COVID CAN'T STOP TRAP GIRL AND THE LOCAL FESTIVAL, AS THEY RETURN IN VIRTUAL FORM

ECHO PARK RISING ... AGAIN

BY BRETT CALLWOOD & LINA LECAO
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COVID can’t stop the local festival, as it returns in virtual form

BY BRETT CALLWOOD • COVER PHOTO BY HENRY ZAVALA

While it feels like a blessing that some form of the Echo Park Rising festival is going ahead, it’s very clear that the annual event is going to be very different in 2020. For starters, it’s just the one day -- Saturday, September 26. And then of course there’s the fact that the whole thing will be effectively crowd-less, livestreamed to our homes from the various Echo Park venues.

Still, the spirit is intact: a ton of local bands, venues and businesses will join forces to offer a multi-channel day of top local entertainment. Self-produced commercials will be streamed between the performances, encouraging viewers to make purchases from those businesses including but not limited to carry-out/delivered food. Meanwhile, while the event is free, bands will accept donations.

So yeah, it’s very different. But much is the same: It’s still being produced by volunteers and, in many ways, it’s reliant on the goodwill and generosity of the community. Under incredibly challenging circumstances, it looks like we’re being presented with an event worth “turning up” for and supporting to the best of our individual ability. From a musical perspective, EPR continues to shine lights where lights deserve to be shone.

One such group is East L.A. band Tropa Magica, formed by brothers David and Rene Pacheco out of the ashes of local faves Thee Commons.

“The band started a few years ago,” says David. “We originally started off as another band called Thee Commons, and then we decided to expand our sound, and added more musicians. That was around 2018.”

Rene says that, while the siblings are still the core, the sound is very different.

“I would say we’ve stepped aside from the psychedelic cumbria to expand some of the soundscapes that David has brought into the mix,” he says. “It’s sort of like garage rock with a symphony in there.”

Lockdown has been difficult for the men, as it has been for pretty much everyone. Rene says that it’s been tough to feel part of any “scene” when stuck at home. Not impossible, but hard.

“There’s a lot of disassociation with people, and there is a scene but it’s all online if any,” he says. “But other than that, yeah I feel like we’re part of something. The way that some people express their gratitude towards the group, I feel like we’re part of a scene in East L.A. Like, ‘Oh my god, you guys are doing it.’ When [lockdown] first happened that was scary for all of us. As it went on, everybody was kind of ok. It’s weird but it’s not the super-panic that it was at the beginning. But after that, I was cancelling weekends and just staying inside to work. If anything, now I just don’t have FOMO [fear of missing out] because I know everybody is staying home.”

Tropa Magica has remained productive during lockdown, putting out their new vinyl album - Tripiando al Infinito en Mi Recámara - on September 4.

“We mixed it and mastered it over quarantine, and sent it out to get pressed,” says David. “We started a promotional campaign towards it, and that’s actually what we’re going to be promoting at Echo Park Rising in our set -- this new album. But yeah, we’ve stayed really productive. Rene is creating customized doodles for the vinyl sleeves. We did all the artwork for it over quarantine.”

The band will be presenting songs from the new album during their EPR set, as they attempt to generate some of that missing crowd energy by themselves. They’ve enlisted the help of violinist Kaitlin Wolfberg to bridge the gap.

“As far as capturing the dynamic of it, it’s something that we’re just going to have to work through with it, “ she says. "Other than the tour and Transgress Fest, we had a private show. A couple wanted Trap Girl to play at their wedding, which was so weird, but they paid for it. So, we had a very busy month, right before COVID, and we were very lucky to blow our wad. The last jerk. Then COVID started and no one was playing shows anymore.”

In addition, Arriola-Sands tested positive for COVID-19 in April; she works in healthcare, literally on the frontlines, and an uncontested outbreak led to her, and a number of her colleagues, testing positive.

“It was very scary, and I got very ill,” she says. “I was under the supervision of doctors through my phone and FaceTime. That obviously put Trap Girl on hold. In a way, I’m still recovering. It wasn’t until last month that we started doing

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stuff again. We did our first show online. It was funny because it was pre-taped. I’ve learned that a lot of these streaming shows are not honestly 100 percent live because they need editing and stuff. But it was so good. The main band was the Yeah Yeah Yeahs.”

