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BY BRETT CALLWOOD
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PHO LEGEND
CONTENTS

GO LA...6
The Third Annual Skid Row Xmas, Yuletide Cinemeland, the Chinese Lantern Festival, and more to do and see in L.A. this week.

FEATURE...11
L.A. Weekly investigates why rising concert prices increasingly put big shows out of our reach. BY BRETT CALLWOOD.

EAT & DRINK...16
Hidden inside a Sawtelle Chevron station, the Bombay Frankie Company is the ultimate pit stop. BY COURTNEY LICHTERMAN.

ARTS...17
L.A. Louver’s exhibition of R.B. Kitaj highlights his passion and the quirks of prints as a medium. BY PAUL MAZIAZ.

TELEVISION...18
UnBinged checks how Apple TV’s offerings compare to other streaming services. BY ERIN MAXWELL.

FILM...19
NATHANIEL BELL explores the movies opening this week, including J.J. Abrams’ Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker.

MUSIC...20
Our guide to the best music shows in L.A. this week.

ADVERTISING CLASSIFIED...22
EDUCATION/EMPLOYMENT...23
BULLETIN BOARD...23

ON THE COVER:
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**FRI 12/20**

**HOLIDAYS**

**Skid Row Benefit**

Cynicism evaporates like a puff of smoke at the Third Annual Skid Row Xmas, a benefit for the homeless community that continues to burgeon throughout the greater metropolitan Los Angeles area. As communities find themselves increasingly in the thick of the dilemma — as did Dub Brothers dispensary founders Barry and Brent Walker — the call to do something about it grows increasingly louder. Speaking of loud: Tonight’s showcase performance features B-Real of Cypress Hill, no slouch when it comes to community and cannabis himself. The problem may not be solved in one night — but addressing it has to start somewhere. The Mayfair Hotel, 1256 W. 7th St., Westlake; Fri., Dec. 20, 8 p.m.; $25-50. (213) 632-1200, dolacom/events/2019/12/20/skid-row-xmas-a-benefit-concert-feat-b-real-

**ART**

**Sonic Zen**

Even if you’re a sound bath skeptic, the case can be strong for acknowledging the winter solstice and the energy of a new year with a shared experience of contemplative sound-based meditation. Whether you come to the aural light of singing bowls and symphonic gongs with a whole thing about greeting 2020 with clarified intention, or just need a relaxing vibe to make it through the holidays, Mary Frances Spencer and Gongphoria are here for you inside CFAER’s historic, creativity-filled halls. Center for the Arts Eagle Rock, 2225 Eagle Rock Blvd., Eagle Rock; Friday, December 20, 8 p.m.; $25. [facebook](https://www.facebook.com/CenterForTheArtsEagleRock/). —JHANA MY S DAMBROT

**SAT 12/21**

**FILM**

**A Christmas Cinemeland**

Heritage Square Museum marks its 50th anniversary this year. With eight Victorian homes on its property, the museum works to preserve the history of Southern California’s development from the late-19th century to the early-20th century. But the museum has more reason to celebrate this month. Hosted by Street Food Cinema, the annual Yuletide Cinemeland will have two outdoor screenings of classic Christmas movies on select nights throughout December, including Home Alone (Dec. 20), Gremlins (Dec. 21, with an appearance by actor Zach Galligan), The Nutcracker Christmas Carol (Dec. 22), Elf (Dec. 23), How the Grinch Stole Christmas (Dec. 27), Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone (Dec. 28) and Edward Scissorhands (Dec. 29). The evenings also feature tours, carolers, candlemaking, a holiday light tunnel, piano sing-a-longs in the William Perry Mansion ballroom and Victorian dance lessons in the Lincoln Avenue church. Of course, the holidays are synonymous with food, so look for food trucks selling everything from lobster rolls, tacos and kabobs to s’mores, vegetarian and vegan options, as well as an outdoor bar stocked with mulled wine and craft beer. Heritage Square Museum, 3800 Homer St., Montecito Heights; Dec. 20-29, doors 5 p.m., movies 6 p.m. & 8 p.m.; $30, $14 children, 5 & under free. (323) 225-2700, heritagesquare.org. —SIRAN BABAYAN

**CULTURE/FILM&TV**

**The Other Name Behind Disney**

Ub Iwerks co-created Mickey Mouse with Walt Disney in 1928. The Disney Legend and Oscar nominee helped revolutionize Disney film and animation, though the public knows little about his career. Walt Disney’s Ultimate Inventor: The Genius of Ub Iwerks, which son and author Don discusses today, is an exhaustive look at Iwerks’ life and relationship with Disney, first as friends in Kansas City and then as partners at Walt Disney Studios. (Iwerks even ran his own animation studio for a time, but later returned to working with Disney.) Don, a former Disney executive, includes in the book photographs, story sketches and movie posters. He also pays particular tribute to his father’s mechanical inventions in special effects, such as cameras and printers, as well as his work on several Disneyland attractions, namely Pirates of the Caribbean, It’s a Small World and the Haunted Mansion. Gallery Nucleus, 210 E. Main St., Alhambra; Sat., Dec. 21, 1-4 p.m.; free. (626) 458-7482, gallerynucleus.com. —SIRAN BABAYAN

**SUN 12/22**

**CULTURE**

**Light Up the Night**

You’ll be sure to start living in interesting times at the Chinese Lantern Festival, a celebration of all things brilliant and bright. These lanterns are more than just sources of illumination — they’re glowing beacons in sculptural form, labored over and tirelessly perfected for your entertainment and amusement. Chinese dragon lanterns! Massive python lanterns! Frightening cactus lanterns! Brought to you by the great folks at Hanart, these lanterns (some several stories tall, others interactive, all gorgeous) celebrate the simplicity of life, a concept that seems difficult to grasp — until you find out where to see how it glows. Through December 28. The Fairplex, 1101 W. McKinley Ave., Pomona; Sun., Dec. 22, 9 p.m.; $16-27. (909) 623-3111, eventbrite.com/e/magical-chinese-lantern-festival-ticket- ets-7139447001. —DAVID COTNER

