

# LAWEEKLY<sup>®</sup>



L.A. HOSTS LEMON  
CHERRY GELATO BATTLE

PUSSY RIOT'S  
'PUNK OPERA' ARRIVES  
AT THE BELASCO

PHRANC'S QUEER  
CARDBOARD FASHION  
SENSE

NOVEMBER 3-9, 2023 / VOL. 45 / NO. 52  
LAWEEKLY.COM

HOW BODY ELECTRIC'S  
**BRIAN KEITH THOMPSON**  
TOOK PIERCING TO THE NEXT  
LEVEL. PLUS, PERSPECTIVE ON  
THE PRACTICE FROM LA'S  
PIERCING PIONEERS

## NEEDLING THROUGH

BY LINA LECARO

CALENDAR

GO EDITORS' PICKS

ARTS

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 2

**Cristopher Cichocki: Rising Inversion at Laguna Art Museum.** For LAM's 11th annual Art + Nature festival, PalmSprings-based multidisciplinary artist Cristopher Cichocki stages an outdoor installation at Main Beach. Rising Inversion harnesses oceanic and planetary elements engaging in direct dialogue with the surrounding natural landscape; from dawn to dusk, the installation morphs from a sprawling arc of sand and barnacles into a luminescent orb rising over the Pacific shoreline. This synergy encircled within the elements of water and light will illuminate throughout the night in a phosphorescent glow powered from the residual energy of the sun—and form the setting for a free audio visual performance at the site on Saturday, November 4 at 7pm. *On view November 2-5 on the beach in front of the Inn at Laguna Beach; free; various ticket levels for related programs and events; lagunaartmuseum.org.*

**LAX Festival presents DaEun Jung: NORRI at L.A. Dance Project.** An evening-length group dance project inspired by the principle, form, and mode of Korean folk dance as a communal performance practice. NORRI, meaning “play” in Korean, creates an inclusive platform to experiment with collaborative pattern compositions while celebrating both collective accomplishments and individual grooves. Re-stylized Korean dance vocabulary, spontaneous Pansori (Korean traditional folk opera) phrases, and continuous pulse of electronic sound interact with each other as the rhythmic encounters of past/present, formality/spontaneity, and uniformity/singularity suggest a new contemporary movement. 2245 E. Washington Blvd., downtown; Thursday-Friday, November 2-3, 8pm; \$14-\$29; [performancepractice.la](http://performancepractice.la).

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 3

**Ewa Juszkiewicz: In a Shady Valley, Near a Running Water at Gagosian.** Juszkiewicz's oil paintings of women begin with historical portraits, appropriating their style while

subverting their conventions through fantastical and discomfoting pictorial interventions. Emulating representations of women painted in the Grand Manner style popular in Western art from the eighteenth through the early nineteenth century, she re-creates the poses, fashion, and settings of her sources while transforming their scales and palettes and adding details that point to the artifice of femininity's stereotypical markers. 456 N. Camden Dr., Beverly Hills; *Opening reception: Friday, November 3, 6-8pm; On view through December 22; free; gagosian.com.*

**Glenn Ligon: DOUBLE NEGATIVE, and Gillian Wearing: reflections at Regen Projects.**

Ligon's artworks frequently cite James Baldwin's 1953 essay, “Stranger in the Village,” but it unfolds here in full across 18 panels, affording what Ligon describes as “the ground on which the painting is sited.” As if to deny or redact what has already been disclosed, X's appear across the nine diptychs, pushing toward abstraction and creating new meanings. In Wearing's portraits, the painter adopts the guises of others as a way of inquiring about the consistency of the self, focusing our attention on the precarity of perception and self-perception, the constructed reality of pictures of any kind, and the susceptibility of how we see ourselves. 6750 Santa Monica Blvd., Hollywood; *Opening reception: Friday, November 3, 6-8pm; On view through December 23; free; regenprojects.com.*

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 4

**Moncho 1929: Botánica at UNREPD.** Dan Monteavaro (Moncho 1929)'s series of 19 new paintings on canvas and wood panel, reimagines the botánica—a space for community, spirituality, and healing for many Latinx people in the United States. Through an exploration of the spirituality of his Puerto Rican upbringing, Monteavaro gives new form to the diversity of cultures, beliefs, and traditions that shape Latinx communities today. 100 S. Grand Ave., downtown; *Opening reception: Saturday, November 4, 6-9pm; On view through; free; unrepd.com.*

LA Dance Film Festival (Live & Virtual).

The 7th annual edition of this celebration of curated short dance films from around the world features an eclectic lineup of 14 intriguing dance films screening in one unforgettable night of journeys through deep human emotions, explored through movement. And to get into the groove, enter the world of dance filmmaking with award-winning director Nadav Heyman in an in-person masterclass earlier that afternoon. Mimoda Studio, 5774 W. Pico Blvd., Mid-City; *Saturday, November 4, 8pm (and online); \$20; instagram.com/ladancefilmfest.*

**Simphiwe Ndzube: Chorus at BLUM.** Ex-

panding the reaches of his surrealist Mine Moon universe—the fictional location that has long functioned as the setting for the artist's otherworldly vignettes—Ndzube perfects his use of oil paint through carving, manipulating finishes to convey a pointillist effect, or adding sand to build out from the canvas. The artist's subject—Black choral music traditions in South Africa—serves as a vehicle, advancing Ndzube's storyline and making space for new painterly techniques. BLUM (Blum & Poe as was), 2727 S. La Cienega Blvd., Culver City; *Opening reception: Saturday, November 4, 5-7pm; On view through December 16; free; blum-gallery.com.*

