WHERE HAVE ALL THE CHILDREN GONE?

Los Angeles’ declining birthrate spells trouble for its beleaguered school district

BY HILLEL ARON
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CAN TRUMP STOP OUR BULLET TRAIN?

California’s high-speed rail could be a fail without federal funding

BY HILLEL ARON

Three weeks ago, President Donald Trump made what might be considered his first real move to screw over California, by delay- ing a $637 million grant, long thought to have been a lock, to pay for electrifying a Bay Area train route.

That’s bad news for Caltrain, which will have to stick to diesel gas for the time being. But it’s also bad news for Gov. Jerry Brown’s pet project, the bullet train, which plans to share that section of track.

The delay has been interpreted, by some, to be an act of political retribution, to get back at California for, oh, take your pick — not voting for Trump, for having so many “sanctuary cities,” for declaring itself the vanguard of the resistance, and so on.

Lisa Marie Alley, a spokeswoman for the California High Speed Rail Authority, downplays the significance of the grant delay.

“I would not characterize it as a big blow whatsoever,” she says. “It’s something that is not good. The bigger ques- tion is, to the Republican administration, why would you hurt something that is creating jobs, creating a system that’s better for the environment and providing a valuable service for the Bay Area?”

The worrying thing for supporters of the bullet train, which aims to connect San Francisco and Los Angeles by 2029 for the not-so-small price of $68 billion (and that estimate is probably low), is: If the Trump administration is willing to delay a fairly uncontroversial grant, can the nation’s largest infrastructure project currently under construction expect any help at all from the federal government?

“The federal role in high-speed rail has pretty much run its course,” says William Grindley, a former World Bank executive and vocal opponent of the bullet train project. “Even the Obama administration washed its hands of it last year.”

Alley insists the project can survive without any more federal money.

“We do not account for or expect any future federal funding.” Alley says. “If federal funding becomes available, would we want it? Absolutely.”

When high-speed rail was first pitched to California voters in 2008, via Proposition 1A — which gave the project its initial $9 billion in bond money — the idea was that the total cost would be split three ways, equally among the state, the federal government and private investors. So far the federal government has ponied up around $3 billion, and that well appears to have run dry. Alley says the High-Speed Rail Authority “envisioned” having one third of its cost covered by the feds, “but we’re not anticipating it at this time.”

Private investment hasn’t exactly been forthcoming, either. Only a small fraction of the world’s high-speed rail projects turn out to be profitable, according to Grindley, and private investors appear skeptical that California’s could end up being one of them. Alley says the rail au- thority hopes that once the first section of the rail is opened, it will begin to attract investors. That section will connect San Jose with the town of Wasco, population 25,000.

Which means that California is pretty much on its own as far as figuring out how to pay for its new train. One source of revenue was supposed to come from California’s cap-and-trade program, which requires companies to buy permits, at auction, to release greenhouse gases into the environment. A quarter of that money is earmarked for the bul- let train. The first two auctions earned close to a billion dollars each — a decent windfall — but the most recent two were duds, yielding the high-speed rail only a few million dollars.

The program is also the subject of a lawsuit, which argues that the program is a de facto tax, and therefore should have needed a two-thirds vote to pass.

The state Legislature may try to work some funding for the bullet train into its next transportation bill, which could include a gas-tax hike in order to fund some much-needed road maintenance. A carbon tax is also a possibility.

Is the bullet train dead? Not yet. It’s in trouble, but not yet. It’s limping along, looking more and more expensive to Californians every day. And it’s very much an open question what happens once the project’s biggest champion, Gov. Brown, leaves office in 2019.

“They’re in trouble,” says Elizabeth Alexis, co-founder of Californians Advocating Responsible Rail Design. “They’ve been in trouble for years, and they just keep going. They stay alive another day. And it’s very much an open question what happens once the project’s biggest champion, Gov. Brown, leaves office in 2019.”
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School board member Ref Rodriguez’s Eastside district — one-seventh of the Los Angeles Unified School District — is a sprawling, crescent-shaped piece of land that manages to include Katy Perry’s home in Los Feliz and the notoriously poor and corrupt cities of Vernon, Bell and Cudahy. Rodriguez maintains a satellite office in the far-flung outpost of South Gate, across the street from a Bimbo factory, in an empty school.

This was once Tweedy Elementary, a peach-colored building and a collection of shabby bungalows set atop a black field of asphalt. When the school district built a new Tweedy Elementary a few blocks away, in 2004, the older campus was converted into an adult learning center. Rodriguez’s office is inside one of the bungalows, which also includes a room full of unused textbooks.

Today, LAUSD finds itself in a curious position: cash-poor and land-rich. It owns 750 properties, making up more than 6,600 acres of land, or more than 10 square miles — an area larger than the city of Santa Monica. But many of its schools are under-enrolled.

“There are places where we have schools that are basically four blocks away from each other — and at a time, that made sense,” Rodriguez says. Now, he says, “Buildings built for 1,000 kids may have something like 400.

“It’s expensive.”

Between 1980 and 2000, LAUSD’s population exploded from about 500,000 to more than 700,000, causing classrooms to become seriously overcrowded. Elected officials responded to the crisis by moving schools to a year-round schedule, by busing students to less crowded schools, and by hiring hundreds of teachers and throwing up hundreds of cheap, prefab bungalows on playgrounds.

Then, in the 1990s and 2000s, voters passed a series of bond measures to fund the construction of more than 100 new schools. Some, like the $578 million Robert Kennedy School, built on the site of the Ambassador Hotel, became among the most expensive public schools in the country.

“We had overcrowding, we were busing kids — some of them were on the bus for a couple of hours,” says LAUSD superintendent Michelle King, who’s been with...
the school district since 1978. “At that point, we really wanted to ensure every child could attend their neighborhood school. No one could have foreseen, I think, that the landscape would change.”

A little more than a decade ago, something unexpected happened. The district’s enrollment, which peaked in 2004 at just under 750,000, began to drop. Some of the loss was to independent charters, a growing trend that would soon amount to a veritable exodus of students. But the total number of kids being served by both the district and charters also was dropping.

The reason was simple: People are having fewer children. They’re also having them later in life — and they’re often leaving Los Angeles once they do.

This is no small problem. School districts in California receive money from the state based on a formula that depends, in part, on how many kids attend their schools. Fewer students means less money.

Today, LAUSD’s enrollment is around 614,000, a number that the district estimates will fall below half a million by 2018. But L.A. Unified’s costs have not gone down. They’ve gone up. This year’s $7.59 billion budget is half a billion dollars more than last year’s.

The nation’s second largest school district is facing a looming fiscal crisis, one that could have devastating consequences for the city.

“Everyone just hopes they can keep the ship afloat for a while and something will happen to change the vectors,” says former state treasurer Bill Lockyer. “I don’t see that happening. But it’s easy to decide that when the alternative is making some hard and unpopular decisions.”

In his 2015 campaign, Rodriguez, a former charter school operator, spoke about the need for the district to shrink — or, as he put it, to “contract elegantly.” Like any company faced with fewer customers, it needed to downsize but in a way that didn’t actually make its “product” worse.

“We’re trying to stay away from the biggest impact to kids in classrooms,” he says. “But I do believe that we need to talk about school closures at some point. It’s inevitable. And we need to talk about it in a way that’s truthful.”

The declining birthrate in the United States is a sort of political sleeping giant. Dr. Dowell Myers, a USC professor who studies demographic change, describes the issue like this: In Los Angeles County, the ratio of people over 65 to people between the ages of 25 to 64 — the ratio of retirees to workers — is likely to double between now and 2030.

“That’s never happened before, ever, in the United States,” he says. “This rising ratio is the central political driver for the next 30 years. The facts of life are this ratio. It’s everywhere in the country, in every state.”

This demographic shift could have devastating consequences for public institutions such as Social Security and health care. But the first victim might be public education. A school district like Los Angeles Unified relies on a steady supply of young people for its revenue, and it pays for its retired workers’ benefits. It’s easy to see how one decreasing and the other increasing could be a problem.

As of now, there are a number of reasons why people are having fewer kids. Contraception is more widely available than ever before, which is believed to be the cause of the decline in teen pregnancies. (A 2014 Brookings Institution study found that two MTV reality shows, 16 and Pregnant and Teen Mom, may be responsible for up to a third of that decline.)

What’s more, just as it has become harder for Americans to maintain a middle-class lifestyle — wages have largely stagnated while the price of buying a home has skyrocketed — it has become more expensive for middle-class Americans to raise children. Childcare has gotten more expensive, as has health care.

“The irony is that urban centers are becoming much better places to raise kids, but the combination of expense factor and poor quality of schools means many people still move out to the suburbs to raise children.”

—RICHARD FLORIDA, a professor at the University of Toronto and author of forthcoming book The New Urban Crisis
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workforce,” he says. “In fact, they’ve increased the size of their workforce. They’re adding staff. That is completely unsustainable. I realize schools are not a business. But you can’t keep adding costs when revenue is declining.”

Today, the district has more than 60,000 employees, fewer than half of whom are teachers. School board members were shocked to hear, in a report by the superintendent in May 2016, that LAUSD’s administrative staff had grown 22 percent over the previous five years. Over that same period of time, the number of teachers had dropped by 9 percent, mostly due to attrition.

For many, that is the exact opposite of how you shrink the district. “To have so many people working at the district that are not teaching, I think, is the biggest problem,” says Steve Barr, the founder of Green Dot, a chain of charter schools. “It wouldn’t be so criminal if they were kick-ass at supporting teachers.”

But Lisa Alva, a teacher who’s running for school board, says the bumper crop of administrators has not shown up anywhere near the classrooms: “I have not seen it at the school-site level. I don’t think anyone has.”

Among other things, the panel suggested that for every 100,000 kids the district lost, it needed to cut 10,000 staff — administrators, teachers, janitors, everyone — in order to save $500 million. But the cost of employee salaries has been going up — this year, it’s more than $4 billion. And the cost of benefits (including workers’ compensation, pensions and health care benefits for both employees and retirees) also is growing — currently, it’s $1.92 billion.

LAUSD superintendent King says the district will shed employees, but the goal is to decentralize the school district — to add positions on school sites and lose positions at LAUSD’s bustling downtown headquarters on Beaudry Avenue.

The cost to the district of paying for its retired employees’ pensions, is expected to balloon over the next few years, by hundreds of millions of dollars. The school board has long seen this problem coming but has been slow to act on it. “We saw the trend lines,” says Yolie Flores, who was on the school board from 2007 to 2011 (she’s now running for Congress). “I remember financial advisors telling us we’re going to be at a cliff. I can’t tell you how many times we tried to address those issues, but we never had a majority of board members that were willing to do anything.”

Many of her colleagues, she says, “were retired administrators, where if you changed the benefits, it would have affected them personally.”

Another reason for the inaction, according to “school reformers,” was the presence of both the teachers union and service workers union, the SEIU Local 99. Both spend prodigiously on school board races, wield enormous influence over the district and have secured bountiful benefits for their members. For instance, LAUSD employees make zero contributions to their health insurance.

“Health care costs are dramatically higher than other school districts,” says Taylor, who notes that management of the employees’ health care plan is run by an independent, nine-member committee — eight of whom are union members. “They have no accountability to the board.”

The panel found numerous ways to save money, including reducing the number of workers’ compensation claims, increasing student attendance and offering early retirement to some of the older teachers who are making the highest salaries.
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These suggestions, along with others, were delivered to the school board in late 2015, about a week before Cortines was set to step down as superintendent.

“I don’t believe they were met with great enthusiasm,” Taylor says. “And I don’t know that anything’s been done about them since.”

King insists the panel’s recommendations have not been ignored, though none of the major ones have been implemented. “We have teams here really digging deep to give us recommendations on efficiency,” she says. “We’ve been very proactive.”

In December, LAUSD chief financial officer Megan Reilly presented an even bleaker picture of the district’s financial outlook: a cumulative $1.5 billion shortfall by the start of 2018, which year six weeks later, she announced was stepping down, after more than a decade on the job.

Before that announcement, superintendent Michelle King had ordered each department to come up with a plan to eliminate 30 percent of its budget. Those cuts have yet to be approved, but the district is already using them to lower its predicted deficit, down to around $220 million in the 2018-19 school year.

The district could, for example, ask voters to raise property taxes to supplement its general fund. But the last time LAUSD tried that, in 2010, the modest, $100-a-year parcel tax was handily rejected by voters, 47 to 53 percent (it needed a two-thirds majority to pass).

“Right now, no one wants to give money to a general fund because they don’t think it will be spent well,” Melvoin says. “My hope is that with better fiscal management, with radical transparency, then we can be honest about our balance sheets, we can go to voters. But at this point they don’t want to throw good money after bad, and I don’t blame them.”

Closing schools is highly unpopular. But the land-rich district has leased some of its property to affordable-housing developers, to build subsidized workforce housing for some of LAUSD’s lower-income employees (the housing was originally conceived of for teachers, but teachers, it turns out, make too much money to qualify). This was done not to bring in revenue but to help workers. But LAUSD could decide to turn over some of its land for market-rate housing.

Which brings us back to Tweedy Elementary— the old Tweedy Elementary.

“It was an exercise for each division to really examine what we do and to see how they are serving the school sites,” King says. She points out that the budget is balanced for the next two years, and adds, “I would define us as being ahead of the curve.”

But even those theoretical cuts don’t solve the district’s “structural deficit” — the fact that its revenue is declining and its costs are growing.

The responses to this impending crisis vary. Some have tried to pin the blame on charter schools, as opposed to looking inward, improve their own schools, be better fiscal stewards,” says Nick Melvoin, a school board candidate who’s running against board president Steve Zimmer (Zimmer declined to comment for this story).

Others say instead of cutting, the district should be looking for ways to bring in more money.

“Too often, the response of the district has been to blame charter schools, as opposed to looking inward, improve their own schools, be better fiscal stewards,” says Nick Melvoin, a school board candidate who’s running against board president Steve Zimmer (Zimmer declined to comment for this story).

“L.A. Unified is always the victim,” says former board member David Tokofsky, now a consultant for the administrators union. “They just sit around and say, ‘Oh my God.’ They’re not stepping up to find revenue.”

The vast majority of people in the city say, ‘Yeah, LAUSD is a joke,’” Barr says. “They’re like the Knicks.”

“The district itself, it has such a bad reputation that we do have to figure out how to get around that,” says Rodriguez, speaking from his office on the former campus of Tweedy Elementary. “In the meantime, there are things that can close. Like this place.”

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We’ve all had that friend who seems to have been “working on their master’s” or “doing their doctorate” forever. However mysterious their endeavors might be, it’s clear that these are something worth devoting a chunk of their life (and a chunk of change) to—and usually while also juggling work and family commitments.

