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ART

A Global Perspective

The ninth edition of Art Los Angeles Contemporary (ALAC) offers an eclectic, wide-ranging perspective on the galleries and artists that help define L.A. as a capital of the contemporary art world. More than 65 galleries are participating this year, including exhibitors from Latin America, Asia and Europe. And 33 of them hail from the City of Angels. Barker Hangar, 3021 Airport Ave., Santa Monica; Thu., Jan. 25, 7-9 p.m.; Fri.-Sat., Jan. 26-27, 11 a.m.-7 p.m.; Sun., Jan. 28, 11 a.m.-6 p.m.; $25. (323) 851-7530, artlosangelesfair.com. —Richard Chang

BOOKS/ART

My Country 'Tis of Thee

It Occurs to Me That I Am America: New Stories and Art is a collection of short fiction by 30 famous authors — each of whom donated his or her proceeds to the ACLU — including Mary Higgins Clark, Michael Cunningham, Neil Gaiman, Walter Mosley, Joyce Carol Oates, Paul Theroux and Alice Walker. Their works address immigration, racism, women’s rights and civil liberties, which are all being questioned under Trump’s presidency. The pieces are accompanied by original art, from paintings and charcoal drawings to photographs and cartoon strips, including Eric Orner’s hilarious “The Ugliest American Alphabet.” Tonight’s discussion features editor Jonathan Santlofer, contributing artist Mimi Pond and Viet Thanh Nguyen, who wrote the book’s foreword and was winner of 2016’s Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for his debut novel, The Sympathizer. Skylight Books, 1818 N. Vermont Ave., Los Feliz; Fri., Jan. 26, 7:30 p.m.; free. (323) 660-1175, skylightbooks.com. —Siran Babayan

DANCE

Move With a Purpose

In the wake of the outcry over the latest racist rants from the White House, 10 top companies arrive here for the 30th annual meeting of the International Association of Blacks in Dance. Unlike most conferences, when the daytime sessions end, these participants take the stage to perform. The scheduled performers read like a who’s who of African-American dance companies, including Dance Theatre of Harlem, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, Kyle Abraham and Philadanco, plus L.A. host company Lula Washington Dance Theatre. A series of late-night showings during the conference at the Sheraton Gateway LAX, which hosts the conference, culminates in three concerts with 10 IABD founding companies on Saturday, Jan. 27, and other member companies on Friday, Jan. 26. This is L.A.’s fourth time hosting the annual conference, and each time it has overidden in Beatlemania touring companies, but the contemporary classical ensemble Alarm Will Sound perform it live in their historical hypothetical 1969, based on a planned meeting between John Lennon and avant-garde composer Karlheinz Stockhausen that never took place. The band also performs Stockhausen’s anti-anthem Hymnen and other music onstage, all conducted by Alan Pierson. Actors play the protagonists and blend with video and photographs and create a fascinating collage of the...
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HOLIDAYS
Year of the Dog
The Original Farmers Market and the Grove welcome the lunar new year with a Year of the Dog event, featuring performances, craft activities, cooking demonstrations, red envelope giveaways, social media contests, decor installations and activities just for dogs.

ART/COMMUNITY
A Homegrown Affair
Nearly 10 years in, the Leimert Park Art Walk is a rare community-driven engine both expanding contemporary artistry and preserving a historic African-American cultural center in the age of gentrification. “We felt if we have a live and thriving community, it could make it into the next step of paying for itself,” says organizer, Renaissance man and KAOs Network head Ben Caldwell, who advocates creating micro-businesses around crowds drawn to Leimert Park’s dense arts community. This Sunday is a tribute to a “father of sustainability, green and growth,” George Washington Carver. Expect art for sale, food, youth activities, DJs, an all-day open mic where seasoned performers sharpen their skills—and a comedy variety show after sundown. Pro female percussionists initiate at noon, but thereafter the drum circle welcomes all who feel its polyrhythmic pull. Graffiti artist EnkOne features works for sale. Leimert Park Plaza, 3333 43rd Place, Leimert Park; Sun. Jan. 28, 1-8 p.m.; free. facebook.com/events/163651871974762x/

-Beige Luciano-Adams

HISTORY
An Old L.A. Landmark
When it opened in 1929, Bullock’s Wilshire was one of the first examples of an art deco building in America. Built by John and Donald Parkinson, who also designed City Hall, Union Station and the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, the luxury department store was famous for its 241-foot, patinated green tower, tea room and celebrity customers. It closed in 1993 and was later purchased by the Southwestern Law School, which preserved the architectural integrity of the property, even opening its doors to the public for tours one weekend every summer. Co-hosted by the Art Deco Society of Los Angeles and the American Cinematheque, today’s Bullocks Wilshire History Presentation looks at the origins of the structure with a talk featuring Margaret Leslie Davis, author of the 1999 book Bullocks Wilshire, and fine art and fashion illustrator Gregory
mon 1/29

DANCE

Get Down With the Real Crews
If you're going to brave Hollywood and an actual nightclub on a Monday, do it for the Carnival Choreographers Ball. This selective monthly showcase attracts the best hip-hop and industry dance crews and choreographers for one mind-blowing night at the Avalon. You'll see the dancers who make Beyoncé, Nicki Minaj and J.Lo look good, plus low-key genius freestylers breaking it down. Expect the latest music, from Cardi B to AfroBeats. This Monday Carnival celebrates its 19th anniversary with choreographer Tricia Miranda atop the bill. If you have a soul, Miranda's musicality will make you weak in the knees. L.A. favorites Wilda-beast Adams, Janelle Ginestra and Matt Stefania also will showcase their work. The show starts at 10:30 p.m. and usually winds down around 2 a.m. So pace yourself, and keep an eye out for your IG dance crush. Avalon, 1735 N. Vine St., Hollywood; Mon., Jan. 29, doors open at 9 p.m.; $25 & 18-plus. (323) 462-8900, choreographerscarnival.com. —Siran Babayan

wed 1/31

BOOKS

Rebel With a Cure
One thing rarely pointed out about the whole "sensitive man" phenomenon in Hollywood during the '70s and '80s is that the actors who were those sensitive men usually had a metric shitload of trauma left over from various terrible upbringings. To wit: Nick Nolte discusses Rebel: My Life Outside the Lines ($29, William Morrow). Oscar nominations, romances and divorces, scandal and addiction — they're all here, and Nolte talks about them in a tone that is measured yet passionate, reflective yet passionate, philosophical yet passionate (he's a passionate guy) in this, one of the last great actor memoirs. Skirball Cultural Center, 2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd., Brentwood; Wed., Jan. 31, 8 p.m.; $29 & $38 (includes book). (310) 659-3110, booksoup.com/event/book-soup-skirball-presents-actor-nick-nolte-discussing-and-signing-his-memoir-rebel-my-life. —David Cotner

tue 1/30

COMEDY

His People Suffered
It's a tormented path in more ways than one, growing up Mormon and gay, getting cancer and then converting to Judaism. But tonight's Latter Day Jew Live encapsulates these struggles — and all the triumphs that implies — with comedian H. Alan Scott. As if he didn't have enough trouble in his life, he had to prepare himself to be bar mitzvahed at the ripe old age of 35. Hear Scott's stories and reflect upon your own battles with existential uncertainty as you experience one of the finer moments of perspective at any comedy club this year. Nerdist, 7522 Sunset Blvd., Hollywood; Tue., Jan. 30, 7:45 p.m.; free. (323) 851-7223, holdmyticket.com/event/304171. —David Cotner

thu 2/1

BOOKS

Through a Latinx Lens
Pulitzer Prize–winning author Junot Díaz will give a lecture that ties into “Adelante! Latinx Activism in California,” a spring 2018 campuswide series of events exploring key moments in regional history and important issues affecting the Latino community. A MacArthur fellow, Díaz won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction for his first novel, The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao. Díaz will stick around to sign books after his talk. University Theatre, Cal State Dominguez Hills, 1000 E. Victoria St., Carson; Thu., Feb. 1, 5:30-8 p.m.; free, tickets required. (310) 243-3322, csudh.edu. —Richard Chang
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Legalizing marijuana for recreational use was supposed to deal a death blow to smugglers, cartels and the black market while simultaneously pumping new money into state government coffers.

But now, less than a month into the recreational reefer rollout, California consumers could decide to bypass legal dispensaries and head back to the black market in a bid to avoid taxes that could double the price of pot.

The state announced Jan. 10 that pot taxes will put $643 million in the state’s piggy bank for 2018. That’s because, for every ounce sold, $9.25 goes to a flower or “bud” tax, $2.75 for a tax on leaves that few people want and 15 percent of the purchase price to a sin tax known as an excise tax. And don’t forget the sales tax — as much as 10 percent in some parts of Los Angeles County.

And those taxes come out of pockets that aren’t used to the cost of doing legal transactions. Most buyers are looking for the best deal they can get, and that doesn’t include an extra $15 or $20 for the same pot they can get on the street for that much less.

Osiris Santos of Americann Made says, “Since we’re in a cash-only business, it’s tempting not to pay your taxes.”

If taxation continues on these levels, legal weed will have a tough time competing with the black market, say growers, pot industry experts, a tax group that monitors excessive government tax-and-spend programs, and people from other states.

For example, the current dispensary price for one-eighth ounce of high-grade marijuana is around $65. But if you stick to buying from your local pot dealer, you could save as much as $30. Low-grade weed with low THC concentration can be had for $20 an eighth on the street. It’ll cost you $40 at a licensed dispensary.

And that phenomenon likely will continue for at least another year, maybe two, said Beau Kilmer, co-director of the Rand Corp. Drug Policy Research Center in Oakland, as prices even out.

Hezekiah Allen, executive director of the marijuana-centric California Growers Association, said two years is optimistic. With taxes on pot set so high as a result of language in Proposition 64, the black market isn’t going anywhere, he said.

Hidden deep in Proposition 64’s official wording was information on the taxes that would be levied. But the taxes received little media coverage, and voters either ignored them or weren’t paying attention when they approved legal recreational sales, Allen said.

Now, Allen wants legislators to put a pot reform measure on the November ballot to give voters a chance to reduce the taxes. Allen will have a few months to put together a ballot proposal.

He would like to see the state reduce the 15 percent tax on retail sales to 5 percent and get rid of the $2.75 tax per dry ounce of leaves. The 15 percent state excise tax is in addition to any local sales taxes, he said.

