Georges St-Pierre is planning to be a full-time actor following his storied career inside The Octagon, and first up is his return to the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

Born to Batroc

By Jimi Devine
The Rebuild SoCal Partnership (RSCP) consists of 2,750 contractors throughout Southern California that represent more than 90,000 union workers. RSCP is dedicated to working with elected officials and educating the public on the continued need for essential infrastructure funding, including airports, bridges, ports, rail, roads, and water projects.

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After such a tumultuous year in the food industry, happy stories from the chef world are a bright spot to pay attention to. Publisher Brian Calle and Food Editor Michele Stueven are doing just that, cooking up another foodie edition of the L.A. Weekly podcast with celebrated Los Angeles chef Nyesha Arrington.

As one of Michele’s favorite chefs, the hosts have a lot of questions. When did Nyesha know that food was going to be her life? When did she know that this was the path she was going to take?

“I feel like being a chef definitely chose me, it wasn’t something where I was like ‘of I want to be a chef.’ When I look back at my life as a kid and as an adolescent adult, I was always cooking and I enjoyed it. I’d cook for my friends when I was in junior high and make these soups, I was always making these soups, and then I kind of lost [it],” she answers. “In high school they’re like ‘what are you going to do with your life’ and I kind of forgot about my passion because the world will tell you ‘oh you have to be a doctor or a lawyer.’ I don’t know, when I was in school it was like you had to have it all figured out by when you graduated high school. So you know, I put cooking on the back burner for a second, which was only about three months before I went ‘oh, I want to be a chef?’”

“That’s what my life had been telling me the entire time,” she continues. “So I went to culinary school.”

Culinary school proved to be the right choice, as it stirred her innate passion into a full-blown career.

“I remember the first day I sat in class, I listened to the chef … and he was so passionate about sauce and sauce making and in turn it made me very passionate,” says Nyesha. This was the root and foundation that led the young chef to working as a saucier in Michelin-rated restaurants.

“It’s something I really really loved,” she describes, telling the hosts of the complexities of her previous job. “I think cooking was always something that was ingrained in me because I really love to connect with the planet that we’re on and I think that chefs are ultimately nurturers.”

“Definitely I’m living who I’m meant to be on this planet, that’s for sure,” Nyesha laughs.

In an effort to have her passion for food touch the lives of more people, Nyesha plans on debuting a line of sauces for retail soon. The sauces are named for her grandmother.

Nyesha started her path at a very young age due to the love and guidance of her grandma, who had Nyesha in the kitchen as her sous chef whenever she could.

“I used to cook with my grandmother a lot, and I valued that time,” Nyesha says. Today, she is now passing those memories and skills on to her nephew, her “resident egg-cracker.”

“I’m always trying to think of ways to bring some of that culture and some of that soul into homes of other people and on the plates of other people, so you know for me, my affinity for sauces and my affinity for essentially storytelling through flavors is where this sauce came about,” she explains.

You have to be courageous in your steps and have the will to learn to succeed in the food industry, advises our guest. Having had to close two restaurants herself, she’s all too familiar with the incredible peaks and valleys that are just a normal part of chef life.

“I love to be able to see the smiling faces of people eating my food [and hear] the beautiful banter of conversation amongst tables. I really honor to be able to do that for people,” Nyesha says happily.

From empowering Selena Gomez and friends in the kitchen on HBO Max’s Selena + Chef to discussing the state of the industry in a post-COVID world, Nyesha Arrington dishes about it all on the L.A. Weekly podcast. Listen to the podcast on Spotify, Apple Podcasts and Cumulus Los Angeles.
On the heels of the biggest fight in MMA history failing to materialize, Georges St-Pierre sat down with L.A. Weekly to chat about his transition into full-time acting. Soon, he will be returning to the Marvel Cinematic Universe reprising his role as Batroc the Leaper in The Falcon and the Winter Soldier on Disney+. St-Pierre was born to play Batroc, a dangerous Frenchman. Over the years, before his leap to the big screen, St-Pierre proved time and again that he was one of the most exciting fighters on the planet; he worked his way through the greatest welterweights of all time to take that title for himself. Eventually, he added to his hall-of-fame career by exiting retirement to defeat Michael Bisping, winning the middleweight title in the process. At the time, he was only the fourth person to ever accomplish such a feat.

His wildly positive energy made him that much more likable through the title defenses, and when he did get involved in prefight banter it had so much more zip coming from an anti-bullying advocate than from the people talking shit all the time in hopes of selling their fights. So, when you see St-Pierre selected to play a hand-to-hand combat-heavy B-list Marvel villain that's been scrapping with Captain America since the 1960s, it adds some excitement for sure. We've seen some of the most dangerous 170-pound men on the planet stand across from him and fail. It makes it feel more believable when you see George St-Pierre (GSP) get shots in against a title character compared to some random henchman.

Not only is St-Pierre considered one of the greatest mixed martial artists of all time, but he's also arguably America's most famous Canadian athlete without a hockey stick. I mean, he has three times as many Instagram followers as Steve Nash, who is the only other guy in the discussion. We started the interview by congratulating him on being the pride of Quebec that doesn't play hockey.

