

REDUCED RESTRICTIONS IN LOS ANGELES • YARIN GLAM KEEPS IT REAL • M.C. ESCHER IN HIS OWN WORDS

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SUNDANCE AT HOME

WHAT TO EXPECT AS AMERICA'S LARGEST INDEPENDENT FILM FESTIVAL GOES VIRTUAL



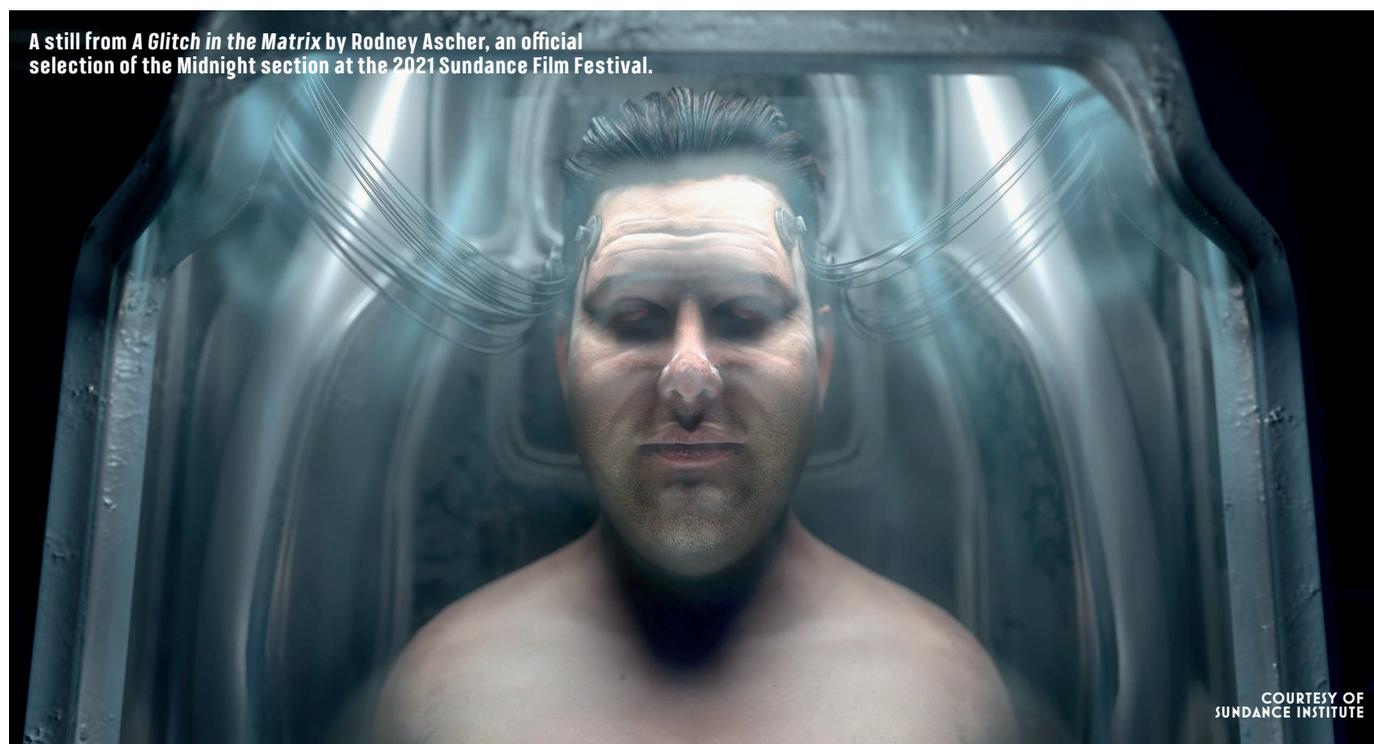
BY LINA LEGARDO



SUNDANCE AT HOME

What to Expect as COVID-19 Forces America's Largest Independent Film Festival to go Virtual

BY LINA LECARO



A still from *A Glitch in the Matrix* by Rodney Ascher, an official selection of the Midnight section at the 2021 Sundance Film Festival.

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This time last year, before COVID-19 turned the entertainment industry on its head, the Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah was pretty much snow-blanketed showbiz as usual – attracting hordes of movie stars, directors, executives, investors, publicists, journalists and film buffs for a week of screenings, skiing, snowboarding and non-stop soirees, not to mention step-and-repeat photo ops, gifting suites, branded activations, live concerts, panels and more. The 2020 fest went off without a hitch, taking place just before the full scope of the coronavirus was understood and led to cancellations by pretty much every other festival last year (including the similarly circus-like music meetup South By Southwest in Austin, Texas). Still, it wasn't without a bit of reproach. Some media reported that the event might have in fact contributed to the pandemic's spread, and many who attended reported feeling ill afterward. No definitive link was ever proven however, and COVID testing wasn't even really available a year ago, anyway.

Though concepts like social distancing and

flattening the curve became part of our vernacular last year, we all remained hopeful that things wouldn't get as bad as feared, even as we adjusted to the challenges of the new normal. Big event organizers, however, did not have the luxury to wait and see. Like most large festival events, the Sundance Institute goes right into planning mode for the next year almost immediately after the event wraps up, and as the grim realities of the virus emerged, tough decisions had to be made.

