Connecting in the Coronazone

How the pandemic has changed L.A. dating culture

by Michele Raphael
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With everything non-essential canceled and closed and social-distancing at its peak, dating, like much else, has moved into the virtual world. In L.A., where the weather and nightlife always beckon, it is particularly challenging. Safer-at-home rules prohibit getting up close and personal with new people outside of your quaranteam, and though no one will know if you do so, singles have to ask themselves if the risk is worth it. Right now, playing it safe while playing the field means forging connection via other means — texts, phone calls and video chatting.

“I never thought phone sex would be exciting after the age of 13, but now it is starting to look enticing,” says Vanessa Johnston, a West Hollywood-based bisexual stand-up comedian and host of the Sooo Aggressive podcast. “Quarantine dating has given me higher standards because I have to actually talk to the person. But I have gotten a lot of really bad pick-up lines like, ‘If corona doesn’t take you out, can I?’ and, ‘Are you the coronavirus? Because I want to take you around the world.’ You can tell who the bad guys are because they still try to hang out even in quarantine.”

While many singles in L.A. are taking a complete break from the dating scene, others are trying to have fun with virtual courtship and using technology to spice up the experience. Online dating sites and apps like Tinder, Bumble, Hinge and OK Cupid are busier than ever in the age of “coronazoning.” Yes, a slew of new terms and pandemic dating trends like this one has emerged and they’re likely here to stay until a COVID-19 vaccine is found. A popular meme defines coronazoning as “engaging in flirty, romantic and/or sexual conversation with someone you have no intention of dating once social distancing is over, solely because self-isolation is leaving you bored and lonely.”

As casually meeting up for coffee at Blue Bottle, Hugo’s or Urth Cafe or planning a fun cocktail night at El Coyote, The Formosa or The Pikey (sadly shut down as a result of COVID-19 losses) are out for now, getting to know someone new the old-fashioned way — very slowly before actually meeting or having physical contact — is becoming the new norm.

“It’s weird because I’ve suddenly realized I’m missing human touch,” observes director Elizabeth Blake-Thomas. “Dating is totally over.” On the plus side, she says, going virtual “means you can spend much longer getting to know someone without that pressure of a first kiss. The worst is not being able to feel a real connection and know if you really do like someone.”

If you don’t find love, reading updated dating profiles and bios on Tinder and Bumble will keep you laughing, at least.

“I haven’t changed my bio, but I have seen some clever updates, and the guy who posed sexily with the Clorox wipes got a right swipe,” admits Christina Parish, an executive vice president at an entertainment marketing research firm in Burbank. “And, ridiculously, my interest in dating has exponentially increased with the quarantine. Spring fever cannot be denied!”

The reality is that dating is much more challenging than it was before. Not only are singles worried about getting sick (or infecting others) but the crushing feelings of isolation and apocalypse can naturally dim desire. Love or hookup interests that started before lockdown have fizzled for many with an uncertain sense of future possibilities. When saddled with additional responsibilities like homeschooling, seemingly endless Zoom meetings, or caring for sick family members and friends — plus the futility of meeting up — flirty texts become low priority. It’s easy to shut down. “It just not a good time right now” brushoffs are a whole quarantine mood.

“I go back and forth between investment and apathy. In some moments texting and video with strangers seems fruitful, but after a long day on Zoom, the limits really present themselves,” says Brian Sonia-Wallace, the Exposition Park-based author of forthcoming book, The Poetry of Strangers, echoing what zapped-out singles are feeling. Like others interviewed by L.A. Weekly, he says he'll start chatting and then lose interest and leave messages unread until he picks up the thread. “Everything on screens seems to sap my energy, and the open sexuality that’s so nice in the gay world becomes a liability because it’s hard to untangle intimacy and horniness, and both are left unsatisfied.”

As Eagle Rock–based writer Sophie Sills shared in her essay “No One to Hunker Down With” in the New York Times last week. “Three days before we were told to stay home, the man I’d been dating for a month told me he was self-isolating. Sound familiar? If you’ve experienced a lockdown breakup, you’re not alone.