**MON 12/23**

**FOOD&DRINK/CULTURE**

**Come for the Selfies, Stay for the Food**

Do we need another pop-up/selfie walk-thru? The people at Dumpling & Associates say yes, we do! Their Dumpling Pop-Up is a 90-day pop-up art experience by ZiJiM that seeks to “redefine your perception of dumplings,” with immersive experiences and backdrops inside a 5,500-square-foot space celebrating the popular Asian food item but also dumplings from other cultures (ravioli, pierogies, etc.). They hope the pop-up will conjure “optimism and inclusivity,” but judging from the groovy photos what it will mostly provide are some great pictures (the antagonism kitchen and giant soup bowl are fun). With 14 installations, this one joins the food-themed celebrations of ice cream, candy, fruit, pizza and tacos that have come to L.A. in recent years.
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years, and like those, it incorporates the real deal (food trucks) so your social media is the only thing that gets satiated. *The Row DTLa*, 777 Alameda St., daily, open through March 5, hours vary. $32, $58, showclix.com/event/dumpling/ tag/ig. —LINA LECARO

**TUE 12/24**

**DANCE**

**Dancing Through the Holidays**

The dance troupes, musical groups and singers lined up for the annual L.A. County Holiday Celebration continue to give Santa’s sleigh competition, traveling around the world on Christmas Eve with SoCal-based dance troupes, musical groups and singers reflecting cultures from around the world. Metro L.A. boasts many populations larger than anywhere outside the home country. The dance lineup this year includes Hawaiian hula from Hālau Keali‘i o Nānāi, Mexican folklorico from Pacífico Dance Company, West African dance from African Soul International, and Jung Im Lee Korean Dance Academy, plus Infinite Flow combining dancers with and without disabilities. Among the musical groups, the popular and resurgent Gay Men’s Chorus perform with their new director. Not only is the show free, parking at the Music Center is free. For those caught up in holiday prep, the show livestreams on pbsocal.org and kcet.org, along with KCET rebroadcasts on Dec. 25 at noon and 7 p.m. Music Center Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 135 N. Grand Ave., downtown; Tue., Dec. 24, 3 p.m.; free. pbsocal.org/holidaycelebration. —ANN HASKINS

**WED 12/25**

**FOOD & DRINK**

**Who Wants to Cook on Christmas?**

In case the thought of spending all Christmas Day with loved ones doesn’t exactly fill you with tidings of great joy, why not treat yourself to *Softel’s Christmas Buffet 2019*? It’s a rich pageant of Yuletide favorites like roast goose and chestnut soup — and they’re partnering with West Hollywood’s Cattle & Claw, which means you also get such soon-to-be favorites as herb-crusted halibut with lobster velouté sauce, and their take on the Beyond Burger. Top it off with a trip to the chocolate fountain, endless desserts and high-quality comfort food and you’ve got a Christmas miracle for the ages. Softel Los Angeles, 8535 Beverly Blvd., Beverly Grove; Wed., Dec. 25, noon; $65 per person, $30 for children between 5-12, free for children 5 and under. (310) 278-5444, softel-los-angeles.com/offers/christmas-feast. —DAVID COTNER

**ART**

**Do Not Phone Home**

If you’re one of those people who regard the big holiday family get-together with at least a mild sense of dread, consider taking part in this slightly classic audio performance art tradition. Jeff & Gordon’s *Not at the Dinner Table* works two ways — you can leave anonymous voice messages getting all that personal and/or political resentment off your chest in the hopes of keeping the party polite at home; or you can be a lurker, listening to a rotating selection of other people’s voicemails in search of comedy, empathy, and schadenfreude. The service is available 24/7 through January 1, in case you ever need to step outside and make a call. Call (785) 268-6858 until January 1, 2020. Jeffandgordon.net. —SHANA NYS DAMBROT

**THU 12/26**

**CULTURE**

**Storytelling Stones**

Need some quiet time after Christmas? Suiseki are Japanese viewing stones that are meant for contemplation and reflection. They’re shaped by wind, water and time, resemble landscapes, animals and people, and are usually displayed on wooden trays. The Japanese have been gathering these rocks for centuries, but the art of viewing them to help relax the mind has become popular in America. As part of its annual *Viewing Stones Shows*, The Huntington hosts Gardena club the California Aiseki Kai and the American Viewing Stone Resource Center, who’ll both display examples of their suiseki stones, in addition to hands-on activities for kids. The Huntington, 1151 Oxford Road, San Marino; Thu., Dec. 26, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; thru Dec. 30; weekends $25/weekends $29, seniors & students, $21/$24, children $13. (626) 405-2100, huntington.org. —SIRAN BABAYAN

**LITERATURE**

**Book Blow Out**

When it comes to books, the access afforded by the web can’t hold a candle to the experience of browsing about shelves and finding something new to read in real life. The self-proclaimed “creatively curated” Highland Park bookshop called Book Show has always been a destination for discovery that proved it, and its recently announced closure marks a sad sign of the times, indeed. In addition to carrying an amazing selection of vintage, used and new books, fanzines and gifts, owner Jen Hitchcock (a former L.A. Weekly contributor) threw some of the most unique local literature and wordsmith-driven events in L.A. (a “Utopian Tunnel Book” workshop, “Historia” storytelling events). The day after Christmas, *Book Show’s Blow Out Sale* offers one final op to gather and get books on the cheap. And fans fret not, Hitchcock wants to make the shop a “road show” so more is hopefully to come. Highland Park Book Show, 5503 N. Figueroa St., Highland Park; Thu., Dec. 26, noon-6 p.m.; free. facebook.com/events/553335198564481/. —LINA LECARO

**HEALTH & WELLNESS**

**PUBLISHES: JANUARY 9**

TO ADVERTISE
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The cost of attending concerts has increased dramatically over the past two decades. And, while inflation dictates that there would naturally be a steady rise, the actual increase has gone far beyond what could reasonably be expected. Here are many elements at play, and we’ll dig into them here. But what’s interesting is that it hasn’t seemed to deter the concert-attending public; rather, arena/stadium gigs and festivals are selling out faster than ever. Therefore, there’s no incentive for any of the ticket sellers or venues to do anything about the price hike. Money still talks.