On top of that, there’s the annual $1,000 state license fee and a requirement by cultivators to pay the $9.25 per dry weight ounce of flowers, both of which Allen wants to see lowered. The leaves are rarely sold for smoking but instead are sent to processors who make things like pot butter and edibles out of them, he said.

The craziness surrounding pot taxation can be seen in the difference between two Northern California cities. In the agricultural hub of Salinas, southeast of San Francisco, voters approved a tax that eventually will rise to $25 a square foot for space used to cultivate pot, according to a Nov. 11 Associated Press story. That adds up to a tax of a little more than $1 million per acre per year. On the other hand, in Humboldt County, a tax on growing is a bargain at $1 to $3 per square foot, or $43,560 to $130,680.

A thriving black market under the current tax structure is quite the opposite of what the state wanted, said David Wolfe, legislative director for the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association. The nonprofit got its start back in the 1970s fighting for the passage of Proposition 13, which limited property taxes and prompted politicians to look at cigarettes, alcohol and now pot as potential tax revenue sources.

Now, Wolfe says, the anti-tax group has other taxes in its crosshairs — including the pot tax. “A tax structure should be put in place but not so punitive as to drive marijuana businesses underground and create a bigger problem than you had before,” he said. “The point is, how close are those price points? That will determine the strength of the black market. Come back in six months or a year and I’ll let you know.”

Kilmer of the Rand Corp. said taxes are necessary to pay for pot industry regulation. That includes testing and proper labeling and packaging. Whether or not voters approved a reasonable taxing system for pot is debatable, he said.

“No one knows the best way to tax cannabis,” Kilmer said. “In most places, taxes are a function of price. If that’s the case, when prices go down, tax revenue goes down.”

In Alaska, where recreational pot is legal, the state taxes pot according to weight. So does California. However, basing taxes on weight gives cultivators an incentive to grow less pot and concentrate on pot that’s higher in the active ingredient THC. The more THC, the more cannabis costs, because that’s what smokers demand.

Cultivators can game the weight-based tax system by growing more potent pot; they get more money per pound and thus pay less in taxes because under California’s system, it’s about weight, not THC levels.

“Taxing as a function of THC is easy just like taxing weight is easy,” Kilmer said.

“There are a lot of different options.”

Allen of the Growers Association said attaching the tax to THC levels would give policymakers a tool to influence behavior while creating a more fair tax rate.

“You can’t do it by taxing weight,” Allen said. “The more potent the marijuana, the more potential for abuse. But you can impact behavior (with higher taxes on higher THC). Government does this all the time with alcohol and whiskey, which they tax at a higher rate than wine and beer.”

The city of L.A. wants to make sure pot businesses don’t get away with anything. L.A. charges pot dispensaries $100 per $1,000 in gross receipts on recreational marijuana and $50 per $1,000 on medicinal. If you transport pot, it’s $10 per $1,000, $25 per $1,000 for cultivators and $20 per $1,000 for anything not covered above.

Unlicensed commercial cannabis businesses in L.A. can be fined up to $20,000 a day. Property owners who lease to an illegal operation face the same fine, too.

Marketing director Kelsey Barney of the Rose Collective in Venice takes a laid-back approach to taxation.

“So far our patients have been half and half,” Barney said. “Some say, ‘Great. It’s legal.’ And some tell me they’re going back to their guy. I try to stay positive because we offer a rewards program — 7 percent back with every purchase.”

That’s probably not the case on the street corner.
ready, set, ascnd.
The last hour of the 190-mile drive inland from L.A. to Slab City is a sensory-deprivation dash through frowning, scrubby nothingness where humans go only to escape or to hide, or because they’ve simply been priced out elsewhere. Beyond manicured Palm Springs and the featureless fields of the Coachella Valley, the increasingly toxic Salton Sea forms a dying mirror of the vast Colorado Desert sky, State Route 111 a thin thread of civilization between its apocalyptic abandoned resorts and the distant Chocolate Mountains.

“Make a left on Main Street in Niland and you can’t miss it,” I’d been told by Slab Gram, a six-year Slab City dweller whom I’d first met outside Sunset Strip’s Whisky A Go Go.

Good thing, because no county signage conveys that you’re approaching what has effectively been a small town for half a century, three miles down an increasingly rutted road from the former “Tomato Capital of the World.”

Cresting a bridge over an irrigation canal, I spot a multi-colored blob on the beige blandness some half a mile ahead, as if all the pigment sucked out of its surroundings had been poured over this solitary, beckoning mound. It had to be Salvation Mountain — the cartoonishly vivid, 50-foot-high art installation that serves as a gateway to Slab City. As I approach, they appear, spread between scrawny trees across an ill-defined square mile framed with craggy peaks: improvised campsites of tarps and found objects; immobilized vehicles reimagined as dwellings; elaborate, cobbled-together compounds demarcated by tires; tents of all types; and myriad motor homes, some the size of studio apartments.

“I escaped right before it got bad, right before my lease was up,” says previously lifelong L.A. resident Tallulah Kidd. “I had to make the decision: Am I going to stay doing this, or am I going to just go toward the route of freedom?”

In an era of uproar over the cost of living in Los Angeles — “You Officially Have to Be Rich to Rent in L.A.” boomed a July headline in this very publication — a trickle...
where even a typical one-bedroom pad runs $1,949 per month (almost twice the national average). Meanwhile, the median sale price for homes in L.A. County hit an all-time high of $757,000 last summer, according to CoreLogic.

“It was costing me more than I could make [in Los Angeles],” says Paul Holman III, 55, an Angeleno since his teens who slipped into homelessness in 2015 before cycling out to Slab City a year later. Holman says he can survive on “five or six bucks” a month (augmented by food stamps and donated groceries) in the Slabs, and everyone I spoke to there claims to spend less than $200 monthly.

Upon my first visit last August, Slab City left a troubling impression of inhumane conditions and admirable, if almost incomprehensible, survivalism. During summer’s lingering triple-digit days, the maybe 100 to 150 year-round “Slabbers” move minimally, and then only in furtive zigzags dictated by precarious patches of shade. Like a perpetual twilight, there’s no distinction between day and night, with stars and faculae of battery-powered LED Christmas lights twinning across the Slabs by night.

“I learned about powering my own solar and composting and jarring,” says Kidd, 32, who worked for a résumé-writing service, Kidd in her native Long Beach, where she lived, “Absolutely No Media”), and my credentials and intentions were repeatedly questioned. As it’s not an organized commune, there’s no one to check in with. Anybody can simply show up and pitch year. Skulking 150 feet below sea level, it’s not so much a place as a space between places.

Camp Dunlap was dismantled in 1956, and within a decade squatters appeared. Stories of Slab City’s genesis are many, but an enduring version is that workers sent by an Oakland company to harvest creosote leaves nearby in the mid-’60s set up temporary homes in trailers parked on the base’s remaining slabs. Soon, homeless people evicted from camps elsewhere in the region began establishing a more permanent community. Other than spotty cell service, Slab City is entirely off-grid, without official water and electricity supplies or sanitation. For personal hygiene, there are nearby hot springs, a communal cold shower and (technically off-limits) irrigation canals. Potable water has to be brought in from Niland. Most year-round residents rely on solar panels for a few hours of TV, fans or even air conditioning each day. Some run generators, while propane facilitates cooking and refrigeration. Sprinkles of battery-powered LED Christmas lights twinkle across the Slabs by night.

“I learned about powering my own solar and composting and jarring,” says Kidd, 32, who moved on from a friend’s Slab City Winniebago for a more nomadic lifestyle earlier this month. “That part of it was really satisfying.”

“It’s hard to ascertain” how many Angelenos (or how many people) occupy Slab City at any one time. Some Slabbers won’t speak to journalists (a printed sign in one trailer’s window announces “Absolutely No Media”), and my credentials and intentions were repeatedly questioned. As it’s not an organized commune, there’s no one to check in with. Anybody can simply show up and pitch camp. But given L.A.’s relative proximity to Slab City, it’s reasonable to assume...
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First impressions of the Slabs tend to be atypical, because the majority of visitors enter and park, usually just to take photos, at Salvation Mountain. Started by late, legendary Slapper Leonard Knight in the mid-1980s, the childlike murals and inspirational Christian slogans of this paint-slathered adobe-and-straw edifice offer small comfort amid the harsh environs. “There’s a few little events and stuff, but it does get boring,” insists Gram, who grew up with hard-partying Punk rockers in Baltimore. “Boredom is way better than crazy drama.”

Finding pleasure in small things appears key, and a product of, survival in Slab City’s harsh environs. “You find ice cream or pizza in the desert, and happy days!” laughs the lanky Holman, who sometimes sports a voluminous gray beard. “Dance around; make a song!” For those with the funds, such foods can be purchased in Niland or, more affordably, in the larger but more distant towns of Brawley and Calipatria. Population 1,000 (and shrinking), Niland also offers a health clinic and, during extreme high temperatures, an air-conditioned, open-to-all cooling center.

While Slab City can appear unfamiliar and even intimidating to newcomers, many residents report crime levels and a sense of safety little different from those they experienced living in L.A. or other cities. “I would definitely feel a lot more safe in Slab City walking around at night than I would in MacArthur Park,” says Brandon Hunsinger, a 28-year-old multimedia artist who punctuated four years of living in L.A. with frequent Slab City stays. A dispatch supervisor at Imperial County sheriff’s office says the calls they receive from Slab City are very similar to those from other communities they serve: mostly medical emergencies, disturbances or theft. But crime may go under-reported in a community where some, having had negative experiences with law enforcement while homeless, or because of past encounters with the police, are reluctant to contact the police.

“I wouldn’t say I felt safe in Slab City. I really didn’t walk around a lot without a partner,” Kidd says. “In Long Beach, I felt like I could maybe do that.”

While there are certainly hard drugs being used and sold in the Slabs...
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LaWeekly.com/Promotions/Free-Stuff
But while Slab City is free, it’s certainly not a free-for-all. Reports of lawlessness (Vice titled its 2012 Slab City documentary Living Without Laws) appear to be exaggerated. The dirt roads are graded by the county and regularly patrolled by both sheriff’s deputies and Border Patrol agents (Mexico is just 50 miles south). “Nothing illegal in Imperial County, the state of California or the United States of America becomes magically legal here in Slab City,” reminds East Jesus’ website. While there’s no formal “government” or hierarchy, common sense and decent manners are generally expected and adhered to, such as checking with nearby residents before pitching camp.

