Driven, obsessive men are Shannon’s bread and butter — see his stellar turns in Jeff Nichols’ Midnight Special and Tom Ford’s Nocturnal Animals for two recent examples — but Frank’s compulsion to track down Alan and punish him is more believable than the depth of his connection with Lola.

Even when we aren’t mucking them up. The premise of Stevie D — think Dave set in the intersection of crime and showbiz in L.A. — suggests a film with a lot more heat and velocity than the one first-time writer-director Chris Corden ultimately delivers. In this case, though, that’s not entirely a drawback. There’s a relaxed quality to the scenes here that occasionally charms, with the fairly predictable crime plot — in which struggling cop Ruff (Luke Y. Thompson) makes toward Lola, the French language turns to mush for him. Despite Shannon’s intensity and Poots’ complex charisma, the conflict and connection remain ambiguous — is Frank being taken advantage of? Even his background as a French-trained chef, which brings him to an audition in Paris, where he further investigates Lola’s past, feels incongruous as we see him making his way around the city; like the overtures of love he makes toward Lola, the French language turns to mush in Shannon’s mouth.

PET

The indie horror trope of “socially awkward guy gets rejected by woman, turns psychotic” remains a perennial — not just because so many filmmakers feel insecure and crazy themselves but also because it’s relatively easy to pull off. So long as you have an actor who can look intense, an actress who can scream and long as you have an actor who can look intense, an actress who can scream and...
actor Michael Rose (Cordone) is hired by construction honcho Angelo DiMarco (John Arena) to impersonate the ne'er-do-well son Stevie D (also Cordone) so remarkably resembles — treated as a clothesline for a series of low-stakes hang-out scenes. The Tarantino-esque banter between two assassins hired to take out Stevie D suggests the playful vibe Cordone is aiming for. The filmmaker clearly has in-timate knowledge of the life of a struggling actor; his movie consistently exudes the ring of authenticity in that regard. Stevie D could be seen as Cordone's attempt to write himself the kind of leading man role he has yet to score in Hollywood. But there's always something a little too good to be true about Michael Rose, the end-lessly benevolent, generous, kind-hearted polar opposite of spoiled misogynistic brat Stevie D. The same could be said for Dave in the aforementioned Ivan Reitman film, but considering Cordone wrote this character for himself, Stevie D acquires an uncomfortable aura of narcissism that eventually overrides its minor pleasures.

Levi’s score adds an overwhelming sense of renewed possibility: “I’ve gained my freedom,” she tells her protégé and onetime student Fabien (Roman Kolinka), even if it doesn’t quite seem as if she believes it. “Can the truth be questioned?” Nathalie asks her students. “Debating truth is a beautifully suffering charade. Not one element of the costuming and production design stands apart but all together re-create the time, place and people. (April Wolfe)

It stars Isabelle Huppert as rape survivor Michèle, a former literary editor who now develops fetish video games about goblins and trolls. Just as Verhoeven uses low-brow genres to create scathing satires of capitalism (RoboCop) and fascism (Starship Troopers), Michèle uses video games to expose nasty truths about human desires: Her monsters violate women from behind with withering tendrils. Brutal violence susired by a smile is maybe the defining idea of the film. Verhoeven treats sexual violence with sobriety (he has repudiated some critics’ queasy description of Elle as a “rape comedy”), but most of the film is a burlesque of manners and mannequins. Verhoeven extrapolates the novel’s ideas on the role of forgiveness and penance and Christian veneration in a rotten world into something far more cryptic: an inquiry into not just the nature of what we call “evil,” but what kinds of transgressions and monsters we’re willing to ignore or absolve. Unwittingly, unexpectedly a Verhoeven film, but it owes everything to Huppert, whose straight-faced comic delivery has never gotten as much renown as her more solemn work. She makes Elle a serious work of art that mocks Serious Works of Art™. (Greg Cwik)

Arrival is aiming for. The filmmaker clearly has in-terpretations that proliferate online. In 2006, he has so striking is how it all winds up focusing on the idea of the film. Verhoeven treats sexual violence by construction honcho Angelo DiMarco (John Aprea) to impersonate the ne'er-do-well son Stevie D (also Cordone) he (John Aprea) to impersonate the ne'er-do-well son Stevie D (also Cordone) he