"In early March, it was clear we would need at least several contingency plans," Kim Yutani, Director of Programming tells *L.A. Weekly*. "Chief among those was the idea that the core of the Festival would be digital, which raised a slew of questions about access, especially for filmmaker teams looking to premiere at a festival – not be immediately available via streaming. So we had to pull together a structure to preserve the excitement and urgency and collective energy of a festival and then design the platform that would host that ambitious structure."

This Friday, the first ever digital version of

the Sundance Film Festival will kick off online and while it remains to be seen how various components of this reimagined format will translate, there is, as always, a lot to be excited about in terms of line-up.

Ever since Robert Redford founded the event in 1978 to showcase emerging independent dramatic and documentary filmmakers, it's been a go-to for big and small cinema premieres and competitions, with media exposure and awards consideration adding to its appeal. To that end, due to the Academy Awards getting pushed back to April 25, some of this year's Sundance premieres will be eligible to compete for Oscars alongside films that debuted in 2020. There are some great titles from last year that went on to receive acclaim, too, including *L.A. Weekly* critics' faves such as *Minari*, *Never, Rarely, Always, Sometimes*, *The 40 Year Old Version* and *Promising Young Woman* in the dramatic categories and *The Social Dilemma*, *Crip Camp* and *Time* in the

meetings over Zoom, which was new, but the conversations about curation and building a relevant and cutting edge program were the same."

So how will this whole thing be structured and how will participants be able to engage so that it feels at least somewhat like the Sundance fans know and love?

"Ticket and pass-holders convene pre-screening in a live digital waiting room, much like a theatre lobby," Yutani explains. "They'll be able to see and interact with each other. Then, at the appointed time, the 'house opens' and the audience is automatically sent into the screening, which we're using a player from industry standard Shift72 to play. The film will be preceded by the usual front matter, including a land acknowledgement and sponsor trailer, and one of our programmers will do a video introducing the director."

Premieres will be followed by live Q&As and invites to check out Sundance's "immersive celebration environment" on their New Frontier platform called Film Party. Here, viewers will be able to interact with each other via chat rooms and avatars.

"Seeing as how my film is all about the implications of being trapped in digital worlds, I shouldn't be surprised that the film is going to premiere in one," says filmmaker Rodney Ascher, whose doc *A Glitch in the Matrix* debuts in the Midnight section at Sundance and asks the question, "What if we are living in a simulation, and the world as we know it is not real?" Diving into this mind-melting idea through scientist's, philosopher's and conspiracy theorist's lenses, the film explores not-so-unique concerns about life and reality that should make some waves this year, especially after the unreal 2020 we all lived through.

Another buzz-worthy debut delving into alternate reality is *Prisoners of the Ghostland*, acclaimed Japanese filmmaker Sion Sono's English language debut starring Nicolas Cage, Nick Cassavetes and Bill Moseley. Back in 2018, Cage saw a turn in his career after his similarly psychedelic gore-fest *Mandy* premiered at Sundance, and this one is likely to cement his standing as the king of weird and wonderful on screen. It follows the mystical journey of his character, called only "Hero," who tries to save a young woman trapped inside a supernatural underworld. Cage has called it the "wildest" and "most out there" film he's ever made.

Moseley, who plays "The Colonel," who hires Cage to rescue his daughter from the wicked confines, tells *L.A. Weekly* that American au-

documentary field.

"Submission numbers were on par with past years, and so too was submission quality," Yutani – who lives in Los Angeles – says of the selection process. "We held our programming



diences new to Sono's work are in for a terror-filled treat with this one. With the crazed and committed performances of these two legends (Moseley is a horror icon, known for his work in Rob Zombie's films and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*) we have to agree.

Like many who have the fortune to get their films into Sundance, the L.A.-based Moseley was excited to experience the fanfare of the festival before COVID made that impossible. "I'm a Sundance virgin," he says. "And I'm a skier! But it made things a lot simpler. I'm mostly happy for people to see the movie and working with Nick was a lot of fun."

With over half of the 2021 slate composed of new-to-Sundance directors and first-timers (aka "virgins") there's lots to discover. There's also several familiar names behind the camera this time: Jerrod Carmichael, Robin Wright and Rebecca Hall all have films at the fest this year, and all are already garnering cinefile chatter.

"I look forward to audiences experiencing the emotional ride of Sian Heder's *CODA* or learning about the hidden histories in Questlove's *Summer of Soul* and Julie Cohen and Betsy West's *My Name is Pauli Murray*," Utani shares as some of her must-sees. "But every year I encourage audiences to take chances and explore the World Cinema offerings – we have incredible fiction films and documentaries from all parts of the world and we're always so proud of that programming."

There's a diverse array of films that will be of special interest to L.A. audiences in particular, as well. Utani nods to the following: *The Sparks Brothers*, a sure to be kooky chronicle of the music careers of Ron and Russell Mael; *Build Your Own Brigade*, focusing on the California wildfires; *Rita Moreno: Just A Girl Who Decided to Go For It*, documenting the life of Latina legend and L.A.-based star of stage and screen; Zoe Lister-Jones and Daryl Wein's *How It Ends*, featuring vignettes of a deserted Los Angeles on the eve of apocalypse; *Rebel Hearts*, explor-



Dynasty Handbag from *Weirdo Night* by Jibz Cameron and Mariah Garnett, an official selection of the New Frontier program at the 2021 Sundance Film Festival.

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ing the legend of the trail-blazing Hollywood nuns who defiantly stood up to the patriarchy of the Catholic Church; and *Weirdo Night*, a film version and pilot of sorts celebrating Dynasty Handbag's popular live show at Zebulon nightclub in Frogtown.