While some longtime Slabbers complain of youngsters lately showing up with nothing to offer the community but an outstretched hand, many newbies bring resources (such as tools or a serviceable vehicle) or useful skills (like construction or auto repair) from their former lives. But for those who are truly down and out, help is at hand. When recent arrival Ben Owens, who once lived on L.A.’s Skid Row, posted “I need food” on the internet cafe’s Facebook page last month, two of his neighbors immediately offered sustenance.

Some Slabbers rave about a community where, often in contrast to their experiences of city life, they know their neighbors and always have somewhere to go and someone to turn to for help ("It’s definitely the American dream," Gram enthuses). Others find the social fabric overwhelming.

"The community gets together a bit, but it’s really more like solo artists," Holman says. "They’ll let you flounder." All agree that Slab City isn’t for everyone. "You have to recognize the humility of the place and go with the flow of it," says Hun singer, who first discovered Slab City while in high school, in a book called Weird California. "You don’t want to be an obnoxious observer — that won’t be taken kindly."

"A lot of people show up here and they’re instantly lonely for their old life," Holman explains, a trio of kids playing at his feet in the internet cafe. "It takes a certain mettle to stay here... You’ve got to have something inside of you that can sit through a windstorm for three days."

Having endured shortages of so many modern staples in Slab City, everyone I interviewed says they’ve learned to exist more simply, frugally and eco-responsibly during their time there — traits they’d bring back with them to urban life, should they return. "I would be worlds different," says Gram, an old-school rapper who performs in both Slab City and nearby towns. "My electric bill would be one-tenth of what it would be before, and my water bill. And just things I really don’t need, [like] cable."

Some Slabbers tell of selling or giving away most of their possessions prior to abandoning their old life, they know their neighbors and always have somewhere to go and someone to offer the community but an outstretched hand. Many newbies bring resources (such as construction or auto repair) from their former homes but an outstretched hand. Many newbies bring resources (such as construction or auto repair) from their former homes. While there’s no formal “government” or hierarchy, common sense and decent manners are generally expected and adhered to, such as checking with nearby residents before pitching camp.

Despite a 2015 state proposal to partition and sell the land Slab City occupies, there’s little sign that it will disappear or radically change anytime soon. The nonprofit, resident-run Salvation Mountain Inc. hopes to purchase the 160 acres around its charge, and a group of Slabbers called the Slab City Community Group is interested in much of the remainder. However, according to the California State Lands Commission, both these prospective sales are stalled.

For some of its residents, an end to Slab City would leave them with few options. Others say they could easily transition elsewhere — even back into "Babylon."

"I’d just end up getting a shitty job in L.A. and living in a shitty apartment again," says one longtime Slabber who recently moved back into "Babylon." Many intend to stay at the Slabs indefinitely, enamored equally with its low overhead and less tangible, subjective charms. "There’s this notion that runs through here that doesn’t exist in the city," says Holman, who sleeps in a tiny, ramshackle hut built around his bicycle trailer. "There’s a trueness to what people are saying or what they’re doing.

As my SUV bounces out of the Slabs and back toward suburbia, my thoughts turn to looming deadlines, my stepdaughters’ college fees and repairs required to their cars. With the wilting winter sun turning the dark folds of the Chocolate Mountains into reaching fingers in my rearview, graffiti daubed across an old concrete guard post bids me "Good Luck Out There!"
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Benefiting SANTA ANA UNIDOS
Beverly Hills Bao
A simple storefront offers affordable but delicious eats in the Golden Triangle

Located inconspicuously in plain sight (blink and you might miss it) in the Golden Triangle — Beverly Hills' extensive shopping district on Wilshire Boulevard — Little Highness Bao has been quietly doling out its delectable bao for the better part of a year. It's a simple storefront location with a dozen tables scattered throughout its airy, light-filled, loftlike space. On the second floor, an array of potted plants adds a vibrant touch of greenery to lighten the proceedings. It's a modest, homespun affair where even the napkins carry over from the previous tenant, Mr. B's Bakery.

Bao are oversize Taiwanese bread buns stuffed with fillings that range from minced beef to vegetables to a chicken-and-pork mixture. They're similar to the dumplings you're used to from dim sum service, except these have more of an emphasis on the bread and come one to an order. They may even remind you of the buns that accompany Peking duck.

At Little Highness, each order arrives carefully pleated in a bamboo steamer. Open the lid and a plume of steam will awaken your senses. The ground beef bao is assertively spiced and goes well with a few drops of rice wine vinegar. Two to three of these savory bao make for a wonderful light lunch and sure beat the nearby lunch options (especially since Barney Greengrass — the supermarket king — closed a few years ago).

The restaurant's original location is in the San Gabriel Valley city of Rowland Heights. The Beverly Hills location is its first on the Westside, and it's a wonderfully authentic addition to the neighborhood.

With the recent openings of Popcorn Chicken and Tasty Noodle House on Sawtelle Boulevard, the Westside is having something of a Chinese cuisine resurgence this past year, which is exceptional news.

Little Highness Bao's concise menu includes superlative xiao long bao, juicy soup dumplings filled with pork and shrimp, which squirt juice as you bite into the tiny dumplings (10 come in each order). They are highly prized by dumpling connoisseurs.

Little Highness also offers grilled versions of the signature bao, which adds a unique char to the oversized buns.
CAME TO THINK OF IT, YOU WILL MOST LIKELY BE EATING MUCH BETTER THAN A WIDE CROSS-SECTION OF BEVERLY HILLS AT THAT VERY MOMENT AND AT MORE THAN REASONABLE PRICES (MOST PLATES ARE UNDER $10; EACH BAO IS ONLY $2).

COLD PLATES SUCH AS PICKLED SEAWEED AND CUCUMBER OFFER A REFRESHING PALATE CLEANSER BETWEEN BITES OF MEATY DUMPLINGS, MUCH AS PICKLED GINGER WOULD DO BETWEEN SUSHI COURSES AT A HIGH-END SUSHI BAR. DIM SUM STANDARDS INCLUDING PORK WONTONS, PORK AND ONION DUMPLINGS, AN ULTRA-CRISP FRIED SPRING ROLL AND EGG FRIED RICE ROUND OUT THE SHORT MENU. BUT YOU’RE OBVIOUSLY HERE FOR THE SUPERB BAO, WHICH ARE MORE THAN WORTHY OF A LITTLE HIGHNESS. —KAYVAN GABBY

Koval Millet Whiskey
Millet is an ancient grain and a significant food source in parts of Asia and Africa, but in the United States it’s most likely known for its use in bird feed. The first distillery in Chicago since Prohibition, Koval means “blacksmith” in several Eastern European languages, but also “black sheep” in Yiddish. A whiskey made from 100 percent millet is certainly out of the ordinary. Also unique, the entire line of whiskey from Koval is single-barrel, certified organic and kosher.

Corsair Quinoa Whiskey
The motto at this innovative distillery in Nashville is “Boze for Badasses” and the name is literally a synonym for pirate, so look for daring, unexpected whiskeys from distiller Derek Bell. Quinoa may have originated in South America, but it’s now a trendy, gluten-free health food here in the United States. The grain (actually a seed) lends this whiskey an earthy, nutty flavor. Even the bottle from Corsair is distinctive, with a label reminiscent of the film Reservoir Dogs.

Vinn Rice Whiskey
The use of rice to make alcohol in Asia predates recorded history, and Americans probably are most familiar with low-alcohol rice wines such as Japanese sake. Located in Oregon, Vinn makes a traditional Chinese rice spirit called baijiu at a much higher proof than sake. The Ly family, whose heritage includes both Chinese and Vietnamese traditions, also distills the first rice whiskey released in the United States, aged in charred American oak barrels just like bourbon.

Dry Fly Wheat Whiskey
Wheat is a much more familiar grain to the American palate, used in smaller percentages for whiskeys ranging from Maker’s Mark to Pappy Van Winkle. A whiskey made entirely from wheat, however, is exceedingly rare. A craft distillery in Washington started by friends who enjoy fly-fishing, Dry Fly is proudly grain-to-glass and uses 100 percent local soft white wheat. The wheat lends a softness to the whiskey as well, and I prefer the higher proof Cask Strength.

Balcones Baby Blue
Start with the single malt from this Texas distillery, but don’t overlook Baby Blue, made from 100 percent Hopi Blue Corn. Balcones elevates the traditionally down-market style of corn whiskey. While bourbon must be 51 percent corn, corn whiskey raises the percentage to at least 80 percent, and is often released as an un-aged, clear spirit. Baby Blue smells like Betty Crocker white frosting straight from the package, and if you like a blended Irish whiskey, you’ll like Baby Blue. —Matt Carlson

Carlson is the whiskey sommelier and manager of Vestry, a speakeasy and whiskey lounge on the second floor of Tom Bergin’s. Vestry will host Trent Tilton, distiller of San Diego Distillery, on Sunday, Jan. 28, at 7 p.m. (despite the recently announced impending closure of Bergin’s). The tasting event is $20; reserve your spot by emailing info@vestryla.com.
Culture //

NOT YOUR MADRE’s PERFORMANCE ART

PST: Live Art LA/LA gives contemporary Latinx artists their due

BY BEIGE LUCIANO-ADAMS

There is a metaphor — one of many — that Mexican performance artist Astrid Hadad uses to sting effect in her carnivalesque cabaret. She is quoting Montezuma, reeling at Cortes’ betrayal and the terror he unleashed, when she says, “My heart is submerged in chili.” From that image, she fashions a love song. “If you don’t know the real love, you submerge your intimate parts in chili and you’ll see what I mean,” she quipped at a sold-out show at the Mayan kicking off the Pacific Standard Time Festival: Live Art LA/LA (Jan. 10-21).

In bold iconography — cleverly redeploying familiar symbols in original and rewritten popular songs, brilliant costume design, tongue-in-cheek showgirl coquetry and sly comedic timing — Hadad showed how “Mexican power can transform terror into something sweet.”