It starts with activists’ (the heptapods, she realizes) when she finds Louise (Amy Adams), a grief-stricken linguist, and Ian (Jeremy Renner) to portray the night before Jackie is to vacate the White House; She plays house, gliding around her elegant living quarters in a slip-dress, before her contract. There’s more, but I’ll leave it at that. Nathalie begins to feel not just the anxiety of a 50-something woman seemingly left alone in the world but also a sense of renewed possibility: “I’ve gained my freedom,” she tells her protégé and onetime student Fabien (Roman Kolinka), even if it doesn’t quite seem as if she believes it. “Can the truth be questioned?” Nathalie asks her students. “Debating truth is a beautifully suffering charade. Not one element of the costuming and production design stands apart but all together re-create the time, place and people. (April Wolfe)

In other words, facts are facts, but their na-
Mario Diaz: “I don’t do flip-flops or glow sticks.”

**Music**

GOOD DIRTY FUN

Club promoter Mario Diaz loves raising the raunch factor in L.A.’s gay nightlife

*BY LINA LECARO*

Big Fat Dick (BFD for the meek), Hot Dog, Full Frontal.

As these monikers might suggest, there’s nothing subtle about Mario Diaz or the parties he throws. And that’s what makes them so damn fun.

The man behind some of the city’s most playful and provocative gay clubs has a sexy, silly, sassy energy that has served him well both after dark and on the screen as a working actor (one of those character actors you see in countless commercials and instantly recognize, though you don’t necessarily know where from).

Still, the New York City transplant considers the auditioning grind second to his starring role as a “Club King,” which also happens to be the name of a recent documentary about his life and two-decade-long career in nightlife, currently available for streaming via Vimeo.

“I’ve always considered my nightclub work my day job, and a fun way to make money while I work as an actor,” Diaz explains. “And it’s been a great combination. I’ve been acting since I was a teenager. In New York I did mostly theater, which was great fun. We had a theater company in the village called Theater Couture. [Drag stars] Jackie Beat, Sherry Vine, Candis Cayne were some of my co-stars, and we did some hilarious, smart, stylish camp — some of the best times I’ve had onstage.”

Diaz moved to New York just out of his teens, but when he got there things were starting to change, and from the queer community’s perspective, not for the better. “It was gentrifying and homogenizing quickly, mainly due to the fascist regime of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and his ‘quality of life campaign,’” he recalls. “The decadence that I read about, and the sexual freedom that was being celebrated, was slipping away and I felt cheated.

“I’ve always felt, as a gay person especially, that being able to accept our innate sexuality without the shame so many of us carry was an essential lesson. So I made it sort of my mission to bring back the sexy, wild NYC I moved there to be a part of.”

Clubs and parties such as Squeezebox, Jackie 60 and Dean Johnson’s Rock & Roll Fag Bar, not to mention infamous precursors such as Studio 54, served as inspiration, and soon Diaz started promoting his own “down and dirty, dark and loud, retro porn–inspired clubs that were reminiscent of the 70s gay scene that I dreamt of.”

He made a point of being uncensored and brazen, but he also strove to inject a sense of humor and style into his events, which led to his first club hit, the legendary “Fucking on the Dance Floor.”

Diaz delved into doing clubs pretty early on, and says he was surprised by his quick success. “The gay clubs were bright, clean and pretty,” he says. “It looked like all the boys, although handsome, had a bar of soap in their pocket. Not really my cup of tea. So I basically turned the lights down, turned the music up, blew some smoke in the room and messed their hair up a little bit.”

Diaz’s clubs have been among my favorites as I cover nightlife for the weekly. In addition to their irreverent and naughty vibes, they always have a rebellious, punkish feel (no matter the music on the dance floor). Also, all his haps — even the ones with hunky, half-naked, tattooed go-go boys wrinkling about — have always been welcoming to us straight (as well as bi and gay) ladies. Well, at least the stylish ones.

When I ask if he has any boundaries where his bawdy bashes are concerned, he replies, “I don’t do flip-flops or glow sticks — anything else is cool with me.”

Rave-toy and bare-toe biases aside, Diaz’s dance soirees are both chic and inclusive, with an emphasis on erotic yet campy vibes and great sounds. His current roster includes Thursday’s BFD at Fubar, a lusty queer party going strong for 14 years; Full Frontal Disco, which started at the Grand Star Jazz club in Chinatown thanks to its famed light-up dance floor and is now held every first Saturday at Akbar; and his newest, Bonkerz!, with his pal Beat at Precinct, which he describes as “puppets, compliments, hugs, all-star drag shows and shenanigans!”