"It feels amazing to have this scrappy weird

film in Sundance and it was a total surprise. They invited us!" shares *Weirdo Night*'s director Mariah Garnett, whose film seeks to create a live-feeling experience in the pandemic celebrating the spirit of the wacky variety show. "We wanted to make something that looked and sounded beautiful and that was worthy of

the artists' time. Normally performers want to make the rounds and do shows regularly for exposure, and *Weirdo Night* at Zebulon has a very dedicated and enthusiastic and supportive crowd that makes it worth a performer's time."

Adds Jibz Cameron (aka show star and host *Dynasty Handbag*) about the exposure Sundance provides: "For a long time we have been fantasizing about making a filmed series and we think it would be such a good TV show. Like a noncompetitive *Star Search* for freaks, bringing back the aesthetics of the televised variety show that have kind of fallen by the wayside in recent years (replaced by competition shows). So we hope someone picks it up for that."

Getting "picked up" by distributors and streaming services is a big part of what makes scoring a Sundance selection stamp so significant. But even when that doesn't happen, being seen by the industry crowd there can pay off down the road, as execs often remember direction, writing and performances that resonated with them. If these positive takes are solidified by blog and media coverage, all the better. Sundance can truly be the big break for filmmakers and actors alike when the stars align.

Rebel Hearts director Pedro Kos hopes that Sundance's new online format might, in fact, lead to more of the above. "Acceptance into the U.S. Documentary Competition particularly was a wonderful validation that what we saw as truly special and unique in this story reverberated with others... especially Shawnee Isaac-Smith who began documenting these incredible women over 20 years ago," Kos says. "And even though we wish we could have been in Park City to celebrate the premiere of the



Prisoners of Ghostland



A still from *Weirdo Night* by Jibz Cameron and Mariah Garnett, an official selection of the New Frontier program at the 2021 Sundance Film Festival.

film, we are excited about the greater accessibility of Sundance 2021, where audiences all over the country will be able to watch the amazing films of the festival. We couldn't have dreamed of a better launchpad for the film."

Though the digital pivot has obviously created challenges for Sundance, Kos may be right to look on the bright side of this experimental online presentation. Journalists like myself who never had the budget to actually fly and stay in Utah, will now have the opportunity to experience the event from the comfort of our homes. This is also true for film fans. In L.A., there were some Sundance-presented drive-in screenings planned initially, but they were canceled due to recent COVID spikes here. Other limited in-person satellite screening locations across the country and in Utah were still being determined case-by-case at the time of this writing.

Like Cannes, SXSW and Coachella, the party scene had become a huge component at Sundance, for better or worse. It will obviously play a smaller role this year as will the ubiquitous swag-driven and brand-driven "houses," events and basically the entirety of the red carpet scene. Still, opportunities for marketing moments as well as promotion driven panels and discussions will be available.

For example, the new short film streaming platform, Argo (which streams high-quality short films to audiences online) will be promoting its content via a panel about the distribution of short films in the Village Festival section of the platform, presenting with part-

ner XRM Media in the "XRM Media Lounge." This will be complemented by a series of short film playlists on the platform, showcasing the best films to be featured at Sundance over the past couple of years.

"We've reimaged the ways we work with our partners and invented new ways to gather in both celebratory and ceremonial ways," promises Yutani, highlighting Sundance's "virtual Main Street" space online and the aforementioned Film Party online meet-ups.

Of course, virtual gatherings will never capture the energy, human connection or debauchery of an IRL festival, but when it comes to content, Sundance seems primed to come the closest we've seen so far. Movies will always be about escape after all, and Sundance is the place to see them first. The slopes and soirees can wait, but the stories on screen (whatever size it may be) thankfully won't have to.

Set up an account via the festival's official website, festival.sundance.org. Different viewing options are available including a \$350 Festival Pass to watch everything from Jan. 28 to Feb. 3 or a Day Pass (choose your day) for \$75. There is also an Explorer Pass for \$25 which includes access to short films, the New Frontier Film Parties, Main Street features and Indie Series programs (included with a festival pass). Individual film screenings are \$15 each. Each feature film has a premiere and dedicated three-hour time slot and these slots are limited so buy your tickets now. There will also be some select free online events. More info on the site.

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COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS LESSEN IN LOS ANGELES

This week in L.A. news: COVID-19 restrictions soften, allowing restaurants to reopen for outdoor dining. Mayor Eric Garcetti also addressed the lack of vaccine doses being distributed to L.A.

BY ISAI ROCHA

Gov. Gavin Newsom rescinded California's regional stay-at-home order on Monday, allowing certain L.A. County sectors to reopen, including restaurants, who will be allowed to conduct outdoor dining starting Friday. The previous COVID-19 California health order prohibited personal gatherings, outdoor dining and put capacity limits on several retail businesses. All of those sectors will now be allowed to operate under the state's "Purple Tier," which was in effect before California's regional order on Dec. 6, 2020.

"With this cancellation of the regional stay-at-home order, the L.A. County Health Officer order that was issued on November 25 is now in effect until we issue a new health officer order

on Friday this week, which will more fully align with the sector openings that are permitted in the purple tier," L.A. County Director of Public Health, Dr. Barbara Ferrer, said on Monday.

After the new COVID-19 health order gets issued Friday, restaurants will be allowed to conduct outdoor in-person dining and the previous business curfew will be rescinded as well.

California restaurants have been in an ongoing battle with the state, fighting the restrictions that have been issued since the start of the pandemic.