Love, anger, terror and transformation also were themes belonging to the festival’s broader body of work, displayed over 11 days by more than 200 Latin American and Latinx performance artists in theaters, museums, parks and public spaces — much of it illuminating paths from complex histories to urgent sociopolitical realities.

Organized by REDCAT, CalArt’s Downtown Center for Contemporary Arts, PST Festival: Live Art LA/LA was a key performance component of PST: LA/LA, the $16 million Getty Foundation–led initiative involving more than 70 SoCal arts and cultural institutions that started in September and ends on Sunday, Jan. 28.

Taken together, the PST: LA/LA performances were acute and expansive, anguished and alight; a collective, beating heart submerged in chili. “Timing may have flavored the proposals,” explained REDCAT executive director Mark Murphy, noting the call for submissions went out a week after the Nov. 8, 2016, election. (The Getty, which provided $600,000 in funding for the live festival, required the majority of programming come from a competitive open call.) “But what’s interesting is that we saw many projects evolve from a statement of anger and resistance to one that was more nuanced and very thoughtful and a positive expression of values held dear.”

Mapping these performances across the city was itself a political act, bringing transgressive bodies into view and complicating identities and narratives around the relationship between the United States and Latin America, L.A. and Latinx immigrants, and within individuals navigating the resulting matrix.

Anger remains in explorations of feminism, immigrant rights, environmental and economic justice, Murphy said, but he credits performances such as Raúl Balta-zar’s Mi Sereno and Carmina Escobar’s Fiesta Perpetua with the transformative effect of activating, connecting and elevating communities.

“At Echo Park Lake, to see these 40 youth (from Guadalajara brass band Maqueos Music) celebrating a sense of place and water and land, and given immigration issues and some of the nasty things said by current leadership,” Murphy said of Fiesta Perpetua, “it was just very heartwarming to see them claiming their right to call this home and celebrate their community.”

Organizers sought to highlight historic connections between development of performance art in California and Latin America, where there is “a long, intertwined history” between political activism and protest that informs performance, Murphy said.

For some who have been thriving in the city’s live art scene for years (or decades), the overtire arrived late.

“As an L.A. native, I’m always really annoyed any time fucking white people put on a festival for the city of Los Angeles, it’s mariachi and folkloric bullshit,” said Marcus Kuiland-Nazario, whose neo-vaudevillean Variedades brought together prominent names in local contemporary performance art — including Nao Bustmante, Dorian Wood and Rafa Esparza.

While praising REDCAT, Kuiland-Nazario called out the Music Center, and the Getty especially, “for not including contemporary live art and performance practice as one of the touchstones when they developed this festival in the first place.”

“Contemporary art gets made in L.A. … This is a Mexican show. It’s my love letter to Los Angeles; it’s my love letter to L.A. culture,” he said.

Some Varyedades performers took a direct approach to activism; others opted for poetic detours.

Inspired by women behind the Chicano Moratorium of 1970, Los Angeles punk icon Alice Bag sang “White Justice”:

“Black clubs/blue collars/blood red/silver dollars/you say justice is colorblind/I know you’re lying.”

Comedian Selene Luna, introduced as a voice “from that Pixar production that revealed that Mexicans do have feelings,” did a bit about ghost TV shows, asking “Why is every haunting some Victorian bitch? Why aren’t there ghosts of color? … We’re fucked if the afterlife is racist, too.”

Esparza offered an arresting spectacle in Corpo Ranfa — his “living cartography” of the landscape of lowrider and gay cruising places in Los Angeles. Dressed in fuchsia satin loincloth, elaborate body art and white sneakers, he was a diorama of lovingly detailed ranfa textures. He beckoned with one bejeweled nail and a miniskirted waif (Sebastian Hernandez) appeared in the middle of the room, tottering in arabesque on platforms before

“WHY IS EVERY HAUNTING SOME VICTORIAN BITCH? WHY AREN’T THERE GHOSTS OF COLOR? … WE’RE FUCKED IF THE AFTERLIFE IS RACIST, TOO.” —SELENE LUNA

slinking through the audience to the stage, where the two posed to Lighter Shade of Brown’s “Latin Active.”

While queer/trans artistic communities were well represented in the audience that night, Esparza noted via Instagram the lack of exhibition space made available to young, Brown Queer artists in the official PST: LA/LA exhibitions in a moment where Brown Queer youth is hyper-active in cultural production.

Artists participated in each other’s events, including Bustamante and Kuiland-Nazario, who played roles in Guatemalan artist Naufus Ramírez-Figueroa’s El corazón del espantapájaros (Heart of the Scarecrow) at LACMA, based on a Hugo Carillo play exploring relationships among the military, government, citizens, oligarchy and religion in Guatemalan society.

Teatro Linea de Sombras’ production of Durango 66 offered a delightfully creative approach to space and spectatorship. On lower Grand, in the concrete cavern beneath a power center of contemporary art, a stark industrial exhibition became a fair of intimate installations inviting audience members to explore.
Ed Moses — a lion of West Coast American art who helped establish Los Angeles as a capital of abstract painting beginning in the 1950s and ‘60s — died Wednesday, Jan. 17, at his home in Venice. His death was confirmed by his son Andy Moses to the Los Angeles Times on Jan. 18. Moses was 91.

Moses made his earliest mark at the influential Ferus Gallery, which stood on North La Cienega Boulevard in what is now West Hollywood. Ferus cultivated groundbreaking Southern California artwork with potent solo shows from Moses and contemporaries Wallace Berman, Billy Al Bengston, Robert Irwin, John Mason, Kenneth Price, Llyn Foulkes, Larry Bell and Ed Ruscha from 1957 to 1963. (Moses’ solo show was in 1958; Ferus shuttered in 1967.)

Among later milestones for Moses were a 1976 LACMA show, noted for its series of monochromatic red paintings in both abstract and cubist styles; inclusion in the 1991 Whitney Biennial; and a 2006 exhibit of Los Angeles artists at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, of which Moses was a major focus.

Recent exhibitions of his art included a 2015 LACMA exhibit of his drawings from the ‘60s and ‘70s, as well as a survey celebrating his 90th birthday at William Turner Gallery in Santa Monica and a solo show at Albright-Benda Gallery in New York, both in 2016. He was one of the key artists in the group exhibition “Two Schools of Cool” at the Orange County Museum of Art in 2011-12.

“Ed was a force of nature — passionate, intense, restless curious, always in motion,” gallery owner William Turner said. “He loved painting — it was his way of leaving his mark on the world — and he was hard at it every day, right up to the last weeks of his life. Ed painted in the moment, without preconception, alert to the doors of possibility that opened by embracing chance and circumstance in the process of working.”

Moses, who was born on a boat as his mother voyaged from Hawaii to California, grew up in Compton, Torrance and Long Beach. He earned his MFA from UCLA in 1958, after beginning his studies at Long Beach City College and spending many years as an off-and-on student. He taught studio art at UC Irvine in the ‘60s and UCLA in the ‘70s. Moses had resided in Venice since the ’80s.

Moses’ work ranged from graphite drawings of floral patterns and geometric compositions to vibrant, slanted grids and vigorous, gestural brushwork on canvas. Admired for his prolific and continually evolving output, Moses’ steadfast view of art as exploration rather than expression — not to create something, but to find it — and his refusal to adapt a consistent, signature style perhaps obviated him from wider recognition.

“I’d like to make it very clear that I’m not creative,” Moses told L.A. Weekly’s Tibby Rothman in 2011, “and I’m not trying to express myself. I’m an explorer, I’m trying to discover things, discover the phenomenal world by examining it, by looking at it, playing with the materiality, pushing it around, showing it, throwing it in the air.”

Moses is survived by his wife, Avilda Peters, two children and two grandchildren. —Matt Minar
DEEP THOUGHTS

Freud’s Last Session dramatizes the debate over God’s existence.

BY DEBORAH KLUGMAN

Philosophers, theologians, believers and nonbelievers from a broad spectrum of cultures and faiths have been arguing about God’s existence for centuries. In Freud’s Last Session, playwright Mark St. Germain crystallizes the essence of the debate, creating a fictional encounter between Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis and a famous skeptic, and Irish-born C.S. Lewis, a scholar, novelist and devout Christian (whose messages of faith, broadcast via radio to his fellow Britons throughout World War II, served as comfort for many during those bleak times).

The play, directed by Robert Mandel and inspired by a book by Dr. Armand Nicholi, The Question of God, is set on Sept. 3, 1939 — the day that Hitler invaded Poland, and two weeks prior to the death of Freud, who, suffering inoperable cancer, ended his own life assisted by his doctor and his daughter Anna.

The faceoff between the 83-year-old Freud and Lewis takes place after the doctor (Martin Stanbridge, who originated the role in 2010) invites Lewis (Martyn Stanbridge) to visit him at his home in London. A vigorous, outgoing man in his middle years, Lewis arrives under the impression that Freud has read one of his books and taken umbrage at his description of a character very like himself — “a vain, ignorant old man.” But it turns out that the ailing intellectual icon couldn’t care less what Lewis thinks of him; he’s only interested in uncovering what prompted his guest, once a professed nonbeliever, to do a 180-degree turnaround to become a man of faith. He pointedly inquires “why a man of your intellect ... abandoned truth and embraced an insidious lie.”

A dialectic ensues, which examines whether morality and a conscience are inbred or taught — or whether they exist at all; also, how the notion of God is often twisted for evil ends (Hitler’s claim that crushing the Jews is “the will of God”); and — this is a thorny one — why an almighty deity allows horrific events to occur. Freud’s concept of God as the projection of infantile need and his theory that the Jews cannibalized Moses and have been expiating that crime ever since come up against Lewis’ ingenuous assumption that his Creator is the source of all good, and “you don’t have to be an imbecile to believe in him.”

Eventually, the intellectual nature of their exchange segues to the personal, as the extent of Freud’s illness and pain are revealed, along with his plans (shocking to Lewis) for a speedy, self-engendered demise. The discussion becomes moot, however, when an air raid siren sounds, and both men rapidly rummage for their gas masks and together race for shelter.

From the beginning the theatrical dynamic derives less from the ideas that are bandied about than from the characters and their contrats. And the actors serve it well — Rayner, intimidatingly authentic as a smug, brittle, brilliant Freud, who minces no words in his takedown of others, less from cruelty than his own inimical vision of reality; and Stanbridge as the more open-minded and charitable Lewis, who overlooks Freud’s affronts and springs to action at the moment of crisis.

