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VENUS PROTOTYPE’S BIZARRE COUTURE BROUGHT UNDERGROUND FASHION TO THE MAINSTREAM

BY LINA LECARO

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The Archetypal Pan in America: Hypermasculinity and Terror
Sukey Fontelieu, Ph.D.

The Archetypal Pan in America is a significant exploration of archetypal causes for the anxieties and ethical dilemmas in the US today. Relying on C. G. Jung’s theory of the applicability of myth to psychological problems and the post-Jungian theory of cultural complexes, the myths of the Greek god Pan are used as the scaffolding for a metaphor that informs this disastrous situation.

Friday, October 5th
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GO LA...6
Visit Kellesimone Waits’s “Astrokitty Space World,” raise a stein for Oktoberfest, take an art walk through Frogtown and more to do and see in L.A. this week.

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Urban contemporary and folkloric dance to her Folk Ballet and veteran of season four. Highways Performance Space, 1651 18th in this one collaborative dance concert. Vocative and topical elements combined and political issues. There'll be lots of productions as well as exploring current social American dance. The choreographers and the pop to the political. Tonight's edition they regularly show salient movies from — and a big lovely outdoor screen, where Purple Garden is a serene and lightly surrounded by freight trains. By contrast, Colombian choreographer Escobar and her Borderline Movements draw on elements of flamenco, African and Latin American dance. The choreographers and their dancers tackle issues of appropriating Latin American and Hispanic cultural traditions as well as exploring current social and political issues. There'll be lots of provocative and topical elements combined in one collaborative dance concert. Highways Performance Space, 1651 18th St., Santa Monica; Fri.—Sat., Sept. 21-22, 8:30 p.m.; $20. highsayoutdoor.org. —SHANA NYS DAMBROT

MOVIE NIGHT

Besides the expansive exhibition spaces and the socially conscious art and books storefront, the Underground Museum's Purple Garden is a serene and lightly surrounded by topiaries and benches — and a big lovely outdoor screen, where they regularly show salient movies from the pop to the political. Tonight's edition of Purple Garden Cinema, however, takes a bit of a turn back toward video art, with a rare screening of artist Martine Syms' Incense Sweaters & Ice. Syms' work at the intersection of cinema vérité, social media, cultural critique and installation art has been hailed at galleries and museums, but this short feature comes closer to a familiar movie structure, following two main characters through a Slacker-like series of vignettes that both tell and muddle their story. The Underground Museum, 3508 W. Washington Blvd., West Adams; Fri., Sept. 21, 8 p.m.; free. (323) 989-9925, theunderground-museum.org. —SHANA NYS DAMBROT

FESTIVAL

Game On!
As anyone who has ever attended a chamber-music concert inside Union Station can attest, the art deco/Mission Revival landmark isn't the best place to hear live music — with all the commuters converging and departing, it's like a train station in there. But the downtown transportation hub's ticket concourse should be a fine setting for the nonstop clanging bells and other metallic noisemaking that will occur at Retrocade Experience, a two-day celebration that features more than 40 vintage pinball and arcade games such as Donkey Kong and Pac-Man. In addition to a daily Pac-Man tournament, players can rest their fingers and wrists between games in the Arcade Lounge. Union Station, 800 N. Alameda St., downtown; Sat., Sept. 22, 11 a.m.—9 p.m.; Sun., Sept. 23, 11 a.m.—7 p.m.; free, $5 to enter the Pac-Man tournament. (213) 683-6897, unionstationla.com/happenings/union-station-s-retrocade-experience. —FALLING JAMES

SURELY ON

The Frogtown neighborhood of Elysian Park is filled with quirky locals, including the mayor-with-the-mullet, Roland Schitt (Chris Elliott). If you're curious about the just-announced fifth season, Live Nation hosts Schitt's Creek: Up Close & Personal with co-creators Dan and Eugene Levy and other cast members, who'll screen clips, tell behind-the-scenes stories and answer questions. Theatre at Ace Hotel, 929 S. Broadway, downtown; Sun., Sept. 23, 7 p.m.; $32.50-$128.50. (213) 623-3233, acehotel.com/calendar/losangeles/live-nation-presents-schitts-creek. —SIRAN BABAYAN
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True Colors
Craziness and richness intensify with the publication of this, the final installment in the Crazy Rich Asians trilogy, as Kevin Kwan unveils Rich People Problems (Anchor, $16.95), a book that dares to reveal the shameful shamelessness and the vicious avariciousness of a Singaporean clan descending into power-hungry madness at the very edge of the deathbed of the family’s grandmother. The entire Shang-Young brood converges on her home in hopes of inheriting her sprawling 64-acre Tyersall Park estate — ripping away the veneer of their genteel lives, finally showing us the base and squalling horrors that constantly writhe just beneath the surface. Vroman’s, 695 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena; Mon., Sept. 24, 7 p.m.; free. (626) 449-5320, vromansbookstore.com/event/kevin-kwan-discusses-and-signs-rich-people-problems. —DAVID COTNER

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Tue 9/25
POETRY
Telling the Trans Truth
“There’s nothing Hollywood-glamorous about writing a poem,” trans poet Ryka Aoki writes in the forward to her 2015 collection, Why Dust Shall Never Settle Upon This Soul. “It’s clumsy stumbling most of the time, with generous helpings of self-importance and self-pity. But … the poem must contain truth. If I’m being evasive, or lying, even unconsciously, the poem reacts.” In just a few curt lines, Aoki evokes the murder of yet another trans person: “With another November, the names of trans people/change color and fall/Mispronounced, sainted/ceded to anonymous candles.” At this evening’s Red Hen Press reading, Aoki is part of a bill stacked with intriguing local writers.

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Jeff Bridges
clips and discussion of his documentary, Living in the Future’s Past
OCT 1
Moss Theatre, Santa Monica

Kate Atkinson
with Susan Orlean
Transcription
OCT 2
Moss Theatre, Santa Monica
THU 9/27

MUSIC

Happy Centennial!
L.A. Philharmonic is beginning the year-long celebration of its 100th anniversary in several stages, including a massive street party, music festival and CicLAvia event on Sunday, Sept. 30, and the debut of a major new work by Andrew Norman at the official opening night of the new season at Disney Hall on Thursday, Oct. 4. But before all that begins, music director Gustavo Dudamel reveals in the music of such Golden State composers as Frank Zappa, John Adams and Jerry Goldsmith — as well as the world premiere of Julia Adolphe's Underneath the Sheen — at California Soul, a gala that will include other Cali-centric songs performed by such guests as British soul singer Corinne Bailey Rae and Coldplay’s Chris Martin. Walt Disney Concert Hall, 111 S. Grand Ave., downtown; Thu., Sept. 27, 7-9 p.m.; free. (888) 488-8083, lacpca.org.
—SIRAN BABAYAN

ART/CULTURE

Ode to the Auto
In Africa, Europe and Asia, many of history’s greatest artists worked to design and beautify temples, churches and other spiritual centers. In the United States, our finest painters, sculptors, illustrators and animators have focused their talents on customizing and celebrating this country’s primary place, and object, of worship — the automobile. There was a time when such auto-erotic fixations — as well as comic books and imagery of skateboardering and surfing — were considered merely lowbrow, but the group show “Auto-Didactic: The Juxtapoz School” reaffirms the connections between Kustom Kulture and contemporary art via work by Robert Williams, Ed “Big Daddy” Roth, Mark Ryden, Sara Ray, Chaz Bojorquez, Ron English, Shag, Laurie Lipton, Robert Crumb, Anthony Ausgang, Patricia Piccinini and Gary Panter. Petersen Automotive Museum, 6060 Wilshire Blvd., Mid-Wilshire; Thu., Sept. 27, 7 p.m.; $30-$60. (323) 930-2277, petersen.org. —FALLING JAMES

FILM/ACTIVISM

Undocumented Success
There are an estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States, half of whom are Mexican. Director Micah Fink put a face on several such undocumented Mexicans in his 2016 PBS documentary, Beyond Borders: Undocumented Mexican-Americans. Fink interviewed parents and their children in states like New York and Alabama as they lived double lives, simultaneously working hard to pursue the American Dream while fearing the consequences of their undocumented status — as well as immigrants who were deported. Among them is Julissa Arce, who, despite being undocumented, worked as an executive at Goldman Sachs and later became an activist and author of two books. (She’s developing a Fox series based on her life, produced by actress America Ferrera.) LA Plaza de Cultura y Arte hosts a screening of the film and a panel discussion, moderated by UCLA Institute for Research on Labor and Employment’s Citlalli Chávez-Nava, with Carlos Amador and Marisol Granillo Arce. LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes, 501 N. Main St., downtown; Thu., Sept. 27, 7-9 p.m.; free. (888) 488-8083, lapca.org.
—SIRAN BABAYAN
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At 10 years old, Corinne Franco had the most fashionable dolls in the neighborhood. The East Los Angeles native learned how to sew in the factories of downtown L.A., where her entire family — all immigrants from Mexico — worked, cutting patterns and putting in long hours on sewing machines for various manufacturers. Making clothes was second nature for her, and she enjoyed the entire process, from drawing to stitching to dressing her “babies” in sweetly coordinated handmade ensembles.