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 5

**Yoo Lee: The Nectar Instead at Winslow Garage.** Stop-motion animated films and their handmade props from several works by Lee—a Korean-American artist and filmmaker who started her career as a fashion designer before transitioning to animation. Lee was drawn to stop-motion animated films because it is a single endeavor that demands all of her knowledge and discipline working in concert toward a single multidimensional vision. 3540 Winslow Dr., Silver Lake; *Opening reception: Sunday, November 5, 3-5pm; free; winslowgarage.com.*

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 8

**Dimitri Chamblas and Kim Gordon: takemehome at REDCAT.** A work for nine dancers, five electric guitars, and five amplifiers, takemehome takes shape under a luminous zeppelin where silhouettes emerge and disappear. These shadows are the forgotten ones of the great metropolises: prisoners, elders, unproductive ghosts, the neglected, the indecisive. Rendered visible in this device, itself ready to disappear, and embodied by dancers with precise movements, they wander, hesitate, or suddenly assert a vital impulse, display an attempt, repeat it, share it. In these emergences, in this collective isolation, telepathy and intuition maintain communication. Between the lines, under your skin, the driving force of the future and of the living continues to circulate and resist. 631 W. 2nd St., downtown; *Wednesday-Thursday, November 8-9, 8:30pm; \$30; redcat.org.*

MUSIC

NOVEMBER 3-9

Kiss Hollywood Bowl

We've been told for the last year or so that this is Kiss' last hurrah. We've heard that from many artists many times, though it seems particularly suspicious coming from the mouths of Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley considering the fact that they

themselves have admitted they're not above sending out a whole new set of musicians in makeup as Kiss. Kinda like a glam metal Menu! For now, we'll take them at their word. Expect fireworks, lights, bloody tongues, and a whole lotta awesome rock anthems. 7:30 p.m. on Friday, November 3 at the Hollywood Bowl, \$110+, [hollywood-bowl.com](http://hollywood-bowl.com).

BIA The Belasco

Boston-born, L.A.-based rapper BIA brings the Really Her tour to her new hometown this week, and she's joined by two other awesome female hip-hop stars — Lakeyah and Lebra Jolie. “BIA's bars are powered by her hard-won self-assurance,” reads her bio. “The Boston-bred platinum international music star has hustled for years to create her own brand of narratively rich and emotional music, and though she has all eyes on her now, she possessed the same confidence even when nobody was watching.” Now, people are watching. 7 p.m. on Saturday, November 4 at the Belasco, \$29.50 - \$69.50, [thebelasco.com](http://thebelasco.com).

Cat Power The Troubadour

Renowned singer/songwriter recently announced that she's taking this Cat Power Sings Dylan show to Carnegie Hall, NY, in February. Therefore, the chance to see it at the rather more intimate Troubadour should be grabbed. Apparently both nights are sold out, so you might have to know someone to get in if you don't already have a ticket. The forthcoming album is a live recording of Cat Power reimagining Dylan's infamous 1966 Manchester Free Trade Hall gig (the night of Judas), at the Royal Albert Hall in London. 7 p.m. on Monday, November 6 and Tuesday, November 7 at the Troubadour, [troubadour.com](http://troubadour.com)