A popular narrative right now is that people are no longer paying for recorded music, so bands make their money and fill that “shortfall” touring. It used to be that bands would use the tour as a loss leader to promote the new record, and sales of said album would then provide the income. Now, that’s been reversed.

VIP packages are in vogue — massively overpriced tickets that include various frills such as meet & greets, preferred seating, shirts and/or meals. But even general sale tickets, even seats up in the gods, can cost a fortune. The Fader reported that ticket prices have increased at a rate far greater than inflation: 20 percent between 2010 and 2015.

“According to trade publication Pollstar’s end of year report in 2015, the price of tickets to live music hit an all-time high that year, with an average cost of $74.25. This decreased by 2 percent in the first half of 2016, but tickets for Drake, Adele, Rihanna, Beyoncé and Lady Gaga still appeared on sale for hundreds, sometimes thousands of dollars.”

The numbers are frankly staggering, but when people are buying tickets in greater numbers than ever, when festivals such as Coachella are selling out in record time year after year, what incentive do sellers have to curb the rising prices? Of course, there is a cost, but it’s unlikely to be one that the sellers give a damn about: Bands are performing in front of thousands of the wealthy and privileged, while middle-income people increasingly have to stay away — and find other live music outlets.

Few, it seems, are turning to the local music scenes, which they can easily support for $5 or $10 per show. Rather, the numbers turning out for tribute band shows are greater than ever.

“Either unable to see these bands any longer (think Led Zeppelin or the original Pink Floyd) or the cost of seeing landmark bands that tour rarely (Rolling Stones, AC/DC or U2), fans are paying less money to see someone mimic the artists they love,” wrote Maury Brown for Forbes.

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“I think there’s a market for all kinds of bands,” she said. “There are venues that cater to original bands just like there are venues that cater to tribute bands. There’s room for everyone.”

Michael Twombly of tribute agency Music Zirconia agrees, saying:

“Does Beatlemania take away from anybody going to see the Lion King? They’re two completely different things. Nobody is going. ‘You know, I was going to go and support local music but instead I’m going to see a tribute band.’ It’s two different audiences. In Southern California, there’s 30 million people. There’s not even a rock genre anymore — there’s 40 rock genres. They ain’t hurting anything. They’re not hurting the original band either because half the time the original band doesn’t exist, or they don’t play in that area. If somebody’s a real fan, they aren’t going to say, ‘I just seen the tribute so I won’t go see the real thing.’ That’s never a scenario that’s realistic.”

We reached out to Ticketmaster to try to get some firsthand insight into perpetually rising prices, but they emailed back, “We’re unable to participate at this time.” That was fairly representative of a general reluctance among primary vendors to speak to us on this subject.

It is clear, though, that there are a number of common factors that go beyond the declining recording industry. Production values are higher than ever, with artists such as Beyoncé and Taylor Swift putting on increasingly lavish and expensive shows.

“If Taylor Swift’s $200 million-plus grossing tour sounds impressive, and cause for the artist to provide the fans she appreciates with a break in the ticket price, it’s important to note that gross and net revenue are altogether different,” wrote Carrie Whitney for howstuffworks.com. “The cost of putting on a show, from stage production to backup dancers to indoor pyrotechnics and even holograms, has skyrocketed along with the price of concert tickets.”

From dancers and holograms to interactive wristbands and Deadmau5’s Cube, performers are constantly looking to push the boundaries of what constitutes a live performance, and those spectacles cost big money.

Jeff Poirier, general manager of theater and music for Stubhub, says that certain big league artists are getting more comfortable raising their ticket prices to capture more of the available upside while trying to balance not alienating their fans.

“One of the ways that they’re doing that, for instance, is with Ticketmaster’s product Platinum Listings, where it will take the premium rows in any given section — which used to just be on the floor or in the lower bowl — take those first couple of rows and release tickets at a certain price, monitor what they’re starting to sell for in the secondary market, release another tranche to what the secondary market or true market value is, and capture more upside that way,” he says. “Now, in some ways what they do is they use that to offset lower ticket prices in the upper parts of any given venue so that, although a wider range of ticket prices, you are able to offset the lower ticket prices with the higher ticket prices to make sure you get all the different price points for your fans that you can get — you’re capturing more upside overall. So we see the use of platinum listings go up over time, but even in general, and you’ll hear this from industry readers, they do fear that ticket prices just continue to go up and up and up over time. I think some of that is realizing that artists are making more and more on tours, and they realize the value of going on tour and they want to maximize what they get for their efforts.”

Poirier says that there is truth in the narrative that people aren’t buying recorded music anymore, which has led to a need (or at least a desire) for greater upside from touring.

“I would say outside the mega artists, it is tougher for them to make a large amount of money off of streaming,” he says. “We see a lot of artists that are playing midsize, a couple of thousand or less, venues who are much more interested in leveraging Stubhub as a distribution channel for some of their inventory to make sure that they’re capturing market value, and it may not be known to the common fan but it does happen — they want to capture some of that upside because they’re not the ones who are necessarily making a whole lot of money from the streaming portion of their music. So they know they have to make as much as possible while touring, and they also know they may never make it to a point in their career where they’re filling up arenas.”