As Franco got older, creating clothing became the saving grace of her adolescence, when what we wear means so much. If her family couldn’t afford a trendy look, she’d simply make it herself. She soon started not only following what was in fashion but exploring outsider looks too, inspired by music, clubs and alternative culture.

These days, the "dolls" Franco adorns are real, confident, sexy women — dominatrices and gals who just want to look like them, pin-up babes, bondage, burlesque, punk and goth freaks, glamazon drag queens ... and, more and more lately, some of the most famous females in the world. After a few decades in the clothing business, the designer has made a name for herself by bringing subversive style elements — in particular those of the fetish scene — to the mainstream. Her designs are seen on stars in videos and in real life, especially those known for sexy, body-conscious looks: Nicki Minaj, Kim Kardashian, Fergie and most recently Arianna Grande (who wore Franco’s silver latex design to the MTV Music Awards).

Franco also is known around L.A. as Venus Prototype (the name of her line, before she recently changed it to Bizarre Fetish Couture) and she’s been a fixture on the club scene for years. Though she never set out to make clothing for celebrities, doing so has become a full-circle transition, since it was a pop star that inspired her the most growing up.

Madonna’s street-chic moxie marked a pivotal cultural moment that continues to influence fashion to this day, and not just in the obvious retro ways. Her fearless fashion hodgepodes (which incorporated punk, frilly señorita lace looks, girly Lolita touches, old movie star glamour and, later, a bold BDSM aesthetic, to name but a few incarnations) made a huge impact on all of us who grew up in the ’80s and ’90s but especially those working in fashion. Big hair bows, bustiers, fingerless gloves and black rubber bracelets are where it all began, of course, and like many young girls of the era, Franco was obsessed with it all. “She was my idol,” the designer says. “Anything Madonna did, I wanted to do a version of it.”

A couple decades later, the little girl who transitioned from making doll dresses to Material Girl miniskirts and crop tops for herself saw her fashionable aspira-
Out of high school, Franco attended FIDM in downtown Los Angeles. After graduating, she got a job designing for a major corporate brand, Yes Clothing, starting as an assistant and quickly transitioning into head designer. “At 19 years old I was designing a collection that would be shipped out to every department store in the entire country,” she remembers. “I got more orders than ever before so they had me do it. I was able to target the customer — we were doing junior dresses — because I was that customer at that time. They paired me with a big merchandiser and I learned a lot.”

Franco says learning the merchandising side of the fashion business helped her later when she ran her own company in her 30s. As a 20 percent owner of the brand Hot Tempered, a division of a company called City Triangles (still in business) in the early 2000s, Franco found success but also a lot of stress, especially when it concerned her business partner at the time. “He started to get not very friendly, and was not very nice to our employees,” Franco explains. “At that time I had hired my mom, and family, and people that my family has known since they first came to Los Angeles.”

She decided to get out, but to do so she had to sign a noncompete clause that mandated she not work in the corporate fashion business for two years. The underground custom fetish world, which had always fascinated her, was another story, however. And that’s when she got into working with latex.

The sultriest fabric in fashion (figuratively and literally), latex was mostly an underground medium at the time. It molds to the body like nothing else, and whether it’s worn as is or polished with oil for a glossy finish, it evokes a power and eroticism that’s hard to convey to those who’ve never actually worn it.

Franco is arguably L.A.’s queen of latex. Not only did she spend her two-year break from mainstream fashion apprenticing with Andy Wilkes — the original owner of Syren latex before it was sold to the designers with made-to-order materials. When you see a printed latex garment from another designer out there, they likely got it from her.

How latex, a fetish-fashion staple, has come to be a go-to for mainstream awards-show garb and paparazzi-ready nights on the town is debatable, but Franco credits renowned stylists B. Akerlund and Brett Alan Nelson for their forward-thinking experimentation, and for hiring her on various small projects for the likes of Britney Spears, Janet Jackson and Christina Aguilera.

“I got a call from Akerlund to make 37 outfits for the ‘Milk Money’ music video, which was Fergie’s comeback a couple years ago,” Franco recalls. “She asked if I could print denim onto latex. I did this photographic print on latex shorts for Kim Kardashian, and this was shortly after she had her baby. Even though she looked great, she was feeling a little self-conscious about her body, so I made them with a corset inside. We were able to cinch her waist down an additional four inches. The blogs went crazy and everybody was talking about it. That was the outfit that got me attention in the entertainment industry.”

Soon Franco was making outfits for superstars for photo shoots, more videos and for tours, which required attending rehearsals and making sure her latex pieces are reinforced for stage wear and (hopefully not) tear. At the same, her Venus Prototype personae and brand kept up its presence in L.A.’s underground.

Franco has thrown dozens of fashion shows locally over the years, most often at fetish- and bondage-themed events but also at clubs such as Miss Kitty’s Parlour, where the uber-popular drag duo the Boulet Brothers of Amazon series Dragula got their start.

Making outfits for the drag community is a newer endeavor for Franco, however. Her latest creations, giant inflatable latex wigs, were all the rage at this year’s RuPaul’s Drag Con after she presented a fashion show there. Providing a cartoony, avant-garde complement to Franco’s unique body wear, the wigs have been used in arty photo shoots and by queens performing onstage ever since. They might not even have existed if it weren’t for another kind of “queen” by the name of Minaj.

“I was called in to make Nicki look like a doll for a video,” Franco says. “So I designed a bunch of these wigs for it but they didn’t end up using them. I was really hurt. I cried. I probably didn’t get out of bed for about a week because I spent so much time with my daughter and a team of people making these wigs. Then I was like, you know what? There’s another purpose for them. Shortly after that I heard that Drag Con was coming up, so my daughter and I made a pop art collection targeting the people who would wear such wigs. They’re expensive pieces, but drag queens have the budgets. It was kind of taking my work into that drag, pop art direction I liked.”

Pop art and pop stars aside, Franco’s Bizarre Fetish Couture is, at its core, about what turns the wearer on. With the help of her daughter, who she says recently became her co-designer, Franco continues to embellish both kinky club kids and iconic superstars. Her current obsession is with the 1940s, which is where the aesthetic she’s been championing most of her career began — in the infamous Bizarre fetish magazines and books by John Willie. Franco changed her brand name in homage, and it is this theme that she will display on the runway as part of Latin Factory’s all-Latin designer event to be held at the Globe Theatre during L.A. Fashion Week.
“My thing is, when making clothes I want to know what is your fetish?” Franco says. “So whether it’s being a pony girl, whether it’s being a bunny, or something else, I want to create these fetish fantasy costumes for people who have different ways of expressing themselves.”

Expression and allure and spectacle is what high fashion is all about, especially on the runway, and this ultimately trickles down into everyday wearable trends. Corseted waists, buckles, bows, grommets, cutouts, thigh-highs, stilettos, restraints, masks, animal print, lace prints — fetish fashion is no longer a naughty secret thanks to stylists who recognize the talent and creativity of designers like Franco, and thanks to influencers and famous figures willing and wanting to push the envelope with what they wear.

Franco’s recent work can be seen in photo spreads on the likes of Tyra Banks, Mariah Carey and Paris Hilton, and she just made some printed latex pieces for Beyoncé to wear onstage, plus more printed logo work for Gucci and YSL. She’s also in the process of interviewing for a certain fashion competition TV show, which next season, she says, ups its prize money package and will feature established designers like her. She’ll surely “make it work” if she is chosen.

“Growing up in L.A., and coming from a family that has worked in the fashion business and working with people who have known me since I was a kid, means so much,” Franco reflects. “I wouldn’t be doing my own collection or this kind of work if I didn’t have that. When I need something, they really go above and beyond to try to help me bring my vision to life, and I’m so grateful and so thankful. I’ve accomplished what I have thanks to a powerful team around me not only supporting what I do but letting me explore all of my ideas with no boundaries.”


“WANT TO CREATE THESE FETISH FANTASY COSTUMES FOR PEOPLE WHO HAVE DIFFERENT WAYS OF EXPRESSING THEMSELVES.”