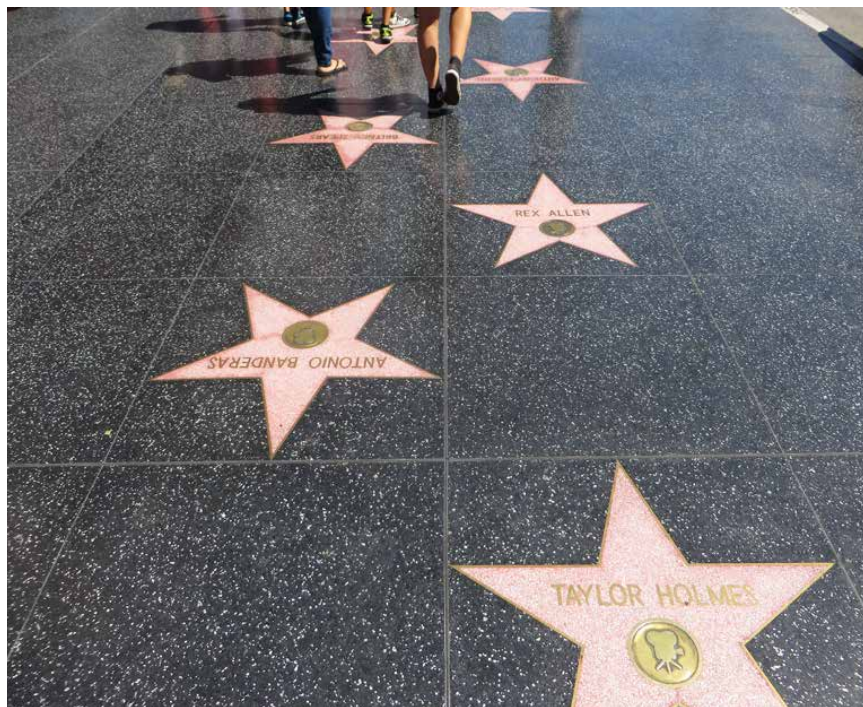
Raye Novo

English pop & soul artist Raye wrote songs and produced for other artists (Beyonce, Rihanna, Little Mix and many more) before she decided to take her own steps into solo stardom. Like Cat Power, Raye's latest album was recorded live at the Royal Albert Hall in London — My 21st Century Symphony. Hence this is her My 21st Century Blues World Tour. “Raye has performed My 21st Century Blues as direct support for SZA, Kali Uchis, and Lewis Capaldi's respective sold out 2023 world tours,” reads the press release. “The second installment of her headline world tour continues with 45 dates across North America, Europe, the UK, and Australia including upcoming stints in Nashville, Atlanta, St. Louis, Seattle, Vancouver, and more before wrapping in Los Angeles on November 7th.” The opening act is Absolutely. 8 p.m. on Tuesday, November 7 at the Novo, \$35, [thenovodtla.com](http://thenovodtla.com)

# CITY SEEKS TO LEGALIZE STREET VENDING ON HOLLYWOOD WALK OF FAME

A Motion Was Introduced In The Los Angeles City Council To Begin Discussing The Legalization Of Street Vending On Hollywood Boulevard.

BY ISAI ROCHA



Street vendors may soon be allowed on Hollywood Walk of Fame if the L.A. City Council can get through the approval process.

An initial motion presented by Councilmembers Hugo Soto-Martinez and President Paul Krekorian passed the council on Oct. 20 and will be heard by the Civil Rights and Public Works Committee, before being introduced for public comment.

“For years, a No-Street-Vending Zone on Hollywood Boulevard has targeted immigrant entrepreneurs who work so

hard to provide for their families,” Soto-Martinez said. “As the son of street vendors, I know firsthand how these entrepreneurs are the ultimate small business owners in LA, contributing so much cultural vibrancy to our city.”

The current ban on Hollywood Boulevard means vendors that are currently seen on the Walk of Fame risk fines and having their merchandise or food taken away. The street is part of a no-vending zone that is currently enforced within 500 feet of landmarks.

Legalization of street vending in the

area was one of the promises Soto-Martinez made during his bid for city council in 2022.

California Senate Bill 972 took effect on January 1, decriminalizing street vending throughout the state, although there are limits related to selling in private property and landmarks.

“If our motion passes, street vendors themselves and community organizations will collaborate with the city on a first-of-its-kind “special vending zone” on Hollywood Blvd, which will inform a citywide framework for improving our street vending policies, Soto-Martinez said. “Instead of criminalizing these Angelenos, it’s time we start supporting them.”

## Former Friends Star Matthew Perry Dies Of Apparent Drowning

Former Friends star Matthew Perry, 54, died of an apparent drowning in his Los Angeles home on Saturday, Oct. 29.

First responders were at the home on a call for cardiac arrest and found the actor unconscious in a jacuzzi.

LAPD officials said there were no signs of foul play and no drugs found around Perry.

Perry was best known for his role as Chandler Bing in the Emmy Award-winning NBC sitcom Friends. Alongside costars Jennifer Aniston, David Schwimmer, Matt LeBlanc and Lisa Kudrow, the six spent 10 seasons together from 1994 to 2004.

“We are all so utterly devastated by the loss of Matthew. We were more than just cast mates. We are a family,” the Friends stars said in a joint statement. “There is so much to say, but right now we’re going to take a moment to grieve and process this unfathomable loss. In time we will say more, as and when we are able. For now, our thoughts and our love are with Matty’s family, his friends, and everyone who loved him around the world.”

An autopsy has been performed on Perry by the Los Angeles County Medical Examiner’s Office and an official cause of death is forthcoming.

Perry’s family said in a statement to People Magazine they were “heartbroken by the tragic loss of our beloved son and brother,” and that the fans “meant so much to him and we appreciate the tremendous outpouring of love.”

After Friends ended in 2004, Perry was in producer roles for sitcoms such as Mr. Sunshine on ABC and a modern adaption of The Odd Couple on CBS.

Concurrent with his run on Friends, Perry starred in various comedy films such as Fools Rush In in 1997, Three to Tango in 1999 and The Whole Nine Yards in 2000.

In 2022, Perry released a memoir

titled “Friends, Lovers and the Big Terrible Thing” where he candidly spoke on his battles with drug and alcohol addiction and shared behind-the-scenes stories about his time on Friends.

Perry was not married and did not have children.

## POPULAR KOBE BRYANT MURAL SAVED AFTER THREATS OF REMOVAL

A landmark mural depicting Kobe Bryant and daughter Gianna Bryant in downtown L.A. will remain after threats of removal.

The mural is on the outer wall of Hardcore Fitness Bootcamp on Pico Boulevard, only a few blocks away from the Crypto.com Arena. Painted by a local artist who goes by Sloe, the mural paid tribute to the former Lakers star and his daughter, who tragically died in a plane crash in January 2020.

On September 14, Hardcore Fitness announced that the landlords planned to ask for the mural to be removed from the wall with a September 30 deadline.

“I was notified by my landlord that I have until Sept. 30, 2023 to remove the Kobe and LA mural from our walls,” Hardcore Fitness owner Cecilia Moran wrote in an Instagram post. “This mural means a lot, not only to the city of L.A. and Laker fans, but most importantly it honors Kobe Bryant and his daughter Gigi. This mural has saved us during COVID times.”

