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Slowdive
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Los Angeles Ballet opens its traveling Nutcracker, a senator talks gun control, comedians roast God, the Grinch gets a new look and more to do and see in L.A. this week.

Best Friends Animal Society is helping feral cats by getting them jobs. By Morgan Sung.

Los Angeles is burning. And we’re not alone. By Hillel Aron.

Los Angeles has some amazing breakfasts. Here are three of the best.

Ladies Room Comedy is the antidote to all-male shows. By Jennifer Swann.

Something Rotten! brings Shakespeare to broadway, bustling life at the Ahmanson.

James Dawson reviews the hotly anticipated Star Wars: The Last Jedi, and Alan Scherstuhl goes along for the ride with The Leisure Seeker, plus Bill Pullman in The Ballad of Lefty Brown and other movies OPENING THIS WEEK, and YOUR WEEKLY MOVIE TO-DO LIST.


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DANCE

Flash Dance
They'll be dancing in the streets — well, almost — as 70 dancers from CalArts take over the Grand Avenue sidewalk and the steps of Walt Disney Concert Hall for a free performance preceding the more formal one with choreography by CalArts’ respected faculty. The flash mob, choreographed by Dimitri Chamblas, the incoming dance department dean, promises to be a preview of his likely direction for this major incubator for local dance. After the flash mob, the concert also includes Chamblas’ choreography along with works by faculty members Laurence Blake, Nina Flagg and Julie Bour as well as guest artist Raul “RubberLegz” Yast. REDCAT, 631 W. Second St., downtown; Fri.-Sat., Dec. 15-16, 8:30 p.m.; $20, $12 students. redcat.org. —Ann Haskins

COMEDY/KARAOKE

Chestnuts, Roasted
Making up parody songs such as “Jingle Bells, Batman Smells” and “On Top of Spaghetti” are a kid’s first introduction to improvisational comedy, and tonight’s Silly Karaoke Showdown will bring you back to the wonderful sense of humor that both thrilled your friends and annoyed your parents. The plan is simple: Writers think up funny new words for familiar songs and singers including BO$$ Lady, Phil Casale, AJ Lubecker and Julie Raelyn sing those songs, which are then rated by relatively hilarious celebrity impersonator judges Mayur Chauhan (as Jimmy Stewart), Doug Culp (as Sylvester Stallone) and Lyssa Mandel (as Joan Cusack). REDCAT, 7522 Sunset Blvd., Hollywood; Fri., Dec. 15, 7:30-9 p.m.; $8. (323) 851-7233, holdmyticket.com/event/300055. —David Cotner

DANCE

Nutmeg Season
Set in 1912, Los Angeles Ballet’s The Nutmeg is an L.A. original, choreographed by company co-artistic directors Thordal Christensen and Colleen Neary, with set design by L.A. artist Catherine Kanner. Now in its 12th season, L.A.’s own professional classical ballet company continues to demonstrate how well it understands this city. With home theaters in Glendale, Westwood, Redondo Beach and Hollywood with a live orchestra, LAB brings ballet to the audience rather than expecting folks to overcome hours of gridlocked traffic. The superb company dancers have proven themselves a home team to root for. (In full disclosure, your scribe volunteered to watch the goings-on from a chimney.) Alex Theater, 216 Brand Blvd., Glendale; Sat., Dec. 9, 7:30 p.m.; Sun., Dec. 10, 2 p.m.; at UCLA Royce Hall, Westwood; Fri., Dec. 15, 7:30 p.m.; Sat.-Sun., Dec. 16 & 17, & 1 p.m.; at Redondo Beach Performing Arts Center, 1935 Manhattan Beach Blvd., Redondo Beach; Fri., Dec. 22, 7:30 p.m.; Sat., Dec. 30, 1 p.m. & 5 p.m.; Sun., Dec. 31, 1 p.m.; $36-$104, $24-$76 seniors, students & children under 13. Also at Dolby Theatre, Hollywood & Highland, 6801 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, Sat., Dec. 23, 1 & 5 p.m.; Sun., Dec. 24, 11 a.m. & 3 p.m.; $72-$124. losangelesballet.org. —Ann Haskins

BOOKS

The O.G. Lefty
The archetype of the grumpy wise old man never gets old, ironically enough — and you’ll get to immerse yourself in that particularly trenchant example of the human experience when actor Ed Asner discusses his book The Grouchy Old-Time Lefty: An Old-Time Lefty Defends Our Constitution Against Right-Wing Hypocrites and Nutjobs ($26, Simon & Schuster). Asner, who played crotchety Mike Feuer, was congressman for the district that includes Newtown, Connecticut, and served during the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre, so he has a thing or two to say on the subject. You’ll find out what his latest moves are to make headway on this thorny topic, how L.A. is dealing with the issue, and if there’s any common ground both camps can reach in the space of one afternoon — which would be a start. Temple Emanuel, 8844 Burton Way, Beverly Hills; Sun., Dec. 17, noon; $26.87, (310) 855-0005, writersblocpresents.com/main/senator-chris-murphy. —David Cotner

COMEDY

Blasphemers Welcome
Jesus loves you — but God thinks you’re an asshole, so why not have a laugh at God’s expense at tonight’s Historical Roast of God? Comedians Scout Durwood, Tony Hinchcliffe, Matt McCarthy, Tony Sam, Josh Snyder and many others will impugn, insult and otherwise indulge in deeply chortlesome giving mark a very special episode of Feliz Navipod’s Feld Navidad Variety Show benefiting Planned Parenthood. Motion City Soundtrack drummer Tony Thaxton and co-host Todd Cooper use their Feliz Navipod podcast to make every day feel like Christmas morning, but keep getting sidetracked by the suckage of daily existence. Appearing tonight are luminaries such as Don’t Stop or We’ll Die, Taylor Goldsmith (of Dawes), Colin Hanks, Mandy Moore, April Richardson, Rory Scovel, Chris Sullivan, Nick Thune and Daniel Van Kirk doing their damndest to remember the reason for the season. Nerdmelt, 7522 Sunset Blvd., Hollywood; Fri., Dec. 15, 8:30-10 p.m.; $15. (323) 851-7233, holdmyticket.com/event/299950. —David Cotner

HOLIDAYS

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blasphemy of the one celebrity that would never show up at His own roast... or would She? Nothing is off-limits and no subject is “too soon” for God, a being that invented Time itself and may or may not exercise that famous godly forgiveness after the last joke ascends to comedy heaven. NerdMelt, 7522 Sunset Blvd., Hollywood; Fri., Dec. 15, 9-10:30 p.m.; $8 advance, $10 door. (323) 851-7223, holdmyticket.com/event/300309. —David Cotner

**BOOKS/MOVIES**

**Something Fishy**

Actor and occasional creature Doug Jones signs the Guillermo del Toro graphic novel adaptation of his new film *The Shape of Water*. “Creating a Fairy Tale for Troubled Times” is the book’s subtitle, and del Toro’s canny reworking of the Creature from the Black Lagoon story into a Cold War thriller and/or love story promises to be one of the most startling spectacles to grace the screen this year. A slightly calmer take is this graphic novel, which the supernally graceful Jones—who plays the amphibious fish-man in del Toro’s film—inherits with his trademark otherworldliness. Dark Delicacies, 3512 W. Magnolia Blvd., Burbank; Tue., Dec. 19, 7 p.m.; free, book is $45. (818) 556-6660, darkdel.com/store/p979/ATTENDING_ONLINE%3ATues%2C_Dec_19th_7_pm%3A_Guillermo_de_Toro%27s_The_Shape_of_Water.html. —David Cotner

**TRAVEL**

**Motorcycle Diaries**

Modern-day authors are at their most vital when they embrace illumination—as such, adventuring author Abigail Reynolds presents *The Ruins of Time: Lost Libraries of the Silk Road*. It’s a triptych of her five-month journey by motorcycle to explore the lost libraries of antiquity that shone as beacons along the Silk Road—the ancient trade routes between Japan and the Mediterranean. From Alexandria to Ephesus to Herculaneum, Reynolds found them all. If you’re even the slightest bit concerned about the erosion of intellect in the modern world, here are your lessons writ large across the wastes of history. El Segundo Public Library, 111 W. Mariposa Ave., El Segundo; Wed., Dec. 20, 7 p.m.; free. (310) 524-2728, facebook.com/events/107850578672193. —David Cotner

**STAGE/MUSIC**

**Purple Haze**

More than a year after Prince’s death and the doves are still crying. Directed by Matt Walker, the Troubadour Theater

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Company, whose past holiday spoofs have included Little Drummer Bowie, Santa Claus Is Comin’ to Motown and Frosty the Snow Manilow, brings back to life the Purple One in its latest musical parody-cum-political satire. How the Grinch Stole Christmas marries humorous versions of the late icon’s songs such as “Little Red Corvette,” “Raspberry Beret,” “Let’s Go Crazy” and “Purple Rain” with Dr. Seuss’ classic kids story about a Christmas-hating Grinch. Of course, in this rendition the Grinch wears purple fur and tries to make the town of Howville funkier. And, not surprisingly, he has a love interest named Applephonia.