As I said, subtlety isn’t part of this man’s vocabulary, and he never plays it safe. But even amidst the eye candy and raunch, what he does always has heart.

“At the end of the day we are all basically the same. We want to have a laugh, connect, feel beautiful, sexy, unique, funny or whatever it is that makes us feel worthy and special,” Diaz says. “Plus we want to listen to some good music and dance. And as far as nightlife goes... it’s about the people. The people creating it and the people enjoying it.”

**BONKERZ!** | Precinct, 357 S. Broadway, downtown Sat., Dec. 10, 9 p.m.-2 a.m. | $5 | precinctdtla.com
ON HIS MOODY NEW ALBUM, WE MIGHT DIE, DUMBFOUNDEAD GETS PERSONAL — AND UPENDS ASIAN STEREOTYPES IN THE PROCESS

BY JEFF WEISS

Dumbofoundead never expected to talk this much about race. Growing up in Koreatown and MacArthur Park, Jonathan Park's closest friends were Latino and African-American. Occasionally the Korean-American rapper got called “Chino,” but mostly as a playful term of endearment, not a racial slur.

Sometime over the last several years, long-simmering racial tensions manifested themselves in the Black Lives Matter protests and the #OscarsSoWhite campaign. In addition to convincing the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences to diversify its voting ranks, the latter inspired one of the most poignant songs of 2016, Dumbofoundead's “Safe” — the hip-hop equivalent of the “Parents” episode from Master of None.

“I'm a huge fan of [Oscars host] Chris Rock and expected him to speak for every person of color in the industry, but he kind of threw Asians under the bus with some tasteless jokes. That really fucked me up,” Park says at a coffee shop a few blocks from his K-town home.

If you didn’t know better, his tattoos and earring might tempt you to describe him as looking like the star of a Justin Lin movie — but that’s part of the problem. Other than Lin, Fresh Off the Boat and Aziz Ansari, Asian-American actors have mostly been ignored by Hollywood or, worse, given roles that embody crude stereotypes (see Ken Jeong in The Hangover).

“I don’t like to front like I’m a crazy activist,” Park demurs, changing the subject. “I’m just a rapper and I like sharing my thoughts.”

Released this spring, the video for “Safe” upends stereotypes of Asians as a “model minority” through withering satire. Superimposing his own face onto characters from Pirates of the Caribbean, Napoleon Dynamite and Titanic, Park makes the absence of Asian faces on the big screen seem glaringly obvious. The opening bars say it all: “The other night I watched the Oscars/And the roster of the only yellow men were all statues.”

An L.A. native, Jeff Weiss edits Passion of the Weiss and hosts the Bizarre Ride show on RBMA Radio. Follow him on Twitter @passionweiss.
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### Colors Comedy for Charity: Shred for Your Life

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album, windows of their songs. On their latest you can hear traces of rural Americana.

The Handsome Family

The Handsome Family announced a joint album between the two, that you’ll be among the first to hear in 2017. Until then, you can cross your fingers and hope they’ll be playing in your town. Tonight these folk troubadours are playing the music that invigorated them in an intimate venue you may hear him unearth a long-forgotten snippet of a song that’s been sitting in his memory since the 70s.

The Bangles

Three and a half decades into their on-going-off-again career, The Bangles are going back to where it all started, playing a run of shows at the Whisky, the scene of so many of their early gigs. The band still loves playing clubs, particularly following the recent release of Ladies and Gentlemen... The Bangles!, a collection of early demos and B-sides. Old fans will be filled with nostalgic glee, while others will be offered an alternative look at a band some view as simply pop. Everybody loves some “Manic Monday,” “Walk Like an Egyptian,” “Manic Monday,” “Eternal Flame,” but the opportunity to see The Bangles in an intimate venue playing the music that invigorated them from the start is irresistible. Also Saturday, Dec. 10. – Brett Callwood

