WHO IS THE REAL AUBREY PLAZA?

FROM PARKS & RECREATION TO LEGION, AUBREY PLAZA IS REINVENTING HERSELF ONE MAJOR ROLE AT A TIME

BY APRIL WOLFE
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From Parks & Recreation to Legion, the actress is reinventing herself one major role at a time. BY APRIL WOLFE.
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Do you have a line on a new bar that the masses haven’t yet discovered? An Instagrammer whose images you want to inhabit? A salon whose stylists deserve heaps of praise? Then make your voice heard in our annual Best of L.A. issue!

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It's Aubrey Plaza's 33rd birthday, and she's curled up on a couch in a deafeningly quiet, concrete-walled room at the Line hotel in Koreatown. She hugs her knees to her chest. Her T-shirt features a hyper-realistic image of Nicolas Cage's face, and I can just see his toothy, maniacal smile peeking out from between her legs — it's unnerving. Her hands fidget, knotting and unknotting a black string attached to a Santa Muerte charm. The actor hit stardom with her sardonic slacker character April on the NBC show Parks & Recreation and, like many TV stars on long-running shows, she has found it difficult to escape her monster creation. With a recent succession of mold-smashing projects — Legion, The Little Hours and Ingrid Goes West — she's about to leave April behind. But who will she become?

“If Andy Kaufman is alive, he should come and find me,” Plaza tells me. Kaufman is one of Plaza's greatest influences. The comic actor died from cancer in 1984 but he melted so deeply into his myriad personas that some people still believe he is alive and playing a long con on his suffering audiences. If you've only seen Plaza on the uplifting comedy Parks & Rec, the Kaufman reference may not immediately resonate for you. But to friends and colleagues, she is a Loki trickster who revels in absurdity. “She's not just playing at being Andy Kaufman,” Plaza's Legion director, Noah Hawley, tells me over the phone. “She is Andy Kaufman.”

He shares the story of their first meeting: Plaza shows up 30 minutes late, on crutches, and immediately opens up about her quest to be a director on Parks & Recreation and her disappointment that they denied her the chance while letting the men direct. “I said, 'That is wrong. They should have let you direct,' but then she said, 'Oh no, I just made that up. I didn't want to direct.'” Hawley sounds simultaneously exasperated and impressed when he speaks of Plaza. “There's a sense she's always testing you — I didn't even know if she really needed those crutches.”

She did, but that's another story.

On Legion, a show about a young mutant who's hospitalized for schizophrenia but realizes he may actually have powers (it exists in the X-Men universe), Plaza plays Lenny. She's a projection of the Shadow King, a psychic mutant who is a kind of gender-fluid parasite who possesses the bodies of others. Essentially, Plaza is playing up to four different characters — all of whom have varied mannerisms and speech patterns — in the same scene. Her performances are as unpredictable from take to take as the multiple characters she plays: Will she embody a power-hungry therapist, or will she break into a sexy, Fosse-style song-and-dance number?

“With her, you never quite know what's going to happen, and that's really for me very exciting,” her co-star Dan Stevens says. “She's always kind of looking for the mischievous choice in the scene,” which is hell on continuity folks and editors charged with making sure she picks up the coffee cup the same way in every take — that never happens. But Stevens and Hawley say Plaza's spontaneity precisely fits the show's tone.

“I needed someone who could be anything and everything in any moment,” Hawley tells me. “There's a sort of slippery quality this character has, very fast-talking. Part
of this character’s dance is about manipulating people and tricking them, and yet I really wanted her to be likable.”

Plaza’s had a lot of practice being abrasive but likable — most of the characters she plays fall into this category, from the diehard party girl of Mike and Dave Need Wedding Dates to Depressed Debbie in Whit Stillman’s Damsels in Distress and perpetually annoyed Julie Powers in Scott Pilgrim vs. the World. But Hawley’s casting of Plaza (and changing the character from male to female for her) has begun a small avalanche of projects that could finally leave her Parks & Rec charter behind and let Plaza become whoever she wants.

The Little Hours, a heartfelt nunsploration period piece from Plaza’s longtime romantic partner and creative collaborator, Jeff Baena, opened in June to rave reviews. Plaza not only stars in the film but also earns her first producing credit.

“A lot of time you see actors getting producer credits, it’s just a vanity title for them,” Baena says. He describes watching Plaza naturally morph into the nurturing attitude of a producer, even using her day off to take actor Paul Reiser on a Tuscany tour — producers have to keep everyone on set happy. “Whatever she does, she takes it seriously. Ultimately, I think she’s going to be a filmmaker with that heightened sensitivity.”

Plaza describes that “sensitivity” as a manifestation of her tendency to “please” people, which is a double-edged sword. Acting and producing require a person to be highly attuned to others’ needs, but what happens if you can’t turn that off?

“I’m such a people pleaser that my natural reaction in interviews and things is to give people what they want. It’s like I’m a robot,” Plaza says. “Oh, these people want me to say something weird or mean or sarcastic, so I just do that. That’ll make them happy.’ I’m just now getting better at feeling more comfortable in my own skin, but it can be hard when people are projecting ideas onto you at full speed, constantly.”

As a young artist who got cast on a popular network series simply by showing up to an informal meeting in shorts and a T-shirt and suggesting that, hey, maybe a character could be a dorky stoner dude, Plaza sometimes can’t even believe that they let her on TV. “If ever she were to get a big head, she says, her re-creation of O'Shea Jackson Jr., who most famously portrayed his father, Ice Cube, in Straight Outta Compton, as her character’s nerdy but confident love interest.

[The part] was written for a kind of dorky stoner dude, but I recognized that the chemistry I would have with O'Shea would be really different from something you usually see,” Plaza explains. She’d met the rapper-turned-actor at a party and relentlessly waved the script in his face until he committed. “I thought if we could capture that on camera, it would just make the movie that much deeper.”

Plaza may be a trickster and comedic actor but she craves depth, and those things aren’t mutually exclusive. Her life has been dictated by the motto: “Take it as far as it can go.” The “it” could be anything — a character, a bit, a basketball team — because whatever she does, it’s gonna be sincere, even if it’s just incredibly weird.

Along “Cult House Road,” deep in the forest on the Delaware-Pennsylvania border, the skeletal trees lining the pavement angle outward, away from the road and their sun source. Through an overgrown path, there is a burned-out abandoned cabin, which is said to have hosted Satanic rituals, pagan animal sacrifices or DuPont incest weddings, depending on whom you ask. Something about this place seems wrong, even if you can’t put your finger on exactly why. This is where M. Night Shyamalan shot The Village. It’s also where Plaza’s mother, Bernadette, would drive her late at night on impromptu road trips with her cousins.

“We’d drive down Cult House Road, and she’d turn the lights off, and we’d all be screaming. My mom is kind of mysterious. She would always do weird things with us,” Plaza says, taking a moment to think. “Maybe that’s why I’m into witches.”

Plaza was raised Catholic and attended an all-girls school in Wilmington, Delaware, with her two sisters. She loved The Craft and doing silly spells, but she was also a teacher’s pet and class president. In true Plaza fashion, she took her presidential campaign as far as it could go, convincing a staffer from Republican senator Bill Roth’s office to help her.

“He was flying around and helping me with my posters, and I remember he helped me set up this archway with balloons at 6 a.m., so everyone who showed up that day had to walk through this thing to get into the door,” Plaza shrugs. “Really bizarre. I was just a kid. But he helped me win.”

What people most often miss about Plaza’s sense of humor is that she doesn’t enjoy “mean” comedy. Yes, she once showed up to a national TV interview wearing vampire teeth for no reason and bewildered ESPN viewers with her re-creation of The Decision to announce that she was trading herself from her infamous Pistol Shrimps basketball team to the Spice Squirrels, but she insists she was never what you’d call a “bad” kid. She was and is a “thrill seeker.”

In high school, she and her friend Neil Casey (Inside Amy Schumer, Ghostbusters) would stand on the side of the highway, dress in costume and toss a beach ball back and forth, simply to boggle passers-by. Plaza thinks her fascination with absurdity stemmed from growing up in such a conservative area. “It was satisfying to do something weird for weird’s sake, with no purpose, to make people stop and laugh.”

She graduated from NYU and went to work as an NBC page around the time Amy Poehler joined Saturday Night Live. “I like to think that I walked by her wearing an astronaut costume while she was making up lies to a group of tourists,” Poehler said via email. “By the time Plaza got an audition for Judd Apatow’s Funny People in Los Angeles, Poehler had gone West herself and was preparing to lead her own sitcom with the creators of The Office. Plaza got that informal meeting set up with the Parks folks and quickly thereafter got the casting phone call that would change her life. Los Angeles became her home. And the Parks cast and crew became her new weird family.”

“Leslie Knope was supposed to be April Ludgate’s mentor, and so our first couple of seasons felt like that [in real life],” Poehler says. “But Aubrey Plaza, the person, is an old soul. Very wise. Always watching.”

Plaza calls Poehler and Rashida Jones her “big sisters.” For a young woman who’d grown up in a tight-knit family with her two real-life sisters, landing in this supportive cast was something of a godsend.

“Looking back, I am blown away still by just that group of people being in one room doing comedy together, and everyone was a genuinely nice and lovable person,” Plaza says. “Then she picks up her phone that’s been buzzing off and on for the duration of our interview. She holds it up to me and
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...and especially wary of social media. Apologize for even asking any personal questions. Everyone was commenting while we’ve been talking.

A large part of the appeal of Parks, then, and now, is its earnestness and the feeling of joy amid darkness it evoked, which Plaza attributes to how pleasant things were behind the scenes and how Poehler ran her set.