Of course no one wins this debate. But Pete Hickok’s period-piece replica of Freud’s study, with its imposing books and collection of artifacts, frames it handsomely, while Derrick McDaniel’s artful lighting adds a final poignant touch.

FREUD POLITELY INQUIRES “WHY A MAN OF YOUR INTELLECT ... ABANDONED TRUTH AND EMBRACED AN INSIDIOUS LIE.”

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LONG MAZE YOU RUN

Too bad The Death Cure fixes what was right with an imperfect franchise

BY ALAN SCHERSTUHL

Maze Runner movies are like that bus from Speed: Everything’s fine when it’s hurtling along, but once it slows down, things get deadly. Often made with more vigor and vision than you might expect but never quite edging too close to “compelling” or “good,” Wes Ball’s glum-and-run film trilogy adapts novelist James Dashner’s YA dystopia into something resembling terse, tough, direct-to-streaming action thrillers — just barely edited down to a PG-13.

Out goes most of the characterization, the relationships, the coming of age, the crises of the soul. In come hurtling scenes of dazzlingly hunky young people dashing down corridors and through warehouses and the streets of ruined cities, pursued by maze monsters (in the first film) or cheapjack zombies (in the sequels). In their coordinated cotton separates, the cast members run, with Cruise-ian power and intensity, and the camera keeps pace with them, capturing bodies in motion with a smooth clarity that shouldn’t be so notable.

During the protracted sequences of flight and fight, speed and brutal impact, the Maze Runner movies run circles around most studio action films. Witness the brawl in a skyscraper that has fallen over but remained somewhat structurally intact in The Scorch Trials, the second movie. Heroes Thomas (Dylan O’Brien) and Brenda (Rosa Salazar) battle leaping zombie dudes in a stairwell tilted at 90 degrees, until Brenda gets knocked into an office on the building’s underside, sliding down the steep inclined floor to crash into the windows that now serve as floor. A desert of ruins and zombies stretches beneath her — and the glass begins to crack.

Yes, the glass gag is cribbed from Steven Spielberg’s The Lost World: Jurassic Park. Everything in Maze Runner films is borrowed. But Ball makes each punch and crash legible and exciting, makes the absurd physics of movie fights persuasive. The latest film, the long-delayed The Death Cure, opens with a train heist that suggests, at once, the Mad Max films, the Fast & Furious franchise, and The Wild Bunch by way of Young Guns by way of a Gap ad. The sequence is as propulsive as it is absurd — the heroes’ plan involves twice knowing precisely where two speeding vehicles will each stop in a desert wasteland — but Ball sells it through brio and attention to detail. As the bullets fly, he wrings tension from practicalities, such as the time it takes to hack open a lock or to separate train cars or to rig up a grappling hook.

The Death Cure, I fear, has fewer of these sensational stretches than The Scorch Trials did. For much of its running time, that middle film was essentially plotless, its characters literally running from Point A to Point B, discovering how wrecked their world is, and then running once the explosions start. This final entry is obliged to reveal mysteries, wrap up the story and dispense with the most half-assed love triangle since I had two go-nowhere crashes at the same time in high school. So the fight/flight gives way to portentious chatter between characters who, over three movies, have yet to develop singular traits.

Here’s a spoiler: In this installment, one pal of the hero gets more lines after his death than he seems to have had in the previous seven hours of Maze Runners combined.

If you get it only from the movies, the Maze Runner mythology remains confounding, a mashup of Lord of the Flies, TV’s Survivor, The Hunger Games, first-person-shooter video games and every grubby movie genre from apocalypse to zombie. Solar flares have devastated Earth and somehow released a virus that turns the remaining population into thoughtless and bloodthirsty “cranks.” Meanwhile, in a walled safe zone, a company called, uh, WICKED has been running teenagers who may have been hatched in a laboratory through a colossal concrete death-trap labyrinth — in search of a cure to the virus. (WICKED stands for “World in Catastrophe: Killzone Experiment Department,” which is even funnier when you realize that these movies do not have jokes in them.)

Now, in The Death Cure, young survivors elect to put off their boat trip to an island haven in order to break into WICKED’s headquarters to save one of their own — handsome Minho (Ki Hong Lee), who apparently never fails to find himself hair product, even in the wasteland, even when locked up for weeks as mad scientists’ guinea pig. (Lee finds more opportunity than the other cast members to express human feeling — pain, fear, a soulful rage — between the action.)

The series’ borrowings often have about them a whiff of playful improvisation, the logic of kids with action figures saying, “And what if then they had to drive into that tunnel from The Stand and it was full of zombies?” As The Death Cure grinds on, though, they become less inspired. Tasked with delivering a route into the walled city of WICKED, the heroes — who are being hunted by the company — turn up at the front gates, amid a mob of refugees. Just as in The Hunger Games, carnage ensues. The block-by-block urban warfare that drags down the final hour also suggests similar scenes from Mockingjay.

Meanwhile, the kids, after beating the villains for two movies, suddenly have lost all sense of tactics: I lost track of the number of times the heroes get flanked or captured by the enemy only to be saved by some out-of-nowhere contrivance. (In this regard, The Death Cure even beats Rogue One, which found its rebel heroes getting surrounded by enemies in the streets of Jeddah four times in four minutes.)

Gleaming yet lifeless, WICKED’s city is the series’ most entrancing setting, beating out the less convincing maze of the first film and the too-obviously computer-generated ruins of The Scorch Trials. But what happens in and beneath its towers is Maze Runner’s least fleet action yet. Expect long confrontations freighted by backstory and villain-versus-hero showdowns with every beat that you can call too many seconds beforehand.

There are surprises, but of the dopy kind. Question for the filmmakers: I appreciate the hero’s good fortune that, after the apocalypse, WICKED still bothered to maintain outside its skyscraper office the world’s deepest reflecting pool, but how did the heroes find access to the world’s largest and most agile crane?

Maze Runner: The Death Cure | Directed by Wes Ball | 20th Century Fox | Citywide
I once read a treatment for a music video proposed by some experimental filmmakers. Their work seemed to defy words, so in the description, they simply wrote: “Never boring! Always interesting!”

This is how I might partially sum up Robert Mockler’s directorial debut, Like Me, a vomit of color, sound, strobes and milk — milk? Yes, milk — centered on a young woman, Kiya (Addison Timlin), who becomes addicted to the thrill of recording people humiliating themselves and then uploading the videos to her website.

Mockler seems to be striving for profound revelations about human connection (or lack thereof) in the digital age, but in fiction that kind of meaning best comes from character rather than circumstance. (See: Ingrid Goes West.) Still, Timlin so fully embodies the role of the sociopathic Kiya that this often-gruesome buffet of wild imagery bathed in hot pink impresses even with a thin, nearly nonexistent story. And Mockler’s and Jessalyn Abbott’s artfully chaotic editing style, full of ultra-slow dissolves, double exposures and scrambled footage playing forward and backward in time as if the image is possessed, elevates Like Me to video art.

Kiya turns up on-scene like a fresh breath of air in Zach Clark’s Little Sister, one of the highlights of 2016. There she played a meek nun, here, she vibrates with anxiety. In the opening scene, Kiya dons a mask and holds up a drive-through convenience store — not to steal money or goods but to bring the cashier to his emotional breaking point on camera. Imagine a Winona Ryder—circa-1994 type huffing with excitement as she peels out in the parking lot, the look of shock crossing her face blossoming into a tenuous smile.

Of course, within hours that video draws more than 2 million views and a horde of response videos — that’s how the internet works in movies. Mockler cuts these unnervingly realistic videos into the narrative in quick succession, so it feels like random people are commenting on and critiquing the metanarrative of the film as it unfolds. Most say inane things like, “This dude pissed himself!” and “Kudos to that girl!” or “She should be ashamed of herself!” with detached amusement. But one king of YouTube, aka Burt Walden (Ian Nelson), pops up with multiple videos instructing Kiya, the “attention-starved whorebag,” to slit her wrists, using the exact hyper-vocabulary that real-life MRA trolls adopt to feign intellectual superiority.

Crucially beget worse cruelty. Kiya kidnaps an equally despicable motel owner, Marshall (Larry Fessenden), and records an assault of her forcing cereal and milk — there it is! — down his throat. Burt gosha into tormented the man to even more violent extremes to prove herself worthy of her newfound internet stardom.

If this film succeeds in revealing anything about modern life, it’s that the ubiquitous dudes of the internet who message women death threats more often than they brush their teeth are cowards who will forever demand more and worse — and then move the goalposts again and again to keep women barred from their fabricated worlds.

Kiya is a formidable opponent for Burt, leaning into a maniacal nihilism that Timlin sells with terrifying zeal. It’s a wonder she hasn’t been snatched up for a big-budget drama somewhere, because it’s a rare talent who can play a whimsical nun and a terrifying, Lair of the White Worn—weird villain with equal believability.

KIYA BECOMES ADDICTED TO THE THRILL OF RECORDING PEOPLE HUMILIATING THEMSELVES.

LIKE ME | Directed and written by Robert Mockler | Kino Lorber
Arena Cinelounge

OPENING THIS WEEK

PLEASE STAND BY In Ben Lewin’s twee coming-of-age comic drama Please Stand By, a young woman on the spectrum becomes obsessed with entering her Star Trek spec contest. Dakota Fanning, who plays young Wendy, seems to have done her research, portraying a believable character and drawing sympathy from the audience without making Wendy pitiable. But the film itself is often flat, akin to a very well-directed after-school special crafted exclusively to dramatize what it might be like to either live on the high-functioning end of the spectrum or care for someone who’s there. It’s possible that audiences might appreciate illumination about the intrinsically neurodiversity, and that “explaner” movies like these are beneficial — hell, even necessary — to catch people up, but the film never transcends its PSA nature. Wendy identifies with Star Trek’s Spock, a character who does not express emotion the way the humans around him do. We hear Wendy’s script in voice-over as she writes it — this is the film’s most thought, reflective element. Wendy embarks on a journey from San Francisco to Paramount Studios in Los Angeles. Everywhere she goes, strangers stop to help her, the naif on the side of the road. Even when she’s inevitably mugged, the mugger is quite sorry about it. And when a ticket taker at the bus station reacts the way someone in real life might when met with a passenger who doesn’t make eye contact and holds up a line, it’s almost shocking: until that moment, Leon had us living in a fantasy world. (April Wolfe)

GO Vazante Daniela Thomas’s exquisitely painful Vazante, her feature debut as a director after several collaborations with Walter Salles, opens in muddy gloom, as the bare feet of chained black slaves shuffle through a jungle downpour. It’s the 1820s. The slaves’ master, gruff bearded Adriano (Carvalho), rides a horse, his eyes as wild in their conviction as John Brown’s in a John Steuart Curry painting, Thomas’ film studies, among other horrors. Vazante is built on mud and blood, on slave labor in Brazil’s prohibitive Diamantina Mountains, can, with judicious cleaning of its surfaces, prove godly. Upon discovering his wife’s death, he promptly marries Beatriz, the decoy woman on the spectrum becomes a British soldier (Fionn Whitehead) — and the mission itself. It tells a story of heroism-in-defeat that has become an integral part of Britain’s vision of itself — and turned it into a nestling doll of increasingly breathless ticking-clock narratives. Some filmmakers might be expecting a sprawling, grandiose war epic. Instead, Nolan gives us one of the leanest, most ingenious studio films in quite a while: an intercutting montage of competing timelines that expand and contract and collide. And somehow, it’s also uncommonly intimate.