The painting’s artist, Sloe Motions, created a petition to save the mural, receiving more than 90,000 signatures on Change.org, and support from Bryant’s widow, Vanessa Bryant.

“No amount of money or power should ever erase our culture,” Sloe said in an Instagram post.

the Kobe Murals Instagram account, which began documenting and highlighting all Kobe Bryant murals after his death, joined the effort to raise awareness of support to keep Sloe’s mural up.

The original deadline for removal passed and the future of the mural continued to be up in the air, until Monday, when Ronnie Singh, the digital marketing director for 2K Games, announced that the videogame company made an undisclosed pledge to keep the mural up.

While the mural remains and a celebration is forthcoming, Sloe expressed his displeasure with the downtown landlords.

“At the end of the day, I’m still pretty upset that this soulless landlord gets money and gets to profit off Kobe’s death when he don’t give a damn about him or his daughter,” Sloe wrote in an Instagram message. “I work my ass off to help small businesses thrive... not to feed the greed of people.” 🙏

# PLEASUREMED OPENS IN WEHO

BY MICHELE STUEVEN

Thanksgiving sausage in the wurst way  
(Courtesy Dog Haus)



Welcome to the pleasure dome. Located in the heart of West Hollywood, PleasureMed will open three concepts under one 6,500 square roof today – an elevated design-forward dispensary patterned after a Cuban pharmacy; a California-inspired destination restaurant, Irie, with a comfy consumption lounge; and an al-fresco cocktail bar, Hind.

The hedonist complex dubbed the pleasure campus is designed to please all five senses, where the food is as good as the smoke. PleasureMed neighbors the Pleasure Chest, the legendary erotic boutique that has survived in the same West Hollywood spot since 1980.

The campus with interiors designed by

Studio UNLTD is the brainchild of Brian Robinson, whose family has owned the Pleasure Chest franchise since it opened in 1971 in New York and then made its way out west. The first location was on LaCienega Boulevard and moved to its present home on Santa Monica Boulevard in 1980. Robinson has been eyeing the old single-story machine shop next door to the boutique for decades, and after six years, transformed it into a two-story gem that has a ground-level bar and dispensary, with a separate restaurant and consumption lounge upstairs. Even the bathrooms are naughty – be sure to check out the cucumber room.

Seasonal food menu items created by former Hatchell Hall chef Wes Whitsell

include jerk fried quail in a tomato aioli, squash ravioli in brown butter, barramundi with rapini, lamb chops with chermoula and pea hummus alongside smashed butterball potatoes with black garlic, as well as a mind-blowing beef nduja pizza with spicy giardiniera.

Hind cocktail options include the Wake N' Bake (Reposado, 43, espresso, banana, cereal whip, popcorn salt.) The Green Fairy (St. Germain, apple, cucumber, sparkling wine, and anise aromatics as well as the Pornstar Slush (Oaxacan

yourself, The Draycott will be offering a special holiday dining experience — at \$100 per person for adults and \$50 for kids age 12 and under prix fixe menu from 11:30 a.m. to 8 p.m., on Thursday, Nov. 23.

Highlights include pumpkin soup and delicata squash salad for starters, as well as roasted organic turkey, sweet potato ravioli and vegetable curry, with a pumpkin and pecan pie combo and roasted apples for dessert. The Draycott is also offering a \$55 per person wine pairing. To book your Thanksgiving reservation, visit Resy or call 310-573-8938.

As part of its Absolute Würst Sausage series, Dog Haus is offering a new, one-of-a-kind Würst Thanksgiving Sausage — the perfect mix of turkey and all the trimmings in one bite. They also are introducing the Peach Maple Smash artisanal cocktail as part of the limited-time offer. Dog Haus will donate \$1 from each purchase to No Kid Hungry, an organization dedicated to ending childhood hunger in America.

As the Black Cake series is set to premiere on Hulu on Nov. 1, a special rum-soaked Caribbean dessert will pop up at Southern Girl Desserts on Martin Luther King Boulevard that day, as part of the larger initiative to stock Black Cakes on the shelves of multicultural-owned bakeries across the United States. These BIPOC bakeries will host a variety of “Black Cake” giveaways and in-store promotions.

Based on The New York Times-best-selling book by Charmaine Wilkerson, Black Cake is a family drama murder mystery that takes place in Jamaica, Italy, Scotland, England and Southern California in the late 1960s.

World Central Kitchen, the nonprofit founded by José Andrés to provide fresh meals to crisis zones, is bringing its Feeding Hope event series to Los Angeles as part of the World Central Kitchen (WCK) Cookbook Tour. The week kicks off at Smorgasburg LA with a WCK passport to the culinary journey that will feature some of LA's best chefs and three intimate dinners that will showcase a crafted menu:

Nov. 5 (10 a.m. – 4 p.m.) – WCK at Smorgasburg

Nov. 7 (6 p.m. – 10 p.m.) – Feeding Hope Feast at Citizen News

Featuring chefs Evan Funke, Giada De Laurentiis, Michael Voltaggio

Nov. 8 (6 p.m. – 10 p.m.) – Feeding Hope Feast at NeueHouse Venice Beach

Featuring chefs Stephanie Izard and Nyesha Arrington

Nov. 9 (6 p.m. – 10 p.m.) – Feeding Hope Feast at The Line LA

Featuring Chefs Ruffo Ibarra and Reem Assil 🍴

rum, Bacardi, Aquavit, grapefruit, passionfruit, mango, coconut, vanilla bean and lime.)