El Portal Theatre, 5269 Lankershim Blvd., North Hollywood; Dec. 21-22, 27-29, 8 p.m.; Dec. 23 & 30, 4 & 8 p.m.; Dec. 31, 9 p.m.; $45, $55, $100. (818) 508-0281, elportaltheatre.com. —Siran Babayan

**FILM/LECTURE**

**Another World**

An Evening With Don Hertzfeldt is your glimpse into the creative processes of one of the most profound yet elegantly simple animators working today. Since the ’90s, director Hertzfeldt has used stick-figure cartoons to comment on the complicated lives of people with lush, deep backgrounds, who are slightly more multidimensional in their problems. His latest short, World of Tomorrow Episode 2: The Burden of Other People’s Thoughts, is a sequel to his Oscar-nominated World of Tomorrow (both of which will screen), and Hertzfeldt will discuss its themes, and what it means to be a human being in the future of the Now. Bing Theatre, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 5905 Wilshire Blvd., Mid-Wilshire; Thu., Dec. 21, 7:30 p.m.; $25 general, $20 LACMA members, students and seniors, $15 Film Independent and LACMA Film Club members. (323) 857-6010, lacma.org/event/evening-1. —David Cotner

**COMEDY**

**Sequelitis**

Traditionally, movie sequels suck and are a disgrace to the original films. At Part 2: The Sequel Show, formerly held at NerdMelt and the Comedy Central Stage, comedians get a chance to pitch hypothetical follow-ups to films, complete with fake movie posters projected onto a screen, after which the audience votes for the winning pitch. Titles at past shows have included Yentl 2, 105 Dalmatians and The Help: The Second Helping. For tonight’s Part 2: The Holiday Sequel Show, co-hosts Tony Sam and Christina Martinez bring together Jamie Loftus, Josh Fadem, Matt McCarthy and Phillip Binder as they present their sequel ideas to such Christmas classics as How the Grinch Stole Christmas and The Polar Express, as well as musical comedian Drennon Davis, who sings original holiday songs in between. iO West, 6366 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood; Thu., Dec. 21, 8 p.m.; free. (323) 962-7560, iowest.com. —Siran Babayan

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STRAY CAT STRUT

Instead of being put down, these feral cats are being put to work

BY MORGAN SUNG

A large gray cat with tufts of white fur demands affection in sharp meows as soon as the door opens, while a younger, cream-colored one stretches on his pillow.

The adoptable cats of Best Friends Animal Society in Mission Hills are family-friendly and uninhibited by the presence of strangers.

In a large wire enclosure behind the shelter, however, the cats shrink from people. They watch cautiously from carpeted ledges and dart behind billowing drapes when they hear approaching footsteps.

Though skittish, the enclosure cats are all for hire.

The Working Cat program matches cats that are “unbonded to humans” with businesses that need pest control. Since Best Friends Animal Society started the program in late 2014, the number of adoptions has jumped from fewer than 30 cats in 2015 to 165 — 26 adopted locally and 140 transfers — in the last fiscal year.

Michelle Sathe, public relations specialist at Best Friends Animal Society, makes it clear that these cats are not pets.

“There are cats that are not meant to be in homes, that are not social enough,” Sathe says. “So we wanted to give them an opportunity to get out of the shelter and give them a job.”

Most of the cats residing in the enclosure have had little interaction with people, particularly during their formative years. Elizabeth Anderson, who leads cat care at Best Friends Animal Society, says working cats can “often enjoy human company, but only at a safe distance.”

“These cats do not allow or enjoy petting the way a normal house cat does,” Anderson says. “We just look for a different type of home for them.”

Sathe says the cats do well in open spaces, particularly in warehouses, breweries and barns. Clients include the Los Angeles Flower Market in downtown L.A. and Anchor Brewing in San Francisco.

Arthur Flores, co-founder of Los Angeles Distributing Company, adopted two working cats for his warehouse. Though he’s there every day, he rarely sees his feline employees — in fact, he’s not sure if both cats still reside in the warehouse.

Though Flores leaves food out daily, consumption has been “cut in half.”

“The food just gets eaten,” he says. “And the mice stay away, so we assume [the cat] is around somewhere.”

Flores’ business supplies stores around L.A. County with wholesale snacks and beverages. He adopted the cats about a year and a half ago after dealing with rodent issues when his distributing company first moved into the building.

Calling pest control didn’t help much, so a friend suggested adopting cats for the warehouse.

And Flores says they’re getting the job done: “We haven’t seen a single rodent since [adopting] the cats.”

“THESE CATS DO NOT ALLOW OR ENJOY PETTING THE WAY A NORMAL HOUSE CAT DOES. WE JUST LOOK FOR A DIFFERENT TYPE OF HOME FOR THEM.” —ELIZABETH ANDERSON, BEST FRIENDS ANIMAL SOCIETY

Cats are a natural rodent deterrent, even if they’re not actively hunting. Mice can smell urinary proteins secreted by cats, snakes and other predators. According to a 2010 study at the Scripps Research Institute, mice don’t recognize predators because of experiences with them but because they have evolved to do so. The mere scent of the urinary proteins found in cats triggers a fear response in mice.

“It’s not like they’re even going after the rodents,” Sathe says of the cats. “They’re kind of like a sonic force.”

Though the working cats aren’t traditional pets, they still need some level of care. Anderson advises against allowing cats to wander freely outside. They need to be in an enclosed space and provided with fresh food and water every day.

Much like adopting a pet for the home, working cats are a commitment. According to Anderson, adopters “need to understand that a cat can live for 20 years!”

Brittany Sorgenstein, who works at Best Friends Animal Society, brought home two working cats for her barn. She has goats, chickens and turkeys on her property, but rodents keep getting into their stored food.

“The feed would come in thick paper bags,” Sorgenstein says, “and the rats would chew right through them, spilling the grain on the floor.” The rats also managed to chew through plastic bins.

Since adopting the cats — now named Bonnie and Clyde — Sorgenstein says the visits from “our rat friends” have declined. However, Bonnie and Clyde aren’t any cats. Like Flores’ warehouse cat, Sorgenstein barely sees her.

“They typically hide when people are around,” she says. “I see them on our security cameras sometimes, playing with crickets.”

Despite the enthusiastic reviews from cat employers, not every Angeleno is enamored of the Working Cat program.

Dr. Travis Longcore, the science director for the Urban Wildlands Group, has been an outspoken critic of programs like this.

Many cities have TNR — trap, neuter and return — initiatives that catch feral cats, sterilize them and release them back into the streets. Longcore sees feral cats as an invasive species, and he supported an 2009 court injunction to halt city-supported TNR until a review of the impact on local wildlife is conducted. Although citizens can bring feral cats to clinics for sterilization, city shelters cannot perform TNR.

“Working Cats is just an excuse to dump shelter cats anywhere but in the shelter,” Longcore says via email. “It is not effective for rat control.”

Longcore is adamant that a cat’s presence only makes rats less visible, and that rodents are “still there if the food source is there.”

“At the end of the day, free-roaming cats are a health hazard in terms of fleas and feces, and a nuisance,” Longcore says. “To control rodents, you need to secure the food sources and kill the rodents directly.”

Despite the criticism, Sathe believes the program is a humane option for animals that would otherwise spend their lives in shelters. She points out that adult cats are among those most killed at city shelters because they’re often not social.

“Our whole goal was to give these cats another option and live life as a working cat,” Sathe says. “Even if it’s not as a traditional pet, it’s still a pretty cool life.”