Stubhub is attempting to evolve with the secondary market, which is to say that the lines between primary and secondary are blurring. The seedy perception of the “scalper” is giving way to something more respectable.

“If I think if you look roughly 20 years ago when Stubhub was founded, there was a lack of understanding about how much access there actually was for people to go to live events,” Poirier says. “If you got on the phone to Ticketmaster and tried to get a ticket and it sold out, it was very hard to understand how you were going to find a ticket, and honestly many people didn’t feel like going and standing on street corners to get what could be a fraudulent ticket. It was a pretty big ask of people to go to live events. Fast forward to today, and you’ve got robust ticket marketplaces that are offering up a seamless way to find the event they want to go to, pay in a safe manner since they’ve found the ticket that they want, and make sure that they got the ticket and have some guarantees in place that they’ll get in the door. We’ve come a very long way.”

The number of players in the game has increased too, which has led to competition which should ultimately be good for the customer.

“I would say that, whereas there were only a couple of players in the market 20 years ago [and] maybe only one — Stubhub — that was online, today you have a multitude of marketplaces that all have a specific customer or user experience, that are competing against each other on basically experience, customer service, brand loyalty, ease of use and quality of inventory,” Poirier says. “So it’s come a really long way in the way it’s evolved over time, and these days what we believe is that we should be able to compete in a fair level playing field on our customer experience, the customer service and the quality of the product that we’re offering.”

There’s still a perception that secondary sellers are purchasing masses of tickets and jacking up the prices for resale. Poirier says that’s the narrative that gets the most press, but it doesn’t tell the whole story.

“Our U.K. business alone if you want to look at that — something just greater than 50 percent of the tickets that sell on the Stubhub UK platform are sold at face value or below,” he says. “We know that because regulations dictate that we have to have the seller input the face value that they
purchased the tickets for. Similar to that, in the U.S. we have a multitude, thousands of events, that you can find inventory for that's below face value (which, by the way, is just an arbitrarily set number). Unfortunately the press that gets the most heat I think, is when a marquee event at an arena or a stadium, it 'sells out', and then ticket prices are inflated on the secondary market. Now the question that you should also be asking is, whose inventory is that? Who's participating in the upside. I can tell you quite candidly that there are brokers that are taking advantage of that mispriced ticket, and the upside maybe captures consumer

"UNFORTUNATELY THE PRESS THAT GETS THE MOST HEAT I THINK, IS WHEN A MARQUEE EVENT... IT 'S SELLS OUT,' AND THEN TICKET PRICES ARE INFLATED ON THE SECONDARY MARKET."

— JEFF POIRIER

sellers — you may decide you can't go or for any other reasons you may decide to resell it. There are artists and there are promoters, as we know from the Metallica news that came out. So there's a whole host of people that are participating in that upside. It's not just someone like a broker.

He's right, and there are occasions when secondary sellers can be useful. Still, there are problems with secondary vendors achieving a level of respectability. The perception from vendors that concert tickets were in fact undervalued for decades, that concertgoers were essentially "getting a bargain" and that the free market will offer a fairer price, is problematic to say the least. Rather, what's happening is middle-income music fans are getting priced out of big events. And yes — sometimes the bands are in on it. Who can forget the story from the middle of the year, when it was discovered that Metallica's people were working with Live Nation to place 88,000 tickets straight onto the secondary market?

Metallica might say that they've been left with no choice; it was drummer Lars Ulrich, after all, who predicted that sites such as Napster would lead to the demise of the music industry. Back then, he was labeled greedy. Looking back, his words were prophetic. Still, their move this year reeks of milking their fans, and that stinks.

So what's the solution? At this point, it's tough to see one. Bigger artists will continue to test the waters and see just how much they can get for a ticket before people turn their backs on them. Ticket buyers need to be smart.

"Some of the more savvy ticket buyers understand that when platinum listing are now being sold for the first three rows halfway up in an arena, it didn't used to be like that so why is that happening?" Poirier says. "Some of the more savvy ones are picking up on that and sharing their frustrations, but I do think that many artists will continue to raise ticket prices. Some won't. But there will always be an event for any price point to go to. It may just not always be those marquee events for those top, top mega artists. That's really what it comes down to."

When you consider the fact that parking at large venues can easily set you back $30 to $40, T-shirts seem to costing in the region of $45, and drinks and snacks prices are equally out of control, going to see a concert is increasingly becoming out of reach for a large percentage of the population. But again, concerts are selling out so why would the industry want to lower prices? Poirier has been at Stubhub for over seven years, and he's seen the business change immensely.

"We started out as a secondary ticket marketplace," he says. "We are very much a ticket marketplace now. If you think about where inventory is coming from. Some of it's being resold, some is coming directly from artists, some of it's coming from teams, from promoters. It is a distribution channel — we're offering up fans the ability to find the events, to find the tickets they want at the price they want, purchase it, know that it's guaranteed, know that they're going to get the ticket. By offering that, we compete on basically sell-through. We want to sell through the inventory that we have for the people that are trying to sell it, so in that way we're very much a distribution channel now for a whole bunch of different people. So if I look further out, I think that will continue to become more and more apparent to people, that we are a distribution channel for tickets for all events around the world allowing people to buy in whatever currency and language that they want."

Jessica Erskine, head of brand communications at Stubhub, says that there's a rise in the demand for touring that the primary market is seeing, and the secondary market follows suit.

"As more and more see that they can capture that opportunity in secondary, that the industry is going to continue to shift," she says.

