Richard Lewis Is Back and Happier Than Ever • The Root Down Soundsystem Celebrate 20 Years

James Franco and his brother Dave make a great film about the worst movie of all time: The Room

By April Wolfe
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La Bohème is reborn as The Hipsters, a daylong comedy podcasting festival, a celebration of Czech and Slovak heritage, UCB’s Holiday Music Spectacular and more to do and see in L.A. this week.

Michael Voltaggio’s ink.well offers simply good food with a hint of gastronomic magic.

You may think he’s depressed, but comedian Richard Lewis is actually a pretty happy guy these days. In STAGE, The Heart of Robin Hood, at the Wallis, brings a feminist slant to the classic tale.

ALAN SCHERSTUHL and APRIL WOLFE recap their favorite movies of 2017, plus reviews of movies OPENING THIS WEEK, and YOUR WEEKLY MOVIE TO-DO LIST.

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**PODCASTS**

**Kings of Comedy**

Not only are podcasts enormously popular but so are the festivals dedicated to the medium. Though not a festival in size, Spaceland Presents Pecast Blast ’17 is a self-described “Monsters of Rock”-style marathon of some of Earwolf’s best comedy podcasts. They cover everything from film and improv to games, and are hosted by comedy heavyweights including Scott Aukerman, Paul Scheer and UCB co-founder Matt Besser. (You may be familiar with the network’s other podcasts, including Kevin Pollak’s Chat Show, Throwing Shade and Ronna and Beverly.). The lineup features tapings of Comedy Bang! Bang! (Aukerman, Paul F. Tompkins and Lauren Lapkus); How Did This Get Made? (Scheer, June Diane Raphael and Jason Mantzoukas); Improv4Humans (Besser); Hollywood Handbook (Sean Clements and Hayes Davenport); Who Charted? (Kulap Vilaysack and H. Jon Benjamin); and the newly launched Playing Games With Jimmy Pardo (Pardo and Matt Belknap). Ace Theater, 929 S. Broadway, downtown; Sun., Dec. 10, 3-10 p.m.; $50-$125; (213) 235-9614, theatre. acehotel.com/events/pee-cast-blast-17.

—Siran Babayan

**FILM**

**So Easy a Child Can Do It**

In an age where smartphones are the go-to technology for everything, the PXL-2000 seems as quaint as a typewriter. Introduced by Fisher-Price in 1987, the lo-fi toy camcorder recorded black-and-white film onto an audioscasette and was easy enough for kids to use. Costing a then-pricey $79.95, the product lasted only two years on the market. But everything old is new again, and the PXL-2000 now has vintage value. (Richard Linklater used it in his 1991 debut, Slacker.) Leading the revival since 1990 has been Venice denizen and filmmaker-writer Gerry Fialka, whose PXL THIS film festival is less a competition and more a celebration of the DIY aesthetic. This year’s edition features more than two dozen international kids, amateur and experimental filmmakers screening their Pixelvision shorts. Highlights include entries by Marc Bascougnou, L.M. Sabo and Benny Maynahan, plus Fialka’s Venice Break Dance, which combines Super 8mm footage of b-boy breakdancers along the Venice Boardwalk. UnUrban, 3301 Pico Blvd., Santa Monica; Mon., Dec. 11, 6-7:30 p.m.; free. (310) 315-0056, facebook.com/events/378728365890287/.

—Siran Babayan

**sat 12/9**

**OPERATION La Vie de Hipsters**

Traditional versions of the Italian opera La Bohème marry Giacomo Puccini’s sumptuous melodies with Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa’s tragic, if melodramatic, story about love and death. But in Pacific Opera Project’s hands, the action in this quintessentially sentimental fable, slyly retitled The Hipsters, is shifted from an 1830s Parisian garret to modern-day Los Angeles. The doomed seamstress Mimi is now a fashion designer (portrayed by charismatic soprano Daria Somers), and her ardent poet-lover, Rodolfo, is transformed into a struggling writer of screenplays (tenor Dane Suarez), while chanteuse Musetta vamps it up as an indie-rock singer (Katherine Giacunto Powers). What was once tragic becomes gleefully absurd, thanks to director Josh Shaw’s heavily doctored libretto. Highland Park Ebell Club, 131 S. Highland Ave; Fri-Sat., Dec. 8-9, 8 p.m.; also Dec. 14-16, 8 p.m.; $20-$65. (323) 729-6122, pacificoperaproject.com. —Falling James

**ART SHOPPING**

**Holiday Cheer, Corita Style**

Sister Corita Kent was a true original. Beginning in the 1960s, the L.A.-based artist and Catholic nun began creating silkscreen prints that integrated her fervent belief in social justice with a bold, pop-art–influenced style. In addition to her own artistic practice, she also taught art at Immaculate Heart College (now the Immaculate Heart Community), which houses a center devoted to her life and work.

This Saturday, the center holds its annual holiday sale and open house, where Sister Corita’s vibrant prints will be discounted 10 percent. They’ll also be offering custom screenprinted wrapping paper and a paper flower–making workshop, in keeping with the slogan that would accompany Immaculate Heart’s yearly sale: “Good things to do, fun things to buy.”

The center is located at 5515 Franklin Ave., Hollywood Hills; Sat., Dec. 9, 1-4 p.m.; free. (323) 450-4650, facebook.com/events/140765919296993/.

—Matt Stromberg

**FILM**

**Czech It Out**

Located in an abandoned movie theater, the Velaslavasy Panorama is a cabinet of curiosities tucked away on a quiet street in South L.A. The space houses visual exhibits, verdant gardens and the titular panorama, a circular room that blends painting, sculpture, lights and sound to re-create scenes from history and the natural world. Although the panorama proper is currently under transition from an arctic tableau to one representing pre-revolutionary China, it’s still hosting performances and events, such as the upcoming Cure for the parts of December, including a holiday special. Who cares? Come for the Czech flavor.

Czech It Out, 1404 S. Central Ave.; $30-$50. (323) 729-6122, pacificoperaproject.com. —Siran Babayan
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PODCASTS

Inside Dirty John

High-profile Serial was a hit in the true-crime podcast genre. L.A. Times reporter Christopher Goffard’s excellent investigative journalism podcast Dirty John is equally gripping. The Pulitzer Prize–winning Goffard released both the print article and podcast in October as a six-part series, which spent weeks at No. 1 on Apple Podcasts. The story begins in 2014, when Debra Newell, a Newport Beach interior designer, met and married John Meehan, a con man who posed as an anesthesiologist. Goffard’s investigation untangles not only their relationship but Meehan’s complicated history as a “sociopath,” including his lengthy rap sheet, and features interviews with Newell, her children, other family members and lawyers. Goffard, along with the L.A. Times’ Carolina A. Miranda, host Dirty John Live, with readings, guests and unaired audio, in addition to a performance by Tracy Bonham, who contributed the podcast’s song, “Devil’s Got Your Boyfriend.” Some proceeds will go to nonprofit organization Peace Over Violence. Ace Theater, 929 S. Broadway, downtown; Mon., Dec. 11, 7 p.m.; $20-$25. (213) 235-9614, acehotel.com. —Siran Babayan

FILM/COMEDY

Name That Film

Stand-up comedian Doug Benson might be known more these days for sitting on a long slow slide down the couch when he hosts a live recording of his Doug Loves Movies: 12 Guests of Xmas podcast. This time, his guests are ready and/or willing to play the Leonard Maltin Game. Somewhere between “it’s the bomb” and “it’s a BOMB,” this is a contest in which Benson reads the cast list from one of Maltin’s movie guide tomes of an unidentified movie, going in reverse order until players guess what film he’s talking about. Largo at the Coronet, 336 N. La Cienega Blvd., Beverly Grove; Tue.-Wed., Dec. 12-13, 7 p.m.; $30. (310) 855-0350, largo-la.com/event/1496707-doug-loves-movies-12-guests-los-angeles/. —David Cotner

HOLIDAYS

Jingle Bell Rock

Feel like poking your eye out with a candy cane whenever you hear Mariah Carey’s “All I Want for Christmas Is You”? Christmas songs can make you less than jolly, but UCB’s Holiday Music Spectacular! puts a comedic spin on all the maudlin tunes. Greg Smith and Heather Woodward play the Colemans, a fictional married, musical duo in the spirit of the wholesome Carpenters and Osmonds, who sing parody and humorous songs, complete with piano accompaniment, costumes and decorations. Last year, they were joined by more than a dozen UCB castmates to perform rock, hip-hop and R&B covers of seasonal standards like “Winter Wonderland” and “Silent Night” as well as “The Christmas Shoes,” a 2000 song by Christian group NewSong, about a boy who’s too poor to buy shoes for his dying mother. Good times. They also promise a funny sing-along to really get you into the spirit. UCB Sunset, 5419 W. Sunset Blvd., Hollywood; Thu., Dec. 14, 8:30 p.m.; $7. (323) 968-8702, sunset.ucbtheatre.com. —Siran Babayan

EAT

A Little Nosh

Hanukkah started last night, and to celebrate, The Kibitz Podcast unveils even more penetrating insights into the world and culture of Judaism with A Catskills Kibitz, this time trying to set the world record for most people biting into a pastrami sandwich at once, officiated by the judges at Recordsetter.com. Hosts Jessica Chaffin and Dan Crane also give you special guests like comedian Moshe Kasher, The Big Sick director Michael Showalter and a performance by singing sensations The Living Sisters (Inara George, Alex Lilly, Eleni Mandell, Becky Stark), with $5 of every ticket headed toward relief for storm-tossed Puerto Rico. Kibitz Room at Canter’s, 419 N. Fairfax Ave., Fairfax; Wed., Dec. 13, 7 p.m.; $18. (323) 651-2030, kibitzpod.com/events. —David Cotner

FILM/BOOKS

A Life in Pictures

Hosted by the Hollywood Heritage Museum and the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, actress, screenwriter and author Pat Silver-Lasky signs her new book, Hollywood Royalty: A Family in Films, a biography of one of the first movie moguls, Jesse L. Lasky and his family. Along with Cecil B. DeMille and Samuel Goldwyn, Lasky formed the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company; he produced more than 1,000 films. The company produced the first feature-length movie filmed in Hollywood, 1914’s Western The Squaw Man, which was shot in and around the Lasky-DeMille barn, home of the museum. The company eventually became Paramount Pictures. Silver-Lasky was married to Jesse L. Lasky Jr., the producer’s son, who wrote the screenplays to The Ten Commandments and Samson and Delilah; she collaborated with him on film and TV scripts. Her book includes vintage photographs and more than 400 letters written from Lasky Sr. to his son. Hollywood Heritage Museum, 2100 N. Highland Ave.; Wed., Dec. 13, 7:30 p.m.; $15. (323) 874-4005, hollywoodheritage.org. —Siran Babayan

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James Franco and his brother Dave make a great film about the worst movie of all time: *The Room*.
do you know about Tommy Wiseau and his accidental masterpiece The Room, because... hell, where do we even start? And why exactly is one of Hollywood's biggest stars making a movie about one of the worst movies of all time?

For the uninitiated who haven't been dragged to a midnight screening of the film by friends who insist, “It’s so bad it’s good,” The Room is about a banker played by Wiseau, who is experiencing marital difficulties, when his wife begins an affair with… actually, it doesn’t really matter what the plot is. The film is terrible. But it’s also incredible. It’s a hot mess of melodrama born from a love of classic cinema and a horrendous miscalculation of talent that reached cult status through a relentless, years-long marketing campaign and the blood, sweat and tears of its makers. However misguided its production, the movie became an underground cult classic, revered or reviled, depending on your perspective. But it’s also about this time where I have to ask you readers: How much do you know about James Franco? Hell, where do we even start with that?