And for Flores, who still believes there’s at least one cat guarding his business, “It’s a win-win.”
Play. It’s legal. 01-01-18 MedMen
The one indelible image of this year’s fire season, which as of Tuesday had consumed 261,000 acres (or 408 square miles) from Santa Barbara to San Diego, has been the 405 freeway at night, the surrounding hillside ablaze like molten lava. The Skirball Fire, not far from what is technically the geographic center of L.A., cut a swath through Bel-Air, one of the city’s richest neighborhoods. But the apocalyptic image of the simmering hillside seemed to speak more to the world than to the city. It captured a mood many of us have been feeling all year: The world is burning.

“The city burning is Los Angeles’s deepest image of itself,” Joan Didion famously wrote in Slouching Towards Bethlehem. “Los Angeles weather is the weather of catastrophe, of apocalypse.”

Los Angeles, which once stood out as a sort of freak city—suburbanized, shallow, culty—has become less of an outlier, having exported its food and culture and mindset. You can find yoga and juice bars and vegan food in every city in America. L.A.’s disasters now feel more commonplace, too. Catastrophes are everywhere these days, like a television left on in another room. 2017 has been a litany of hurricanes, earthquakes, mass shootings, terrorist attacks — let alone the bullshit that Donald Trump says, does and tweets every day.

How do you tell when there’s a fire if the whole world is burning?

By the ash falling on your car, by the smell of the smoke in the air, the way your throat goes dry and your lungs feel small. When you open up the newspaper and read that at least 54 horses have died, trapped in barns and stables with roofs caving in and smoke filling the air and flames consuming their flesh.

This year’s fire season was already the worst in the state’s history, before the six Southern California wildfires broke out. To blame: global warming, hillside development, lots of rain earlier in the year and a long, hot summer. And maybe just a bit of bad luck.

One of the most eloquent photos I’ve seen is by L.A. Weekly’s Ted Soqui, of a day laborer riding his bicycle home. The air is a murky mustard color. He’s wearing goggles over his eyes and an air filter over his mouth. There’s just a couple of flames licking up the side of a bridge.

Unless your house or horse is on fire, most of us are just out here trying to live our lives, no matter what’s on fire. I love this city but I don’t like it when it’s burning.
Unless your house or horse is on fire, most of us are just out here trying to live our lives, no matter what’s on fire.

I love this city but I don’t like it when it’s burning.

The 210 Freeway was closed due to the Creek Fire jumping across it.

The 15,619-acre Creek Fire burned in the Sylmar and Shadow Hills areas of Los Angeles.

The Creek Fire, seen here burning in Shadow Hills, started Dec. 5 at 3:44 a.m. four miles east of Sylmar.
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UCLA RB#16-001857. This UCLA research study is being conducted by the UCLA Dept of Family Medicine (PI: Keith Heinzerling MD). Funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

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A lot full of antiques after the Thomas Fire raced through it.

Bruce Englar’s house, where he’s lived since 1992, was saved but his front yard was burned.

Aftermath of the Thomas Fire

This spate of SoCal wildfires has destroyed 1,000 structures and counting.

Five cars were lost at this house.
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county we’ve got three of the best
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picks from our 2017 Best of L.A.
issue.

Destroyer

Even before Vespertine, chef Jordan
Kahn was known for his visually stunning
food, at Red Medicine (where dishes were
as likely to turn up in goldfish bowls as on
plates) but also prior to that, when he was
Michael Mina’s corporate pastry chef.
That hasn’t changed at his daytime place,
Destroyer, despite the fact that it’s basi-
cally a futuristic café where Hayden Tract
office workers come to get coffee and oat-
meal. But the coffee is from San Francis-
cisco’s Coffee Manufactory, and the oatmeal
comes raw and crunchy in a beautiful,
white bowl with drifts of red currant,
perfect for Instagram, as is just about
everything here. In fact, Destroyer’s stark
background, heavy, earthy ceramics and
meticulously artful plate settings might make
it the most Instagrammable restaurant
in the known universe. Chicken confit
comes in a wide bowl under a blanket of
charred cabbage leaves and a flurry of
cheese. Beef tartare, bound by smoked
egg cream, comes under a plated armor
of perfectly arranged radishes, with
sprigs of dill at the edge for froudy visual
appeal. This is cerebral food, but it also
speaks to your more emotional needs.
3578 Hayden Ave., Culver City; destroyer.
x. —Besha Rodell
Division 3

Since opening in Glassell Park in early
2016, Division 3, a tiny, shacklike joint
with a walk-up window and a shady back
patio, has become a go-to neighborhood
spot. For such a small space, D3 turns out
a surprisingly diverse menu, including
sandwiches, salads, pastries, hot links
and something called “Jersey French
toast in a cup,” a gooey mass of syrup-
soaked, toasted bread in a cardboard
to-go container that you won’t be able
to stop eating, especially on a hungover
Sunday morning. But the star attractions
here are the biscuit sandwiches, which
mix various meats and veggies with
an over-medium egg and an addictive,
Thousand Island dressing–like substance
called “D3 special sauce,” all served on
a homemade biscuit that’s flaky but firm
enough to hold together as it soaks up
that runny egg yolk. The sandwiches
come in five flavors, of which the stand-
outs are the fennel-cured salmon, topped
with crème fraîche, and the corned beef,
as tender and peppery as any New York
deli’s. They’re small enough that those
with heartier appetites can spring for
two, but even so, at a mere $5 a pop, they
might be the best breakfast bargain in
town. 3329 Division St., Glassell Park.
—Andy Hermann
Fukagawa

One of the great joys of living in L.A. is
that you can find a dazzling array of inter-
national cuisine within reasonable driv-
ing distance. This extends to breakfast.
One of the few places to find a traditional
Japanese breakfast around these parts is
Fukagawa — and fortunately, it’s served
all day. The breakfast consists of several
small dishes served on a tray: Rice, miso
soup, cold tofu, a sheet of seaweed, pick-
led vegetables and an egg prepared one
way or another, all included in every combo.
Other combos include your choice of
steak or grilled fish (salmon, Spanish
mackerel, mackerel) or the notorious
fermented soybean dish natto. Combo D
includes all of the above for the largest
way to start your morning. Tucked in
the Pacific Square Shopping Center, the
restaurant is a fixture in Gardena, a city
with a rich Japanese-American heri-
tage. While udon, soba and a variety of
other Japanese dishes are served, it’s the
breakfast that keeps regulars returning to
the humble restaurant that’s been around
for more than 30 years. 1630 W. Redondo
Beach Blvd., Gardena; (310) 324-4306.
—Jim Thurman

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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 Barrelworks wild 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 fried 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!

3205 Washington Blvd,
Marina Del Rey, CA 90292
BATHROOM HUMOR

Ladies Room is the antidote to all-male comedy shows

BY JENNIFER SWANN

Meghan Gailey has a joke about why women should flush tampons down public toilets during a Trump presidency. Ever Mainard has a bit about the futility of shaving her pubes in the bathtub after a breakup. Emily Heller, who likes Mainard loathes going to the gym, says her only fitness goal is to look like the red M&M character. Rachel Scanlon has a bit about all the dirty things she’s accidentally said to her gynecologist during a Pap smear. And Dana Eagle, a self-described “gay bipolar Jew with a lazy eye,” says her cancer treatment was so safe that all the nurses walked out of the room during it.

It would be an understatement to say that the five comedians, all of whom performed at November’s edition of the monthly stand-up show Ladies Room Comedy, have no problems talking about their bodies onstage in a bar full of strangers. More than that, they’ve found ways to turn the intimate, sometimes revoltingly visceral details of their bodily functions into comedy. It doesn’t hurt that in an audience of mostly women, many of these details are excruciatingly familiar. That might explain why Gailey’s monologue about unbuttoning her pants at the movies and forgetting to button them back up again after the credits rolled elicited roars of laughter. Or why Mainard’s joke about having to fart compulsively when she gets anywhere near a treadmill provoked as many chuckles as it did cringes. And yes, there were plenty of jokes about tampons, IUDs and Pap smears, perhaps indulging the stereotype that all women comedians love to talk about their vaginas. But to the hosts of Ladies Room, there’s no shame in that.

“Literally, every single person is like, ‘Oh, do you guys just tell jokes about your vaginas?’” says co-host Jen O’Donnell, repeating a common response she hears when others find out the show is all women. “Yeah, like about how men suck?” chimes in co-host Jessie Stegner.