The California Restaurant Association has presented lawsuits against outdoor dining bans and in late December got a favorable decision from an L.A. Superior Court judge who ruled that L.A. County needed to provide more evidence for its ban.

"As we've repeatedly said, their order was arbitrary and targeted restaurants unfairly, without supporting evidence," CRA President Jot Condie said.

Over the 2020 holidays, more than 372,000 restaurant and bar workers lost their jobs in the U.S., with more than 110,000 restaurants closing, according to the National Restaurant Coalition, an organization that also pushed for a "Restaurant Act" that received support from dozens of Congress members.

While L.A. County restaurants had to wait until Friday for a new health order to allow in-person dining, other sectors in the county were more immediately affected by the change in regulations.

Since Monday, private outdoor gatherings were allowed with three or fewer households involved and fewer than 15 people.

Family entertainment centers, cardrooms, miniature golf, go-karts and batting cages were allowed to reopen at 50% capacity; indoor malls and personal care services such as barbershops and hair salons were allowed to operate at 25% capacity, while religious services, fitness centers, museums and zoos were allowed to operate in outdoor settings.

All of the reopened sectors have specific COVID-19 health guidelines they must follow, including the use of face coverings and keeping a 6-foot distance from others.

L.A. IS NOT RECEIVING VACCINES FAST ENOUGH

As daily positive COVID-19 cases begin to decrease in L.A. County and the county attempts to ramp up its COVID-19 vaccination efforts, at the current pace of vaccine distribution the county would not be able to fully vaccinate all its health care workers and seniors 65 and older until June, let alone be able to move forward in its vaccination phases.

"That is a correct calculation," Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti said when addressing the reported June estimations. Garcetti iterated that the county is receiving about 160,000 vaccine doses a week, but he believes that the current pace will accelerate when additional vaccines from pharmaceutical companies such as Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca get approved in the U.S.

"When you expand that to the 7.5 million... that the department of public health at the county level expects to get a vaccination... we're talking about being in June 2022 at the current pace here," Garcetti said. "I want our state leaders to hear that, I want our federal leaders to hear that and I want our private sector who is producing this vaccine to hear it. We are ready to do more here."

The city of Los Angeles turned Dodger Stadium into a COVID-19 mass vaccination site, capable of administering 12,000 doses per day, although that number may not be realistic with the current pace of distribution.

"It's going to be a sad day when I stand here saying, 'Dodger Stadium has the capacity to take in 12,000 people, but we only have vaccines for 2,000.'"

FORMER COUNCILMAN SENTENCED 14 MONTHS IN FEDERAL PRISON

Former Los Angeles City Councilman Mitchell Englander was sentenced to 14 months in federal prison and ordered to pay \$15,000 after lying to FBI agents about his involvement in an ongoing racketeering case.

Englander is the first to be sentenced in the

case that also involves former L.A. City Councilman Jose Huizar and former deputy mayor George Esparza.

On separate occasions in Las Vegas and while at a Palm Springs golf tournament, Englander accepted more than \$50,000 worth of cash and gifts from a businessman alleged to be involved in the case. Englander later admitted to lying about his involvement to FBI agents in both 2017 and 2018.

Englander's request for probation was declined by Judge John F. Walter and prosecutors wrote that Englander "illicitly cashed in on his status as a purported public servant in casino bathrooms and through VIP bottle service, luxury dinners, and behind hotel room doors."

Former Councilman Huizar, who served with Englander from 2011 to 2018, was arrested on June 23, 2020 and charged with more than 50 counts of allegedly violating the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act and accepting more than \$1.5 million in bribes from a Chinese businessman who owned a hotel in Huizar's district.

Huizar's trial date is currently scheduled for June 22.

LASD BEING INVESTIGATED FOR ALLEGED PATTERN OF 'UNCONSTITUTIONAL POLICING'

A civil rights investigation has been opened by California Attorney General Xavier Becerra to determine if the L.A. County Sheriff's Department has acted unconstitutionally in its policing.

A press release from the California Department of Justice released Friday, January 22, stated the investigation was prompted by allegations that LASD have used "excessive force, retaliation, and other misconduct."