“Dating online has been … bad! It’s hard to keep the momentum up and stay excited about
Still, Schwartz publically went rogue, dipping her toe into “social-distance dating” recently. “Went on a first date today where we met at Trader Joe’s to wait in line 6 feet apart,” she tweeted. Each wearing red bandanas as masks, the two beamed in an at-a-distance-double-selfie, with him waving. They kept their masks on during their shopping date, and he gave her a gift of TJ’s chocolate-covered almonds when they said their good-byes. Things have been progressing at a safer range since then. “We’ve been texting a ton and we had a FaceTime movie date.”

Although it can be frustrating and depressing to be alone and sexquestered during this time of hyper-isolation, it might be for the best in terms of building something real and weeding out bad apples. The dating industry has taken note of the cultural shift too, sending in-app messages and adding video features to their platforms.

“All of us in the industry make dating safety a top priority,” says Julie Spira, an L.A.-based online dating expert and founder of Cyber-DatingExpert.com. “During the COVID-19 crisis, we are all encouraging singles to ramp up chatting to stay connected and to help with isolation. As rules for safety in this pandemic are fluid, I’ve had to reverse my strategy from trying to get singles to go from moving from online to offline, to staying online with meaningful conversations on the phone or in a video chat.”

Spira also touts binge-watching shows together/ apart by adding the Netflix Party Chrome extension to your browser, which allows friends to watch a program or movie together in real time. “You can push the pause button to chat about the show, go on a virtual dinner date or sip a ‘quarantini,’ and toast cheers,” she says. “The intimacy of a video chat can be a bonding experience now, at a time when singles have a strong need to connect.”

Dating in the time of the coronavirus has dramatically changed the nature of courtship, and though we hope the restrictions are temporary, adapting to the current situation might end up being just the reset many hoping to find love needed. “I’m pleased to see ‘slow dating’ emerge from the mandates of self-isolation,” says Spira. “As a result, logging on to dating apps has become an essential part of feeling connected when you’re alone at home self-distancing. It’s also a good time to get creative. There are guys who are sending Purell or even meals to women they like. Matches and love are out there. Just keep swiping and chatting.”
Native daughter Mirai Nagasu helps save Sushi Kiyosuzu with the Power of 10

BY MICHÈLE STUEVEN

The initiative is based on re-employing staff, establishing food security and aiding the community. By raising $10,000 per week in donations, the organization is able to provide 10 full-time jobs and 1,000 free meals to any direct, in-need community. This allows restaurants to reopen without having to implement takeout/delivery services that they were not built to handle.

“The idea was how an independent small business owner in the U.S. like me could find different ways to navigate what our new normal was going to be and how to save my businesses,” says Yang in a call from D.C. “At that point in time, half my portfolio had closed, and I had two remaining open restaurants, Maeketto and ABC Pony. I was driving through my neighborhood and it was just empty where so many restaurants used to thrive. It was an indescribable feeling of remorse.”

His team started doing financials to see how much they’d need to make each week to stay in business and the same numbers kept reappearing. They had to make about $10,000 a week to secure 10 full-time jobs and had to sell 1,000 meals a week to make that happen. Yang, who grew up in Long Beach after his family came to the U.S. from Taiwan, reached out to Mirai in an effort to help Sushi Kiyosuzu. While she was on board, it was a tough sell to the family.

“First my dad got mad at me,” says the Olympian. “I don’t have time for your nonsense,” he said while wrestling with the PPP form. He kept rejecting the idea, but I told him it’s a good alternative trying to help. Where my parents pushed me to become a good skater, I pushed them hard to do this.”

Mirai finally talked her parents into taking part in the Power of 10 and they became the first L.A. restaurant to join the program. According to David Wang, who helms the L.A. chapter of the program, Sushi Kiyosuzu was funded with a $20,000 check for four weeks, faster than any state or federal government agency has been able to fund independent operators in the U.S.

“As the donations come in we want to be sure we can earmark $20,000 to $40,000 depending on the restaurant’s capabilities to make sure they’re good for four weeks,” Wang tells L.A. Weekly. To date, they’ve raised $75,000 since March 26 and have served about 7,000 meals in the country’s capital.