“But like, sometimes, guess what? We do tell jokes about our vaginas, just like 60 percent of all male comedians tell jokes about their dicks. And that’s fine, too,” O’Donnell says.

“It’s not that the comedians onstage are encouraged to talk about their gender or to detail any number of embarrassing moments at doctor’s offices, gyms or public restrooms, but Stegner and O’Donnell hope the environment at Ladies Room makes it easier to do so.” It’s literally why we called it the Ladies Room, because [it’s] like when you’re in the bathroom and you’re in front of the mirror and somebody’s like, ‘You have lipstick on your teeth, I love your necklace,’ or, ‘Hey there’s a guy out there who won’t stop talking to my friend, he’s really drunk, stay away from him,’ ” O’Donnell says. “There’s something really powerful that happens behind that closed door that we were like, ‘That’s what we kind of want to capture.’”

The show, held the third Wednesday of the month in the back room of Hollywood bar Three Clubs, celebrated its one-year anniversary last month. From the beginning, it has aimed to give women the microphone as much as it has to give female audiences the chance to hear jokes that resonate with their own experiences.

Stegner, a graduate student in UCLA’s screenwriting program, and O’Donnell, a consultant for reality TV, met about two years ago at a women’s comedy competition. The circumstance, O’Donnell says, was “sort of funny and weird in general because it’s like, ‘Hey! We’re all female comics! But we’re also competing with each other.’” Their first clue that they’d be good friends was when they ordered Jack and Diet’s at the bar after the competition. But the moment they realized they might also make good collaborators was when Stegner pitched the idea for Ladies Room Comedy and O’Donnell responded, “I think we should start a Google spread-shee,” Stegner recalls. “I was like, ‘That’s it, we’re going to be fine.’”

Even still, O’Donnell and Stegner wondered if they had the chops to host their own comedy show — a concern that, looking back now, they say most male comedians probably wouldn’t have thought twice about. To gain more experience, Stegner enrolled in a comedy show hosting workshop but discovered she was the only woman there. “A bunch of guys were just talking about how all the women that Bill Cosby molested were lying and they were just talking about how servers, if you tip them extra, they’ll give you a lap dance,” Stegner says. “I felt really small and quiet and I felt like I had to sort of represent all women in this moment and teach them something, which is not my responsibility.”

That experience helped convince Stegner that maybe creating a female-oriented comedy show was more important than she’d realized. O’Donnell likes to joke that, prior to hosting Ladies Room, she’d been booked for so many all-male stand-up shows that at one point she was the only woman on the lineup along with four different guys just named Josh. The other benefit to starting their own show, Stegner and O’Donnell say, was that they no longer had to deal with bookers who seemed more interested in hitting on them than in listening to their comedy. “So we were like, ‘How about we just literally skip the middle man and book our friends, book people who we think are funny,’” O’Donnell says.

The first show Stegner and O’Donnell hosted got off to a rocky start. It was held just days after the 2016 election, and the hosts had planned their opening monologue around the assumption that Hillary Clinton would be elected president. “We were like, ‘We have to write new jokes! Like, what do we say?’” O’Donnell says. “And we really had to be like, ‘Holy shit, not only do we have to get ourselves together for the world, but this is our first show and it’s a big deal, so how do we deal with this?’”

In the end, the two ditched their empowerment-themed, utopian-leaning jokes and went for a decidedly darker monologue. A year into the Trump presidency, and with allegations of sexual harassment and assault emerging against entertainers like Louis C.K. seemingly on a daily basis, O’Donnell and Stegner’s material hasn’t gotten any more positive, and they’re OK with that. At November’s show, they joked that they’d been tossing around a list of potential new names for the Ladies Room. It included “The Nobody Will Whip It Out Show” and, simply, “Don’t F#ck.”

Now they see their show — which may come off as gimmicky with its cupcakes, pink balloons and Google spreadsheets — as more than just an excuse to avoid lecherous bookers and grant women the microphone. At a time when women are beginning to publicly call out harassment and men are facing real consequences for it, O’Donnell and Stegner say Ladies Room and other female-oriented comedy shows like it are more vital than ever.

LADIES ROOM COMEDY | Three Clubs, 1123 Vine St., Hollywood | Wed., Dec. 20, 8 p.m. | $15 | (323) 462-6441 | facebook.com/events/8803957942549578/
BY DEBORAH KLUGMAN

S
omething Rotten! is a ditz satire that takes a wry poke at wannabe-ism and artistic celebrity, while it may not be the deepest or drollest of musicals, the choreography is great, the lyrics are clever, and the comic performances are entertainingly on the mark. Set in Elizabethan England, it features Shakespeare (Adam Pascal) as a serpentine plagiarist who glitters like a rock star, with aspiring writer-producers Nick Bottom (Rob McClure) and Nigel Bottom (Josh Grisetti) his desperate rivals struggling to compete.

Directed and choreographed by Casey Nicholaw, with book by Karey Kirkpatrick and John O’Farrell and music and lyrics by Karey and Wayne Kirkpatrick, the story unfolds after the Bottom brothers’ patron, Lord Clapham (Joel Newsome), demands they come up with a new idea or lose his support. Desperate, Nick raids his wife’s “money box,” and uses her savings to consult Thomas Nostradamus (Blake Hammond), the nephew of the famous clairvoyant, to learn what, in future, Shakespeare’s greatest play is likely to be — his plan being to beat the Bard to the punch.

Unfortunately for Nick, Thomas’s imperfect soothsaying skills yield misleading answers; instead of Hamlet, he sees “omelet” (as well as “ham” and “Danish”), leading Nick to become obsessed with the notion of a musical about eggs. His insistence on going with Thomas’ vision eventually leads to a rift with Nigel, a gifted writer (and supposedly the real author of Shakespeare’s greatest lines) who prefers being true to himself over participating in his bro’s ludicrous project.

The show opens with “Welcome to the Renaissance,” a lively number that instantly spotlights the terrific ensemble, whose unflagging vitality and accomplished performances are constant throughout. The plot threads include Nick’s relationship with his level-headed wife (Maggie Lakis), who wants a job outside their home, and Nigel’s verboten romance with the daughter of a Puritan elder (Autumn Hurlbert). While these scenes are OK (the feminist theme is a bit forced), it’s the dynamite dancing and the waggish songs (with their epigrammatic references to multiple Broadway shows such as West Side Story and Fiddler on the Roof) that are the heart of the fun.

As Nick, the physically agile McClure relays the abiding essence of frustrated showbiz ambition. Pascal’s Bard, arrogant, glitzy and platinum blond, oozes tawdriness and duplicity. Hammond’s befuddled prophet deserves the laughs he gets, while Scott Cote as a swishy fire-and-brimstone fanatic plays his closeted character with clipped comical nuance. In the throes of first love, Grisetti’s straightforward young poet serves up a pleasant contrast to the otherwise loony antics.

Gregg Barnes’ period costumes (which the capering actors handle with great skill) and Jeff Croiter’s flashy variegated lighting add to the buoyant ambiance.

SOMETHING ROTTEN! | Ahmanson Theater, 135 N. Grand Ave, downtown | Through Dec. 31
Oscar Isaac is back as rebel pilot Poe Dameron, who enthusiastically requests “permission to jump in an X-wing and blow something up.” Andy Serkis excels as the First Order’s Supreme Leader Snoke, a deliciously snide CGI character who seems contemptuously amused by Rey’s willfulness and Kylo Ren’s indecisiveness. At the other end of the computer-animated spectrum are the adorablygross Porgs from Luke’s island, who are sure to be a stuffed-animal sensation.

Director Rian Johnson, whose last feature was 2012’s kinda stupid time travel/noir flick Looper, is the only writer other than Lucas to receive sole screenplay credit on any Star Wars film. (He also is slated to direct three spinoffs over the next decade.) Yet The Last Jedi plays more like a generic, cover-all-the-bases corporate pastiche than a uniquely singular vision. It gets the job done, puts some new toys on shelves and includes one major franchise-altering event. It also has outer-space dogfights aplenty, brings back some classic weapons and features an unexpected character cameo.

So why does this feast feel like so much filler?