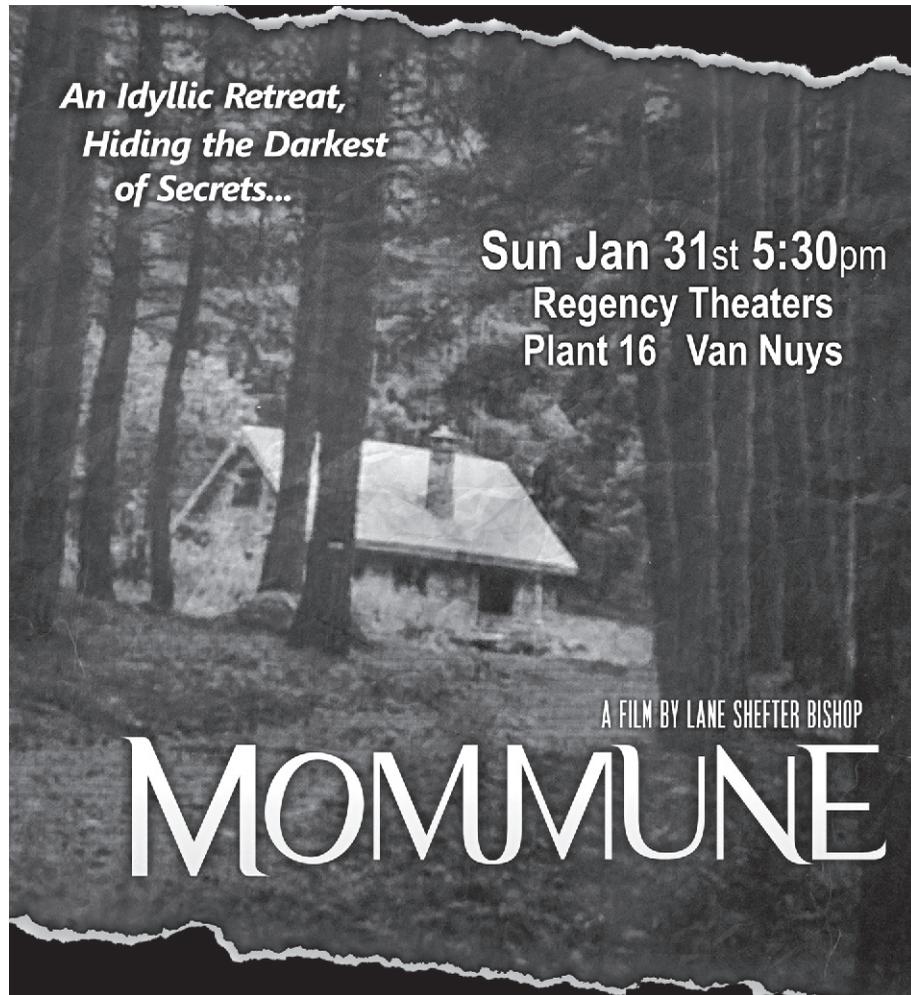
"Those of us in positions of public trust know that the job comes with the solemn obligation to be accountable to the people we serve. Because of the nature of the work involved in law enforcement, that duty of care is heightened," Attorney General Becerra said in a statement. "There are serious concerns and reports that accountability and adherence to legitimate policing practices have lapsed at the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. We are undertaking this investigation to determine if LASD has violated the law or the rights of the people of Los Angeles County."

The press release also noted that it is not a criminal investigation and the attorney general had not made any determinations regarding allegations toward the LASD, but will "consider all relevant information."

In response to the investigation, Sheriff Alex Villanueva said in a statement:

"As sheriff, I look forward to this 'non-criminal' pattern and practice investigation. Our department may finally have an impartial, objective assessment of our operations, and recommendations on any areas we can improve our service to the community. During my administration, we have routinely requested the state Office of the Attorney General to monitor our investigations, and we will provide immediate access to all information in our possession. We are eager to get this process started, in the interest of transparency and accountability."

In an interview with KABC-LA on Friday, Los Angeles District Attorney George Gascon responded to the investigation, saying, "There's certainly a lot of people who have been alleging complaints of irregularity at the Sheriff's Department, including the inspector general, so I'm pleased to see that the Attorney General is taking steps to look into this matter."





Escher at work

ART

A NEW FILM PRESENTS M.C. ESCHER IN HIS OWN WORDS

The documentary *Journey To Infinity* is narrated by the artist himself

BY SHANA NYS DAMBROT

M.C. Escher -- he of never-ending stairwells, fish morphing into flowers, hands drawing one another, expert use of glass globes, and math-minded imagineer of infinite nesting universes -- is an iconic image-maker who

is almost universally recognized outside the art world, criminally unrepresented in the art world canon, and, it turns out, not at all the sort of person one might suppose him to be.

His art is on every sort of merch, psychedelic poster and album art, millions

of tattoos, has inspired films from *Labyrinth* to *Inception*, and graced every college dorm room wall -- but it was decades after his death in 1972 before the world finally started getting proper museum shows dedicated to his career. In the new documentary film from Robin Lutz, we find out just how he felt about that -- and about a great deal more besides.

Journey to Infinity's imagery is an inventive combination of works and animations of them, spliced with vintage photographs and modern-day artistic interpretations of his most iconic compositions. The narration is almost entirely down to Escher himself -- or rather, to his own words, voiced by beloved British actor Stephen Fry. The script is composed from his extensive diaries, excerpts from lofty lectures and personal, frequently caustic correspondence, and lightly punctuated with interviews with his adult children. It deals with subjects ranging from his eternal desire to "visualize infinity," to his consternation at the popularity of his images among drug-addled hippies, to his suspicion that his estrangement from the art community was because whereas, "Other artists pursue beauty, I pursue wonder."

Actually the elaborate, gorgeous choreography of the schisms and interlocations between art and mathematics is the most recurrent theme throughout the film (other than his hatred of hippies). To hear in Escher's own words the step-by-step evolution of his vision and the range of his own studies is a marvelous treat. Enchanted by architecture, maths, and the natural sciences, Escher was at heart a printmaker

whose impossibly elaborate and finely detailed works are somehow both futurist and baroque, the results of a mastery of analog craft and abstract thought.

It may come as a surprise to those who grew up loving Escher's work that the originals are neither paintings nor drawings, but rather block prints. It may also be a bit shocking to confront his curmudgeonly disposition, however gamely the incomparable Mr. Fry performs his words with an infusion of wry humanism. There's a love story, and children who appreciate the impact of his legacy. If the viewer is already an Escher person, this will be a fascinating, intimate session full of surprises.