— CORINNE FRANCO

OUTSIDE THE LINES

Six alternative L.A. style makers to watch

BY LINA LECARO

All of L.A. is a runway, and with another Fashion Week upon us, it’s important to remember that. Fierce style can be seen on red carpets and catwalks, at clubs, boutiques and art shows, and of course in the streets. Here are six designers doing their part to provide Angelenos (and, thanks to the World Wide Web, beyond) with something fresh, fun and unique to wear, using all of the above outlets to promote the next few weeks and all year long.

Bomme Studio

Matthew Metz, the man behind Bomme Studio, describes his aesthetic as “looking to the future.” But as the designer himself admits, none of us knows what the future will be, so deciding what to create is an organic, intuitive process. “To me, it’s like looking at the darkest part of the night before the dawn. It’s the mixing of sex and science fiction, a blend of fantasy and subversiveness,” he says. Bomme Studio’s inspirations are deeply rooted in American nostalgia, and Metz says experiences such as walking down the horror aisle in ’80s video stores and watching the first music videos on early MTV come into play in his dresses and separates. So his work is as much about the past as it is the future, and if he has his way, the frocks he concocts will be worn by technology-loving tribes looking to express themselves in bold ways.

See Metz’s designs on the runway at L.A. Fashion Week at the Peterson Auto Museum on Sunday, Oct. 7, and check out more of his work at bommestudio.com.

Lone Hawk Hats

Charlie Overbey has always had an eye for cool headwear. He started doing hats in 1993 during his Sunset Strip musician days. “I really wanted big crazy hats and just could not seem to find anything suitable,” he says. “So I just shaped and dressed my own.” Inspired by Old West style, Native American culture, ‘70s Southern rock, Bob Dylan and glam rock, Overbey’s hats have that effortless worn-in look, which you usually can’t buy for any price. Usually only rockin’ nights and sunshine-filled days can weather and personalize the kind of style Lone Hawk hats evoke, but Overbey has the magic touch; when his hats are worn, it’s straight-to-the-head alchemy. Fans include Nils Lofgren of The E Street Band and Crazy Horse, Craig Ross of Lenny Kravitz, Blackberry Smoke, Barry Gibb, Richard Fortus of Guns N’ Roses, Evan Ross, Raoul Max Trujillo (Mayans M.C.), Marcus King, Kesha, Natalie Bergman of Wild Belle, Chelsea Tyler, Elizabeth Cook, Aaron Lee Tasjan and many more.

Check out Overbey’s work at the shop he runs with his stylist gal-pal, Honeywood Vintage, 5117 York Blvd., Highland Park; (323) 739-0101, honeywoodvintage.com or lonehawkhats.com.

Laser Kitten

Laser Kitten’s Marisa Ravel has been killing the enamel pin game for a few years now, with sassy designs, clever wordplay and pop culture–driven cartoon imagery. So it was only a matter of time until she branched out into fashion and ac-
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Accessory collaborations. Her latest includes an '80s- and '90s-style back-to-school capsule collection for The Archies' Betty & Veronica that’ll make comic-loving cuties say “tee-hee!” The line includes a pop art mesh bodysuit, body-con dress, heart-shaped backpack, earrings and matching pin set, and it launches Oct. 8, just in time for Fashion Week (available on https://www.bettyandveronica.com/). A new line of Laser Kitten signature pattern bodysuits will be next, and there are plans for a high-end line of basics including super-soft T-shirts and sweatshirts. Kitten has been hosting monthly art installation events in its Melrose showroom, fun bashes designed to support the L.A. art community and provide some pretty vibrantly backdropped Instagram pics, too.

Check out Laser Kitten on Sat., Sept. 22, when artist Kellesimone Waits turns the space into an “Astrokitty Space World” with another can’t-miss installation. 6700 Melrose Ave., Hancock Park; LaserKitten.com.

Uprising

Minimalism meets social consciousness with Uprising, the L.A. brand from designer Michelle K. Hanabusa. Hanabusa left the corporate fashion world to create something different — basics with a message. Selling T-shirts, sweatshirts and tops with slogans meant to empower, uplift and unite communities, her goal was both fashion- and people-focused. Her eye and knack for marketing garnered attention, even in the oversaturated tee market. Uprising’s simplicity, Hanabusa explains, is meant to save time and energy when getting ready every day so that the wearer can focus on more important matters and concerns in life. It brings to mind the trendy home-decluttering movement, but even non-basic, embellishment- and bauble-loving fashionistas will find something in the line to spark joy.

For World Mental Awareness Day (Oct. 10) pop-punk singer Kota Wade and the Uprising brand will unveil a new design, touting Wade’s #YoureNotAlone message. Check out uprisingbrand.com to connect, learn more and purchase.

Laura Byrnes

When Pinup Girl Boutique closed a few months ago due to skyrocketing rents in its Magnolia Park neighborhood, L.A. glamour gals shared a collective grief for the loss of the whimsical, retro-styled shop. Thankfully designer Laura Byrnes hasn’t let the lack of a flagship slow her down. The sexy '50s style frocks Pinup is known for are still available online, and her collaborations with the likes of Elvira and Traci Lords are still on track, too. Pinup Girl has always been a favorite of curvy gals, and Byrnes’ newest pieces still adhere to the body-positive approach, even as she stretches her aesthetic in new ways and into new eras. Her latest pieces (available in October) see her dipping even more into '60s and '70s silhouettes and details, with shorts, pants and tops that bring to mind the vixens from Russ Meyers’ sexiest bad-girl movies.

pinupgirlclothing.com.

Tiny Bangs

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Check out Tiny Bangs’ runway show in collaboration with Fiora Boes (costume designer of SLC Punk!) on Sat., Dec. 1, 5 p.m., at the Silver Lake Flea Market, at Micheltorena Street Elementary School playground, 1511 Micheltorena St., Silver Lake; and see tinybangs.com.

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**Laura Byrnes, left, with models.**

Laura Byrnes

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Feast Like a Fashionista

Where to find great food and even better people-watching during L.A. Fashion Week

By Michele Stueven and Melissa Curtin

We surveyed the L.A. Fashion Week community on the trendiest places to eat once the carpet is rolled up, the Spanx are off and the catwalk has been dismantled (or anytime, for us civilians.) Here are their picks for the most fashionable dining spots.

Catch L.A.: The dramatic rooftop entrance to one of the best seafood spots in town shows off arriving diners as if they were celebrities. A fresh take on southern Italian, the menu blends touches of France, Spain, the Middle East and North Africa in an elegantly casual blue and gold setting, designed by Parts & Labor. Giant original paintings by Australian artist James Peter Henry (who also happens to be the best server on the floor) set a bold tone in the dining room.

Javier’s Century City: The upscale, multiregional Mexican restaurant on the ground level of the Westfield Mall in Century City is dotted with fireplaces and palms throughout the main dining room, al fresco patios, intimate private dining rooms and sprawling bar under covered ceilings.

Javier’s offers an extensive ceviche menu and seafood specialties such as the popular shrimp, crab and lobster enchiladas. There’s a 14-ounce tomahawk pork chop topped with chipotle cream sauce, sautéed onion and mushroom. For dessert, try the mocha tres leches, made with Patron tequila and coffee, or deep-fried ice cream rolled in corn flakes, nuts and honey served in a buñuelo basket.

10250 Santa Monica Blvd., Century City; (424) 313-8143, javiers-cantina.com/index.html#!/page_centurycity.

Viale dei Romani: The most fashionable gem in Casey Lane’s food empire is located in the new Kimpton La Peer Hotel in West Hollywood’s design district. A fresh take on southern Italian, the menu blends touches of France, Spain, the Middle East and North Africa in an elegantly casual blue and gold setting, designed by Parts & Labor. Giant original paintings by Australian artist James Peter Henry (who also happens to be the best server on the floor) set a bold tone in the dining room.

The Restaurant Lounge, located at 8764 Melrose Ave., West Hollywood; (310) 432-2000, ceconiswesthollywood.com.

Avra Beverly Hills: Located in the heart of the Golden Triangle, the new Avra is a delicious and chic people-watching spot where everyone is perfectly coiffed (likely at the famous Christophe Salon down the street). Currently serving lunch and brunch, the 11,000-square-foot space includes an enormous outdoor patio overlooking Beverly Drive; it’s designed to mimic an open-air villa in Greece, with fresh lemon trees, imported limestone and washed stone walls. Greek classics include grilled Portuguese sardines with lemon, capers and extra virgin olive oil and spreads with house-made pita. The extensive fish menu includes a raw bar, sashimi and a wide range of grilled whole fish (lavraki, fagri, lithrini and tsipouro) by the pound, deboned at the table. 233 N. Beverly Drive, Beverly Hills; (310) 573-0841, avrabeverlyhills.com.