American universities award around 750,000 master’s degrees and 175,000 doctorates each year. So just what are these advanced qualifications, what do they entail—and what should scholars expect at the end of years of study?

Two types of post-graduate degrees are offered in America. Master’s degrees, which usually take two to three years to complete, exist to demonstrate advanced mastery of a specific field of study or area of professional practice. A doctorate (also called a doctor’s or doctoral degree) qualifies holders to teach at the university level or to work in a specific profession, such as law, psychology, medicine (physicians, surgeons and doctors), or science (for example, medical scientists or marine biologists). Divided into “research degrees” and “professional degrees”, doctorates will require three to seven years of further study after earning a master’s.

“At the master’s level, it invites you to explore pretty thoroughly a topic of your desire,” said Dr. Craig Calquist, Associate Provost of Pacifica Graduate Institute, which offers master’s and doctoral degrees in several areas of study at two campuses near Santa Barbara. “At the doctoral level, you’re expected to become an academic and applied expert in that field.”

In order to thrive at a graduate level, an individual will require:

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not just ambition for career advancement (and a bigger pay check), but also a true passion for learning, highly-developed reading and writing skills, advanced analytical thinking abilities, a love of inquiry, and mental flexibility when encountering diverse approaches to problem solving.

“At the undergraduate level, you’re just sort of watching movies … At the master’s level, you’re moving on to critiquing movies,” said Dr. Michael Berger, dean of the College of Doctoral Studies at Grand Canyon University (GCU), by way of metaphor. “And then at the doctoral level, we’re finally moving on to directing and creating your own movie.” GCU is a private Christian university comprising a state-of-the-art online education platform and 17,500 students on its Phoenix, Ariz. campus.

The academic arc from a bachelor’s degree through a master’s and then on to a doctoral degree is about evolving from being a student to becoming a specialist scholar.

“When you’re in a bachelor’s program, you’re learning the fundamental building blocks of knowledge in a field,” Berger continued. “When you move on to a master’s … you’re not just stacking those blocks – you’re re-arranging them; you’re learning what they’re made of.”

While a master’s degree teaches the research skills and study techniques to analyze and evaluate other peoples’ work, a doctorate involves the synthesis and very creation of new knowledge.

“You’re no longer reading research – you’re writing research,” said Berger. “And it’s this sort of complex transition … which is one of the reasons that doctoral education can be so hard: it’s not about learning new things – you need to learn new ways of thinking.”

As well as holding a bachelor’s degree, most institutions will expect further demonstration that a grad school candidate has both the academic track record and personal attributes indicative of the ability to successfully tackle the demands of a master’s or doctoral program.

“We do look at have you gotten your degree from another regionally-accredited institution – we feel that’s important,”

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"Usually folks who come into our doctoral programs want to make a change," said Berger. "They’ve seen something; they have a passion for some topic [wherein] they want something to happen that’s different, whether it’s their work community, their ministry community [or] a non-profit that they’re involved in.”

"At the undergraduate level, you’re just sort of watching movies … At the master’s level, you’re moving on to critiquing movies".

Certain programs, such as psychology, can also have an acute personal impact on graduate-level scholars – even before their studies are complete.

“Sometimes such profound self-understanding that it actually changes the course of one’s life,” Chalquist revealed. “I’ve often heard older students, in class, say ‘y’know, I’ve been doing the same pattern of behavior all my life and I never understood until this moment why I do that and how it affects me’.”

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As a freelance writer, I generally work from home, but have occasion to visit the offices of various publications for collaborative projects and meetings (I even maintain a desk at one). When I’m writing in a collective workspace, I find myself rubbing shoulders with full-time, salaried employees; part-time employees; temps; fellow independent contractors; and salaried employees who mostly telecommute.

This is just one example of what’s become known as the “blended” or “agile” workforce. And with roughly 25-30 percent of U.S. workers now classified as “contingent” (that is, freelance, temporary or part-time), according to Intuit, it’s a rapidly-growing trend.

“The makeup of today’s workforce has been changing over the past 10 years, partly due to the recession of 2008 and partly due to the changing demographics, with millennials becoming a significant portion of the workforce,” said Linda Duffy, President of Irvine, Calif.-based Ethos Human Capital Solutions, which supports small business owners in their human capital needs.

According to the recent Workplace 2025 report by human resource consulting firm Randstad, companies’ commitment to building an agile workforce has increased 155 percent over the past four years.

“The move toward this always-on, always-connected, flexible work environment has mirrored workplace technological advances. In the 1980s, organizations shifted from being solo silos toward developing collaborative networks with partners as suppliers,” said Sylvia Metayer, CEO, worldwide corporate services segment at multinational food service and facilities management company Sodexo. “Today, the next iteration – the cellular organization – is on the rise, with autonomous groups inside organizations operating in a spirit of collaboration and friendly competition but joining forces when necessary.”

Companies are finding that – as well as avoiding the recruitment, onboarding, insurance and redundancy costs intrinsic to maintaining a traditional, permanent full-time workforce – hiring on-demand allows them the flexibility to solve problems more quickly and efficiently.

“A blended workforce integrates strategic agility, with the traditional permanent employee model to anticipate talent needs, adjust in real-time and utilize workers from a variety of employment arrangements,” said Jim Link, Chief Human Resources Officer at...
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Randstad North America. “At its core, it is the ability to build a world-class talent engine consisting of external expertise, like freelancers, contingent workers, and consultants with highly specialized skill sets alongside permanent workers when driving critical projects and initiatives.”

The move toward more agile workforces also suits workers who sense, and crave, the opportunities for greater time-management flexibility enabled by contemporary communication technology. Such freelance and contractor employment relationships have become colloquially known as “1099 work”, in reference to the IRS from used to report independent contractor and other miscellaneous kinds of non-salary income.

“Some workers enjoy 1099 work or a few part-time jobs to control their work/life balance,” Duffy explained. “Others may prefer 1099 work for taxation purposes. If they don’t need benefits, they may be able to make more money as a 1099 contractor. By diversifying, it also lessens their concern of being laid off.”

But one of the challenges of the blended workplace is maintaining morale and team spirit in an environment where people are being compensated differently, receiving dissimilar levels of benefits, and coming and going with varying amounts of (and rigidity in) time commitment to a given company or project.

“This type of workplace can be challenging for workers, especially those who may be accustomed to a more traditional workplace with well-defined roles,” said Metayer. “However, the most forward-looking companies are creating learning and social programs and designing spaces that encourage workers to create a sense of community and teamwork.”

And while contemporary technology has vastly improved collaboration between diverse and sometimes physically distant pools of talent, some of the positive intangibles of the traditional 9-to-5 workforce are yet to be adequately replicated or replaced in its “agile” incarnation.

“Communication may be served by today’s technology, but it’s the casual ‘water cooler’ talk and social events that limit the team building as well,” Duffy continued. “Technology can only do so much. Grabbing coffee or lunch with a team member isn’t done through technology.”

Companies also need to navigate what can be a regulatory
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minefield relating to proper classification of workers, workers’ comp insurance, and the practice of “test driving” of potential full-time employees by first engaging them as independent contractors (a breach of both federal and California law, according to Duffy).

“One of the biggest challenges of a blended workforce is successfully and consistently creating an inclusive environment,” said Metayer. “This applies not only to different categories of workers ... but also to the five generations of workers now in the workforce as well as gender and ethnic backgrounds. The key is to offer activities and programs that connect different workers and help them work better together by exchanging knowledge, ideas and skills.”

Yet, while managers, recruiters and workers alike may be still be adapting to aspects of the agile work environment, it appears to be rapidly confirming itself as the new, if ever-evolving, “normal”.

“Sixty-eight percent of employers and 70 percent of employees agree that by 2025 the majority of the workforce will be employed in an agile arrangement,” Link reported, citing Randstad’s Workplace 2025 study. “Employers expect 69 percent of their workforce to be agile talent by that time frame.”

With robots already working alongside humans everywhere from factories and telesales companies to hospitals and hotels, and collaborative “co-bots” (the market for which is growing by 50% annually) imminent, the blended workforce is only going to become a more complex and nuanced cocktail in the near future.

“Day-to-day office working is an idea of the past. Some organizations hang onto the physical space without thinking about what their employees are actually doing there,” said Metayer. “The rules of the workplace are being completely rewritten. Change is happening at an unprecedented pace across the world, in all economies, impacting the very nature of work and how individuals thrive (or not) at work.”
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WALK THE LINE

Howlin’ Ray’s is a bona fide phenomenon, but does it deserve the hype?

By Besha Rodell

At 10:30 on a Sunday morning, the line for Howlin’ Ray’s already stretches through the entire bottom level of Chinatown’s Far East Plaza. It starts at the restaurant’s door — which won’t open for another half-hour — then extends around the picnic tables at the center of the plaza, past the sign that indicates the wait from that point will be 45 minutes to an hour, past the door of Roy Choi’s Chego, through the center atrium that’s open to the sky, past the elevator column and the vintage clothing store and the booth that sells 3-D posters of puppies and $6 sunglasses, all the way to the street. The people at the very end of the line will wait about four hours to get what they came for: a very spicy fried chicken sandwich.

The hours-long wait is now as much a part of the Howlin’ Ray’s experience as the fried chicken payoff at the line’s end. The mood is different on different days — most subdued (and shortest) on Wednesdays, most raucous (and longest) on Saturdays.

CRITIC’S RATING

★★★★★ ★★★★★ ★★★★ ★★★ ★★ ★ Zero = Poor ★ = Fair ★★ = Good ★★★ = Very Good ★★★★ = Excellent ★★★★★ = World-Class

On Sunday there’s a kind of hungover, fuzzy feel to the crowd, though some folks have started the party over again. The scent of weed is omnipresent. One large group of friends is passing around a bottle of Hennessy, getting rowdier as they inch toward the front of the line. Though the demographic skews young, in every other way this is probably the most diverse crowd you’ll find gathered for a shared purpose anywhere in the city. One woman bides her time studying a giant medical textbook as her young son does his own homework, tracing over lower- and uppercase letters of the alphabet.

Every so often, a bemused older couple or group of men from the neighborhood wander by. One stops to ask me why we’re standing in line, and then goes back to his wife to report. “Fried chicken,” he says, with a heavy Cantonese accent. She doesn’t understand. “Popeye’s! Chicken sandwich!” She shakes her head in wonderment.

It’s hard to explain to anyone why this many people would stand in a line this long for a fried chicken sandwich, or why the most popular food item in town is Nashville-style hot chicken, an import that’s been around for decades in another state. Perhaps even harder to explain, though, is why it took so long for hot chicken to spread across the land. Seven years ago, when I watched a fried chicken shack open, falter and close in Atlanta, I remember saying to someone: “Why didn’t they do hot chicken? There would have been a line around the block for that.”

The dude who came to that conclusion here in L.A. has a name worthy of a Marvel villain or a rockabilly icon: Johnny Ray Zone. The L.A. native discovered hot chicken in 2014 while he was staging at the Nashville outpost of Sean Brock’s Husk. Zone became so enamored that he returned to Tennessee to do a “hot chicken tour.”

The upshot of that research was Howlin’ Ray’s food truck, which Zone launched with his wife, Amanda Chapman, in mid-2015. After six months the couple traded the truck for a space in Far East Plaza, and in mid-2016 Howlin’ Ray’s opened. On its busiest days, the place now serves as much as 600 pounds of all-natural, antibiotic-free chicken.

Part of the allure of Howlin’ Ray’s is undoubtedly the dare that lies at the end of that line: How hot can you handle? There are six levels of heat, and anything above the third level, called “medium,” is hot enough that it comes with a warning. “Do not touch your face after eating the chicken,” the guy at the cash register warns you if you order anything “hot” or higher: “You will burn your skin.”

Most of the media given to Howlin’ Ray’s revolves around that intense heat, and you can find plenty of videos on the internet of sweaty dudes sitting at the picnic tables in front of Howlin’ Ray’s, swooning and exclaiming over L.A.’s hottest chicken.

Zone, for his part, does everything he can to dissuade people from ordering the hottest level of chicken. There’s a face he finds the heat of his “howlin’” chicken truly disturbing. And he’s right. Because anything above the medium-level chicken will destroy your mouth so thoroughly that you might not get the chance to notice that this is genuinely fantastic fried chicken. I’m not judging — I order the “hot” despite the fact that it renders me useless for the rest of the day. There’s something about the burn of cayenne (as well as a ton of other kinds of peppers, including ghost peppers) that creates a similar endorphin rush to jumping into a freezing river or being initiated into Fight Club.

But to truly appreciate how good the chicken is, I suggest starting with an order of the “country” style chicken — that is, level one, no heat at all. The way the skin shatters and gives way, the utterly perfect spicing of the batter that’s indistinguishable from the bird’s skin, the juicy flesh underneath, all goes to show that this is incredible chicken, with or without the heat.

It also will leave your mouth functional enough to appreciate the smoky, deeply flavored, lightly funky collard greens, as good as any I’ve had outside of the South (and better than much of what I’ve had in the South). If you’re hell-bent on spicy, get an order of the vinegar coleslaw, which offers something close to relief for a few brief seconds before the burn returns.

On the weekends you can order chicken and waffles, and the waffles are big and fluffy and piping hot, made on a waffle iron in front of the counter. If you order fries, you should also order some comeback sauce to dip them in. Similar to remoulade, comeback sauce is a Mississippi specialty, invented in the 1930s by Greek immigrants in Jackson who ran restaurants that specialize in Gulf seafood. But it works wonders here, particularly alongside pickles and slaw on the chicken sandwich, which is probably the best fried chicken sandwich in town these days.

While talking with a friend about the enigma of Howlin’ Ray’s, and the mystery behind why anyone would stand in that line, he opined that the most important ingredient wasn’t the ghost peppers or the cayenne but Zone himself. “He has been at the restaurant every single day since it opened,” he said. “He expedites every order, sees every piece of chicken. I think that makes a huge difference.”

Zone also knows how to set the mood in the tiny space. The place has an energy so festive it feels like a party, a cumulation of joy that builds as you inch toward the tiny space. The place has an energy so genuine. Once you’ve ordered and taken your seat at the counter, the cooks thank you and there’s a jubilant back-and-forth with his cooks. “Do you have a comeback sauce?” “Of course!” “You sure do!”

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The hours-long wait is now as much a part of the Howlin’ Ray’s experience as the fried chicken payoff at the line’s end. The mood is different on different days — most subdued (and shortest) on Wednesdays, most raucous (and longest) on Saturdays.