It tells the story of the evacuation by cutting among three perspectives, each with its own specific time frame: one week following a British soldier (Fionn Whitehead) on the beach at Dunkirk, as he tries to find a way off this huge, doomed stretch of land; 24 hours on the small wooden yacht Moonstone, manned by David Mckay (Mark Rylance) and two teenagers as they head across the roaring English Channel to aid in the rescue effort on the other side; one hour in the cockpit with RAF Spitfire pilot
Farrier (Tom Hardy), his face once again totally covered) as he battles the Germans bombing the straddled army below. The film’s setup may sound confusing, but onscreen titles inform us of the film’s variable timeframes early on. In the end, Dunkirk suggests that how you handle the most devastating existential defeat may well be the very thing that saves you. We allglich of need to remind ourselves that those days, (Bilge Ebri)

GO FACES PLACES

Something of a prank, a farewell, an art project, a buddy comedy, a vox popuil 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 is an on-the-road film. It finds the intrepid documentarist and photographer Agnes Varda, 88 at the time of filming, teaming up with the 33-year-old photographer JR to wander France, their itinerary set by their own whims, doing what they each have made a life doing. For JR, that’s pasting photographed portraits of people on building walls and water towers and any surface, making the mundane almost religious, it’s meeting those people, talking to them and documenting the process, the resultant work and their impact. “Jeanne’s, it’s not sad!” Varda says, with exquisite tenderness, to a woman who is brought to tears by the sight of her own visage in black-and-white across the brick face of her home in a mostly abandoned mining town. Varda and JR also playfully document some of their own process and friendship. “Chance has always been my best assistant,” Varda declares, as she embarks on her first collaboratively directed film—she and JR share a director’s credit. They drive along in JR’s custom truck, painted like a camera and housing a photo booth in the back. They visit his grandmother, put close-ups of Varda’s eyes and toes on train cars, paper over a ghost town with the faces of people who live nearby. The film is light, funny, alert, witty, the work of a great and her inspired collaborator who are forever happy to be looking, (Alan Scherstuhl)

THE FINAL YEAR

Greg Barker’s engaging and resolutely un-dishy travelogue, The Final Year, is a fly-on-the-wall documentary following President Barack Obama and several cabinet members and staffers—Samantha Power, U.N. ambassador; Secretary of State John Kerry; Ben Rhodes, deputy national security adviser and speechwriter—over the course of 2016. Team Obama circumnavigates the globe, practicing what he preaches: thoughtful engagement, diplomacy and dogged efforts at securing compromises and ceasefires. Everyone looks somber, run ragged, but still somewhat awed. They look ahead as they chase peace in Syria, a climate accord in Paris, a nuclear deal in Iran. Rhodes lists the State Department’s 2016 priorities in the earlier scenes, and the moment plays as grim comedy: The earlier scenes, and 2016 priorities in the moment play as grim comedy: The undertaking is ambitious, the present moment plays as grim comedy: The undertaking is ambitious, the current diplomatic lifeclock is running fast and the future is in doubt.讲故事的点到为止

Tuesday, Jan. 30
LACMA’s Tuesday Matinees series concludes its tribute to Dorothy Arzner with Dance Girl Dance. A 1940 drama about a romantic competition that develops between two members of a nightclub dance troupe (Maureen O’Hara and Lucille Ball), the film is shot through with knowledge of the hard facts of life among professional women, something Arzner—the only female director in 1930s Hollywood—knew something about. LACMA, 5905 Wilshire Blvd., Mid-Wilshire; Tue., Jan. 30, 1 p.m.; $4. (323) 857-6000, lacma.org. —Nathanial Bell

YOUR WEEKLY MOVIE TO-DO LIST

Women in Film: 9 to 5 and Dorothy Arzner

Friday, Jan. 26
Don Coscarelli wrote, produced, directed, photographed and edited Phantasm at 24 — roughly the same age as Orson Welles when he made Citizen Kane. The similarities may end there, but Phantasm has retained a sturdy cult following for its willingness to throw out everything but the kitchen garbage disposal for the sake of a good time. Its most iconic elements are the “tall man” (played by the lanky Angus Scrimm) and the flying metallic sphere that punctures human skulls, but there’s much more to this enduring, sometimes incoherent indie flick, which the Nuart is hauling out for its long-running Cine Insomnia series. Actor Reggie Bannister will appear following the midnight screening, Nuart Theatre, 11272 Santa Monica Blvd., West L.A.; Fri., Jan. 26, 11:39 p.m.; $12. (310) 473-8530, landmarkettheatres.com.

Sunday, Jan. 28
A popular hit the moment it landed, 9 to 5 delivers some sharp-edged comedy around the idea of three female coworkers (Lily Tomlin, Jane Fonda and Dolly Parton, in nicely individualized characterizations) who turn the tables on their horrible boss (Dabney Coleman). The most inspired bit has Tomlin fantasizing about poisoning him in the style of a well-known Disney cartoon, but each of the women gets her moment to shine. The American Cinematheque will screen this film in favor of the Writers Guild of America, West, as part of a screening series honoring groundbreaking screenwriters—in this case, Colin Higgins and Patricia Resnick. It will be followed by Thelma & Louise, the feminist neo-classic that earned Callie Khouri an Oscar for her original screenplay. Egyptian Theatre, 6712 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood; Sun., Jan. 28, 7:30 p.m.; $12.

(323) 466-3456, americancinemathequecalendar.com

Ryan’s Daughter was originally planned as an intimate drama about marriage and infidelity, but under David Lean’s gaze it became something more grand: an exalted drama with the look of an epic and the soul of a D.H. Lawrence novel. Sturdy performances from a stalwart cast stand against the breathtaking Irish countryside. Nevertheless, the reviews were so unsold that Lean did not direct another feature for 14 years. It screens at the Aero in a crisp DCP in celebration of the English director’s career. Aero Theatre, 1328 Montana Ave., Santa Monica; Sun., Jan. 28, 7:30 p.m.; $12. (323) 466-3456, americancinemathequecalendar.com.

(323) 466-3456, americancinemathequecalendar.com

Phantasm

Tuesday, Jan. 30
LACMA’s Tuesday Matinees series concludes its tribute to Dorothy Arzner with Dance Girl Dance. A 1940 drama about a romantic competition that develops between two members of a nightclub dance troupe (Maureen O’Hara and Lucille Ball), the film is shot through with knowledge of the hard facts of life among professional women, something Arzner—the only female director in 1930s Hollywood—knew something about. LACMA, 5905 Wilshire Blvd., Mid-Wilshire; Tue., Jan. 30, 11:59 p.m.; $12. (323) 857-6000, lacma.org. —Nathanial Bell

Loving Vincent

There’s a glorious tension in Vincent Van Gogh’s paintings, the thick paint holding each of the artist’s gestures like an insect in amber, and the long-hardened material still appearing to shimmer and pulse. Animators Dorota Kobiela and Hugh Welchman free that contained movement to make Van Gogh’s brushstrokes breathe in Loving Vincent, an engaging exploration of the artist’s final days rendered in his signature painting style. Like the work of Van Gogh, whose audacious imagery has been reproduced into ubiquity, its first feature is at once audacious and safe. After a live-action shoot with actors cloaked in the garb of Van Gogh’s subjects, Kobiela and Welchman led an animation team in hand-painting the images, so Postman Roulin looks like his 19th-century French counterpart but is also recognizably Chris O’Dowd. It’s Roulin’s son Armand (Douglas Booth) who undertakes a Citizen Kane quest, interviewing those touched by Van Gogh’s paintings and by the troubled outsider. Kobiela, Welchman and Jack Dehnel have written a Thorny narrative, with two observant daughters, the gregarious Adeline Ravoux (Eleanor Tomlinson) and aloof Marguerite Gachet (Saorise Ronan), enriching this compelling vision of the dogged man who engendered decision as much as adoration. This rendering of a celebrated idea contains iconic elements that employ the gold-black-and-white of film noir instead of Van Gogh’s blazing, assaultive colors. It’s the most daring decision in Loving Vincent, a visual reminder that the artist belied into cliché could feel an engraving darkness that his voluminous letter writing and extensive artistic output could barely keep at bay. —Peter Bart

The Square

Ruben Ostlund’s The Square, which won the Palme d’Or at Cannes this past May, probably says more about the times we’re living in than any other film you’re likely to see this year. And yet the beauty of the movie is that everybody will have their own ideas about
what, exactly, it is saying. It's not vague, however. Ostlund is specific and exacting as a writer and director, and within The Square's empty spaces, we're forced to confront our own values, and our own visions of ourselves. That idea is, in fact, what's at the heart of the project. In a contemporary art museum in Sweden, chief curator Christian (Claes Bang) prepares to host a conceptual art project called "The Square," which is described as "a sanctuary of trust and caring. Within it we all share equal rights and obligations." One could look at this square – an actual square carved into a courtyard – and laud the work that has gotten to a point where such vacuous and phony writing is part of an art project. The language describing the installation suggests that humanity's natural state tends toward equilibrium and fairness – or that these can at least be achieved by a kind of quiet, willing consensus. When such thinking meets the real world, of course, chaos ensues. And while one can't really argue against the somewhat loosely connected, often hilarious vignettes, Ostlund's film questions our understanding of honesty, trust and fellowship. It is through a bizarre argument about what to do with a used condom or a crave approach to marketing "The Square" itself, the film's scene suggests that our notions of integrity and community might be a lot more fragile than we think. (Billie Fairchild)
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2/2
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2/3
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2/8
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2/16
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PARTY ON IN WEHO

A guide to a fun night out in the LGBT hub

BY MICHAEL COOPER

Los Angeles may be one of the most diverse cities in the world, but its LGBT scene is a bit behind cities such as New York and San Francisco. The local center of LGBT nightlife is no doubt West Hollywood, in terms of the sheer volume of options one has in that city. West Hollywood can be a little intimidating, so here’s a road map for a fun weekend night there.