PartyNextDoor, Jeremih

Hip hop and R&B star PartyNextDoor has had a busy year. Aside from penning two tracks on Rihanna’s chart-topping album Anti, “Sex with Me” and the inescapable “Work,” the Canadian crooner released his sophomore album, PartyNextDoor 3 — a deeply moody record, and his most dancehall-inspired work to date — on mentor and frequent collaborator Drake’s imprint, OVO Sound. This summer, “Birthday Sex” singer/rapper Jeremih added to PartyNextDoor’s plate, announcing a joint album between the two, Late Night Party, slated for release in 2017. Until then, you can cross your fingers that you’ll be among the first to hear their new tracks when the two take the stage together. – Artemis Thomas-Hansard

John Digweed, Droog

Digweed builds tension until the sounds explode. Make sure you arrive early enough to catch Droog as well. The L.A. trio have spent the better part of the last decade building up the hometown house scene, championing new sounds as DJs, producers, promoters and label owners. – Liz Ohanesian

The Jigsaw Seen

Since 1989 or so, pop masters The Jigsaw Seen have offered expertly transmogrified meltdowns of arty rock, flowery psychedelia, heavily rocking garage fuzz and true-toned Americana. Tonight these local heroes perform songs from their concept album Winterland, a festive song cycle highlighting the virtuosic ensemble’s hydra-headed spasms on traditional holiday music, plus loads more of the superbly crafted gems that fairly spill over the sides of their amazingly vast catalog, which has seen release on several of the wiser labels including Del-Fi, Eggbert, Get Hip, Rhino/Warner and Vibronics. (You can hear their excellence in episodes of Futurama, too.) Seek out a copy of The Jigsaw Seen for the Discriminating Completist (Rarities and Singles 1989-2015), released by Burger Records last winter. – John Payne

Pylon Reenactment Society

Pylon were one of the first and greatest bands from the underground music scene in Athens, Georgia, in the late 1970s, which included such peers and admirers as R.E.M. and The B-52’s. Although they were never as commercially successful as their more-famous rivals, Pylon were more musically unusual, combining funky rhythms with angular post-punk riffs that were topped with Vanessa Briscoe Hay’s coolly arty vocals. In many ways, they sounded more like British groups such as Gang of Four and The Slits than other bands in Athens at the time. After breaking up in 1983, the band have reunited sporadically over the years and are calling themselves Pylon Reenactment Society on their current tour. Far more than just a tribute-band reenactment, Pylon are a band who are ready to fight back against oppression. Le Butcherettes have more of an intimate, personal perspective in their melodic folk-punk reveries, whereas another L.A. duo, Deep Vally, make for a stark contrast with their heavy grunge provocations. Seattle quartet Chastity Belt take their post-punk inspirations into dreamier, more contemplative sonic territory, while L.A. combo The Menstruators mix the occasional shock-rock duo into a more musically evolved from a performance art–minded rave scene in Athens, Georgia, in the late 1970s.

John Digweed, Droog

Before you join the queue to check out an “extended set” from John Digweed, prep yourself by listening to his weekly “Transitions” shows on Mixcloud. Digweed serves up the sounds of underground house and techno from slick to soulful, with an emphasis on the new, although you may hear him unearth a long-forgotten gem here and there. One of few DJs who can legitimately be considered a superstar, with a career spanning decades,
MILD HIGH CLUB
Skiptracing
Tinged with 1970s hues, jazzier moments and brief psychedelic spells, Skiptracing is a beautifully produced and paced adventure that plays out like a soundtrack.

HAILU MERGYA AND DAHLAK BAND
Wode Harer Guzo
Sourced from Mergia’s only cassette copy of the album, Wode Harer Guzo captures traditional Ethiopian standards but recorded with heavy beats and funky brass – reminiscent of Nigeria’s Fela Kuti.

WEYES BLOOD
Front Row Seat To Earth
Natalie Mering continues to refine her psychedelic folk-pop sound, placing less emphasis on experimentation and spotlighting her stunning voice and introspective, poetic lyrics.

MODERN BASEBALL
Holy Ghost
Rather than sticking with what worked before, Modern Baseball have pushed the band forward, keeping their music in line with their rapidly maturing outlook.