It’s not reasonable, of course. Four hours is a ridiculous amount of time to wait for a chicken sandwich. But who said that life was reasonable? Take a look at the world! Everything is crazy! There are far worse things you could do than spend half a day with your fellow weirdos, waiting for chicken so good it’s made us all lose our collective minds.

Howlin’ Ray’s | 727 N. Broadway, #226, Chinatown | (213) 935-8399 | howlinrays.com | Wed.-Sun., 11 a.m.-4 p.m. | Chicken: $3 (for one wing)-$28 (for a whole chicken) | No alcohol | Street and lot parking
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WHERE DOES MAESTRO’S CHEF EAT?

THE BEST MEXICAN RESTAURANTS IN L.A. ACCORDING TO DANIEL GODINEZ

Daniel Godinez has an obsession that many of us share: the food of Mexico. But the Acapulco-born chef has taken this obsession to the extreme, not only making it his life’s work but also backpacking to all 31 states in Mexico to research regional cuisine. Until recently, Orange County was reaping all the rewards of the chef’s extensive knowledge and training, but in early January Godinez opened his first L.A. County restaurant: Maestro in Pasadena. At Maestro, Godinez is continuing on the path he started with his two O.C. restaurants, combining Mexican flavors with fine-dining techniques to create something wholly his own.

We wondered, with this new foray into the L.A. market, what he considers the best Mexican restaurants in town. These are his six favorites.

Sonoratown

“This place truly makes me feel like I am in Sonora with their incredible flour tortillas. The ambiance and food makes me completely forget about place and time and brings me back to the western Mexican state of Sonora.” 208 E. Eighth St., downtown. (213) 290-5184, sonoratownla.com.

Mariscos El Faro

“I personally believe it’s hard to find a good representation of what authentic Mexican seafood should taste like. Mariscos El Faro hits it out of the park with the aguachile tostada — it’s fresh and delicious every time.” 6113-6139 N. Figueroa St., Highland Park (truck). (323) 359-3814, mariscoselfaro.com.

4 Guerrilla Tacos

“Why would anyone reinvent the wheel? Well, chef Wes Avila did with his unorthodox ingredients, but he also found balance by mixing in authentic flavors and tradition. If you’re a foodie, or just a taco lover, I would highly recommend chasing the Guerrilla Taco Truck around town.” Various locations (truck). (213) 289-5340, guerrillatacos.com.

Tire Shop Taqueria

“It’s hard to believe that some of the best street tacos in L.A. are based out of a tire shop. The charcoal and fresh masa are good, but the people who work there are truly the best part of the experience.” 4069 S. Avalon Blvd., Historic South Central. tireshoptaqueria.com.

Mercado

“Just like the markets in Mexico, the guys at Mercado are always sourcing fresh, seasonal ingredients that you can taste in every bite. I would recommend trying their daily specials and their carnitas. You will not be disappointed.” 1416 Fourth St., Santa Monica. (310) 526-7121. Other locations in Beverly Grove and Hollywood. mercadorestaurant.com.

Broken Spanish

“Chef Ray Garcia elevates traditional Mexican cuisine with his fresh produce combinations and innovative techniques.” 1050 S. Flower St., downtown. (213) 749-1460, brokenspanish.com.

Besha Rodell

The 10 Best Restaurants in Koreatown

Since Koreatown might be the best restaurant neighborhood in L.A., it may be the best restaurant neighborhood in the world. Culling a “best-of” list down to just 10 locations was wildly difficult, given Koreatown’s density, global representation and apparent civic commitment to good eatin.’ But we persevered, and came up with a collection of restaurants that represent Koreatown’s present and fu-
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- Chengdu Taste
- Chi Spacca
- Chichen Itza
- Colonia Publica
- Coni’s Seafood
- Dune
- El Coralense
- El Huarache Azteca
- El Fetto
- E.R.B.
- Guelaguetza
- Guerilla Tacos
- Guisados
- Isaan Station
- Jitlada
- Jon & Vinny’s
- Kogi
- La Casita Mexicana
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- Luches
- Lukshon
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- N/Naka
- Night + Market
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- Pine & Crane
- Pok Pok LA
- Providence
- Racion
- Republique
- Ricebar
- Rose Cafe
- Rustic Canyon
- Salt’s Cure
- Sotto
- Spago
- Summer Rolls
- Szechuan Impression
- The Bellwether
- The Hungry Cat
- Trous Mec
- Tsujita LA
- Union
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**THE FRESHMEN 15 CONFIRMED RESTAURANTS:**

- 71 Above
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- Erven
- Gus’s Fried Chicken
- Gwen
- Here’s Looking At You
- Holbox
- Kali
- Kato
- Lalibela
- Michael’s
- Salazar
- Shibumi
- Winsome

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**Laweekly.com/free/mohawkbend**

**Beer Belly**

Would your doctor approve? She would not. The counter bristles with taps for beers so local that they probably could be delivered on an MTA bus, and you will be tasting several of them before you stagger out the door. Sunday brunch includes Lucky Charms pancakes with Fruity Pebbles whipped cream, and the menu suggests a beer pairing for it. The only healthy thing on the menu is the grilled broccoli, and even that comes with what the menu calls Craftsman 1903 Beer Whiz. Where we come from, Beer Whiz does not generally refer to cheese sauce. There are deep-fried Oreos for dessert, but don’t let the whimsy fool you: This crew can cook. Don’t forget to try something savory: 532 S. Western Ave., Koreatown. (213) 387-2337, beerbellyla.com.

**Isaan Station**

Angelenos like to think that we know about Thai food, and it’s true that our collective knowledge base is greater than the average American’s. But even we would do well to venture away from our favorite menu items — and Thai Town. Located on the northern end of Koreatown, Isaan Station specializes in the food of northeast Thailand, which means a lot of grilling, a lot of herbs, and a lot of sour and spicy flavors. Plus, sticky rice with everything. Be sure to try the grilled chicken, which is a house specialty and gives the next restaurant on this list some stiff competition. The beef and pork “jerky” epitomize the funk and the sourness the Isaan region’s food is known for, and the papaya salad might be (steady on yourself) the best in Los Angeles. 125 N. Western Ave., Koreatown. (213) 498-2451, isaanstation.com.

**Pollo a la Brasa**

This Peruvian chicken shack is the kind of place you may have thought was zoned out of existence, a kind of glassed-in shed set down on a traffic island and nearly hidden by high drifts of cordwood. The first thing you notice about it is the wood smoke, great billowing clouds that float down Western Avenue and almost magically perfume the chickens, flavored with garlic and black oregano and roasted on a vast, flame-licked apparatus. There is a limited menu here, basically salad and fries and an indifferent preparation of the grilled-beef-heart dish anticuchos, but the chicken is enough: well-garlicked, slightly spicy, caramelized and crisp, clearly the marriage of a chicken and a bunch of logs. 764 S. Western Ave., Koreatown. (213) 387-1531.

**BCD Tofu House**

BCD Tofu House has built something of an empire, with two Koreatown locations and many more peppering the outer reaches of Los Angeles and Orange counties. While they serve many Korean staples, their specialty is BCD Tofu House, which comes in 20 or so varieties, a spicy stew containing soft tofu and a wide variety of other ingredients — seafood, meat, kimchi, even potato curry. This location is open 24 hours, and anytime is good for a combo, a feast that starts with fried fish and ends with barley tea, with about a dozen tiny plates in between. 3575 Wilshire Blvd., Koreatown. (213) 382-6677, bcdtoufo.com.

**Myung In Dumplings**

Los Angeles is heaven for dumpling lovers, and while most of our bounty can be found in the San Gabriel Valley, there’s at least one reason to venture to Koreatown on your next dumpling crawl. Myung In, a small and sparse affair in an Olympic Boulevard strip mall, is one of those places that epitomizes the beauty that can be achieved when an establishment dedicates itself primarily to one foodstuff. Even when you take into account all the Chinese and Japanese dumplings in L.A., Myung In’s various fried, steamed and soup-immersed dumplings rank among the city’s best. There’s spicy soup and fried rice to fill out the offerings, but take your cues from Anthony Bourdain, who is smiling down at you from a huge photograph on the wall — a memento of when he ate here for the second episode of his CNN show, Parts Unknown — and order the large, steamed...
mandu. The experience is much like eating a doughy, pork-filled softball. 3109 W. Olympic Blvd., Koreatown. (213) 381-3568.

Kyochon
A gleaming, sterile, mostly takeout joint in a Koreatown mall, Kyochon is an early local outpost of a 1,000-restaurant chain that prepares chicken with the intense precision more commonly associated with brain surgery or microchips. What do you eat at Kyochon? Fried chicken — a whole, tiny chicken chopped into tiny pieces — steeped in a garlicky marinade that supposedly contains 23 ingredients, double-fried to a glassy, thin-skinned crunch, meat rendered of most of its fat. It’s similar to what you might find in a good Cantonese restaurant, only juicier. While you wait for your chicken, you are given a bowl of crunchy, sweet-and-sour pickled radish cubes, the classic Korean accompaniment, which is slightly less penitential than it may sound, and as much Coke and Sprite as you can drink. There has been Korean-style chicken in Los Angeles before, but Kyochon may be the most chicken-intensive restaurant on the planet, especially when the sticky Korean pop pauses just long enough to allow the playing of a Kyochon radio commercial, whose clucks and scratchings can be understood in any language. 3833 W. Sixth St., Koreatown. (213) 739-9292, kyochon.us.

Ham Ji Park
This sticky-table dive does a rather spectacular version of pork-neck soup, simmered until the meat has turned almost to jelly and thickened with a brick-red puree of chilies — if you weren’t nursing a hair-of-the-dog shot of soju, you might almost mistake it for a Oaxacan mole colorado. The crunchy, sticky grilled pork ribs do justice to the glorious beast. At the end of the meal you’ll be covered in sauce and happy about it. 3407 W. Sixth St., Koreatown. (213) 380-1717, park’sbbq.com.

—Katherine Spiers

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March 15, 2017
**Culture Shock**

**ArtNight Pasadena** is the city’s twice-yearly tradition of free art, music and other entertainment, which last fall attracted 28,000 visitors. Eighteen of the area’s art and cultural institutions extend their hours, and some will have food trucks parked outside. It’s a sizable spread, so you can either walk to the venues or take advantage of complimentary shuttle rides, whether you want to listen to soul music at the Jackie Robinson Community Center, hear poetry at the Pasadena Museum of California Art or admire works by Rembrandt, Van Gogh, Degas and Picasso at the Norton Simon Museum. Various locations, Pasadena; Fri., March 10, 6-10 p.m.; free. artnight pasadena.org. —Siran Babayan

**Musicals**

**Maria, Maria**

With a tragic, romantic plot that focuses on two lovers swept up in the conflicts of rival gangs in New York City, *West Side Story* has always been emotionally darker and more unexpectedly violent than other musicals from Hollywood’s Golden Age. Composer Leonard Bernstein and lyricist Stephen Sondheim infused storyteller Arthur Laurents’ makeover of *Romeo and Juliet* with memorably passionate songs, and Jerome Robbins artfully choreographed the fight scenes with a soaring, balletic bravado. Many remember as the definitive version the 1961 film with Natalie Wood and Richard Beymer, but in this new production directed by Richard Israel, the musical returns to the immediacy of its Broadway roots with a vibrant cast that includes Ashley Marie (as Maria), Eddie Egan (Tony) and Marlene Martinez (Anita). Valley Performing Arts Center, 18111 Nordhoff St., Northridge; Fri., March 10, 8 p.m.; Sat., March 11, 3 & 8 p.m.; Sun., March 12, 3 p.m.; $33-$75. (818) 677-3000, valleyperformingartscenter.org. —Falling James

**Books**

**Turn the Page**

This year, *Downtown Bookfest* at Grand Park is partnering with the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs’ Big Read to celebrate the poetry of Emily Dickinson. The annual literary gathering highlights the work of L.A.-based writers and publishers with daylight readings, spoken word and activities featuring members of 826LA, Get Lit Players and others. You can catch performances by Mayda Del Valle, David Prather and Cut Chemist + Hymnal; take part in a book-making workshop inspired by Dickinson’s collection of 400 plant specimens; pose for pictures in a Victorian-themed photo booth; or write poems on vintage typewriters. If you want to skip a trip to the bookstore, Red Hen Press, Skylight Books and Get Lit Publications will sell books and other souvenirs in pop-up bookshops. Grand Park, 200 N. Grand Ave., downtown; Sat., March 11, noon-5 p.m.; free. grandparkla.org/event/downtown-bookfest. —Siran Babayan

**Museums**

**By George**

Famed Star Trek actor and community leader George Takei is the subject of the Japanese American National Museum’s latest exhibit, "New Frontiers: The Many Worlds of George Takei." The display’s timeline follows the Los Angeles–born Takei’s life and career, from his family’s incarceration in the Japanese-American internment camps in California and Arkansas during World War II and his many film and television roles to his outspoken gay activism and stints in public service, including serving on the Southern California Rapid Transit District. Among the collection’s personal items are photographs, artwork, scripts, awards, campaign materials from Takei’s 1973 bid for a seat on the Los Angeles City Council and the torch he carried in the lead-up to the 1984 Summer Olympics in L.A. Japanese American National Museum, 100 N. Central Ave., downtown; Sun., March 12, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. (runs through Aug. 20); $10, $6 seniors & students, free children under 5. (213) 625-0414, janm.org. —Tanja M. Laden

**Art & Culture**

**Simon Says**

Born in the United Kingdom and based in Hong Kong, artist Simon Birch created the nonprofit 14th Factory Foundation in order to produce art experiences that serve as vehicles for social change. The 14th Factory has come to Los Angeles, transforming a huge lot and 150,000-square-foot warehouse into a maze of modular micro-exhibitions. Sixteen international artists give us their take on the current political climate, with everything from architecture, photography, video, design and performance art to painting, sculpture, installations and other mixed-media works. The 14th Factory Pop-Up Space, 440 N. Avenue 19, Lincoln Heights; Sat., March 11, 10 a.m.-10 p.m. (runs through April 30); hours vary; closed Mon.; $18, $15 in advance. (213) 223-3474, the14thfactory.com. —Tanja M. Laden
**DANCE**