At the same time, the film does not function as a useful introduction to Escher from a conventional documentary point of view. Its premise works only for those who already know the art, and the absence of the expected art historians, curators, avid collectors, and publishers who show up to outline the artist's legacy is a noticeable one. That said, the absence of those voices leaves all the more room for Escher's own to ring through. And while there may be a lack of canonical presentations on a suitable scale in our institutions, every bookstore, tote bag design shop, and internet browser in the world is well stocked. At heart, this quirky, inventive hybrid of documentary and monologue is dedicated to the exploration of what we don't know about one of the best-known artists in the world.

For more information, visit *M.C. Escher: Journey to Infinity*. The film opens February 5 at Laemmle's Virtual Cinema; laemmle.com.

MUSIC

YARIN GLAM IS KEEPING IT REAL

Israel-born, Los Angeles-based pop artist releases new EP in installments

BY BRETT CALLWOOD

Yarin Glam
Laura Lynn Petrick



Yarin Glam was just 14 years old when she moved with her family from a small town in Israel called Arad to the sprawling majesty of Los Angeles. As a child, she had watched and listened to so much American TV and music, that she couldn't want to make the move.

"The American Dream," she says. "So my parents decided to give it a chance for a year. I

could go and see what I always dreamed of. My sister can try the acting stuff. See how it is for a year. In my head, a year is a long time. That's how we got here."

Arad, she says, is a small town with a population in the realm of 25,000. Moving from a "homey" place to something as gloriously insane as L.A. made the whole process all the more stark.

"I was like, 'I'm gonna move to L.A., it's gonna

be like *High School Musical*,'" Glam says. "I'm gonna meet my Troy Bolton. But then it was moving to a whole different country, the culture, the language. I thought I spoke great English but it turned out I didn't. I came here and had to struggle with my accent. You have all the insecurities of a normal teen but add the pressure of trying to find friends and fitting in with your language and everything. It was insane."

Glam spent her first year trying to deal with high school, and struggling with friends encouraging her to take the "easy route" and return home to Israel. But she was determined to get through school, and kickstart a career.

"All my life, I was a very shy kid," she says. "When I moved here and barely had any friends and stuff, I just listened to music, watched my favorite artist's interviews and concerts, imagining myself doing that. Then when I was 17, I was at IHOP with my friend at 2 a.m. I was always that kid who dreamed very big and al-

singing, which was in turn passed to a producer. She was already working with a producer in L.A., and the cumulative result is that she released three songs when she was 17. The ball was rolling, but she was learning on the job. Back in Israel, she had big dreams, but her shyness held her back from performing.

"Ever since I can remember, I always knew that I wanted to do music," she says. "I remember being six years old, going to people and being like, 'Hey, I'm going to be a singer.' But I was very shy, and I would tell people that but wouldn't perform to anyone. It puts that doubt in your head, because all of the artists you listen to and look up to were performers, performing at their school and whatever. I was like, 'How the hell am I going to do that?' But a part of me knew that when the moment would come, I'd do it."

Glam describes her sound as a blend of pop, urban and Middle Eastern music. The latter in particular she wanted to bring to the forefront on her new EP, *Realness*.

"I really wanted to concentrate on being honest with my lyrics, and the stuff that I'm talking about, the story behind it," she says. "I was always like, I don't want to do music to just do music, I wanted to do music with a message. Be vulnerable and share stories that are harder to talk about usually but with my music I can express myself and hopefully help other people that might go through the same stuff that I have."

The EP isn't being released in the traditional way. There'll be no one-drop EP release. Rather, four singles will be dropped, each forming a quarter of the EP.

"Two of the EP's singles are already out," she says. "The first one was 'Free,' the second is 'Realness.' The third single is called 'Shut Up' and the fourth is 'Unbothered.' They should all be out by February 26. I'm calling those four singles the EP. They're released every few weeks but they're cohesive as one project."

The title track, she says, is about being your true self, letting your real self out.

"It's very fun," she says. "It's upbeat. I wanted to bring out celebrating our own uniqueness. Society always tells guys if they're not manly enough, or for women there are so many boxes they try to put us in instead of letting us discover our true self and celebrate our uniqueness. This whole project is about that - bringing your true self to the surface."

The EP, of course, was recorded during the COVID lockdown, though she says the creative process has been therapeutic.

"It let me be more creative," she says. "We're all at home most of the time, so I was writing more, expressing myself more, and I was really sitting down with my feelings and what I wanted the message to be. I really sang about subjects that I've never talked about. I didn't even share with my family the stuff that I was going through. To come out, put it in a song and share it with the world is definitely a crazy step for me and a place where I was very vulnerable, but I feel like the whole lockdown stuff let us sit down with ourselves more. Educating ourselves about stuff that's going on with the world, and for me it let me be more creative for sure."

As for 2021, Glam is planning a livestreamed show to celebrate the EP release, before the vaccine hopefully allows her to perform properly later in the year. Whatever happens, Yarin Glam will be keeping it real.

Yarin Glam's single "Realness" is out now.

WHAT CANNABIS REFORMS SHOULD THE DEMOCRATS MOVE ON FIRST?

Now that the Democrats control both Capitol Hill and The White House, what major cannabis policy reforms should they take action on first?

BY JIMI DEVINE

The Democrats are on the clock, how far can they push cannabis reform while they control both houses of congress?

This conversation in itself wasn't even in the orbit of the cannabis industry a few months back. But on election night, morning, then week as the industry quickly came to terms with the potential of what it could mean now-Vice President Kamala Harris had sponsored the Senate version of weed's biggest congressional win yet, there was so much more.