Arriola-Sands tested negative in late June, and has had four tests, every other week, since then -- each one negative. She’s ready to go with this virtual version of EPR, with fond memories of previous years in her mind.

“We had a blast last time,” she says. “It was funny because we were last, on at midnight. The band before us, I’m not going to say who it was, but they were doing shitty AC/DC covers. I was like, ‘everybody’s gonna leave.’ But they got done and we went up, and everyone wanted to part and hang out. They wanted heavy, hardcore punk music. From the first song, everyone went crazy. I had to push guys off the stage. The crazier the crowds are, the happier I am. There was alcohol everywhere and I had a blast.”

This time, they have to find that energy themselves, which Arriola-Sands admits is a challenge.

“If we want to continue performing, then we have to adapt,” she says. “The first livestreamed show, we just did two songs. This time, we’re doing a full set and it’s harder because I was against getting filmed. Because I want Trap Girl to have an air of mystery. That allure has helped Trap Girl be what it is. To be filmed for 30 minutes and be able to see that home -- it’s a sedated beast I guess you could say. Rather than standing in front of me and have me spit on you and fall to the ground. Grab you and scream in your face. It’s different.

Trap Girl’s Transwomen and Chokeholds EP came out in December. They’re working on a full-length album, but the lockdown has slowed down work on that. Arriola-Sands is working on a solo album, and that will probably come out sooner. As for the set, who knows what to expect? They certainly don’t.

John Tejada of festival headliners Wajatta is a professor at CalArts, and he’s been spending much of lockdown expanding his teaching by producing online content for other schools and teaching sites and working on some solo music. It’s been, he says, an oddly productive time. This will be his first Echo Park Rising experience in any capacity, and his set with bandmate Reggie Watts is highly anticipated.

“We’ve had some shows trying out different tech and ways to play the songs over the last 2 years,” Tejada says. “Just before the pandemic we ended on a method we felt worked really smoothly and gave us lots of options to be spontaneous during the set. So, it will be really fun to play the set now that we feel we’ve finally settled on a great fit and chemistry.”

Also excited is Dublab artist Callie Ryan, who actually got started in electronic music by listening to Dublab.

“I grew up in a very musical family, primarily musical theater,” Ryan says. “My father works in film, so I was always very close to creative outlets. I grew up in Los Angeles, so I at the time was very passionate about the label Anticon, and I still am. That was my gateway into this world of music that was pushing the sonic boundaries that I had been introduced to previously. Then when I went to college, UC Santa Cruz, I studied experimental electronic production, and delved very deep into just sound and the amazing ability that sound has to move us emotionally but also on a physical level. I’m very interested in bodily systems and the ways that sound can overlap with our internal systems.”

That’s actually really interesting. Since she was young, Ryan was faced with a lot of body sensitivity issues and she used music as a means to explore and deal with them.

“One of the things I was very sensitive to was sound in the sense that it was very comforting and supportive to me,” she says. “As I explored that more and more, I thought about the ways that sound can affect different bodily systems. It can calm us, it can make us feel overwhelmed, so many different emotions. For me specifically, a lot of the inspiration for my music comes from experiences I’ve had with my body.”

That sense of peace, of soothing, comes across in her music, and other people are finding the same sense of support that she achieves herself through the tunes.

“I think a lot of people who have reached out to me who listen to my music also have body sensitivities and move through different physical challenges, and my music has felt supportive to them,” Ryan says. “That’s my goal and my hope -- my music can be a space for people moving through difficult or vulnerable situations whether that’s emotional or spiritual.”

Ryan has DJ’d at Echo Park Rising before and, though she accepts that it’s going to be very different this year, she’s still sure that represents something special.

“I think it’s a really exciting time, and it’s the activation of Echo Park and the surrounding area,” she says. “When you walk down the street, there’s so much going on. So many different kinds of music are represented. It’s just a special time for people to curate events that highlight local artists.”

