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MARCH 27-APRIL 2, 2020 / VOL. 42 / NO. 19 / LAWEEKLY.COM

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# CHASING THE LIGHT

BY LINA LECARO





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# MOVIE NIGHT AT HOME

L.A. Weekly's watch guide to help you survive the lockdown

BY CHUCK WILSON



John Turturro, Bobby Cannavale, and Audrey Tautou in *The Jesus Rolls*

Sure, we're all stuck at home but that doesn't mean we can't go to the movies — we can do it from the couch. Our screens, through cable and on-line on-demand services, are filling by the day with brand new movies (including early releases of biggies like *Emma*, *The Hunt* and *The Invisible Man*). We took a look at the latest. You stocked up on popcorn, right?

## The Jesus Rolls

Resplendent in purple, John Turturro stole the show in the Coen brothers' *The Big Lebowski* (1998) as Jesus, a ball-licking master bowler prone to a proclamation: "Nobody fucks with the Jesus." Twenty-two years later, now writing and directing, as well as starring, Turturro brings the Jesus back for an amiable remake of *Going Places*, a provocative 1974 comedy starring a young Gerard Depardieu. Newly released from prison, Jesus and his hapless friend Petey (Bobby Cannavale) hit the road and proceed to charm but mostly antagonize an array of

eccentrics, played by scene-stealers such as Pete Davidson, Audrey Tatou, Jon Hamm, J.B. Smoove and Christopher Walken. There's a sweet sense of Turturro relishing the chance to let his actor pals cut loose, but he's saved the plum role for Susan Sarandon. As a newly minted ex-con whose deep currents of sensuality and melancholy affect Jesus and Petey's entire way of being, Sarandon proves anew that for a great actor there are no small parts.

## Swallow

In whatever form it ends up being presented, in movie theaters or on home screens, the film year is unlikely to see a performance as richly complex as the one Haley Bennett gives in *Swallow*. She plays Hunter, who spends her days planning the perfect dinner for her handsome, entitled husband (Austin Stowell), who is reflexively attentive but doesn't really see her. One day, not long after discovering she's pregnant, Hunter eats a marble. As she swallows it down, she smiles, joyously. (She's been reading a book

called *A Talent for Joy*, and suddenly, here it is hers.) Hunter continues eating random objects — a thumbtack, a Duracell battery, a safety pin. In a stellar feature debut, writer-director Carlo Mirabella-Davis presents Hunter's condition as an illness, yes, but also, gradually, as a source point for a rebellion that's been a lifetime in coming. It's a strange and thrilling journey.

## Human Capital

Scene by scene, line by line, this remake of the 2013 Italian film, *Human Capital* (based on the American novel by Stephen Amidon), does everything right. The ace cast is a pleasure to watch, Owen Moverman's script is literate and Marc Meyers' direction elegant, and yet, after a strong first half, the movie sputters, like a lit fuse with too little powder in the line. Liev

es, and later a newborn baby, are left by unseen masters. Philip Murphy's inventive production design proves to be more satisfying than the third act plot twists in this *Black Mirror*-esque thriller from Irish director Lorcan Finnegan, but the soulful chemistry between Eisenberg and Poots makes up for the story's shortcomings.

## Resistance

For the stirring *Resistance*, Eisenberg honed his miming skills to embody the legendary Marcel Marceau, whose work helping to rescue Jewish children as a member of the French Resistance during World War II is explored dramatically for the first time. A reluctant fighter, Marcel comes to realize that his instincts as an artist make him the perfect person to literally take frightened children in hand and lead them to safety. Working on an epic scale, writer-director Jonathan Jakubowicz sometimes bites off too much story, as in the extensive screen time spent on the domestic travails of Nazi barbarian Klaus Barbie (Matthias Schweighöfer). One longs to see more of Marcel, whose lead-with-love response to the cruelty Barbie represents should prove a lasting inspiration for moviegoers young and old.

## Lost Transmissions

"Are you counting my blinks?" asks Hannah (Juno Temple), an aspiring L.A. singer-songwriter who finds herself in the home of Theo (Simon Pegg), a once-famous music producer. You'll wonder at first: Is Theo looking for talent or quick romance? Happily, first-time writer-director Katherine O'Brien brushes aside tired notes of movie romance in favor of an evocative exploration of platonic friendship, which finds the chronically depressed Hannah setting aside her own pain to help Theo, who suffers from schizophrenia. A film that feels meandering for a good long time — stick with it — *Lost Transmissions* packs a wallop in the home stretch as Pegg, in a revelatory performance, digs deep to reveal the unfathomable pain of a man who can't stop searching for the "Princess of Time."