"I do play! But I suck!" St-Pierre told L.A. Weekly through the laughs. Despite being an amateur gymnast over the last decade, and since incorporating the practice into his training regime in the second half of his career, St-Pierre joked he had no balance on ice and zero hockey intelligence.

We moved on to what is filling his time these days. We didn't want to say retired, because he obviously has plenty on his plate, but we asked how he would describe daily life. He said mainly it's just really busy. But you can hear the conviction in his voice as he attempts to perfect a new craft with the same level of focus that got him multiple UFC titles across two weight classes.

"I'm having a lot of auditions, and I'm working a lot on different skills that require a lot of my time," St-Pierre expands. "My English classes, acting camera classes, theater classes, audition classes. So, I'm very busy now trying to learn new things. And it's a lot of fun. It's like a new challenge in my life."

GSP emphasized that even with all these new challenges, he still trains regularly. According to his longtime training partner
Rory MacDonald – a former Bellator Champion – Canada's second most dangerous welterweight of all time after St-Pierre, half of a lot of people’s greatest fight of all time alongside Robbie Lawler, and the current favorite heading into the million-dollar Professional Fight League Tournament, GSP could still hang with the best of them. "I think if he wanted to, and he had that passion, he definitely could," MacDonald told The Schmo recently. "He’s probably better now than he was when he retired. He just keeps training and keeps getting better.”

Prior to hearing MacDonald's glowing praise just after our chat, we asked GSP if he was still sparring. Simulated combat with the young killers of Montreal and points beyond is no joke and provides perspective on just how hard he's going at the moment. If not for COVID closing the gyms, he said he'd certainly be in there mixing it up with the young lions.

"Yeah, not now because the gyms are closed, but yeah for sure. I always train, and I'm training at the elite level because I help guys prepare for their fights," St-Pierre said before looking ahead to when Montreal gyms reopened just after our chat. "So now I'll be able to go back to the gym and train. I love that the science of fighting.

We asked St-Pierre how much easier it is to balance the acting side with training compared to when he was an active champion defending his belt. The first time he portrayed Batroc was in the training camp leading up to his fight with a pre-USADA Johny Hendricks. At that moment, Hendricks was one of the most spectacular knockout artists in the UFC with three knockout-of-the-night bonuses during a six-fight win streak that led up to the St-Pierre fight.

"Yeah, exactly. Just different stress," St-Pierre replied. "Because when you fight you have only one shot. If you zig when you should zag you can get knocked out. It could be very bad for you.”

Acting isn't as bad, "because they say 'Cut! Let's do it again' but there is much less pressure. "

St-Pierre said every time he walked to the Octagon, he was terrified and uncomfortable, but thankfully he had a mean poker face. It's always surprising to hear GSP reference this in interviews over the years since his walkouts were in the top 20% for energy levels throughout his career.

St-Pierre went on to say even with the difference in the kind of pressure he faces when it comes time to shoot a take, there are certainly similarities in preparation. Both require him to rehearse for the various outcomes he sees in his head.

"But when you get on set it's not exactly the same as you imagine it. The setup is always different. Very often the reactions of the other actor are playing differently," St-Pierre said. “So, to be successful, a successful fighter and a successful actor, I believe you need to be, like Bruce Lee said, 'Be like water my friend.' The best actors and fighters, I think they’re the ones that can adapt the best.”

Playing off his Bruce Lee reference, we asked what it was like to be such a major representative for traditional martial arts in this new platform where he plans to take the bull by the horns. St-Pierre credited Hollywood's attempts to cast more authentically over the years with his chance to provide a platform to martial arts. It came down to the perfect timing of The MCU needing a ninja with a Quebecois accent that could pass as French to the less cultured ear.

"I'm just very blessed and lucky that I came in the right timing. I've been told that in Hollywood now there's this new trend that if they're looking for someone to play an Italian guy, they're going to often choose an Italian person. Same thing when they look for someone to play an Irish guy they, look for someone with an Irish background," St-Pierre said.

St-Pierre said it was a lot of fun to be able to put a different level of commitment into the character this time around. The first time it was just for fun, now it's a lot more important to him as he moves on post-fight life. "And I'm aware now that the career of an athlete has a limit, you know?" St-Pierre said. "We all have a window, and you can say I can play basketball, play football, play baseball, but you don't play fight. You don't want to hang there too long in a sport like fighting because it could be very dangerous.”

As St-Pierre wanted to change the orientation of his career to focus more on acting, Disney contacted him to reprise his role in the MCU.

"I was thrilled," St-Pierre said of the timing. "I felt very lucky that the stars were all aligned. And now I'm focusing on acting full-time. It's been two years now that I followed low classes. I improved my game, my acting game.” He emphasized he still has a lot to learn now that he has a lot more screen time. He expects fans to love what they see.