We woke up on Wednesday with most Americans agreeing Joe Biden would be President in a few months. But in addition to that, cannabis woke up with a whole new level of hope. Sure the party that championed most of the recent success cannabis had seen now controlled the executive branch, but what was happening in Georgia?

As excited as we were for Joe Biden to have the opportunity to write some of the wrongs from his previous contribution to the drug war, minds quickly turned from Biden and Harris's admittedly weird weed journeys to the Georgia Runoff Senate Election.

Less than two weeks ago we found out Biden would take office with the democrats controlling both houses of congress, and then last wednesday it all came to reality. So where do we hope to see things go?

Sure there is some nation fixing and pandemic stuff at the top of the list, but as we move back to something a bit more normal than our recent life experiences where do we want to see the Democrats take it when it comes to reforming our nation's cannabis laws?

Here are some boxes we'd love to see them check off while they have the power.

Get Them Out

As we saw with the last round of pardons from former President Donald Trump, there are plenty of nonviolent cannabis offenders still behind bars as the value of the U.S. cannabis market continues to jump by billions of dollars every year. President Joe Biden's Department of Justice should look to priori-

tize a full review of those cases with the intent of releasing as many cannabis offenders as possible. The DOJ should also dedicate resources to coordinating the mass expungement of cannabis convictions state-by-state to help as many people as possible. As Code for America's proven in their expungement work, the DOJ assisting in creating a mechanism that can work in various states with light tweaks is not beyond the realm of possibility. This should be the top priority because these men and women won't get these years of their life back but the dollars will still be there for the industry in the end.

Reschedule Marijuana

So much of our cannabis headache as Americans is a direct result of the federal government treating marijuana as a dangerous substance with zero medical value. Yes, despite all the years of glaucoma, cancer, and AIDS patients living a better quality of life that's been documented time and time again this is still the case. That's not even getting into the CBD entourage effect we've learned a lot more about over the last decade. At this point leaving marijuana as a schedule one narcotic is a proven detriment to all involved. It makes patients criminals, creates a disproportionate criminal justice vacuum for communities of color, and erodes faith in community policing strategies by creating negative experiences with law enforcement over something that would be completely legal in so many places if not for the Controlled Substances Act.

Banking Access

In this moment, banking may be the most bipartisan cannabis effort you could get through both houses quickly and to Joe Biden's desk. One of the reasons banking access is so important is because it really would help out the little guy. These giant corporate weed entities send a few Chads to Panama (or wherever) to whip up offshore financial institutions to use. Sure they get hit one by one as the feds catch on to the ruse, but the company just ends up losing credit cards or something for the day and they're on to the next one. Mom and pop farmers don't have



PHOTO BY: ALEJANDRO BARBA/UNSPLASH

these kinds of resources. Many smaller cannabis operators who have survived to this point each have about twenty stories about losing a bank account and the stress of searching for the next one. Not to mention proper financial services would make it a lot easier for the states to collect their weed money.

Equity

Providing a fair shot in the industry for the communities most disproportionately impacted by cannabis laws in America is critical. The idea people from communities devastated by weed laws don't deserve the best shot possible in this new legal industry is insulting. Even worse, some just hate the idea of equity because of retail permits being protected for people who have suffered the worst under weed laws, the haters tend to not be from those communities and have never spent time in a cell themselves. The only reason I put equity after banking is because I think creating mechanisms for equity applicants to be successful is critical too, and I think it will make it easier for those businesses to make it. Hopefully the Biden administration will mandate equity at the federal level to cut back some of the drama we've seen in implementation at the local level. Sometimes equity programs have proven a scapegoat for officials and permit holders in municipalities where the cannabis programs are generally a mess, the feds taking the lead would pull the rug out from those excuses.

Research

One of the most common arguments against weed in recent years were formed around the lack of research. While the democrats are in control it is absolutely vital they open up the floodgates to cannabis research. If they maintain the status quo the old talking points will remain. If they don't go hard now they could lose congress in a couple years without a lot to show for it. Then we would be back to this holding pattern of the little bit of mids being grown at the UMiss going to researchers all over America. Biden should order the DEA to approve the million dollar facilities sitting in holding patterns waiting for the right to grow research grade cannabis. Some of the built out facilities have been waiting years for DEA approval after jumping through the hoops they needed to just to apply. Opening up the supply

chain is the best thing Joe Biden can do for cannabis research in his first 100 days.

Vets Access

Immediately following the federal government coming to terms with marijuana having medical value, VA doctors should be allowed to prescribe it and write recommendations for medical cannabis. While the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has come a long way on pot in recent years, there is still work to be done. Especially given the immediate benefit being seen by veterans using cannabis to cope with the physical and psychological toll of their service.

Prevent Classism

As the democrats work under Joe Biden to move cannabis policy forward, they need to make sure they are changing the laws for everybody. Many times when we talk about cannabis now being legal, we forget it's not technically possible for everyone to smoke it legally. Public use tends to be illegal across the board and cannabis lounges are few and far between across the U.S. at this point. Where are people who don't own their own property supposed to consume cannabis? Mechanisms that allow every tax bracket to use cannabis are critical or we're just creating new penalties that will be enforced disproportionately in the same communities that were getting screwed in the first place.

Real Organic Pot

There is a lot of organic lingo flying around the cannabis industry and a ton of different programs have come and gone over the years certifying pot as clean. The USDA should be empowered to bring organic commercial cannabis farming under their umbrella. This would just standardize everything and give the term organic weed a lot more weight in a retail setting.