## Hooking Up

This low-budget comedy about a potty-mouthed sex-addicted magazine writer (Brittany Snow) persuading a shy artist (Sam Richardson) to go on a road trip in order to reenact with her every sleazy sexual encounter she's had in her life (a long list) looks and sounds really dumb but... it's not bad. Snow and Richardson make a terrific team and as actors, are too honest to let the sexual hi-jinks — which include a fireworks warehouse and souvenir shop sex — tip their characters into the realm of the silly and unreal. First-time writer-director Nico Raineau and co-writer Lauren Schacher definitely get lost in the weeds of ennui when it's time for their lead characters to confront their respective truths, but the Snow/Richardson spark carries the day. On a dark night of quarantine despair, you could do worse.

Schreiber, a wonderful actor forever in search of a great movie, is Drew, an upstate New York real estate agent who puts all his assets on the line in order to invest in a hedge fund run by Quint (Peter Sarsgaard). Drew longs for Quint's high-style life, one that Quint's wife, Carrie (Marisa Tomei), meanwhile, feels trapped within. Told from three viewpoints — Drew, Carrie and then Drew's daughter — this is a class warfare melodrama with no bite. A beautifully acted disappointment.

## Vivarium

The adventurous actor Jesse Eisenberg has two films opening this week, and they couldn't be more different. In the visually vivid *Vivarium*, he co-stars with Imogen Poots as a couple enticed to tour a new suburban community where all the houses are uniform and there's not another human in sight. That should have been a clue to flee but instead, the duo find themselves trapped. Every attempt to exit leads them back to their new home, where food box-

# A PODCAST HAT TRICK

Hrishikesh Hirway's third podcast, *Partners*, may just get you through the lockdown

BY BRETT CALLWOOD



Hrishikesh Hirway

PHOTO BY JAKE MICHAELS

PJ Vogt & Alex Goldman



PHOTO COURTESY OF MAILCHIMP

Anyone familiar with *The West Wing Weekly*, the podcast co-hosted by Hrishikesh Hirway that saw him discuss Aaron Sorkin's wonderfully idealistic *The West Wing* one episode at a time alongside former cast member Joshua Malina, will be very aware that he has an extremely calming voice. Our chat (on the phone of course), as the world seemingly grinds to a halt, only confirms this. It's actually a bit of a shame, then, that listeners don't get to hear his voice on his new podcast, *Partners*. Unlike *The West Wing Weekly* but like his first home run *Song Exploder*, Hirway edits himself out of the conversations with the interviewees, so they take on more of a Ted Talk–kinda feel. The approach works — really well in fact — but it's still a shame. Oh well, we'll have to re-listen to *The West Wing Weekly* for those soothing Hirway tones.

*Song Exploder* has been a tremendous suc-

cess. At the time of writing, there are 180 episodes which see musicians delve deep into just one song, taking it apart and discussing the inspiration, the creative process, the production — everything. Artists as diverse as Slipknot, Fleetwood Mac, Yo-Yo Ma, St. Vincent, and The Roots have been “exploded,” and each episode offers fascinating insight.

“I usually tell people to listen to one by an artist they love, and then one by an artist they have never heard of,” Hirway says. “Listen to both, then you can get what's the same in both episodes and you'll understand what the show is.”

The great news is that all of the episodes of *Song Exploder* and *West Wing Weekly* are available to listen to right now. The former is ongoing, while the final episode of the latter was recently recorded. *Partners* makes three, and that's particularly comforting during these worrying times.

“I'm torn between trying to read every single

piece of news and the updates, trying to learn everything I can, and then going 180 degrees in the opposite direction trying to think about something that is absolutely not that,” Hirway says. “So I think that for better or worse, the *Partners* podcast has nothing to do with current events and it's just about close relationships. To me, I feel like in some ways it's a good antidote in that way, especially if people are feeling apart from people who they are normally close with. It could be nice to have a show that's about closeness.”

So *Partners* sees Hirway speak to two people who have been in a lengthy relationship, though not necessarily a romantic one (usually not, in fact), and discusses how they've made it work. Early episodes focus on Samin Nosrat and Wendy MacNaughton (author and illus-

a little surprisingly, that his inspiration came from an old Billy Crystal rom-com.

“There are the scenes in the movie *When Harry Met Sally* — in between the story of Harry and Sally, there are these older couples that tell the story of how they met,” Hirway says. “I love that part of the movie. I love those different characters and the little glimpse you get into those relationships. I had thought for a long time that I would listen to a podcast that was just that. That was one part of it, and then there was a feeling that I had that any partnership — any business or collaborative relationship or anything like that — those are all kinda love stories too, even if they aren't explicitly acknowledged as such.”