In the mid-1990s, a teenage James moved down to Los Angeles from his family’s suburban Palo Alto home. He’d already proven himself to be a math whiz and enrolled in UCLA, but realized quite quickly that he was more interested in acting. “I dropped out to go to acting school, because UCLA wouldn’t let me audition for the acting program for two years,” he tells me. “My parents said, ‘We’re not going to support you financially if you don’t go to a university!’” His most formative job up to that point was an internship at Lockheed Martin that he’d earned with his math skills, which wasn’t too attractive to any of the local Los Angeles restaurants he’d applied to, so he went to work for McDonald’s.

“My parents were like, ‘OK, you’re making this big choice, this is you, you better show that you want this,’ so I worked really hard—all my free time was put toward acting, and it paid off. I got a job, got out of McDonald’s, and two years later was on Freaks and Geeks. So part of me learned…you want to do something, then you better throw yourself into it.”

He shifts uncomfortably in his chair, while Dave listens intently, nodding with encouragement as though he’s here as his brother’s sponsor at Workaholics Anonymous. Everything James is expressing right now is a winding and seemingly unrelated response to my bringing up his April 2016 interview with art critic Jerry Saltz, wherein James pours his heart out to explain how unfair and demoralizing it is to be judged for his huge output of artwork as “Franco the agitator actor,” not “Franco the legitimate artist.” That interview is painfully sincere. You get the sense that as James hashes out his grievances with the art world, he is coming to some hard realizations, that focusing on one thing intensely may be better than following every passing fancy. And that it’s easier when you’ve got a partner. “You’re out there on your own,” Saltz says, and James replies, “Exactly. Exactly.”

Dave’s influence as the shrewd, cautious brother has helped transform James’ life over the past year. “I’m prone to say no to everything, and he used to be prone to say yes to everything,” Dave says. But in working on the postproduction of The Disaster Artist and joining forces to create a new production company, the two brothers have rubbed off on one another. “It’s my instinct to always tell him, ‘Let’s only work on projects that we absolutely love and feel the need to...”
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Wiseau is wearing dark sunglasses in this poorly lit room at the Four Seasons. His shades cover that now-iconic face of his that graced that billboard on Highland Avenue for five years, promoting his film — and listing his personal phone number.

While the wonky production design and inept green-screen of The Room drew curious audiences in, the enigma of Tommy Wiseau was the film’s siren song. Who was this guy who speaks so strangely, who poured his Tennessee Williams–tortured soul into this lovingly made monstrosity?

“Ending of The Room is supposed to be different. Johnny survives but he became vampire,” Wiseau tells me, explaining that (spoiler alert) the character he played was supposed to drive off his roof in a flying car, instead of dying by self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head.

The director had changed the ending of The Room to reflect the tone of realism he was trying to create with the film, but his fascination with vampires hasn’t let up. “I’m still talking about vampires,” he says. “I have three vampire scripts.” In Sestero and Bissell’s book, Sestero explores Wiseau’s psyche, remarking multiple times on the director’s obsession with youth, of a kind of eternal life. (Few people know how old he is.) And as Wiseau talks with me about vampires, Sestero looks down at his hands and smiles, as if he’s heard this story from his friend a million times before, because he probably has.

It’s rare for a filmmaker to spend as much time and energy promoting a single film as has Wiseau promoting The Room — 14 years and counting, to be exact. “I watched him going to screenings trying to keep it alive,” Sestero says. “A lot of decisions that would method actors like James Dean and Marlon Brando, so much so that Franco would play Dean in a Golden Globe–winning performance, and Wiseau would ultimately agree to let Franco play him in The Disaster Artist because Franco aced that role.

And both Franco and Wiseau were better with a team — James with Dave, and Wiseau with Sestero — than they were alone.

But perhaps the most salient similarity between James and Wiseau is that both have thrown themselves into worlds they knew little about in a trial-by-fire gauntlet. Their shared desire? Validation.
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>14) stabbed in the forehead. “It was daring you.”

Rousselle and his friends got more and more of their buddies to see The Room, creating games — like throwing plastic spoons at the screen whenever they saw a framed photo of a spoon — and essentially making The Room into the phenomenon it is. Now Rousselle even teaches a workshop on the film at SoCal universities.

But Wiseau remains a mystery. “My favorite line from Tommy that we put in [the book of The Disaster Artist] is, ‘You have to go to the edge of your moment,’” Bissell tells me. “It trembles on the edge of profundity and nonsense. That’s Tommy.”

No one knows where Wiseau came from or how he made his money, but to many including the Francos — it would seem a letdown to actually find out so many years into his elaborate masquerade. “We could have asked,” Dave says. “We could have dug in, but it would have killed the mystique.”

Even Sestero doesn’t know anything about Wiseau’s background, after decades of friendship, and doesn’t seem to care. What the two bond over is loving movies and chatting with r scratches The Room fans, who will ask them the same questions over and over for as long as the film screens, which is starting to look like … eternity.

Wiseau’s IMDb page is somewhat short for a man of unknown age, with just four other feature-film roles under his belt, one a co-starring role in Sestero’s Best F(r)iends, and another his wonderfully bizarre cameo after the end credits of The Disaster Artist. But what Wiseau has proven is that it’s not how much you do but where you choose to put your energy. As Sestero says, it’s about “committing” to one thing. You can’t help but compare Wiseau’s output to Franco’s and side-eye the numerous projects the latter has done that are either stuck in postproduction or that disappeared as quickly as they premiered.

But that’s the old Franco.

In 2012, controversial art figure Jeffrey Deitch was the head of L.A.’s Museum of Contemporary Art and had approached Bianca Chen and her father, JF, a well-regarded furniture collector, with a novel idea. They could clear out their entire antiques showroom for a monthlong art show from the one and only James Franco. Neither of the Chens knew much about James’ art; this was to be his first significant show, which was called “Rebel.” But the Chens trusted Deitch, and overnight, James had transformed their showroom — which is also a few blocks from where Wiseau’s billboard for The Room once stood — into a radical shrine to Old Hollywood, including a scale replica of the Chateau Marmont and a wrecked car standing up on its grill meant to evoke both the crash in Rebel that had been largely dismissed. He says he thought going to prestigious MFAs and reading all the things he was supposed to read would convince people he was serious, but instead classmates posted snapshots of an exhausted James passed out in class.

Validation was elusive. “That’s certainly part of my story and not even being aware of needing validation, but then looking back in hindsight and thinking, ‘Oh my God, I subconsciously thought if I achieve x, y and z, then turning point,” he laughs. “Maybe the best chemical peel + FREE AFTER-CARE KIT $395

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“EVEN WHEN I DID HAVE SUCCESSES, THOSE DIDN’T FILL A HOLE. IT WAS LIKE, ‘OH WAIT. MOVIES AREN’T NECESSARILY GOING TO SAVE MY LIFE.’” — JAMES FRANCO

Without a Cause and the accident that actually took its star James Dean’s life. There were hordes of blow-up dolls and dildos, as well as a looping video by performance artist Paul McCarthy, featuring raw sex noises. How James had constructed this entire world overnight, Bianca says she didn’t know, but she was both shocked and excited. “I walked into our showroom after James had spent the night setting up his exhibition, and literally bumped into a dangling dildo,” Bianca says. “But we did feel bad for the volunteers who had to listen to Paul McCarthy’s movie over and over,” she laughs.

This foray into the art world for James would find mixed reviews. Is it homage? Tribute? A flaming hot mess? Later in 2014, James would re-create Cindy Sherman’s Untitled Film Stills at the Pace Gallery, replacing Sherman’s face with his own. Again, controversy. A Pace spokesperson declined to comment on the show. Earlier, in 2010, James had swerved into literature, publishing his short-story collection, Palo Alto, which received a few kind, considered reviews but mostly scathing remarks from writers who couldn’t help but gripe that James’ short stories would automatically find an audience no matter their assessment. And by the time James got to open all these wounds in that Salz interview, he had also directed and produced numerous art films
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Michael Voltaggio wore a T-shirt that read “People Hate Me on Yelp” at the Gold Standard food event in 2012 as he served beef tongue dunked in liquid nitrogen. This was post-Top Chef fame, during the tail end of L.A.’s molecular-gastronomy heyday as diners were moving on from Jose Andrés’ “Philly cheese steak” on air bread at the Bazaar to the refined takes offered by Ludo LeFebvre and Ricardo Zarate on their respective cuisines.

I always liked Voltaggio’s cooking style, because he emphasized flawless technique and flavor-bomb levels of salt and acid. “Volt” opened ink. on Beverly as a way to capitalize on the modernist-food-experience essentials, such as seeing things explode on your plate whose fragments were then supposed to be eaten. But as fun as it was to eat nitrogen-dunked popcorn and breathe out fumes of “dragon breath” vapor through your nose, it soon became apparent that perfectly cooked steak was just a hell of a lot more satisfying and memorable than sodium alginate.

ink.well is a stripped-down version of the original where Voltaggio has nailed a happy, satisfying medium between modernist glum and just complex takes on simple good food. It’s the type of place where you can get Teutonic’s Laurel Vineyard pinot noir — an exceptional, eucalyptus-forward natural wine from Oregon that’s a steal for $13 a glass — while Nate Dogg’s notoriously explicit first verse of “It Ain’t No Fun” blasts on the speakers at a decibel level where you can clearly hear the brazen words. You know it, I know it, we all know it: “Cause you gave me all your pussy, and ya even licked my balls.”

The unabashed lyrics, it turned out, were a precursor to Voltaggio’s food.

The menu seems straightforward, with seafood, vegetables and a couple of pastas and meats thrown in for reflex: Gem lettuce, corn, calamari, sea bass, rigatoni, lamb and plenty more. Except when you take a closer look at them, every single dish has done serious time inside the head of the chef. That calamari is battered in a black corn masa/potato crust with a flavor profile closer to pokora than any fried calamari you’ve encountered. That Gem lettuce salad is halved, not torn, and draped with a vinegar-intense frozen blanket of crunchy avocado reminiscent of taqueria-style guacamole. The big-eye tuna tartare features tofu and is tightly rolled up with shaved celery root, looking more like a fresh Cohiba than any cylinder of raw fish.

The more dishes you order and think you know what you’re getting, the more your head will be spinning from all of the flavors, textures and presentation.

Voltaggio demands your attention; it’s almost impossible to come into ink.well and have a casual dinner with someone, because the food has this way of sucking you in and keeping you from carrying on a conversation. The “beets by Michael,” with densely tender, pickled beets placed on a smear of pistachio butter, will make you re-examine your love or disdain for beets. The texture of the root vegetable, and hear me out on this, is somehow custardly and cakelike. His lamb belly glazed with a pine nut casserole is insanely rich and has a small fortune’s worth of pine nuts, yet you will still find a way to fork up every last little morsel. It’s eerie how he makes boiled macadamia nuts taste like hominy in his take on green pozole with chia seed-crusted sea bass. Though, his version of street corn, which I suspect was intended as an ode to esquites, is more like creamed corn than anything I’ve had in the streets. If you’re into creaminess, it will be fine. If you were looking for a fun, chilled-up version of street corn, you will feel duped.

The desserts are studies in perfect technique in the same way as the savory stuff, and ink.well is not the spot to pass them up. If you’re a chocolate- or nothing person, you can get your thrills with his take on Mexican chocolate. You will use a little bit of elbow grease to dig into the thin layer of frozen chocolate asphalt with your spoon, but the fudge-like, crunchy Mexican chocolate is worth the effort. It’s topped with little bits of toasted rice cream (aka horchata) chips still smoking from a bath in liquid nitrogen, because old habits die hard. However, if you are of the other dessert school and would much rather just have a big bowl of ripe seasonal berries after the kitchen’s runner brings out dishes to The de
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Back then, people would love to just hear us talk,” says restaurateur Nick Mathers of his early days in New York 14 years ago.