“I think most people at No. 1 on the call sheet, like Amy is, it’s really hard for them to keep things in perspective,” Plaza says. “It’s easy to take on that No. 1 status and just have your ego take over, and Amy was just so always conscious of the vibe on set, and the idea of gratitude, and respect, but also having fun.”

As Plaza has stepped into that No. 1 spot herself, she’s tried to take to heart what she’s learned from her mentors. “My biggest fear is that I lose myself,” she says. Nowhere is that challenge more evident than in the endless press junkets and interviews she does to promote her projects. Seeing how fascinated people are with her personal life is deeply uncomfortable for her.

Even this interview brings a certain discomfort to Plaza, which makes me want to apologize for even asking any personal questions. She’s uneasy with too much attention and especially wary of social media.

With all this in mind, it is absolutely no wonder that Plaza was drawn to her most recent film, Ingrid Goes West. It taps into these fears she has about sharing personal information. Ironically, the actress delivers these fears she has about sharing personal information. She wants to have a connection, and they feel lonely and misunderstood, and that’s a universal feeling for human beings.”

Though Plaza jokes the trailers for the film suggest it is “a crazy, nonstop laugh express train to nowhere,” viewers likely will be shocked by how emotional the story gets, or, rather, how emotional Plaza gets. Ingrid walks a tightrope of anxiety, juggling lies; when they catch up to her, her denial and subsequent breakdown turns this comedy into a tearjerker. The success of this film hinges on Plaza’s ability to sell drama. And she does.

“There were times when she was in an emotional scene, and we did 20, 25 takes, and she would want to do more,” Ingrid Goes West director Matt Spicer says.

Being a producer, Plaza was forced to watch herself in the dailies, poring over the footage. She says she never watches her own movies, so this was a little circle of hell for her. “Making good movies is so hard... That should be the title of this article,” Plaza laughs. She seems energized by having creative control over her projects. She tells me she’s never been able to be picky. Every role she takes is for a reason. (“Did I think Dirty Grandpa was going to be the best movie in the world? No. But you’re telling me I’ve got a shot to play Robert De Niro’s love interest? I’m in.”) More than anything, she’s excited to age; she’s tired of playing a 20-year-old.

“In Dirty Grandpa, I played a college senior, and I was 30,” she says. “I’ve always thought, ‘God, when I’m in my 40s, I think I’m going to get some meaty parts.’ But everyone is so obsessed with youth, so every movie is about 19-year-olds. I used to watch movies that had adults who were wearing blazers and high heels and going to work and dropping off their kid.

“Where did those characters go?”

Today, on Aubrey Plaza’s 33rd birthday, she tells me she wants to bring the adult woman back into style. She wants to make action films. She wants to make funny films. She wants to revive the screwball romantic comedies of the 1980s, like her personal favorite, Romancing the Stone.

Actor Chris Pratt may know the real Aubrey Plaza. “Aubrey is a survivor and alchemist. Her on-screen (and off-screen) personas are equal parts defense mechanism and performance art. She’s tough and surprisingly complicated. The very best parts of her are yet to be discovered by audiences and most people. She would deny it, but beneath her signature eye rolls (and accessible to only the luckiest people in her life) is softness, kindness, pathos, creativity and vulnerability.”

That’s the heartbreaking sweet assessment Pratt sent via email about his longtime Parks & Recreation costar. And Pratt’s right, because “most people” never will know Plaza. But audiences are now about to see a few new sides to her.

In Ingrid, Plaza plays a bereft woman with a bag of cash she inherited from her recently deceased mother. Her woeful social ineptitude renders her helpless, unable to reach out to others without becoming too attached; think Single White Female “lite” in the age of Instagram. She stumble onto the candid photos of lifestyle influencer Taylor Sloane (Elizabeth Olsen) and maneuvers her way into the stranger’s life, forging a “friendship.”

“I think the movie could have easily veered into the direction of being an indictment on social media, but I wanted it to be rooted in a human story about human connection,” Plaza says. “It’s about someone who really wants to have a connection, and they feel lonely and misunderstood, and that’s a universal feeling for human beings.”

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PIZZA PARADOX

Cosa Buona represents a very specific type of gentrification. It's also delicious

BY BESHA RODELL

In this city of ever-rising rents and ever-changing streetscapes, there are almost as many forms of gentrification as there are two-bedroom houses listed for more than a million bucks. There’s the old-fashioned land-grab version, wherein wealthier, whiter people buy up housing in an affordable neighborhood, rendering it no longer affordable. Then there’s the coffeehouse gentrification, art gallery gentrification — and from there all that’s left is for artsy, upper-middle-class Angelenos to be pushed out by more moneyed, less artsy New Yorkers and their cutely named toddler spawn.

Mixed up somewhere in all that is pizza gentrification. This phenomenon is slightly more meta than the rest: An old-school pizza place is bought and revamped and becomes a new-school pizza place, while appealing to both the gourmet pretensions and the nostalgic instincts of a gentrifying population that grew up eating in old-school pizza places. Upscale pizza is nothing new — just ask Wolfgang Puck and Nancy Silverton. And not everything that's fancy is a force of gentrification. But turning a cheap pizza joint in a newly expensive neighborhood into a pizza joint where you can sub out regular mozzarella for buffalo mozzarella? That’s pizza gentrification.

And ugh, I can’t help it — I like it. I liked it when Jon Shook and Vinny Dotolo did it at Jon & Vinny’s on Fairfax, replacing Damiano Pizza, and I like it at Cosa Buona in Echo Park, which replaced Pizza Buona. Yes, even the name was appropriated, a move by chef-owner Zach Pollack that probably felt to him like a respectful nod to the past but to some seems like a co-opting of a history Pollack had no part in building.

What Pollack has has a hand in building is the more recent tradition of very good pizza in L.A. As one of the opening chefs of Sotto (with Steve Samson), Pollack had an obsession — which included importing a 15,000-pound Stefano Ferrara oven from Italy — that resulted in pizza many still believe to be the city’s best. When Pollack left Sotto to open Alimento in Silver Lake, he focused on his own brand of Cali-Italian cooking, which didn’t include pizza.

A longing to return to the heat and reward of a great pizza oven was certainly a factor in Pollack’s opening of Cosa Buona, but the original kernel of inspiration was the chicken Parmesan sandwich he began selling at Alimento. The sandwich took all the elements of old-school chicken parm — battered and fried chicken, ham, melty cheese, soft bread — and ramped it up with high-quality ingredients. Pollack made it to satisfy his own hunger for the nostalgic flavors of Italian-American comfort food, but it kindled enough passion in his customers that he wondered if there might be potential for a whole restaurant based on that hunger. So he took over the Pizza Buona space on the corner of Sunset and Silverton. And not everything that’s fancy is a force of gentrification. But turning a cheap pizza joint in a newly expensive neighborhood into a pizza joint where you can sub out regular mozzarella for buffalo mozzarella? That’s pizza gentrification.

Unsurprisingly, the pizzas are wonderful — the crust dappled with just enough char and imbued with a mellow tang, the structure sturdy but stretchy. There’s no one pizza that’s superior to the rest, but I do recommend ordering the calzone, which is almost a pizza/salad hybrid, its contents of slightly wilted romaine in a caesar dressing spilling out of the crust along with a ton of capers and burrata. It oozes funk and crunch and freshness, and redefines the form in the best way possible.

Pollack slides into slightly more creative territory here and there, as with the soft-boiled eggs tonnato, a snack of eggs sliced over a creamy tuna sauce. It’s delicious and beautifully plated but decidedly outside the realm of things you might have found at a pizza joint in this neighborhood 10 years ago. It’s also the first dish that highlighted a bit of a disconnect between the kitchen and the wait staff, who are eager and friendly but often aren’t prepared for anything beyond basic questions. Asked about the eggs tonnato, a waitress said, “It’s eggs … with a kind of fish thing? It’s fish.”

There’s a short and fun wine list that’s meant to pair well with the food but also cater to the tastes of folks who might want something fairly simple to go with their pizza — yet most of the staff can only talk about the glass pours, and even there they seem awfully shaky. Fortunately, a manager on hand was happy to come by and discuss the ins and outs of the whole list.

And, of course, it’s expensive. If you order two pizzas, two desserts (or appetizers) and two glasses of wine — and once you add tax and the automatic 18 percent service charge — you’re looking at a $100-plus meal. It’s not exactly your casual family Tuesday night at the pizzeria. But neither is the food consistent with that kind of night — it’s much, much better. It’s the food of your youth but better and the pizza of your adulthood (but also probably better).

Is this a good thing for the neighborhood? Well, it’s sure as hell not going to help lower your rent if you live nearby. But it will put you within walking distance of some of the city’s best pizza.

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Restaurants that echo with history are getting harder and harder to find in Los Angeles. Change is inevitable, but it also creates a longing for permanence. Finding a hidden gem often presents a dilemma of whether to share it with those who will also care, or to keep it secreted away from potential oversaturation. But shining a light on things that matter can in the end help preserve them. The 94th Aero Squadron Restaurant, located in a remote and tucked-away place at the Van Nuys Airport, needs to be preserved and celebrated.

Opened in 1973 by David Tallichet, a World War II Army Air Corps veteran, as a means to share his love of all things aviation-related, the restaurant was modeled on a rustic Normandy farmhouse. Tallichet chose a spot on the sidelines of the airport’s long, straight runway and named it after the 94th Aero Squadron, a much revered U.S. Army Air Service unit during the first World War.