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12/29 - HED (P.E.)
12/31 - LA GUNS + FASTER PUSSYCAT
1/6 - VAIN
1/13 - MAIN MAN
1/18 - MARTY FRIEDMAN
1/19 - PAUL GILBERT
1/20 - BANG TANGO
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FRI 12.09

**Jonathan Richman**

@ EL REY THEATRE

Jonathan Richman is an institution, and if you need something solid to hold onto right now, well, that’s kind of what he offers. Yes, let’s remember his original band, The Modern Lovers, whom he led through a debut record that captures a certain species of adolescence with awesome depth and detail. But if you stopped there, then you never really got started with Jonathan. On album after album, he somehow rediscovers and renews his own personal kind of rock & roll, where innocence and nostalgia and love and loss and joy are less emotions than forces of nature. His newest, Ishkode! Ishkode!, is named for the Ojibwa word for “fire” (Richman loves languages) and single “Wait! Wait!” is a Valentine and a half. It’s not for nothing that people cry at his shows, honestly and freely and without hesitation or shame. You might, too, and you’ll be happier if you do. —Chris Zegler

**Sara Watkins**

@ THE TROUBADOUR

While she frequently performs at Largo as part of the Watkins Family Hour and often lends her time to various benefits and tribute concerts, a Sara Watkins headlining show is an imperative experience for fans of the founding member of the Grammy-nominated “progressive bluegrass” trio Nickel Creek. Watkins’ current tour features songs from her recently released solo album, *Young In All the Wrong Ways*, produced by Gabe Witcher of The Punch Brothers, which boasts her strongest set of songs yet. Her solo shows in Los Angeles regularly include an all-star band, special guests, memorable songs from throughout her career, and often some surprise Jackson Browne and/or Fleetwood Mac covers.

—Jackson Truax

**Girls Pool:**

See Saturday.

**Animals as Leaders**

@ THE MAYAN

Since bursting onto the heavy metal scene in 2009, guitarist Tosin Abasi has steered Animals as Leaders from their auspicious upstart beginnings to their current status as one of the most revered acts in instrumental rock. The band’s early days were peppered with riffs that were heavy enough to make Meshuggah fans mosh it up and dazzle Musicians Institute grads with off-kilter time changes and musical dexterity. The combination made prog-metal cool again with a new wave of mid-aughts kids raised on hardcore. On new record *The Madness of Many*, Abasi — alongside second guitarist Javier Reyes and drummer Matt Garstka — has guided Animals as Leaders down a path that is not as heavy as their past musical excursions, with increasing jazz and electronics influences blended into their more familiar sounds.

—Jason Roche

**The Dustbowl Revival**

@ THE HI HAT

Folks who dismiss The Dustbowl Revival as another retro-swing band are missing out on everything the Venice collective can do. The group aren’t just reviving swing music; they can also draw upon rich strains of folk, blues, soul, Americana and jazz. By the time they’ve blended it all together, they’ve come up with something that’s smart and sassy and hardly as quaint as their name. Liz Beebe sings many of the lead vocals, but she’s well matched by bandleader Z. Lupetin, who chimes in on guitar, harmonica, kazoo and vocals. On their new single, “Busted”/“Only One,” The Dustbowl Revival are supertight and musically dexterous instead of staid and bound by tradition. On the A-side, Beebe walls with a fiery immediacy, whereas she and Lupetin harmonize aching on the stripped-down B-side. —Falling James

—Chris Zegler
ALEX'S BAR: 2931 E. Anaheim St., Long Beach. Rogue One Pre-Party, with The Sithfits, Jedi Evins, Fri., Dec. 9, 8 p.m., $5. The Freeze, Agression, Love Canal, Thu., Dec. 15, 8 p.m., $8.00.


ANGEL CITY BREWING CO.: 216 S. Alameda St., L.A. Famous Friend, Shere Disraeli, Taber Othmanth, Fri., Dec. 9, 9:30 p.m., $10; Equanimous, Famous Friend, Shere Disraeli, Taber Othmanth, Fri., Dec. 9, 9:30 p.m., $10. The Superbeens, Barrio Tiger, Le Cos, Sat., Dec. 10, 10 p.m., $7. Open Mic, Mondays, 8 p.m., $5. The Ukulele Orchestra of the Western Hemisphere, Tue., Dec. 13, 8 p.m., $10. Short Film Night, Wed., Dec. 14, 9 p.m., $10. Annie Hardy, Lael Neale, Alex Aleco, Thu., Dec. 15, 8:30 p.m., $5.

ARMADA HOUSE: 200 W. Broadway, L.A. Batwings Catwings, Panoramic, Bellhaunts, Fri., Dec. 9, 9 p.m., $5.