We asked St-Pierre how much the money factored into us not seeing him fight more in the second half of the 2010s. He said it wasn't too much of a factor. He knew the PPV money would be there. His first fight with PPV points was worth more than his whole career combined up to that point.

Contrary to the financial aspects, GSP said the state of the game before the UFC brought in the United States Anti-Doping Agency to run its drug-testing program certainly played a factor in his activity levels.

He pointed again to the “you don’t play fighting” metaphor. “Especially for that reason, because the outcome of a fight to them, severe impact of the athlete's life, and the well-being. And that's one of the major reasons I’ve always believed that our sport should be clean, more than any other sport. Because the outcome could influence so much more in the life and the health of the athlete.”

After helping lead the conversation around testing in the years prior to the UFC’s eventual deal with USADA, St-Pierre is thrilled to see where the conversation is now. He understood the risk the organization took in wider scrutiny of the substanc-
feel more about feeling more

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Walking into the galleries at Hauser & Wirth Los Angeles right now is like walking into summer. A new suite of just five paintings (three quite large) by Amy Sherald radiate from the broad clean walls, where her subjects pose with sunflowers and bicycles and flowing blue dresses, surf gear, muscle cars, kitten heels and sunshine. It’s a pageant of gloriously ordinary American life. All the people in the paintings are Black; all the simple blue-sky pleasures on offer are universal.

As Sherald is best known for her celebrated portraits of Michelle Obama and Breonna Taylor, it’s tempting to see these compositions as portraits as well. There’s a certain relationship to selfies and other tropes of vernacular photography -- for example the pure joy of a cute head-to-toe pink look and a shiny car at the end of the driveway in As American as apple pie, or the feeling-myself jaunt of someone in their new favorite shirt in A bucket full of treasures (Papa gave me sunshine to put in my pockets...). The regal, rural peace of A Midsummer Afternoon Dream especially makes you want to know more about the stylish cyclist

The celebrated artist’s new L.A. show expands Americana

BY SHANA NYS DAMBROT
and her picturesque world and adorable dog.

“I have to say that when I look at these paintings that I make, I don’t see them as portraits,” Sherald tells the Weekly. “Once I photograph the model and start making the painting, they stop being themselves and they start to represent something else. The work itself I think sits more conceptually within the American art canon. I consider myself an American Realist and somebody that paints about American experiences -- of which the Black experience is a subset,” albeit both an integral and perniciously othered one.

When this conversation about Americanism started for Sherald, she was abroad and somebody said something derogatory about America, and it was addressed to her as an American. She had this moment of epiphany that she was being conflated with all Americans -- assumed to be just a random American like any other -- in a way that was both troubling and way more equalized than what she experienced at home, where her Americanness was under constant question. “To be forced to experience such diametrically opposed emotions in a single moment was freeing,” she says. “It’s like, you figure out the shape of your Americanness only when you leave America and get that perspective.”

This idea about joy and banality, about belonging to America, is a discourse that is as urgent as her paintings are serene. It is a tall order, decolonizing Western art history, but it has to happen. The question is, by what means. “The American story has to include all Americans,” Sherald says. “Black people live out our lives in the most mellow and boring ways, just like everyone. It’s not always a moment of resistance, anger and grief. That’s a huge part of our narrative from the time we came across through the Middle Passage to
now, but it’s like, we are kaleidoscopic, full humans.”

This statement is delivered in Sherald’s work with thoughtful familiarity and intentionally off-kilter but always pleasant nuance. Her relationship to Americana includes a sort of quasi-abstract, color-driven approach to rendering full figures in flat pictorial space and other schematic stylizations -- all of which meshes perfectly with our post-photography visual culture. Color and abstraction in Sherald’s style perform a sort of parallel narrative to the imagery, telling an intuitive and emotional story, creating within a harmonious arrangement of shapes a tender, balanced sensation -- what Sherald calls “the sweet sound,” the feeling of which is how she knows when a painting is finished.

In service of this, her striking and slightly eccentric palette is her own invention; sometimes she even creates and names new colors in tandem with the paintings themselves, like Camaro Orange, or Two If By Sea. “These colors kind of tell little stories too,” she says. “I think it’s all the same. Even when I look at abstraction, the way that one color plays into another color, there’s a kind of symmetrical narrative there. So, I think the way that I approach my work and the way that I approach color is the same way that somebody would make a painting that’s based on abstraction, because for me it’s totally intuitive. There’s a lot of non-verbal, really spiritual moments happening in the process. I feel like the painting becomes the director of me, in a way.”

So, what can viewers glean as to Sherald’s current state of mind from the bright, bold, upbeat palette of “The Great American Fact” paintings? “You know, somebody asked me, how much of your life do you want to allocate grief? And these paintings are just light, moments of pleasure and leisure and joy -- because life has to have balance. And we have to have time to breathe. And I think, for me, they were a part of taking care of my own well-being and my own mental health. I needed to see this work, too.”