It looks like we're all going to be on lockdown for the foreseeable future, shut in our houses with our partners and spouses, perhaps for longer than we ever have been before. Many people in L.A. have modest-sized homes, without the luxury of a room to themselves. Friction is inevitable, and Hirway believes that *Partners* can help.

“That is absolutely the main ingredient of the show — how did you figure out how to coexist with each other,” he says. “What did you have to learn about how the other person operates? Podcasts, in some ways, give you license to do things you are not normally licensed to do if you just want to talk to people about stuff. So this is my way to live out my path-not-taken life of couples therapy. It's not just a story about individuals. The thing that makes it work between them is yet another entity that lives between them. The partnership is its own kind of shape.”

With two successful shows in the bag, and *Partners* very much looking like being a third, one has to ask — in such a crowded pool, how do you go about creating a successful podcast?

“I'm looking to try and answer a question that I think doesn't get asked or hasn't been answered yet,” he says. “I guess I feel like, if it's something that I'm deeply curious about then I have to hope that other people are too. I used to teach a workshop on how to start a podcast and I used to ask the people to think deeply about the question of why they are making this show. What could you do to convince someone who has no vested interest in you to listen? Specificity is something that I think helps a lot. Podcasts have a reputation for being niche content, and I don't think that's at all a bad thing because it means that if you can find the people who are interested in that content it can be really powerful for them to be able to connect with something that they care about in that way. That's the thing I've tried to do myself. Make things with as much of a specific vision as I can. The more you can bring to it that is unique, then the better off you are for carving a place out for yourself.”

Seems to be working out.

Go to [partners.show](http://partners.show) for all of the info about where to listen to *Partners*.

trator of *Salt Fat Acid Heat*), Kevin Systrom and Mike Kriger (co-founders of Instagram), Rachel Bloom and Aline Brosh McKenna (co-creators of *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*), and fellow podcasters PJ Vogt and Alex Goldman. Future musical episodes include sisters Tegan and Sara, Jeff Tweedy from Wilco and his collaborating son Spencer, while the next episode after publication of this piece is Rafael Casal and Daveed Diggs (*Hamilton*) — best friends who co-wrote and are co-starring in the movie *Blindspotting* together.

“They're best friends and collaborators across music, theater, poetry and film so it's an interesting partnership because it's gone on for so long and stretched across so many types of projects,” says Hirway.

The first season will consist of eight episodes, most of which are already recorded. The creator says that he wanted to make sure they were all very different from each other. He also said,

# SHOPPING FROM HOME

Angelenos are turning to delivery services during lockdown

BY TARA FINLEY

As restaurants are temporarily shuttered and grocery stores resemble a scene from an apocalyptic film, Angelenos are having to rely on alternate services for sustenance. Twenty years ago, the impact of COVID-19 guidelines on our daily lives would have been much different, leaving us cut off from services, forced to make do with whatever skills and ingredients we had. Thankfully, the year is 2020, and from grocery and food delivery to meal-prep and cooking kits, Los Angeles is adjusting to its new normal of indefinite restrictions as imposed by Governor Gavin Newsom and Mayor Eric Garcetti in an effort to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

While these new rules are meant to preserve and protect lives, local businesses can't help but feel the negative effects. Restaurants and family-owned establishments need our support now more than ever, but for many of us facing coronavirus-related furloughs and layoffs, the money to frequently order to-go just isn't there.

Many food delivery services have seen a dramatic increase in customers, especially giants like Amazon and AmazonFresh, as Angelenos rush to order whatever pantry-fillers they can.

"We believe our role serving customers and the community during this time is a critical one. We've seen an increase in people shopping online for groceries and are working around the clock to continue to deliver grocery orders to customers as quickly as possible," an Amazon spokesperson told *L.A. Weekly*.

Produce delivery service Farmbox Direct experienced a significant swell in customers. Says founder and CEO Ashley Tyrner, "as of Saturday, March 14, we have seen the number of orders double day after day."

The company is working hard to meet the demand created by COVID-19 stay-at-home orders. "We have added two extra shipping days and a second shift to our workforce," said Tyrner.

She is grateful for the growing demand, as it enables workers to remain employed during this difficult time, saying, "we are thankful for this rapid growth, as it is allowing my distributor the ability to not lay people off. This shift is taking people who would have been laid off and strategically repositioning them to a different shift and function to keep up with volume."

For those that want to eat healthy but balk at the idea of cooking, meal delivery services like Territory Foods are partnering with local chefs to provide nutritionist-approved feasts to Angelenos stuck inside. Los Angeles Territory

Foods partners include Cafe Gratitude, chef Terri Wahl, Marbled L.A. and more.