Star Wars: The Last Jedi | Directed and written by Rian Johnson | Walt Disney Pictures | Citywide

James Dawson’s website is iDawson.com.
**Wheezy Riders**

**HELEN MIRREN AND DONALD SUTHERLAND CHUCK THEIR MEDS AND HIT THE ROAD IN THE LEISURE SEEKER**

BY ALAN SCHERSTUHL

If you were to jot down a list of things you expect to happen in *The Leisure Seeker* — a comic drama in which a retired couple facing their last days embark on a Massachusetts-to-Key West Winnebago road trip — you would almost certainly get a lot right. There are winning vistas, some silliness with a motorcycle, a showdown with some randy thugs, a run-in with the cops. Yes, the couple loses and finds each other, and the journey they’re on turns out to be more than merely geographical. But for all its occasional familiarity, this first English-language feature from Italian director Paolo Virzi (*Human Capital, Like Crazy*) is at times moving in its sincerity, thanks to stellar casting and the director’s clear-eyed perspective on aging and dementia, even when the story skirts toward sensationalism.

Helen Mirren and Donald Sutherland play the couple, a duo who go together like matching furniture, their moods and habits perfectly shaped by each other’s. Even their ailments are complementary, one suffering in body and the other in mind: Mirren’s character, Ella, is facing cancer, while Sutherland’s, John, is losing his memory and his certainty about who he’s speaking to and what year it is.

We know the year: 2016. Virzi opens with audio of a Donald Trump campaign speech, a stab of the very now that audiences for *The Leisure Seeker* likely are attempting to escape. Later, deep in the South, Sutherland’s character will lose himself in a #MAGA rally, chanting the chants without grasping their significance. He’s a former professor of literature, a lifelong Democrat who just gets caught up in the moment without recognizing the foolishness of the anti-immigrant fervor. Ella spirits him away, knowing better than he sometimes what the mind she’s loved for so long values and depletes.

**ALL LOGIC TELLS YOU THAT THIS TRIP CAN’T END WELL, AND VIRZI ESTABLISHES THAT WORKING IN THE U.S. HAS NOT MADE HIM SENTIMENTAL**

She’s spent her life listening to him rattle on about Herman Melville and Ernest Hemingway, and she’s planned this trip to show him his favorite author’s famous home in Key West. She lets him drive — he’s alert behind the wheel — but she’s fully in charge, except in those moments when he wanders off. Sometimes Virzi plays this for comedy, but there’s terror in these scenes, a species-level discomfort related to our distaste for convincing scenes of children in danger. If John gets lost, he could be lost for good. Ella, meanwhile, is off her meds and occasionally vomits. All logic tells you that this trip can’t end well, and Virzi establishes by the end that he and his winning in the States has not made him sentimental. The final scenes feature a welcome sexual frankness you probably would not note on that list of what *The Leisure Seeker* will offer, and the ending — well, I misted up. I did twice during the film, at the end credits and during a scene of the couple screening a slideshow of their past on a sheet hung up in an RV park. Both times I felt satisfied rather than worked over.

The drama at first concerns the couples’ incidental bickering, his jealousies over her long-gone first boyfriend and her frustration at his failing memory, especially the way he can remember beautiful students of decades back but struggles to identify his own children. It’s not always convincing, with a scene in which John mistakes Ella for another woman too much to swallow, and some of the jokes don’t land. It hurts, a little, to see actors of the stature of Mirren and Sutherland play scenes accusing each other of farting. But the performers are always lively, often engaging and sometimes moving, worth our contemplation even when the script flags. (It’s based on a novel by Michael Zadoorian.) They peak as the material edges toward melodrama, grounding the big emotions in an unflashy matter-of-factness. But even when *The Leisure Seeker* dips into wheezing comedy, there’s fun to be had in pondering Mirren’s South Carolina accent, which fades in and out like an unsteady radio signal.

**THE LEISURE SEEKER | Directed by Paolo Virzi | Written by Stephen Amidon, Francesca Archibugi, Francesco Piccolo and Virzi | Sony Pictures Classics | NoHo**
Kevin Costner and Jeanne Tripplehorn in Waterworld

YOUR WEEKLY MOVIE TO-DO LIST

Nitrate Treasures and Holiday Pleasures

Saturday, Dec. 16
UCLA continues its magnificent Nitrate Treasures series with Jules Dassin’s archetypal film noir Night and the City. Richard Widmark plays Harry Fabian, a two-bit hustler trying to navigate London’s underworld and, like all noir antiheroes, falling pitifully short of his dreams. Superb nightscapes and a tense wrestling match highlight this artful exercise in postwar fatalism. The rare 35mm nitrate print will be preceded by a newsreel and a Paramount cartoon. Teacher’s Pest. UCLA’s Billy Wilder Theater, 10889 Wilshire Blvd., Westwood, Sat., Dec. 16, 7:30 p.m.; $10. (310) 206-8013, cinema.ucla.edu.

Sunday, Dec. 17
The holiday spirit lives on with two musical favorites presented by the American Cinematheque. Leading off the night is White Christmas, Merle Curtiz’s pleasant Technicolor musical starring a subdued Bing Crosby and a rambunctious Danny Kaye as soldiers who rescue a beloved general’s falling nightclub. Rosemary Clooney and Vera-Ellen provide solid female support, but it’s Irving Berlin’s song score that keeps folks coming back year after year. The soundtrack includes “Sisters,” “Snow” and the classic title tune. Holiday Inn, the 1942 musical from which the Curtiz film draws its inspiration, and which pairs Crosby with Fred Astaire, closes the night. Egyptian Theatre, 6712 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, Sun., Dec. 17, 7:30 p.m.; $12. (323) 466-3456, americancinemathequecalendar.com.

Tuesday, Dec. 19
LACMA’s Tuesdays at the Miracle series offers a rare 35mm screening of Ride the Pink Horse, one of the strangest and most compelling of the postwar film noir cycle. Robert Montgomery directs and stars as an army veteran visiting a Southwestern town in search of the gangster who killed his pal. In addition to its socially progressive view of Mexicans (represented by Thomas Gomez in an Oscar-nominated supporting performance), the film contains several impressive stylistic flourishes, including a stunning long take that tracks the protagonist through a sleepy desert bus stop. LACMA, 5905 Wilshire Blvd., Mid-Wilshire; Tue., Dec. 19, 1 p.m.; $4. (323) 857-6000, lacma.org.

Thursday, Dec. 21
Kevin Costner’s Waterworld was the most expensive flop of its era and a timely wakeup call to an overconfident Hollywood. Now it plays more like a fictionalized, moderately campy remake of An Inconvenient Truth. Costner stars as a brooding mariner trying to survive on a drowned planet years after the polar icecaps have melted, only to be softened by a fetching stowaway (Jeanne Tripplehorn) and her 10-year-old daughter (Tina Majorino) with a map to Dryland tattooed on her back. Dennis Hopper shows up attired in pirate paraphernalia (eye patch, cutlass) to enliven the proceedings. Even back in 1995, the film cost a mint — about as much as your average Marvel movie — and lost a ton. Laemmle’s Throwback Thursday series offers audiences a chance to savor the spectacle all over again. Laemmle NoHo, 5420 Lankershim Blvd., North Hollywood; Thurs., Dec. 21, 7:30 p.m.; $12. (310) 478-3836, laemmle.com. —Nate Bell

Buckingham (Felicity Kendal) rejects the insistence of her mother (Liddell) that she must visit England some day. But her white Britishness is part of her allure for the man she’s fallen for, the prickly gentleman Sanju (Shashi Kapoor), who comes to see Lizzie play the bard’s tragic women. He’s also wooing a Bollywood star, played by the commanding Madhur Jaffrey. But this love triangle only takes to over the film in the final reels. For much of its running time, Shakespeare Waits examines, with a resolute lack of sentimentality, the troupe’s somewhat out-of-time existence proselytizing the great genius of a country that’s been given the boot. The vignettes are varied and arresting, the climax comic and the final moments sweetly sad. This early Merchant-Ivory effort might not offer the catharsis of their mature work, but it is in some ways more inimitable. (Alan Scherstuhl)