“Now there are so many Australians — I mean, we’re like a rash!” he jokes, Aussie accent still intact after over a decade in the United States.

Mathers, who opened West Hollywood’s Eveleigh in 2010, is a sort of pioneer of Australian food in this country. Since he launched the successful Sunset Strip restaurant almost eight years ago, L.A. has seen an influx of Australian eateries. Meat pie shop Bronzed Aussie opened in April 2013. E.P. & L.P., from chef Louis Tikaram, opened in May 2015. The Paramount Coffee Project debuted on Fairfax in October 2015. Venice Beach hangout Bondi Harvest opened in April 2015. Sydney-based Ministry of Coffee recently opened in Westwood. On the fine-dining side, Curtis Stone continues to dazzle us with Maude and meaty meals at Gwen. Recently Melbourne star chef Shaun Quade teamed up with Ludo Lefebvre at Trois Mec as part of the 2 Chef series and showed off his Australian flavors after smuggling emu ham through airport customs for the dinner. Quade, who is known for his acclaimed Lûmé, is set to open a restaurant in L.A. in late 2018.

So why the inundation of Aussie eateries in L.A.?

“I know why I opened a restaurant. I loved America and I needed to figure out how to get a visa,” says Mathers, whose latest venture, Little Ruby, is a spinoff of the very popular cafe he opened in New York in 2003. A stone’s throw from the beach. Little Ruby Santa Monica embodies Sydney’s Bondi Beach culture with a menu of everything from Vegemite toast (for the actual Australians) to a wide selection of burgers, pastas, salads and plenty of “brekkie” items. The stylish, laid-back vibe at this all-day cafe seems to be just what the neighborhood needed. And it’s just that vibe, says Mathers, that defines Australian dining.

“Australian restaurants are somewhere that you can have breakfast, lunch and dinner. It’s one of those places you can pop in anytime. You go there multiple times a week,” says Mathers, noting that generally speaking, Australian and American palates don’t differ much.

“It’s very global, Australia, so we pulled from all these different parts to create what we know as modern Australian food. It’s very produce-driven. So coming to California was a no-brainer, because the produce was so fruitful, and then we were able to bring what we thought was Australian and it just turned out that’s modern Californian.”

Mathers points out that there are business benefits to venturing into the American market.

“There are a lot more people here, so business is more fruitful. I think there’s an opportunity to be more. I mean, I can open multiple restaurants here, whereas in Australia there’s a limit to how many restaurants. There’s 300 million people here and about 20-odd million in Australia, so just on sheer numbers...”

Mathers also feels there is a cultural difference when it comes to entrepreneurship in the United States. “Everyone is so excited about people succeeding and I think that’s such a charming thing about Americans.” Australians, on the other hand, are less supportive, according to Mathers: “We have a little bit of tall-poppy syndrome. It comes from England. They want to chop the tallest poppy down. We want to make sure the poppy fields are level. We don’t want to see anyone growing out of the fields, so we’re like, ‘Oh no! They’re not good.’ Here it’s like, ‘Everyone’s gonna grow! We’re all going to be tall poppies’.”

Mathers’ restaurants have succeeded both in New York and L.A. And he takes credit for something most think of as quintessentially Californian: avocado toast.

“I was having that as a kid. We literally were serving that 14 years ago at our restaurant Ruby’s. We were the first people to serve avocado toast. We know that for a fact. That’s a bit of a phase. The flat white — we were doing flat whites 14 years ago. They’ve got it at Starbucks now.”

For someone juggling so many restaurant projects, Mathers seems relaxed and happy as he watches the lunch crowd flow in and out of his new cafe.

“We love Americans and they seem
to love us, so it's a good combination.”

—Heather Platt

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**THEME PARKS**

**Six Flags Magic Mountain Wants to Serve Restaurant-Quality Food**

At the gates, a constellation of lights dangles overhead from signs advertising treats and tchotchkes. A sonic barrage of classic pop obliterates conversation as soon as it leaves the mouth, so the crowd simply stares ahead, endurances surging in rhythm. Scents — butter, dough, sugar, smoke — start to mingle, and soon, we are starving. It is 10:30 a.m.

This is the entrance to Six Flags Magic Mountain, the amusement park and tourist landmark on the edge of the Santa Clarita Valley. Since its opening in 1971, it has become the premier destination for the adventurous children of parents hoping to avoid a more exhausting (and expensive) trip to Anaheim or Buena Park.

Growing up in this city meant spending dozens of birthdays at “Magic” in my youth, as it still does for many thousands of visitors annually. It also meant eating my weight in what the park calls “all-American fare” — usually a melange of fast foods and sweets that damaged my parents’ pocketbooks — several times a year. Since time immemorial, it has been both a thrill seeker’s mecca and a health-conscious gourmet’s nightmare.

But a visit to the park this fall, my first in half a decade, revealed a fascinating evolution from the Six Flags of my childhood.

On clear display throughout the 262-acre property is a freshly blossomed ambition: to revamp and elevate the park’s cuisine from biologically mandated drudgery to something more delightful. Some of the dishes that have sprung up in this effort even flirt with a health-conscious gourmet’s nightmare.

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Among the best of these are new lunch options at places like Ace O’Clubs, a barbecue joint named for a bar in the comic book city of Metropolis. The restaurant, since opening in July, has doubled down on Southern-style plates that required big jumps in both quality and price point. This is something of a gamble for a destination known primarily for its quesadillas and chicken strips, but it pays off handsomely.

Baby back pork ribs in a Memphis-style sauce compare favorably to those at Backwoods Inn and Lucille’s Smokehouse, two of Santa Clarita’s many rib destinations. Ace O’Clubs doesn’t go overboard with the sauce; the downside is that too little is left to mop up with the gigantic hunk of cornbread served on the side.

The true star, however, is a tri-tip sandwich served with house-baked kettle chips. Christopher Parker, the culinary services manager at Magic Mountain and Hurricane Harbor, told me that creating the marinade and finding employees able to make it was unprecedented in its difficulty. To parkgoers, it was worth the effort.

Given the mammoth portions of these meals, a walk was necessary before climbing on the rides in Metropolis (take it from a former Austinite: The only thing worse than meat sweats is dealing with them on roller coasters). Leaving the district for dinner was a nonstarter, since another July-born venue, the Metro Park Pub, offers the most diverse of the park’s culinary experiments.

This was where the tension really plays out: how to balance the needs of modern eaters — artisanal beer craving, sustainably minded — with those who expect the grease and battered fare of a bygone era?

One solution is to keep standards like fish and chips, fried green beans and nachos on the menu but beautify them: The cod is now beer-battered and served with house-made sriracha ketchup; the green beans are tempura-ed; and nachos are topped with pulled pork.

As Parker put it, “We have a long way to go.” True, perhaps, but better late than never. —Sean L. Malin

**HAWAIIAN FOOD**

**Come to This Coffee Shop for Community, and Stay for the Sukiyaki**

If you were new to L.A. and looking for a sense of community, you’d be smart to start hanging out at Gardena Bowl. It’s a community center ostensibly built around a bowling alley — but really the main event is the restaurant.

It’s a coffee shop in an older sense of the term, where the focus isn’t on coffee at all but on big plates of crowd-pleasing food that’s never too expensive and can be eaten at the counter. The people working there are all kind, and will leave you alone for as long as you need.

The bowling alley was built in 1948 when community leaders noticed that there were “something like 160 bowling teams” in the area but no alley in Gardena itself. I’m not sure from my brief research when the coffee shop became a Japanese-inflected Hawaiian restaurant (“Hawaiian” in the sense of anything from the northern half of the Pacific Rim), but perhaps it always was — Gardena has long had a big Japanese and Pacific Islander population.

The food here is a study in midcentury inventiveness, still serving the mashups that emerged in the 1950s. Spaghetti Bolognese? Of course.

If this type of cuisine is new to you, I recommend diving in head-first. Get the signature dish the restaurant calls the Hawaiian Royal: rice, eggs, green onions, chashu, Portuguese sausage and teriyaki sauce. You’ll know with-in two bites if you’re into Hawaiian food.

The huge menu offers breakfast all day, plus tempura, egg foo young, BLT’s and sukiyaki, among other items. It has Spam musubi, of course. Really good Spam musubi.

The restaurant — and the bowling alley — has such a great mix of people that you might be inspired to join a league. I sometimes suspect people bowl here just for an excuse to order dinner to-go. Saimin can be addictive. —Katherine Spiers

15707 S. Vermont Ave., Gardena; (310) 532-0820, gardenabowlcoffeeshop.com.
Firestone Walker Brewing Company’s Propagator pilot R&D brewhouse in Venice is the place for beer drinkers and locals to dine, hang out and sip on Firestone Walker’s latest creations.

The Propagator is the third location from Firestone Walker — which was created by brother-in-laws, David Walker (aka the Lion on the logo) and Adam Firestone (aka the Bear) — and it’s a unique experience from start to finish. Unlike the two other locations (the main brewery in Paso Robles and the Barrels & Ales facility in Buellton), The Propagator is a state-of-the-art small scale Kaspar Schulz brewhouse that operates as a hub of experimentation, setting the pace for what is next from Firestone Walker. Most recently, it has been the driver behind the brewery’s new Leo v. Ursus chronology of beers, as well as the Generation 1 IPA. In addition to Firestone Walker favorites, The Propagator offers one-off beers, and experimental beers that may or may not make it into the brand’s official lineup. The adjoining restaurant and bar feature pizzas (we’d try the Rustica Carne complete with Italian sausage, brisket, pepperoni and mozzarella), burgers, tacos (like the Drunken Cauliflower) and of course desserts (like a seasonal berry cheesecake). Even better — at least in our opinion — is that The Propagator has a Beer Brunch that is to die for. It features two signature beers, as well as coffee and OJ, and lots of delicious brunch food options. Deep fired bacon PB&J anyone? Yes, it’s a real thing, and you need it in your life. What are you waiting for? The Propagator is calling and you should listen… drink up!
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Call 310-905-2670 for information on the inpatient meth study or to make an appointment at our research clinic in Santa Monica or visit www.uclacbam.org/meth

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Matrix Institute on Addictions, Los Angeles

Research Investigators: Dan George, MPH, MBA, Jeremy Martinez, M.D. & Tasnim Shamji, M.D.

This research project is sponsored by the National Institute on Drug Abuse.
Richard Lewis returns to L.A. stage for first time in five years, more content than ever

Richard Lewis' comedy act is known even by people who've never seen his stand-up. His persona has become such a singular archetype that younger comedians who manifest an agitated, irreplaceably confessional, complaining-with-punchlines character are seen to be descended from Lewis' comedy lineage. A figure in black clothes restlessly prowling the stage, raised hands gesturing plaintively, bits coming out with a stream-of-consciousness rhythm — aside from the words, it's a feel, an identifiable vibe, and one that will soon be hitting an L.A. stage for the first time in five years.

Lewis has brought a more focused, life-seasoned version of his stage presence to HBO's Curb Your Enthusiasm, undoubtedly exposing him to millions of younger viewers unfamiliar with his 40 years of stand-up, multiseason early-'90s sitcom Anything But Love, and movie roles ranging from the heavy drama Leaving Las Vegas to the parody Robin Hood: Men in Tights.