The exterior of the property features a 67' x 30', 4-minute 3D video art experience that has been created by Optical Animal and Robinson to illuminate the side of the PleasureMed building. Titled The Jaguar's Eye, the moving piece takes viewers on a journey from the microscopic to the cosmic, finding familiar forms among a diverse cast of characters, environments, flora, and fauna. The projection will feature new displays on a rotating basis from local artists.

As Halloween rounds the corner, it's already time to start making Thanksgiving plans. If you want to make it easy on

CANNABIS

# LA HOSTS LEMON CHERRY GELATO BATTLE

L.A. Came Together To Hunt Down The Best Version Of One Of The Most Popular Strains On The Market

BY JIMI DEVINE



Los Angeles recently hosted Connect Community's Lemon Cherry Gelato Battle Royale.

The classy name for the event was Cultivation Chronicles "Crop Steering Candies." After previous community building events in Sacramento and Palm Springs, this was the first installment in the Los Angeles area.

Organizers noted that cultivators came together to create a collaborative environment to showcase the heat of a specific cultivar and share knowledge in cultivation and level each other up.

"The LCG Battle Royale was introduced to celebrate the wonderful cultivation work of one of the most popular cultivars in the industry — Lemon Cherry Gelato,"

said the event's producer Sergio Picazo. "Candies are dominating the market right now, however, they can be challenging to grow. We aim to bring value to the cultivation community by having a focused panel discussion with killers sharing their perspective and grow tech on how to grow these small bud trait cultivars."

Picazo said there are so many unknown genetics out there claiming to be LCG, they leaned into the trait-agnostic genomics tool, known as the CCI (Certificate of Cultivar Identify) powered by MyFloraDNA, to provide genetic similarities between the different flower samples submitted into the Battle Royale.

"Results will be shared in a few weeks once the genomics reporting has been



finished," said Picazo. "Every single submission of the 11 cultivators who competed were absolutely fire! The judging criteria was simple: Aroma, Bag Appeal, Taste, Harshness of Smoke."

Picazo went on to all the cultivators in the competition and multiple trusted lungs of judges have been involved in other major events. The judges' picks came in two awards. One was based off of a scoring system and based on points. The other was a people's choice category where the judges picked their favorite without breaking it down.

Kush Alley would end up the top dog no matter how you counted the votes. They took home the win in both categories. AJ's Flower Co was in the runner-up position with Maven Genetics finding their way to yet another podium, this time without the strain formerly called French Laundry doing the heavy lifting.

Picazo went with an open invite to recruit cultivators, allowing them to participate in the first of its kind event.

"We've seen grow-off competitions with a single cultivar provided by a nursery, which is totally cool and appreciated, however, what makes The Connect



Community unique is that in addition to providing molecular IDs to the genetics submitted into the competition," said Picazo, "we invited cultivators who competed in the Battle Royale to discuss cultivation techniques on how to bring out the most genetic expression focused on quality, and the knowledge dropped on the panel was next-level cultivation discussion."

Picazo aims to bring value to the community with what he calls no-ego, positive vibes-only educational discussions focused on leveling each other up mixed with engaging networking opportunities. But there is always going to be a pinch of ego when someone is the winner.

There is certainly a place for these kinds of strain specific events. As the marketplace gets flooded with certain strains, like Lemon Cherry Gelato, understanding what makes the best version of anything special is critical. And it's important that it's happening at the cultivation level.

If it was at the consumer or distro level, it would just be another cup. Centering everything on how to make something popular really special is a fun new take on things. [L]



Brian Keith Thompson

# NEEDLING THROUGH

How Body Electric's Brian Keith Thompson Took Piercing to the Next Level. Plus, Perspective on the Practice from LA's Piercing Pioneers

BY LINA LECARO

**L**ike all forms of body modification, the art of piercing has evolved. Getting one's ears pierced is common no matter your gender or age, and nobody blinks an eye at the site of a nostril, a bellybutton, an eyebrow or even a lip ring these days, though the latter three might seem a bit dated to older folk, visually tied to the early '90s punk and metal heyday when they became most popular and were

seen all over album covers and MTV.

A new generation has discovered body jewelry and adornment, and it's not even a retro thing. Fans of goth aesthetics and fashion hubs like Dolls Kill, Killstar, and the like, have re-ignited a new piercing culture. With celebrities like Demi Lovato and Miley Cyrus rocking them, they're practically mainstream. The hashtag "piercings" has 14.7 billion views on Tik-

Tok.

Recently, this writer's own teenager requested to move beyond earlobes to the cartilage between their nostrils – the septum – and our reaction wasn't exactly that of a "cool mom," despite the fact that we happen to be tattooed and have multiple holes in our own ears. For many, facial piercings go too far, even today. They may not exactly be job killers anymore,

but faces are focal points and, depending on the size of the jewelry, it can still be distracting. For others, especially in South Asian cultures, it's commonplace and represents social status and a coming-of-age, signifying womanhood. In India, nose piercing is simply tradition.

We came to a compromise – two piercings: one nostril, and an upper ear – and we had to decide where to go. Piercing parlors aren't as prevalent as they once were in Los Angeles, and mall piercing stations at places like Claire's Accessories are extremely risky and more painful than the alternatives.