The Henry: This neighborhood joint is a low-key, fun spot to kick off the Louboutin and have a scene for breakfast, power lunches and dinner. Savory dishes include the spicy tuna rice crispy served with a choice of tuna tartare or avocado salad. Have a negroni at the bar, and you just may run into...
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Fashion is dangerous. The danger goes beyond the perils of cluelessly mixing stripes and polka dots or defying the cliché that white can’t be worn after Labor Day. In many places, wearing the wrong dress — or even the wrong fabric or color — can get you killed.

As many women know, simply dressing with any hint of flair, color or sensuality comes with the risk of being harassed — or worse — by strangers. But it also happens to men, or anybody who wants to look different.

“What we wear is dangerous gear. It’ll get you picked on anywhere,” Joe Strummer sang on The Clash’s 1977 single “City of the Dead.” He and co-songwriter Mick Jones were talking specifically about being physically attacked for wearing punk fashions, but their lyrics resonate with anyone who dresses in styles outside of accepted conservative American social norms. This can include people in the counterculture (rappers, goths, hippies, metalheads, even cosplayers) or from different ethnic groups and religious backgrounds (Muslims, Sikhs, Native Americans, Asians, conservative Jews, etc.), as well as those who identify as gay, lesbian, trans or nonbinary.

The idea of gender — like fashion itself — is always changing and ever evolving. It wasn’t so long ago that it was considered socially unacceptable for women to wear pants. Eventually, women dressing in pants became fairly commonplace, thanks in part to actors such as Marlene Dietrich and Katharine Hepburn, who boldly ignored the dictates of their era. By definition, any woman who wears pants is a transvestite, crossing gender lines and rules, but few are discriminated against these days for making that choice. And yet that same freedom to cross-dress outside of social boundaries is still denied to men who identify as — or merely want to dress as — women.

It’s considered cute when a waiflike woman chooses to casually put on her football-player boyfriend’s oversized jersey, but when a man dares to reveal his adoration for overtly feminine clothing, he is reviled and shunned as a ninny women by dressing, for instance, as a cheerleader, his (mock?) flirtation with his future boss.

Much of the social rejection of male cross-dressing also could be rooted in society’s overt hostility toward women and femininity in general. It’s one thing for women to wear pants and silently acknowledge the implied power of male fashion roles, but when a man wears a dress, he is defying unwritten social rules and risks punishment (physical or otherwise) for rejecting his own male power and inherent advantages in a society where that’s still strictly verboten.

But things are changing. Whether it’s Against Me!’ singer Laura Jane Grace bravely declaring that she was a transgender woman in 2012 and openly discussing her identity in her punk-rock lyrics, or the increased popularity of trans-friendly TV series like RuPaul’s Drag Race and Pose, as well as the public metamorphosis of Caitlyn Jenner from a macho athlete into a conservative transgender symbol, there is wider acceptance and tolerance of nontraditional gender roles today. It’s not uncommon, for instance, for macho male athletes and many other men these days to wear earrings and other jewelry, decades after gay men paved the way for them.

Despite this shift in attitudes, transgender men and women still face enormous obstacles to gaining full acceptance in America. Even with changing and more enlightened workplace rules, trans people still encounter widespread discrimination in getting or keeping jobs, and the rate of suicide for trans people is far higher than for people who are considered “normal.” At least three people have been murdered this year in central Florida, but because the victims are African-American trans women, the media has been largely silent about the possibility of a serial killer who is still roaming freely. Trans people are often assaulted, and many police departments refuse to show the same concern that they demonstrate for other victims of violence.

We’ve been here before. In the early 1970s, male glam-rock musicians rejected the casual hippie fashions of the era and began stomping around onstage in high-heeled platform boots while sporting eyeliner and glittery makeup. This trend was stronger in the U.K., where rock stars as David Bowie, Freddie Mercury and Marc Bolan were unafraid to look overtly feminine or play with gender roles. In the United States, The New York Dolls and Lou Reed tried to do much the same thing but were generally ignored by mainstream classic-rock radio. Alice Cooper had greater commercial success, but he slathered on makeup in a horror-movie style devoid of femininity or hints of homosexuality.

The glam-rock scene was revived in the mid-1980s, but many of those musicians were notoriously misogynist and homophobic. Groups like Poison and Pretty Boy Floyd might have teased their hair higher and worn more face paint than most women at the time, but there was a macho undercurrent and attitude that was hardly liberating or revolutionary. For most of those bands, their femininity was from the waist up — a de rigueur bullet belt was often the de facto border line of their dress-up play acting. Almost none of these musicians wore skirts or stockings; instead they swaggered around in leather pants and jeans to reinforce their innate masculinity.

Color and fabric can also play a big part in what’s considered socially acceptable. As a trans woman, I have long been able to get away with wearing black dresses in public. Black, funeral and goth attire is far more acceptable and commonplace in public nowadays. But whenever I wear a dress that’s pink — a seemingly more carefree and joyous color — I have to take extra care because that color often invites more violent assaults from hostile strangers. Similarly, men can wear form-fitting leggings now when they jog or exercise in public, but if they go further and reveal their legs in sheer stockings or pantyhose, they risk being attacked or judged by the cultural enforcers and busybodies of this era.

It’s only when one is accosted by a mob of drunken men in a sports bar that one recognizes the secret power — and danger — of donning seemingly harmless, flimsy fabrics like satin and nylon and cheery colors like pink in this seemingly enlightened era.

A man doesn’t even have to walk a mile in high heels to realize the sociological effects and risks that many fashionable women and trans people encounter on a daily basis. Men should try dressing in drag in public for a day as an experiment, if only to see how attitudes change toward them when they dare to cross these invisible borders.
Bohemian Society’s Victor Wilde manifests at L.A. Fashion Week

BY EZRHA JEAN BLACK

Victor Wilde directs his fashion-art-design enterprise, Bohemian Society, lies at the intersection of several transitional neighborhoods — the Historic Core, Fashion District, Arts District and Skid Row. One of L.A.’s oldest saloons is a mere stone’s throw from Wilde’s studio, as is an array of prominent social service agencies and stunning, sometimes jarring, architectural silhouettes.

It could be said that the city sidewalk is Wilde’s notion of a runway — an enveloping, immersive catwalk with a thousand eyes on it, its flâneurs continuously scanning the horizon, only fleetingly fixing their gaze on one thing or another. Wilde is aware of himself as one of those actors; he stares with scavenging eyes, continuously recomposing his gaze.

Off those streets and up in that studio, Wilde is focused on an actual runway — or at least a “runway environment.” He’s closing L.A. Fashion Week with his presentation of SS19, a collection called Manifest, and it’s going to be something to remember. The notion of a Bohemian Society show being other than a full-blown interdisciplinary happening is a total non-starter. This will be Bohemian Society’s first L.A. presentation in three years, and Wilde’s gaze is wandering in all directions. Contemplatively, he says, “It will be just enough chaos.”

A certain cinematic aspect to Wilde’s approach is readily apparent, and not accidental. Although his talent for fashion surfaced early, his childhood passions were painting and filmmaking. A featured extra performance in Woody Allen’s 1987 Radio Days sealed his fascination. In film studies at North Carolina’s School of the Arts, Wilde chafed against what he perceived as the school’s arbitrary institutional guidelines, but he took what he needed from the experience. He knows how to shape a production.

Only a couple of years ago, a camera followed Wilde strolling through Berlin, all but rolling up the sidewalk for his work, ripping up derelict street advertising and construction signage for a show at Berlin kunsthalle SomoS, planning to turn the stuff of assemblage into couture. The production, presented as an “interdisciplinary multimedia micro-residence,” was titled “Was ist Lost? Or What Is Happening?”, in a pun on Los Angeles, ’60s conceptual art and social dismay all at once — but there was nothing micro about it. Wilde’s art and clothes, which is really the exact same thing, bloom as the creative process happens, performatively, in that crucial creative moment of a sharp spark within one dazzling blur, before a live audience.

Back home amid the art-music-fashion cross-pollination of downtown L.A., it was almost inevitable that Wilde would cross paths with charismatic tenor Timur Bekbosunov and his band, The Dime Museum; he had with so many musicians, Wilde would later dress and style them for videos and photo shoots. But before any of that, within minutes of meeting him, as Bekbosunov describes it, “I immediately pitched him Collapse,” a “post-ecological requiem” produced by Beth Morrison Projects for REDCAT in 2014. “At our very first meeting he made a spontaneous draft on a napkin as to what my three costumes should be,” Bekbosunov recalls. “He seems to always know what he wants from the beginning, but then things evolve….”