BOOTLEG THEATER: 2200 Beverly Blvd., Los Angeles. The Handsome Family, Drunken Prayer, Fri., Dec. 9, 8:30 p.m., $20 (see Music Pick). Slotface, Junk, Sat., Dec. 10, 8:30 p.m., $10. ExSage, Death/Hymn Number 9, Girl Tears, The Mad Walls, Mon., Dec. 12, 8:30 p.m., $5. Name the Band, Tiger Watt & the Secondmen, Big Pig, Sat., Dec. 10, 9 p.m., $10. Radwaste, Trotsky Icepick, Mike Parks, Mon., Dec. 12, 8 p.m., free; Jay Dee Maness, Cody Bryant, Carmine Barnyard Stompers, Jimmy Angel, Thu., Dec. 15, 7 p.m., free. The Cody Bryant Experience, Wednesdays, 7:30 p.m., free. The Spirit of the Bobcats, Tuesdays, 7 p.m., $5. Tracy Dawn, The Cody Bryant Experience, Lynette Play'n Lucky, Fri., Dec. 9, 7:30 p.m., free. Big Jay Famous Friend, Shere Disraeli, Taber Onthank, Fri., Dec. 9, 8 p.m., free. Sebastian Bach, signing copies of a new book, Tue., Dec. 13, 5 p.m., free.

CAFE 2106: 2006 Cypress Ave., Los Angeles. Tommy Chong, Snoop Dogg, Charles Bradley, Little Voodoo, Ghidehrah, Fri., Dec. 9, 9 p.m., $5. Radwaste, Trotsky Icepick, Mike Parks, Tue., Dec. 13, 8 p.m., $20. Name the Band, Tiger Watt & the Secondmen, Big Pig, Sat., Dec. 10, 9 p.m., $10. Radwaste, Trotsky Icepick, Mike Bathroom, Sat., Dec. 10, 9 p.m., $10. Name the Band, Tiger Watt & the Secondmen, Big Pig, Sat., Dec. 10, 9 p.m., $10. Radwaste, Trotsky Icepick, Mike Parks, Mon., Dec. 12, 8 p.m., free; Jay Dee Maness, Cody Bryant, Carmine Barnyard Stompers, Jimmy Angel, Thu., Dec. 15, 7 p.m., free. The Cody Bryant Experience, Wednesdays, 7:30 p.m., free. The Spirit of the Bobcats, Tuesdays, 7 p.m., $5. Tracy Dawn, The Cody Bryant Experience, Lynette Play'n Lucky, Fri., Dec. 9, 7:30 p.m., free. Big Jay Famous Friend, Shere Disraeli, Taber Onthank, Fri., Dec. 9, 8 p.m., free. Sebastian Bach, signing copies of a new book, Tue., Dec. 13, 5 p.m., free.

**THE ROSE:** 245 E. Green St., Pasadena. The Robert Cray Band, Fri., Dec. 9, 9 p.m., $38-$58. The Dirty Knobs, Marc Ford, Sun., Dec. 11, 8 p.m., $30-$50.

**THE ROXY:** 9009 W. Sunset Blvd., West Hollywood. Benjamin Francis Leftwich, Brolly, Fri., Dec. 9, 8:30 p.m., $17. Assuming We Survive, In Urgency, Sykes, Dead Avenue, Sat., Dec. 10, 7:30 p.m., $12. Hall the Sun, Sun., Dec. 11, 7 p.m., $15. Fitz & the Tantrums, Arkells, Mon., Dec. 12, 8 p.m., $35. Roy Woods, Wed., Dec. 14, 8 p.m., TBA.

**THE SAFARI:** 1429 S. Los Angeles St., Los Angeles. High-Functioning Flesh, Leather Slave, P22, Future Shoxxo, in a benefit for Planned Parenthood, Thu., Dec. 15, 8 p.m., $10.

**SAINT ROCKE:** 142 Pacific Coast Highway, Hermosa Beach. Tracii Guns, Juan Croucier, Lose Control, Sat., Dec. 10, 8 p.m., $18. The Charlie Hunter Quartet, Wed., Dec. 14, 8 p.m., $20.