“The three of us all grew up in the same fashion with Asian-American backgrounds and our ability to connect was really great and made it easier to pitch to Mirai’s parents,” says Yang. “I’m Chinese American and understand what it’s like communicating with my parents. It reminds me of where I grew up and for an L.A. launch it couldn’t be a better partnership.”

The Nagasu family started making 500 meals last week and Mirai is hoping to bump it up to 1,000 per week. They’ve started with chicken teriyaki and salted salmon, and plan to add in pork cutlets and some marinated beef xu dong over rice.

“The meals are going to go to the Foothill Unity Center, the Asian Youth Center in San Gabriel and the Methodist Hospital, which are all in the 626 area,” Mirai says. “That’s really important to us because it’s the area we grew up in and we can give back to our community. Even though I trained in Colorado for my last Olympics, the 626 area came up and supported me. It’s where I went to elementary school and high school.”

Making up to 100 meals a day to be delivered is an adjustment for Ikuko and Kiyoto, but Mirai plans on supporting them just as they did in her Olympic success.

“They put so much into my personal and sacrificed so much for me,” she says. “Where my parents pushed me to become a good skater, I hope to push them hard to do this. At the end of the day it’s for a good cause. For any healthcare worker to get an authentic Japanese meal, that’s enough for them.”

To donate, go to powerof10initiative.com
The essential lockdown Mother’s Day cannabis guide

BY JIMI DEVINE

The Mother’s Day on lockdown has arrived, and we have a fantastic lineup of cannabis products sure to help her pass the time.

So whether mom is a rookie or debating the county about plant counts, we’ve got something in this holiday lineup she is sure to love.

Let’s not kid ourselves, buying your parents weed is a fun activity all the time. But now that we’re approaching two months being isolated from most of the folks in our lives, giving the gift of an adventure you can take from your couch should qualify as mental health support.

So whether mom is a rookie or debating the county about plant counts, we’ve got something in this holiday lineup she is sure to love. Maybe she wants to pass the time experimenting in the kitchen or taking trips to outer space? Regardless, there is something for her.

Magic Butter
Making your own weed butter is the base of the edible pyramid. It’s also basically the prep cooking for the real main event, so why not get some basic automation going as opposed to trying to not mess it up? Magic Butter has long been at the top of the market when it comes to digitally combining pot and butter. The newest Magic Butter M2be is the company’s most high tech offering yet. It grinds, heats, stirs and steeps your pot in the correct time intervals and temperature for an excellent consistency every time. The Mother’s Day Special runs through Friday, May 8, if you want to save $30. Shipping is free.

CandleBudz
Absolutely one of our top accessories for spring, CandleBudz is an extremely fun new twist on the relationship between weed and candles. As opposed to hiding the smell of marijuana, CandleBudz use strain specific terpene profiles to make your room smell danker than basically everything grown east of the Sierra Nevada range. We enjoyed the whole lineup featuring names like Cookies, Venice Beach legend Jack Herer and L.A. Weekly’s 4/20 cover model Josh D. Nevertheless, Dr. Greenthumb Jet Fuel OG from B-Real might be the dankest candle of all time.

Northern Emeralds Strawnana
Northern Emeralds grows some of the best weed in California period, and their Strawnana is like jumping in a DeLorean back to the Obama administration. Strawberry Banana is one of those strains that was cursed by its own success over the years. The DNA Genetics bred strain was one of the main terpene loaded— not industrial runoff, like some gas station creams. Their THC-rich options give you some context into how much they love their concentrates. While mom might not be mentally prepared to dive into the world of rosin collabs quite yet, the disposable vape pens coming from Alien Labs and their extraction partners are just the training wheels she needs. With proper practice, she’ll be clearing whole diamonds out of a Mother’ship Exosphere in no time!

Newell’s Botanicals Deep Skin and Soak
Newell’s Botanicals is basically the Runtz of topicals. When you can get your hands on them you should, and we just got word of a fresh drop at LAX Compassionate Care. Why all the hype? Deep Skin has won the Emerald Cup three times. Like all great championship pot topicals, it was originally developed for someone’s grandma. The Deep Soak ended up being what took the crown from the original Deep Skin this year. So whether mom is looking to apply to a local area or just soak her aches away, the team at Newell’s is producing some of the best products available. A big part of the pedigree comes from the regenerative farming practices they use to cultivate many other ingredients in addition to cannabis themselves.