Amy Sherald: The Great American Fact is on view by appointment through June 6 at Hauser & Wirth Los Angeles, in the downtown Arts District; free; hauserwirth.com.
FROM DEATHSTROKE TO DJ:

Joe Manganiello Rocks New Roles in Smiths-Inspired Movie Shoplifters of the World and the Justice League Snyder Cut

BY LINA LECARO

Shoplifters

BY LINA LECARO

L.A. WEEKLY: Really enjoyed the new movie and I think it will resonate with music lovers no matter what genre they were into growing up. I’m curious what kind of music you listened to as a teen and if your tastes and past experiences informed this role as a heavy metal DJ?

JOE MANGANIELLO: I don’t think I was easily put into a category. In high school I was kind of friends with everybody. But I will say that from a young age, I had all Van Halen records. And then as I got a little bit older, I think my first cassette tape was Bon Jovi Slippery When Wet. Then I found Appetite for Destruction, and that was – that just blew my mind wide open. Then I discovered Ride the Lightning, and I listened to nothing but that, start to finish and then on repeat, for about 18 months straight. I had a yellow Sony Walkman, and I would flip the tape. Once one side ended, I would flip it to the other side and that went on for about a year and a half… Then I realized, oh wait, there’s like Kill Them All and Master of Puppets. My first concert was Pantera, Sepultura and Biohazard, so it started there. But I wound up in the theater club. So I was a jock and captain of the sports team, but I also had friends I would make movies with. Then, from making those movies, I wound up getting cast in a bunch of plays my senior year. So when my senior year started and theater replaced sports, I thought, “I am going to be an actor or be in entertainment…” I’m going full force over in this direction.” So once I started hanging out with the theater kids, I started getting mix tapes with all of those bands around that time, whether it was The Smiths and New Order or Violent Femmes. The great bands of that era.

It’s a bygone era and I felt the movie really captured that time. Can you talk a little bit about how you approached playing the DJ? Did you model him after anyone?

I think when I looked at the character, I thought, okay, there’s a bit of Eric Bogosian in there. He’s like a shock jock but I think that that mixed with – I don’t want to say Henry Rollins’ cause Rollins was very punk – and Micky is very metal. But I was certainly obsessed with Rollins. You know kind of like the spoken word, and there is a bit of poetry that comes with my character. He kind of gets poetic about what’s going on with these kids and so there’s a bit of that. I think that my relationship to Ellar’s character is very Sam Shepard True West. That’s where you have these two characters whose identities were very much linked. I chose a certain music type and a certain way of dressing, that then lent itself to a certain ideology and created a form of tribalism amongst themselves to repel others who are not as cool. I think that they ultimately intersect in the middle and kind of wind up influencing each other and becoming more well rounded by the end.

It’ll be interesting to see if older viewers relate more to your character’s perspective and if younger audiences connect with the kids… even though they represent music-lovers who are our ages now.

One of the scenes talks about rock stars that you idolize and how bands break up all the time, and they’re gonna get older and they’re gonna say things that are gonna turn you off and go against everything they ever stood for. When you’re young you’re putting all these eggs into this basket of worship, and they’re just going to disappoint you, which is a very cynical way of thinking. But I think what my character needs is the ability to open up because he’s also had his heart broken and he’s never really been able to reconcile it. Through the music of The Smiths and through Ellar’s character opening up, my character becomes a little more sensitive, and I think his character a little tougher, a little cooler.

Speaking of worship, fandom and being disappointed sometimes, are you aware that a lot of fans feel that way about The Smiths singer?

Well, I’m a huge Smiths fan too. So yeah, I’m aware. We started making the film 10 years ago. Well, I read the script and met with Stephen [it] about 10 years ago so that was a different climate. The things that you’re referring to, didn’t even reach… Our film isn’t about that – it’s not even really about Morrissey. It’s about the teenagers who were affected by the breakup of the greatest band of all time. And if you talk about the band’s influence on kids in 1987, oh my god, they were huge. Morrissey was worshiped like Elvis. If you went to a Morrissey concert there’d be boys and girls crying.

Oh yeah for sure. I think that especially in this day and age, we have to ask ourselves the age-old question: can we appreciate the art and even separate it if we don’t like everything that the artist did in their lives. Yeah and that topic didn’t necessarily have to be broached for our film because like I said, we were shooting scenes set in a certain time.

I think you guys pulled it off and I really enjoyed it. So shifting gears, I’m not a big superhero movie watcher, but like everyone else who has HBO, I did watch the Zack Snyder Justice League cut and was happy to see you in the end. What can you tell us about your role in the theatrical release versus the new cut?

Okay so I was cast by Ben Affleck to play the main villain in his Batman. The plan was to tease our Batman movie and give the first glimpse of me as the villain Deathstroke in the end credit scene in Justice League. Four and a half years ago I shot the scene on the yacht with Lex Luther. When Batman was canceled, the studio went in and ADR-ed Jesse Eisenberg’s dialogue and re-shot with him in a bald cap to tease a Justice League part two, which never happened, without me even knowing they did that. I signed on for the Batman movie but when it was canceled, I thought, okay, they’re just gonna throw that scene out. But that wasn’t the case. They altered it to tease a part two, which I was not signed on for. So that’s what appeared at the end of the original theatrical cut of Justice League. Now, what you see at the end of the Zack cut is the restoration of the scene that teases me going after Batman.