**THE SATELLITE:** 1717 Silver Lake Blvd., Los Angeles. Sims, Air Credits, VerBS, Fri., Dec. 9, 9 p.m., $14. Naomi, Ruslan Sirota, Stephen Puth, Mac Hanson, Badflower, Mon., Dec. 12, 9 p.m., free. Heaps n Heaps, Wilderado, Windward Flyer, Thu., Dec. 15, 8 p.m., $10.


**THE SMELL:** 247 S. Main St., Los Angeles. Drug Apts., The Daydreams, David Scott Stone, Kate NV, Fri., Dec. 9, 8 p.m., $5. The Loyalists, FeatherWolf, Cinder Cone, Sat., Dec. 10, 9 p.m., $5.


**TAIX FRENCH RESTAURANT:** 1911 Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles. Naia Izumi, Tubby Boots, Fri., Dec. 9, 10:30 p.m., free.


**TIMEWARP RECORDS:** 12204 Venice Blvd., Los Angeles, Mr. Vampire, Sat., Dec. 10, 8 p.m., $5.

**THE TOWNHOUSE:** 52 Windward Ave., Venice. Scotty Wells, Mr. Numberonederful, Ireesh Lal, Planet 9 Collective, Malik Moore, Ana Saldana, Colleen Lovejoy, plus activist Ilana Carter, Thu., Dec. 15, 9 p.m.-2 a.m., $10.

**TRIP:** 2101 Lincoln Blvd., Santa Monica. Phil & Lu, The Midway, Juli Blooms, Fri., Dec. 9, 8 p.m., $10. Sideways Hog, The Chuckleheads, The Grill Sergeants, Bunn & Evan, Sat., Dec. 10, 8 p.m., $10. The Julian Coryell Trio, Tuesdays, 9 p.m., free. Triptease Burlesque, Wednesdays, 10 p.m., free.


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WHISKY A GO-GO: 8901 Sunset Blvd., West Hollywood. The Bangles, The Last, Fri., Dec. 9, 9 p.m., TBA (see Music Pick). The Bangles, The Muffs, Sat., Dec. 10, 9 p.m., TBA, Lord of War, Democide, Uncarried, A Butcher’s Euphoria, In Ritual, Mon., Dec. 12, 7 p.m., TBA. King T, The Faculty, Jack Be, Robnorri, Lethal Diversity, Kiyotaka, Wed., Dec. 14, 7 p.m., TBA. Warbringer, Thu., Dec. 15, 7 p.m., TBA.

WHITE OAK MUSIC & ARTS: 17646 Sherman Way, Van Nuys. Liberty, No Advisory, Dr. Party, Aggro Mucho, Sun., Dec. 11, 5:30 p.m., $5.

JAZZ & BLUES


COWBOY DOWNstairs: 3213 S. South Figueroa St., Long Beach. Greg & the Gallows, Dec. 9, 10 p.m., $5. El Locke, Wed., Dec. 14, 8:30 p.m., $3.

COUNTRY & FOLK


DANCE CLUBS

CATALINA BAR & GRILL: 6725 W. Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles. Melba Moore, Dec. 9-10, 8:30 p.m., TBA. L.A. Jazz Society & ASMAC Holiday Brunch, Sun., Dec. 11, 11:30 a.m.-TBA; The John Daversa Big Band, Renee Olstead, Sun., Dec. 11, 7:30 p.m., TBA. The Gordon Goodwin Big Phat Band, Mon., Dec. 12, 8:30 p.m., TBA. Richard Sheline, Sat., Dec. 10, 8:30 p.m., TBA. The Jennifer Leitham Trio, Wed., Dec. 14, 8:30 p.m., TBA. The Mike Stern Quartet, Thu., Dec. 15, 9 p.m., TBA.

DESSERT ROSE: 1700 Halstead Ave., Los Angeles. The Mark Z. Stevens Trio, Saturdays, 7-11 p.m., free.

THE FRET HOUSE: 309 N. Citrus Ave., Covina. Jeff Linsky, Abe Lagiminas Jr. & Jennifer Leitham, Sat., Dec. 10, 8 p.m., $20...

HARVELLE’S SANTA MONICA: 1432 Fourth St., Santa Monica. The Toledo Show, Sundays, 9:30 p.m., $10. The House of Vibe All-Stars, Wednesdays, 9:30 p.m., $10. The Dave Cavalier Trio, plus burlesque dancers Olivia Bellafontaine, Donna Hood, Erin Bridges, Thu., Dec. 15, 9:30 p.m., $15-$25.