As of last Friday, the meal delivery service's sales were up 120 percent as people began to prepare for the inevitable coronavirus shut-down. Already, L.A. is their second largest market — over a million meals a year ordered, with a surge in demand for plant-based, low carb offerings.

Their team spoke with *L.A. Weekly*, giving tips on how to ensure your delivery food is safe for consumption during the coronavirus pandemic: "As with your choice of takeout provider, be sure that meal delivery services you are choosing are taking all the necessary precautions to assure your health and safety. Read any correspondences they are disseminating via email or social media or visit their website for information and updates," says Frank Curto, former employee of USDA and head of quality and regulatory at Territory Foods.

"Additionally, since many of these services are providing food ingredients in the form of 'meal kits' many of the ingredients and components require further preparation therefore, extending a portion of health and safety responsibility to you, the consumer. Be sure that you are practicing good food handling and hygienic practices during the storage and preparation of your food," furthers Curto.

Like many others, Territory Foods has moved to a delivery-only model in adherence with Newsom's guidelines. "Our commitment to delivering safe, high-quality, delicious meals remains unchanged," assures CEO of Territory Foods Abby Coleman.

"Due to the closures of gyms, where our customers could pick up meals, we have now implemented a 'delivery-only' system. All Territory Foods meals are delivered directly to our customer's door — touch-free and no trips to the grocery store needed. We are working closely with our delivery partners to ensure we take all measures to reduce any exposure risks. Territory provides the foundation for healthy eating and healthy living. I believe in this as much for my own family as I do for our Territory community. These values are more important now than ever before, and we're proud to be able to serve our communities."

From takeout to grocery delivery and meal kits, Los Angeles is seeing an exponential increase in options that fall in line with coronavirus-era prohibitions. Take care of yourself and protect your community by staying home and taking advantage of all that L.A. and the app store as to offer.

MARCH 27 - APRIL 2, 2020

VOL. 42 // NO. 19 // LAWEEKLY.COM

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Autumn de Wilde



# CHASING THE LIGHT

*Emma* director Autumn de Wilde brings a vibrant beauty to film

BY LINA LECARO

She's one of the most recognized names in photography, having shot unforgettable images of musicians and fashion figures, but Autumn de Wilde became a photographer totally by accident. It wasn't her intention

to follow in her father's footsteps. Jerry de Wilde — known for his iconic shots of Jimi Hendrix and the Monterey Pop Festival in '60s — did show his daughter the basics, but she never sought formal education or looked at it as a career path. Capturing

the world around her was a more organic pursuit, and it became a passion with time and encouragement from her friends — some of whom just happened to be beloved rock stars. After many years making a name for herself with her images, she moved on to music videos and promotional films for major fashion houses, capturing designer looks in the sumptuous yet whimsical, narrative way that became her signature, and led her to the biggest moment in her career: directing her first feature film.

De Wilde's vibrant new version of Jane Austen's classic *Emma* was released a few weeks ago, and the directorial debut was enjoying great reviews and healthy box office numbers. Then our world suddenly changed. Even before movie theaters closed down across America due to mandatory orders, people were starting to stay home to protect themselves as fears of the COVID-19 pandemic grew. While most of the country continues to self-quarantine, we

are all struggling to entertain ourselves and looking for escape. Early video on demand releases of films like de Wilde's *Emma* are exactly what we've all needed. This movie in particular whisks us away from the woes of contemporary reality and offers a glimmer of joy and impish fun that is truly a gift right now.

The long-term impact of COVID-19 on the movie industry remains to be seen, but de Wilde's work on *Emma* is sure to lead to more cinematic explorations either way. Her ability to tell a story with pictures is evolving, and that's exciting. Hers is an L.A. success story too, though not in the cliched way. Her talents weren't "discovered," they were developed and they were inspired by the creativity she's always immersed herself in. We know this because we saw it happen firsthand.

Born in New York, de Wilde grew up in Silver Lake, and this writer recalls that she always had art-minded passions when we both attended John Marshall High School in Los Feliz. We were part of the same circles, performing in a couple plays and musicals together at school and even sharing a brief stint in a band formed by some of the drama department's students. Despite being quite tall, Autumn was always graceful. She was heavily into dance as a teen and took ballet for 14 years, which gave her a serene presence that was always pleasant to be around. She was one of those people everyone liked, and you just knew that she would go on to do something really interesting with her life.

"I always took pictures of my friends because that's what we do in my family," de Wilde tells us at the Four Seasons Hotel before *Emma*'s big premiere. "I cherished the photos my dad took of his friends in the '60s, so I did the same."