For safety and quality, a little research was in order. Google "best in piercers in L.A." right now and one name comes up again and again: Brian Keith Thompson at Body Electric on Melrose Ave. Thompson is the proprietor and "chief piercing officer" at the second-story shop, which for many years was best known just for its tattoo work. We got our first piece of ink



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRIAN KEITH THOMPSON / BODY ELECTRIC TATTOO



there in fact, so coming back would be a full-circle experience. While Thompson and Body Electric have gained attention for a consistent celebrity clientele (he is touted as “Beyoncé’s piercer” by name-driven publications and tabloids), the longtime Angeleno also is known for his soulful, communicative approach to the art of piercing, which is anything but pretentious or celebrity-seeking.

When we arrived at the Melrose studio, Thompson was talking with a mother and her two young daughters, both of whom wanted to get “constellation piercings” – the term coined for his artful stars-in-the-sky-like ear designs, which usually feature clusters of tiny studs, gems and delicate hoops running from the bottom of the lobe all the way up to the top of the ear, each section with a different name: the daith, the helix, and the orbital, being just three of them.

We opted for an “industrial” ear piercing, which runs through two points of cartilage on top of the ear, and the aforementioned nostril. Thompson talked about what he was doing as he took a large needle and pushed through the skin and flesh in a calm, relaxed manner that made everyone feel comfortable. It was over quickly, with minimum wincing, flinching or blood.

Next comes the healing stage, and if you’re thinking of getting pierced, please note: It takes attention, a lot of daily care and can involve swelling and irritation, as



the body adjusts to the wound. Even so, as is often the case after one’s first body modification, our kid is already itching for more.

### Bars and Barbells

Brian Keith Thompson came to Los Angeles from Texas at the age of 12, after his parents divorced in 1984. “I was always just different. I looked different, I thought differently,” he recalls. “So I moved here with my dad I finally felt free to be who I wanted. But then I got here and I was bullied. The problems didn’t

go away. I had long hair back then, listened to metal, and I was called heshier. In eighth grade, the kids picked me up at lunch and threw me in a trash can in front of the whole school. It just sucked, constantly getting messed with and beat up. So I just kind of retracted. I always said that one day, I’m gonna make these people see what I’m made of.”

Thompson was suicidal as a teen, until he met a new friend at a local Target. The guy he called his mentor ultimately introduced him to cholo culture and gangs, which gave him the sense of belonging

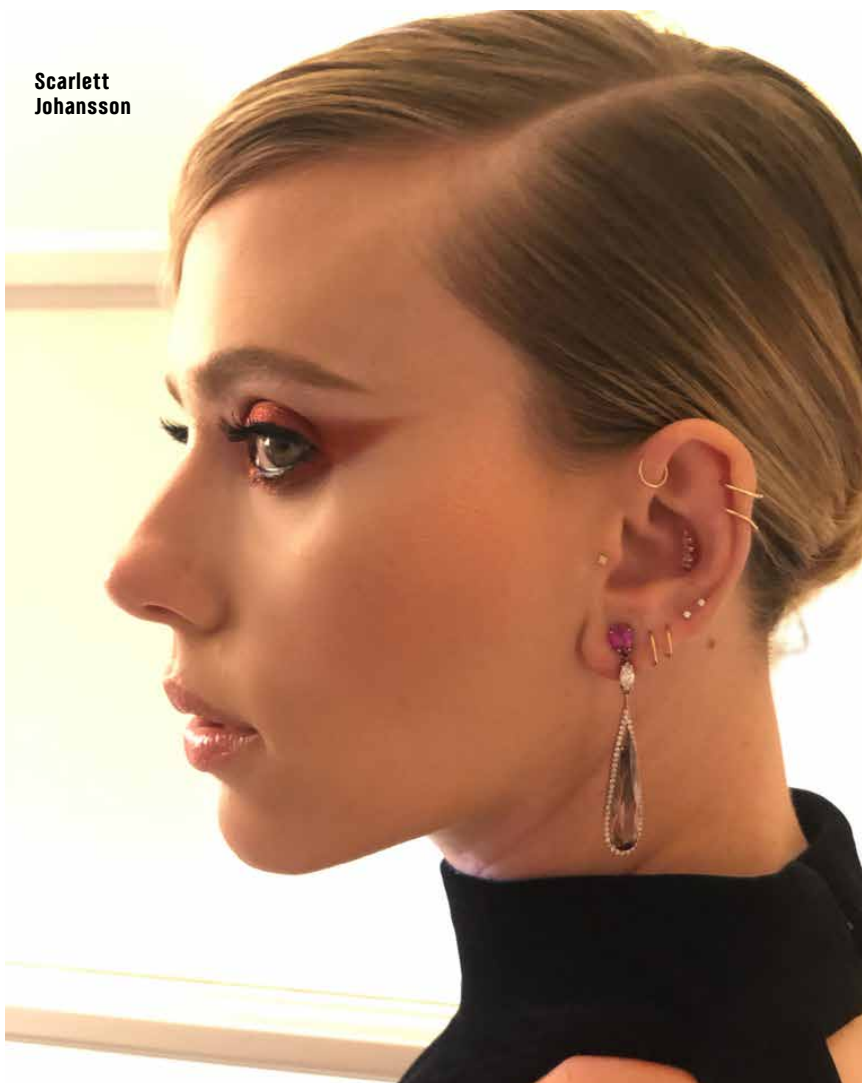
he craved. It was both a good and a bad thing. He started hanging with the mostly Latino Canoga Park Alabama Street gang, who referred to him as “gaba,” short for “gabacho,” a term often used for white people.