**Downtown Brown**

Part of the 1960s postmodern dance movement centered at New York’s Judson Church, Trisha Brown’s 50-year career defies easy categorization and explains why UCLA’s weeklong Trisha Brown Retrospective Project in 2013 in venues ranging from the Getty rooftops to the Royce Hall’s stage only whetted appetites for more. Again organized by CAP UCLA, over the past week Trisha Brown: In Plain Site Los Angeles has hosted site-specific public performances, mostly free, all over town at art institutions that signed on to be sponsors as well as sites for Brown’s unpredictable, inventive, thought-provoking and often with choreography. This weekend’s finale moves from the Getty Center (Friday) to LACMA (Saturday) and winds up at Hauser Wirth & Schimmel, a recent addition to the Arts District, housed in a repurposed flour factory. The free public performance is followed by a big-ticket benefit for CAP UCLA. Hauser Wirth & Schimmel, 901 E. Third St., downtown; Sun., March 12, 4:30 p.m.; free. cap.ucla.edu. —Ann Haskins

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**MUSIC**

**Ray of Light**

Laserium was once a quintessential SoCal experience, running for almost 30 years at the planetarium at Griffith Observatory, until it shut down for renovation in 2002. You got high and saw a laser light show in a theater, a communal experience that might seem quaint in an era of streaming entertainment on mobile devices. But what better time than now to get whacked out, forget about your problems and watch laser beams and animation choreographed to some of the druggiest rock music ever recorded? Founded by creator Ivan Dryer in 1973, the Van Nuys–based company still produces events all over the world. Tonight, Laserium and Spaceland co-present laser tributes to The Beatles, followed by Pink Floyd’s The Dark Side of the Moon and Nine Inch Nails. You can attend one show, or — if you’re feeling very comfortably numb — sit through all three. The Regent Theater, 448 S. Main St., downtown; Sun., March 12, 5, 7 & 9 p.m.; $16.50-$18, $40-$45 for all three shows. (323) 284-5727, the regenttheater.com. —Saran Babayan

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**FILM**

**The Main Event**

Space plays host to some of mankind’s most fantastic dreams and aspirations, from walking on the moon to the eventual colonization of other planets. Incidentally, it’s also the setting of one of the most terrifying movies ever made, the 1997 critical and box office failure—turned—cult classic Event Horizon. A team of astronauts goes in search of a lost craft and its crew, and discovers that sometimes black holes lead to places that are better left unexplored. In honor of the film’s 20th anniversary, horror con and fan site Mad Monster hosts a screening at TCL Chinese Theatres. It’s guaranteed to make you cover your eyes, if only to make sure your eyeballs are still in their sockets. TCL Chinese Theatres, 6925 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood; Mon., March 13, 9 p.m.; $13. madmonster.com/features/movienight. —Gwynedd Stuart

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**MUSEUMS**

**Gallery Gal**

Sometimes the most pivotal figures in art are its enthusiasts. Legendary art dealer Virginia Dwan speaks with LACMA director Michael Govan, minimalist art expert James Meyer and modern art aficionado Stephanie Barron about her life and times running galleries in Westwood (1959-67) and New York (1965-71), the logistics and arcana behind her boredom-shattering exhibitions of everyone from Edward Kienholz and Yves Klein to Robert Smithson, and how she got her hands dirty cheerleading the dawn of land art. It’s a more expansive aspect of the “Los Angeles to New York: Dwan Gallery, 1959-1971” exhibition, which opens March 19. Bing
**COMEDY**

**Bright and Early**

Comedian-actor John Early is all over the place these days. Last year he played a vapid, gay millennial on TBS’ recently renewed comedy Search Party, starring Arrested Development’s Alia Shawkat and co-created by Michael Showalter, and appeared on Netflix’s sketch series The Characters. This year Early teamed up with frequent creative partner Kate Berlant for Vimeo web anthology V55, co-produced by Tim Heidecker and Eric Wareheim. Similar to the monthly variety show Showgasm he hosted in his native New York, Early kicks off a monthly residency at the Satellite. Tonight’s lineup features stand-up by Sam Jay, Frankie Quinones and Baskets actress Martha Kelly, in addition to music by house band BUCK. The Satellite, 1717 Silver Lake Blvd., Silver Lake; Tue., March 14, 9 p.m.; $8. (323) 661-4380, thesatellitela.com. —Siran Babayan

**Don’t Mensch-on It**

Ronna and Beverly, the respective creations of L.A. comedians/writers Jessica Chaffin and Jamie Denbo, are the archetypal talkative, overbearing Jewish matriarchs. Since 2011, Ronna Glickman (the raspy-voiced one) and Beverly Rudolph, Russell Brand, Eli Roth, Matthew Perry, Mindy Kaling and Jeff Garlin. They host a biweekly podcast in which they sing their children’s praises in their native Boston accents, crack wise about current events and interview celebrities. (On a recent episode, they likened living in America after Donald Trump’s win to sitting shiva. “The nation gained a collective 4½ pounds,” they joked.) Past guests have included Jon Hamm, Amy Poehler, Maya Rudolph, Russell Brand, Eli Roth, Matthew Perry, Mindy Kaling and Jeff Garlin. They also boast about having co-authored their best-selling, nonexistent book, You’ll Do a Little Better Next Time: A Guide to Marriage and Re-marriage for Jewish Singles. For their first live taping at Largo, they sit down with America Ferrara and Paul F. Tompkins to gab and offer plenty of unsolicited advice. Largo at the Coronet, 366 N. La Cienega Blvd., Beverly Grove; Wed., March 15, 8 p.m.; $30. (310) 855-0350, largola.com. —Siran Babayan

**For Latasha**

The brutal beating of Rodney King by LAPD officers is frequently cited as being an impetus for the L.A. Riots, which took place 25 years ago this April. Less frequently do people remember Latasha Harlins, a 15-year-old girl who was shot in the back of the head by Korean convenience store clerk Soon Ja Du after a dispute over orange juice. Du was tried and convicted of voluntary manslaughter, and was sentenced to probation and community service and had to pay a $500 fine but served no prison time. In honor of Harlins and girls who have or will suffer similar fates, the California African American Museum hosts a panel discussion called #BlackGirlsMatter, featuring Brenda Stevenson, professor of history, UCLA; Funimila Fagbamila, professor, activist, and an original member of Black Lives Matter; Shamell Bell, UCLA doctoral candidate and an original member of BLM; Tia Oso, national organizer, Black Alliance for Just Immigration; Denise Harlins, Latasha’s aunt; and Britni Danielle of Ebony Magazine. CAAM, 600 State Drive, Exposition Park; Thu., March 16, 7-9 p.m.; free with RSVP. (213) 744-2024, caamuseum.org. —Gwynedd Stuart

**ART & MUSIC**

**Private Parts**

Tonight’s screening of Tony Conrad: Completely in the Present is the West Coast premiere of Tyler Hubby’s documentary on Conrad, whose art involved the leading lights of the American avant-garde — La Monte Young, Lou Reed — for more than 50 years, disseminating new ideas and strange noises into popular culture at large. If that’s not enough, Henry Rollins will moderate a post-screening conversation between Hubby and artist Tony Oursler, and then Kim Gordon of Sonic Youth will play everyone off with a passel of drones in honor of the man now playing in his own Theatre of Eternal Music. It’s all part of the Broad and the Ace’s ongoing Un–Private Collection series. The Theater at Ace Hotel, 929 Broadway, downtown; Thu., March 16, 8 p.m.; $18. (213) 622-3833, acehotel.com/calendar/losangeles/un-private-collection-tony-conrad-completely-present. —David Cotner

**The Characters**

For their first live taping at Largo, Marriage and Re-marriage for Jewish matriarchs. Since 2011, Ronna Glickman (the raspy-voiced one) and Beverly Rudolph, Russell Brand, Eli Roth, Matthew Perry, Mindy Kaling and Jeff Garlin. They host a biweekly podcast in which they sing their children’s praises in their native Boston accents, crack wise about current events and interview celebrities. (On a recent episode, they likened living in America after Donald Trump’s win to sitting shiva. “The nation gained a collective 4½ pounds,” they joked.) Past guests have included Jon Hamm, Amy Poehler, Maya Rudolph, Russell Brand, Eli Roth, Matthew Perry, Mindy Kaling and Jeff Garlin. They also boast about having co-authored their best-selling, nonexistent book, You’ll Do a Little Better Next Time: A Guide to Marriage and Re-marriage for Jewish Singles. For their first live taping at Largo, they sit down with America Ferrara and Paul F. Tompkins to gab and offer plenty of unsolicited advice. Largo at the Coronet, 366 N. La Cienega Blvd., Beverly Grove; Wed., March 15, 8 p.m.; $30. (310) 855-0350, largola.com. —Siran Babayan
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BROOK HSU USES CARPET SQUARES AS CANVASES IN BBQLA'S GROUP SHOW

BY CATHERINE WAGLEY

This week, valley fever haunts the cast of a film, and an artist learns to do a backflip.

Dog days
Perhaps because wall-to-wall carpeting only became widely accessible in the 1950s, and because it’s associated with a now bitsweet version of the postwar domestic dream, there’s something particularly stomach-churning about badly stained carpet. Brook Hsu used a carpet square as canvas for Dog Smoker, which appears in group show “Here’s Looking at Holston-Johnson” at BBQLA. An angry dog head, painted with black and white acrylic, angles across the dyed carpeting, looking like a tag left behind on the floor of a vandalized suburban split-level. 2315 Jesse St., Boyle Heights; through March 18. bbqla.net.

Fever dreams
A “mysterious smile” comes across the face of Rose of Sharon, who has just given birth to a stillborn child, when she nurses a starving man in Steinbeck’s The Grapes of Wrath. A stand-in for Rose nurses a gaunt, dirty man in the film at the center of “Geomancies,” Miljohn Ruperto’s exhibition at REDCAT. Ruperto collaborated on the film, Ordinal (SW/NE), with director Rini Yun Kegay, and it’s set around Bakersfield, where valley fever, a disease that plagued migrants during the Dust Bowl, has resurfaced. The film has a hypnotic rhythm, and a narrative that’s both mundane and ominous. The protagonist moves through daily life — attends university, calls the mother of his infant child, goes for a swim — yet you understand that both he and his child are sick. By the end, after we’ve cut to the romantic nursing scene and then back to the normal-looking Central Valley, we hear a voicemail left for the protagonist: The child’s mother has contracted the fever, too. Illness seeps through everything.


Great balls of fire
The sunset is loosely the subject matter of Sadie Benning’s “Blinded by the Light” at Susanne Vielmetter. Benning, who puts her paintings together like puzzles (literally, piecing together specially made and painted resin shapes), often makes subtle, reserved-looking work. Not so this time. Certain paintings have the palette and buoyancy of children’s drawings of trees, monsters or explosions. It’s hard to tell whether the work is optimistic or apocalyptic, and that fuzziness compels.

6006 Washington Blvd., Culver City; through April 7. (310) 837-2117, vielmetter.com.

Open-ended screw
Judith Bernstein’s exhibition at the Box is titled after the first drawing you see upon entering the space: “Cock in the Box.” It shows a cartoonish cock emerging from a red, white and blue box. “America’s Number 1 Toy,” the artist scrawled across this drawing when she made it in 1986. Cocks, cunts and screws have been Bernstein’s subject matter for half a century and they appear in this exhibition in all their irreverent glory. But it is the abstractions that steal this show, their open-endedness maybe fuller and richer because it’s in contrast to Bernstein’s explicitness. One big circular canvas has an imperfect black circle at its center — it’s called Circle Screw, though its screwishness is inexplicit. On the opposite wall hang the Anthuriums, paintings made in the 1980s and named after the flower that they vaguely resemble. Each differently colored composition combines round shapes with angles, and could be a poetically blurry detail of a fabulously clad, fleshy limb captured in motion. 805 Traction Ave., downtown; through March 18. (213) 625-1747, theboxla.com.

Fight against entropy
The project New Trick took artist Jennifer Dalton a year of weekly rehearsals. She had been told that anyone could learn to do a backflip, so she set out to try, filming each training session and always hanging shimmering, theatrical curtains behind her as she worked. In “Participation Trophy,” her current show at Charlie James Gallery, the same curtains hang behind two monitors that show Dalton working toward her goal, and also track her age, height, weight and how much this new trick and the documentation of it is costing her (by June 2014, it had cost $1,921.44). Yellow text running along the bottom of the screen explains that she started to feel more hopeful as soon as she started training, “as if I were more active in my fight against entropy.” The tensions between helpfulness, anxiety, proactivity and paralysis are present throughout the exhibition. Visitors can write their own hopes and fears on colored paper and anonymously add them to a Flexiglas box near the gallery entrance — these contributions will become source material for Dalton’s future work. 969 Chung King Road, Chinatown; through April 1. (213) 687-0844, cjamesgallery.com.

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Girls Boss

Lola paints a portrait of South L.A. gang life through the eyes of the woman in charge

By Paul Teetor

It’s generally taken for granted that crime organizations are operated by men. In her debut novel, Lola (Crown, $26), Melissa Scrivner Love uses that expectation as a narrative device, to wonderfully subversive effect. Protagonist Lola is the secret leader of a South Central L.A. gang called the Crenshaw Six. To outsiders and even her friends and neighbors, she appears to be just the meek 98-pound girlfriend of the gang leader. Garcia, serving up tacos and empanadas to the male gangbangers as they plot their latest drug deal, heist or murder.

But her soldiers — Garcia, Hector, Marcos and Jorge — know the truth: Lola calls the shots. Lola does the thinking. Lola gives the orders. And if you defy her, or if you fuck up an assignment, you can expect to join all the other bodies dumped in the Angeles National Forest.

She even slices off Hector’s trigger finger because he fucked up an operation where they were supposed to intercept a rival’s drug deal and capture both sides of the drop: $2 million in cash and $2 mil worth of heroin, known on the street as “product.” The only reason she didn’t outright kill Hector: He happens to be her “product.” The only reason she didn’t drop “fucking” him, she says, is because she needed him to help her run the organization.

Lola became the head of the brutal, bloodthirsty, up-and-coming gang three years prior, when she shot her boyfriend Carlos, the previous leader of the Crenshaw Six, right between the eyes and watched him bleed out on their living room floor. That one act of cold-blooded murder — never solved by the police — immediately gained her the respect and unquestioned devotion of the four remaining Crenshaw Six members.

In an act of literary magic, Love somehow manages to make Lola a sympathetic protagonist as she tells the story of Lola’s point of view. It isn’t just Lola’s survival instinct which enabled her to overcome being pimped out by her junkie mother to whatever pedophile had a little “product” that night. And it’s not just her decision to take in poor little Lucy, a young girl also being pimped out by a junkie mother.

Lola is sympathetic because of the idea Love subtly conveys that she’s succeeded in joining her only way open to her in a macho culture dominated by men who aren’t as smart, determined or resourceful as she is.

The narrative, which really roars to life with the unsuccessful Venice drug-drop intercept, features a corrupt detective, a fierce female prosecutor involved with drug dealers herself, and a Mexican cartel that takes notice of Lola and her little gang when it starts to become a little too successful.