"When I photographed someone, I tried to show them what I thought was amazing about them," she continues. "Or I was trying to make sure a moment wasn't forgotten, that something they did that was incredible would not be forgotten. So those people often felt the love that I felt for them from those photos."

Indeed, her subjects felt the love and de Wilde's photog gig work started to blossom via word of mouth recommendations throughout the L.A. music scene. It started when she shot her friends in the popular Silver Lake band Whiskey Biscuit, who back in the '90s lived in an old Victorian party house, hosting jams and hangs that de Wilde documented like only a close friend could.

She also took photos of her pal Beck at Lollapalooza back in 1995, and after the tour he liked them so much he asked for more. "He was like 'would you come take pictures of this thing, then that thing...'" she recalls. "I remember one time I said, 'I'm not a real photographer,' and he said, 'stop saying that. You are a fucking photographer!'"



Mia Goth (left) as 'Harriet Smith' and Anya Taylor-Joy (right) as 'Emma Woodhouse' in director Autumn de Wilde's *EMMA*. A Focus Features release

© FOCUS FEATURES



Josh O'Connor (left) as 'Mr. Elton' and Tanya Reynolds (right) as 'Mrs. Elton' in director Autumn de Wilde's *EMMA*. A Focus Features release

© FOCUS FEATURES



Beck



Elliot Smith

ELLIOT SMITH AND BECK ARE BOTH COURTESY AUTUMN DE WILDE

Elliott Smith was another champion that de Wilde says encouraged her early on. "He wouldn't do a video unless I directed it," she says. "So that was my first directing opportunity. I didn't pitch it, he just said he wasn't doing it unless I directed. I thought 'oh shit, I better bring it.'"

And bring it she did. If not for the trust of these two groundbreaking music artists, she says she might not have done so, or even be where she is today. "It got me through tough times," she explains of the pair's influence. "I couldn't always pay my bills. Not everybody believed I could do it. But in my head I thought, well Beck believed I could do it

and Elliott believed I could do it. That was my fuel through the hard times, so I'm very grateful."

While making *Emma*, de Wilde confides that she even had a few moments when she broke down, thinking about her departed supporter Smith and the encouragement he gave her to work early on. "Making this film, there were a couple moments where I was just like — 'I wouldn't be here without him seeing what I didn't see right away in my work,'" she shares.

In a beautiful, reciprocal kind of way, Smith and de Wilde contributed to each other's legacies. The pair's most famous

collaboration is probably Smith's *Figure 8* album cover taken in Silver Lake in front of a local music store on Sunset Boulevard just down the street from Thomas Starr King Middle School, which de Wilde attended. When Smith died, that wall became a memorial to the singer, and later there was a huge uproar when it was removed. It cemented his memory for a lot of people — in L.A. and beyond.

During the interview, we reminisced about the Silver Lake we both grew up in. These days, the area, especially along the Junction, looks very different. Most of the cool indie

shops of our teenhoods have been replaced by high-end boutiques, chain stores and trendy juice and cold brew hubs. The creativity and color that always felt so deeply woven into the fabric of the neighborhood — that drove us both to want to tell stories in our own way — is harder to find, but it's still there. It's just different. And there's always something in the mix to bring everything full circle, whether it be driving by the Soap Plant, or catching a film at the Vista, or seeing a giant billboard for de Wilde's *Emma* hovering above Sunset.

De Wilde says that her environment has definitely been an inspiration for all that she

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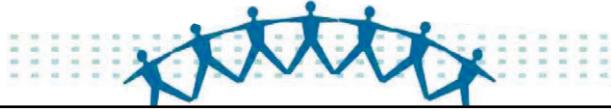
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does. “I’m so grateful that I lived in a part of town that was not dominated by one type of person,” she says. “There’s no real ruler of our roots. We were exposed to so many different types of people and cultures. I didn’t have to learn later about why I should open my eyes.”

“As a photographer I learned how to pretend I was anywhere in the world by piecing together parts of L.A.,” she goes on. “Think of it like a giant set with all the props mixed up. I think that knowledge of L.A. as my set and as a storytelling tool, and learning how to harness the light like a beast... that kind of light study I had living in Los Angeles was an awesome opportunity.”

In some ways de Wilde has been “chasing

**“I’M SO GRATEFUL  
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ROOTS.”**

— AUTUMN DE WILDE

the light” her entire career, and not just in the technical photographic sense. Her work with fashion houses Rodarte and Prada, for example, showcased each brand’s beautiful creations on gorgeous models. These were more than eye candy; they were experiences that injected fantasy and a sort of blissful, airy brilliance into the mix. Whoever thought of de Wilde to helm the *Emma* project when it was being pitched a couple years ago knew exactly what they were doing. Her attention to detail and her ability to capture nuance of character beyond the surface, incorporating her subject’s surroundings, thoughts and expressions, made her a perfect fit.