So that's where we are. Prices are unlikely to go down anytime soon — in fact, they're likely to go up until the marketplace dictates that sales will go down. Live music at large events is becoming a rich person's sport. We'll always have awesome local music, but the option of attending an arena or festival show is diminishing for the non-wealthy. And that's just tragic.
FOOD

PUMPS AND PAPADUM

The Indian restaurant hidden in a Chevron station

BY COURTNEY LICHTERMAN

There's a funny, almost palpable sense of disbelief among the diners at The Bombay Frankie Company restaurant on Santa Monica Boulevard, just west of the 405. As if having anticipated otherwise, they almost can't help but mention to the employee running the cash register how good the food is. As if having experienced this exact reaction before, he smiles knowingly and thanks them in between ringing up more customers. Perhaps the fact that this booming Indian restaurant is located in a Chevron station has something to do with the phenomenon.

Started just two years ago, in a strange way, the popular spot has been in the works for more than three decades. As kids growing up in L.A., "foodpreneurs" Priyanka Mac and her brother Hiram, along with their parents, were frequent patrons of local Indian restaurants owned by chef Kamaljit Singh. Like so many hardworking, industrious immigrants, chef Singh’s career trajectory followed an impressive, somewhat familiar pattern. Arriving from India, he started out as a dishwasher at India’s Tandoori restaurant, rose to head chef and eventually opened three of his own restaurants, including Nawab Cuisine of India and Bombay Café.

Having become great family friends with the siblings and their parents, when Singh lost the leases on his existing restaurants a few years ago, he approached the family about taking over a slice of their West L.A. Chevron station to start a new eatery. As luck would have it, the siblings had been mulling over the idea of starting a business together, although, according to Ms. Mac, whose background is in the fashion industry, starting a restaurant was "the last thing I wanted to do," saying that it seemed like a "nightmare."

Thankfully, less rational heads prevailed, and the group took the plunge together. Now a thriving operation, Bombay Frankie serves a pared-down but enticing menu that centers around frankies, an Indian street food that is essentially the Indian equivalent of a burrito. With lively Indian music playing on the speakers and a full, spotless kitchen that even includes a tandoor oven, it’s easy to forget that just outside truckers are filling their rigs.

Fresh, creative and remarkably reasonable (prices range from $9 to $13.50), the frankie served here offers a big bang for the buck. Options for the main filling include chicken tikka, tandoori paneer (cubed cheese), aloo gobhi (sweet potato with cauliflower), shahi paneer, white fish and chana masala (chickpeas). Wrapped like a burrito in piping hot thin naan, the frankie is filled with a glorious, tasty mixture of chickpea spread, jeera potatoes, red onion and mint chutney among other ingredients. The result is an unusual, satisfying mixture of tastes and textures that make it hard not to order a second before the first is even finished.

In addition to the frankie, the main fillings above can also be ordered as bowls or a la carte entrees. Other menu options include yellow pakora and besan fries, along with the usual collection of tandoori chicken, shahi tikka, tandoori paneer (cubed cheese), aloo tikkas, and collages. The menu also offers a la carte naan, the frankie is filled with a glorious, tasty mixture of chickpea spread, jeera potatoes, red onion and mint chutney among other ingredients. The result is an unusual, satisfying mixture of tastes and textures that make it hard not to order a second before the first is even finished.

Stuffed with a variety of chili-spiced fresh vegetables, the frankie is filled with a glorious, tasty mixture of chickpea spread, jeera potatoes, red onion and mint chutney among other ingredients. The result is an unusual, satisfying mixture of tastes and textures that make it hard not to order a second before the first is even finished.

The Bombay Frankie Company, 11261 Santa Monica Blvd., Sawtelle; (310) 444-9241, thebombayfrankiecompany.com.

Until then, regulars and pleasantly surprised customers will continue to crowd the tiny but bustling restaurant, filling up in more ways than one.
How can visual art change our perception or at least cause surprise? The reconfiguration of what we've come to expect fascinates and gives way to new vistas onto the world. Art allows for new and unexpected connections, understandings. It also enables us to let go of control in favor of controlled abandon, to approach and re-approach both art and life more freely, accepting cohesion and dissension as aspects of the human experience. I'm reminded of these things, visiting L.A. Louver in Venice for the current exhibition of the early collage and print works by the late R.B. Kitaj, spanning from 1964-1975.

Kitaj was a passionate maker whose early print and collage works are typified by supreme interest, vigor and humor (both dumb and intellectual) in lieu of tepid indifference. These prints and collages are gorgeously rendered, vivid in color and subject matter, and utterly singular in composition.

“R.B. Kitaj Collages and Prints” is the gallery’s third solo exhibition of the artist, the first being in 2003 soon after he’d left London to live in Los Angeles in 1997. Pleasant to look at though not quite picturesque, Kitaj seemed to have been working to obey not style so much as the logic of the picture — and whatever was required of it in the passing moment. However brooding, sexed-up or sad, Kitaj’s work favored tone over sentiment. The 1964 screenprint, Old and New Tables, captures this well. Here, divergent images and types of mark-making commingle in a single image that reflect things as various as the artist’s hand, artistic reproduction, home movies, aristocratic interiors and the nude female form. It’s something like the transcription of a dream and shows how, at least with his collages, Kitaj evaded hesitation by pulling shining things seemingly from thin air.

In another print, The Gay Science — from Kitaj’s series Mahler Becomes Politics, Beisbol — a skylight window opens up onto a cloudy, blue sky. “Up onto” is strangely accurate in describing the bewildering spatial perspective in this image, which is basically, like, a wall of colorful blue-green warehouse windows broad-sided with poems, all of which frame the top of the sky. You could look at this in enjoyment for hours and not really need to know where the poems came from or all of what they say, because the surface excitement is enough to satisfy the eye, imagination.