WORMWOOD

Erdal Morris’s murky, evening-long epic Wormwood is the kind of true crime documentary where you just know someone will pronounce, in the final hour or so, “For me, part of the story is that you can’t tell the story.” From the opening minutes, which imagine with a dreamer’s intensity the purported 1953 suicide of CIA operative Frank Olson, it’s clear that Morris and his interviewees will not come to any resolution. This is a story about cover-ups and conspiracy, one whose mysteries can’t be illuminated without some fictionalization — but that fictionalization here too often takes over. Olson, a biochemist specializing in biological warfare, soared out a 10th-story window of Manhattan’s Hotel Statler in 1953. His death was ruled a suicide spurred by a nervous breakdown. Two decades later, a commission led by Nelson Rockefeller released a report about the intelligence community’s abuse of the public trust. Among its findings: The CIA’s Project MKUltra, a study in mind control, had dosed citizens and operatives with LSD. Officials soon cited the drug in Olson’s death, claiming a bad trip had inspired him to throw himself out the window. Morris’s film dramatizes Olson’s last days between interviews with Olson’s son Eric and journalists and lawyers who have taken the case as a cause. Over Wormwood’s four hours, a theory emerges: Eric Olson sees the MKUltra explanation as a cover-up of an execution. As always, Morris, a one-time private investigator, is a superb interviewer, and no documentary so adeptly edits the testimony of his or her subjects. But his dramatizations too often reveal little except how hard it can be to fill six streaming episodes of 40-plus minutes each. (Alan Scherstuhl)

ONGOING

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 Exxtase (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 historically cinematic it can’t ever be dramatized. Hollywood soon made her a star — Algers and Samson and DeVil 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 the inner 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 compensation) 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)
Neighborhood Movie Guide

Schedules are subject to change; please call ahead to confirm showtimes. See Film & Video Events for other theaters.

HOLLYWOOD & VICINITY

ARENA CINELOUNGE SUNSET (323) 664-1044 Sunset Blvd. (323) 664-1044

Downtown Independent (213) 622-1600 South Main Street

CGV CINEMAS WA 621 South Western Avenue (213) 388-9000

Call theater for schedule.

RED CAR CINEMAS L.A. LIVE STADIUM 14 1100 West Olympic Blvd. (310) 444-6274/740 4046

Jumani: Welcome to the Jungle Wed., 11:45 a.m. 3, 12:15 p.m., 3:15 p.m., 6:45 p.m., 9:45 p.m.

COURT CITY, LA MARINA DEL REY

CINEMARK 18 & XD 6801 Centinela Ave. (310) 398-8000

The Greatest Showman Wed., 10:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m., 4:30 p.m., 7:30 p.m., 10:30 p.m.

CINEMARK WESTWOOD

1026 Wilshire Blvd. (310) 205-3400

The Greatest Showman Wed., 10 a.m., 1:30 p.m., 4:30 p.m., 7:30 p.m., 10:30 p.m.

ARCLIGHT HOLLYWOOD

5240 Hollywood Blvd. (323) 464-4226

Call theater for schedule.

CINERAMA DOME

Sunset Boulevard (323) 664-2164

Call theater for schedule.

Ferdinand

Jumanji: Welcome to the Jungle

Star Wars: The Last Jedi

Coco

CARS 2

PANAMA CITY, SHRIserrat Oaks, Encore

CINEMAS 3520

Holmby Hills, (310) 478-8386

The Mesu;aHacker/ture

Jumani: Welcome to the Jungle Wed., 11 a.m., 11:45 a.m., 12:30 p.m., 1:15 p.m., 2 p.m., 2:45 p.m., 3:30 p.m., 4:15 p.m., 5 p.m., 5:45 p.m., 6:30 p.m., 7 p.m., 7:45 p.m., 8:30 p.m., 9 p.m., 9:45 p.m., 10 p.m., 10:45 p.m.

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THE TOP 10 METAL ALBUMS OF 2017

Bang your head to make the pain go away

BY JASON ROCHE

The last decade has seen the heavy-metal landscape flooded with the corpses of bands that worshipped at the altars of early thrash greats like Metallica, Slayer and Exodus and the vintage crossover hardcore of D.R.I. and Suicidal Tendencies. The third record from Texas thrashers Power Trip is the first in that bloated power trio could be very loosely tossed around to describe the force behind the nihilistic sludge mayhem on display. That power is of a triumphant fist-pumping nature, though. Instead, that power is a crushing, apocalyptic weight bearing down on the listener. This record is 78 minutes of ear-bleeding heavy metal, and shut off-kilter time signatures continue throughout the remaining 35 minutes on the first proper full-length from this Greek thrash band. This album then takes a magnificent left turn at second track, veering into a sharp turn toward eclecticism in its own right, not because the music drags but because each track is an ambitious sprawling soundscape in its own right. Loosely categorized as black metal, The Ruins of Beverast evoke a suffocating sense of gloom with detours utilizing synthe-izers, wind instruments and bagpipes to disorient listeners even further.

1. Power Trip, Nightmare Logic

10. Skyteater, The Maw of Time

This L.A. quintet’s debut full-length consists of four tracks, each a harrowing, 10-minute-plus musical trip into a blackened-doom metal abyss. Guitarists Brian Reis and Johann Currie take turns with bassist Spencer Wessels in providing bloodcurdling screams. Alongside drummer Eric Soth, the band steer their music through disorienting twists and turns in their quest to explore the faster-paced thrash tropes of beer, Satan and bombs. Ex- pander accomplish the mission statement of their band name by indulging in dystopian sci-fi lyrical themes and moments of unpredictable musical angularity that mix up the current Texas thrash-metal sound with a flair for Voivod-esque fancy.

8. Craven Idol, The Shackles of Mammon

These fiery Brits are a throwback to the more speed-obsessed edge of the early-’80s New Wave of British Heavy Metal movement. This sophomore effort is for those who like to throw old Venom records on a turntable and try to find ways to crank up the RPMs even more. There are a few midtempo moments scattered here and there on tracks like “The Trudge,” but those passages are brief respite before the race for the fastest riffs in metal begins again.

6. Pallbearer, Heartless

This Belgian act took a sharper turn into the esoteric on this, their fifth record. Moments of goth-shrouded shoegaze atmospherics, angular post-punk ugliness and haunting industrial synth work are smashed together and then filtered further through a black-metal shield. The group’s early beginnings as a more traditional extreme-metal band have been fully left behind, but the experimentation in recent years has paid off with a record full of rewards for the more open-minded metal fan.

4. The Ruins of Beverast, Exuvia

This German outfit’s fifth record showcases a band that truly is among the best at creating haunting musical art. The album is an expansive, punishing 88-minute listen that is genuinely difficult to sit through in one sitting, not because the music is too fast-paced to make their quest to explore the faster-paced thrash tropes of beer, Satan and bombs. Expander accomplish the mission statement of their band name by indulging in dystopian sci-fi lyrical themes and moments of unpredictable musical angularity that mix up the current Texas thrash-metal sound with a flair for Voivod-esque fancy.

2. Locust Leaves, A Subtler Kind of Light

The riffs that blast off this record in its first 30 seconds make this seem like a throwback to the angular thunder of early prog-doomsters Mastodon. The album then takes a magnificent left turn at second track, veering into a sharp turn toward eclecticism in its own right, not because the music drags but because each track is an ambitious sprawling soundscape in its own right. Loosely categorized as black metal, The Ruins of Beverast evoke a suffocating sense of gloom with detours utilizing synthesizers, wind instruments and bagpipes to disorient listeners even further.

3. Primitive Man, Caustic

Denver’s Primitive Man have produced the most appropriately titled record of 2017. The term “power trio” could be very loosely tossed around to describe the force behind the nihilistic sludge mayhem on display. That power is of a triumphant fist-pumping nature, though. Instead, that power is a crushing, apocalyptic weight bearing down on the listener. This record is 78 minutes of ear-bleeding heavy metal, and shut off-kilter time signatures continue throughout the remaining 35 minutes on the first proper full-length from this Greek duo, which somehow remains infectious and catchy instead of off-putting, as that musical mission would be in lesser hands.

5. Enslaved, E

The act with the longest history on this list, Norway’s Enslaved have had a trajectory similar to beloved Swedish act Opeth, with a performance that evolves a more subdued Geddy Lee, and the band’s musical output is peppered with small nods to prog-metal psychedelia. The group have further mastered their clean guitar harmonics, once again leading to one of the year’s more hypnotic musical experiences.