We begin with dinner at Saint Felix, a cozy restaurant in the heart of West Hollywood that opened in 2008. It wouldn’t be out of the ordinary to have some LGBT stars dining next to you — when we went, we saw RuPaul’s Drag Race season three winner Raja Gemini. But the restaurant is anything but elitist. “I don’t care what you do, who you are, how much money you make … as long as everyone’s having a good time,” owner John Arakiki says.

Saint Felix’s signature craft cocktails were the perfect kickoff for the night — the Cucumber Dilettante and the Desperado were standouts. Arakiki describes the food as “California cuisine with an international edge” and “creative but familiar,” like the Kobe beef slider and nachos, both of which were highlights.

After dinner, we head a few doors down to the Bayou, one of West Hollywood’s smaller, more divey bars. Co-owner Graham Northwood describes the Bayou as a “New Orleans-themed dive bar that is much more of a house-party atmosphere” and he couldn’t be more right. Opening on Halloween 2012 (an “interesting” night to open on that strip, Northwood said), the Bayou is the perfect place to grab some cheap drinks before heading to other clubs. It has two happy hours every night, seven days a week — from 4 to 8 p.m. and from 10:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. — and they include $3 beers, $4 well drinks and $5 wines.

“You have enough stress at work. If you’re going out for a drink … you don’t want to deal with door guys, bartenders or customers that are really annoying or rude,” Northwood says. He aims to keep the party going with his eclectic music playlists and even goes around the bar taking requests.

“We’re ready to warm up our dancing shoes, so we head to Flaming Saddles a few blocks east. Opened in early 2015, the WeHo bar was the second in a chain started by Chris Barnes and choreographer Jacqui Squatriglia, originally of Coyote Ugly in New York City. “Jackie said she wanted to open up a gay country-Western bar where [she could] see the bartenders doing [her] dances,” Barnes says.

The couple purchased what was formerly Eleven Nightclub in WeHo when they decided to expand Flaming Saddles to the West Coast, but then they discovered they had to make a few changes. “In New York City the bar is only 1,700 square feet … but in West Hollywood we have 6,000 square feet so … we had to double XL [the wow factor],” Barnes says. Barnes explained that he and Squatriglia consult an agent to seek out dancers, among them male and female competitive pole dancers, whom Squatriglia auditions. And you can tell — the talent on display amazed us. “We made the second floor more of a dance club experience and the downstairs more of the Cirque du Soleil show experience,” Barnes says.

Barnes also realized that they’d have to shift the genre of music they played. “We knew we had to go outside the country-Western genre to more of a pop sound, so we did that but we also didn’t go as far as EDM,” he says. “We have a rule that we better hear somebody singing if you’re DJ’ing at our place.”

After watching some of the dancers perform and dancing ourselves a bit, we were ready to head to the grand finale of our evening out in WeHo.

For the final bar of the evening, we recommend one of two, depending on what kind of music you want to hear: the Chapel at the Abbey for EDM/techno music or Bar10 for pop, Top 40 and hip-hop.

The Chapel at the Abbey opened in 2016 for the bar's owners, Todd Barnes and Stanfield, who had previously run a gay country-Western bar where Barnes says they were more inclusive. Indeed, an inclusive and welcoming destination for everyone in the LGBT community is what makes West Hollywood so special.

Saint Felix, 8945 Santa Monica Blvd, West Hollywood; (310) 275-4428, westhollywood.saintfelix.net.

The Bayou, 8939 Santa Monica Blvd, West Hollywood; (310) 273-3033, thebayouweho.com.

Flaming Saddles, 8811 Santa Monica Blvd, West Hollywood; (310) 855-7501, flaminingsaddles.com/weho.

The Chapel at the Abbey, 696 N. Robertson Blvd, West Hollywood; (310) 289-8410, thechapel.com.

Bar10, 8933 Santa Monica Blvd, West Hollywood; (323) 322-6445, bar10weho.com.

“SINCE I WAS 15, WEST HOLLYWOOD HAS KIND OF BEEN MY SANCTUARY. … WE UNDERSTAND THAT THE COMMUNITY IS EVOLVING TO BE MORE INCLUSIVE.” —JARED STANFIELD, BAR10

where Here Lounge used to be, adjacent but not connected to the Abbey. Todd Barnes, general manager of the Abbey and the Chapel, says, “The Chapel was really inspired by the growing EDM scene. We built the Chapel to be like the best gay EDM party every night,” he says. Music isn’t the only difference between the Chapel and the Abbey. While Barnes describes the Abbey as a “gay Disneyland,” he says the Chapel is “a little more secluded, a little more sexy and a high-energy dance party.”

It’s no surprise that the Abbey and Chapel are the No. 1 Uber and Lyft dropoff and pickup locations for a nightclub or bar in the country — the Chapel is definitely the place to be on a weekend night. While it can get a bit packed, everything about it is sleek and modern — and the lights make it feel more like you’re at an event or a concert than just a club. “The lights, the music, the dancers and the music all make sure we turn your night up to 11,” Barnes says.

Bar10 doesn’t have the flashiness of the Chapel, but its best asset is its music if your tastes run to pop, Top 40 and hip-hop. “We always try to make the environment feel nostalgic. We want people to come in here and not just feel like they’re in a nightclub,” creative director Josh Westover says. “With the music that we play and with the friendliness of our staff, we want everybody to feel like they’re welcome. We don’t charge covers ever at this club. We’re not an exclusive bar; we’re a bar for everybody.”

Opening in 2014, Bar10 was originally a fine-dining restaurant called the Horn. When the restaurant didn’t take off, the owners reconceptualized and opened Bar10 three months later. In less than four years, it has built up its name as a premier destination in WeHo, even acquiring its own group of regulars. General manager Jared Stanfield says, “We really try to focus on the people that support us and I think that’s important to have them feel like this is their second home.”

Westover and Stanfield say the biggest goal of Bar10 is to be a place that is welcoming to all. “[Bar10 is] an open, friendly neighborhood bar,” Westover says. “We do drag events, we do lesbian events, we do trans events. We want everybody to feel included.” It’s the perfect place to end your night out in West Hollywood.

As a 2 a.m. drew closer and our level of sobriety improved further, it was time to Lyft home and call it a night. West Hollywood can be intimidating, over-the-top and sometimes clichéd, but since L.A. doesn’t have a gay bar in every neighborhood, WeHo stands out as the central hub for LGBT nightlife and a place to build a strong LGBT community.

“I’ve been coming out to West Hollywood for the past 17 years of my life. Since I was 15, West Hollywood has kind of been my sanctuary,” Bar10’s Stanfield says. “I’ve got a strong connection to my community. We understand that the community is evolving to be more inclusive.” Indeed, an inclusive and welcoming destination for everyone in the LGBT community is what makes West Hollywood so special.
Melvins @ ALEX’S BAR
Thirty-five years later and the Melvins remain staunchly, resolutely, inescapably the Melvins. Rare is the band that actively sticks to its guns — in their case, guns that are slow-firing, life-changing and extortiously loud. For this two-night, 18th-anniversary action at Alex’s (alongside Farbarb and Spinriffit), Mary, Cover and Osborne have been scraping the lid for new material; chances are you’ll hear some of that work in progress alongside all the big hits, withered misses and songs from their latest double album, A Walk With Love & Death. In an era when everyone is trying so hard to run away from their own innate weirdness — that glowing, glinting strangeness that sets them apart from everyone else — the Melvins keep the black flag of slow-burning, discomforting individuality flying proudly high. —David Cotner

Freestyle Fellowship @ ZEBULON
“We’ll strip your emotion and take rap music to its threshold of enlightenment,” Freestyle Fellowship promised on their 1991 debut album, To Whom It May Concern… The announcement was no idle boast as the L.A. collective perfected a jazzy, philosophically expansive form of rap that transcended the pettier obsessions of gangsta rappers. A major early force in the influential Project Blowed scene, Freestyle Fellowship are distinguished by the artful contributions of Acyayalone, Myka 9, P.E.A.C.E. and Self Jupiter — each of whom is a legitimate force individually, but they take on greater impact when their literary superpowers are combined. “We are by no means ashamed of our cultural background,” Myka 9 declared on “Inner City Boundaries,” from the Fellowship’s crucial second release, Innerscity Griots. Acyayalone echoed that sentiment by celebrating “the birth of a new generation of blackness.” —Falling James

Strawberry Alarm Clock @ WHISKY A GO GO
Strawberry Alarm Clock really shouldn’t be a band that people are talking, much less writing, about in 2018. The psychodelic rock group formed in Los Angeles in 1967 and had a smash No. 1 hit, “Incense and Peppermints” — and that was as good as it ever got. But it was far from the end of the story. The band have taken a few breaks over the years, with members coming and going, but they are now 50 years older and relatively intact. And, perhaps thanks in part to an appearance on the Nuggets box set, there is still a great deal of love in Los Angeles for these old hippies. That might explain why these gits at the Whisky are becoming a semi-regular thing: People are turning out to see the band, and the Alarm Clock are responding by putting in stellar performances. That in itself is truly far out. —Brett Callwood