“Autumn has a wonderful aesthetic sense,” says producer Graham Broadbent, who notes that de Wilde also really understood the high school prism through which Emma (played by Anya Taylor Joy) looks at relationships. “That makes these relationships feel quite contemporary and accessible and fun.”

Of course Austen’s classic about a 19th-century privileged girl who fancies herself a matchmaker has been explored cinematically before, and via the modern high school perspective (Amy Heckerling’s 1995 hit *Clueless*). Then there was the more traditional period piece starring Gwyneth Paltrow back in 1996. Both were memora-

ble in their own way and both might come to mind briefly while watching de Wilde’s *Emma*. But in all the ways that matter, this is its own film, and as many have noted, that is mostly thanks to de Wilde’s direction, which utilizes audacious hues, intimate angles and yes, the all important light, to help envelop the viewer in Emma’s world. There’s also plenty of feel-good moments and laughs. The producers view this version as a screwball comedy, and according to writer Eleanor Catton, “most of the best moments came out of trying to make her [de Wilde] laugh.”

“Jane Austen transformed the idea of the novel with *Emma*, so making this film felt like an opportunity to learn — which is always high on my list above success,” de Wilde tells us. “I have sort of an obsession with the community of formality because when I was growing up, when I should have been going to punk shows, I was watching Fred Astaire movies. I was just obsessed over Hepburn and Grant and like, *Bringing Up Baby*. And so those were my heroes in junior high and that was the place that I escaped to. Period films were always important to me.”

While we became friends after she had come out of her shell a bit, Autumn did always seem to have an affinity for the past, something which she obviously infused in her work. We lost touch after high school, but her success as a photographer and video director — working with the likes of Florence and the Machine, Jenny Lewis and Jack White — was always on our radar. Years later — because L.A. is a small town when you’re a creative — she had a daughter with this writer’s second cousin, local drummer Aaron Sperske (Beachwood Sparks, Father John Misty). That little girl ended up becoming a rock star herself and now tours the world as lead singer of the band Starcrawler. Yes, mom directed one of the band’s videos, and yes it’s awesome.

On video and film, playing with color and light to create a sense of time and place are two of de Wilde’s most notable gifts. They are, she notes, “great storytelling tools,” and her ability to build layers and make her subjects both appealing yet relatable has served her well. Back in Emma’s era, “color was how you expressed yourself,” de Wilde explains. “It played a role in position and class. Historical pieces don’t always show that. I was making a satirical piece so I used a lot more color.”

“These characters are so human, so iconic and so familiar,” the filmmaker says of the players in *Emma*, but she could just as easily be talking about the old movie actors who inspired her as a kid, or the rockers that helped put her on the map — or even herself. One thing is for sure: She knows how to convey all three and that makes everything she does shine, whether she’s in the light or not.

# CORONAVIRUS AND CANNABIS

“Every single day has been busier than 4/20”

BY JIMI DEVINE



PHOTO BY ADD WEED ON UNSPLASH

Nothing in the brief history of legal marijuana has ever spurred sales quite like coronavirus preppers, and now a week after its record day, the industry looks back at a wild run of days and wonders what the future holds.

Last Monday, it quickly became apparent that as word of pending lockdown orders started to spread across California consumers were rushing to dispensaries. Unsure of what would happen to the cannabis supply chain in that moment, they bought huge amounts of pot.

“Every single day has been busier than 4/20,” an employee at People’s OC dispensary in Santa Ana told *L.A. Weekly*.

We spoke with cannabis industry data miners Headset the day after to see if they had picked up anything across the data points they cover in California. They said they did not see sales jump quite the same way they do on 4/20 — but it was close. Sales last Monday in

California were 56 percent higher than the preceding four Mondays.

But Headset’s data only cover so much of the market. Many retailers we called said Monday was the biggest day of their existence, whether they were a couple of months old or a couple of decades old. The pace of how well business kept up through the week varied from dispensary to dispensary, but many did awesome.

“Over the latter half of last week and into the weekend we saw the winds shift dramatically in some states,” Headset’s founder Cy Scott told the *Weekly*. “The stock-up behaviors demonstrated early last week cooled off by the weekend, especially in California.”