7. Expander, Endless Computer

The first full-length from this Austin quartet is a catchy ripper that very much falls into the thrash category but has plenty of subtle layers lurking within to make it rise above so many acts utilizing riffs from the same playbook. Instead of the beloved thrash tropes of beer, Satan and bombs, Expander accomplish the mission statement of their band name by indulging in dystopian sci-fi lyrical themes and moments of unpredictable musical angularity that mix up the current Texas thrash-metal sound with a flair for Voivod-esque fancy.

9. Emptiness, Not for Music

This Belgian act took a sharper turn into the esoteric on this, their fifth record. Moments of goth-shrouded shoegaze atmospherics, angular post-punk ugliness and haunting industrial synth work are smashed together and then filtered further through a black-metal shield. The group’s early beginnings as a more traditional extreme-metal band have been fully left behind, but the experimentation in recent years has paid off with a record full of rewards for the more open-minded metal fan.

end of preview
Skating Polly @ THE ECHO
Skating Polly can punk it up as much as any other riot-grrrl band, but the Oklahoma City sibling trio also occasionally digress into more introspectively melodic passages. On 2016 album The Big Fit, the group alternate between pent-up bursts of grungy catharsis such as “Oddie Moore” and starker acoustic tracks like “Picker of His Words,” in which Peyton Bighorse exchanges lines and casts out waves of consoling harmonies over her step-sister Kelli Mayo’s rueful laments. Skating Polly were championed early on by Exene Cervenko, and they collaborate with Veruca Salt’s Louise Post and Nina Gordon on the recent EP New Trick. “Hail Mary” encapsulates the band’s sonic duality, as Kelli Mayo coolly describes — over somberly lulling waves of Bighorse’s guitar — a damaged girl who has “tied her guts in a knot” before drummer Kurtis Mayo slams into the momentously stormy climax. –Falling James

Oh Sees @ TERAGRAM BALLROOM
In their two decades in show business, Oh Sees have gone through numerous incarnations and lineup changes, and leader John Dwyer (Coachwhips) and his San Francisco band have performed under just as many variations of the name (Thee Oh Sees, Orinoka Crash Suite, OCS, Orange County Sound, The Ohsees). The group’s latest album, Orc, is a fittingly jagged and unpredictably ecletic barrage, moving from the throttling glitter-punk intensity of “The Static God” and new-wave synth flashes of “Nite Expo” to the guttural metallic grumbling of “Animated Violence” and the spacey, Brian Eno–style post-punk epic “Keys to the Castle.” And that’s just the first four songs. Dwyer changes his keys to the Castle.” And that’s just the first four songs. Dwyer changes his vocals like “Picker of His Words,” in which he is spiked with his florid bolts of guitar. He’ll likely mute or transmute some of that energy this weekend for what’s being billed as a “mellow, sit-down” set. Plus, Ty Segall and Shannon Lay. Also Saturday, Dec. 16. –Falling James

Behold! The Monolith @ FIVE STAR BAR
Behold! The Monolith guitarist Matt Price once said in an L.A. Weekly feature, “We want to throw everything in and do whatever works.” The L.A. band rain down thunderous riffs pulled from multiple metal playbooks, mixing elements of slowed-down Black Sabbath sludge, rapid-fire thrash metal and haunting, caustic death metal into a wicked brew, and all of it works. The group’s 2015 Architects of the Void saw the group continuing to fine-tune their concoction via lengthy musical trips through every metallic fork in the road. There has been a departure in the vocalist position since that record’s release, but early performances have seen new singer Ekaterina Gorbacheva ready to match the razor-gargling screams and throaty bel lows of her predecessors. –Jason Roche

Suicide Silence @ GLASS HOUSE, POMONA
Seasoned bands face a directional dilemma: Pander to fans’ expectations or stay true to the artistic authenticity that probably earned them attention in the first place, regardless of what that might actually sound like? Riverside’s Suicide Silence bravely opted for the latter on their self-titled fifth full-length earlier this year (their second with vocalist “Eddie” Hermida). Having helped to propel deathcore toward the mainstream with their early releases, the quintet clambered a few branches back down heavy metal’s family tree for Suicide Silence, which owes oodles to 1990s Deftones, Korn and Faith No More. Recorded live-in-the-studio by nu metal genre architect Ross Robinson, it’s a recklessly flawed, often confusing melding of brute rage and tortured introspection that, even when it stumbles, reeks of single-minded “fuck you” self-esteem. And isn’t that what metal is supposed to be all about? (Also Sunday, Dec. 17, at Whisky a Go Go). –Paul Rogers
The Who put their own groovy spin on the wicked riff back in the ‘60s.) But Hefti did more than just put those famous three notes together. The longtime Tolucans local resident played trumpet, was a big-band bandleader, arranged music for Count Basie and Frank Sinatra, and composed distinctive scores for film and television, most notably The Odd Couple. Son Paul Hefti keeps his late father’s music alive these days with a thoughtful, elegantly presented homage. Hefti Plays Hefti. Vocalist Deryn Rush finds the timeless soul in such memorable tunes as “Girl Talk,” as guitarist Paul Hefti and an adept jazz combo lay down a smart, tastefully playful backdrop. —Falling James

**mon 12/18**

**Egrets on Ergot, Joe Baiza**
@ **4th Street Vine**

These days, much of what passes for modern goth and post-punk music can come off as little more than harmless nostalgia for the ancient early ‘80s, but Egrets on Ergot have somehow succeeded in making it all sound genuinely disturbing and aggressively unsettling again. Building on the sinister potential of debut EP Serve Us Tender, the L.A. quartet’s first full-length album, Surfeit of Gemütlichkeit, unfolds as a series of interlocking rooms whose dark chambers are only occasionally lit up by Adam Brooks’ anguished vocal shrieking and squallid saxophone retorts. On such sprawling, swampy, ’tude-ridden riffs and more atmospheric shadows of sound that hum and hover like quivering ghosts. The layered, psychedelic production by Paul Roessler (Screamers, Nina Hagen) adds to the sense of overall dread. Saccharine Trust guitarist Joe Baiza comes from a punk background but plays with a funny, jazzly angularity. —Falling James

**tue 12/19**

**The Bellrays, The Bombpops, Supersuckers**
@ **The Viper Room**

It doesn’t get more rough and rolling than tonight’s titanic trifecta of rock action with three of the hardest-working bands in the business — and with all the depressing nonsense happening in the world today, sometimes all you want is a bunch of hard-rocking crazies to take you by the hand and lead you into total musical amnialisation. Riverside’s soulful garage punks The Bellrays rocked so hard at one point that singer Lisa Kekaula and guitarist Bob Vennum fell in love, married and had a rockin’ baby. The Bombpops celebrate a decade as a going concern in Tucson — have led a properly respectable life as 30-year-strong purveyors of the type of rock & roll that scandalizes clergy and horrifies bluehairs and bluenoses alike. —David Cotner

**wed 12/20**

**Method Man, Redman**
@ **The Novo**

The dynamic duo rides again in yet another spectacular example of tag-team rap excellence that’s truly a wonder to behold. You never know what to expect from Wu-Tang clan member Method Man, who’s shown up everywhere from Luke Cage to The Deuce, even while he finesses his long-delayed “Crystal Meth” record. But like every good practitioner of the martial arts, who knows exactly when to move and when to wait, Method Man continues to perfect the method to his madness. As for Redman, he’s hosting VH1’s new horror reality series Scared Famous and working on Too High, the sequel to the 2001 Stoner comedy How High, which really should be part of a stoner comedy film festival. Until then, you’ll dance your ass off all night and smell a much sweeter kind of smoke than you’ve had to breathe lately. —David Cotner

**Thu 12/21**

**L.A. Witch**
@ **Teragram Ballroom**

It’s been a big year for local dark rock trio L.A. Witch. After four years of working their butts off and learning their trade, their self-titled, full-length debut album came out in September to solid reviews. That in itself is an achievement: The women largely produced the record by themselves, learning to do it as they went along. That work ethic and classic rock & roll DIY mentality likely will serve them well in a modern music industry that pretty much demands it. The tunes are swampy, ’tude-ridden magnificence, and the band makes for a gloriously heavy live experience. During a recent interview, singer Sade Sanchez told us that they are never 100 percent happy with what they do, and that’s a healthy attitude, too. But they can certainly afford to go into 2018 feeling positive. —Brett Callwood

**Jay-Z**
@ **The Forum**

This year began with Jay-Z’s infidelities laid out bare for the world to see courtesy of his wife’s game-changing Lemonade and, later, his own admission. Despite all the tabloid gossip-page fodder, the man is still among the most successful rappers in the game, and his business ventures prove he knows how to make a buck. People genuinely love his music; he’s had 14 No. 1 albums on the Billboard Hot 100, a record for a solo artist. This year’s 4:44 is one of those, an album that everyone from the Grammy peeps to British mag NME have heralded. Fair enough — scrape away the commercial sheen, and there’s incisive social commentary in the lyrics. He’ll be spitting them out in Inglewood, and his faithful fans will inevitably go bat-shit crazy. Still, though — who cheats on Beyonce? —Brett Callwood

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SOUNDBITS STUDIOS: 1975 Riverside Dr., Los Angeles. Necronomoid, Fri., Dec. 15, 9:30 p.m., $100.