It’s a neo-noir story that could have been a 1940s film about bootleggers, updated to the present in drug-riddled L.A., with double and triple crosses, hostages, revenge killings, family dysfunction and even a big reveal at the very end. The story moves seamlessly from the projects of Huntington Park, where Lola secretly rules her little fiefdom with Garcia as her front man, to the upscale streets of gentrified Venice, where the

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To anyone who has lived in L.A. for a while, the story has the kind of serious verisimilitude readers crave. It all reads and sounds so authentic that you have to wonder how a white woman from Kentucky who now lives in Sherman Oaks was able to conjure up such a gritty story with such compelling locales.

“When I first got to L.A. 13 years ago, I started delivering food for Project Angel Food all over the city,” Love says. “That’s when I fell in love with the city and all its discrepancies and dichotomies. I immediately thought this is where I belong.”

Love, 36, writes for the Fox TV series Rosewood, which helps explain why the writing in Lola is so cinematic. “It started out as a TV pilot,” Love admits. “I eventually did a complete rewrite and turned it into my first novel.”

And for the many first-time fans Lola is sure to generate, there’s some good news.

“I just finished a sequel, and I’m sending it off to my agent next week,” she says. “I would love for it to be a TV show shot in L.A.”
STAGING OF GRIEF

A friendship cut short by death becomes something more profound in Good Grief

BY DEBORAH KLUGMAN

I

n the preface to her extraordinarily eloquent play Good Grief, Ngozi Anyanwu tells us that it takes place between 1992 and 2005 in Bensalem, Pennsylvania — and also “at the beginning of time … and the future.”

The story revolves around the droll and complex friendship between a young woman whose raw honesty is both her gift and her curse, and a thoughtful, unassuming young man she’s known from childhood. When he dies prematurely in an automobile accident, she’s flooded with grief — not only for the person who so vividly inhabited her present and her past but for everything he seemed to be evolving into for her future.

Beautifully produced at the Kirk Douglas Theatre, and directed by Patricia McGregor with sensitivity and grace, the piece has one foot in the everyday world we live in and the other in the contemplation of time, death, grief, love and loss that inform the most profound dramatic work.

When we meet her, Nkechi (Ayanwuu), the daughter of Nigerian immigrants, has been studying to be a doctor, likely at the behest of her opinionated, patriarchal Dad (Dayo Ade) and her mother, Nene (Omoze Idehenre), a nurse. But Nkechi has begun to perceive that she’d rather be a writer than a doctor, a realization she confides to her friend MJG (Wade Allain-Marcus), a laid-back dreamer who likes to speculate on what it would be like to be a king, honored and preserved in memory by everyone.

One who easily takes umbrage, Nkechi isn’t easy to be pals with, but MJG has persevered from their early years in grade school, when he sought out her friendship despite her gruff, rejecting manner. In high school, 15 years old and never-been-kissed, Nkechi turns to MJG for guidance when she has the coveted opportunity to garner that first smooch with the school’s prom king, whom she’s been tutoring. The lesson (not surprisingly) is a turning point in their friendship, the beginning of a testy, tangled intimacy whose significance becomes most clear after MJG loses his life. Years later, that former prom king, JD (Mark Jude Sullivan), re-emerges; like MJG, he’s a charmer whose gallantry testifies to our feisty protagonist’s great taste in men.

Though Nkechi and MJG are front and center much of the time, the play’s other characters and their culture are brilliantly illuminated by the actors. One of the most captivating scenes is an interaction between Nkechi’s parents, who quarrel about what to do as they listen to their daughter grieve, with her mom counseling patience as she diverts her frustrated husband with beguiling words and embraces. Another memorable and funny encounter transpires between Nkechi, an honor student who’s assimilated into suburban America, and her brother (Marcus Henderson) who, though as smart and educated as she, has adopted the subculture and lingo of the ghetto (yet beneath the bravado and disaffection also mourns the death of his sister’s friend).

From the opening sequence — with the supporting ensemble colorfully arrayed as various gods and goddesses (wonderful costumes by Karen Perry) — the playwright traces a link between her earthbound characters, with their bickering foibles and uncertain dreams, and a grander cosmos not just outside them but within. Kathryn Bostic’s music, Pablo Santiago’s light design and Adam Phalen’s sound meld beautifully on Stephanie Kerley Schwartz’s fluid set to help realize her vision.

GOOD GRIEF

Kirk Douglas Theatre, 9820 Washington Blvd., Culver City | Through March 26 | (213) 628-2772 | centertheatregroup.org

PHOTO BY CRAIG SCHWARTZ

Ngozi Anyanwu and Omoze Idehenre in Anyanwu’s Good Grief

BAD GRIEF

BY NGOZI ANYANWU

DIRECTED BY PATRICIA MCGREGOR

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- On antiretroviral therapy for at least 6 months
- T-cell count at or above 100

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Are you interested in trying to improve the way your brain works?

If yes, you may be able to join a study where you add FDA-approved medication(s) to your HIV-regimen to improve neurocognitive performance.

This study is for HIV-positive people who also have HIV-associated neurocognitive disorder (HAND) as defined by the Frascati criteria. It will help us to identify if adding Maraviroc (MVC) and/or Dolutegravir (DTG) to their current antiretroviral therapy will improve neurocognitive performance. Participants will be enrolled in this study for about 96 weeks. Compensation will be provided.

To join you must be:
- 18 years of age or older
- HIV-positive with an undetectable viral load
- Have had a HIV-associated neurocognitive disorder within 45 days prior to study entry

For more information contact the UCLA CARE Center at careoutreach@mednet.ucla.edu or via phone 310-557-9062

There are limitations to the confidentiality of email communications. Do not include any sensitive health information if you choose to contact the study team via email.
THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE

In a bizarre ghost story, Kristen Stewart haunts herself

BY MELISSA ANDERSON

I

n 1976’s The Devil Finds Work, James Baldwin makes a crucial verb distinction when discussing the screen legends, like Bette Davis, with whom he was transfixed (sometimes uneasily so) in his youth: “One does not go to see a act: one goes to watch them be.” When one goes to see Kristen Stewart — among the most quicksilver of her generation’s performers — in Olivier Assayas’s Personal Shopper, a shape-shifting, resolutely of-this-moment ghost story that features her in nearly every frame, there’s an idiosyncratic production — allows one of the most famous people on the planet to become smaller.

And also, paradoxically, bigger: I can’t think of another Stewart vehicle, not even any of the films from the Twilight pentad, signals from the dead, Maureen dashes from one high-end boutique to the next for the fashion-fascist celebutante/gorilla-rights-activist boss she says despises, Kyra (Nora von Waldstätten). Just before boarding the Eurostar to London for yet another haute couture errand, Maureen seems to receive a message from the beyond: the first in a string of menacing texts from an unknown source. Thanks to this volley of Bieber-ese (“R u real?”) transpiring over several days, the iPhone clutched in Maureen’s hand becomes Stewart’s most significant screen partner in Personal Shopper, a film in which she is often framed in isolation.

The premise is ludicrous but not unexpected from Assayas, a restless inventive filmmaker whose sinister global thrillers Demolition (2002) and Boarding Gate (2007) likewise pivot on absurd plot points to plumb 21st-century malaise and disorder. Yet the most salient predecessor to Personal Shopper might be Irma Vep (1996), Assayas’s affectionate, frantic metromovie in which Maggie Cheung plays a version of herself: a luminary of her generation’s performers — in Olivier Assayas art — among the most quicksilver of her peers.

THERE’S A PERVERSE THRILL IN WATCHING STEWART, LONG AN A-LISTER, SO ASTUTELY INHABIT THE ROLE OF HELMPATE.

in which the actress appears in every scene, often alone or as an anonymous figure in a crowd (most thrillingly as Maureen motors from arrondissement to arrondissement on her Peugeot scooter). In this supernatural tale, the phantom looming largest is that of Stewart’s actual celebrity, a reflecting made doubly literal when Maureen surreptitiously tries on Kyra’s glassy-spangled dress from Chanel — the exclusive brand for which Stewart has been an ambassador for the past few years. Dropping off some finery at Kyra’s empty luxe dwelling, the assistant tries on another of her employer’s haute couture ensembles, one with a harness and transparent bodice. This charged, forbidden act is made even more lubricious when Maureen begins to masturbate in Kyra’s bed. The actress loses herself in the scene’s lurid hall of mirrors, succumbing to the irony of playing a character who gets turned on by pretending to be, however briefly, someone she’s not — that is, by acting.

The frisson is multiplied as we watch Stewart — who, in real life, must always be on guard against stalkers and other predators — portray someone who thrills at violating the rules and sanctum of her own VIP boss. “Or is it just me?” Maureen asks the spirit world in Personal Shopper’s final minutes before the screen fades to ghostly white. Determining the antecedent of me stands as the film’s most confounding pleasure.

PERSONAL SHOPPER | Written and directed by Olivier Assayas | Sundance Selects ArcLight Hollywood, Landmark

KONG ROARS AGAIN IN A SUITABLY SILLY MONSTER-MASH

F

or a movie in which a major character’s death is discovered when a giant lizard-monster vomits out his skull, Kong: Skull Island is surprisingly breezy affair. It’s not so much that the characters or situations are particularly lighthearted. The film offers up plenty of wartime atmosphere and grim backstory, and the constant carnage of soldiers and explorers getting tossed and crushed and eaten by pseudo-prehistoric beasts is certainly anxiety-inducing — at least for the plastic people on screen. But despite all that, it remains charming, insistently piffle — a monster movie that’s unafraid to be cruel while also mining the genre’s inherent silliness.

The story plunges us into the waning days of the Vietnam era, as American explorer-businessman Bill Randa (John Goodman) attempts to convince his government superiors to let him take a voyage to a remote, skull-shaped island. His team includes bureaucrats, scientists, a helicopter attack brigade led by a hard-ass sergeant (Samuel L. Jackson), a roughneck British tracker (Tom Hiddleston) and a photojournalist (Brie Larson).

As soon as the helicopters approach the island, however, they’re being swatted out of the sky and chewed up by cinema’s favorite giant primate. Crashing on different parts of the island, what remains of the team struggles to survive, reconnect and escape. People die in creatively graphic ways, and the spectacle of brawling beasts in beautiful, forbidding settings is at times as captivating as it probably was in 1933, when audiences first gaped at Ernest B. Schoedsack and Merian C. Cooper’s original King Kong. But there’s something curiously soulless about the whole enterprise, even as the filmmakers continually strive for greater resonance or meaning. – Bilge Ebiri

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**THE LADIES WHO LUNCH**

JULIA DUCOURNAU’S AUDACIOUS RAW MAKES A SISTERHOOD OF CANNIBALISM

**BY APRIL WOLFE**

Almost no one ever asks young women what they desire — in movies or reality. Feminine cravings are still seen as a dire threat, a grand disturbance to the power structure, and the few movie men who dare speak the words “What do you want?” — like Noah in The Notebook — get elevated to folk hero status: Did he ... does he ... care?! But what happens when female characters truly hunger? What if their desires prove as grotesque as society assumes they are? This is the kind of fear director Julia Ducournau sets loose in her riveting body-horror film Raw, where a young woman comes to understand her own sexuality by way of one of the greatest of taboos: cannibalism.

In the beginning, young teacher’s pet Justine (Garance Marillier) is off to veterinarian school in the French countryside, where she’ll study alongside her older sister, Alex (Ella Rumpf). Ducournau shows the school’s pastoral setting in wide, static shots, peaceful and devoid of animal life. She juxtaposes that external serenity with human chaos and drama in the school; it’s rush week, and Justine and her classmates are subjected to humiliating rituals and tests that show Homo sapiens for what they really are: filthy beasts.

On the first night, rowdy, masked seniors violently pull Justine and her gay roommate Adrien (Rabah Nait Oufella) from their beds. The two, along with all the other newbies, are prodded into consuming cattle as they’re corralled into an after-hours discotheque in a blood-soaked wing of the school. When innocent Justine enters the party, Ducournou’s camera follows her in one long, unnerving tracking shot through a maze of frenzied, writhing bodies. Marillier lets herself go almost limp, so it’s as if Justine’s body is not hers to own, just pushed along from room to room until she runs into Alex — this sister is out for metaphorical blood (and, later, real blood) on the dance floor. She’s totally vampyric, aggressively sexual and exactly the opposite of Justine. Soon after the party, Alex

FEMININE CRAVINGS ARE SEEN AS A DIRE THREAT. BUT WHAT HAPPENS WHEN FEMALE CHARACTERS TRULY HUNGER?

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YOUR WEEKLY MOVIE TO-DO LIST

See Where “Gaslighting” Came From Friday, March 10

It’s surely a coincidence that the Aero is screening Gaslight so soon after Donald Trump took office — it’s not like they played The Great Dictator the day of his inauguration or anything. George Cukor’s psychological slow burner is paired with another drama of manipulation, Sudden Fear, with an introduction by The Love Witch director Anna Biller. Ingrid Bergman (who won an Oscar) and Joan Crawford (who earned a nomination) are the beguiled wives in question; if they made it out OK, maybe there’s hope for the rest of us! Afro Theatre, 1328 Montana Ave., Santa Monica; Fri., March 10, 7:30 p.m.; $11. (323) 466-3456; americancinemathequecalendar.com.

They Live has come here to chew bubble gum and kick ass — and it’s all out of bubble gum. John Carpenter’s 1988 cult classic feels as cutting as ever (if not more so) given the current administration, with the late, great “Rowdy” Roddy Piper’s greatest screen performance serving as a populist yawn for all disenfranchised Americans to echo. Cinemamily’s midnight screening on 35mm is apropos of the film itself, which always felt like a secret the Man didn’t want you to know about. Cinemamily/Silent Movie Theatre, 611 N. Fairfax Ave., Fairfax; Fri., March 10, 11:59 p.m.; $12. (323) 655-2510, cinemamily.org.

Saturday, March 11

UCLA offers a night of Classic Animated Shorts From Paramount, with 35mm restorations of such old-tyme favorites as Raggedy Ann and Raggedy Andy, A Cartoon Travesty of the Raven and Educated Fish. Max and Dave Fleischer are responsible for the lion’s share of cartoons being showcased, while stop-motion innovator George Pal will be represented by his 1941 short Rhythm in the Ranks. Adult Swim this is not, but the charm and ingenuity of animation circa the 1930s and ‘40s is hard to replicate — especially when it’s shown on actual film stock. UCLA’s Billy Wilder Theater, 10899 Wilshire Blvd., Westwood; Sat., March 11, 7:30 p.m.; $10. (310) 206-8013, cinema.ucla.edu.