Would you like to pursue more with the Deathstroke character?

Well I wrote the story for an origin film prior to the mass exodus of executives that happened after Justice League came out in theaters. The entire studio was reshuffled. The people who were champions of my origin film left the studio. And the next regime that came in did not see that film as a priority. The old regime was in negotiations with Garrett Evans, the director of The Raid movies, to direct this origin story so, like, do I have a story? Would I love to be able to take all of that, take all those old notes and turn it into like a serious character? Yes. So do you have anything else you’ve been working on?

There’s Archenemy and another film, Spine of Night, an animated Rotoscope film that I recorded seven years ago; it just played South of Night and another cartoon, Big City Greens. I’m the voice of Viper Fang who is the arch nemesis of Danny Trejo’s Tiger Fang. I have an animated film called Koati which is about the Latin American animals of the jungle that Sophia [Vergara, his wife] produce and does a voice in. I play the fatherly panther in that movie, and that’s coming out, so that’s fun. And I voiced a 3D animated series that is being directed by Zack Snyder. It’s part of his zombie universe for Netflix.

A longer version of this interview appears on LAWeekly.com.

Shoplifters of the World is currently in select theaters, available to rent now on VOD and digital including Amazon Prime.
L.A. County moved into the “orange tier” of California’s Blueprint for a Safer Economy this week and with it came the ability for businesses to serve more people.

In the orange tier, restaurants, movie theaters, museums, zoos and places of worship will be allowed to operate at 50% of their max capacity.

While Public Health did not update its guidance for stadiums and theme parks, being in the orange tier would qualify stadiums and outdoor entertainment venues to increase their capacity limit from 20% to 33%.

Dodger Stadium, which will begin its Dodger season on April 9, would be allowed to seat nearly 20,000 fans instead of 11,000 when under the red tier.

Theme parks in L.A. County, such as Six Flags Magic Mountain and Universal Studios, would also be eligible to increase occupancy from 15% to 25% of max capacity.

The 25% max capacity would also apply to gyms, wineries and bowling alleys.

In the orange tier, Los Angeles bars also will be allowed to reopen for the first time since Gov. Gavin Newsom ordered a shutdown on June 28, 2020.

As restrictions lessened over the months, bars that served food were allowed to do so outdoors, but alcohol-only bars remained shut down.

Los Angeles city bars can apply for the city’s “Al Fresco” program and begin the reopening process.

The Al Fresco program allowed restaurants to forgo outside permits that were usually necessary to set up dining areas on sidewalks, streets or parking lots. Now bars will be allowed to operate under the same program, pending their approval from the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control.

“Bars will be able to open outdoors, not indoors,” Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti said, Wednesday. “Bars in the city of Los Angeles will be eligible for our very successful L.A. Al Fresco program.”

As was the case with restaurants, face masks will still be required when not eating or drinking in these bars and there will be no counter service. Live entertainment will also not be allowed at bars.

Like restaurants, tables will be set up eight feet apart with no more than six people per table.

There will also be a 10 p.m. curfew for L.A. bars, just as there is for wineries and breweries.

A leading qualifier to get into the orange tier was averaging less than four new positive cases per 100,000 residents. L.A. County’s COVID-19 case rate currently stands at 3.8 per 100,000 residents. It also needed to average less than 5% positive cases in the whole county, a rate that currently stands at 1.5%.

In order to move down to the yellow tier, L.A. County will need to average less than 1 positive case per 100,000 residents, or about 100 daily positive cases. Even if the county does meet these metrics, it must remain in the orange tier for at least three weeks before moving down.

REOPENING INDOOR THEATERS AND ARENAS

With proof of vaccination or COVID-19 testing, California arenas, theaters and concert venues will be allowed to operate indoors starting April 15.

Although Los Angeles County has not publicly announced if its venues will align with the California order yet, the Lakers put out a statement that implied fans would be able to watch the April 15 game against Boston, in person.

“We are incredibly excited that the state of California announced guidelines today that will allow Lakers fans to return to STAPLES Center,” the Lakers said in a statement. “Now that we have the guidance, we will work with L.A. County Public Health and STAPLES Center to finalize our plans to have fans safely attend our games starting with the Lakers vs. Celtics game on April 15.”

Both the Lakers and Clippers are also in the process of putting together ticket packages for fans to attend future games.

In order to attend an indoor event, proof of vaccination, or a negative COVID-19 test, will be required, although the process for that has not yet been announced.

There is also a possibility of having separate sections within the venues where fully vaccinated people may sit shoulder-to-shoulder, with masks, while non-vaccinated people may be seated in a curated, socially-distanced manner.

The capacity at which theaters and arenas can operate will vary depending on which “tier” the county is in according to California’s Blueprint for a Safer Economy.

“Today’s update to the Blueprint for Safer Economy is a result of the progress we are making both in vaccinations and in controlling the spread of COVID-19,” California Health and Human Services Secretary Dr. Mark Ghaly said.