The prints offer the kinds of textures that the collages don’t really have, adding a new level of elegance. In the flattening out of the referenced, the drawn and the final picture, a kind of holism is achieved that’s in keeping with the collaborative spirit of the series. In fact, during this era and with many of the works in this exhibition, Kitaj worked with master printer Chris Prater to execute the prints. The medium also allowed Kitaj to be measured and planned while flirting with creative abandon.

In work like this, spontaneity is meant to turn conventional meaning on its head, revealing other kinds of realities. They’re there waiting to be enjoyed, and I think in the case of Kitaj, all we need to do is jettison the academic categories, hierarchies and expectations that get in the way of just taking a look and enjoying the show. Beginning as a painter, the practices of collage and printmaking served as an important jump-off in terms of Kitaj’s ongoing creative practice. These methods allowed him to embrace spontaneity and treat his medium as a means to collaborate with himself, freely bouncing from thing to thing — idea to idea, image to image — repurposing his own imagery as well as the imagery found elsewhere. He often appropriated fragments of earlier paintings into his prints, and this kind of reimagining is seen throughout the L.A. Louver show.

There seems to be an ongoing critical occupation with Kitaj’s literary, referential aspects. Many find his apparent erudition frustrating, distracting or presenting limitations to possible connection. But the keys to Kitaj’s art are, to my mind, exemplified in the works in this show: spontaneity, fragmentation, strange and surprising juxtaposition, and the freedom that comes from the abandonment of ordinary sense. These qualities connect Kitaj to the poets whom he loved and collaborated with, and he had good taste in poetry: Robert Creeley, John Wieners, Kenneth Koch, Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, etc. Like the poets, Kitaj draws upon all manner of sources and, through the practice of purposeful but chance-driven juxtapositions, renders new meanings by way of oblique positions. His are not at prescriptive, however referential the works may appear, but rather, they’re multiplicitous, and even democratic.

There’s an expectation that, to be able to “read” this complex work you also ought to have read what Kitaj has read, to get his references. But this kind of approach might miss out on a lot of the inexhaustible beauty that Kitaj created. Instead, it is possible to look at Kitaj’s work mainly for its surfaces, these lush and various constructions made under creative circumstances that clearly pleased him greatly. His language or vernacular is open, at play. The work isn’t only meant to be understood in the way that literature is; and the literary doesn’t fully achieve the magic of the work. Spontaneity does.

The exhibition is on view at L.A. Louver in Venice through January 25.
A s streaming services wage war for our attention, a new player enters the battlefield. Not to be outdone, Apple’s own streaming service offers a small selection of original programming featuring A-listers and top-notch talent. Putting their money where their mouth is, each production is lavish, to top-notch talent. Putting their money where their mouth is, each production is lavish, to top-notch talent. Putting their money where

Reporter Dorothy Turner (Lauren Ambrose) and husband/chef Sean (Toby Kebbel) star as a distraught couple looking for a little help after the tragic loss of their child. As a way to deal with the devastation, Dorothy gets a Reborn Doll — a silicon newborn meant to help ease the pain of loss. Nell Tiger Free is Leanne, the nanny hired to help feed Dorothy’s fantasy of denial. Silicone-baby Jericho is the unholy child of a Nordstrom mannequin and Baby Alive (Gen-Xers know her) that was conceived in an uncanny valley. But just as the audience gets used to the demonic-looking doll, the creepy baby is suddenly very real, with only Sean and his brother-in-law Julian (Rubert Grint) noticing the shift. Then another type of horror story begins.

Showrunner Tony Basgallop creates a confined atmosphere by using close-up shots of people and objects, thus creating a feeling of disjointed storytelling, which keeps the audience on edge. Shots featuring extreme focus on certain subjects and small distortions of reality convey the mania that both Dorothy and Leanne share regarding baby Jericho, but they also come off gimmicky at times, adding up to the underlying ruse of Servant: What is real, and what is a lie? Of course, we’ve come to expect these kinds of elaborate from Shyamalan and his best work pulls it off brilliantly.

With Servant, Apple M. Night mostly pull it off, providing the signature twists and turns, and toying with the audience’s perception of storytelling. But this is not for a passive viewer to watch while doing chores. Pay attention. Stay alert. And don’t trust what you are told because this tale will have more to tell before it’s over.

See | Apple TV
With its post-apocalyptic setting and fantastical storytelling device. There are many different ways man can bite the big one. The trick is to find a new way to establish this world, its rules and its people without coming off as outlandish.

See does have a decent concept as its core, but at the end of the day it relies on tired cliches for its world building, taking the story to absurd places. The characters are irrelevant and forgetful while the culture is a bit goofy. It is somehow more impressive that an unscathed vinyl of Lou Reed’s Transformer survived this rather than any part of society.

When done right, fantasy storytelling is a blissful escape, but when done wrong, it’s nonsense.

The performances are top notch, but not without blemishes. While Aniston holds her own as a veteran news anchor with issues at work and at home, Witherspoon sometimes falters. She moves in and out of her Southern drawl while painting a less than believable portrait of a small-town reporter who makes it in the big city. In Big Little Lies, Witherspoon is every inch a queen bee of the PTA. But here, her character hasn’t found her footing. The actress recently received a Golden Globe nomination for her work here, but honestly, she doesn’t deserve it nearly as much as she does for her layered performance in Lies.

Luckily, Witherspoon is propped up by a great cast. Not just from key players Mark Duplass, Billy Crudup and a magnificent Gugu Mbatha-Raw, but also from the stream of talent in colorful, smaller roles, including Brett Butler, Marcia Gay Harden, Mindy Kaling and a terrifying Martin Short. Special shout-out for Steve Carrell, who plays an aging Lothario enabled by his peers to become a predator.