Scott noted Headset saw sales nearly double normal volumes on Monday the 16th and Tuesday the 17th. However, as shelter-in-place orders took effect over the weekend, there were fewer orders and sales dipped below normal levels. Sunday sales were down about 15 percent compared to an average Sunday for stores that remained open; that dip excludes

the many stores that temporarily closed their doors.

Weedmaps data confirmed these trends as their online ordering platform saw record numbers. In a week-over-week comparison, they observed a 207.25 percent increase in the number of orders placed during the week of March 16 in comparison to the previous week. Weedmaps also observed a 191.33 percent increase in the number of orders placed this past weekend in comparison to prior one, on the eve of lockdown orders starting to pick up steam.

In fact, Weedmaps experienced the highest number of orders placed through the site in the company’s history last Friday. At the end of the day, they were at 235.75 percent of 2019’s

everything so wild. “We had a lot of traffic and people buying up, but how that translates into the following weeks we’re not really sure yet. Nonetheless, we’re just glad to be able to remain in operation,” he said.

We asked Beck about concerns around the industry after last week’s records. They believe it might be tough times ahead as consumers’ cash reserves start to dwindle, with no end in sight for when people will be able to return to work. “I think that’s a realistic thing for every essential industry, not just cannabis,” Beck replied. He pointed to the reality of the impact of what is happening right now on Americans that live paycheck to paycheck.

Over at Caliva’s lineup of dispensaries, things are also going great.

“So far in March our delivery business is seeing double-digit growth. We have seen an increase in our delivery services across all of our locations, with record breaking sales over the past two weeks,” Caliva president Steve Allan told *L.A. Weekly*. “We know that many cannabis users rely on our products and services for their ongoing well-being, so having a delivery option that can continue to service them during these unprecedented times is something we’re proud to keep up and running, of course with the safety of our own employees and our community front of mind.”

Allan said sales have increased for all of Caliva’s most popular products, including Caliva top sellers such as Dogwalkers, Reef Leaf, and our DELI by Caliva Ounces and Quarters.

The National Cannabis Industry Association pointed to the sales spike as clear evidence of how essential cannabis is to many American consumers.

“The sales spikes we saw around the country in cannabis businesses over the last two weeks is indicative of a combination of factors, including the fact that it is actually essential to the health and wellness of many consumers, coupled with the uncertainty of continued availability as the pandemic response progresses and intensifies,” NCI’s media director Morgan Fox told *L.A. Weekly*.

Fox believes the fact that an increasing number of state and local governments are either declaring cannabis businesses “essential” or facilitating continued access in some form is a great sign of the legitimacy and acceptance of regulated cannabis providers. He said that it also shows the recognition of cannabis itself as a valuable medicine, therapeutic product and safer alternative to alcohol.

“Early assurance on the part of the authorities that at least limited legal access will continue can go a long way to alleviating any further panic buying or stockpiling, which could create unsafe conditions for everyone and supply problems for patients,” Fox said. “Failure to allow some form of legal access will almost certainly push some consumers into the illicit market, where they will be exposed to untested and potentially harmful products, obtained under unregulated and dangerous conditions.”

4/20 figure.

“With a little over a week left in March, we’ve already seen a 73 percent increase in unique customer orders than in the entire month of February,” Weedmaps’ communications director Travis Rexroad told us.

The longtime providers at Alternative Herbal Health Services in West Hollywood were thrilled to see the city and state take active steps to preserve the cannabis supply chain by declaring dispensaries essential, but their main concern is with the most at-risk populations they provide medicine. According to AHHS owner Jason Beck, it was also fair to say they also rode the wave of consumers statewide rushing to secure longer-term supplies of marijuana than usual.

“Our main goal is that we’re open and we’re providing services to our most vulnerable and most needy members of the community,” Beck told *L.A. Weekly* before speaking on last week’s sales bump. Beck pointed to the combination of long-term supply and foot traffic that made

## ART

# GETTING CLOSER THROUGH THE SOCIAL DISTANCING FESTIVAL

Ensuring art will continue to flourish and inspire during lockdowns, in L.A. and across the globe

BY SHANA NYS DAMBROT

uKhoiKhoi  
Indigenous Electro  
social distancing  
festival



About two weeks ago, I noticed a curious new account in my Twitter feed. It came seemingly out of nowhere and had the most intriguing name: the Social Distancing Festival. This was during the early days of keeping ourselves separated, before the full Safer at Home set of orders came through here in Los Angeles; people in the local and indeed the global arts community were already getting hit with waves of canceled trips, concerts, events, stage productions, screenings, readings, performing arts tours and gallery openings.