A sense of vintage magic abounds. Ivy wraps around white-washed and exposed brick, and a World War I propeller plane sits flirtatiously on the front lawn near vintage war Jeeps, a cart full of baled hay, some cannons and an honest-to-goodness World War II ambulance. Upon further inspection, gaping holes can be seen on the roof of the far end of the restaurant. You wonder what accident may have occurred here, until you find that this is merely the open-air patio roof, intentionally created to resemble a bombed-out Normandy bunker.

The food channels patriotism and a sentimentality for the red, white and blue. Specializing in prime rib, fish and chips, burgers, soups and salads, the restaurant does not deliver many surprises, but the dishes are done well. A Sunday champagne brunch buffet is a relaxing and casual way to get acquainted with the restaurant while taking in its atmosphere.

The reason many people fall in love with 94th Aero Squadron is the entertainment, which involves watching airplanes take off and land just beyond a chain-link fence separating the red-bricked patio area from the nearby runway. It is an enchanting vantage point to see the planes come racing through and brings an aura of excitement and romance.

Van Nuys Airport was built just before World War I, in a field growing banana squash, and has evolved into the longest and busiest general aviation runway in the world, with more than 700 airplanes coming and going every day. It was used as a location to *Casablanca* and was the place that Norma Jean Baker, before she became Marilyn Monroe, was “discovered” doing a photo shoot and subsequently offered her first screen test. Amelia Earhart used this runway, as did the much celebrated pilot Clay Lacy, who still eats here frequently. Clay coined the term “jet set” after regularly flying Frank Sinatra’s Rat Pack on a Learjet from this airport, equipped with a very necessary cocktail pouring service. There is a room dedicated to Clay and his lengthy aviation history.
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According to Karen “Martini” Marmont, who books rockabilly, swing and roots bands that play at 94th Aero Squadron on weekend evenings, “This runway is on every pilot’s bucket list.”

Marmont says that all of the war memorabilia lining the walls and hanging from the ceiling is authentic and donated by vets themselves, including uniforms, gas masks, airplane propellers, framed photographs and even torpedoes. A long communal table in the bar area was hand-carved from the wood of a World War II airplane by pilots just after the war ended and ultimately found its way to 94th Aero Squadron. It now bears a sign that says “Reserved: Pilots Only” and is occupied by everyone from 20-year-old helicopter pilots to 90-year-old war veterans. Model planes hang from the rafters above the table and are actual replicas of planes flown by regulars who have left the skies for the great beyond. —Nikki Kreuzer

16320 Raymer St., Van Nuys; (818) 994-7437, 94thVanNuys.com.


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**Canadian choreographer Aszure as the Sun**

Canadian choreographer Aszure Barton made a strong first impression last year with her powerful, theatrical Untouched for Los Angeles Ballet. L.A. has another chance to see Barton’s work, this time with her own Aszure Barton & Artists. The calling card is Awáa (the title translates as “one who is a mother” in a Canadian indigenous language). The 90-minute work follows a half-dozen men focused on a single woman and generally has received high praise from critics since its premiere in 2012. This is the first of three events this weekend as the Music Center pairs with the Ford Theatres under the banner Music Center on Location. On Saturday, fast-rising L.A. contemporary dance troupe Jacob Jonas the Company shares the stage with Tim Hecker’s electronic music, and Sunday welcomes multitalented Rufus Wainwright.

Ford Theatres, 2580 Cahuenga Blvd. E., Hollywood Hills; Fri., Aug. 18, 8:30 p.m.; $25-$45. (323) 461-3673; fordtheatres.org. —Ann Haskins

**Arts & Culture**

**Roaring Back**

At the Art Deco Festival at the Queen Mary, you can party like it’s 1934, the year the ship launched. Not just a Long Beach tourist attraction, the ocean liner is one of the most famous in the world, with a gorgeous art deco interior. Hosted by the Art Deco Society of Los Angeles, the festival’s highlights are Saturday’s ball, which includes a four-course meal and live music by the Dean Mora Orchestra (a portion of the proceeds benefit the 2017 Queen Mary art conservation project), and Sunday’s tea dance, which includes tea service, treats and music by Ian Whitcomb and His Bungalow Boys. Both days feature a vintage bazaar with one-of-a-kind collectibles and even hairstyling and lectures on the history of art deco design. Queen Mary, 1126 Queens Hwy., Long Beach; Sat., Aug. 19, 10 a.m.-11 p.m.; Sun., Aug. 20, 10 a.m.-7 p.m.; $25, $199 ball, $49 tea dance. (877) 348-0752, queenmary.com/events/art-deco-festival. —Siran Babayan

**Museums**

**All in the Family**

Natsumatsuri Family Festival is a gold mine of performances, crafts and activities for anyone with an interest in all things Japanese. Along with a traditional community Obon dance, there’ll be music by Japanese folk group Minyo Station and a joint performance by TaikoProject and Latino fusion band Quetzal. Other attractions include a family art project inspired by the museum’s current exhibitions (create an artwork about your family using light-sensitive paper), origami lessons, martial arts demonstrations, a samurai sword lecture and a karaoke open mic. Japanese American National Museum, 100 N. Central Ave., downtown; Sat., Aug. 15, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; free. (213) 625-0414, janm.org. —John Payne

**Comedy**

**Just Dewey It**

David Arquette, a producer-actor best known for his roles in Never Been Kissed and the Scream franchise and for being the brother of Patricia and Alexis Arquette and the ex-husband of Courteney Cox, is hitting the UCB stage for Improv With David Arquette. Improv actually runs in the family — David’s great-grandparents were vaudevillians, and his father, Lewis, was an established short-form improviser when David was growing up, working with improv pioneers Viola Spolin and Paul Sills in L.A. and was very involved with Second City in Chicago. The actor will perform three different long-form improvisational styles with three different teams. UCB Sunset, 5410 Sunset Blvd., East Hollywood; Sun., Aug. 20, 9 p.m.; $8. (323) 908-8702, sunset.ucbtheatre.com/performance/56201. —Katie Buenke
**SUN.** 8/21

**ASTRONOMY**

*There Goes the Sun*

The United States of America is about to experience its first total solar eclipse since 1979, and everyone is very pumped about it. People are booking flights to Middle America and paying jacked-up hotel prices to be in the ominous-sounding “path of totality,” where the sun will be completely blocked out for as long as 2½ minutes in some places. Here in L.A., we’ll only see 70 percent coverage of the sun’s surface, but it’s still bound to be cool. Organizations — scientific and otherwise — are hosting Solar Eclipse 2017 viewings, from L.A. Public Library branches to Glendale Community College’s planetarium, but the biggie is obviously Griffith Observatory, where you can watch from the grounds; the coelostat (solar telescope) will be available to visitors too. It’s bound to be busy, so the facility is recommending taking the DART bus from the Vermont/ Sunset Red Line station. Griffith Observatory, 2800 E. Observatory Road, Griffith Park; Mon., Aug. 21, 9 a.m.-noon; free, griffithobservatory.org. —Gwynedd Stuart

**MON.** 8/22

**PODCASTS**

*Down With the Sickness*

Between 1997 and 2011, MTV aired *Daria*, an animated series about a brainy, sardonic, deadpan suburban teenager, who had not low self-esteem but “low esteem for everyone else.” She was a heroine to many females, including Brittany Ashley and Laura Zak. Ashley is a writer-actress who’s created videos for BuzzFeed, and Zak co-wrote the 2016 Emmy-nominated web series *Her Story*, about transgender women. Ashley and Zak share their appreciation for the bespectacled redhead on their new podcast, *Sicker Sadder World*, where they break down Daria episodes and characters and how they relate to our current culture. For the podcast’s first live taping, the two will screen and discuss season-one episode “Malled” — the one where Daria and her classmates go on a field trip to “that repository of human greed and debasement” — with guests Gaby Dunn, Ira Madison III and Navid Sinaki, as well as singer Mindy James, who’ll perform a cover of the cartoon’s theme song, “You’re Standing on My Neck.” Segovia Hall at Ace Hotel, 929 S. Broadway, downtown; Tue., Aug. 22, 7 p.m.; free with RSVP. (213) 623-3233, acehotel.com/calendar/losangeles/sicker-sadder-world-podcast-live. —Siran Babayan

**TUE.** 8/23

**FOOD & DRINK**

*Aw, Shucks*

If there’s an art to eating oysters (there is), there’s certainly an art to preparing to consume them. Expand your knowledge on the topic at an *Oyster Shucking Workshop*. Executive chef Ron Armendariz, formerly of the Standard Hotel downtown, will show you everything you need to know about oysters’ preparation and presentation. You’ll learn about the sauces in which each variety can be best enjoyed, as well as a tasting of the wines with which they ought to be paired. You’ll also receive a bunch of handy oyster recipes, and a shucking knife to fend off vengeful oysters at home. Ebell of Los Angeles Dining Room, 741 S. Lucerne Blvd., Mid-Wilshire; Wed., Aug. 23, 3 p.m.; $50, $45 member (reserve by Mon., Aug. 21). (323) 931-1277, ebellventickets.com. —David Cotner

**THU.** 8/24

**BOOKS**

*The Life of Brian*

You can fill a small library with books about Queen. But *Queen in 3-D*, which Brian May signs tonight, is not only the first book written by an actual member but the first to feature images of the band in 3-D. Published by May’s London Stereoscopic Company, and accompanied by a nifty, yellow “OWL” stereoscope viewer, the 300-plus photographs were taken mostly by the legendary guitarist using a stereo camera and have never been seen. May traces the band’s entire existence with Freddie Mercury, as well as with Paul Rodgers and Adam Lambert, and captures everything from the group recording, touring, shooting videos and at awards shows to Mercury drinking wine in the back of a limo and sitting under a hair dryer at a Paris salon. *Book Soup, 8818 Sunset Blvd., West Hollywood; Thu., Aug. 24, 6 p.m.; $20. (310) 659-3110, booksoup.com.* —Siran Babayan