“These people were like brothers and it was like being in the military, too – there was a rank structure and a respect level. I was a part of something that had a functional base to it. And it made me feel powerful,” he says.

But eventually, he was in the wrong place at the wrong time and it got him pinned with a murder charge. He was at the scene of a shooting, though he didn’t pull the trigger. In 1998 he went to jail for two years, but ultimately fought the case and got out.

Thompson had worked at his father’s tech company and been in the Marines prior. He was smart and determined. Once he focused on getting out of jail, he made it happen. Though he says it was hard to be white in L.A. county at that time, he made friends. Forced to choose an allegiance, as most inmates are, he joined the white gang, “the Woods,” out of sheer self-preservation. He got a job serving food to the inmates in super-maximum and would sneak extras for everyone, forging connections and earning respect.

Scarlett Johansson



Brian Keith Thompson

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BRIAN KEITH THOMPSON // BODY ELECTRIC TATTOO

“When I got out, I heard, ‘see you assholes next month,’ and it’s a guy in the tower looking down (at me). And I said, ‘no, sir, you will never see me again.’”

Though he says, in some ways, prison was “the best thing that ever happened to me,” he was focused on moving on once released. He started getting the gang and prison ink he’d acquired covered up with new art, which led him to the famed Body Electric tattoo on Melrose. He “became obsessed” with getting work done even as he was still working at his dad’s company, making money and saving it, as he hid his tattoos under his business suits.

Before the stock market crash of 2008, Thompson cashed out his 401k and bought the shop, set on connecting with people in new ways and revitalizing tattoo and piercing culture in Los Angeles. He’s done just that. Body Electric is now known globally for both its ink work and piercing services, and Thompson hopes the place will remain a local landmark once he’s gone. He’s been renovating and remodeling the building for the past few years, putting in new Deco and vintage



touches like marble and fixtures from historic L.A. landmarks. The shop is gleamingly beautiful, clean and classy. You walk in and you just know you’re in a quality spot.

“I wanted to make it a friendly place, more customer-oriented, so that no matter who you are, you don’t have to feel intimidated to walk in,” Thompson says. “I also wanted to show a finer side of it. I

didn’t want all that tribal stuff anymore. I like diamonds and gold and fine jewelry.”

Thompson’s presence and personal style only add to this vibe. Dressed in stylish suits and pristine sneakers – his signature look – he also has a shaved head and an array of iced piercings, including stretched earlobes that shimmer under overhead lighting and in the sunshine that beams into the shop from large windows overlooking Melrose Ave. This is an elevated piercing environment that’s also quite relaxed and welcoming, for famous people (he pierces in a private backroom), for alternative types, and for families.

Thompson got into getting heavily tattooed in 2001, and he got into piercing in 2006. But he had always been fascinated by both. “One of my favorite movies was *Pulp Fiction*,” he recalls, about what first made him think seriously about the art of piercing. “That whole scene where John Travolta asks about piercing guns when he gets his drugs and (Rosanna Arquette) says how guns go against everything it’s about... Then he talks about ‘all the shit



in her face,” and (Eric Stoltz)] says, ‘that’s Judy, my wife.’ That scene is burned in my brain. And then I became a fucking piercer. That’s just so weird to me.”

### The Gauntlet Ran the Gamut

While Thompson has forged his own path in the world of piercing, we’d be remiss if we didn’t give a nod to the groundbreaking figures of the past who turned piercing into a bona fide movement, based right here in L.A. The Gauntlet, founded by master piercer Jim Ward in the late ‘70s, was the first business of its type, with an original location in West Hollywood on Santa Monica Boulevard, followed by shops in San Francisco, New York, Seattle and even Paris.

Though piercing first emerged from queer and BDSM communities in Southern California and gained traction with the popularity of the modern primitive movement (as seen in the iconic Re:Search book *Modern Primitives: Tattoo, Piercing, Scarification*) it quickly grew and became popular with all kinds of people who steadily had more and more jewelry and designs to choose from, including different gauges (thicknesses) and of course, places to pierce. As the Gauntlet piercers and those who learned from them became more popular, the public became more educated, too. The safe, professional practices in place led to the popularity of more intimate body parts (nipples, tongues and genitalia, for example) for many.

“Its primary focus was on body piercing as a way to enhance sex,” says the Gauntlet’s owner and recognized pioneer of piercing Jim Ward tells LA Weekly. “In those days, we did a lot of nipple and genital piercings. Things have changed dramatically since then. Gauntlet may have created an industry, but the focus these days is primarily on piercings above the neck and for cosmetic purposes.”

“Today’s standards for techniques, tools, jewelry designs, and ethos, shared by the most advanced practitioners, nearly all trace their roots back to the Gauntlet,” adds Paul King, a master piercer who worked for Ward in all three former Gauntlet locations and later went on to open his own space Cold Steel in SF. “The modern body piercing industry rose from the foundation developed by (Jim) and spread by masterfully skilled piercers such as Elayne Angel.”