Papa & Barkley Releaf Balms
Papa & Barkley’s lineup of balms is quickly becoming of the most popular in the state. In a world of more sketchy weed topicals then ever, Papa & Barkley produces its balms from plants that were always meant to be medicine— not industrial runoff, like some gas station creams. Their THC-rich options give you the full spectrum of the entourage effect, where many believe the most healing happens. All the different salves in the line are made from all-natural ingredients grown on American farms, a blend of beeswax and several essential oils. In addition to pot, the other extracts in the blend include eucalyptus, tea tree, peppermint and lavender plants.

Alien Labs Disposable Pens
Give mom the gift of clout. Alien Labs produces some of the most coveted pot in the state and is hyper-selective about who is allowed to run the limited material available into hash. One of the founders was actually a BHO judge for The Emerald Cup last year with me, so judging the world championships should give you some context into how much they love their concentrates. While mom might not be mentally prepared to dive into the world of rosin collabs quite yet, the disposable vape pens coming from Alien Labs and their extraction partners are just the training wheels she needs. With proper practice, she’ll be clearing whole diamonds out of a Mother’ship Exosphere in no time!
MORE THAN A WALKTHROUGH

Galleries get creative in their digital and analog adaptations

BY SHANA NYS DAMBROT

With all the places you get your art-viewing closed for the time being, what’s an aficionado to do? If you’re looking for multisensory, dynamic visual art to enjoy in socially distant conditions, here are a few galleries, artists and institutions that are each doing something special — in both the digital and analog realms.

Firstly, kudos to all the venues who realized that the world, and their own programs and archives, already contains a universe of historical and contemporary video art. A growing number of galleries and museums have culled their holdings and networks for curated film and video-based hubs. For example, a few weeks ago we told you about another year in LA, an internet-only gallery who still has both its glorious summer and winter avant-garde film festivals archived on the site. Roberts Projects tapped Aaron Rose to curate a Festival of Rare and Hard to See Films; and in lieu devised a video screening room showcasing video art by their gallery stable.

Similarly, the UK’s Whitechapel Gallery launched an online resource called Artists Film International, which delivers original works of video art as well as short documentaries. And the Chicago-based Video Data Bank has been here for you since 1976, and now houses the work of more than 600 artists and 6,000 video art titles, much of which is available online. Paris’ Galerie Perrotin launched an ongoing series called Screenings, where new and modern fine art video works are added every Friday, and the archive is up to about 20 impressive titles so far, including works by Emgreen & Dragset, JR, Sophie Calle, Xavier Veilhan and Ivan Argote.

Some galleries are going with less of an archive and more of a must-see internet-TV energy. For example, Vielmetter Los Angeles has organized a limited-run stream of gallery artist Stanya Kahn’s epic new film-based work, No Go Backs. A piece rendered in 16mm whose recent premier at the Wexner Center is inaccessible, it online for one week only. It will be streaming on the gallery’s website from May 8-15, and a live Zoom with Wexner Associate Curator of Exhibitions Lucy L. Zimmerman and curator of the film/video studio Jennifer Langa, happens on Wednesday, May 13 at 4 p.m. Pacific.

Many people and venues have produced new creative content, and the most watchable go beyond the walkthrough or lecture format. New media artist Peter Wu “had some time on his hands,” and decided to launch a tech-forward, most definitely experimental internet project he’s calling EPOCH Gallery.

He’s showing works by artists who are already deeply engaged in digitalia, including his own new works from the Prometheus and the Fly (2020) — synthetic paintings created by adding a complete history of his own paintings and drawings and one image of a household fly into an AI machine. As a promotion, Wu hid three “Easter eggs” and gave away a work to the first person who cracked them.

The Cultivation Syllabus series from Ghebaly Gallery is a sort of magazine-style assortment of short artist-made instructional videos created for the project by the gallery’s artists, with three or four new pieces added for each week’s “coursework” which could be anything from ceremonial tinctures to more hearty construction advice and more esoteric spirit-hacking.