Lay The Groundwork for Interstate Commerce

My biggest pipe dream is that the Democrats will get the ball rolling on interstate commerce enough that it will be unstoppable regardless of what happens in the midterm elections. As we all presume some time was chopped off the clock in the Georgia Senate Runoff, this will dictate how much.

HOW TO UNWINE-D DURING THE PANDEMIC

Skittish about going out? There are plenty of great ways to enjoy your wine at home.

BY MARY THOMPSON



It goes without saying that we are living in a different world whose ever-changing landscape is what stress is made of. In Los Angeles, where hospitals are at their capacities, we are still urged to stay home despite restrictions being lifted somewhat. Staying home for this duration has become quite boring and we all miss seeing friends, going out and doing things. As a certified sommelier, I thought I might share some safe and fun wine ways to continue your enjoyment of wine at home. I miss enjoying wine at restaurants quite a bit and also sharing wine with guests probably even more. As a certified sommelier, I thought I might share some safe and fun wine ways to continue your enjoyment of wine without the restaurant folks and wine aficionados that you haven't been able to visit for months.

If you are consuming all of the TV that is of interest and running out of things to watch, you may consider a movie about wine. There's the 2004 classic *Sideways*. This comedy celebrates pinot noir and the Santa Ynez Valley. Also, Paul Giamatti notoriously pounds a spit bucket like a champ. Napa Valley is at the heart of *Bottle Shock* (2008) where Chris Pine delivers as a young Bo Barrett and California wine aims to be taken seriously on the global stage. The documentary *Sour Grapes* (2016) chronicles

the wine counterfeiting story of Rudy Kurniawan who was arrested in Arcadia in 2012. This absorbing local story involves wine collectors, millions of dollars, hard to find and non-existent Burgundies and prison time. *Wine Country* (2019) is a grape-soaked feel-good comedy about a girl's trip to Napa. Amy Poehler directs and stars with an ensemble cast which resembles an SNL alum field trip.

For those who really want to binge, SOMM TV streams a variety of documentaries and films celebrating all that is Oenology from series like *A Closer Look*, which explores wines and wine regions around the world, to films like *Decanted*, which dives into what it takes to sustain a winery in Napa Valley.

While I own shelves of wine books and many read like reference and text books, there are several introductory books I find myself repeatedly recommending to motivated servers and enthusiastic guests. *A Perfect Glass of Wine: Choosing, Serving, and Enjoying* (Brian St. Pierre, 1996) is an uncomplicated look at the often-intimating subject. Here, St. Pierre takes a sensible approach and features wine by variety with easy-to-understand maps. This book is not insanely dense but instead inspires one to continue pursuing wine as study.

Windows on the World - Complete Wine

Course (Kevin Zraly) was the first wine book I ever purchased. Originally published more than 30 years ago, it still provides the fundamentals like few others. The World Trade Center restaurant is gone forever, but its former wine director keeps it and his eight-week wine course alive through the pages. It's an intense but fun read with quirky sidebars, recap quizzes and producer recommendations.

While endlessly trolling social media or just one more news story, take a second to buy yourself something nice. **Online wine shopping** has never been so easy. You can search by producer, region, grape and price. This takes away some of the fear of whether "it is good." You can rest your searches with things that you already know you like, and branch out slightly without breaking the bank. Many online retailers offer free shipping, discounts at volume and custom recommendations once the site knows you a bit. One thing to note: The driver may need to see you and your license, likely in your PJs, upon delivery to verify your age.

You could also shop locally. Just ring your favorite bottle shop or winery and have them put together a **wine box**. Tell them your favorites, interests and budget and let them find your next favorite wine for you. This is an easy way to support a local business and start building up your wine vocabulary. Don't be afraid to ask questions and journal the things that you like and don't like once you dig into your picks.

While you sit in front of that lifeline of a computer, consider using Zoom for something other than another meeting that could have been an email. Set up a **virtual tasting** or happy hour with friends that you unfortunately haven't seen in some time. You can build a theme to the tasting

like a region or grape but also something more personal like "my favorite bottle" where each person can bring their favorite and share a story about that bottle, where they had it or who they were with. If your friends do not share your enthusiasm for wine, you can attend virtual tastings with pros on sites like wine.com where you can select a tasting that speaks to your preferences.

Celebrate Black History Month by booking a private virtual wine tasting with Phil Long, founder and winemaker of Longevity Wines. Sip, chat, and learn about his award-winning wines and the Longevity story, with a spotlight on Black winemakers.

If your at-home collection is collecting dust, pull out a bottle or two, wrap in foil and then put it back. Once you have forgotten what the wines are, crack them open and test your blind tasting skills. An **at-home tasting** can be a fun way to put all of those newly learned facts to the test. Walk through the steps of deductive tasting and make an educated guess as to what the bottle might be. Is it red or white, light or full, what types of fruit do you smell and taste? What could the wine be or easier, what could it not be? You can also play this game with friends and each person brings a bottle in foil or a brown paper bag.

Savor your wine. Take a moment to forget about that last Zoom meeting and note the color. Slow down, decompress from homeschooling your children and really smell the wine. Forget about the arduous trip to the grocery store and sip it, noting the complexities on the palate. Turn off your current Netflix binge and think about the finish and how it makes you feel. Despite how crazy the world is, and how thirsty it makes us, gulp water and sip wine, you'll feel better if just for a moment.

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