As for her own set, Ryan wants to offer people music that makes them feel warm, supported and safe during this difficult time.

“Even though there won’t be that face to face interaction that I’m used to at DJ and live performances, I’m hopeful that the music can connect us, and the sounds can feel supportive,” she says.

For the full Echo Park Rising lineup and all of the information, visit epr.la.
CULTURE

BEDROCK LA AND ECHO PARK BUSINESSES SEEK TO RISE ABOVE PANDEMIC

BY LINA LECARO

It’s an understatement to say that businesses in Los Angeles are struggling during the Covid-19 crisis, and sadly, it’s the creative ones that continue to suffer the most. Music and nightlife, bars and clubs, plays and movies have all been restricted or shut down. And Festivals? Forget about it. Large gatherings that are not necessary (or history-changing, such as protest events) simply aren’t worth the safety risk. Like other fests we’ve seen move online the past several months, Echo Park Rising is going virtual this year. This effort deserves your support, maybe more than any other online event pivot so far, as it’s put on by the businesses for the businesses in need themselves.

EPR usually marks the busiest week-end of the year for Echo Park-area shops, restaurants and creators. The four-day event brought thousands to the area with local bands, artists and merchants from the Echo Park Chamber of Commerce participating. One of the biggest has been Bedrock LA, a neighborhood Mecca for rehearsing, recording and inspiring local music-makers. Founded in 2009 by three musicians who believed there was a better way to provide creative space, the Eastside landmark features 40,000 square feet with multiple rooms of air conditioned facilities, providing a “sound sanctuary” for those who seek one.

“We’re a working-musician kind of place,” says proprietor Kamran V. “It’s clean, friendly and things work. It’s not fancy but we’ve had everything from Weird Al’s #1 selling, Grammy Award winning album ‘Mandatory Fun’ to local piano teachers paying $10/hour for a solo room to teach piano to a young child. We love it that we can serve such a wide variety of customers.”

With a giant mural that the owners claim was done by the band D Did That rehearsing at Bedrock.LA, “I'm very proud to be a part of such a fine group of people respectfully and safely rehearsing in the #3 seller of guitar strings in Los Angeles, obviously curtailed things to say the least. V calculates about 2,500 musicians per week came through pre-Covid. Bedrock was also the #3 seller of guitar strings in Los Angeles, just behind Guitar Center and Sam Ash. “Things are different now,” he says. “We just partially reopened a few weeks ago. [We’re] still far from breaking even on our costs of...
doing business, but it is really nice to see people respectfully and safely rehearsing and attending this event. We hope that fans of Echo Park Rising really put their full support into the businesses working to stay open and remind people that artists are businesses too.”

In addition to Bedrock.LA, planning partners at EPR include Gil Cedillo, Mitch O’Farrell, Community Partners, Department of Cultural Affairs, Echo Park Chamber of Commerce, The Echo and Echoplex, iam8Bit, Lassen’s, Mohawk Bend, Spacecadet Presents, Studio Number One and Taix (look for a special “Memories from Taix” piece on LAWeekly.com coming out during fest).

Donate to Echo Park Rising at https://paypal.me/echoparkrising (Proceeds will be shared with each member’s businesses).
SIX-MONTH ANNIVERSARY EDITION PANDEMIC PICKS

It's the six month anniversary of California going into lockdown so we look back at the biggest jump in legal weed smoking ever

BY JIMI DEVINE

When I first started doing The Pandemic Picks as a joke on Instagram to keep things lighthearted through all this perpetual misery, I didn’t think the pandemic part would have us all on lockdown smoking as much weed as we have. Now, this set of selections essentially serves as the tenth edition all these months later, or The Pandemic Picks X as I’ve been waiting to say in Roman numerals.

To keep the picks accessible, everything on the list is currently available on store shelves around greater Los Angeles. There’s one exception that is just all hyper, but you’ll probably be able to smoke it once, once it gets into full circulation.

Here are the Six-Month Anniversary Edition Pandemic Picks!