TRIP: 2101 Lincoln Blvd., Santa Monica. The Julian Coryell Trio, Tuesdays, 9 p.m., free. Triptease Burlesque, Wednesdays, 10 p.m., $5.


THE GIBBONS: 104 N. Avenue 56, Los Angeles. The California Honeymds, The Steady 45s, Thu., Dec. 21, 8 p.m., $18.


JAZZ & BLUES

ALVAS SHOWROOM: 1417 W. Eighth St., San Pedro. Eric Rigler, Dicky Freymuth, Sat., Dec. 16, 8 p.m.; Sun., Dec. 17, 5 p.m., $30.

ARCADIA BLUES CLUB: 16 E. Huntington Dr., Arcadia.
SUNDAY, DEC. 17

**THE BLIND BOYS OF ALABAMA:** 7 p.m. The Theatre at Ace Hotel, 929 S. Broadway, Los Angeles.

**BUCKETHEAD:** 8 p.m., $10. The Nove by Microsoft, 800 W. Olympic Blvd., Los Angeles.

**KEIKO MATSU:** With Euge Groove, Lindsey Webster, Alain Hawley, 3 p.m., $40-$80. Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts, 12700 Center Court Dr., Cerritos.

**METHOD MAN, REDMAN:** 8 p.m., $30. The Observatory, 3503 S. Harbor Blvd., Santa Ana.


**MONDAY, DEC. 18**

**DOM KENNEDY:** 8 p.m. The Novo by Microsoft, 800 W. Olympic Blvd., Los Angeles.

**KEHLANI:** 8 p.m., $45. The Observatory, 3503 S. Harbor Blvd., Santa Ana.

**LADY GAGA:** 7:30 p.m., $51-$281. The Forum, 3900 W. Manchester Blvd., Inglewood.

**SYRIA:** With MSFTS Music, 8 p.m., $20. The Observatory, 3503 S. Harbor Blvd., Santa Ana.

**TUESDAY, DEC. 19**

**DRAKEO THE RULER:** 9 p.m. The Observatory, 3503 S. Harbor Blvd., Santa Ana.

**JHENÉ AIKO:** With Willow Smith, Kitty Cash, Kodie Shane, 8 p.m., $38-$125. The Observatory, 3503 S. Harbor Blvd., Santa Ana.

**WEDNESDAY, DEC. 20**

**98:** 8:01 p.m. City National Grove of Anaheim, 2200 E. Katella Ave., Anaheim.

**BARRY MANILOW:** 7:30 p.m., $39.75-$499.75. The Forum, 3900 W. Manchester Blvd., Inglewood.

**DIANN REEVES:** 8 p.m., $38-$598. Walt Disney Concert Hall, 111 S. Grand Ave., Los Angeles.

**METHOD MAN, REDMAN:** 8 p.m., $29.50 & $39.50. The Novo by Microsoft, 800 W. Olympic Blvd., Los Angeles. See Music Pick.

**SMOKEPURPP:** 11:30 p.m., $20. The Observatory, 3503 S. Harbor Blvd., Santa Ana.

**VIC MENSA:** 9 p.m. The Observatory, 3503 S. Harbor Blvd., Santa Ana.

**THURSDAY, DEC. 21**

**98:** 7:30 p.m., $36-$86. Fred Kavli Theatre, Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza, 2100 E. Thousand Oaks Blvd., Thousand Oaks.

**ALL DEF L.A.** With VanJess, Arik Khan, Jean Deaux, Ollie Chanin, Kronika (DJ set), Urias, 9 p.m. The Regent Theater, 448 S. Main St., Los Angeles.

**DAVID BROZA:** 7:30 p.m., $55 & up. The Broad Stage, Santa Monica Performing Arts Center, 1310 11th St., Santa Monica.

**HOMESHAKE:** With Mild High Club, Enjoy, 8 p.m., $20. The Observatory, 3503 S. Harbor Blvd., Santa Ana.

**JAY-Z:** 8 p.m., $39-$542. The Forum, 3900 W. Manchester Blvd., Inglewood. See Music Pick.

**LINSEY STIRLING:** With Alexander Jean, 8 p.m. Microsoft Theater, 777 Chick Hearn Court, Los Angeles.

**MARIACHI LOS CAMPEROS:** 8 p.m., $29 & up. Reneé & Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall, 600 Town Center Dr., Costa Mesa.

**OMAM:** 11 p.m., $20. The Observatory, 3503 S. Harbor Blvd., Santa Ana.

**STEVE LACY:** With Daisy, 9 p.m. El Rey Theatre, 5515 Wilshire Blvd., Los Angeles.

**FRIDAY, DEC. 22**

**BIG BAD Voodoo Daddy:** Sun., Dec. 31, 8 p.m., $36-$58. Fred Kavli Theatre, Thousand Oaks Civic Arts Plaza.

**BONE THUGS-N-HARMONY** Fri., Dec. 21, 11 p.m., $25. The Observatory.

**BRYSON TILLER:** Fri., Dec. 29, 8 & 11 p.m., $65. The Observatory.

**CHERRY GLAZER:** With Vagabon, Shannon Lay, Fri., Dec. 29, 8 & p.m., $21. The Fonda Theatre.

**DAVE KOZ:** Dec. 22-23, 8 p.m., $50-$95. Cerritos
**Classical & New Music**

**Antony Lusy & Tom Beghin:** Cellist Lusy and fortepiano specialist Beghin cover all five of Beethoven's sonatas for cello and piano, Sun., Dec. 17 p.m., $65-$100. The Broad Stage, Santa Monica College Performing Arts Center, 1310 11th St., Santa Monica.

**Chanticleer:** Sun., Dec. 8 p.m., $38-$58. Walt Disney Concert Hall, 1111 1st St., Santa Monica.

**The Choir of Claremont College:** University: The Da Camera Society presents a holiday concert by the 30-person choir, Sun., Dec. 17, 2-6 p.m., $55, Bradbury Building, 304 S. Broadway, Los Angeles.

**Chris Victor:** The composer-cellist debuts new work with members of Wild Up, Sun., Dec. 17 p.m., $15 & $20. Dynasty, 2806 Clearwater St., Los Angeles.

**Holiday Sing-Along:** With Melissa Peterman, Angeles Chorale, Philip Smith, Sat., Dec. 16, 11:30 a.m. & 2:30 p.m., $33-$58. Walt Disney Concert Hall, 111 S. Grand Ave., Los Angeles.


**La Bohème:** Powerhouse soprano Daria Soirner (as Mimi) and tenor Giovanni De Martianis (as Rodolfo) find the romantic pathos at the heart of Pacific Opera Project's revival of its revered remount of Puccini's opera, which is set in present-day Highland Park, Fri.-Sat., Dec. 15-16, 8 p.m., $20-$140. Highland Park Ebell Club, 131 S. Avenue 57, Highland Park. See Music Pick.

**La Philharmonic:** Georgian pianist Khatia Buniatishvili induces Mozart's enchanting Piano Concerto No. 23 in A, K. 488; and Michael Tilson Thomas steps in to conduct Bruckner's Symphony. Symphony, Fri.-Sat., Dec. 14-15, 8 p.m., Sun., Dec. 17, 2 p.m., $20-$194. Walt Disney Concert Hall, 111 S. Grand Ave., Los Angeles. Recommended.


**Real Estate:** Wed., Feb. 28, 8 p.m., $35 & up. The Theatre at Ace Hotel.

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