ARRAY @ the Broad presents Ousmane Sembène’s Black Girl, a vital work of African cinema and an enduring look at the pain of constantly being made to feel Other. About a young woman who travels from Senegal to France to work as a domestic servant, where she experiences racism both overt and subtle, it introduced the man now regarded as “the father of African film” to the international cinema community and laid the groundwork for a generation of productions to follow. Sefgma and 13th director Ava DuVernay curates the ongoing series, which includes same-night access to the Broad starting at 5:30 p.m. REDCAT, 631 W. Second St., downtown; Sat., March 11, 6 p.m.; $20. (213) 237-2800, redbcat.org.

Sunday, March 12

Neither Diary of a Mad Housewife nor Play It as It Lays is available on DVD, making the New Beverly’s 35mm double bill all the more alluring. Frank Perry’s two literary adaptations — one from Sue Kaufman, the other from Joan Didion’s landmark L.A. novel — were released within a few years of each other, exploring early-’70s malaise from the perspective of beleaguered women at their wits’ end. New Beverly Cinema, 7165 Beverly Blvd., Fairfax; Sun., March 12, 6:30 p.m.; Mon., March 13, 7:30 p.m.; $8. (323) 938-4038, themewbc.com.

Six years later, no movie has come close to surpassing The Tree of Life as the most transcendent movie of this strange, surreal decade. If you’ve never seen Terrence Malick’s instant all-timer on the big screen, the Egyptian offers a chance to correct that cosmic oversight as part of a weekend tribute to the philosophically minded writer-director. From the backyard of a small home in Texas to the birth of the universe, The Tree of Life literally has it all (including dinosaurs). Egyptian Theatre, 6712 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood; Sun., March 12, 7:30 p.m.; $11. (323) 466-3456, americancinemathequecalendar.com.

Tuesday, March 14

Thirty-six years and 17 Oscar nominations ago, Meryl Streep was The French Lieutenant’s Woman. Featuring two affairs in one, Karel Reisz’s adaptation of the novel by John Fowles stars Streep and Jeremy Irons as actors whose illicit romance takes place both in front of and behind the camera — both with disastrous consequences. LACMA screens it on 35mm in the early afternoon, the perfect time to sneak into the theater with a secret lover of your own. LACMA, 5905 Wilshire Blvd., Mid-Wilshire; Tue., March 14, 1 p.m.; $4. (323) 857-6000, lacma.org. —Michael Nordine

OPENING THIS WEEK

ACTOR MARTINEZ Spanning the longest 75 minutes you’ve ever yawned through, Actor Martinez is a meta-documentary in the spirit of last year’s infinitely more engaging Kate Plays Christine, in which a real-life actor is followed around by a film crew while preparing for a difficult project. In both outings, the scrutinizing presence of the filmmakers ultimately provokes the actor into fits of anxiety and rage, but what’s left deliberately unclear is whether these onscreen blowups are scripted or actually happening. Are we watching voyeurism, or a twisted study on voyeurism? The earlier film succeeded thanks to the multifaceted, intelligent actress at its center and the tragic backstory of the person she was attempting to portray (an anchorwoman who committed suicide on-air in the 1970s). The stakes are emphatically lower in Actor Martinez. Directors Mike Ott and Nate Silver are hired by Arthur Martinez, who’s something of a bigwig in Denver’s independent film scene, to document the shooting of his latest film and potentially bring him fame. Instead, they encourage him to open up and make a far more personal film. That causes Arthur to yell a lot — at his friends, at his co-stars, at the directors. They all yell back that he’s a coward and a pothead (his marijuana plants are glimpsed in nearly every scene). And that’s about everything worth noting. Whether the real-life Martinez is this hotheaded and quick-tempered is left a mystery, but it matters not a whit, because even five minutes in the company of this film’s Martinez is excruciating. (Sam Weisberg)

THE FREEDOM TO MARRY Though its legalities often are obscured by romantic filigree, wedlock is one of the most conservative institutions, legally and culturally, in human society — a codified set of limitations and rights reserved for two people willing to merge their fates and their property. For decades, lesbian and gay people, reviled by many for supposed deviance, have wanted in. In his documentary The Freedom to Marry, Eddie Rosenstein demonstrates just how long it’s been: the first time a same-sex couple applied for a marriage license in the United States was
The Sense of an Ending

Directed by Olivier Assayas

A masterful, disquieting novel about love and the human psyche. The film's narrative structure is as intriguing and thought-provoking as its characters. With excellent performances by Emily Blunt, Jessica Biel, and Clive Owen, The Sense of an Ending is a triumph of storytelling, exploring themes of memory, the human experience, and the power of the past.

**Audience Rating:** A Suspenseful Masterpiece

**Parental Advisory:** N/A

**Duration:** 1 hour, 16 minutes

**Screening Date:** March 10, 2017

**The Salesman (Forushande)**

Directed by Asghar Farhadi

This film is a poignant exploration of love and loss, set against the backdrop of Iran's Islamic Revolution. With stunning performances by Taraneh Alidoosti and Shahab Hosseini, The Salesman (Forushande) is a powerful commentary on the human condition, the resilience of the human spirit, and the enduring power of love. The film's cinematography and score are also outstanding, making it a must-see for film lovers.

**Audience Rating:** A Masterpiece

**Parental Advisory:** N/A

**Duration:** 2 hours, 12 minutes

**Screening Date:** March 10, 2017

**Beatriz at Dinner**

Directed by Gideón Raffel

A smart, witty, and thought-provoking film that explores the complex dynamics of relationships. With a stellar cast led by Salma Hayek, Beatriz at Dinner is a hilarious and intelligent examination of modern morality, and the challenges of navigating the emotional landscape of contemporary life. The film's dialogue is sharp, the characters are relatable, and the direction is masterful.

**Audience Rating:** A Brilliant Satirical Comedy

**Parental Advisory:** N/A

**Duration:** 1 hour, 35 minutes

**Screening Date:** March 10, 2017

**The LEGO Batman Movie**

Directed by Phil Lord and Christopher Miller

An animated adventure that is both irreverent and heartfelt, The LEGO Batman Movie is a joyous celebration of the beloved superhero and the world of LEGO. With a talented voice cast led by Will Arnett, the film is a fun-filled, action-packed ride that is sure to delight both children and adults alike. The animation is vibrant and dynamic, and the story is filled with humor and heart.

**Audience Rating:** A LEGO-tastic Fun

**Parental Advisory:** PG

**Duration:** 1 hour, 35 minutes

**Screening Date:** March 10, 2017

**The Lego Batman Movie**

Directed by Phil Lord and Christopher Miller

This animated adventure is a delightful and humorous take on Batman and the world of LEGO. With a talented voice cast led by Will Arnett, the film is a fun-filled, action-packed ride that is sure to delight both children and adults alike. The animation is vibrant and dynamic, and the story is filled with humor and heart.

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**Screening Date:** March 10, 2017
Hollywood-style romantic dramas. How high would you rank the Armenian genocide? How high would you rank any genocide? As Armenian refugees flee slaughter at the hands of the Ottoman Imperial Army in Joseph Ruben’s handsomely mounted The Ottoman Lieutenant, you might wonder why the camera doesn’t follow them rather than continue its dogged documentation of the American heroine’s struggles with what my mother calls “kissing problems.” Love, battles, an abscess that, once lanced, swells like a mustard packet stomped on a sidewalk — this movie’s got everything like a mustard packet stomped on a sidewalk — this movie’s got everything.

Findlay), who the narrator immediately recognizes as a straight-faced sketch artist,////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////////

This Beautiful Fantastical

beautiful fanatasies

life blooms in enchanting ways

Brimstone

Directed and written by Martin Koolhoven

Music Hall

ON GOING

MOVING AND INSPIRING

THE FREEDOM TOMORROW

With music and lyrics from March 10-11

MARCH 10-16

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8:30, 7:50

10:15

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MICHEL HUISMAN

JOSEPH RUBEN

JEFF STOCKWELL

BY DEAN LAYTON

“TENDER, HEARTFELT AND UPLIFTING! AN ENCHANTING TALE!”

An Offer, NY Movie Guru

“GET OUT is the most trenchant studio release in years, a slow-building, often hilarious horror thriller built upon a dead-serious idea: that a black man walking alone through white suburbs is in as much danger as any flesh-blood flick teaser. Peele’s playing with fire here, and I mean playing in the best sense of the word. He’s half of the comedy duo Key & Peele, who have always in their sketches glanced lightly against hard truths. Horror and comedy both turn on gags, and Peele demonstrates a fluid facility with both kinds, which often in Get Out aren’t distinct from each other at all. The story finds Chris (Daniel Kaluuya), a young black photographer, venturing into that same suburb from the opening, this time to meet the parents of his white girlfriend, Rose (Allison Williams). What he encounters, at first, could be a straight-faced sketch about well-heeled-but-sheltered white liberals. In a comedy, these incidents might each prick a laugh and then pass, helped along by jaunty music and the genre’s dependence on redemptive narrative arcs — we’ll be cued that these people still mean well. Here, each slight sting and lingers, Peele’s comic mind weaponized. Each gag joke is simultaneously a send-up of white cluelessness, an evocation of the pain and humiliation of being viewed only as a body and a clue in the twisty, satisfying mystery of what’s really going on in Rose’s suburb. And something is going on, of course. The buildup to the big revelations can be uneven, but at the screening I attended the mixed-race crowd cheered the bloody third act, the violence — like its victims — all strikingly well executed. (Alan Scherstuhl)
FRI. MARCH 10

BASSWEIGHT RECORDS TAKEOVER

SAT. MARCH 11

THE WORLD OF DRUM & BASS
DJ THE PROTOSIDES, BROOKES BROTHERS & NADELLA

SAT. MARCH 11

REMEMBER
FT. JOJO FLORES, MARQUES WYATT & MASTER KEV

SAT. MARCH 11

GHE2OGHOT1K
LSDIXOE, VENUS X & ASMARA

SUN. MARCH 12

SPACEGIRL GEMMY
ZTHERESQ, BRUUT & SPECIAL GUESTS

THU. MARCH 16

FIU XIU
PETE SWINSON (DJ), GWALLAR, NEISH SMILE & GIRL PUSHER

COMING SOON:
3/9 MAIN COOLIN X CORREY C THE C
3/9 FORWARD RHYTHM & UNION PRESENT: BADNEW, YALA & SUGA SHAY
3/10 SALVAGE SUNDAYS AND FUNK FAM FUNKTION PRESENT: SIDE BY SIDE
3/11 THE WORLD OF DRUM & BASS
3/16 DEDEKIND CUT, JAMES FERRARO, ELON KATZ, RENE HELL
3/17 ELECTRONIC ENLIGHTENMENT FT. REKOL
3/17 CLAUDE MONSTROK
3/18 LUCIDITY FESTIVAL PRE-PARTY
3/18 BACKWOODS N’ DUTCHES
3/18 NERD BOY EXTRAVAGANZA
3/19 DISCO BALL 2017 “STAYIN’ ALIVE”
3/19 POT OF GOLD EXOTIC DAY PARTY
3/23 DEFFIE, MALCOLM ANTHONY, KOZZE
3/23 INGER THE BOY 3/25 RAVEN FELIX
3/24 CRU-MAGS
3/24 STATE OF THE UNION WITH XXXYXX
PLUS SPECIAL GUEST HOODBOI
3/25 CARPENTER BRUT
3/25 PROMETHEUS TOWN TOM U.S. TOUR 3/30
SPRING BREAK PART II
3/31 FORGIVE ME FATHER
4/2 NAMASBASE: A DRAKE THEMED
YOGA CLASS
4/2 NAMASBEAT: A BEYONCÉ THEMED
YOGA CLASS
4/7 HARDRUSH: HARDCORE UNDERGROUND
4/7 HORSE THE BAND
4/8 P-SOUP
4/15 MECHANICAL TURK
4/21 LA RESISTENCIA
4/21 PERPETUAL DAWN / INTERSESSIONS -
PLANNED PARENTHOOD BENEFIT PARTY
4/22 ACDC
4/22 NEW SCHOOL DAZE
5/25 THE NEW DIVISION
6/15 SATURISTIC INTENT
SOUNDTRACK TO SORROW

Twenty years after its release, Elliott Smith’s Either/Or is still the album I turn to at the bleakest times

BY JEFF WEISS

My grandfather’s final request was a slice of cheesecake. For those last two weeks, he painlessly withered away in his retirement home, refusing to eat, waiting to die. But tremors of hope briefly wobbled when he opened his eyes, gingerly slid the oxygen mask to the left, and whispered for dessert at 3 p.m.

This was January, as I clanked back and forth from Chatsworth, listening to Elliott Smith’s Either/Or loop, lurching for the right words to comfort my grandfather in his half-conscious fog — finding none. Show me someone who handles death well and I’ll show you the spiritually delusional or the clinically sociopathic.

Scripture, poetry and drugs failed to offer solace. I told him that I loved him. I told him that I’d think of him every time I stared in the mirror and saw his slightly sunken mahogany eyes in my sockets. I told him that I’d honor his name and make him proud. I told him that I’d get him cheesecake.

So I found myself wandering around a Westfield mall in Woodland Hills, searching for a Cheesecake Factory, assaulted by mall perfume and shrill pop-punk. This could be my grandfather’s last supper, and all he wanted to set his soul at ease was something easily procured next to the food court. It was almost a Drake lyric.

For almost the entirety of my adult life, I have reflexively listened to Elliott Smith when beset by bleak vertigo. In a darkly absurd fugue state, I streamed the record when beset by bleak vertigo. In a darkly absurd fugue state, I streamed the record when beset by bleak vertigo. In a darkly absurd fugue state, I streamed the record when beset by bleak vertigo.

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For whatever misguided reason, I’d always assumed that Either/Or was an L.A. album at its core. Beyond “Angeles,” there was “Alameda” and “Rose Parade.” The former finds Smith walking down Alameda, one of the streets encompassing downtown’s Skid Row. I figured it was a sullen junkie’s lament — not a song about a part of Portland, as Crane corrects me. He also tells me that Portland has a Rose Parade, too.

“It’s time because it beautifully and succinctly encapsulated the pain and isolation that people feel in every generation,” Schnapf says.

The romantic myth of the self-destructive, Rimbaudian poet persists, but neither Schnapf nor Smith’s archivist and engineer, Larry Crane, remembers Smith doing hard drugs during the period in which Either/Or was recorded, mostly in Portland. Crane remastered a 20th-anniversary expanded edition that Kill Rock Stars is releasing this month — including five live cuts and three previously unreleased studio recordings.