The clothes became a spectacular and striking element of the production. While the band members were attired in variations on the burned, melted-down, smoky elements that are a Wilde specialty, tailored to their “post-apocalyptic” specifications, Bekbosunov moved between a dramatic goth priest look, a spectacular slashed and brocaded suit of fire, and a half dress suit/half bustier-and-petticoat getup to marry the sexes.

Wilde continues to work with Bekbosunov and with Morrison, as well as other Dime Museum members who, like most musicians, have multiple gigs going. Guitarist Matthew Setzer, who regularly tours and performs with bands such as London After Midnight and Skinny Puppy, wasn’t sure what hit him when Wilde dressed The Dime Museum for their first photo shoot, but he was taken with Wilde’s relaxed, improvisatory self-assurance — and the results. “The pictures just looked insanely good!” he says. They bonded during a tour through Amsterdam, and later (with video projection artist Jesse Gilbert) plunged deep into Wilde’s origin story, set between Canarsie and Red Hook in Brooklyn. As Setzer views it, Wilde’s creativity shines in collaboration with other artists.

Wilde’s process is essentially an all-encompassing bricolage, seeing couture as a form of assemblage, handmade using whatever materials are available. He can be influenced by film (one collection was inspired by Jonathan Demme’s 1986 Something Wild, another by David Lynch’s Wild At Heart), but his influences come from all over and include Jasper Johns, arte povera and Alan Vega. “I’ll get ideas and draw them,” he says. “Sometimes you’re inspired by the street, sometimes you make an upside-down mood board from whatever’s on the internet.”

As for his studio practice, how do you describe getting in front of a blowtorch? Explosonically embroidering? Wilde’s fabric racks are troves of swagged silk, layers of vintage lace collaged with botanica decals, chainmail beneath jackets in various stages of deconstruction, dyed silks in radioactive hues. His techniques are classic — draping, gathering, swagging, pleating — but he’s self-taught, with an innate sense of how to seame, reverse or slash to transform the texture of a fabric.

Musicians and other creatives are always game for Wilde’s process. Most recently he dressed Alan Cumming for his band’s summer tour of club appearances. One of Wilde’s most in-demand looks is a collection of hand-embellished “shark jackets,” after the one he made for Julian Casablancas to wear in a video fronting for Daft Punk.

The connection with performers is something that comes from Wilde’s own experience — not just donning masks and costumes for an aunt’s Christmas pageant in Canarsie but as a street performer in a silver bodysuit, which Wilde describes as his first legitimate job. Later he was invited by the West Hollywood Standard Hotel to occupy its signature lobby “Box.” The first (and possibly only) man to occupy this space, he made a compact design studio of it — a one-of-a-kind fusion out of which he fashioned a debut at Lisa Kline and what’s going on 15 years in the business.

Wilde has kept his distance from the annual Fashion Week ready-to-wear rollouts but has done his share of trade shows. Bored at one such trade show in Paris, he wandered up to a neighborhood between the Second and Third Arrondissements and a street once famous for its maisons of ill repute, Rue Blondel. Along several blocks and alleys they continue to practice the oldest profession well past what we might think of as retirement age. Wilde was fascinated with the women’s looks, their poses, as well as a story he heard that Max Factor’s most famous red lipstick was inspired by just such femme fatales.

He convinced a photographer he’d met in Berlin to help him. “She brought two cameras and a light and I brought a suitcase full of my stuff. We started at the beginning of the street, and she introduced me, “This is my friend Victor from L.A. He’s trying to work with people for his clothing line who aren’t regular models.” Everyone said no until we got to the end of the street; and as the last woman is saying no, another woman walks by and hears us talking. She takes us to a back alley where we started to dress and photograph her. It started to rain and we went to another alley. A younger woman comes down; she starts trying on the stuff and we photograph her. Then an older woman sticks her head out the door and shouts to us, “What are you doing outside in the rain?” And suddenly I’m inside this woman’s boudoir where she’s probably just given someone attentions 10 minutes before and we’re photographing her. In the meantime, there are knock on the door, and she’s putting her customers off while we filmed for an hour.”

Like something out of Toulouse-Lautrec, this was a moment that for Wilde eclipsed even fashion, a moment when, he says, “I felt so completely alive. My dream would be to close down the Rue Blondel, dress the andagers and walkers in Bohemian Society, and make the street the runway.”

L.A. Fashion Week’s closing-night presentation features Bohemian Society’s SS19 collection Manifest inside a classic Wilde-style Spring Happening, at 9 p.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 10, at the Petersen Automotive Museum. Timur Bekbosunov will perform live with Alex Noice, while Rie Rasmussen (who shot the campaign for Bohemian Society’s signature scent, Sex Tape) creates Manifest SS19’s lookbook live on the runway. Unconventional model casting includes the legendary Buck Angel as well as performers from the Skid Row theatrical collective Los Angeles Poverty Department, thebohemiansociety.com.
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Michael Moore has titled Fahrenheit 11/9 like a sequel to his 2004 megahit Fahrenheit 9/11, and he opens it the same way. “Was it all a dream?” he again asks, in his too-cute, put-upon, slurry/naive way. “Everything seemed to be going as planned.” And he walks us through an alternate reality we were so certain would come to pass, trotting out clips in which pundits outright reject the very idea that Donald Trump would be president. And then he revisits Nov. 9, 2016 (it would be nice if just one contemporaneous documentary would resist that temptation), capturing the bad-dream quality of the midnight-or-so realization that no, the impossible was possible. He also takes a moment to remind the audience that he predicted this, a choice that’s more than a little self-serving, but hey, it is a Michael Moore movie. And then after all that, he asks a not unreasonable question: “How the fuck did this happen?”

Moore has some theories. He floats the convincing notion that the Trump campaign at first was a publicity stunt to crank up Trump’s Apprentice salary, and that his vanity then took over. Candidate Trump was aided by a news media eager to chase the story, no matter how reprehensible. Moore offers up a damning montage of empty podium coverage, with news networks counting down to the start of Trump speeches, and audio of disgraced man-of-the-hour Les Moonves note in, in the thick of the election, that Trump’s campaign “may not be good for America but it’s damn good for CBS.”

Moore follows that with an effective montage of the president’s creepiest moments, many involving comments about daughter Ivanka. Then comes the turn. “Does this make you uncomfortable?” Moore asks. “I don’t know why. None of this is new.”

None of this is new. Moore’s point is that Trump has always committed his crimes in plain sight, but that line jumps out, as it’s less about the president than it is about this movie. Fahrenheit 9/11 felt urgent because so much of what it had to tell and show us was new; in the pre-Youtube era of 2004, before The Rachel Maddow Show and late night’s comedy truth-tellers, its most damning clips were not easily accessible, and its impassioned liberal arguments were rare on our screens.

That’s probably why it was such a smash. 9/11 remains the highest-grossing documentary feature of all time, by a considerable margin: It grossed $119 million domestic, nearly $50 million more than second-place March of the Penguins, and nearly $100 million more than Moore’s next biggest, Sicko. So it’s not surprising that the filmmaker decided to give Trump the same treatment. But 11/9 plays not like a much-needed blast of truth but like an all-purpose Michael Moore sequel, a self-congratulatory follow-up to several of his films, with Parkland material in the Bowling for Columbine vein, references to Sicko and even excerpts from 1989’s Roger & Me. On one clip from a shared appearance on Roseanne Barr’s short-lived talk show, Moore is even seen making nice with Mr. Trump, who compliments Moore’s Roger & Me and notes, with a smile, “I hope he never does one on me.”

Too bad he didn’t. The problem with Fahrenheit 11/9 is that it’s Trump’s Fahrenheit 9/11 rather than Trump’s Roger & Me. The genius of Moore’s first film was its entry point: Moore began with an up-close look at his hometown of Flint, Michigan, and then expanded out to make Flint a microcosm for a broken nation. This one gets that backward, to its detriment.

Moore strains to connect Trump to Flint by latching onto the idea that Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder was something of the canary in the coal mine, or at least the gas that killed the canary. He posits Snyder as a proto-Trump — another CEO turned “run it like a business” politician, arguing that that approach made the governor singularly unqualified to deal with the Flint water crisis, which Moore calls, correctly, “a slow-motion ethnic cleansing.”