Belief Defect @ LOT 613
Conceived as a secret project, Belief Defect is a collaboration from two of L.A.’s most prominent techno producers. We won’t spoil the surprise here, but if your curiosity gets the better of you, check out the YouTube clips from their hard-hitting debut set at the Berlin Atonal experimental music and art festival (you really should anyway). Belief Defect released their first album, Decadent Yet Depraved, last year and are making their stateside debut tonight. The duo share a stacked bill with Byetone, Grischa Lichtenberger, Surachai, Richard Devine and Uchi. All performances will feature strong visual components. This BL_K NOISE event is a Raster label showcase (formerly Raster–Noton) and unofficial afterparty for the NAMM music gear trade show in Anaheim. —Matt Miner

Ceramiks, Littlest Sister, River Gods, Young Lovers @ THE SMELL
Ceramiks gather up shards of sound both shimmering and dark, fusing them together in sonic sculptures that are some of the finest modern soundtracks for driving north up Pacific Coast Highway; their new Emmaus CD is exceptional in its perceptions. The instrumentalists of Littlest Sister — the duet of drummer Evan Fiehler and guitar-and-glockenspiel enthusiast Cindy Sukrattanawong — are the utmost soul of pleasantness. Meanwhile, River Gods make “mood ring rock,” which implies a certain mutability if body heat is applied to however you perceive them, so press yourself up against the quartet of Shiraz Dhouette, Joseph Freeman, Matt Kranis and Sukrattanawong (jeez, Cindy, come on!). Young Lovers really tie the room together with their jangling pop meditations on just what it means to know another person and then transmute all the questions from those interactions into art. —David Cotner

Save Music in Chinatown 14 @ GRAND STAR JAZZ CLUB
Martin Wong’s ongoing Save Music in Chinatown concerts invoke the power of punk rock to raise funds for music programs at Castelar Elementary School. The 14th edition of the series is stacked with a legendary lineup of punk all-stars that includes the hard-driving post-punk explorations of Mike Watt & the Missingmen, which pairs the muscular bass riffs of its bandleader with the spectral guitar shimmers of Tom Watson (Red Crayola, Slovenia). Meanwhile, two of the L.A. punk scene’s earliest and most provocative singers — Alice Bag and Phranc — combine forces in a new project, Phag, blending their voices on such topical and subversively folkie anthems as “The Alt-Right Is All Wrong.” In addition to the dance-tastic funkiness of K Records mastermind Calvin Johnson’s Selector Dub Narcotic, the gently engaging Lois Maffeo — Johnson’s onetime collaborator — strums a rare solo set. —Falling James

Pearl Charles: See Thursday.
Buddy Rich Big Band
@ CATALINA JAZZ CLUB

Countless musicians have come and gone throughout the 20th century — yet how many are remembered consistently since then? With someone like jazz drummer Buddy Rich, it took a certain kind of confluence to become a legend in the pantheon. A film like Whiplash enriched the Rich enigma, for instance, or those jaw-dropping tour bus tapes during which Rich explodes at seemingly substandard musicians — recordings that have touched everything from home taping to Seinfeld. A more substantive preservation of the legend comes with the Buddy Rich Big Band, touring his music and legacy. On the traps tonight is the unimpeachable Gregg Potter, accompanied by Rich’s daughter Cathy on vocals and various priceless reflections on Buddy Rich consciousness. —David Cotner

Habibi
@ THE MOROCCAN LOUNGE

Like so many groups these days, Habibi are inspired by ‘60s garage rock, but the Brooklyn band are unique in the way they suﬀuse their traditional inﬂuences with their own style. Rahill Jamalifard is a coolly restrained lead vocalist who prefers to intone her songs as intimate confessions instead of as brassy shouting, and her bandmates surround her contemplative melodies with dreamy girl-group harmonies. The combination of pop harmonies and psychedelic passages with guitarist Lenny Lynch and bassist Erin Campbell’s garage-rock riffs — and Jamalifard’s lyrics, which evoke classic Iranian poets such as Haﬁz — makes Habibi’s music feel both familiar and strange. “Dieto Baby,” from the group’s self-titled 2014 debut album, pays homage to the retro-pop stylings of The Detroit Cobras and Nikki & the Corvettes, while “Far From Right” slinks along with a raw, lo-fi charm. —Falling James

Reverend Horton Heat, Voodoo Glow Skulls
@ ALEX’S BAR

The Cramps don’t get nearly enough credit for inspiring people to start bands, but they really should — Reverend Horton Heat, founded in 1985 by Jim Heath, started life in one of those shocking moments that you hear people had when they’d see an amazing band. Now the good Reverend brings his rock & roll Frankenstein to you, dousing you with enough psychobilly to permanently etch grooves for that crazy, crazy sound bouncing around in your head. They might be playing new songs from a forthcoming album on Victory — their ﬁrst in four years — but every chord from the Reverend is a blessing, even if it’s a chord you don’t know yet. Also tonight: Voodoo Glow Skulls, entering their third decade, with new singer Efrem Schulz; even though it’s a change in voice, they still have something to say. —David Cotner

I Am Morbid
@ WHISKY A GO GO

Is there anything more embarrassing than when the members of a beloved band commence in-ﬁghting, resulting in a breakup, and then they tour and record separately using the same band name or a variation of it? Just look at Queensrÿche, Great White and now Morbid Angel. The Floridian death-metal pioneers have been fronted by Steve Tucker for some time, and after some apparent soul-searching, original singer/growler David Vincent has put his own band together to play Morbid Angel tunes, and he’s called it I Am Morbid. It’s all a bit cringe-worthy and would be best ignored if not for the fact that Vincent really does have one of the best sets of pipes that the genre ever produced. Therefore, hearing tracks from early albums such as Altars of Madness and Blessed Are the Sick live and performed by Vincent will undoubtedly be a treat. —Brett Callwood

Pearl Charles
@ THE ECHO

Pearl Charles is a former member of The Driftwood Singers and she’s played drums with The Blank Tapes, but over the past three years she’s also evolved into a striking solo performer whose songs brim with commercial potential. On her new full-length album, Sleepless Dreamer, Charles’ lulling vocals float over a range of country-rock tunes (“Long Hair,” “Only in America”), breezy rock (“All the Boys”), funky pop (“Beginner’s Luck”), acoustic balladry (“Phases”) and something she calls “country disco” (“Night Tides”). It’s another promising release by the local singer, who uplifts these soft-rock settings with a gentle assurance. While the new record doesn’t rock as much as Charles’ 2015 self-titled debut, which featured the inescapably compelling “You Can Change,” it nonetheless exudes a kind of languid vitality. —Falling James
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PASSION PIT: Sat., Feb. 3, 7 p.m., $35. The Belasco Theatre.

REAL ESTATE: Wed., Feb. 28, 8 p.m., $35 & up. The Theatre at Ace Hotel.

RENEE FLEMING: The American soprano performs a recital, backed by German pianist Hartmut Holl, Tue., Feb. 6, 7:30 p.m. Dorothy Chandler Pavilion.

SAKON, CREATOR: Fri., Feb. 9, 6:30 p.m., $35. The Wiltern.


STEVE HACKETT: Sat., Feb. 24, 8 p.m., $39-50. The Orpheum Theatre.


WALK THE MOON: With Company of Thieves, Fri., Feb. 9, 7-9 p.m., $39.50. Hollywood Palladium.

WILSON PHILLIPS: Fri., Feb. 9, 9 p.m., $38-58. Saddle Brook Theatre.

ALLEGRA BRUNI: With Tommy Genesis, Mon., Feb. 12, 8 p.m., $29.95. With Tommy Genesis, Mon., Feb. 19, 7:30 p.m., $29.95. Hollywood Palladium.


JOSH TURNER: Tue., Feb. 27, 7 p.m., $35. The Belasco Theatre.

JUDAH & THE LION: Thu., Feb. 27, 8 p.m., $26. The Belasco Theatre.

KALEIDOSCOPE CHAMBER ORCHESTRA: The conductorless group delves into the West Coast premiere of Viet Cuong's Re/3; the U.S. premiere of Aart Strooststra's Riquem Aposidus; the world premiere of an untitled work by Akysa Weinberg; and Arnold Schoenberg's Chamber Symphony No. 1, Op. 9, Sat., Feb. 10, 10 p.m. L.A. Center Theatre. Sun., Feb. 11, 1 p.m. First Presbyterian Church.

LA CHAMBER ORCHESTRA: Sun., Feb. 25, 7 p.m., $27-$324. UCLA Royce Hall.

L.A. MASTOR CHORALE: Grant Gershon conducts Handel's oratorio Israel in Egypt, Sun., Feb. 17, 5 p.m.-7 p.m. Walt Disney Concert Hall.


LETTUCE: With The Motet, Thu., Feb. 15, 8 p.m., $24.50-$59.50. The Wiltern.

LONG BEACH SYMPHONY: Sat., Feb. 17, 8 p.m., $26-$165. Long Beach Terrace Theater.


LUCIA VAVOOL FINALE: Wed., Feb. 14, 8 p.m., $40-$75. Thu., Feb. 15, 8 p.m., $40-$75. The Mayan.


MEOW MEOW: With Thomas Lauderdale, Feb., Feb. 8, 2 p.m., $29-$59-$69.50. The Theatre at Ace Hotel.


PITAGORA SYMPHONY:Cellist Ibnel Segeb unwinds Antonin Dvorak’s Cello Concerto, and David Lockington conducts Igor Stravinsky’s The Firebird Suite, as well as world premiere of a work TBA, Sat., Feb. 17, 2 & 8 p.m., $35 & up. Ambassador Auditorium.


PACIFIC SYMPHONY: Ukrainian pianist Alexander Romaniw plays apart Prokofiev’s Piano Concerto No. 2, and Carl St.Claire conducts Brahms’ Third Symphony and the West Coast premiere of Paul Chihara's Wild Wood, Thu., Feb. 1, 8 p.m., Fri., Feb. 2, 8 p.m.; Sat., Feb. 3, 8 p.m., $25 & up. Renee & Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall, 600 Town Center Dr., Costa Mesa.

ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA: Cellist Gautier Capuçon works up Haydn’s Cello Concerto No. 1 in C major, and Thierry Fischer fills in for the disgraced Charles Dutoit by conducting Debussy’s Petite Suite and Stravinsky’s The Firebird, Fri., Jan. 26, 8 p.m., $49-$85. Valley Performing Arts Center, 18111 Nordhoff St., Northridge.

TIME FOR THREE: Wed., Jan. 31, 8 p.m., $20-$40. Smothers Theatre, Pepperdine University, 24255 Pacific Coast Highway, Malibu.
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