**SHOPPING**

*To Market*

There’s a new flea market in town, and it’s 100 percent vegan, queer and family-friendly. “We are about breaking down barriers and opening up communities and acknowledging all genders, sexualities, abilities and peoples,” says Iris Green, a cookbook author, educator and nutritional activist who is behind the *East Los Queer Flea Market*, along with drag persona, community leader and POC LGBTQ advocate Phillip Hurt. Vendors sell everything from herbal tinctures and art to clothing, terrariums and hand-crafted pipes. There’s also an open mic and an altar celebrating the lives of trans women who were murdered this year. As Green explains, “The idea is that queer is about the individual defining themselves. This is a space and place for people to feel safe inside their definition of that identity.” Green’s Center for Plant Based Nutrition and Gluten Free Education, 4906 E. Olympic Blvd., East LA; Thu., Aug. 24, 7 p.m.; free. (323) 422-5762, facebook.com/events/929266340549830. —Tanja M. Laden
Sundance Institute is proud to thank the sponsors of 2017 SUNDANCE NEXT FEST

Together we celebrate movies, music, and the mischievous spirit of independent artists.
When Venus Over Los Angeles titled its summer show of six female artists “CUNT,” a sort of low buzz began among female art worlders in L.A.

All-women shows proliferate these days, especially shows of “overlooked women” who began working in the 1950s, ’60s and ’70s, as did all the artists featured in “CUNT.”

Longtime Angeleno Susan Mogul jokes that she’s been fetishized as a “vintage artist.” Penny Slinger, who turns 70 this year, says she’d like “some recognition … not only for the old work,” even as Blum & Poe peddles her 1970s collages. Shows such as Hauser & Wirth’s recent “Revolution in the Making: Abstract Sculpture by Women” do wonders for making visible work of female art worlders in L.A.

Certainly, the artists in “CUNT” — Valie Export, Dorothy Iannone, Carolee Schneemann, Judith Bernstein, Marilyn Minter and Betty Tompkins — deserve all the attention and exposure they can get. Their work, too rarely seen before the 2000s, explores sexuality in daring ways. Even so, is it OK to use derogatory slang for a female body part as a show’s title or does it just reinforce stereotypes that artists are working to break?

“There’s been a lot of feedback about the title,” says Anna Fury, the Venus Over Los Angeles partner who organized this show. She insists that “CUNT,” unlike blanket all-women shows, is organized around subject matter and theme — all the women in it were and are purposefully doing work about gender and sexuality. “The word ‘cunt’ is inherently negative, but the idea is that if you take back the power of the language as a speaker and you redirect it, the negativity can be mitigated,” she says. Of the title, she adds, “It’s actually something that the women in the show were all really adamant about keeping.”

“We thought it was exciting and really very bold,” says Betty Tompkins, whose monochromatic paintings and drawings of female genitalia are titled, among other things, Cow Cunt, Ersatz Cunt and Cunt Grid. Also, she adds, “I was in a show earlier this season … called ‘Dicks,’ and next season I’m going to be in a show called ‘Hard.’ I’m covering all my bases.” Marilyn Minter says, “The word ‘cunt’ is so loaded. But that’s what we’re called. We’re reclaiming words that were used to put us down.” Her 1992 enamel painting White Cotton Panties hails from a time in her career when her sexually explicit work was, in her words, “exorcized.”

“I pushed for it!” Bernstein says of the title via email. “CUNT is the last bastion of crudité!” (In French, crudité means rawness.)

Bernstein’s charcoal drawings of vertical screws hang from the ceiling in the sunlit first gallery. In the darkened second gallery, her aggressive and colorful glow-in-the-dark opuses hang on the walls. Her two Cuntface paintings show a vulva with teeth and eyes exploding. “I use Cuntface as a metaphor for the Big Bang,” she says.

“I hate essentialism. I’m allergic to essentialism,” Minter says when asked if centering a show of women around sexual-ity could be reductive. Maybe it could be, but not this show with these artists, she explains: “All of us were so radical that people were appalled by what we were doing and they still are. I think of what essentialism is and it wouldn’t embrace us.”

Minter sees this show as ideally suited to this particular moment, when we have a “pussy grabber” commander-in-chief and a vice president who refuses to be alone in a room with women other than his wife. “It’s really about women owning the agency of sexual production, which has never happened — it might be the last taboo.” Unlike Tompkins and Bernstein, she’d never before used the word “cunt” in her work, but now she’s making a series of videos: My Cuntry tis of Thee, No Cuntry for Old Men.

“It’s the most terrifying thing there is for women to own their sexuality, for men [and for] women who want to be taken care of by the patriarchy,” Minter says. “For women to make sexual images for their own amusement seems to bring out the worst in people. But the gesture has to be made.”

“I’m certainly not going to call them VAGINA PAINTINGS.”

— BETTY TOMPKINS

Minter’s suite of auto-biographical drawings from 1968 fills a vitrine in the main gallery, always depicting her figure’s genitals. A woman may be fully dressed but with breasts and genitals exposed. A man in pants and a button-down shirt will still have his penis out. In 1969, in a show in Bern, Switzerland, the otherwise progressive-seeming curator Harald Szeemann put brown tape over her figure’s privates. “Your films aren’t really films,” peers told Schneemann. Export heard similar criticism. But too often, galleries, curators and institutions refused to pay attention.

“It was rejected forever,” says Tompkins, who began painting vulvas in the late 1960s. “I didn’t really get any recognition or any exposure until 2002.” That year, her first solo show at Mitchell Algus Gallery was written up in the New York Times.

Early on, Tompkins based her paintings on porn her then-husband had ordered from Singapore, then smuggled into the United States from Canada — the imagery, while illegal, was also vanilla. “I originally did just heterosexual sex, money-shot close-ups,” she says. Now that her access to imagery has broadened, her subject matter has broadened and her approach has become lusher. Her recent airbrushed images have an ethereal quality, as if they’re being viewed through a light mist. “The culture has changed enough to accept them, because these are beautiful paintings and they have charge, which is what I always wanted to do.” Her titles, however, are blunt as ever. “I’m certainly not going to call them vagina paintings.”

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Judith Bernstein’s Cuntface Red (2015)
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- On antiretroviral therapy for at least 6 months
- T-cell count at or above 100

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

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**Stage**

**TILDA TO THE RESCUE**

Tilda Swinton surprises a suicidal man in a campy new stage comedy

BY DEBORAH KLUGMAN

In *Tilda Swinton Answers an Ad on Craigslist*, Byron Lane’s shtick-filled comedy at Celebration Theatre, a flamboyant figure claiming to be actress Tilda Swinton (Tom Lenk) shows up on the doorstep of a suicidal man named Walt (Lane) and inspires him to accept himself and get on with his life.

“Tilda Swinton” is a curious name to attach to this character. In real life, Swinton is an actress who emanates strength and intelligence, has a British family pedigree that goes back to the Norman Conquest, and has moved in intellectual and left-leaning political circles throughout her life. (She flirted with Marxism in her youth.) By contrast, Lenk’s drama queen cavorts in the style of Gloria Swanson or some other tart-tongued, camera-worshipping celebrity. This love-the-limelight individual is an androgynous blond who makes an entrance in an all-white, fantastical fairy-godmother sort of robe (eventually discarded for simpler but still blindingly white garb).

The reason Tilda’s seeking proximity to Walt is so he can use Walt as a character model for his next film, still in development. Drab Walt is dazzled. In the midst of Tilda’s prattling and prancing, Walt’s buff, baby-faced ex-boyfriend (Mark Jude Sullivan) makes a return visit. He’s as narcissistic as Tilda is, if that’s possible; the two, sharing similar self-love philosophies, make a brief connection. Later the same actor returns as Walt’s stuffy accountant Dad, who wants Walt to come into the family business (one reason Walt’s doing trial runs of plastic bags over his head). Dad briefly has it out with Walt’s mom (Jayne Entwistle), who’s also shown up to spend an evening with Walt watching *The Bodyguard* (one of her favorites, as it speaks to a woman’s need to be cared for).

Directed by Tom DeTrinis, Lenk performs with flawless aplomb; if his character is a campy caricature, well, it’s an admirably crisp, well-paced one. In multiple roles, both Sullivan and Entwistle prove skilled comedians. (Besides Walt’s mom, Entwistle plays both Tilda’s assistant and a fast-food delivery person, whose scene at the end generates the piece’s sole genuine moment.) Sullivan and Entwistle got more laughs from me than Lenk simply because the jokes attached to them were based on real human behavior rather than Tilda’s pseudo–movie star antics. As Walt, Lane’s too content to play straight man for the others; he never stirs much interest.

The main problem comes down to the script, which features a smattering of laugh lines but too few in a show that, promised to run 60 minutes, ran 20 minutes longer. There’s a lot of reiteration and excess silliness — not, for my money, the inspired kind. It reminded me of a diet soda, carbonated and empty. Some folks found it funny, so I guess if you’re a person who enjoys stylized camp for its own sake, you might, too.