And here’s where Moore’s priorities betray him. The current water crisis really is an equivalent to the tragedy at Roger & Me’s center, the abandonment of Flint by General Motors. The best material here — serious and comic — addresses that crisis: the specifics of how it happened, the danger the citizenry still faces and the efforts of Snyder’s administration to cover it up. What Moore reports here is vital, engraining not widely known. What we know all about, on the other hand, is Donald Trump and the 2016 election. So it’s hard not to wonder how much Flint material was left on the cutting-room floor so Moore could take a victory lap for having said on TV in 2016 that Trump could win or rehash Trump’s well-documented history of racism and misogyny or (yes) relitigate 2016’s Democratic primary. Moore clearly calls his own shots, has long seen the whims of his films affirmed by his loyal audience and presumably doesn’t have a lot of people around him questioning his instincts. But someone should have asked a simple question: Why spend so much screen time rehashing all that when there’s a more important story, one so clearly suited to Moore’s talents and righteousness, staring him right in the face?

FAHRENHEIT 11/9 | Directed by Michael Moore | Dog Eat Dog Films | Citywide
"I’m Antonio, and I’m going to draw you, girl!" This is model/author Pat Cleveland’s earliest memory of meeting Antonio Lopez, who liked to say that when he spotted a muse in the rough, whereupon the gorgeous, charismatic, game-changingly gifted fashion illustrator would seduce, inspire and transform the object of his attention into that day’s indelible fantasy.

His drawings, while ostensibly of the couture and ready-to-wear garments presented by the chicest fashion houses of the day, were immediately recognized at the time as being an absolutely new approach to his genre. His impeccable rendering skills in both the figure and the clothing formed a foundation for flights of fancy that injected narrative scenes and symbolism, wild patterns and emotional color, into otherwise familiar illustrations. These drawings transcended their functionality and truly became fine art. Everyone was crazy about them, and Lopez — along with his constant partner and collaborator, Juan Ramos — worked with the best magazines, designers and editors the fashion world has ever known.

Photographer Bill Cunningham recounts the art-making sessions, describing how “Antonio would draw. He was born with it,” he had the fire and the flair. “Juan would color, he was refined, he had taste. It was the best possible collaboration.” The men had met and fallen in love at New York’s Fashion Institute of Technology but left after a year, already in demand to work at Women’s Wear Daily, The New York Times, Vogue and, often, directly with the designers themselves. These drawings transcended their functionality and truly became fine art. Everyone was crazy about them, and Lopez — along with his constant partner and collaborator, Juan Ramos — worked with the best magazines, designers and editors the fashion world has ever known.

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Less of an academic documentary film and more of a yearbook vivant, James Crump’s Antonio Lopez 1970: Sex Fashion & Disco revisits the high and higher points of this era through archival footage and present-day interviews with many of the stars in that firmament. Among those participating are future supernovas like Jessica Lange, Grace Jones, Bob Colacello, Jerry Hall (to whom Lopez was once engaged), Grace Coddington, Patti D’Arbanville, Michael Chow, Karl Lagerfeld, Bill Cunningham and Joan Juliet Buck.

As one after another they echo each other’s recollections of heady days, elevated nights, sexual adventurism and creative intensity, there isn’t a sour note in their memories of Lopez or the time. There is laughing and, later, some deep soul crying when they have to remember that he died (of AIDS, in 1987), and their feeling of profound loss for themselves and the world is still acute after all this time.

The film delves into the intimate relationship between Antonio, Juan and Karl Lagerfeld; Lagerfeld’s rivalry with Yves Saint Laurent; and the making of Andy Warhol’s L’Amour in Paris, largely at Lagerfeld’s apartment, where the men had taken up residence. But Lopez’s proper milieu became standing “reservations” at Max’s Kansas City and Paris’ Club Sept. These were times of drugs and sex and being naked on camera and shaving your eyebrows and dancing all night and doing Paris runway shows with hookers and making art nonstop and did I mention sex? There was a lot. Like, a lot.

The people interviewed for this film all remember those as golden days of innocence and promise, not with shame but with pride. They knew then and came to even more fully appreciate that what they did together was truly special. “We were all caught up in Antonio’s dream,” they say. “You couldn’t meet him and not fall in love with him.”

“Sex, Fashion & Disco” opens Friday, Sept. 21, at the Laemmle Royal and also is available on Netflix.
Colette Art imitates life imitating art based on life in Wash Westmoreland’s bustling Colette, a Belle Epoque dish of scandal, style and eventual liberation. Its subject, the novelist Colette (played by Keira Knightley), conceived of the original in 1900, Claudine, who came of age in four once-scandalously sensual novels published early last century. Claudine became a Parisian phenomenon, inspiring young women in fashion and mores. Colette’s libertine character inspired her creator, to. So it insists Westmoreland’s film, which parades merrily through parlors and theaters, country houses and the Moulin Rouge — and finds Colette slowly moving in life toward the passions she depicted in fiction. Of course, nobody knew at the time that Claudine was hers. Colette’s husband, the enterprising author and publisher Henry Gauthier-Villars, or “Willy,” published the Claudine stories under his name. The choice was so natural for him that, onscreen, the characters don’t even really think to discuss it. A heartily whiskered Dominic West plays Willy, and in the film’s first half he and Knightley make for a thornily comic duo, but with him dominant. Colette writes for him, even when she’s not inclined to, and after the first Claudine proves a sensation, he locks her in a room to knock out pages. The film finds Colette striding into a modernity few are ready for, including Willy. As her marriage opens up, and Colette begins to take lovers of her own, Knightley summons up a moving sense of both relief and recklessness. This Colette is thrilled to have new options, but she’s committed to pushing for more. (Alan Scherstuhl)

Selling Lies

A Happening of Monumental Proportions

A Happening of Monumental Proportions, the directorial debut of actress Judy Greer, is the kind of indie pop-scored, sunny, lightweight comedy we’ve seen many times before. The slightly novel story concerns seemingly random characters whose relationships to one another are gradually revealed through a series of increasingly eye roll-inducing trials and tribulations. These include but are not limited to figuring out what to do with a dead body, dealing with office politics and, most annoyingly, proposing dick-measuring contests. These scenarios don’t add up to much, and the film feels not unlike a sitcom. The ensemble cast, featuring such capable stars as Jennifer Garner, Allison Janney and Bradley Whitford, is weighed down by stilted dialogue and an insistent avoidance of any emotional high stakes — which is somewhat weird given the aforementioned corpse. Greer has brought humor and charm to many supporting roles, and it’s a shame that little of this energy is channeled here. The film runs under an hour and 20 minutes, and with all these characters and happenings, it’s hard to get any real foothold on the action. At the end, initially disparate events come together in an amply satisfying way, but Greer would be better served by a story with a narrower scope. One that might let us actually know some of these people. It’s no spoiler to say that the happening is anything but monumental after all. (Abbey Bender)

La Noria

Life Itself

There’s an old habit among actors reading a script: Search for your character’s name and peruse only that part. But if there were ever a vivid example of why a performer should read the whole thing, it would be Dan Fogelman’s drippy, half-baked melodrama of interconnected vignettes, Life Itself. A plethora of monologues about life and love likely enticed the actors in this film — Oscar Isaac, Annette Bening, Olivia Wilde, John Lithgow, Michael Douglas, Brie Larson and more. So let us actually know some of these people. It’s no spoiler to say that the happening is anything but monumental after all. (Abbey Bender)

Emily

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La Noria

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Emily

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THE HOUSE WITH A CLOCK IN ITS WALLS

Let’s give 2018 this much: It’s the year that we finally get to see Cate Blanchett head-but a pumpkin. To be specific, it’s a bloated jack-o’-lantern, one projectile-puking seeds and pulp, a beast that’s just one of the jolly, joyful delights unleashed in the raving last third of Eli Roth’s The House With a Clock in Its Walls. Roth’s film is a funhouse throwback, a scare-the-kids goof with a top-shelf cast, an antique shop’s worth of creepy windup dolls and more heart than you might expect. Its final third is a series of inventive, funny, just-frightening-enough horror-comedy set pieces that split the difference between Goosebumps and a good Tim Burton film. Of course, in adapting John Bellairs’ beloved young-adult mystery from 1973, set in a warlock’s Victorian mansion in 1955, Roth and screenwriter Eric Kripke commit some of the usual sins of today’s kids movies. They lavish more attention than necessary on the digestive tract of the warlock’s toippy grill, for example, and hustle every along too quickly, even in the early reels. These scenes find the dictionary-obsessed, recently orphaned fourth-grader Lewis (Owen Vaccaro) sent off to live with his wild-eyed stage-magician uncle, Jonathan (Jack Black). Edward Gorey himself drew the home in Bellairs’ book, and you might guess that as you savor Jon Hutman’s splendidly cobwebbed production design. Since the movie is in such a hurry, we’re not given much chance to soak in this strangeness. Making up for it: Black is paired with Blanchett, who plays a charming but sinister, shockingly violet skirt ensemble; the two rat-a-tat insults at each other like a vaudevillian comedy duo. (Alan Scherstuhl)
Wilde, Antonio Banderas, Jean Smart and Samuel L. Jackson. But had they read the full mind-boggling script that glosses over tragedy with an annoyingly blithe c’est la vie sheen, they would have known that this film would be the Crash-meets–Collateral Beauty-false-gravitas joke of the year. There are, however, clues within individual scenes that this can’t possibly work, such as when a little girl says she “craves” stability “like a fat person craves chocolate.” Or when Abby (Wilde) spouts nonsense about how unreliable narrators are only used in horror or mystery movies. (Since when?) Or when an olive picker in Spain explains with the sincerity of a tourism ad that he picks only by hand as he is but a simple man, and it is the “right way.” We’re steeped in her mind and heart. This interior perspective makes Radner’s departure from Saturday Night Live – and much public performing – seem a relief rather than a loss. We may have wanted more but, as she attests here, she needed to discover who she truly was. The vital late passages concern the stability Radner found in the most unlikely of places: a high-profile Hollywood marriage. Gene Wilder comes across in private film footage as tender and loving, especially in scenes he shot of Radner undergoing chemotherapy in the late ’80s. She unspools the scarf from her head to reveal a short shock of hair where once had been that famous tangle. She beams at Wilder and asks how she looks, and he responds, with sincere awe, that she’s beautiful. (Alan Scherstuhl)
Women of the Gulag
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Changyou’s Journey
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A Fine Point Films production directed by Brendan J. Byrne.
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310-478-3836  laemmle.com