By following public health guidelines such as wearing masks and getting vaccinated when eligible, we can resume additional activities as we take steps to reduce risk.”

Los Angeles is currently in the orange tier, but as of this writing, a capacity limit has not been announced for the tier. Those counties in the red tier, which has been more restrictive than the orange tier, will be allowed 10% in venues that have a max capacity of 1,500 or less. Venues that are larger will be allowed 20% capacity within the red tier, and 35% in the orange tier.

Other high-capacity venues such as theme parks and outdoor stadiums have started the reopening process in Los Angeles, but this would be the first time indoor venues will be reopening.

Orange tier modifications to the L.A. Health Officer Order will begin Monday with expanded capacity for businesses and the reopening of bars.

FULLY VACCINATED ANGELENOS WILL NOT NEED COVID-19 TESTS TO TRAVEL

The L.A. County Department of Public Health said the CDC’s recommended travel guidance for fully vaccinated people will apply in Los Angeles, as of Monday.

The CDC’s flight regulations state that those who have been fully vaccinated will not need to take a COVID-19 test, nor self quarantine after a domestic flight.

“The CDC and L.A. County continue to urge that everyone avoid nonessential travel during this time when there are significant hotspots across the country and the world,” L.A. Public Health director Barbara Ferrer said Monday.

“Travel is always associated with additional risk, however, travelers who are fully vaccinated… are at lower risk and they can now travel and they will not be required to test or quarantine upon their arrival in L.A. County.”

Ferrer added that the guidelines apply to fully vaccinated people who are not experiencing COVID-19 symptoms.

COVID-19 tests will still be required for all before flying into the U.S. from another country, however. There are also instances when an international destination may require a test before a flight.

Those who are not fully vaccinated will still be asked to take and get a negative COVID-19 test before travel and quarantine for at least seven days after travel.

People are considered fully vaccinated two weeks after their final COVID-19 dose. Those receiving the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine are considered fully vaccinated two weeks after their second (or “booster”) shot. Those receiving the Johnson & Johnson vaccine are considered fully vaccinated two weeks after taking the single-dose shot.

The CDC still recommends caution as variants of the COVID-19 virus have been discovered and are still being researched as far as severity, spreadability and reaction with the current vaccines.
DRAPED IN ARMANI

Rapper Jahmed Drops Second Locked-Down EP

BY BRETT CALLWOOD

There was no way that west coast rapper Jahmed was going to let a global pandemic slow down his career when it was just getting started. The artist was just preparing to release his THEBOOFMOBILE EP when the world screeched to a halt, and so he had to do everything the hard way. A debut drop with no touring – the ability to take his brand new music to the masses was snatched away. But the internet has made the world a small place, and he’s thriving anyway. Now, he’s just released the Armani album – his second lockdown project.

“THEBOOFMOBILE came out this time last year, in the earlier stages, so we were limited on that rollout,” Jahmed says by phone. “Same with this one. I think it’s a beauty because it takes a lot of guts to do stuff like this. I’m very new into being in the business, the industry. For me to be limited and still making somewhat of an impact is a blessing because when the time is right, when we’re not locked down and limited, I think I’m gonna go crazy when I drop a project and I can really have a full rollout and a press run with it. All of this only tells me what I can do when I’m not limited.”

He’s right. He’s currently like a coiled spring, doing everything he can while options are restricted and ready to go crazy when conditions allow. He’s been preparing for this his whole life.

“Probably the age of 14 around 2010, is when I first started, when I first made my first record,” he says. “It didn’t really get serious until I got into high school. Everybody was figuring out what they were going to do, college-wise. I tried to lean toward the college route but it didn’t make sense. Rap was a tool for me to express myself, because I was going through a lot at the time. It just made sense for me to really take it seriously then, around 2014.”

Back then, he was learning from west coast icons such as Ice Cube/NWA, DJ Quik, and Suga Free. Like the latter, Jahmed is from Pomona, though he has divided his time between California and Texas for family reasons. That geographical split, he says, has helped shape his personality and musical style.

“During high school, at Christmas and winter breaks, I would go out to Texas because my grandmother on my father’s side, they all lived there,” he says. “Both of my grandmothers are southern. So the south has always been in my blood. When I was able, I’d go back and forth to Texas and eventually after I graduated high school, I moved to Texas to see what Texas was talking about. Honestly, it’s one of the greatest moves I ever did because growing up in California, you’re used to certain things, seeing certain things. The lingo. Then you have this second chance to experience a whole other side of the world. You start getting into the southern lingo, the music, and it was one of the best things I ever did. I was able to match those two worlds together and come up with records like ‘Roadblock’ where it’s a southern bassline but then California sounds, swag and attitudes.”

Nowadays, he describes his sound as energetic, a means to express himself.

“Really just being aggressive with certain records,” he says. “It’s just out there. I guess you never know what you’re going to get when you listen to Jah. I’m not trying to box myself in, but it’s very open.”