**TILDA SWINTON ANSWERS AN AD ON CRAIGSLIST**

| Celebration Theatre at the Lex, 6760 Lexington Ave., Hollywood | Through Aug. 31 | celebrationtheatre.com |

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dublab
future, roots, radio.
when actor-director Justin Chon was 11, his father took him on a tour of the Los Angeles riots of 1992 and left without a word to the family’s shoe store in Paramount, a relatively poor, 4.8-square-mile city bordered by Compton and Downey.

“In a lot of Korean families, when something’s wrong, people don’t say anything. They just react,” Chon says. “The verdict was about to come out, and as the day progressed, you could feel the energy change. Then the riots broke out.”

Chon was watching live as Reginald Denny was pulled from his truck and beaten. That footage then played on repeat. “It was movie-level violence,” he says. And then came footage of Korean store owners defending their businesses with guns and improvised weapons. “I was like, ‘Does this mean we have to move, have to change schools, make new friends?”

As Chon got older, he returned to these memories again and again. His family’s shoe store was looted during the riots, though his father was unhurt. But the image of Denny and the pervasive anger and fear blanketing the city was something that he, as an actor and filmmaker, desperately wanted to reassess. Yet every role he read for in films about the L.A. uprising seemed to miss the mark of how those events affected individual people, especially Korean-Americans.

As writer-director of his sophomore feature, Gook, Chon doesn’t take the riots head-on, from the perspective of someone at ground zero of the unrest. Instead, he takes a long view, looking at the day leading up to the verdict and riots through the eyes of two families who are removed geographically a few miles from the violence but affected by it just the same — as Chon himself was.

In the film, an 11-year-old African-American girl named Kamilla (Simone Beker) has befriended two Korean-American brothers — Eli (Chon) and Daniel (David So) — who own and operate their late father’s ramshackled women’s shoe shop. The three are inextricably tied for life, because Kamilla’s mother and her men’s father were both shot and killed in a holdup at the store, many years earlier. Kamilla’s brother Keith (Curtiss Cook Jr.) blames the brothers for his mother’s death and subsequent poverty. Leading up to the verdicts, TVs and radios are tuned to the news, setting a tense backdrop for a showdown between the two families.

“When I went out to pitch the project — it’s the craziest thing — it perplexed people, that it was a film about a Korean store owner and an 11-year-old black girl,“ Chon says. “It blew my mind that they couldn’t wrap their head around it, that these people would have relationships if they’re in the same neighborhoods.” Potential financiers were even more confused that the character of Daniel was aspiring to be an R&B singer — it seemed news to them that Korean-Americans could be inspired by American pop. So it became ever more important to Chon, having lived through the experience, to represent the people and riots as they really were — not as our popular culture usually imagined them.

The director even cast his own father in a pivotal role, as Mr. Kim, a traditional corner-store owner who refuses to speak English and butts heads with young Korean-American men who want so badly to assimilate and thrive. But in convincing him to take the part, Chon found his father didn’t remember the riots with the same curiosity he did. “My dad is really grumpy. I wrote the part for him. But he was confused as to why I wanted to revisit this time. It took him three months to commit.”

Still, the experience of directing his father proved significant for both. Chon found it was the first time that his dad seemed to view them each as “kind of equals, rather than with me lower than him in this Korean-American age hierarchy.”

Chon compares how his father reacted to the riots 25 years ago — getting in his car and driving away with no emotion — to how emotive he was on set while playing the role of Mr. Kim. “I’ve never experienced anything like that with him before,” Chon says with more than a hint of pride in his voice.

The cast worked together for two months of rehearsal, almost as though Chon were directing a play. (“They weren’t beholden to their marks. They could do whatever they wanted on the shoot day, but I wanted them to feel comfortable.”)

Since Baker was so young, they didn’t have much time with him, and Chon had the uncomfortable task of having this little girl the history of the riots.

“Her mom really needed to be a part of the team,” Chon says. “So we talked a lot during those two months — about social issues, talking about each specific scene and what it meant. Obviously, [Baker] has no connection to this event emotionally, so it was hard for her to understand the gravity of the situation.”

As is the case with many films directed by actors, the nuanced, emotional performances drive Gook’s story. Chon believes both Baker and Cook are destined to be stars, and critics have celebrated both. Cook creates a multilayered character in Keith. As the actor performs “thuggish” actions — like jumping David So’s character and plotting to loot the shoe store — he conveys that Keith himself is also performing, trying to be someone’s not. To portray vulnerability, even as you soak someone in the face, is extraordinarily difficult.

Since Chon made this Sundance-premiered film on a shoestring budget, he’s still vowed that he’s getting a limited theatrical run. But the warm reception to the film in its limited run, especially the reactions from his family, has him excited. “People shy away from talking about what they actually want to say,” Chon says. “We need to respect each other. But if we’re not actually talking, I think it’s just a bunch of tip toeing around it.”

And Chon, who has relentlessly spoken out about race and discrimination in Hollywood, is the first to say he invites discussion and criticism about the portrayals in his film.

“Look, we’d be far better to one another in this country if we just talked, if we hit things head on.”
Without Rhyme or Reason

FEEL-GOOD RAPER COMEDY PATTI CAKES DOESN’T EARN ITS MIC

BY MELISSA ANDERSON

The story beats of Patti Cakes, a socioeconomic sermonizing comedy about a thick young white woman with huge hip-hop dreams and little prospects, are as predictable as the ticking of an egg timer, as generic and tinny as the pulses of a drum machine.

“Terry the bigger the girl/the deeper the pain,” Patti raps at one rookie showcase, the lyrics (also written by Jasper) providing the title, but for more MC Lyte, the hip-hop oracle whose brief appearance in Geremy Jasper’s feature debut remains the movie’s sole unadulterated pleasure and surprise.

“Why don’t you act your age?” Patti tells Barb during a set-to. “Why don’t you act your age?” demands some actual reflection. The character, at least initially, tentuously links to the one moment in Patti Cakes that demands some actual reflection. “Why don’t you act your age?” Patti tells Barb during a set-to at the kitchen table. Mom’s response, rushed and almost inaudible: “Why don’t you act your age?”

“Why don’t you act your age?”

the goons she grew up with, the striving microphone controller often looks in the mirror and delivers some variation on this self-assessment: “You’re a boss bitch.”

The white Precious,” as one rival calls her, may be trying to master a musical genre known for ingenious metaphors and similes, but Patti Cakes rarely rises above the literal. Visual redundancies abound: “Let’s go to the diner,” her desexualized pal and beat-boxing collaborator Hareesh (Siddarth Dhananjay) suggests after a gas-station rap battle — his request immediately followed by a screen-filling sign reading DINNER. The friends will soon be joined by a black noise-rocker who answers to “The white Precious,” as one rival calls her, may be trying to master a musical genre known for ingenious metaphors and similes, but Patti Cakes rarely rises above the literal. Visual redundancies abound: “Let’s go to the diner,” her desexualized pal and beat-boxing collaborator Hareesh (Siddarth Dhananjay) suggests after a gas-station rap battle — his request immediately followed by a screen-filling sign reading DINNER. The friends will soon be joined by a black noise-rocker who answers to

“Why don’t you act your age?”

PATTI CAKES | Directed and written by Geremy Jasper | Fox Searchlight

AirLine Hollywood, Landmark

OPENING THIS WEEK

DAVE MADE A MAZE Andrei Tarkovsky’s Stalker (1979) depicted a more haunting, agonizingly slow crossing into the heart of darkness than Francis Ford Coppola’s Apocalypse Now would a few months later. In Tarkovsky’s gorgeously shot film, two men hire a guide, or “stalker,” to take them into a mysterious restricted zone that seems to be alive, and which can only be traversed along an invisible path. Like Stalker, director Bill Watterson’s impressively visual Dave Made a Maze concerns a group of people attempting to navigate a living and hostile territory seeded with threats. Dave (Nick Thune), a frustrated artist, builds a cardboard maze in his apartment. Its interior is vastly larger than the exterior, and Dave becomes lost as the maze expands; his girlfriend Annie (Meera Rohit Kumari), along with the crew of a documentary filmmaker (James Urbaniak), crosses its threshold to find him. It’s kind of an artisanal, Brooklyn-y riff on Stalker, the maze haunted by a crafty cardboard minotaur, its passages winding through sculptural, handcrafted dead-trap, forced-perspective illusions and elaborate art galleries themed on playing cards and piano keyboards. The film is deceptively cute — in one sequence, the characters are transformed into paper-bag puppets — but its heart is dark. Cardboard is cheap, and by marshaling a tiny budget toward craft-store set design, Watterson builds a movie that’s genuinely bigger on the inside. (Chris Packham)

GOOK Justin Chon’s electric and impassioned Gook, a comic drama tinged with tragedy, is set on the day in 1992 when South-Central L.A. erupted after the acquittal of the police officers who beat Rodney King. Often, it’s a powerful corrective: We witness the story behind the stereotypical image of a Korean shopkeeper caught up in ugly confrontations with customers. This shopkeeper, played by Chon’s father, pulls a gun on a preteen African-American girl, Kamilla (Simone Baker), who he believes has been shoplifting; later, as he listens to other Korean business owners on the radio discussing attacks on their stores, he explains to a young Korean-American man that, back home, every man had to serve in the military. At Gook’s best, Chon captures, with sharply memorable dialogue, both the essence of particular characters and the drift of generations. Chon and David So play Americanized brothers who inherited their late father’s shoe store; the initial hangout is more accomplished and often prickingly tense. The other film that

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—THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

“ONE OF THOSE RARE MOVIES WHERE YOU COME OUT A BETTER PERSON THAN WHEN YOU WENT IN.”