In Curb, whereas David is ultimately glib and emotionally armored, Lewis is lamenting and wounded. The pair do a kind of manic-obsessive dueling banjos, all the more resonant because we know they're accessing a lifelong, Brooklyn-born friendship.

“I know what my sweet spot has been,” Lewis says. “It's personal stuff, dysfunction, fear of intimacy, family stuff, psychology stuff. I eviscerate myself onstage. Once I started to get really personal about myself, I used hyperbole. I love hyperbole.”

In 1989, Lewis played Carnegie Hall for more than two hours to standing ovations.

“I came down the stairs a half-hour after the second ovation, I was fucking hammered on booze and I made a complete fool of myself in front of people I've known my whole life. I showed my alcoholism after the great show.”

The one topic he has suppressed onstage — his alcoholism and drug addiction — was unlocked once Lewis got sober in 1994. Another of his tightly held habits was working with an almost comically bountiful pile of notepads, covered with shorthand bit ideas, which he preferred to lay down on a piano onstage.

“One day one of my 4,000 managers said, ‘Why don’t you try it the real way? Traditionally?’ Doing it without the pads, people close to me said that my performance level had been far superior.”

Lewis also got a nudge regarding the notes from a different set of industry professionals.

“I was doing a huge Vegas venue years ago, went down for a sound check and said I needed a piano. By the time I was done, these Teamster guys were collapsing from exhaustion bringing in the grand piano, and I whipped out my three inches of paper and they weren't thrilled with that.”

With or without notes, Lewis will always leave himself open to improvisational inspiration. “When you do something in the moment, it may just be for that stage, that audience, that head space that you’re in.”

Lewis got to play a stable entertainment professional in Leaving Las Vegas, the Oscar-awarded 1995 feature about severe alcoholism, and then a half-year later won a lead role as a heavy addict in Drunks, an impressively cast low-budget drama about a Manhattan Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. Such powerful addiction-related themes turned out to be cathartic and therapeutic for the newly sober actor-comedian.

Nearly a quarter-century in to an alcohol-free life, Lewis credits various tools for helping him maintain his healthy mental state, chief among them a dog — a little Maltese mix who sits on a mat in front of him. “She doesn’t give me any shit. She doesn’t argue.”

A year and a half ago, just before leaving for a Vegas gig, Lewis walked on the roof of his house to compulsively check on a drain, fell off, was seriously injured and got knocked out of commission for 17 months — ironically, all while having been decades stone sober.

“I told my wife to call everybody and say, ‘I’m out of the business for a while.’ I had to cancel almost two tours. I’m in very good health now.”

When it comes to combing life for those odd, contentious “Curb moments,” Lewis stresses that it’s Larry David’s special genius — and job — not his. But then he concedes an anecdote from his honeymoon trip to Rome.

On a walking tour through the Eternal City’s historical treasures, other tourgoers came up and mentioned Curb to him, the guide going so far as to use Lewis’ name in reference to historical martyrs, declaring “I bet Richard felt like this.”

Lewis asked for some privacy, as it was his honeymoon. Then Lewis’ wife felt a sudden urge, so he grabbed the guide and said, “You’re gonna make a lot of money from that tour, because of me. Get her a bathroom.” It being an urgent situation, and with the guide’s privileged access, Lewis’ wife got to pee in Da Vinci’s toilet. Which perhaps just further proves that Lewis — comedian, actor, author — is a true Renaissance man.

By Adam Gropman
**MERRY MAID**

*The Heart of Robin Hood* focuses on Lady Marian

**BY DEBORAH KLUGMAN**

Marketed as family fare, *The Heart of Robin Hood*, David Farr’s feminist twist on the classic legend, is perhaps more suitable for kids than for grown-ups. Co-directed by Icelandic artists Gísli Órn Garðarsson and Selma Björnsdóttir, it’s a pleasant two-hour interlude that serves up an attractive spectacle, nimble acrobatics and moderate chuckles. As long as your expectations are moderate, you’ll enjoy your evening.

In Farr’s version, which premiered at the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2011, Robin (Luke Forbes) and his men are merry bandits who take from the rich and keep the spoils for themselves. The story’s true heroine is Lady Marian (Christina Bennett Lind), the beautiful eldest daughter of the Duke of York. She’s an adventurous, open-hearted woman who aspires to be an outlaw in the forest, especially after the wicked and lecherous Prince John (Eirik del Barco Soleglad) arrives at her father’s castle and declares he wants to marry her.

When Marian first meets Robin, she’s disappointed to learn he’s only out for himself. Suspicious of women, he discourages her from joining his band, so she dons men’s garb and establishes her own marauding enterprise, assisting the poor and becoming revered as “Martin of Sherwood.”

Eventually the rival bandits meet again, and Marion persuades Robin to help her rescue two orphaned children (Gavin Lewis and Lily Rose Silver) from evil John, who has already executed their father for refusing to pay an onerous tax.

A visual treat, designer Börkur Jónsson’s set evokes a lush magical forest, with a steep sliding backdrop for the actors to cascade down and scramble up again at frequent intervals. The performers also swing from ropes and hang upside down from the ceiling, circus-style. Their maneuvers add panache to the story, but if you’ve been to Cirque du Soleil, you likely won’t be blown away.

Lind delivers a perfectly serviceable performance as Marion, but it’s more capable than inspired. Forbes also performs ably as a swashbuckling hero with issues, but here, too, there’s a missing spark. On the other hand, as villain John, the comical Soleglad steals every scene he’s in. Sarah Hunt is also a good deal more entertaining as Marion’s desperate-to-marry sister, Alice, than is her noble-minded sibling. And as Pierre, Marion’s clownish gay companion, Daniel Franzese lucks out with the lion’s share of comic riffs.

Icelandic vocalist Salka Sól and her band bridge the various scenes with folksy songs that don’t mesh all that well into the story. The lyrics are rather bromidic, and the effect is to extend the show beyond its organic conclusion.

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**CRITICS CHOICE “Pitch perfect”**

* – LA Times

**ROTTERDAM**

by Jon Brittain

directed by Michael A. Shepperd

A queer love story about all of us...

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2017’S 12 BEST MOVIES

From veterans like Spielberg and newbies like Jordan Peele come one critic’s favorite films of the year

BY ALAN SCHERSTUHL

couple of caveats: First, these are my favorite movies of the year, not a claim to rank the definitive best, so don’t write to tell me that your favorite should have made it. Put it on your list, bro. Second: I saw more than 200 new-release movies in 2017, but the only way to have caught all of them would mean dissolving into a whiskery puddle of flesh and eyes. So, yes, I know I’m missing some things. Third: I made a list of 10 movies before seeing, in just a few days, the December releases from Paul Thomas Anderson, Alexander Payne, Guillermo del Toro and Steven Spielberg. Then I added two of their titles, to come to 12.

Finally, none of the superhero movies made this list, though I did enjoy the light-touch myth-making of Wonder Woman’s first half, the ’70s fantasy paperback booksplosion of Thor: Ragnarok and the local-hero comedy of Spider-Man: Homecoming, a movie that sometimes dares to push against our entertainment culture’s pathological insistence upon violent heroism as the solution to all problems. As for bloody, brooding Logan: C’mom, even in his dotage, Professor X would never let his crew endanger the lives of that poor farm family.

Dawson City: Frozen Time

The ultimate found-footage doc this side of his own Decasia (2002), Bill Morrison’s meditative beauty showcases long-lost silent films — features and newsreels — discovered buried beneath a swimming pool in a Yukon Gold Rush town. Here are glimpses of the infamous 1919 White Sox, forgotten dramas with titles like The Unpardonable Sins and footage of the town itself, woven together to reveal (without spoken words) both the history of Dawson City and also what entertained the Hardy folk who braved the elements to settle there — what they dreamed of.

Faces Places

Something of a prank, an art project, a buddy comedy, a tour of the French countryside and an inquiry into memory and images and what it means to reveal our eyes to the world, Faces Places finds the great documentarian and photographer Agnès Varda, 88 at the time of filming, teaming up with 33-year-old photographer JR to wander France, pasting photographed portraits of the people they meet on building walls and water towers and any surface that will take them. The film is light, funny, alarm, alive, the work of a great and her inspired collaborator who are forever happy to be looking.

The Florida Project

Another on-a-shoestring study of American life on the margins, Sean Baker’s follow-up to Tangerine boasts a movie star (Willem Dafoe as an endearingly decent motel manager) but also, again, a cast of amateurs and newbies giving some of the year’s most vivid performances. In this case, the breakout are the kids who dash about a touristy strip of Florida frontage road not far from Orlando’s Disney World. Homeless, holed up in a flophouse, these characters still lark through scenes of vibrant, playful, broke-ass joyousness, as Baker and his grown-up cast make sure we always know what the kiddos sometimes can overlook: the precariousness of their existence.

Get Out

Outside of Wonder Woman, Jordan Peele’s Get Out is the only 2017 studio picture that truly seemed to matter to people who don’t live and breathe for movies. Much can be said about its courage and cleverness, its horror and hilarity, but I’ll leave it to this. In its first moments, Peele got America audiences to accept what white folks still have a hard time admitting: that no It clown house is as scary as the thought of being a black man walking alone at night through a strange white suburb.

God’s Own Country

My favorite of this year’s gay romances, Francis Lee’s lusty, muddy feature debut finds a brutish young farmer discovering tenderness amid the rough beauty of northern England. Lee and his cast dare a naturalistic frankness, never shying away from the practical realities of sex, livestock or the prickly confusion of young men who yearn for something different than what they’ve been raised to.

Human Flow

You’re right not to trust a film critic who calls a movie “stunning.” But Human Flow, the documentary surveying the scope of the global refugee crisis, from Chinese artist-activist Ai Weiwei, stunned in the truest sense of the word. Again and again, over 140 minutes, Ai overwhelms with visions of populations in flight, a new mass migration that most world governments refuse to respond to. Human Flow reveals the full breadth of a global catastrophe.

I Called Him Morgan

It’s fitting that one of the great films about jazz centers on the re-creation of a lost moment. Kasper Collin’s exquisitely haunted documentary meditation I Called Him Morgan, about the life and murder of the ‘60s hard-bop trumpeter Lee Morgan, is shrouded in shots of New York whited out with snow, the lightening of the Chrysler Building the one point of orientation. Pulses and alive beneath it: the fascinating lives of the musicians interviewed here, a doomed romance and Morgan’s crisp, insistent trumpet. It’s on Netflix right now, people.

Lady Bird

Greta Gerwig’s coming-of-age weird comedy is rare not just in its brisk buoyancy or its sharply observed understanding of how place and family and friends shape a young self. It’s also rare in its understanding and empathy, in its honoring of what every character would be feeling at the moments that we’re watching them. The year’s best scene partners: Saoirse Ronan and Laurie Metcalf.

Mudbound

The studios wouldn’t touch Dee Rees’ raw and intimate epic of white and black families, both poor, scrabbling through the war years on a patch of Mississippi dirt. So Netflix bought it, and that means you can savor its humanity, its clear-eyed honesty about power and economics under Jim Crow, its painful moments of hope, its vital performances and its can’t-look-away sweep toward inevitable tragedy tonight.

Phantom Thread

Exquisitely acted, staged, shot and conceived, the latest collaboration between writer-director Paul Thomas Anderson and Daniel Day-Lewis guts the familiar great man’s muse story that it at first seems to be telling. Vicky Krieps, as an old prick’s young inspiration, seizes the movie from the big names, just as her character seizes control of the quiet, controlled life said prick has groomed her for.