The Shivering Truth: Consta-Death
Sept. 21-27, 2018  Daily at 12:30 pm
Glendale
207 N. Maryland Ave.  Glendale, CA 91206
310-478-3836  laemmle.com

Monster Challenge
Sept. 24-30, 2018  Daily at 12:20 pm
Laemmle’s Town Center 5
17200 Ventura Blvd.  Encino, CA 91316
310-478-3836  laemmle.com

for an era two decades past but the film, directed by Ari Gold and co-written by Elizabeth Bull, is actually about the nostalgia the characters themselves hold for an even more forgotten time: the Jazz Age. Gold presents their memories of that long-gone era through what looks like a vintage Instagram filter and of their present day with an almost too-warm saturation — it’s someone’s idea of someone else’s reminiscence. But maybe that’s the point, since the story is centered around 20-something Ollie’s mythification of his family. Following his father’s suicide, Ollie (Rory Culkin) makes a trip to his family’s lake house with his friend Nikolai (Robert Sheehan) to steal a valuable recording, which is named for and after the location, Sway Lake. Ollie believes his father would’ve wanted him to have the 78, which was in the family for generations, as he genuinely appreciates the music. The bouncy ’20s party tune, which plays throughout, is actually great, but there’s a grating fairy-tale vibe to the film, especially when Ollie and Nikolai’s motivations are narrated through in almost “once upon a time” tone. Things get a little more complicated when Ollie’s grandmother, Charlie (Mary Beth Peil), also arrives at Sway Lake, intent on selling the record because she needs the money. Ollie, meanwhile, gets involved with a local girl, Isadora (Isabelle McNally), and Nikolai gets caught up in the Sway family history with his own, carried-away obsession with Charlie. But the most interesting character here is Marlena (Elizabeth Peña), the family maid, who puts up with semi-aggressive racism from the privileged Sways but whose storyline is ultimately squandered. (Kristen Yoonsoo Kim)
Fire Tiger want a return to the “go big or go home” ’80s

BY BRETT CALLWOOD

As we get closer to L.A. Fashion Week, an admittedly enormous event in these parts, it only makes sense that, here in the music section, we take a look at a group with a bigger-than-the-norm image. A band that care about their fashion, put some effort in. And shit, local pop-rockers Fire Tiger look spectacular. The ’80s influence on the sound has had a similar impact on the image, much to the group’s benefit.

“Personally, I’m a thrift store junkie,” singer Tiff Alkouri says. “I take clothes with hope and potential, and alter them to fit my body and style, which is always different depending on the mood I’m in. Of course, we’re always in awe of the fashion of the ’70s and ’80s. It was truly the freest, wildest time for clothing. People wore whatever they wanted, there were no limits. ‘Go big or go home’ was their slogan. It’s so easy so inspired by those decades.”

Similarly, the frontwoman’s teased hair is a gloriously OTT reminder of the excesses of the ’80s. Hair is, Alkouri says, the most important element to a person’s look.

“It can say a lot about a person right off the bat,” she says. “I love bleaching my hair, shaping it into kind of a mullet with a lot of layers. I tease it a lot with very strong hairspray. On my good days, you know right away I’m not in law school. You immediately think, ‘She might be in a band called Fire Tiger.’ Or they might just think I’m another street wanderer. As long as they don’t think I’m in law school, I’m doing my job.”

The ’80s is a roundly ridiculed decade, often considered artistically empty, soulless and entirely dependent on the baser, unsavory elements of capitalism. On the flipside, a lot of the sound and visuals were all about fun. Just pure fun. And, while people could walk around today dressed in ’90s attire and barely raise an eyebrow, the ’80s look is very distinctive.

“The ’80s was the last big time, even for music, to be big, glamorous and over the top,” Alkouri says. “It’s not just clothes. It’s clothes and music and the way people acted on the street.”

Fire Tiger formed in L.A. in 2011, Alkouri and keyboardist James Ramsey jamming with a few friends and roommates when they decided that they wanted to spread their wings — they previously had an ’80s cover band called Danger Zone L.A. Their first song and video was a catchy ditty called “Energy,” and they never looked back.

“We have an authentically retro sound, which is what we’re going for, but we’re hoping to have it break into the mainstream today,” Ramsey says. “We’d like for retro to be more accessible on mainstream radio.”

“What we mean by retro is, for me it’s high quality,” Alkouri adds. “It’s Whole Foods vs. the 99 Cent Store. When something sounds authentically ’80s, ’70s or ’60s, for me that’s like saying, that’s high quality. The top is set to the top.”

The joy of Fire Tiger is in the fact that they blend many elements of ’80s music, including, but not exclusive to, pop, hair metal and new wave. They refer to The Beatles, Michael Jackson and Rush as wider influences, as well as anything that was in the Top 40 from the late ’70s to early ’90s. They gleefully marinate in one-hit-wonders and everything that music snobs might turn their noses up at. That’s why they’re so fucking great. And there’s that wonderful band name.

“James made that up,” Alkouri says. “He wanted a double rhyming name, so he liked how A-Ha sounded. Oingo Boingo, Duran Duran, Tears For Fears. There’s no specific reason for Fire or Tiger. He just liked the way it sounded. We didn’t even know it would be permanent. Then we started moving forward with it.”

On the surface, that ’80s vibe might be all about the glitz and fun, but Fire Tiger’s lyrics display genuine depth and maturity. That makes for a compelling semi-contradiction.

“If you listen to ‘Energy,’ that’s trying to find somebody with energy to push me forward,” Alkouri says. “‘He Has Changed’ is about my mom waiting for my dad to return because he cheated on her. She’s still in denial to this day that he’s gonna come back. It’s really sad. So all sorts of things. It could be personal, but I could also put myself into someone else’s shoes. ‘Faces’ is about dementia. I have nothing to do with that but I know a lot of people do, and I was inspired to write a song about that.”

“So mostly, our songs are about subjects like intimacy,” Ramsey adds.

The subject of intimacy leads us to personal relationships, and then the band’s part in the current local scene. Fire Tiger feel extremely fortunate to be part of what they consider a blooming Los Angeles music scene right now.

“I really love it,” Alkouri declares. “When we go out, we see so many talented bands. It’s kind of depressing because I don’t know if they’ll ever get a chance to make it, or we’ll ever get a chance because there are so many talented bands and it is an oversaturated market. You are a fish in a sea of other fish. But I think there’s a lot of great talent out there, and I see it is moving forward as people go out and see these awesome bands.”

That said, the group is making moves over in the U.K. in an attempt to crack that market, following in the footsteps of other locals who succeeded overseas first.

“We have linked up with Supreme Songs in the U.K., and we’re really excited about that,” Alkouri says. “We’re going to try to shop around for label representation and anything we can get over there. The U.K. seems to understand our music style a lot more than the industry here. We have a lot of fans in the U.S. but I feel like the industry in the U.K. will be more open to the classic-rock style that we have. The Struts came out of there. Haim is a band from the Valley and, like us, they were playing up and down the Sunset Strip for a few years, and they said they never got any industry respect, so they went to the U.K. and got a record deal there. They have the pop-rock ’80s/’70s thing going on, so that shows you what we need to do. It’s a good example. We need to get out of here.”