Dante Spinotti, Cinematographer

“L.A. CONFIDENTIAL”

LA WEEKLY // August 18 - 24, 2017 // www.lawweekly.com
of thing you’ll like. Here’s what Patrick If you like this sort of thing, it’s the sort to be, but more so. It’s the hard-R action talk fast and funny, each scoring lots of on-there’s a plot going on that we’re meant tasked with reminding us that, oh yes, forever caught in sequences rather than a hardware store (axes, nail guns). We’re restaurant kitchen (chucked cast-iron skillets, going to be, minus ‘70s/’80s-era. But as writer-producer-editor-director, Sanders is deeply committed to this love story of free-spirited pragmatists, with an impossible guileless Madison ideally paired with the heartfelt Neri. Sanders takes the elements of teen exploitation films and fashions a simple, placid return to innocence. (Seren Donadoni)

LOGAN LUCKY In Steven Soderbergh’s hillbilly heist comedy, the West Virginia prison where vault specialist Joe Bang (Daniel Craig) resides is pristine and peaceful. While only a small part of this ca- per takes place in the prison, this setting is indicative of a tone Soderbergh excels at in his studio comedies; on the surface, these stories are unencumbered by deeper so-cio-political struggles. In a word: Fun! Good of Jimmy Logan (Channing Tatum) gets fired from his excavation job at a NASCAR track because of his limp. It might’ve been easy for a filmmaker to exploit that for sympathy, showing us how difficult life is for this blue-collar guy in poverty-stricken America. Instead, Logan hatches a 10-step plan for breaking into the track’s under-ground cash vault. This plan is scrawled on a note that Jimmy’s bro Clyde (Adam Driver) discovers — “I see you’ve got a ro-bbery to do list on the refrigerator.” Then the plot twists, as the bros hire Joe and his bros. It’s lot to explain, with regard to the setting and the mechanics of the caper, but Soderbergh rarely gets bogged down in details. First-time screenwriter Rebecca Blunt (rumored to be Jules Asner, Soderbergh’s wife) never complicates things past a Robin Hood framing. If Asner really did write this script, I can only imag- ine “Soderbergh and Soderbergh” tagline blazed at “Ocean’s 7-11,” uttered by a reporter describing the thieves. If Soderbergh’s first Ocean’s had a pitch-perfect ensemble cast, this down-home version matches up in every way. (April Wolfe)

MARJORIE PRIME Leave it to Michael Almereyda (Experimenter) to make a science-fiction movie that consists of little more than smoke and mirrors, as two characters talking in plumply appointed living rooms. Marjorie Prime, adapted from Jordan Harrison’s play, takes place in an unspeci-fied future, when intelligent holograms of deceased loved ones (known as “Primes”) have emerged as a common method of dealing with grief. The first dialogue scene positions Marjorie (Lois Smith), who is in her 90s and fighting dementia, and her hus-band, in conversation with the much-younger- looking Prime (Jon Hamm) of her late husband, Walter. She sits on a sofa, occa-sionally taking a scoop of peanut butter as she speaks to the Prime of beloved memo- ries (one involves the ’90s Julia Roberts rom-com My Best Friend’s Wedding, which, suspecting, gets employed as a structural device); the Prime sits, rigidly and firmly, on a couch across from her. Like most of the interactions in the movie — which gradu- ally sneaks forward in time without fanfare and comes to involve Marjorie’s daughter, Tess (Gene Davis), and Tess’ husband, Jon (Tim Robbins) — this introductory chat calmly and poignantly peels back emo-tional layers, dredging up past tragedies and revealing still-present grievances. Almereyda reaches a peak near the end when Tess and a Prime, in half-darkness, listen to the Band singing “I Shall Be Released”; Davis’ profound silence — head swaying, eyes open one moment, closed tenderly the next — communicates emo-tionally in a movie that personally has words to spare. (Danny King)

THE MONSTER PROJECT What’s that go-ing bump in the night? It’s the camera operator in a “found footage”–style horror film careening into a wall. In The Monster Project, writer-director Victor Mathieu doesn’t always orient us in space, but he’s careful to give us broad strokes of characters, so we can’t quite grasp what’s happening, we always know where it’s happening to. In the early scenes, Mathieu highlights the tension among a group of filmmakers as they arrange inter- views with three supposed monsters for a YouTube show. The subjects, when they ar-ive, are creepy and distinctive — the skin-walker (Steven Flores) is a gruff cop from a nearby reservation; the vampire (Yvoone Zima) makes a seductive play for a crew member; the demon-possessed girl (Shiori Ida) is shy from trauma. Naturally, the power goes out, the full moon rises and the YouTubers are bolting from three different monsters in a creepy old house, Scooby-Doo style. It’s sometimes tough to follow the action, but for a while it’s breathless fun. Sadly, the creatures are more like scares in a carnival haunted house — never intersecting, just waiting their turn to pop out of the shadows and roar. (Rob Staeger)

THE KING OF SPAIN (LA REINA DE ESPAÑA) Penelope Cruz and Zooey Deschanel’s gang are back — but, sadly, the chemistry in writer-director Fernando Trueba’s sequel, The Queen of Spain, seem as if they were more fun to film than to watch. Reprising her 1998 role as Macarena Granada, Cruz is luminous as an actress returning to 1950s Spain after becoming a Hollywood star. Years after director Blas Fontenivas (Antonio Resines) propelled her to fame, Granada’s place becomes the subject of a Time magazine cover — a American film featuring a cast filled out by her raucous Dreams cohorts. Fontenivas, meanwhile, has emerged from hiding after doing time in a concentration camp. Before long, he’s sent off to perform forced labor for Franco, and the boisterous crew members attempt high-stakes hijinks to rescue their once-looker leader. While Deschanel and Mackie fill out small supporting roles (as a hammy, predatory leading man and a Connie screenwriter, respectively), a Princess Bride reunion isn’t in. In fact, it’s hard to place The Queen at all. Is it a serious social critique of Franco’s dictatorship? A silly escape flick? A paean to the Golden Ages of Hollywood? The Queen may be all of those for familiar with Dreams; but this uneven film glosses over too much — and runs too long. Sumptuous production and costume design coupled with Jose Luis Alcaine’s expert cinematography make it a feast for the eyes ... but there’s not much substance. (Tabata Crane)

The rise of the incarceration bios. (April Wolfe)
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A PASSAGE TO PUNJAB
L.A.-based DJ and filmmaker Arshia Fatima Haq traveled to Pakistan to document Sufi devotional music, a tradition under attack from the Taliban

BY CHRIS KISSEL

On a chilly day in the winter of 2014, Arshia Fatima Haq sat on the edge of a small, stone concert hall stage in Hyderabad, Pakistan, and placed a digital recorder on a thin rug, a couple feet from a singer named Shazia Tarannum.

“It was the worst place to record, because the ceilings were so high and there was no insulation,” Haq says. But, she adds, “Her voice could cut through an iceberg.”

In the recording, which is included on the album Haq recently compiled — Ishq Ke Maare: Sufi Songs From Sindh and Punjab, Pakistan — Tarannum’s voice sounds as if it’s physically rising toward the rafters, melting through more notes or the low thrum of traffic often are heard in the background, behind performances that balance unwavering devotion with unrestrained emotion, a kind of physically overwhelming desire for holy communion.

“For these Sufis,” Haq writes in the liner notes, “sound is the gateway to the realm of paradise, the tidal force through which one can attain visaal, or the mystical union with God.”

Ishq Ke Maare captures intimate moments Haq experienced with singers and musicians in Pakistani shrines, concert halls and living rooms. Coughing, talking or the low thrum of traffic often are heard in the background, behind performances that balance unwavering devotion with unrestrained emotion, a kind of physically overwhelming desire for holy communion.

Haq was born 1,100 miles away, in Hyderabad, India — to an orthodox Muslim family. From an early age, she was captivated by Sufi music, which she discovered via her father’s cassette tapes of qawwals, a form popular in the Indian subcontinent. It’s a full-throated music that doubles as a highly personal, energetic method of worship — a counterpoint to the strict practices of her childhood.

“I was more immersive and creative and emotional, versus all the rules that I was getting,” Haq says. “I was raised with this idea that there was one way to do things, but I saw that there were other ways to do things, and the music was one way to do that.”

Haq’s family immigrated from India to the United States when she was 5. In 2001, she moved to L.A., where she earned an MFA in experimental filmmaking at CalArts, and went on to work in film, visual art and experimental sound. In 2012, she founded Discostan.

Not long afterward, the music of her childhood drew her back. In late 2013, Haq crossed from India into Pakistan for the first time, and set out with a camera and a microphone to document.

The music Haq recorded is a traditional music, one whose melodies are passed down through generations and whose words are based on quotations from Sufi saints. In performance, those words are uttered fervently, and the music is stretched and improvised, each moment like a shared epiphany.

Haq recorded several styles, including qawwals — raw versions of the kinds of songs she knew in her youth. One of them, the driving “Jo Tera Gham Na Ho,” credited to Kalyam Shariff Qawwals Troupe, features rolling tabla, billowing harmonium and a chorus of devotees singing verses up from their bellies. She also recorded kalaam, like the Shazia Tarannum piece — sung verse delivered in a more solitary, soul-baring fashion — as well as other styles specific to the regions she visited.

In recent years, fundamentalists have targeted Sufism, bombing shrines and attacking prominent qawwals performers. Superstar vocalist Amjad Sabri, of the internationally renowned Sabri Brothers, was gunned down last summer in an attack claimed by the Pakistani Taliban.

In February of this year, a shrine Haq had visited, Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, was bombed by terrorists, killing 88 worshipers.