Indie Highland Park gallery LAST Projects opened a solo show by Liz Walsh right before everything went to hell, called Dreams of Supermoom. So instead of gallery hours, LAST is hosting Walsh in a weekly broadcast 9-11 p.m. on Saturdays through the show run until May 16. The programs, which are based on the artist’s YouTube channel, are a surrealist’s paradise of non-sequitur segments ranging from garage goth to DIY bread-hats, psychedelic shimmy, poetics, bong-cleaning tips and lord knows what else. They have a public-access-on-mescaline aesthetic that is somehow perfect for these absurd, fractured times.

But lest we forget our old friends in the real world, some analog responses have been just as creative. The multi-city Tiger Strikes Asteroid artists collective has begun releasing new PDF shows every two weeks — printable-at-home “catalogs” for your actual hands to touch, if you like. Art Angels for their part is going both high and low-fi, as the simultaneously offense painter PUNKMETENDER’s newest exhibition of explosive chromatic works A Battle Won in a sharp VR view — and at the same time, they’ve installed The Boombox Series 2020 by Lyle Owerko on their exterior at 9020 Robertson Blvd.

The Lodge gallery’s brilliant installation Anteroom, is a fully furnished salon-style exhibition installation environment featuring art, furniture, objects, rare books and more — instead of being able to walk in, it’s set up like a diorama in a street level vitrine optimized to be viewed from outside (1024 Western Ave).

SOLA Contemporary and SOVO Magazine have collaborated on a storefront window drive-by gallery project of their own launching soon (3718 W. Slavson). And in what is perhaps the most ambitious and certainly the most adventurous, Durden & Ray’s We Are Here/Her We Are is a Google Maps-based self-guided tour of outdoor/ streetview site-specific sculptures opening at about 100 locations across the county on May 16, like a scavenger hunt you can accomplish from your car. No word on what you might win for catching them all and remember, pictures or it didn’t happen.
THE MODERN WORLD IS ABOUT HELEN MONEY

The cellist newest project is an album for the current COVID-19 zeitgeist

BY BRETT CALLWOOD

Helen Money (aka cellist Alison Chesley)’s new album Atomic is Chesley’s fifth album under the Helen Money name, and it was produced in two parts: here in Los Angeles with Will Johnson, and in Chicago with Sanford Parker. It was written over a couple of years and recorded in 2018 and 2019. The album displays, Chesley says, her own growth when it comes to songwriting.

“I know on this new record, I’ve tried to make it a little more intimate than the ones in the past,” she says. “I think I feel I’ve been able to strip things away a little bit, see if I could have less parts, maybe compose structures that aren’t pop song structures — that’s kind of the world I came out of. So yeah, just get a little more like, make the textures a little more transparent.”


“It’s a story of the discovery of Lucretius’ writing on the nature of things and how it really helped to bring about the Renaissance period and enlightenment,” she says. “Jefferson read this text on the nature of things. So that’s how I heard about this philosopher. Basically, he didn’t believe that the gods controlled everything. He believed that we all interact with each other. We’re all a bunch of atoms, and interactions. We come out of what’s already existing, and when we die we go back into what’s existing. There’s no afterlife or god, this is all we have right now — this is it. That connected with me — my parents passed away about five or so years ago, and then my brother, sister and me were trying to keep connected after that. So this is all what I’ve been thinking about and it really resonated with me.”

On the subject of staying connected, Chesley has moved between Los Angeles and Chicago for years. Her siblings both reside in Northern California, and she still enjoys moving between the different areas to feel their differences.

“It’s different but they’re both very community-centered places,” she says. “Thankfully, they’re both progressive places. As far as being here in Chicago, the one thing I missed about it in Los Angeles was how accessible everything is. It’s very easy to go out and hear music. You can go hear jazz at the Hideout or the Constellation. Sometimes you don’t even pay a cover. There’s stuff happening all the time and it’s very easy to access it. I miss that in Los Angeles.”