The Post

I believe it’s a good thing that Steven Spielberg is on the nose about the issues he’s on the nose about in a movie that will be seen by America’s dads and uncles. The dude rocks Rockwells, believes in the sunny ol’ American past, has made billions anticipating the national mood and suddenly has whipped up a movie about what it’s like to be a woman in rooms full of powerful dudes at just the moment his country finally seems ready to think about that. Also: Meryl Streep goes sublime!

A Quiet Passion

“For those of us who lived minor lives and are deprived of a particular kind of love, we know best how to starve,” says Cynthia Nixon’s Emily Dickinson deep into Terence Davies’ soaring, despairing drama about achieving greatness without ever leaving one’s house. We see Dickinson starve: for love, for recognition of her genius, for any sense that humanity will not fail her.
A THRILLING YEAR FOR FILM
APRIL WOLFE’S TOP 10 MOVIES OF 2017

By April Wolfe

What this year lacked in civility and sanity, it made up for in movies. And thank God. Because in the year of “let’s be legends,” we needed a little bit of anything to hold onto. All 10 of these films moved me profoundly. Some of them gave me hope for America, others invited me into foreign-to-me cultures and one even made me delightfully nauscent. And they each thrill me.

Mudbound

I will never stop thinking about Dee Rees’ Mudbound, a gorgeous, sprawling epic tackling race and class in the Deep South, during and after World War II. There’s not a single person involved who doesn’t deserve a standing ovation. Rees’ masterful direction balances romance, terror, merit, and despair. Rachel Morrison’s cinematography buries us in a sea of rich brown palettes with texture and dimension. Makali Kamitsuna’s editing keeps the pace taut. And every single actor is electric with the energy of a gathering thunderstorm.

Lady Macbeth

For me, Florence Pugh is one of 2017’s biggest breakout stars. Here, she plays Lady Katherine, a much older man’s wife, who will scheme and murder her way to freedom, even if that freedom is cursed. Pugh’s cat-and-mouse scenes with Naomi Ackie almost made me ill (in a good way) with their high tension. Ackie plays lovely maid Anna, who often bears the brunt of Katherine’s whims, and the suspense comes from seeing which one will break first. Directed by William Oldroyd and written by Alice Birch, Lady Macbeth, gives us one of our finest screen anti-heroes; you’ll cheer her on one minute, then want to hang her the next.

The Florida Project

Sean Baker makes films like they’re journalism. In The Florida Project, he takes us to the seedy motels just outside Disney World, where a little mischievous girl named Moonee lives with her tattooed and troubled young mother. The film is nearly narrative-less, simply trailing Moonee and her adorably annoying little friends, the fierce and funny Little Rossos. Their exploits through the colorful motel of the area are surprisingly hilarious, leading up to one big, emotional moment, full of magic and insight. The film is pure joy.

Brimstone & Glory

Someone practically begged me to see this in a theater and not at home, and I’m grateful for the pestering, because Brimstone & Glory is an immersive experience of color and sound and emotion, so immediate that my heart literally beat faster as I watched it. Filmed in the Mexican town famed for making most of the country’s fireworks, director Viktor Jakovleski drops us right into an annual festival where this community celebrates life by tempting death, shown to us mostly through the eyes of one little boy who’s overcoming his fears to carry on his family tradition. Just... wow.

Raw

I’ve seen Julia Ducournau’s wonderfully gruesome debut feature five times and can’t wait to see it again. This sister story about a vegetarian girl who suddenly develops cannibalistic urges is fun, funny, thoughtfully and thrilling. Beautifully shot with a score full of pipe organs and strings, it’s a small film that feels huge. It’s one big coming-of-age tale that tackles with rare honesty how terrifying it is for a girl to grow into her own sexuality. Ducournau is a serious talent.

The Bad Batch

Ana Lily Amirpour is one of the most wildy inventive genre filmmakers working today. Her story of a young woman who narrowly escapes cannibalistic, desert-dwelling body builders to avenge her own near-death is at once hilarious and unnerving. Amirpour gets special bonus points for casting Keaun Reeves as a silk-robed messiah cult leader with a hareem of gun-toting pregnant followers who pass out acid to mellow out the townspeople. Even if this story doesn’t grab you, let yourself revel in the audacity of this filmmaker to try something unbearably new.
"ALTOGETHER WONDERFUL!"

A.D. Scott, The New York Times

"ONE OF THE FINEST MOVIES OF THE YEAR."

Stephanie Zacharek, Time

"THE SHAPE OF WATER IS INFUSED WITH MOVIE LOVE."

Peter Travers, Rolling Stone

"A FAIRY TALE THAT SUBMERGES YOU IN THE FANTASTICAL REALM OF THE DIRECTOR'S IMAGINATION."

Jake Coyle, AP

"THIS FILM IS A LABOR OF LOVE, A DEVOTION THAT SHOWS IN EVERY FRAME."

Richard Lawson, Vanity Fair

"A POWERFUL VISION OF A CREATIVE MASTER FEELING TOTALLY, JOYOUSLY FREE."

Ben Croll, IndieWire

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Jake Coyle, AP

THE SHAPE OF WATER

A GUILLERMO DEL TORO FILM

"THIS FILM IS A LABOR OF LOVE, A DEVOTION THAT SHOWS IN EVERY FRAME."

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OTHER SHOWS STILL AVAILABLE • VISIT TICKETS.THESHAPEOFWATERTHEMOVIE.COM FOR SHOWTIMES
BIg Sonia Twice during the new documentry Big Sonia, Sonia Warszawski says forgiveness has to come from a higher power, because what she experienced during the Holocaust overwhelmed her own capacity to forgive. One of those experiences, the most devastating, was watching her mother forced by guards to a dead shopping mall. The loose structure is bound by a thread of motherhood. Sonia’s children, two daughters and a son, are lively, intelligent and deeply affected by their parents’ trauma. They recall their father regularly shouting in his sleep, and describe Sonia as tough and demanding — but nonetheless, a mother who they always knew loved them. The directors make excellent visual use of the mall with drifting shots of empty stores and the dry fountains that once cascaded down two stories, a visual reminder of time’s arrow and other, more important losses. (Chris Packham)

BOMBSHELL: THE HEDY LAMARR STORY

The famously beautiful actress Hedy Lamarr set movie screens ablaze in the 1940s and ’50s, but few knew that her true calling was as an inventor: Credit Lamarr with the Wi-Fi technology bringing you this review. In this superb documentary, first-time filmmaker Alexandra Dean uses newly discovered audio tapes from a 1990 interview to let Lamarr — with valuable insight from historians, her children and friends such as Robert Osborne — tell the amazing story of her life. Born in Austria, she shocked the world at age 16 by appearing in a scandalous nude pic called Ekstase (1933), which the pope denounced and Hitler banned. At 18, she married a munitions tycoon whose controlling ways (and ties to Mussolini and the Nazis) sent her fleeing to Paris in an escape story so wild and inherently cinematic that it cries out to be dramatized. Hollywood soon made her a star — Aggers and Samson and Delilah are among her best remembered films — but all along Lamarr was honing her skills as an amateur engineer. In an inspired stroke, Dean uses animation to show how Lamarr visualized “Bomber” workings of every object, such as player pianos and TV remotes, a way of seeing that helped her devise a frequency-hopping radio signal that would change the world. Recognition (and compensa-
tion) proved elusive in Lamarr’s lifetime, but in this marvelous documentary, a brilliant woman — “I’m a very simple, complicated person” — finally gets her due. (Chuck Wilson)

BULLET HEAD

A gonzo 10-minute standoff between Adrien Brody and a man-eating pitbull single-handedly justifies the existence of the otherwise uninspired heist thriller Bullet Head. Unfortunately, viewers must wade through an hour of long-winded dialogue and nearly pointless killing flashbacks before seeing Brody, as a hapless bank robber waiting for a getaway car after a job goes awry, race through an abandoned warehouse to avoid a Cujo-esque attack dog. Before this energizing sequence, Brody and co-stars John Malkovich and Rory Culkin laboriously establish their dull stock characters through tissue-softened flashbacks about closely guarded truffles, deadbeat dads and stolen goldfish. Malkovich, as a cynical veteran thief, instigates most of the talking: He chides Culkin’s junkie newbie and dispenses fatherly advice to Brody’s cipher-like Everyman. But there’s one topic that Malkovich’s world-weary character avoids bringing up: the blood-soaked attack dog that’s guarding the stairway to their hideout’s main exit. Thankfully, you don’t even have to remember these disposable protagonists’ names when Brody locks (flimsy) doors, sprints through (bottleneck) corridors and hides in an unlocked school bus to avoid his nameless four-legged nemesis. Instead, heavy-handed uselessly appoints a body climbing into a hallowed-out piano! Gasp as a computer-generated drop of sweat gives away his location! Laugh with joy as a blood-soaked poosh crashes into the piano like a heat-seeking missile! (Simon Abrams)

COMPANY TOWN

“Everybody in my neighborhood knew that I lost one of the last 40 years died from cancer,” says a resident of Crossett, Arkansas, at a public hear-
ing captured in the blood-blooding doc Company Town. The man continues: “I’m the only one left on that street.” That street cuts close to Crossett’s Georgia-Pacific mill, which pumps out 45 million gallons of wastewater a day, much into ponds and streams. The Ouachita River, which wends past the mill, blackens at Crossett. Local doctors, a resident tells us, describe the coughing and congestion common to the area as “the Crossett crud”; another resident reports being paid by the mill’s owners to buy “feet and feet and feet of poison” near the mill underneath 4 to 6 inches of dirt. Tests confirm a high proximity of toxic chemicals in the water, and Simone Smith, an elementary-school girl, has cancer. The filmmakers establish all this through old-fashioned journalism: They show up, talk to people and film the poisoned life of Crossett, population 5,500. But the town is up against the heaviest of heavies: The mill is owned by Koch Industries. The film becomes bumbling tragically when EPA officials (from the Office of Environmental Justice and Tribal Affairs) arrive in 2013 to survey the damages. They smile, look concerned, but make no promises. They have so little power that one suggests that the best way to take on Koch is “to kill ‘em with kindness” because “you get more with honey than vinegar.” It all ends in a Flint-like muddle, with no serious action taken to protect America’s poorest communities. (Alan Scherstuhl)

FILM STARS DON’T DIE IN LIVERPOOL

Here’s a film in which excellent actors play fascinating people in interesting circumstances, but the adaptation from real life to memoir (by Peter Turner) to screenplay to movie has lost what’s fascinating/interest-
ing about them. The finely realized Annette Bening performance at the center of Paul McGuigan’s Film Stars Don’t Die in Liverpool doesn’t power the movie. McGuigan stages this anguished romance between the troubled, aging ac-
tress Gloria Grahame and her under-30 pick-me-up hunk Turner (Jamie Bell) as if that thumbnail description is all you need to know. Every scene of their coupling seems crafted to make the simplest of points: That Grahame is deluded and insecure about her age; that Turner, an actor himself, sees an affair with her as some sort of opportunity; that actors, in the real world, act out the selves they wish they were. For all that, both leads summon full characters out of the sketches they’ve been given. Bening adopts a fluttery unreliability, making Grahame’s small lies into piecing tragicomedy. Bell’s young man on the make seems torn be-	ween love and opportunism, though the screenplay event that clearly left a gaping crater in his heart; she repeatedly touches watching her mother forced by guards experiencing, the most devastating, was her own capacity to forgive. One of those experiences, the most devastating, was watching her mother forced by guards to a dead shopping mall. The loose structure is bound by a thread of motherhood. Sonia’s children, two daughters and a son, are lively, intelligent and deeply affected by their parents’ trauma. They recall their father regularly shouting in his sleep, and describe Sonia as tough and demanding — but nonetheless, a mother who they always knew loved them. The directors make excellent visual use of the mall with drifting shots of empty stores and the dry fountains that once cascaded down two stories, a visual reminder of time’s arrow and other, more important losses. (Chris Packham)