The Morning Show | Apple TV
Apple TV’s flagship show reunites Friends’ “sisters” Jennifer Aniston and Reese Witherspoon in a modern All About Eve for the morning TV sect. It’s definitely fun to watch America’s sweethearts get down and dirty, throwing below-the-belt punches and tossing F-bombs like confetti. As Alex Levy and Bradley Jackson, the duo are given a lot to work with as two newscasters reeling from the fallout of a scandal on their top-rated morning talk show. They play deeply flawed characters.

Far from Elle Woods and Rachel Green, these two are frustrated, angry, sad and, at times, downright callous people who are nevertheless, just trying to stay above water. Sometimes that requires drenching each other too.

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The Morning Show is more than an hour-long with a shoe-horned political agenda. While that is part of it, it is also a look at women in the workplace, a swipe at the new age of journalism and a blow to the entertainment industry as a whole. It might not be the wake-up call it wants to be, but it’s at least as entertaining as the programs it aims to represent.
**FILM**

**CATS GETS BIG-BUDGET ADAPTION**

And *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker* caps trilogy trifecta

**BY NATHANIEL BELL**

Welcome to L.A. Weekly’s Movie Guide, your look at the hottest films in Los Angeles theaters this week — from indie art house gems and classics to popcorn-perfect blockbusters and new movies garnering buzz. Check here every week before you make your big screen plans.

**Opening wide**

Friday, December 20

*Cats* transfers the long-running — we’re talking four decades — Broadway musical to the screen in a splashy, special effects laden opus that seems destined to elevate your spirit or give you nightmares. Director Tom Hooper has attempted big Broadway before (*Les Misérables*), but not like this: digitally enhanced cat fur hugging the faces and bodies of Francesca Hayward, Taylor Swift, Ian McKellen, Idris Elba, Jennifer Hudson and Dame Judi Dench, among others. You will know after watching the trailer if you were meant for this.

The Skywalker saga comes to a decisive conclusion with Episode IX, *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker*. There’s an unusual amount of tension hanging over this particular installment following Rian Johnson’s surprisingly divisive *The Last Jedi*. Will director J.J. Abrams walk back some of the previous installment’s more controversial choices? Will Luke be brought back? Will director J.J. Abrams walk back some of the previous installment’s more controversial choices? Will Luke be brought back? Some of the previous installment’s more controversial choices?

Saorise Ronan stars as Jo, the role that shot Katherine Hepburn to stardom in 1933, and the winning cast includes Emma Watson, Florence Pugh, Eliza Scanlen, Laura Dern, Meryl Streep and Timothée Chalamet.

*Spies in Disguise* is a family-friendly animated feature cooked up by Blue Sky Studios and distributed by Disney through 20th Century Fox. Will Smith lends his voice to the role of Lance Sterling, a super spy whose gadget backfires and turns him into a pigeon. Now reliant on his young scientist sidekick Walter (Tom Holland), he must continue his duties fighting a cybernetic supervillain while cooing like a dove. Troy Quane and Nick Bruno directed.

**Limited**

Friday, December 20

Invisible Life is Brazil’s 2019 Oscar selection for Best International Film. The movie, an Amazon Studios original, is set in Rio de Janeiro in 1950. Euridice and Guida, 18 and 20 years old respectively, are sisters living with their parents. Their conservative father forces them to live apart from each other and they lose all contact. Karim Ainouz directs with great empathy for these two young women who slowly find the strength to take charge of their lives. *Laennme Royal*, 11523 Santa Monica Blvd., Sawtelle, Fri., Dec. 20, various showtimes; $9-$13. (310) 478-3836, laennme.com.

Wednesday, December 25

Just Mercy tells the story of Bryan Stevenson (Michael B. Jordan), the attorney who represented Walter McMillian (Jamie Foxx), an inmate wrongfully accused of murder. His 1988 conviction involved police coercion and perjury. Destin Daniel Cretton handles the powerful subject matter with his customary sensitivity with actors. Brie Larson plays Eva Ansley, who together with Stevenson became the co-founder of the Equal Justice Initiative.

Greta Gerwig tackles the Louisa May Alcott perennial with *Little Women*, a period adaptation of the 1868 novel about four young sisters carving out their individual paths to happiness in a society with rigid expectations for women.

Also opening on Friday, December 20: She’s Missing; Ip Man 4: The Finale; The Song of Names.
FRI 12/20

My Chemical Romance
@ SHRINE EXPO HALL

The news that My Chemical Romance were reuniting was met with fever pitch excitement from the ‘00s emo-punk fans that are most likely all grown up and out there in the real world now. So it’s no surprise that this solitary L.A. date sold out fast. Still, it’s an important event for many so it’s worth talking about (and you can probably find a ticket on the secondary market for the price of a small island). Frontman Gerard Way released a solo album in 2014, but of late he’s been far more busy working on his comic books, notably the excellent The Umbrella Academy series that was turned into an equally excellent Netflix series. But rest assured, by the time the band hits the stage at the Shrine, they’ll all be ready. —BRETT CALLWOOD

Eric Bellinger
@ THE FONDA THEATRE

Is Eric Bellinger the King of R&B? He thinks so. The Compton native has been in the music industry for quite some time, penning hits for artists like Chris Brown, Usher, Justin Beiber and many more. In 2014, he even took home a Grammy win for his work on Chris Brown’s F.A.M.E. Fast forward to 2019, he’s focused more than ever on his own artistry, proving he has the voice, the talents and the personality to hail as one of the greatest to ever do it. With each release, Eric lays his heart on his sleeve. His lyrics are filled with love and romance, two things we appreciate most in his craft. Now, he takes the stage at The Fonda to perform the classics, along with cuts from his most recent album, Saved by the Bellinger. —SHIRLEY JU