While his love for Texas is understandable, Jahmed is keen to stress the virtues of the current SoCal hip-hop scene. This region will, he says, always provide due to its ingrained authenticity.

“It’s aggressive, it’s up front with you, and a lot of times we need that in music,” he says. “We have a lot of different types of approaches from different sides. But Southern California is always gonna be there because it’s just real. We’re tough out here, and we’re tough critics. We’re so selective of who to put on a pedestal because you’ve got to be authentic. You’ve got to be about what you’re talking about, what you’re rapping about. We don’t just accept anything.”

Armani is the new EP, and it displays all of that authenticity and aggression. Jahmed is naturally delighted with the way it turned out.

“I think it was the perfect outcome,” he says. “Making a body of work, I had expectations and of course I exceeded those. Just on the music side, the sonic, the maturity that I’ve obtained while making this project. I’m definitely pleased with the outcome. I couldn’t be happier.”

Lyrically, the artist has tried to keep things as literal as possible. There’s little in the way of metaphor here, as he explores life as he knows it.

“I try to spoon feed the lyrics, and at the same time balance it with saying clever things,” he says. “I think lyrically, it’s a perfect balance. There’s enough to really, for hip-hop heads, in records like ‘Makaveli,’ and ‘Dirty, Ho.’ It’s a perfect balance when seeing it from afar.”

The evolution from THEBOOFMOBILE is, he says, stark. His writing is more mature, even after only a year. That debut EP saw the rapper having fun and finding himself.

“It’s the same thing with Armani as well, but you can hear a lot of maturity,” he says. “You can hear that I went through something, and putting that vulnerability frontline. What I have to share and my experience of living. Being a young black man in America, I just think those few topics I name right there, it’s a huge progression. It takes a lot for an artist to put himself in front of these songs and giving it to the thousands of people who listen to you. You’re giving your life to these people.”

Looking ahead, Jahmed has some livestreams in the world for 2021, and he hasn’t stopped recording.

“Two days after the project, I went right back into the studio so I think there will be more music coming,” he says. “More records. I’m trying to get one more project out before the end of the year. I’m trying to go crazy with it. It just don’t stop. It’s still going to be coming.”

Jahmed’s Armani EP is out now.
SOME VICTIMS OF CHILD ABUSE END UP WITH VICTIMS OF THEIR OWN.

Before he became a murderous cult leader, Charles Manson was a victim of child abuse. Visit amigosforkids.org to help Stop The Cycle.
Yung Bleu is Ready To Flood The Charts

BY RYAN LEUTZ

Yung Bleu, 26, is known for being an extremely versatile and successful R&B crooner. He started his music career in Mobile, Alabama, as a rapper in the mixtape scene, which is a stark contrast to his style of music today.

“Most people describe [my sound] as R&B. I would describe it as ‘pain music’ because I go back and forth between singing and rapping a lot,” Bleu told the Rockstar Experience Podcast. “But for me, I can step outside of that and go anywhere I want with it. I’m just diverse really. I can slide in and out of any genre I want to.”

Bleu’s versatility has paid off for him in dividends with multiple gold records and a nomination in XXL’s Freshman List. He also scored himself a Drake feature on his hit song “You’re Mines Still,” which has proved to be one of the biggest breaks of Bleu’s career.

“I knew it was gonna pop off when I did the original song. I just ain’t know when,” Bleu told us. “Drake hopping on it just sped it up. You know what I’m saying? I knew it was a good song.”

The song has been one of Bleu’s biggest, earning him a gold certification, and the story behind the record is just as impressive.

“I did ‘You’re Mines Still’ in 15 minutes,” Bleu professed.

“And you freestyled it?” we asked.

“Yeah I just heard the beat and walked in the studio. I dropped that whole project within 4 days because I just woke up one day and was like ‘I wanna drop a concept project.’ I had just dropped the album but I was like ‘man I just wanna keep music coming.’” Bleu said.

And that he has. Yung Bleu has released two projects in the past year – Bleu Vandross 2 and Love Scars: The 5 Stages of Emotion – and it seems like there is more music on the way now that he’s figured out his label situation. Bleu recently took to social media and claimed that leaving a major label and going independent was “one of the best decisions of his career.”

Bleu recently left his long-time major label to publish his music independently through a distribution company, Empire Distribution. When asked about the specifics of his label situation, Bleu explained his reasoning.

“It just worked out for me man, it’s just my personal decision,” he said. “When I went independent I just made way more money and had more freedom to do what I wanna do. I just started prospering way more. Once I came to Empire, they gave me the tools to do what I knew needed to be done, without questioning. Shit just started goin’ crazy. I had only dropped like two projects since I been off a major label and ‘Love Scars’ was one of them. I just randomly texted the [Empire Distribution] CEO and said ‘I want to drop a project Friday. Two weeks. Get ready.’ And I couldn’t have done that with a major label!”

Now that Bleu is working with added flexibility and prosperity through his Empire Distribution move, he’s ready to drop his next project. Bleu has promised that it will be released this year and will contain more heavyweight features.