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Crise Gillespie’s raucous Tonya Harding biopic, , isn’t all #TeamTonya or #TeamTruth — will we ever know the full, real story? Gillespie doesn’t pretend to be definitive. Instead, he spins the tragedy of Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan into a searing indictment of America’s obsession with “America” and the ways in which public opinion can be irreparably warped by the media. Those expecting camp or catfights won’t find them in Gillespie’s movie, which instead offers thoughtful and somewhat optimistic critiques, plus seriously dark humor that will elicit uncomfortable gasps of laughter — and invites you to ponder difficult truths. To write the script, the filmmakers traveled...
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to Oregon, where Harding still resides, to capture interviews with her and her husband/possible co-conspirator Jeff Gillooly, as well as family members and associates. The film unfurls as a collage of these dramatized interviews with re-enactments — starring Margot Robbie as Valley and Sebastian Stan as Carl, with the foursome’s murderer, the unknown who avoids capture — that smash the fourth wall and span Harding’s youth all the way up to and past... “the incident.” You see Kerrigan scream out — “Why?” — but Gillespie’s story becomes about a different physical abuse, that of Harding’s, first at the hands of her mother (Allison Janney) and then at Gillooly’s. Using Harding’s, first at the performing arts and second at the family business, second thoughts express her disdain for the way in which the girl — the girl for whom all is set up for some intrigue, and second thoughts express her disdain for the way in which the girl — the girl for whom all is set up for some intrigue, and

KALEIDOSCOPE

Writer-director Rupert Jones’ slipperily slow-burn psychological thriller Kaleidoscope is powered by a fusion of two elements — a female corpse and a disturbed mother-son relationship — that immediately evokes Alfred Hitchcock’s Psycho. Unlike that movie, however, Kaleidoscope unfolds in a frustrating achronological fashion, toggling among three key points: a first date between Carl (Toby Jones, Rupert’s brother), an isolated ex-con, and Abby (Sinead Matthews), a woman Carl met through an online-dating platform; the morning after the rendezvous, when Carl wakes up to find his dead body in the upstairs bathroom, blood splashed on the walls; and the ensuing days and nights of fraught mother-son cohabitation, the consequence of the former’s sudden trip to London. The discomfort of Carl’s relationship with his mom (Anne Reid) is emphasized even before she materializes on-screen, when Jones cast her on the acting machine and then, months before emitting the announcement of her impending arrival with grand menace. Jones’ constant temporal shuffling calls into question the reality of the events depicted: One flash moment, for example, shows Carl racing to the bathroom and discovering Abby heaving on the sink with her cigarette, saying, “So, no love after all; he frantically embraces her and apologizes. Minutes later, however, Jones switches back to Psycho territory, sticking us alongside Carl as he goes about the dirty business of ditching a body. But all the narrative toy-arounding has the effect of making these characters seem less like thinking, feeling human beings caught in a complicated puzzle-piece screenplay, furthermore, that this movie about a man’s torment-ed mind uses as its intrigue-generating launching-off point the dismemberment of a woman’s body is a cringe-worthy start that Kaleidoscope never shakes. (Danny King)

NAPLES ‘44

In the Ricky Gervais comedy The Invention of a Lie, a world in which nobody can conceive of the concept of fiction, movies consist simply of a narrator reading from a book of historical facts. Naples ‘44 isn’t quite that bare-bones, but at times it suggests a way Gervais’ characters could have spiced up their relentlessly literal films, as this documentaryary-referencing film arrives in Naples as an opportunistic and leaves an advocate. Writer-director Bryan Buckley treats Badaroo’s 2008-09 odyssey, chronicled in his nonfiction book The Pirates of Somalia: Inside Their Hidden World, as an elucidating examination of kinship more than a biopic. This formative experience shapes his portrayal and informs the immersion as a reporter became portraying Somalia as fully rounded individuals instead of cartoon villains. Buckley shares that perspective. His Oscar-nominated short Asad is about a Somali boy’s coming of age during wartime, and Badaroo’s contacts in Somalia continually surprise and enlighten him, especially translator Abdirizak (Barkhad Abdi), whose sly wit and emotional support are invaluable, and Maryan (Sabrina Hassan Abbude), who challenges Jay’s naive and romanticism. But there’s a tension between two competing narratives. While Buckley aims to show Somalis as they see themselves, Badaroo has been cast in the white-savior role, even if Jay’s “Don’t blame me, I’m Canadian” apologists for Western ignorance of African history and culture. Buckley (The Bronze) also injects Badaroo’s perspective with satirical ex-aggeration expressed in nightmares and hallucinatory revelations. (The Pirates of Somalia was originally called Where the White Man Rode Away.) Peter’s effectively portrays Badaroo’s maturation from a self-involved bumbler to knowledgeable writer, but the real stars here are Somalis. In a starkly different role, Abdi displays the charisma intensity that got him an Oscar nomination for Captain Phillips, and Hassan Abudde radiates humor, warmth and intelligence. Jay is slyly transformed by his love affair with the artist himself, plus the people who knew him best. At the height of his fame, the restless, irascible, never-satisfied painter turned from his shadowmen to sea- and landscapes, a drug-fueled search for the sublime that art buyers weren’t interested in soon. Hambleton was crashing in hovels, celebrating his occasional sales with heroin and caviar. We see scarfing video of some of his homes. In 2009, Hambleton enjoyed a comeback, touring the world with new shadow art that sells to celebrities and Wall Street sweats and oligarchs, none of whom much impress Hambleton. In 2013, a Moscow businesswoman offers him a cut of the fortune that might interest Robert Taylor. For one painting a month, Hambleton could live at the Trump Soho. Six months in, we learn, that Hambleton — true to form — got booted for trashing his room. (Alan Scherstuhl)

THE TRIBES OF PALO VERDES

This languid, lyric adaptation of Joy Nicholson’s novel about coming of age in a spec-tacular hidden home at first pulses with promise. The directors, music video pros Emmett Malloy and Brendan Malloy, demonstrate an effective command of teenagers’ moody reveries, following toothsome twins (the excellent Maika Monroe and Cody Fern) as they acclimate to the swanky beach town of Palo Verdes, where their family has relocated as their parents’ marriage combusts. The Pacific crashes just below their back patio, and the teens take up surf-ing in sequences that capture, with a sun-in-your-hair indie-pop soundtrack, the pleasures of steadily developing a skill. One twin slides into drugs, though the other, played by the always charismatic Kiersey Clemons, who sometimes did and had some power thanks to the directors’ pleasing evocation of a stoned Call life. Meanwhile, the twins’ mother (Jennifer Garner) is losing it, haunting their beach palace in her bathrobe, suspecting their cardiologist father (Justin Kirk) of cheating. Garner’s character rages at him, threatening to leave him in order to play a sort of generic idea of white America niceness getting the chance to chainsaw. That’s the film’s second distinguishing factor: Garner erupts and expectorates with winning zeal, swirling tennis balls at the mistress and lambast-ing the very idea of Palo Verdes beauty regimens. “I have the perfect anti-aging solution,” she declares early to an assistant. “It’s called death.” Her character turns manic once her husband leaves the family. The heartfelt glee of her exclamation, “We could get a gaza!” is all by itself reason enough to see the movie. The younger performers also are strong, but the last hour of the film is often slack, with too few sharp scenes amid the sun-and-sea vistas. (Alan Scherstuhl)

SONG OF GRANITE

This patient and luminous life-of-the-artist film earns strongest praise about its evocation of its titular character, the music of Irish folk singer Joe Heaney here is situated in the hard beauty of the land and village he grew up in, in the songs of birds and local balladeers, in hill and sea and timeless toil. Director Pat Collins shoots in black-and-white, sometimes in shadows and candlelight, fascinated not by drama but by milieu. The first third of his formally daring

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The Pirates of Somalia: Inside Their Hidden World, as an elucidating examination of kinship more than a biopic. This formative experience shapes his portrayal and informs the immersion as a reporter became portraying Somalia as fully rounded individuals instead of cartoon villains. Buckley shares that perspective. His Oscar-nominated short Asad is about a Somali boy’s coming of age during wartime, and Badaroo’s contacts in Somalia continually surprise and enlighten him, especially translator Abdirizak (Barkhad Abdi), whose sly wit and emotional support are invaluable, and Maryan (Sabrina Hassan Abbude), who challenges Jay’s naive and romanticism. But there’s a tension between two competing narratives. While Buckley aims to show Somalis as they see themselves, Badaroo has been cast in the white-savior role, even if Jay’s “Don’t blame me, I’m Canadian” apologists for Western ignorance of African history and culture. Buckley (The Bronze) also injects Badaroo’s perspective with satirical ex-aggeration expressed in nightmares and hallucinatory revelations. (The Pirates of Somalia was originally called Where the White Man Rode Away.) Peter’s effectively portrays Badaroo’s maturation from a self-involved bumbler to knowledgeable writer, but the real stars here are Somalis. In a starkly different role, Abdi displays the charisma intensity that got him an Oscar nomination for Captain Phillips, and Hassan Abudde radiates humor, warmth and intelligence. Jay is slyly transformed by his love affair with the artist himself, plus the people who knew him best. At the height of his fame, the restless, irascible, never-satisfied painter turned from his shadowmen to sea- and landscapes, a drug-fueled search for the sublime that art buyers weren’t interested in soon. Hambleton was crashing in hovels, celebrating his occasional sales with heroin and caviar. We see scarfing video of some of his homes. In 2009, Hambleton enjoyed a comeback, touring the world with new shadow art that sells to celebrities and Wall Street sweats and oligarchs, none of whom much impress Hambleton. In 2013, a Moscow businesswoman offers him a cut of the fortune that might interest Robert Taylor. For one painting a month, Hambleton could live at the Trump Soho. Six months in, we learn, that Hambleton — true to form — got booted for trashing his room. (Alan Scherstuhl)
GETTING DOWN

The Root Down Soundsystem on creating one of L.A.'s defining parties

BY JESSICA LIPSKY

Twenty years ago in a cafe tunnel raucous cocoon of an event space, two musicians and their friends cultivated the ultimate breeding ground for multigenre experimentation. From the seeds of the acid jazz, underground hip-hop and funky breaks germinating all over Los Angeles bloomed a unique party with a distinctly eclectic sound.

“The Root Down was dedicated to showcasing the roots of hip-hop in a way that was previously unknown,” says Root Down co-founder Carlos Guaico, aka DJ Loslito. “We bridged the gap of great turntablism and seamless mixes while keeping the dance floor up.”

Spawning from a party called the Breaks — in which emcees were backed by band the Breakesta while DJs spun funky breaks — the Root Down is one of those only-in-L.A. events that has gained legendary status over the years. It’s been host to Cut Chemist, The Black Eyed Peas, Antibalas, Peanut Butter Wolf and Mayer Hawthorne, among others, offering a stage for experimentation in a time when few such venues existed.

“The Root Down became a weekly activity and something that was just, without thinking, you knew you were gonna show up there. The challenge was to make sure you could make it in before it reached capacity,” says singer Aloe Blacc, who got his start rapping with DJ Exile, performing as Emanon.

To celebrate two decades of deep cuts, the Root Down will have a weekly Thursday residency at the Virgil (formerly Little Tem-


number of my musical heroes and inspirations from being part of the Root Down. I’ve grown up under its umbrella and there’s a lot of people that are family to me because of it.”