Like most of the world, Chesley has been working in lockdown for the past few weeks, though the rollout of this new album has kept her busy.

“I’ve been keeping in touch with people to do press, and also these quarantine concerts — I did one for Experimental Sound Studios,” she says. “It seems like I’m keeping connected that way. But I really miss playing for people. I love connecting with my audience, I love meeting people after the show. So I really wish I was able to be with people and sell them my record in person. I miss that a lot.”

In addition to the release of Atomic, Chesley has been working on a soundtrack to the movie Girl on the Third Floor alongside longtime musical collaborator Steve Albini plus Tim Midyett.

“Shortly after I mobbed back here to Chicago, I feel like I approached Steve about doing music for a soundtrack,” she says. “He asked if I’d be interested in playing on it and of course I said yes. I’ve known Steve for a long time — I toured with Shellac and I worked at Electrical Audio [Albini’s Chicago studio complex] as a session player. So I have a really good relationship with him. I knew it would be fun and I trust him. I met his friend Tim Middlyett.

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**ACCOUNTING**

**Tax Senior Associate.** Financial Services Multi Post, PriceWaterhouseCoopers LLP, Los Angeles, CA. Provide tax advice on the wide array of tax matters faced by price waterhouse cooper companies throughout the business cycle. Req: Bach's deg or foreign equiv in Acct. Bus Admin. Tax or rel. 3 yrs. rel. work exp. req. Master's deg or foreign equiv. in Acct. Bus Admin. Tax or rel. 1 yr rel. work exp. Travel up to 20% is req. Send resume to: Attn. Job Code CA2519, Attn: HR Int’l/Talent Management, 4000 W. Boy Scout Blvd, Tampa, FL 33607.

**Assistant Designer:** Research & develop designs. Mail resume: Current Air Clothing, Inc. 1175 S Cocker St, 4th Flr, LA, CA 90012. Send resume to: Very L. Inc. Attn: Derrick Jung, CFO 1150 E. 5th Street, Los Angeles, CA 90015.

**Retail Dietitian:** Mgmt in dietetics, nutrition or related. Mail resume to L.A. Downtown Medical Center LLC. 7771 W. Temple St., Los Angeles, CA 90020.

**General Manager:** Delegate responsibilities to the best employees to perform them & oversee their completion. App must have a Master’s deg in Business Admin., Econ., Management, or related. Alternatively, app must have a Bachelor’s deg in Business Admin., Econ., Management, or related + up to 5 yrs. ex in man of a managerial or supervisory position. Mail resume to: Golf Buddy America, Inc. 10700 Norwalk Blvd., Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670 Attn: Terry Kim.

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Young members ministry. Apply by mail glory Church of Jesus Christ, 1801 S. Grand Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90015. Attn: Senior Pastor.

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RdMaster in Psychology, Counseling, Theology or rel. Mail: Resume: World Mission University, 500 Shafter Pl, #202, LA, CA 90020.

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**General Manager:** Delegate responsibilities to the best employees to perform them & oversee their completion. App must have a Master’s deg in Business Admin., Econ., Management, or related. Alternatively, app must have a Bachelor’s deg in Business Admin., Econ., Management, or related + up to 5 yrs. ex in man of a managerial or supervisory position. Mail resume to: Golf Buddy America, Inc. 10700 Norwalk Blvd., Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670 Attn: Terry Kim.

**Logistics Analyst:** Coordinate logistical info. Req: BA/BS in Bus. Admin., Supply Chain or related Mail: resume: Grand Life, Inc. 5840 E Ana St. Compton, CA 90221.

**MINISTER**

Young members ministry. Apply by mail glory Church of Jesus Christ, 1801 S. Grand Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90015. Attn: Senior Pastor.

**OPERATIONS SUPERVISOR**

Supervise & manage bus. operation. Req: AA/AS in Bus. Admin., Econ., or related Mail: resume: 5DW Management, Inc. 14547 Artesia Blvd #5A La Mirada, CA 90638.

**STUDENT ADVISOR**

RdMaster in Psychology, Counseling, Theology or rel. Mail: Resume: World Mission University, 500 Shafter Pl, #202, LA, CA 90020.