“I don’t know when it’s comin’, I just know I don’t really wanna say any of the features because they’re not cleared yet. I know they gonna be cleared but it’s gonna be a lot of huge people on there,” Bleu said.

“So for sure this year right?” asked Bryan Escalante, the Rockstar Experience’s producer.

“Yes, for sure, yeah,” Bleu assured.

Until then, dive into Yung Bleu’s extensive catalog and check out his latest hit record, “Thieves in Atlanta” ft. Coi Leray.

You can check out the full Rockstar Experience Podcast interview on Spotify, Apple Podcasts and iHeart Radio.

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NEW MEXICO NEXT TO LEGALIZE
Cannabis Legalization Bills Sent to Governor

BY JIMI DEVINE

New Mexico will be the next state to legalize marijuana as Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham enthusiastically watched the Legislature send the bill to her desk last night while advocates across the nation were still celebrating the morning’s victory in New York.

Under the new plan, sales of adult-use marijuana would begin no later than one year from today. A new Cannabis Control Division of the state’s Regulation and Licensing Department will absorb the medical license under its umbrella.

House Bill 2, the Cannabis Regulation Act, and its companion bill, Senate Bill 2, create the general framework for legalization in New Mexico.

“The bill expunges criminal records for cannabis acts no longer illegal under HB2 & rightly expands the small list of records that can’t be considered for public employment or licensure,” New Mexico House Democrats noted on their official Twitter following the victory.

The plan permits adults over the age of 21 to legally purchase up to two ounces of marijuana. They can also buy up to 16 grams of cannabis extracts. New Mexicans can also buy other products for their own personal use.

As former-Gov. Bill Richardson did 14 years ago for medical marijuana, Lujan Grisham would prove a critical champion for legal marijuana in the Land of Enchantment.

After noting her pen was ready via Twitter, Lujan Grisham issued a statement on the legislation, following a two-day special session.

“This is a significant victory for New Mexico,” Lujan Grisham said. “Workers will benefit from the opportunity to build careers in this new economy. Entrepreneurs will benefit from the opportunity to create lucrative new enterprises. The state and local governments will benefit from the additional revenue. Consumers will benefit from the standardization and regulation that comes with a bona fide industry. And those who have been harmed by this country’s failed war on drugs, disproportionately communities of color, will benefit from our state’s smart, fair and equitable new approach to past low-level convictions.”

Lujan Grisham went on to note a lot of the work was done during the regular session, but the two-day session certainly proved a success. She also thanked her fellow advocates leading the charge.

“This is a good bill,” Lujan Grisham said. “This special session was a success. And the work of making sure that this industry is a success, that New Mexicans are able to reap the full economic and social benefit of legalized adult-use cannabis, that workplace and roadway safety are assured to the greatest degree possible — that work will go on. Change never comes easily and rarely does it occur as quickly as we might like. But with this major step forward, we are signaling more clearly than ever before that we are ready, as a state, to truly break new ground. To think differently about ourselves and our economic future, to fearlessly invest in ourselves and in the limitless potential of New Mexicans.”

The governor again took to twitter on Thursday morning as advocates awaited word of a signing. She said change never comes easy and rarely does it occur as quickly as we might like. “But with this major step forward, we are signaling more clearly than ever before that we are ready, as a state, to truly break new ground, to think differently about ourselves and our future.”

It’s been a wild 48 hours for the team at the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana (NORML) after 50 years of effort. These important policy changes will ensure that consumers going forward will no longer suffer criminal arrest and prosecution, while also remedying past injustices caused by the drug war,” said Carly Wolf, NORML’s State Policies Manager.

Wolf was excited to see, for the second time in as many days, a legalization plan that didn’t forget about the communities devastated by previous enforcement.

“I commend lawmakers for working together to craft legislation that prioritizes social justice and inclusion,” Wolf said. “Passage of this legislation will ensure that minor marijuana possession offenders, many of them young people, are no longer saddled with a criminal record and the lifelong penalties and stigma associated with it.”

NORML Executive Director Erik Altieri also issued a statement, reminded everyone the legislative efforts we’re seeing in New York and New Mexico are now the norm.

“New Mexico joins an ever-growing list of states that have realized the failures of marijuana prohibition and the harms it brings to their communities and citizens. They are the third state so far this year that has approved legalization via the legislative process and we expect several more will follow suit in a short period of time,” Altieri said.

Altieri believes the dominoes will continue to fall, one by one, as more and more Americans normalize their relationship with marijuana as it continues its exit from the illicit market.

“The American people are demanding an end to prohibitionist policies that have wreaked havoc on communities of color, squandered countless millions in taxpayer dollars, and wasted limited judicial and law enforcement resources on criminalizing otherwise law-abiding individuals for possession of a product that is objectively less harmful than currently legal alcohol and tobacco,” Altieri said. “Thankfully, lawmakers at the state level are finally implementing the will of their constituents and, by doing so, they are applying further pressure on the federal government to finally deschedule marijuana nationally and end this ongoing tension between state and federal policies.”