RED WHITE + BLUEZZ: 37 E. Molino Ave., Pasadena. Gilbert Gunderson, Fri., Dec. 9, 7 p.m., free. Sabine Pothier, Sat., Dec. 10, 7 p.m., free. Yuko Mabuchi, West, Dec. 14, 6-9 p.m., free.

ROCKWELL TABLE & STAGE: 1714 N. Vermont Ave., Los Angeles. Shawn Ryan, Mon., Dec. 12, 8 p.m., TBA.

SEAGIRD JAZZ LOUNGE: 130 E. Broadway, Long Beach. Body (Hurricane) Spencer, Fri., Dec. 9, 9 p.m., TBA. Ishameel Hunter, Sat., Dec. 10, 9 p.m., TBA. Gennine Jackson Francis, Wed., Dec. 14, 7 p.m., TBA.

SPAGHETTI SEAL BEACH: 3005 Old Ranch Parkway, Seal Beach. Darryl Walker, Fri., Dec. 9, 8 p.m., $30. Blake Aaron, Sat., Dec. 10, 8 p.m., $30. DW3, Thursdays, 8 p.m., $15.


VITELLO’S ITALIAN RESTAURANT: 4349 Tujunga Ave., Studio City. Poncho Sanchez, Fri., Dec. 9, 9 p.m., TBA. George Khan, Thu., Dec. 15, 9 p.m., TBA.


UPCOMING events at AMOEBA! For a full calendar of events, visit AMOEBA.COM

SATURDAY, DEC 17, 2016

DANCING BLUES

ALEY’S BAR: 2913 E. Anaheim St., Long Beach. Get Low, hip-hop night, Sat., Dec. 10, 9 p.m., $10.

AVALON HOLLYWOOD: 1735 Vine St., Los Angeles. Control, with DJs spinning dubstep and more, 19+, Fridays, 9:30 p.m.; Josh Pan, Team EYX, XGP, Well Groomed, Fri., Dec. 9, 9:30 p.m., TBA. Skellism, Maxuxx, Wed., Dec. 14, 9 p.m., free.

CREATE NIGHTCLUB: 6021 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles. EC Twins, Fri., Dec. 9, 10 p.m.; SoNo Frisday, Frisdays, 10 p.m. Arcade Saturdays, Saturdays, 10 p.m.; Bassjacker, Riggli & Peros, Venice, Sat., Dec. 10, 10 p.m., $20.

THE ECHOPLACE: 1514 Glendale Blvd., Los Angeles. DJ Spinna, J Rocc, DJ Aaron Paar, Fri., Dec. 9, 9 p.m., $10-$25. Dub Club, an eternally mesmerizing night of reggae, dub and beyond from resident DJs Tom Chasteen, Roy Ford, The Dungeonmaster and Boss Harmony, plus occasional live sets from Jamaican legends, 21+, Wednesdays, 9 p.m.-12:30 a.m. (see Music Pick).

GENERAL LEE’S BAR: 475 Gin Ling Way, L.A. DJ Joey Altruda’s Shanghai Noir, Wednesdays, 9 p.m., $30.

GRAND STAR JAZZ CLUB:

HOLIDAY HOURS - BEGINNING THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15TH - DECEMBER 25TH, WE WILL OPEN AT 10AM. CHRISTMAS EVE 12/24 - 9AM to 8PM (TRADE COUNTER 8am to 6PM)

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SPEARMINT RHINO'S CITY OF INDUSTRY

FREE ENTRY DAILY
TIL 8PM!

LIVE ON STAGE XXX ADULT FILM SUPERSTAR
NIKKI DELANO

DECEMBER 16TH-17TH
SHOWTIMES
11PM & 1AM EACH NIGHT

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- RHINO ROOMS - $150 20MIN.
WEDNESDAY
- RETREATS - $150 20MIN.
- RHINO ROOMS - $150 20MIN.
THURSDAY
$100 30MIN. RETREATS
FRI & SAT
- NUDE 15MIN. VIPS
- RETREATS - $160 20MIN.
- RHINO ROOMS - $180 20MIN.
FREE ENTRY DAILY TIL 8PM

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NOT VALID DURING OFFICIAL EVENTS. ONE PERSON PER COUPON ONLY.
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