TRD brought an additional aspect of musical education to attendees in the form of “baseball card” flyers, which Miles and Loslito initially distributed by pounding the pavement in the days before social media. The cards featured a picture of each guest artist along with “stats” on the back that offered some context and musical history.

As the Root Down moved from its first digs at Gabah on Melrose, to Little Temple in Silver Lake, to El Cid and eventually the Echoplex, the night also branched into satellite events in New York and more narrowly themed nights such as the now defunct Afro-Latin fusion party Descarga, Motown on Mondays, and Funky Sole, which will celebrate its 18th anniversary over Christmas.

The driving force behind this expansion was Tarek Captan, aka DJ Dusk, whom Miles calls “one of the best selector/DJs, emcee hosts I’ve ever witnessed.” Dusk brought a catalytic change to the Root Down sound, blowing the night’s definition of hip-hop roots wide open to include a fearless mix of tunes from the late ’70s and ’80s, R&B and boogie alongside Latin and Brazilian music.

“His library was even broader than ours. He and I would sit there and talk about salsa records and cumbia records before you could even collect any of that stuff in L.A.,” Loslito says. “If it created a good vibe, people were open. Hip-hop heads would sit down and listen to cumbia. Even if they didn’t know it, they’d participate.”

Dusk was killed by a drunk driver in 2006, and his absence created a major handicap for the Root Down. Two years later, when the economy took a nose dive, attendance dwindled and Miles and Loslito decided to take a break from the hustle for a couple of years before bringing the Root Down back for semiregular events. The 20th-anniversary residency is perhaps less of a triumphant return than a celebration of a multigenre musical culture they helped create.

“The Root Down is almost this folklore thing. Because of that constant energy and sincerity from people throughout our lives, it was hard for us to fully let go,” Loslito says. “The fact that we were able to be relevant to some degree, the fact that the brand is still being sought after, is the highest compliment.”

As a new generation hits the floor with baked-in knowledge of the roots of hip-hop and access to vinyl, one might think that the Root Down’s relevance is disappearing. Miles challenges that assertion: “In my opinion we made ourselves relevant in the first place. If it’s good music that we’re playing and featuring, maybe that’s always relevant.”

Loslito adds, “The fact that we were able to kind of be the tree that branched these other scenes and other movements, and nurtured these bands and allowed performers to do their thing on our stage, I’m definitely proud of what we’ve been able to accomplish. I think the legacy is really the people that have come from us.”

THE ROOT DOWN RESIDENCY | The Virgil, 4519 Santa Monica Blvd., East Hollywood (323) 660-4540 | $10 before 10:30 p.m. with RSVP; $15 otherwise | roothd.eventbrite.com
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**Music Picks**

**fri**

**12/8**

DJ Spinna, J Rocc
@ ECHOLPLEX
Having style and a sound as a dance music DJ is one thing, but having a genre you never step out of, like a DJ who just plays techno music — or, more specifically, Detroit techno music — kind of sucks. The best part of a truly good DJ, and a truly good DJ set, is the DJ’s ability to transition among many styles and genres, weaving a narrative between disparate genres. New York’s DJ Spinna and L.A.’s own J Rocc are two DJs not at all confined by genres. In Spinna’s decades-long career as a DJ and remixer, he’s worked to connect the dots between hip-hop, house music, soul, funk and Brazilian rhythms. J Rocc, meanwhile, has concentrated on illuminating the connection between hip-hop, electro music and the weirder varieties of rock and electronic music. —Sam Ribakoff

Very Be Careful, Cutty Flam
@ ALEX’S BAR
For 20 years, Very Be Careful have been pumping out their own inexorably bewitching version of vallenato. Formed in L.A. by brothers Ricardo Guzman (accordion) and Arturo “Brickems” Guzman (bass), the quintet take the rollicking rhythms and unfolding melodic sequences of traditional cumbia and vallenato from northern Colombia’s Caribbean coast and infuse them with a surge of punky California energy. From their early recordings with Beastie Boys producer Money Mark to 2012’s “Remember Me From the Party?”, Very Be Careful have always shown a lot of underdog heart and soul, even as they’re filling dance floors with Arturo’s nimble rhythms and Ricardo’s swooning waves of accordion. Cutty Flam are a thoroughly charming trio from the San Fernando Valley who give rootsy garage rock and accordion. Cutty Flam are a thoroughly charming trio from the San Fernando Valley who give rootsy garage rock and accordion. Very Be Careful infuse their latest album, “Very Be Careful, Cutty Flam” with enough unexpected variations on the standard formula to establish their own brash sound. The title track is pushed madly along by choppy, urgent Velvet Underground-style rhythm-guitar chords topped by Glenn Brigin’s balefully hazy wash of keyboards and Dylan Siemore’s snarling vocals. Siemore transforms into a melodic teenage idol among the weepy strands of the flower-pop reverie “Let Love Be Love,” before the group pick up the tempo and plunge into the swirling 13th Floor Elevators-inspired vortex of “Learnings of the Light.” Washington state’s Weed crank out a comparatively modern fusion of assemblage of Can’s psychedelic echoes and ’70s Black Sabbath sludgy wallowing. Also on the bill: the fuzzy synth rumblings of Bert Hoover’s shadowy and sinister Hooveriis. —Falling James

**sat**

**12/9**

Frankie & the Witch Fingers, Weede, Hooveriis
@ THE SMELL
At first, Frankie & the Witch Fingers come off like so many other retro, garage-rocking archaeologists these days who are reliving ancient ’60s pop psychedelia. On closer inspection, the L.A. quartet infuse their latest album, ‘Brain Telephone,’ with enough unexpected variations on the standard formula to establish their own brash sound. The title track is pushed madly along by choppy, urgent Velvet Underground-style rhythm-guitar chords topped by Glenn Brigin’s balefully hazy wash of keyboards and Dylan Siemore’s snarling vocals. Siemore transforms into a melodic teenage idol among the weepy strands of the flower-pop reverie “Let Love Be Love,” before the group pick up the tempo and plunge into the swirling 13th Floor Elevators-inspired vortex of “Learnings of the Light.” Washington state’s Weed crank out a comparatively modern fusion of assemblage of Can’s psychedelic echoes and ’70s Black Sabbath sludgy wallowing. Also on the bill: the fuzzy synth rumblings of Bert Hoover’s shadowy and sinister Hooveriis. —Falling James

Stevie Wonder
@ STAPLES CENTER
Stevie Wonder returns with the 21st edition of House Full of Toys, his annual benefit for needy kids and struggling families. Each year, the R&B-pop-soul icon is joined by a small galaxy of stellar guests, and this year he and music director Rickey Minor welcome seemingly ageless crooner Tony Bennett, R&B stylist John Legend, soul-pop diva Andra Day, the eternally “Happy”-minded Pharrell Williams, tap-dancing whirlwind Savion Glover and the thoroughly innocuous Dave Matthews. But even with such celebrity diversions, the real draw here is a chance to hear the aptly named Wonder revisit two of his classic albums, Talking Book (1972) and Innervisions (1973). The latter alone encompasses the gently spiraling introspection of “Visions” and the more outward-looking, boldly forthright social outrage of “Living for the City.” —Falling James

Malcolm Mooney
@ ECHOLPLEX
With the recent passing of drummer Jaki Liebezeit and bassist/soundmeister Holger Czukay, the only remaining founding members of the legendary German avant-rock unit Can are keyboardist/theoretician Irmin Schmidt and the band’s American vocalist Malcolm Mooney. (Guitarist Michael Karoli died in 2001; Stone Age singer Damo Suzuki joined the unit following Mooney’s departure.) Mooney’s infamous surreal stream-of-consciousness raps is a thing of rough, raw beauty
Chimes and cherry harmonies. Although the Russian band Pussy Riot are largely known in the West for being imprisoned after provoking Vladimir Putin during an unauthorized attempt to perform in a Moscow church, Tolokonnikova seems just as intent on bringing her messages of defiance to this country after being released from jail. Tonight, she performs under the Pussy Riot name, apparently without Masha Alekina and other original members. According to the group’s publicist, “The full lineup from Pussy Riot is anonymous for safety reasons.” Also at the Bootleg Theater, Wednesday, Dec. 13.

—Falling James

Pixies, Eagles of Death Metal, The Orwells
@ HOLLYWOOD PALLADIUM
Pixies would have been an unusual band no matter which era they started, but they really stood out amid the sound and fury of the hardcore punks and hair-metal bands in the late 1980s. Even grunge groups such as Nirvana who were inspired by songwriter Black Francis rarely approached the curiously compelling melodic poignancy of the Pixies, although they were more clearly influenced by the Boston quartet’s loud-soft dynamic shifts. Pixies haven’t really been the same since bassist Kim Deal left in 2013, but current bassist Paz Lencchantin is a powerfully assured performer, and the better moments on the 2016 album Head Carrier occasionally echo Pixies’ late-’80s peak. Eagles of Death Metal guitarist Dave Catching and Eden Galindo take “Brown Sugar”—style suspended chords and speed them up ruthlessly to provide an appropriately fierce backing for lead shouter Jesse Hughes’ party-time exhortations. The Orwells are the real wild cards, with their riotously shambolic power chords crashing headlong into singer Mario Cuomo’s sarcastic lyrical provocations.

—Falling James

Roni Size with Dynamite MC
@ PROJECT CLUB L.A.
Roni Size returns to Los Angeles for the third time this year, his second at the drum ‘n’ bass institution Respect. With the accompaniment of the singular Dynamite MC, the experience is decidedly enhanced. Size is marking the 20th anniversary of his breakthrough album, the genre-blending New Forms, with a monster deluxe remastered reissue. This includes four discs worth of unreleased remixes, updated remixes and re-edits. The Mercury Prize–winning New Forms is one of those classic albums that signifies a turning point in time yet sounds perennially relevant with its unique concoction of acoustic and electronic elements. Size blew the roof off of Project Club L.A. for Respect’s 18th anniversary earlier this year. With Dynamite MC expertly directing the crowd with flawless rhymes, this evening is sure to be explosive with rewind after rewind.

—Lily Moayyer

Kehlani and Friends
@ THE NOVO
Rocketing directly to the heart of a new holiday tradition, Kehlani and Friends bring their annual Tsunami Christmas concert to L.A. The hotly tipped R&B singer now calls downtown L.A. home, and it’s a far cry from the rough conditions in which she found herself growing up in Oakland. It’s a kind of homecoming on multiple levels—blossoming and unveiling hidden parts of her soulful self with each new song and each new artistic victory. It’s a fitting coda to her whirlwind 2017 that began with the release of her debut Atlantic record, SweetSexySavage, a tour-stopping hernia surgery and a cascading cavalcade of well-deserved plaudits that come from being talked to like an adult human individual by an artist who uses her art to tell you what’s really going on with the world inside her.

—David Cotner

Pussy Riot
@ LODGE ROOM
“Big smile for the camera, it’s always on,” Nadya Tolokonnikova coos in a sugary voice on Pussy Riot’s febrile, dreamily foreboding video for the new single “Police State,” which features Chloé Sevigny as a sadistic, baton-wielding police officer. “It’s all in the protocol,” they tapped my phone,” Tolokonnikova confides against an ironic backing of bell
LA WEEKLY

**Upcoming Events at Amoeba!**

**FRIDAY • DECEMBER 8 • 5PM**

**ANGUS & JULIA STONE**
Performance & Signing

**SATURDAY • DECEMBER 9**

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20% OFF TURNTABLES, POSTERS (including framed), HEADPHONE, USED DVD/BLU-RAY & USED BOOKS.