One of those creatives is Nick Green, a playwright based in Toronto. He writes plays and musicals, and his production *In Real Life* (with composer Kevin Wong) was canceled due to the need for social distancing. “It was tough. This

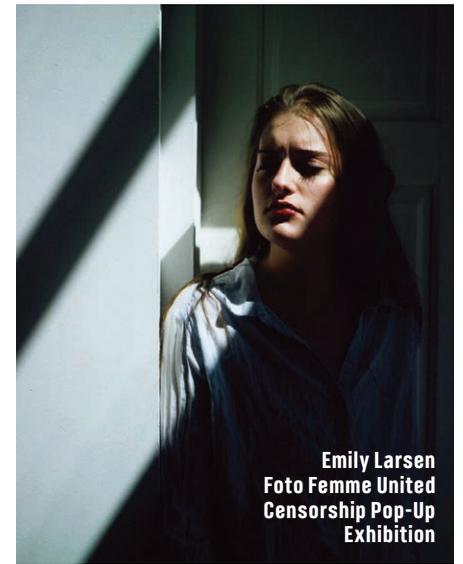
was a show that we had worked on for a long time, and we really don’t know what the future holds for this show,” Green admits, echoing the worst fears of many thousands of artists in the same situation.

As Green tells the *Weekly*, and again like so many other innovators in the arts, it wasn’t long before hopelessness turned to inspiration. “It got me thinking about all the artists out there who are experiencing such loss and disappointment, and how badly we all need something that will keep us motivated, optimistic and connected to one another,” he explained. “And that’s when the idea came to me.”

The idea behind the Social Distancing Festival is both quite powerful and fairly straightforward — send Green the links and materials from your COVID-19-canceled and quaran-

ted arts projects and, if everything is order, the SDF will amplify them. Across Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and through scheduled streaming events at their main website, this earnest and lovingly curated platform offers everything from dance companies to gallery shows and musicals to monologues, poetry and performance art. There’s also an “old-school” chat room on the site called the Beer Tent and a list of internationally-based arts relief resource organizations.

Prior to this project, Green had worked as a writer with a few publications, particularly writing about lifestyle and food, and maintained a personal blog called ...and Fabulous. “It was totally embarrassing but I was so proud of it back then!” he says. “I was familiar with how to design and maintain a website through that. In terms of social media, I can’t say I was



Emily Larsen  
Foto Femme United  
Censorship Pop-Up  
Exhibition

Florence, Tasmania, Spain, all over the U.S. and of course throughout Canada, where the arts scene is incredible.”

The submissions have represented nearly every discipline of art you could name. There has been visual art, dance, opera, classical music, theater, music, film and different aspects of spoken word. Green and his team of artists sort through submissions with empathy and curiosity, primarily focusing on work that was disrupted or canceled by the need for social distancing. They ask that people share a bit about their story in their submission, about the work that they put into the project, and what plans they had for it before everything changed.

The overall quality of submissions are impressive, but Green admits that a few have really caught his eye. The composer behind the musical *Grow* (music: Colleen Dauncey; lyrics: Akiva Romer-Segal; book: Matt Murray) sent a video of her singing one of the newest songs of the show. “This was a very anticipated musical being produced at the Grand Theatre,” Green says. “The song is stunning!”

He also received a dance video from an artist in Dar es Salaam named Tadhí Alawi. He had been planning on traveling to Ireland to present this dance video and a new piece before it was canceled. “He has few opportunities to showcase his incredible talent, and I love the piece,” says Green.

A textile artist named Jane Sanders in Newcastle Upon Tyne, U.K., also submitted some of her work, which had lost its exhibition. Green totally fell in love with it. “She makes the most amazing textile portraits using her sewing machine with felt, fabric and unconventional materials like newspaper and old cigarette cards. I want one in my living room!” he exclaims.

“These are hard times,” Green continues, “and I think it’s going to take a while to recover. We can’t forget to support one another. We have to motivate and encourage each other. Give hope. Be generous and supportive. And share other people’s art with the world.”

Check out [socialdistancingfestival.com](http://socialdistancingfestival.com) for more information.

any sort of Twitter aficionado. I’ve maintained a solid 350 followers on my Insta account, posting mostly shots of the same four friends and baked goods. It’s been quite something to see how social media operates when people are talking about what you’re doing. I’ve got a (younger and cooler) colleague named Matt who is largely running it for me now.”

Well, it’s good he has some help because SDF has been getting pings from every corner of the world. Green finds the response surprising, but also kind of not. “I’ve been an artist all my life, so it doesn’t surprise me at all that people are responding so quickly and with such passion,” he says. “It is a close, tight community and we don’t like to see each other hurting. That said, I didn’t expect the response to be so far-reaching. I’ve connected with artists in Amsterdam,

# 420 SPECIAL ISSUE

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