ELLIO T SMITH

DISCOVERED A WAY TO MAKE THE SOFTEST MUSIC SOUND HARD.

Crane says that Smith was constantly writing and always observing. He lived in the studio to the point where he’d apologize for the body odor.

“He seemed down sometimes, but no more than most of my friends,” Crane remembers. “He was funny. He’d moonwalk, or you’d look over to the control room and he’d do that thing where you pretend that you’re walking down stairs.”

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Either/Or is still working its dolorous spell in my headphones as I consider my own mortality and my grandfather’s imminent demise, clutching grotesquely oversized slabs of cheesecake, trying to find my car in the mall parking lot. Smith is one of those artists better left as a myth. Most posthumous deification of artists rests on an idea, but Smith distills an emotion. The songs defy one consensus interpretation because they’re so intimate, subject to different meanings for every listener.

For me, they’re soundtracks to tearfully wandering Boston’s Logan Airport one dim night, waiting to fly home after my mom told me they were going to put my childhood dog down. These songs operated as support systems for breakups that incurred what seemed like irreparable damage. Now they’re the soundtrack to help salve the grievous pain of my grandfather’s death.

Smith reminds me what can be extraordinary about everyday mortals. His classic early songs are undamaged and stripped bare, absent orchestral excess or brassy hooks.

I couldn’t help but equate this to my grandfather, who excelled in the quietest fashion: a World War II veteran and devoted parent, who showed fidelity, positivity and philanthropy to family and friends. Like Elliott Smith, he reminds me that our greatest heroes can often be ordinary.

When I finally returned to the nursing home, my grandfather was fast asleep. My grandmother woke him up to let him know that I was back, and even though it was obvious he hadn’t remembered the initial request, a brief smile crossed his face. He took a bite or two to be polite, told me he loved me and begged me to stay healthy, then he closed his eyes for one of the final times.

When I finally left, I took the long way home, because I needed to keep listening.
RAP MOGUL RUSSELL SIMMONS MIGHT BE ONTO SOMETHING WITH TANTRIS, HIS NEW HIP-HOP YOGA STUDIO

BY JEFF WEISS

I’m sweating in the bhujangasana cobra pose as Biggie Smalls blares over the speakers at the Tantris studio in West Hollywood, the new yoga and spiritual center launched by Def Jam founder and multi-hyphenate mogul Russell Simmons. Suddenly, the lyric “Tell me who’s hot, who’s not” has new meaning.

Yoga has always been more hip opener than hip-hop. When you see rappers exercising, it’s invariably weightlifting, competitive sports or 50 Cent shirtless on a treadmill. The ancient Indian practice has long battled outmoded Western stereotypes about it being strictly for girls or “touch my heart with your foot” consciousness bros.

But it’s quietly become a workout staple of professional athletes and regular humans searching for a meditative retreat from the distraction blitzkrieg of social media. Rae Sremmurd might have bragged last year that all their girls do yoga, but just last month, Future rapped about doing 90-degree hot yoga and feeling incredible.

Enter Tantris, which blends the rigors of the asana physical practice with yogic philosophy and a little bit of Mase. As you might imagine, Simmons is heavily involved in the playlist curation. He keeps the music rhythmic and at a fairly low tempo, so as not to impair the nervous system. No techno because he believes it’s too hard to smile, breathe and keep a quiet mind when the BPM is too high.

“I didn’t build a yoga studio to be Mr. Me Too,” Simmons says. “I built one to be the studio that I’d want to go to. This is fun. You’ll hear Nas, Migos and then Krishna Das and beautifully sung devotional chants. It balances a commercial and spiritual sensibility. The teachers are very studied, and we’re trying to help people move toward enlightenment.”

As someone who has done yoga for more than a dozen years but typically avoided telling others due to the stigma associated, I found Simmons’ concept and execution very impressive. You usually have the choice of the ultra-authentic or the crassly American. Hot yoga can be more inhospitable sauna than soothing respite.

Don’t even get me started on the soundtracks. There’s definitely a limit to my love of James Blake. If I ever have to hear Bon Iver in a yoga class again, I’ll lock myself in a cabin in the woods. Devotional chants and tabla and sitar jams are great but also can be so numbly calming that you fall asleep or become George Harrison in 1972.

During this particular Tantris class, I hear Dr. Dre and Prince, Rihanna and T-Pain, Bob Marley and Raphael Saadiq. There’s a Poolside cover of “Harvest Moon,” Stevie Wonder, and just enough traditional music for it not to feel gimmicky.

There are no songs from Lady Gaga, but she’s in attendance. So is Simmons, who has been practicing for 27 years. He attributes daily yoga and twice-a-day meditation to his professional and personal success and state of clarity.

The evangelizing is rooted in truth. At Tantris, there’s a balance of traditional devotion and modernity. Buddhist votive candles, lanterns and deity statues line the spacious two-story complex, but it still feels like the kind of place where Future would do hot yoga. It’s obviously a trendy West Hollywood yoga studio, but one that avoids the corniness that usually connotes.

DURING ONE PARTICULAR CLASS, I HEAR DR. DRE AND PRINCE.

In the downstairs area after the class, the sound system restoratively bumps Air’s “Cherry Blossom Girl,” Wax Tailor and Blockhead. Two framed photos tout this month’s inspirations: Krishna Das and Beyoncé.

“I think we’re ready. It’s already exploded, but now the idea of yoga itself — real yoga, besides the sweating — is ready to take root,” Simmons says. “People come out of these classes and feel like they’ve gone to church. You leave high and happy.”

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.
DRILL LOS ANGELES

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FITTED (BOB LEE, GRAHAM LEWIS, MATTHEW SIMMS, MIKE WATT)

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ART, PAST AND PRESENT

I try to listen to music every day. I’ve learned that being open-minded is key and that there’s no part of the record store that doesn’t have something to offer.

To widen my appreciation, I had to ask a lot of questions and spend hours listening, reading and trying to understand the environment the musicians were in that may have influenced their output. For instance, anyone can listen to jazz great Charlie Parker and enjoy it. But if you read Ross Russell’s Bird Lives! The High Life and Hard Times of Charlie (Yardbird) Parker and listen to Parker’s scorching live recordings from the Royal Roost (Savoy), you will get the music in a different way.

The more I read about the America that jazz players endured, the more I understood that context was of the utmost importance to absorb the full potential of any artist’s output. The more I learned, the more I wanted to know.

There have been musicians, records and books that forced me to hit the reset button. In 1984, I found a book called Up-Tight: The Velvet Underground Story by Victor Bockris and Gerard Malanga. It was more than a biography of a great band; it talked about Andy Warhol’s Factory scene and the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, which involved The Velvet Underground as well as Malanga, the book’s co-author. Warhol and the band were doing their thing in the mid-1960s, before all the peace-and-love stuff. Looking at the pictures and reading about the scene made me curious to the point of obsession.

The book went on to describe the solo work of Lou Reed, John Cale and Nico after the Velvets had broken up. This was the most interesting part. I had never heard any of these records, like Lou Reed’s Berlin or The Marble Index by Nico. Thanks to music writer Byron Coley, who found me used copies, I was finally able to hear them. They blew my mind, especially the Nico albums. Nothing sounds like them. They are dark, intense and starkly beautiful.

These records sent me down paths of musical interest that I don’t know how I would have found otherwise. I have met Gerard Malanga a couple of times and on both occasions was fairly speechless, knowing what he was a part of.

One of the people mentioned in Up-Tight was a man named Tony Conrad. He was in the apartment building at 56 Ludlow St. in NYC with Reed and Cale when they started The Velvet Underground. Conrad was a musician, filmmaker, teacher and true artist. In the 1960s, he, along with Cale, Angus MacLise, La Monte Young and Marian Zazeela, recorded several hours of hypnotic, droning music, only a fraction of which has seen release.

I got turned on to the sounds of Conrad and also Cale’s early material featuring Conrad and occasionally Sterling Morrison of The Velvet Underground while I was living in NYC, when these recordings came out on the Table of the Elements label. I bought them because I knew all the names from the book that I had read more than a decade before. In my small Lower East Side apartment, I listened to music made in other small apartments not far away.

Filmmaker Tyler Hubby has made a documentary called Tony Conrad: Completely in the Present. I have watched it twice now and it’s great. It made me dig out all those records and check them out again. I hear them differently knowing what I learned from the documentary. Conrad, a Harvard grad, was 100 percent badass, relentlessly creative and a truly original thinker. Funny, too. Without Tyler Hubby’s documentary, Table of the Elements and other labels like Superior Viaduct, which have kept Mr. Conrad’s music in circulation, one of the great stories of American music and art might have gone underappreciated.

On March 16, the Broad Museum and the Ace Hotel are showing Tony Conrad: Completely in the Present at the Theatre at Ace Hotel (more information on the Broad Museum’s website).

IN BAD TIMES AS WELL AS GOOD, I LOOK TO ART FOR INSPIRATION.

In bad times as well as good, I always look to the world of art for inspiration. People like Conrad, so free of many of the conventional ideas and restraints that often just end up being selling points, reminds me that as down as you want to feel is just how much you want to deny the fact that there have been brilliant people in every decade, including this one, pushing in every possible way against mediocrity, conformity and ignorance. When in doubt, go to the museum, the gallery, the record store, anywhere you can find art. The world might not change, but yours could.

On a different note, I thought it was poetic that Iggy Pop’s most recent album, Post Pop Depression, and David Bowie’s Blackstar were both nominated for a Grammy in the Best Alternative Music Album category. Both records are some of the best work either released. Blackstar won, I wanted Iggy to win because he is still here and I bet he would have said something kind about Bowie. I thought it was cool that they were kind of together one last time.

Speaking of Iggy Pop: Two days from now, in Mexico City, the Undisputed Heavyweight Champion of Rock & Roll is playing three nights. He’s got Metallica closing for him, which I thought was mighty generous. Iggy once said, “I don’t need no heavy trips/I just do what I want to do.” Which is why tomorrow, I am flying down for the shows.

Guys like Conrad, Bowie and Iggy go on and on. And then they stop. I reckon you have to jump into the space before the period at the end of the sentence and be in those moments as much as you can.
Music Picks

Terry Malts @ THE Hi HAT
L.A./S.F. band Terry Malts reinvigorated themselves and then some on last fall’s Lost at the Party, a hi-fi LP that finds this previously lo-fi outfit sounding better than ever. This is pop and punk (but not pop-punk) as the product of diligent vinyl scholarship. While the official description mentions Dwight Twilley and The Chills — echoed on the lovely “It’s Not Me” and closer “When the Nighttime Comes” — At the Party is really more alive with the power and personality of prime ’80s American indie. It might not sound much like Hüsker Dü or mid-period Feelies (though sometimes it does), but it would fit nicely between them. This isn’t a retro re-enactment album, but it sure knows where it came from. Maybe that’s why it’s so confident about where it’s going, too. —Chris Ziegler

Sabina Sciubba @ LARGO AT THE CORONET
Sabina Sciubba is best known as lead singer of the colorfully groovy New York City electro-pop band Brazilian Girls, but she occasionally splits off from the group to perform solo. In 2014, the German-Italian chanteuse released her first solo album, Toujours, an inviting assortment of musical bonbons that ranged from funky pop-reggae (“Mystery River”) and swirling psychedelia (“Long Distance Love”) to languid, Nico-esque balladry (“Cinema”). “I’ve asked you for a kiss and you kiss me on the cheek,” purrs over the slinky rhythms of “Viva L’Amour.” Sciubba is also a regular on TV’s Dancing With the Stars, and tonight her co-star, Sabrina Bryan (of Destiny’s Child fame), joins her for a set that will include some new material. —Falling James

The Warlocks, The Creation Factory @ THE ECHOPLEX
Tonight’s bill is a psychedelic showdown of groups that sound as if they were beamed here straight from the mid-’60s. The Creation Factory churn out retro garage-rock fantasies that are pumped up by waves of keyboards and rabid lead guitar, while lead singer Shane Stots snarls like Sam the Sham or and rabid lead guitar, while lead singer Shane Stots snarls like Sam the Sham or The Champs. The Warlocks also have psychedelic roots, though the bleary-eyed opuses on their most recent album, Songs From the Pale Eclipse, touch upon shoegazer hypnosis and Velvet Underground haziness, as well as the more expected garage-rock influences. —Falling James

Dokken @ WHISKY A GO-GO
Don Dokken has always had a reputation for being temperamental, but he seems to have taken that crankiness to a whole new level recently. Insulting local opening bands, chastising sound people — is Don losing the plot, or is he simply turning into a grumpy old man? Either way, with or without guitar maestro George Lynch, when Dokken (the band) hit their stride, songs like “The Hunter” and “Into the Fire” still sound magnificent live. The classic lineup that includes Lynch has re-formed occasionally in recent years, but this isn’t it. Still, former Warlock/Doro man Jon Levin is an excellent player, more than capable of shredding through a tune like the Freddy Krueger-approved “Dream Warriors.” As for Don himself, the frontman can wail with the best of them. There hasn’t been any new material in a while, so expect a killer greatest-hits set. —Brett Callwood

Pussy Riot Theatre @ THE FONDAL THEATRE
When members of the Russian art-punk collective Pussy Riot were sentenced to prison following a provocative, ambush-style performance inside a Moscow church in 2012, it brought attention to how the government of that country represses cultural dissent. But before Americans get too smug about how much more freedom we have here, compared with music fans in Vladimir Putin’s Russia, the band want to remind listeners that censorship and repression can happen in any country led by a fascist-leaning demagogue. The group’s recent “Make America Great Again” video satirizes Donald Trump with a sound collage of his own xenophobic and homophobic speeches mixed with a sly backing track. Tonight, the spectacle continues with the world premiere of a new work, Revolution, an hourlong mélange of video art, protest and music inspired by band member Maria Alyokhina’s book, Burning Doors. —Falling James

Soviet Soviet, The Wraith, Deth Crux @ THE ECHOPLEX
From nostalgic goth grinders to newbie post-punkers, Part Time Punks’ live bills are never, ever boring. No exception here: Soviet Soviet (out of Italy, not Russia) make ominous sounds that’ll please seasoned fans of ’80s shoegazer rock as well as hip kids looking for moody alt-slams with a Euro twist. Black eye makeup would make more sense than the beards these boys sport, but mood lighting surely will be involved. Thankfully, the visual vibes will be more than fulfilled by opener The Wraith. Led by riotous frontman Davey Bales (Lost Tribe) and featuring members of Cinema Strange and Blink-182 (their original drummer), the local deathrock-driven quartet will be playing from their new EP, Shadow Flag, which viciously comes alive onstage and off—Bales gets into the crowd most shows. Also with the metallic doom of L.A.’s Deth Crux. —Lisa Lecaro

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ROTATIONS: KATON
Tuesday • March 14th • 6 PM
THE LOVE WITCH DVD SIGNING
Anna Biller visits Amoeba to celebrate the DVD/Blu-ray release of her celebrated indie film, The Love Witch (Oscilloscope Pictures). Anna will be joined by cast members; Samantha Robinson, Gian Keys, Jared Sanford, Jennifer Ingrum, Stephen Wozniak, April Shows and makeup artist Emma Willis.