Your Highness - Lemon Mints

Who doesn’t love the idea of an amazing kush dipped in Lemons? Nobody reasonable, that’s for sure. Our first offering comes to us from Your Highness. Their rendition of Seedy Junky Genetics’ Lemon Mints is simply must-smoke locally grown pot. It’s almost a more chipper version of the Kush Mints #11 that was paired with Lemon Meringue Cake to create it. If you see it on shelves act quickly, Your Highness said they keep access points to their products extremely limited by only selling to the high wattage dispensaries like Cookies, Jungle Boys and Dr. Greenthumb.

Humboldt Terp Council - Triple OG

The Sherman Oaks crowd currently has access to some of the best concentrates The Emerald Triangle has to offer with Humboldt Terp Council’s Triple OG. The Terp Council is famed for its preservation of all unique terpene profiles growing up north. While the exotic flavors they’ve refined are something special, well done OGs have some of the highest impact and best effects of any good concentrate. The council also just announced they’re joining the Rosin revolution and you’ll be able to pick up some solventless dabs from them soon. Be sure to take it easy on the first one if you’re not a big dabber and just buy a Puffco Peak or Focus V CARTA if you don’t want to look like you’re freebasing weed. No judging here, except at the BHO world championship at The Emerald Cup, I judged that. But I’m not judging “you,” because God knows what planets I’ve visited via electronic dabs.

Curated Cannabis - Mendo Breath

Curated Cannabis is another local killer where the weed doesn’t make it out of town. In a market filled with a lot of middle-tier products, dispensaries are scooping up every drop as soon as it’s available. One buyer from up north told me they basically had no chance of getting their hands on it because the L.A. demand was so great. With a killer phenotype of Gage Green Group’s Mendo Breath, it’s easy to see why people are so excited about the chunky nugs they use. Mendo Breath has a wild lineage that includes some of the best Purple from back in the day and OGKB, a famous fire version of Cookies that was rescued by grower NorCal_ICMag, a separately fascinating tale. The phenotypes of Mendo Breath in production these days have been refined over the years. Some of the best smell like a minty or pine breakfast pastry with fuel noted on top. You can scoop some Mendo Breath at Erba Markets, Herbarium and DC Collective. There are a couple of spots in Malibu with it too.

Compound Genetics x Runtz - JOKERZ

We recently had the opportunity to visit the Compound Genetics mothership at Node Labs to see the results from a greenhouse pheno hunt of over 1,200 seeds. We hinted at the visit in the Strains of Summer but it was still all too overwhelming to reminisce on in that moment. Now, after thinking back on the 60 or so jars that made it to the next round, the biggest winner was JOKERZ, and you have to put it on your radar immediately. The new strain brings together White Runtz and Jet Fuel Gelato, and it’s no surprise the combination of two of the biggest cuts of the moment is an absolute savage. We found five phenotypes that were particularly off the chain. The #54, #4, #86, #79 and #36. The #36 was the gassiest of the bunch and arguably our favorite, but they were all so special that it’s really difficult to make the call. Compound is doing a ton of crazy collaborations these days. Expect to see other big-name genetics continue to be paired with their stable of rockstars. JOKERZ is hyper exclusive and hyper exotic at the moment, but at least I told you where you can buy all the other stuff on the list!

Broke Boyz - LemonBars

One of the more uplifting options in this lineup is certainly the LemonBars. According to popular California hypefluencer Got-Bars510, the LemonBars “is a Lem oncillo cross grown for me, with a little taste of Got-BarsOG, that’s where the name LemonBars came from.” One of the exciting parts about the strain is the limonene heavy terpene profile making it through the full sesh. And as always, we’re smoking for all tax brackets here at L.A. Weekly. LemonBars is one of the most competitively priced options on the list.

Bloodwalker - LA Kush

While LA Kush’s Bloodwalker has seen many moons since it first started placing on podiums a few years back, it’s a heater that any dispensary would want on their shelves to this day. Among the strain’s accolades was a runner up spot at Chalice in 2017 for Best Indica. Anyone who got credit in the twilight of the medical market at those events should certainly still be wearing the feather in their cap. The Skywalker OG x Cherry Pie cross takes flavor notes from both parents. That is likely what helped the judges make up their minds. But just for bonus points, the sprinkling of orange hair is very California. So if you’re looking to switch it up from LA Kush’s popular red and blue box pheno of dank kush, check out the Bloodwalker for something different but up to par.