SAT 12/21

Adam Lambert
@ EL REY THEATRE

Adam Lambert has been touring the world and making a whole bunch of new friends as the de facto singer with Queen. Following the success of the Bohemian Rhapsody biopic, the world was clamoring for Queen in whichever form they could get, and Lambert did a sublime job of filling the giant gap left by the legendary Freddie Mercury. But Lambert is also a successful solo artist who has sold over three million albums and five million singles in the past decade. He has a new album, Velvet: Side A, on the way, no doubt another collection of flamboyant glam-pop gems which will please the thousands of glamberts out there. Lambert is perfect for Queen, but he can more than cut it on his own too. —BRETT CALLWOOD

Natalie Gelman
@ THE HOTEL CAFE

Folk-pop singer/songwriter Natalie Gelman says that she has a California heart and an NYC soul, and both coasts come across in her sharp, poignant tunes. Back in August she told us that, “I put a ton of heart into my songs and lyrics and my performances so that’s a big aspect of my music as well... there’s a lot of grit and soul. A lot of people tell me that my music is authentic and honest. I have been through the wringer a bit in my childhood and with my family and I put it all back into the songs. Some of my biggest influences are Jewel, Patti Griffin and Sheryl Crow and that gives you a good idea of what my vibe is.” Sounds perfect. —BRETT CALLWOOD
SUN 12/22

Ariana Grande
@ THE FORUM

While you might not want to take Ariana Grande with you on your next visit to a donut shop, there is no denying that the 25-year-old singer possesses a big, powerful voice that belies her tiny physical stature. Unlike her early inspiration Mariah Carey, who also has an awe-inspiring vocal technique but rarely seems to know how to rein it in, Grande is adept at using her talents more persuasively. On Grande’s latest album, Thank U, Next, the singer revels in lust, longing and desire with such seductive idylls as “Break Up With Your Girlfriend, I’m Bored” and “Needy.” In recent years, the former child television star has developed into a more nuanced artist exploring feminist themes, although her inviting 2018 single “God Is a Woman” is a relatively faint echo of The Ringling Sisters’ 1994 riot-grrrl anthem “God Is a Girl.” (This pick originally ran May 2, 2019.) —FALLING JAMES

Machine Girl
@ 1720

This one’s going to be lively. Brooklyn’s Matt Stephensen, aka Machine Girl, has remixed and produced all manner of artists, but he’s more than capable of putting on a wild and frenetic show. This one’s going to be lively. Brooklyn’s Matt Stephensen, aka Machine Girl, has remixed and produced all manner of artists, but he’s more than capable of putting on a wild and frenetic show. While you might not want to take Ariana Grande with you on your next visit to a donut shop, there is no denying that the 25-year-old singer possesses a big, powerful voice that belies her tiny physical stature. Unlike her early inspiration Mariah Carey, who also has an awe-inspiring vocal technique but rarely seems to know how to rein it in, Grande is adept at using her talents more persuasively. On Grande’s latest album, Thank U, Next, the singer revels in lust, longing and desire with such seductive idylls as “Break Up With Your Girlfriend, I’m Bored” and “Needy.” In recent years, the former child television star has developed into a more nuanced artist exploring feminist themes, although her inviting 2018 single “God Is a Woman” is a relatively faint echo of The Ringling Sisters’ 1994 riot-grrrl anthem “God Is a Girl.” (This pick originally ran December 20, 2018.) —FALLING JAMES

TUE 12/24

Randy Emata
@ THE FEDERAL BAR, NORTH HOLLYWOOD

Similarly, soulful pop singer Sarah Lightman will be performing on the Universal City Walk on Christmas Day, if you want some live music between the feasting. —BRETT CALLWOOD

THU 12/26

Hookers & Blow
@ WHISKY A GO GO

Guns N’ Roses keyboardist Dizzy Reed doesn’t like to take a break, apparently. He’d rather play a few shows with his jam/cover band Hookers & Blow, alongside Quiet Riot’s Alex Grossi, Type O Negative’s Johnny Kelly and W.A.S.P.’s Mike Duda, among whoever else happens to be available. As the name suggests, this isn’t an intricate prog-rock side project, but rather an excuse to musically kick back and indulge in some big dumb fun. Expect a whole set of rock & roll covers (Elton John’s “Saturday Night’s Alright For Fighting” was released as a single), and songs associated with the musicians’ main bands. Sure, Reed isn’t many peoples’ fave Gn’R member, but this is still a cool opportunity to see one of them in an intimate setting. (This pick originally ran December 20, 2018.) —BRETT CALLWOOD

MON 12/23

CeCe Winans
@ WALT DISNEY CONCERT HALL

“Best-selling. “Most-awarded.” That’s a real weird headspace to be in when you want to turn yourself on to some gospel music—but CeCe Winans is ultimately just a lady singing to God, who probably doesn’t really need the praise, but just likes hearing her sing. Hers is a voice that is rich but simple. Direct but not brutal. You can be brutal when you’re singing about The Lord, believe me. Yet Winans is anything but graceless—as seen recently on the CMA Christmas Show, where she sang a bunch of Christmas songs, which you’ll probably hear tonight. And why not? You go to tonight and it’ll be like when that Crusader tells Indiana Jones after he drinks from the little cup that turns out to be the Holy Grail: “You have chosen wisely.” —DAVID COTNER

CeCe Winans
12/23

THE FORUM

There isn’t a lot to choose from on Christmas Eve, but Randy Emata will be crooning at the Federal Bar if you feel the need to get out of the house and avoid the last minute gift wrapping. You’re welcome. —BRETT CALLWOOD
All purchases over $100 from November 29 - December 31st, 2019 qualify for a Pleasure Check. Offer cannot be combined with any other offer or discount. Valid only on in-store purchases under $1000. All Pleasure Checks are redeemable through 3.31.20.