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Wednesday • March 22nd • 6 PM
DUNGEN
In-store performance and signing of their album, Häxan (Mexican Summer). Dungen’s first all-instrumental album, Häxan is a continuation of all the things we love about their music. Signing space is limited to purchasers of Häxan. Performing at The Getty Center on 3/21.

mon
Hurray for the Riff Raff, Kera & the Lesbians @ MASONIC LODGE AT HOLLYWOOD FOREVER
“The World Will Come like the Turning of the Sun over Tall Buildings and the Beating of Drums,” Alynda Lee Segarra confides over a bed of percussion and under a wash of strings on the title track of Hurray for the Riff Raff’s new album, The Navigator. Such electronica-laced tracks as “Hungry Ghost” mark a shift in sound for the New Orleans band, which first came to attention in 2007 with a more rootsy mix of folk and blues. The change in styles also is reflected in the new songs’ subject matter, which was inspired in part by Segarra’s exploration of her Puerto Rican heritage. “First they stole our language, then they stole our names,” she sings coolly over the funky

Pussy Riot Theatre
See Sunday.
Hakidame ni Tsuru — John Payne

Under the name Kaze, Usui, percussionist Takaaki Masuko and ensemble, joined by guitarist Yasuhiro and NALTREXONE & Confidential creations are given far-reaching settings in partnership with trumpeter Kappa Maki, with whom she has made improvisatory magic on the duo’s recent album under the name Kaze, Trouble Kaze. The prolific Fujiw’s Satoko Fujii Orchestra Tokyo recently released the spectacularly sprawling Peace, and she’s just come out with a superb solo piano set, Invisible Hand. Tonight, Fujii and Maki rebrand as Hakidame ni Tsuru (Crane in the Wasteland), an avant-jazz-rock-leaning ensemble. Fujii’s Satoko Fujii Orchestra has included the likes of Kamasi Washington, Michael Schenker and Miles Mosley. Like his associate, bringing elements of classical and alternative rock into his own jazz compositions. All of this can be heard on his excellent new album, Planetary Prince, which sounds like the best elements of Weather Report, Keith Jarrett, McCoy Tyner, Austin Peralta and Pavement. — Daniel Kohn

Portugal. The Man @ CLUB BAHIA
If you’re a fan of both punctuational nomenclature and indie rock, be sure to come on down when Portugal. The Man descend from on high — otherwise known as their hometown of Wasilla, Alaska — to play various bangers from the last 15 years, as well as possibly songs from their forthcoming record, Gloomin + Doomin. Produced with Mike D of The Beastie Boys, it’s a long-awaited record that, given their tireless searching for new sounds, may be like their 2013 album, Evil Friends, or something from scratch. With their spacey, accessible and cinematic sound (most widely heard on their hit “Purple, Yellow, Red and Blue”), they’re less standard-bearers than they are standard-bearers. Case in point: their highly limited-edition record for the Smithsonian to benefit endangered Sumatran tigers. — Jason Roche

Meat Puppets @ THE ECHO
To a certain set of fans, Meat Puppets are forever known as the group that sat in with Nirvana during their iconic MTV Unplugged performance. Beyond winning Kurt Cobain’s approval, the Phoenix natives have managed to play their quirky blend of cowpunk, hardcore and alternative rock for more than 35 years. Though they broke up twice — in 1996 and 2002 — Meat Puppets continue to play before a fiercely devoted fan base. It’s been more than 20 years since that Unplugged appearance, but events such as Riot Fest have introduced the alt-rock pioneers to a younger crowd. Even though they haven’t released a new album since 2013, brothers Cris and Curt Kirkwood continue to influence a new generation of musicians as they once influenced Soundgarden, Dinosaur Jr. and Pavement. — Sam Ribakoff
BOARDSR’S: 1652 Cherokee Ave, Heatherne Apostles, Chairwoman, The controversy, Sat., March 11, 10 p.m. The Sound, Wed., March 15, 8 p.m., free.

BOOTLEG THEATER: 2200 Beverly Blvd, Lady Lamb, Dustin Lavelle, Fri., March 10, 8:30 p.m., $20. Barbru, DJ Phatrick, Sat., March 11, 8:30 p.m., $18. Bird Concerns, Emma Cole, Albert & His Dreamboats, Sun., March 12, 8 p.m., $5. La Bouquet, Tilly, Red Honor, Mon., March 13, 8:30 p.m., free. Part Time, Wyatt Blair, Panther, Batll, E. Trujillo, Tue., March 14, 8:30 p.m., $7. Tickle Torture, Chrome Canyon (DJ set), Rooms, Velvet Negroni, Wed., March 15, 8:30 p.m., $8. Laura Jean Anderson, Alivia Jane Kaplan, Shannon Inouye, Thu., March 16, 8:30 p.m., $7.

CANYON CLUB: 28912 Rosewood Drive, Agoura Hills. Geoff Tate, Sat., March 11, 9 p.m., $24-34.

CLUB BAMA: 1320 W. Sunset Blvd., Los Angeles, Portugal. The Man, Tue., March 14, 7 p.m., TBA. See Music Pick.

CODY’S VIVA CANTINA: 267 S. Main St., Los Angeles. Decry, Tue., March 14, 8 p.m., $10. Meat Dangers, Sun., March 12, 8 p.m., $16. Fucked Up, Alex Lahey, Emerson Star, Liv Slingerland, Sat., March 11, 8 p.m., $30. See Music Pick.


ROCK & POP

Mann & the Shine Runners, Thursdays, 9 p.m. Through Hoop Screams, Fri., March 10, 9 p.m., $11.50. See Music Pick.

The Tarzana. Kill Cafe, Jade Amenity, SoCal Tennis Pros, Mourners, Jason Paul, Sat., March 11, 6-9 p.m.

Negroni, Wed., March 15, 8:30 p.m., $8. Laura Jean Tickle Torture, Chrome Canyon (DJ set), Rooms, Velvet Negroni, Wed., March 15, 8:30 p.m., $8. Laura Jean Anderson, Alivia Jane Kaplan, Shannon Inouye, Thu., March 16, 8:30 p.m., $7.

REGAL INN: 6753 E. Carson St., Lakewood. Long Beach Alltory, The Decline, Rhino 39, Fri., March 10, 9 p.m., TBA.

RESIDENT: 428 S. Hewitt St. Chastity Belt, Summer Cannibals, Lila Prank, Fri., March 10, 8 p.m., $15. Ian Moore, Sat., March 11, 6:30 p.m., $12. Wayne Williams, Gary Walls, Sat., March 11, 8 p.m., $10. Guacamole Baywatch, Frankie & the Witch Fingers, Trabants, Mon., March 13, 8 p.m., $10. Xenia Rubinos, Thu., March 16, 8 p.m., $12.


THE TROUBADOUR: 1314 S. Pacific Ave., San Pedro. Stop Rock It or Not Over, a benefit and silent auction with music from Randy Stodola, Joe Baiza, The Mourners, Jason Paul, Sat., March 11, 6:9 p.m.


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p.m., $20. JC & Laney, Sat., March 11, 7 p.m., $18.

March 15, 9:30 p.m., $15. Doug Webb, Thu., March 14, 9 p.m., $30. Larry Koonse, Joe Bagg & Jason Harnell, 9:30 p.m., $25. Wesfest 12, Sun., March 12, 7:30 p.m., TBA. P.L. Brown, Sat., March 11, 7:30 p.m., TBA.

—Falling James

for more listings, please go to laweekly.com.

CONCERTS

FRIDAY, MARCH 10

THE AARON DIELH TRIO, CÉCILE MCLORIN SALVANT:

With Adam Birnbaum, Jason Moran, 8 p.m., $46-$123. Wait Disney Concert Hall, 111 S. Grand Ave.

ALIX PEREZ, EPROM, IVY LAB:

10 p.m., TBA. The Belasco Theater, 1050 S. Hill St., Los Angeles.

BLUE OYSTER CULT:


BURNING GHOSTS, EVIL GENIUS, RAGE THORNBORNES:

8:30 p.m., $20. REDCAT, 631 W. Second St., L.A.

CHARLES BUSCH:

7:30 p.m., $79. Samuelle Theater, 630 Town Center Drive, Costa Mesa.

DARKEST HOUR:

With Ringworm, The Doomed Rivers of Nihil, 6 p.m., $20. The Regent Theater, 448 S. Main St., Los Angeles.

ESPINOZA PAZ:


JAPANDROIDS:

With Craig Finn, The Uptown Controllers, 9 p.m. The Fonda Theatre, 6126 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles.

RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS:

With Trombone Shorty & Orleáns Avenue, 8 p.m., $49-$99. Staples Center, 1111 S. Figueroa St., Los Angeles.

SALT-N-PEPA:

8 p.m. The Novo by Microsoft, 800 W. Olympic Blvd., Los Angeles.

THE SHINS:

With Psychic Twin, 8 p.m., $20. The Observatory, 3503 S. Harbor Blvd., Santa Ana.

VAUD & THE VILLAINS:

7:30 p.m., $45-$80. The Broad Stage, Santa Monica College Performing Arts Center, 1311 11th St., Santa Monica.

SATURDAY, MARCH 11

AFRICAN GUITAR SUMMIT: With Alpha Yaya Diallo, Donne Roberts & Madagascarian Slim, Kofi Ackah & Nabey Camara, 7 p.m., $15-$35. Aratani Japan America Theatre, 244 S. San Pedro St., Los Angeles.

CHARLES BUSCH:

7:30 p.m., $79. Samuelle Theater, 630 Town Center Drive, Costa Mesa.

COMMON KINGS:


DJ ESCO:

8 p.m., $5. The Observatory, 3503 S. Harbor Blvd., Santa Ana.

KARI JOBE:

With Bryan & Katie Torwalt, 7 p.m., $28.50-$42.50. The Wiltern, 3790 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles.

RITA MORENO:

8:30 p.m., $55. Musco Center for the Arts, Chapman University, 1 University Drive, Orange.

THE ROBERT CRAY BAND:

8 p.m., TBA. Downey Civic Theatre, 9435 Firestone Blvd., Downey.

SHINGOZ & THE CHEE-HOOS:

With Spinnmaster A-1, Nitsua, Chily-T, 8 p.m. El Rey Theatre, 5515 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles.

SHANKING REGGAE FESTIVAL:

With Panteon Rococo, Tokyo Sala Paradise Orchestra, Dread Mar I, Antidoping, Los Caligaris, The Slackers, La Banda Skalavera, 4 p.m., $40-$100. Shrine Auditorium & Expo Hall, 710 S. Broadway, Los Angeles.

SOCIAL DISTORTION:

With Jade Jackson, 8 p.m., TBA. Fox Theater Pomona, 301 S. Garey Ave., Pomona.

TECHNMATIK:

9 p.m. The Novo by Microsoft, 800 W. Olympic Blvd., Los Angeles.
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DUA LIPA, RO RANSOM:

THE MENZINGERS:

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CLASSICAL & NEW MUSIC

TUESDAY, MARCH 14

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DIANA DAMRAU & NICOLAS TESTÉ:

DIANA DAMRAU & NICOLAS TESTÉ:

ROCK graphite Steve Vai sizzles through four of his own compositions, and Carlos Izcaray conducts Ensa-Pekka Salonen’s Gambit and Stravinsky’s The Rite of Spring, Sat., March 11, 2 p.m., $15-$54. Walt Disney Concert Hall, 111 S. Grand Ave., Los Angeles.

BRAD MEHLDAU:

The jazz pianist covers parts of J.S. Bach’s The Well-Tempered Clavier, interspersed with an improvisation and his own Three Pieces After Bach, Fri., March 10, 8 p.m., $20-$55. UCLA, Royce Hall, 340 Royce Drive, Westwood.

CAMERON CARPENTER:

The celebrated organist runs through a mix of Bach classics and flashy if less interesting original compositions, Thu., March 16, 8 p.m., $29-$49. UCLA, Royce Hall, 340 Royce Drive.

DIANA DAMRAU & NICOLAS TESTÉ:

The phenomenal German coloratura soprano Daniela Mack (who makes her L.A. Opera debut later this month in The Tales of Hoffmann) and her bass-baritone husband, Testé, burst forth with romantic arias by Rossini, Meyerbeer, Verdi and Gounod, Sun., March 12, 6 p.m. The Broad Stage, 1310 11th St., Santa Monica.

FRETWORK:

The viol consort runs through variations of Taverner’s In Nomine by Tye, Parsons, Byrd, Picforth In Nomine, 7 p.m., $29.50-$50. The Belasco Theater, 1050 S. Hill St., Los Angeles.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15

DUA LIPA, RO RANSOM:

7 p.m., TBA. The Belasco Theater, 1050 S. Hill St., Los Angeles.

TRENDMÖLLER:

7 p.m., $25. The Belasco Theater, 1050 S. Hill St., Los Angeles.

THURSDAY, MARCH 16

BELA FLECK & ABIGAL WASHBURN:

7:30 p.m., $30-$55. Musco Center for the Arts, Chapman University, 1 University Drive, Orange.

BOUNCING SOULS:

With Alix, Get Dead, 6:30 p.m., $26-$50. The Observatory, 3503 S. Harbor Blvd., Santa Ana.

METRO BOOMIN:

11 p.m., $10. The Observatory, 3503 S. Harbor Blvd., Santa Ana.

SHINY TOY GUNS:

With Kitten, 8:30 p.m., $25-$50. The Regent Theater, 448 S. Main St., Los Angeles.

WEDDIT:

With Henry Steinway & Harry Rodrigues, Henry Laufer, Sam Griesemer & Jerome Potter, Jasper Patterson, Djayvan Santos, Nick Meledandri, 9 p.m. The Henry Laufer, Sam Griesemer & Jerome Potter, Jasper Patterson, Djayvan Santos, Nick Meledandri, 9 p.m. The Fonda Theater, 6126 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles.

YOUNG THUG:

8 p.m. The Novo by Microsoft, 800 W. Olympic Blvd., Beverly Hills.

–Falling James

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![Image of a club ad with a woman in a bikini]

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![Image of a club ad with a woman in a bikini]

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