Before that, Fire Tiger play the Viper Room this week, and they promise an exciting set.

“We’re going to have a mixture of our classic songs from the first album, Energy, along with our new album, Suddenly Heavenly,” Alkouri says. “It’s gonna be a packed house, hopefully.”

Fire Tiger play with Riker & the Beachcombers, The Gatsby Affair and Sierra & the Radicals at 8 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 21, at the Viper Room.
**MUSIC**

**GO HEAR**

**FRI 9/21**

**Savannah Pope**

@ THE STUDY

Savannah Pope doesn’t just put on a show — she puts on a full-fledged, full-blown theatrical spectacle. The local singer treats her own body as a canvas as she wraps herself up in a cloud of feathers and pearls, her face slathered boldly in artsy streaks of makeup and glitter. Pope belts out powerful vocals that are as big and brassy as her visual presentation is colorfully fantastic. As a solo performer, she continues in the same bombastic ‘80s glam-rock style as her former band Spacecream, alternating hard-rocking tracks such as “Nefarious Lothario” with the power ballad “Pterodactyl Sky” and the darkly moody “Leave Dracula Alone.” Amid the metallic riffage of her new single, “Creature,” Pope’s operatic vocals split the sky like thunder as she resolves to emerge like a brightly plumed phoenix from Spacecream’s ashes. —FALLING JAMES

**The Charlatans UK**

@ TERAGRAM BALLROOM

British indie rockers The Charlatans still have to use that “UK” addendum on the name, even though nobody knows anything about another band called The Charlatans. Whatever, the band have managed to remain remarkably active and quite prolific since their 1990 Some Friends but also released last year to some acclaim. It’s interesting that they’ve always been associated with the same Madchester scene that gave the world The Stone Roses and Happy Mondays — they were, in fact, formed in Birmingham, in the West Midlands, so geographically they’re more closely related to Ned’s Atomic Dustbin. Still, musically they share psychedelic sensibilities with their neighbors to the north, and by all accounts they still deliver live. —BRETT CALLWOOD

**SAT 9/22**

**Mavis Staples**

@ JOHN ANSON FORD AMPHITHEATRE

A lot of the great ones have already left us, which makes any chance to hear Mavis Staples in person a precious opportunity that shouldn’t be wasted. She is also that rare legendary performer who is still creating vital new music, as the 79-year-old vocalist recently proved again on her 2017 collaboration with producer/co-writer Jeff Tweedy, If All I Was Was Black. Her warm, knowing vocals recall the heyday of her family band The Staple Singers, as well as her later collaborations with Prince. But Staples and Tweedy’s lyrics decrying racism and advocating a sense of unity and community imbue these various R&B, gospel, pop and blues settings with a feeling of immediacy and relevance that goes beyond nostalgia. Blues acolytes The James Harman Band and Alex Nester also appear at tonight’s “Hollywood Blues Bash.” —FALLING JAMES

**SUN 9/23**

**Brighter Death Now**

@ THE RESIDENT

Brighter Death Now — the Swedish experimental-music concern of Roger Karmanik — has, for the past 30 years, explored the depressing extremes of the human condition previously touched upon by groups like SPK, Throbbing Gristle and Maurizio Bianchi. With albums bearing titles like Pain in Progress and May All Be Dead, understandably Karmanik suffered under the weight of his obsessions. “My whole body told me this was wrong,” he admits to this writer, adding, “But I didn’t listen ... so, I collapsed mentally. That was over 10 years ago, and I’m not fully back yet — or, maybe this is me now. Maybe this is who I’ve always been!” So you get to experience a (possibly) brighter Brighter Death Now, performing in Los Angeles for the first time ever. Can you take it?! If not, please call someone. With Birthright and Torture Garden. —DAVID COTNER

**MON 9/24**

**Traps PS, 100 Flowers, Mike Watt & the Secondmen**

@ THE ECHO

The latest album by Traps PS is aptly titled between 1987 and ’91, they’ve pretty much stuck around ever since. Influenced by established hardcore vets such as Circle Jerks and Black Flag as well as U.K. Oi! groups like U.K. Subs, Youth Brigade went on to influence the likes of The Briefs and The Nation of Ulysses. Shawn and Mark are at least as well known for creating BYO Records, the label responsible for releases by the aforementioned Briefs, Bouncing Souls and many more. That said, the last Youth Brigade studio albums came out in 1996, five years after the reunion. Boys, it’s time to get back to work. —BRETT CALLWOOD
**COMING SOON:**

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**THU. SEPTEMBER 20**
- LuNeY Tunez Presents: Dope Azz Party

**FRI. SEPTEMBER 21**
- Club 90's Presents: Emo Trinity Night

**SAT. SEPTEMBER 22**
- BRD & Butta

**SUN. SEPTEMBER 23**
- A Punk Metal Fest

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**SUN. SEPTEMBER 23**
- A Punk Metal Fest
New Chants. In an era when so many other bands are content to drag a contact high from the ancient inspirations of musicians from earlier decades and generations, this local trio stubbornly continue to create art.

Traps PS’ short, jagged noise-funk and post-punk collisions have antecedents in such groups as Gang of Four, as well as two of the co-billed performers tonight: local art-punk trio 100 Flowers, who are sometimes better known as their earlier minimalist hardcore incarnation Urinals, and former Minutemen bassist Mike Watt. But Traps PS push even those modernist influences forward in such urgent, unsettling and compulsive grooves as “Waking Hour” and “In Decline.” “We’re a figure of speech, we’re alike,” singer-guitarist Andrew Jeffords laments in “Two Voices” against bassist Danny Miller and drummer Miles Wintner’s curt rhythms.

—FALLING JAMES

Amorphis

The Finnish band Amorphis have been around since 1990 and, while their style has shifted somewhat over those nearly three decades, their desire to push the boundaries of prog metal has remained consistent. At their most experimental, in the early to mid-’90s, the group delved into the dark world of folk metal, resulting in music that sounded like medieval chanting over brutal death metal. Later, they played around with psychedelic metal, melodic death metal and doom metal, as well as straight prog metal. Always metal, always heavy, always genre-defying. Queen of Time, which came out in May on Nuclear Blast, is the band’s 13th studio album and, true to form, it features pipes, saxophone and laryngeal singing. Sometimes, you’ve got to throw your expectations out of the window and go with the flow. —BRETT CALLWOOD

DakhaBrakha

“World music” is too dry and generic a term to attempt to describe the strange and fantastic sounds stirred up by DakhaBrakha. The Ukrainian quartet prefer to call what they do “ethno-chaos.” Singer-acordionist Marko Halanevych and a trio of women vocalists adorned in black conical headdresses and colorful, arty long skirts — cellist Nina Harenetska, percussionist Olena Tsybulska and pianist/multi-instrumentalist Iryna Kovalenko — exhale a rhythmic patter of birdsong and febrile melodies. Their music might seem merely quirky at first, but you can’t help being swept away by the mesmerizing swirl of rapid-fire vocals and traditional instrumentation that — in DakhaBrakha’s deft hands — sounds anything but traditional. —FALLING JAMES

Thurston Moore & David Toop

This evening is being billed as “Free Improvised Noise Music,” which should spell things out clearly enough for those hoping to hear a few Sonic Youth classics played the way they were recorded: probably not gonna happen. Moore and Toop have worked together numerous times over the years as part of the U.K.-based Alterations, though they rarely perform together in duo form in the States. As is generally the case with improvised noise music, don’t expect a standard verse-chorus-song structure. These guys will go out of their way to create the wildest sounds imaginable. If your mind is totally open, if you enjoy the more extreme forms of jazz, you’ll find yourself among the stars. —FALLING JAMES

WED 9/26

First Aid Kit, M. Ward, Julia Jacklin

@ CHICAGO THEATRE

“You told me once I have a rebel heart,” Klara Söderberg intones solemnly on “Rebel Heart,” from First Aid Kit’s recent album, Ruins. “I believe you saw something in me that lives inside you too.” While tendrils of Klara’s guitar wrap slowly around her mournful vocal melody, her bassist sister, Johanna Söderberg, chimes in with a compulsive, yearning chorus, “Why do I keep dreaming of you?” As with so many of the Swedish duo’s folk-pop songs, their gloriously sad harmonies lift a seemingly simple tune and lyrics into something that’s hypnotic and emotionally resonant. The sisters were so full of feelings during the Ruins sessions that four extra tracks were just released on the EP Tender Offerings. Artful songwriter M. Ward (She & Him) and Australian opener Julia Jacklin stack this bill with more smart words and pop melodies. —FALLING JAMES

THU 9/27

DakhaBrakha

@ THEATRE AT THE ACE HOTEL

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MUSIC

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