“It was really difficult recording in Pakistan — it is a place that is very turbulent. Being there, there’s a lot of anxiety,” Haq says. “When I heard [about the shrine bombing], I realized nothing is sacred for these people.”

Haq ultimately made two trips to Pakistan to record audio and video, but when she returned to the United States, she wasn’t quite sure how to present all the film she had recorded. Ultimately, she decided to delay the film project, and contacted Alan Bishop of Sublime Frequencies, a label known for releases of unvarnished music from places “world music” labels often ignore. Bishop agreed to put Haq’s audio recordings as a vinyl LP. “They have a very intimate sound,” Bishop says. “[It’s] as though you are present. And the tracks are very expressive, and exciting.”

Haq took a personal approach to assembling the album, sequencing tracks as a narrative and highlighting meaningful moments from her travels.

“It’s a love letter — I always say that about Discostan, a love letter to the music,” Haq says. “[I chose] whatever appealed to me the most, or was the most emotional.”

Largely what appealed to Haq was the bravery and defiance the musicians displayed, in the face of violence that threatens their mode of creation and sometimes their lives. “I think the musicians who are using songs as part of their devotional expression are radical. It’s a resistance movement, especially to the dominant fundamentalist [outlook]. They sing about political themes, and the saints were agitators for people’s rights. There is definite sociopolitical content. [The album] is paying homage to that part.”

In that sense, perhaps, Haq has created something of her own samo, a Sufi concept describing the sacred space between performer and audience where each person’s devotion can become intertwined. It’s also a direct channel to a kind of pure release a world away that reminds us of the urgency of its performers’ beliefs, and perhaps reaffirms our own.

“I don’t need a speaker, I don’t need amplification — I am the folk singer,” Fatah Daupoto says, before playing a piece called “As Mil Yasa.” “Folk means folk singing based upon voice. It’s not based upon the mechanical or the digital or the instrument or other things. Folk means natural. Immediate.”

He clears his throat.

The piece is a kalaam, a solitary devotional, with words written by Bulleh Shah, a Sufi saint who died in 1757. Daupoto’s voice drones, then soars over intermittently plucked ektara. “All loves wander,” he sings in Punjabi. “If I wander, so what?”
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AFTER SPENDING NEARLY HALF HIS LIFE IN PRISON, TYSON CROOKMIND HAS FOUND REDEMPTION THROUGH RAP

BY JEFF WEISS

Tyson Crookmind’s life story demands cinematic adaptation. You’d sell it to a Hollywood executive as a cross between Boyz n the Hood, The Shawshank Redemption and Straight Outta Compton.

Fade in on the Fremont District, between Central Avenue and Broadway, 92nd Street to Florence. It’s the mid-’80s and crack has conquered. As a child, Crookmind ran these blocks, raised by his mother and grandmother, after his father went to jail when the future rapper was just 3. After his release, Crookmind’s father would open legendary Inglewood nightclub the Dynasty, frequented by everyone from Showtime-era Lakers stars to Mike Tyson.

Crookmind’s uncles were more than a decade older, breakdancers who taught him about Doug E. Fresh, Whodini and Run-D.M.C. He fell in love with hip-hop just in time to receive the transmissions of asphalt wisdom from Ruthless Records, Death Row, Mac Dre, DJ Quik, 2Pac and E-40 that came later.

Before he began junior high, the streets were already calling.

“In the third grade, I told myself, ‘Imma sell dope and play basketball,’” Crookmind tells me, dressed in crisp blue jeans and a custom-made shirt with two cherries on it, an allusion to a Blood set but also his underground street hit, “Keep It Cherry,” released earlier this year. His watch and bracelet are diamond-encrusted and blindingly expensive.

“My uncle was the man of the house, a superhero to me, and I seen him and his friends do a bunch of shit,” Crookmind continues. “I had all the things that I wanted back then mapped out. And I got them; I accomplished all that bullshit in the streets.”

It also landed him 16 years, starting at age 18, in penitentiaries scattered across the state. While he was incarcerated on robbery and kidnapping charges, prosecutors pinned a murder charge on him from a previously cold case. Then a knife was found in his cell, another offense meriting a strike on his record.

By 23, he faced the terrifyingly real prospect of dying behind bars. But while in solitary confinement, he experienced a transformative spiritual epiphany.

“In this small little square room, I ended up motherfucking crying — not because I’m scared but because I was asking God, ‘Why me? Why is all this shit happening?’” Crookmind says. He speaks quietly, with the intensity of someone who has seen the unspeakable. The tears weren’t cowardice but catharsis, from decades of stress and trauma.

“All I had was my fucking heart, my will to survive and will to prove to myself that, irrespective of what everybody told me, I know who I am, what I’m worth and what I’m capable of,” Crookmind continues. “Once I cried, it felt great. It purified the soul.”

He dedicated himself to his own education, absorbing books and wisdom passed down to him from other inmates, many of whom were serving life sentences: the Egyptian Book of the Dead, Harriet Beecher Stowe, the Koran and the Bible, Shakespeare, Greek mythology, John Steinbeck. He also began writing raps, many of which wound up on his excellent debut, Free the Real, which dropped earlier this summer.

He finally obtained his freedom in late 2015, much too late to attend the funeral of his father, who was murdered in his Rolls-Royce in 2011. Until the biopic beckons, the stories are all in the music: a tale of tragedy, pain and ultimate redemption.

“I’m an instrument, a vessel in the universe bearing a message,” Crookmind says. “I’m here to share my experiences in case you don’t have a daddy or a brother that’s still here. I don’t give a fuck what society says, I’m going to tell these stories regardless. That’s why I’m out of prison. What other purpose do I have to live?”

An L.A. native, Jeff Weiss is the founder of Passion of the Weiss and POW Recordings, and hosts the monthly POW Radio on Dublab (99.1 FM). Follow him on Twitter @passionweiss.

PHOTO BY ALEX KIM

Tyson Crookmind

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THE MAN WITH THE BEST WORDS

On 12-30-15, at a campaign stop in South Carolina, comrade Trump got his pre-lathered fans extra gooey by beating up on President Obama and his administration’s achievements, or lack thereof, in Syria. Trump expressed his exasperation at using the word “incompetent” and, in his ceaseless quest to make America great again, had to call Obama apparently what he is — stupid.

“The world has blown up around Barack Obama. Now I don’t know if you saw his recent release, they were talking about the department of state, State Department, and they said, very strongly, the things that they’ve done. Well, they couldn’t find any because what have they done that’s good? And they said, ‘bringing peace to Syria.’ Did you see that? So instead of saying they made a mistake, call it a typo, they made a mistake, they’re trying to justify it. ‘Well, we meant we’re working on it.’ Can you believe, bringing peace to Syria? ... The level of stupidity is incredible. I’m telling you, I used to use the word incompetent, now just call them stupid.

Actually, the State Department did basically say they were “working on it.” The statements that same December from John Kirby, the State Department’s spokesman at the time, are online and can be read in full by anyone who’s inclined.

So, if President Obama’s every sentence was routinely deconstructed to root out the America-hating, islam-first sentiment, Trump supporters should expect the same scrutiny to be exacted on Trump’s statements, for their incompetence, stupidity and comedic payoff.

Let’s look at some of the verbal roadkill the non sequitur ending of a young poet’s absurdist anti-joke said in a Parisian salon on the non sequitur of a young poet’s absurdist anti-joke said in a Parisian salon on

Our country encourages freedom of speech, but let’s communicate w/o hate in our hearts. No good comes from violence.

We ALL must be united & condemn all that hate stands for. There is no place for this kind of violence in America. Let’s [sic] come together as one!

Sure! Show us how you do it. Proceed, comrade.

Here’s how you don’t do it. As president and best-word guy, say this:

“We condemn in the strongest possible terms this egregious display of hatred, bigotry and violence, on many sides. On many sides. It’s been going on for a long time in our country. Not Donald Trump, not Barack Obama. This has been going on for a long, long time.”

You don’t repeat “on many sides” twice, thus coating the white supremacist element at Charlottesville with extra insulation, or talk about yourself in the third person and attempt to offload the weight of the issue by dragging the previous president into it.

I’m not highly educated and the best words aren’t in my vocabulary, but here goes: Trump is a fucking coward.

Comrade Trump is clearly winging it. An attack on North Korea would result in South Koreans and Chinese dying by their sheer proximity to Pyongyang. A dull-minded burst of bellicosity like this from a back-bench member of Congress wouldn’t be surprising, but from an American president, it’s — I would like to say incompetent, “but there’s no better word than stupid. Right? There is none.”

The word that sticks out like the proverbial condom in the salad is “frankly.” Trump, lost in his world of narcissistic narcissism, feels that he’s on a roll, and he can’t stop talking. As if “fire and fury” wasn’t corny enough, he has to level with you, “and frankly power.” It’s like the non sequitur ending of a young poet’s absurdist anti-joke said in a Parisian salon on an absinthe-soaked afternoon.

Not being able to let it go, at a later skirmish with the press, Trump fills the piss bottle once again and the best words spilleth over.

“I will tell you this: If North Korea does anything in terms of even thinking about attack — of anybody that we love or we represent, or our allies or us, they can be very, very nervous. And they should be, because things will happen to them like they never thought possible.”

The unfocused opacity of this man’s junkyard mind is incredible. I can see the tears of laughter rolling down Kim’s cheeks as he realizes he can play the American president like a children’s game.