**SATURDAY • DECEMBER 9**

**LARGE VINYL COLLECTION - ON SALE SATURDAY 12/9!**
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**TUESDAY • DECEMBER 12 • 5PM**

**BATHS**
Baths celebrate the release of the new album, Romaplasm (out now on Anticon) with a live performance and album signing at Amoeba Hollywood.

**THURSDAY • DECEMBER 14 • 6PM**

**KEDI SIGNING W/CEYDA TORUN**
Join Amoeba as we celebrate the documentary Kedi (Oscilloscope Laboratories), this year’s best cinematic ode to cats and those whose lives they enrich. Director Ceyda Torun will be at Amoeba to sign copies of the DVD/Blu-ray. Proceeds will benefit Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Los Angeles (spcaLA).

**HOLIDAY HOURS**
**SUNDAY 12/17:** 10am-10pm
**MONDAY 12/18 - 12/23:** 10am-11pm
**CHRISTMAS EVE 12/24:** 10am to 8pm
**CHRISTMAS DAY: CLOSED**
**TUESDAY 12/26:** 10am-11pm

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FRIDAY DECEMBER 8, 2017

ALVIS SHOWROOM: 1417 W. Eighth St., San Pedro. Doug Marcello, Sat., Dec. 9 & 10 p.m., $20. The 20th Annual Carlos Vega Memorial Birthday Concert, with David Garfield, Karizma and others, Sun., Dec. 10, 4 p.m., $40.

ARCADIA BLUES CLUB: 161 E. Huntington Dr., Arcadia. The Rae Gordon Band, Fri., Dec. 8, 7 p.m., $10. Chico’s Bail Bonds Blues Band, Sat., Dec. 9, 7 p.m., $5.


BLUE WHALE: 123 Astronaut E.S. Onizuka St., Los Angeles. Steve Coleman & Five Elements, Fri.-Sat., Dec. 8-9, 9 p.m., $15.

CATALINA BAR & GRILL: 6725 Sunset Blvd. Marscha Bartenetti, Fri., Dec. 8, 8:30 p.m. Take 6, Sat., Dec. 9, 8:30 p.m. Alister Porter, Sun., Dec. 10, 7:30 p.m. The Gordon Goodwin Big Phat Band, Mon., Dec. 11, 9:30 p.m. Simon Phillips, Dec. 12-13, 8:30 p.m. The Mike Stern Quartet, Thu., Dec. 14, 8:30 p.m.

COLOMBO’S ITALIAN STEAKHOUSE & JAZZ CLUB: 1933 Colorado Blvd., Eagle Rock. Steve Thompson, Fridays, 5:30 p.m., free; Blue Bird Harmony, Fri., Dec. 9, 8 p.m., free. Ernie Draffen, Saturdays, 5:30 p.m., free; The Elliott Caine Quartet, Sat., Dec. 9, 9:30 p.m., free. Take 6, Sat., Dec. 10, 11 a.m. 3 p.m., free. The Eric Erstrand Trio, Mondays, 4:30 p.m., free. Trifecta, Thursdays, 7 p.m., free.

DESSERT ROSE: 1700 Hillhurst Ave., Los Angeles. The Mark Z. Stevens Trio, Ross Margzita, Sat., 7 p.m.

Goodnight Texas, Runner, Lucy Arnell, Fri., Dec. 8, 9 p.m., $14. Senses, Dax, Battery, Mon., Dec. 11, 9 p.m., free. Travis Peery, Wed., Dec. 13, 9 p.m., free.


THE SMELL: 247 S. Main St., Los Angeles. Kuromi, Flamingo Enterprises, Loco One, Fri., Dec. 8, 9 p.m., $5. Frankie & the Witch Fingers, Weeded, Hooverist, Sat., Dec. 9, 9 p.m., $5 (see Music Pick).


JAZZ & BLUES


ARCADIA BLUES CLUB: 161 E. Huntington Dr., Arcadia. The Rae Gordon Band, Fri., Dec. 8, 7 p.m., $10. Chico's Bail Bonds Blues Band, Sat., Dec. 9, 7 p.m., $5.


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DESSERT ROSE: 1700 Hillhurst Ave., Los Angeles. The Mark Z. Stevens Trio, Ross Margzita, Sat., 7 p.m.
CONCERTS

FRIDAY, DEC. 8

AC SLATER: 9 p.m. El Rey Theatre, 5515 Wilshire Blvd.

ACO ADOLESCENTS: With Big Drill Car, Ch3, Twilight Creeps, 8 p.m., $18. The Observatory.

BENNIE MAUPIN: 8:30 p.m., $25. REDCAT.

THE DEG SINGER: 8 p.m., free. Union Station.

LUSTY DUNCAN: With Ryan Hurd, 7 p.m. The Novo.

FERRE ROUGE: 8 p.m. The Fonda Theatre.

INTO THE WOODS: 8 p.m., $40-$100. Dolby Theatre.

JAMES BLAKE: With Connie Motorakian, 8 p.m., $49.50. Immortal Presbyterian Church, 3300 Wilshire Blvd.


LA BOHEME: 8 p.m. Disney Hall, 111 S. Grand Ave.

MICHAEL FEINSTEIN: 8 p.m., $43-$59. Valley Performing Arts Center, 1811 Nordhoff St., Northridge.

TIM HEEDICK: With DJ Dougpound, 7 p.m., $10. The Regent Theater, 448 S. Main St., Los Angeles.

SATURDAY, DEC. 9

THE CHRIS ROBINSON BROTHERHOOD: 9 p.m. The Fonda Theatre, 6126 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles.

COLORS OF CHRISTMAS: With Peabo Bryson, Marilyn McCoo & Billy Davis Jr., Ruben Studdard, Jody Watley, Carlprit, Carnia, Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts.

THE DREAM: With BJ the Chicago Kid, 8 p.m. The Novo.

FIESTA MEXICANA: FELIZ NAVIDAD: With Mariachi Garibaldi, Ballet Folklorico de Los Angeles, 7 p.m., $36-$578. Valley Performing Arts Center, 3300 Wilshire Blvd.

JAMES BLAKE: With Connan Mockasin, 8 p.m., $49.50. Immortal Presbyterian Church, 3300 Wilshire Blvd.

JOHN MCLAUGHLIN, JIMMY HERRING: 8 p.m. Royce Hall, 340 Royce Dr.

KROQ ALMOST CHRISTMAS: With Muse, Thirty Seconds to Mars, Queens of the Stone Age, Prophets of Rage, Against, Run the Jewels, Cold War Kids, 4 p.m., $50-$155. The Forum.

ZOMAYRAT: 9 p.m., $29-$54. Saban Theatre.

PIA TOSCANO: 7 p.m., $20 & $50. Annenberg Center.

SALES: With Neon Chaos, 8 p.m., $25. The Regent Theater, 448 S. Main St., Los Angeles.

SUNDAY, DEC. 10


JAMES BLAKE: With Connan Mockasin, 8 p.m., $49.50. Immortal Presbyterian Church, 3300 Wilshire Blvd.

KROQ ALMOST CHRISTMAS: With Morissette, The Killers, Weezer, The Lumineers, Foster the People, Phoenix, Walk the Moon, Franz Ferdinand, 4 p.m. The Forum.


SLOW MAGIC: With Shy Girls, 8 p.m. The Novo.

STEVE WONDER’S HOUSE FULL OF TOYS: With Tony Bennett, John Legend, Andra Day, John Legend, Andra Day, Pharrell Williams, Dave Matthews, 8 p.m., $49.50-$159.50.

THURSDAY, DEC. 14

DANCE GAVIN DANCE: With Polyphonic, Icarus the Owl, Wolf & Bear, 8 p.m., $22. The Regent Theater.

GRIZZLY BEAR: With Serpentwithfeet, 7 p.m., $37.50-$54.70. The Wiltern, 3790 Wilshire Blvd.


JULIEN BAKER: With Half Way, Adam Torres, 8 p.m., $25-$35. Palace Theatre, 630 S. Broadway, L.A.

LIVING LEGENDS, HIEROGlyphICS, THE PHARCYDE: With Revenge, Harry Mack, 8 p.m. The Theatre at Ace Hotel.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD: With Kid Bloom, 9 p.m. El Rey Theatre, 5515 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles.

KROQ MIDKIND: 6 p.m. The Theatre at Ace Hotel.

CLASSICAL & NEW MUSIC

COLBURN ORCHESTRA: Pianist Hyelin Kim rumbles through Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto No. 3, and Yehuda Gilad conducts the Russian composer’s Second Symphony, Sun., Dec. 10, 3 p.m., free. Valley Performing Arts Center, 18111 Nordhoff St.


LA MASTER CHORALE: Eric Whitacre conducts a brace of holiday carols, Sat., Dec. 9, 2 p.m., $29-$129. Jenny Wong conducts Bach’s six motets, Sun., Dec. 10, 7 p.m., $29-$129. Walt Disney Concert Hall, 111 S. Grand Ave., Los Angeles.

LA PHILHARMONIC: Violinist Jonathan Heyward leads a chambered performance of Stravinsky’s The Firebird, in a morning youth concert, Sat., Dec. 9, 11 a.m., $22 & $26. Conductor Yuan Zhang puts her stamp on Prokofiev’s Sixth Symphony and Chen Yi’s Go Xu (Antiphony), and Venezuelan pianist Sergio Tiempo works out Tchaikovsky’s First Piano Concerto, Fri., Dec. 8, 11 a.m.; Dec. 9, 8 p.m.; Sun., Dec. 10, 2 p.m.; $29-$188. Georgian pianist Khata Buiabatishvili induces Mozart’s enchanting Piano Concerto No. 23 in A, K. 488; and Michael Tilson Thomas steps in to conduct Bruckner’s Seventh Symphony, Thu., Dec. 14, 8 p.m., $20-$194. Walt Disney Concert Hall.

LA BOHEME: Pacific Opera Project revives its comedic 2012 makeover of Giacomo Puccini’s opera, a.k.a. “The Hipsters,” which is set in a modern-day L.A. apartment loft, Fri.-Sat., Dec. 8-9, 8 p.m.; Thu., Dec. 14, 8 p.m.; Dec. 15-16, 8 p.m.; Highland Park Ebell Club, 131 Avenue 57. See GoLA.

L.A. SYMPHONY: Violinist Sarah Chang, 8 p.m. Novo, 707 S. Broadway, Los Angeles.

ORDINARY DANCE: With members of L.A. Master Chorale, and spoken word by Dana Hitacre, sirenlike soprano Hila Plitmann and poet Michelle Rusher, 9 p.m. The Novo. See Music Pick.

MONDAY, DEC. 11

JOSHUA HENRY: 8:30 p.m. El Rey Theatre.

KEHLAN: 8 p.m. The Novo. See Music Pick.

LUKE BRYAN: 8 p.m. The Belasco Theater.

TUESDAY, DEC. 12

EMILY HAINES: 7-30 p.m., $25. Hollywood Forever Cemetery, 6000 Santa Monica Blvd.

PORTUGAL. THE MAN: With Electric Guest, 8 p.m. UCLA, Royce Hall. See Music Pick.

THOM YORKE: 10 p.m., $53. The Fonda Theatre.

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 13

GRIZZLY BEAR: With Serpentwithfeet, 7 p.m., $37.50-$54.70. The Wiltern, 3790 Wilshire Blvd.

A HOLIDAY VARIEITY SHOW: With members of Chvrches, Computer Games Death Cab for Cutie, plus Jenny Owen Youngs, Justin Long, Muna, Reggie Watts, Cobie Smulders, Cameron Esposito, Nick Kroll, Rhea Butcher and others, 8:30 p.m., $40 & up. The Fonda Theatre, 6126 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles.

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