Sin Mint Cookies - Pearl Pharma

One very exciting addition to the legal marketplace is Pearl Pharma’s pheno of Sin Mint Cookies. The strain is an effort produced by Sin City Genetics that brings together Girl Scout Cookies and Blue Power, another of Sin City Genetics’ big name cuts. So it’s basically the GSC crossed with what was previously their most famous strain before the Sin Mint dropped. I first saw it in California in concentrate form before the regulations killed the sesh scene. The AGM Farms version was one of the only dabs I ever bought twice at different events. Pearl Pharma’s flower justifies the hype from yesteryear. It’s slightly below top shelf pot and in the price bracket to match. The nugs aren’t stiff, but they hide a lot of the cookies’ aroma until you break them up. You can pick up Sin Mint Cookies at MMD in Hollywood, many Catalyst locations, and Hazel in Encino.

ILLcohol 99% Isopropyl Alcohol - Adam ill

Many of the usual options for buying bong cleaning supplies have run dry as the pandemic continues to decimate the global supply of Isopropyl Alcohol. But fear not, Secret Sesh host and general pot personality Adam ill has you covered with his new official ISO. He’s even tossing in a little free salt for his biggest fans. You might see it run ten bucks cheaper online for this quality of ISO, but it looks like a lot of those places have sold out just like drug stores. And they don’t have the extra 1 percent of clout found in ILLcohol.
When Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D, New York) and Senator Ed Markey (D, Massachusetts) introduced a Green New Deal legislative package in 2018, like so many historically visionary proposals it was branded as ambitiously naive, impractical, too far “left,” and whatever else the Congressional establishment could think of in a backlash to its threat to the status quo. In fact, the foundation of its ideas and even its name had been around for decades by then, slowly gaining traction and a presence on progressive platforms as widespread awareness has continued to grow.

Now, just two years later, politics and global meteorological instability being what they are, its core tenets have gone pretty much fully mainstream, if not always the GND brand name. For example, cities demonstrating a commitment to vital pedestrian and public transportation infrastructure, construction credits for renewable energy elements, jobs programs tied to invention and retrofitting, organic and sustainable farming, veganism, tree-planting, urban gardening, intersections with race and class, the vital role of education initiatives and direct actions, and more.

Amplifying these evolutions, a gorgeous new book from Creative Action Network, Sunrise Movement, and Workman Publishing, Posters for a Green New Deal celebrates and advances these tenets through the language of art, with the aim of furthering awareness, enthusiasm, inspiration, and way to think about these urgent issues and the dire consequences of inaction that is inclusive, empathetic, and eclectic.

Much as the old WPA programs employed artists, photographers, and writers to chronicle and canonize the original New Deal for America’s infrastructure-based jobs and economic recovery that helped pull us out of the Great Depression. And in fact, many of the artists in the book channel a certain retro-futurist utopianism in their aesthetics which hearken back to the sleek and jaunty style of that original era.

With 50 artists’ unique voices, the full spectrum of posters ranges from the throwback to the modern day, with street art, crazy font design, landscape painting and bouncy surrealist, illustration, conceptual schematic and architectural scenes, psychedelic solutions, cribbed advertising language, upbeat almost children’s book energy and more adult and even dire sensibilities, fantasy, fable, and pure poetry. Each image is accompanied by evocative prose explaining the specific facet of the issue under consideration and an explanation of the path forward -- which also makes the book a teaching tool for anyone who needs it, which is everyone.

At a hefty 11x14 inches, and with 50 removable plates, the book is a really satisfying object as well as a source of mindful decor. And don’t worry, the volume itself is as eco-friendly as its messaging; it’s Forest Stewardship Council-certified, printed on satiny, substantial paper made from responsibly sourced wood fiber, and using surprisingly luscious non-toxic, soy based ink. Because as important as the message is, it’s just as important to lead by example.

Find out more, get a copy, and get involved at creativeaction.network.