Last weekend in Charlottesville, Virginia, thousands of neo-Nazis, militarists, Antifa, protesters, bystanders and members of the fake news media all got together to swap spits and beat the hell out of each other over the removal of a statue of Civil War general Robert E. Lee. It was pure 21st-century American greatness, from the tennis shirt–clad frat boys and their Friday night tiki-torch parade before the Saturday clash, to the multiple injuries and three fatalities — two police officers in a helicopter crash and a woman killed after a car slammed into a group of people.

Within seconds of something like this happening, it is the president’s duty to make a statement. Unsurprisingly, it was the first lady who was the first to say a word, albeit via Twitter, but nonetheless:

“Our country encourages freedom of speech, but let’s communicate w/o hate in our hearts. No good comes from violence.”

Somewhat banal but well-meant and appropriate. About an hour later, her husband piled on.

“We ALL must be united & condemn all that hate stands for. There is no place for this kind of violence in America. Let’s [sic] come together as one!”

Sure! Show us how you do it. Proceed, comrade.

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Echo Park Rising @ THROUGHOUT ECHO PARK
There’s something wonderfully daft about Echo Park Rising. The four-day fest evokes the arty community spirit of the early Sunset Junction gatherings but, apart from a couple of outdoor stages, EPR is more of an indoors affair. Dozens of musicians perform in such traditional music venues as the Echoplex and Taix. The French Restaurant, but they also pop up along a stretch of Sunset Boulevard in intimate record stores and clothing shops. Everything’s free (although $20 and $35 VIP tickets are available), and the variety and level of musical quality exceed other SoCal neighborhood fests. Reunited ‘80s Echo Park scene-setters Popdefect appear alongside modern indie-rock/pop-punk explorers Pipe Dreams, Miss Jupiter, Veronica Bianqui and Spare Parts for Broken Hearts. Authentic ‘60s survivors The Sloths lead into such acolytes as The Creation Factory, juxtaposed with Miles Mosley, Haunted Summer and Egrets on Ekgot. Also Saturday-Sunday, Aug. 19-20.
—Falling James

Atmosphere @ THE WILTERN
For a group like Atmosphere, success isn’t defined by singles, hits or even major festival appearances. Instead, in keeping with their deep underground roots, the Minnesota-based hip-hop tandem of Slug and Ant’s uncompromising artistic vision, relentless tour schedule and fervent live show have built them a devoted fan base. Their latest album for celebrated Twin Cities rap label Rhyme-against-Reason, 2016’s Fishing Blues, didn’t earn the mesmeric flounce of Brazilian Girls. Founded in New York in 2003, the quartet — keyboardist Didi Gutman, percussionist Aaron Johnston, bassist Jesse Murphy and frontwoman extraordinaria Sabina Sciubba — are veterans of the big music festival circuit, but here’s your increasingly scarce chance to experience them in their natural habitat: intimate close quarters in which you will sweat and move and dance. Also on the bill: The Soft White Sixties, the hard-rockin’, too-cool-for-school quartet that is the welcome bitters to Brazilian Girls’ rump cocktail. —David Cotner

Midnight Oil @ THE GREEK THEATRE
When Midnight Oil played the Wiltern in May — on their first tour in 15 years — they burst right out of the gate with “Bedrock Wonderland” and it was as if no time had passed. The politically charged rockers’ message of social justice is still as potent as ever; “Put Down That Weapon” followed a moment of silence for the Manchester bombing victims. After frontman Peter Garrett spent years serving in the Australian Labor Party, the band decided to hit the globe for this massive tour dubbed The Great Circle. As far as rock stars go, Garrett is more “cool high school teacher” than “lust object,” but his presence is still striking and his voice is tip-top. Expect all the pounding, sing-along hits, a bit of Trump-bashing and a sideshow by Rob Hirst, one of the all-time greatest drummers on the planet. —Libby Molyneaux

Shabazz Palaces @ REGENT THEATER
In 2009 a short, self-titled EP by a mysterious group called Shabazz Palaces made its way around the blogosphere, infecting hip-hop fans with grooves that touched on jazz, Detroit techno and African percussion, abetted by cryptic, poetic lyrics and an esoteric, Afro-futurist aesthetic. Once the group signed to Sub Pop, we learned that Shabazz Palaces consisted of rapper/producer Ishmael Butler, formerly of ’90s group Digable Planets, and producer-percussionist Tendai Maraire. This year the duo released two albums simultaneously: Quazarz: Born on a Gangster Star and Quazarz vs. The Jealous Machines. On both albums, Butler and Maraire continue their experimentation with the hip-hop form, bringing the genre farther and farther into deep interstellar space. —Sam Ribakoff

Sun 8/20

Rufus Wainwright @ FORD THEATERS
With Rufus Wainwright it’s been a hit-and-miss proposition, all this eclectic searching for a style and solid persona. From lushly orchestrated pop balladry to hard-edged, R&B-flavored stuff to contemporary operatic works, the ever-morphing singer-composer-performer has done a little bit of it all in his near two-decade career. On a good night, the Canadian-American son of musicians Kate McGarrigle and Loudon Wainwright III is at the very least a languid crooner with an indefinably dark sensibility, easily capable of tearing your heart out with complexity layered interpretations of a curiously curated selection of covers and his own finely crafted originals. He’ll favor the former at tonight’s performance, a celebration of fellow Canadian songwriters including Joni Mitchell, Neil Young and Leonard Cohen. —John Payne

Mon 8/21

Dead Cross @ EL REY THEATRE
This hardcore punk project featuring drummer Dave Lombardo (ex-Slayer, Fantomas) and members of San Diego art-punkers Retox hit a roadblock after initial vocalist Gabe Serbian quit music last year to focus on his family. The project was...
Shabazz Palaces: revitalized after Mike Patton (Faith No More) stepped in on vocal duties. The band’s self-titled debut is a 28-minute burst of pure punk force, and is easily the most vitriolic material that either Lombardo or Patton has been involved with in many years. Patton’s snarls harken back to angrier tracks from Faith No More’s mid-’90s heyday, and Lombardo pounds his drums with the ferocity that helped make Slayer’s *Reign in Blood* an enduring metal classic. That’s not to say this is a two-man show, as guitarist Mike Crain and bassist Justin Pearson (both from Retox) expertly craft short but powerful songwriting bursts that serve as the backbone for the quartet’s hardcore explosiveness. —Jason Roche

Nightmare Air, Terminal A @ THE SATELLITE

August Satellite residents Nightmare Air are a modern, local twist on shoegazing dreaminess; as their name implies, there’s a foundation of dark, hard-rock power that underlies their more ethereal tendencies. The combination of bassist Swaan Miller’s floating, delicate vocals and the harsher power chords of guitarist Dave Dupuis drives such tracks as “Escape” and “Who’s Your Lover,” from the L.A. quartet’s debut album, *High in the Lasers*. Miller confides her shadowy secrets amid a landslide of crushing keyboards — now played live by new fourth member Liza Stegall — and Jimmy Lucido’s relatively restrained post-punk/disco drums on “Icy Daggers.” As dour Terminal A singer Colin Peterson anguishes and tears his hardened heart out against a harsh synth backdrop, Lee Busch amps up the duo’s anxious moods with sinister shards of guitar. —Falling James

Judith Owen @ LARGO AT THE CORONET

Welsh singer-songwriter Judith Owen is known to American and English audiences as the voice of Richard Thompson’s albums *1,000 Years of Popular Music* and *Cabaret of Souls*. A pianist possessed of superbly crystalline folk-jazz vocal pipes, Owen has a treasure box of cleverly lyricized and musically edgy material to draw from, and while on the surface it resides mainly in your standard territory of love and loss, dreams and despair, and life and death, she pulls it off with such intelligence, wise-cracking good humor and outstanding musicianship that an evening spent with this charismatic performer is like a night at the theater. She’ll highlight material from *Ebb & Flow*, a love letter to the 1970s Laurel Canyon scene, along with the more introspective *Some Kind of Comfort* and her recent *Somebody’s Child*, accompanied by renowned bassist Leland Sklar. —John Payne

Herbie Hancock, Kamasi Washington @ HOLLYWOOD BOWL

With two generations of the finest in jazz on the same bill, this shapes up to be one of the best jazz events presented at the Bowl in the past several years. Opening the evening is saxophonist Kamasi Washington, with many of his cohorts from L.A. jazz collective The West Coast Get Down, including the original double drum pairing of Ronald Bruner Jr. and Tony Austin and twin keyboardists Brandon Coleman and Cameron Graves, plus the full choir and string section Washington first used at the 2015 live premiere of his debut album, *The Epic*. Fourteen-time Grammy-winning pianist Herbie Hancock follows with the band he’s been fronting most recently, including guitarist Lionel Loueke, bassist James Genus, mega-drummer Vinnie Colaiuta (Sting, Jeff Beck, Frank Zappa) and South L.A.’s own Terrace Martin on saxophones and keyboards. For jazz fans, this should be an evening to remember. —Tom Meek

Les Grys-Grys, The Loons, Creation Factory @ ALEX’S BAR

Les Grys-Grys hail from Montpellier, France, but the shaggy-haired quintet sound more like they’re from London in the mid-’60s. The group take the snarling vocals of early Mick Jagger and combine them with the spiky garage-rock riffs of The Yardbirds and The Kinks to energetic effect. It’s as retro and secondhand as music gets — modern-day kids imitating the young Rolling Stones imitating their hardened blues elders — and yet that seemingly tired formula has led to so much great rock & roll. San Diego’s The Loons share some of the same influences but with more of an American edge, led by maracas-shaking shaman Mike Stax (The Crawdaddys, Tell-Tale Hearts). Local sextet The Creation Factory pump out a more overtly psychedelic brand of fuzzed-out garage-rock bliss. —Falling James


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