Angel, the first person to be certified as a Master Piercer at Gauntlet, literally wrote the book on the practice, *The Piercing Bible*, which features information on everything you’d ever want to know about piercing. “When I was a Gauntlet client in the early 1980s and became manager there later in that decade, body piercing was not yet an accepted part of modern culture,” she says. “Piercing was an ob-



scure fringe activity, and people thought we were freaks, weirdos and perverts. It was so different, it is hard for younger people today to even imagine the shock and disgust onlookers often displayed when confronted with body piercings back then.”

“There was a tremendous sense of newness and adventure when the field was still in its infancy,” she continues. “Piercing had yet to become an industry. That was a period of experimentation and innovation, including trials and errors. We learned a lot about what not to do, along with our successes. It was a truly exciting era that I recall fondly. Though my family was far less enthusiastic about my career choice; they’d never heard of a ‘professional piercer.’ Eventually, they came around, and they’re now proud of me for my role as a pioneer in the field. Nowadays, everyone knows that piercing exists, and it has become an option that nearly anyone might exercise.”

Both Angel and King highly recommend Ward’s book *Running the Gauntlet* (and its accompanying website ([runningthegauntlet-book.com](http://runningthegauntlet-book.com)) as an essential resource for anyone interested in piercing culture. For more background and history check out King’s *Body Piercing Archive* ([bodypiercingarchive.org](http://bodypiercingarchive.org)) and Angel’s book site ([piercingbible.com/the-piercing-bible-book](http://piercingbible.com/the-piercing-bible-book))

### Stars and Studs

While piercing is no longer necessarily an outsider thing, it still gives a little edge to anyone who chooses to do it. Rihanna (a Thompson client) has proudly shown off her nipple piercing, which surely inspired copycats and normalized the practice. Thompson and Body Electric get the most attention media-wise thanks to the celebrity angle, but he’s built a strong community fan base as well. Like most practitioners with close client

relationships, he is not a name-dropper. His longtime client list is out there on the web, though, and in addition to RiRi, it’s stellar to say the least: Queen Bey, as well as Christina Aguilera, Scarlett Johansson, Angelina Jolie and most recently Doja Cat, just to name a few.

Visiting the shop (which still offers an array of tattoo artists up front and a piercing studio in the back) has become popular content for influencers not only due to the star power, but also Thomp-

son’s eye-catching star-like placement style, especially on ears. Other shops and piercers have tried to copy his popular constellation designs, but he’s the recognized best, taking an artful approach not only to where, but to what – choosing various weights and shapes that adorn each ear, nose and body part he works on. He might not be the cheapest, but when puncturing one’s face and body, who really wants to skimp? You get what you pay for.

“When I started here I wanted to show a finer side of piercing,” Thompson tells us, as we finish up our kid’s session and a truly engaging conversation. “I wanted to do something fresh and new. You know, when I got into this business, everyone said ‘you can’t make money in the tattoo/piercing business anymore.’ I’d tell them ‘yeah, you’re right, ‘you’ can’t, but watch me because I will not stop.’ When I am into something and want to do something, I will just master what I love every day. I will outwork everyone. And I will give each client the same intensity in the first five fucking minutes that I get here, as I do the last five minutes before I leave. I give everybody the same and they feel it. It’s part of the experience.”

**Body Electric, 7274 Melrose Ave., 323-954-0408. [bodyelectrictattoo.com](http://bodyelectrictattoo.com)**

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## MUSIC

## RIOT DAYS REVISITED

Pussy Riot's 'punk opera' arrives at the Belasco

BY BRETT CALLWOOD



It's been clear and obvious since they formed in 2011 that Pussy Riot is not an ordinary band. It's collective, performance artists, but their politics come first. Everything it does, all that it is about, centers around activism and manifestos.

As such, an interview with a member of Pussy Riot about a forthcoming L.A. show is not going to be a regular music interview, regardless of the fact that it's sat here in the Music section. Questions about evolution of sound, the gear that is used, etc., seem utterly irrelevant. That's just not what Pussy Riot is about.

It is interesting that this latest tour, Riot Days, is the brainchild of Maria 'Masha' Alyokhina, and has nothing to do with founding member Nadya Tolokonnikova. In fact, while they have protested together, Alyokhina and Tolokonnikova have never performed together on stage. They each have their own branch of Pussy Riot. Not different versions — this isn't LA Guns. But different branches.

Alyokhina's story is long and complicated, turbulent and fascinating. In 2012, she was sentenced to two years imprisonment by Russian authorities for "hooliganism motivated by religious hatred" for a performance in Moscow's Cathedral of

Christ the Savior. At the time, she was a student at the Institute of Journalism and Creative Writing in Moscow.

Many people were confused when she was in a relationship with far right activist Dmitry Enteo, especially when considering the fact that he had protested in favor of Pussy Riot's arrest. We're not TMZ when it comes to people's dating life but, c'mon, that is fucking weird.

Much of her life of protest and prison is detailed in her book, *Riot Days*, upon which this latest tour is based.

"*Riot Days* is not a usual musical concert," Alyokhina says. "It's a story with a beginning and an end. You can expect a lot of statements and manifesto words, and the songs of Pussy Riot, from the period of the Red Square action which I participated in — and that's how my Pussy Riot story started — to the last day of prison where I spent two years. With additions regarding the war with Ukraine, and current political prisoner situations in Russia. So it's musical, theatrical, political and personal."

*Riot Days*, the performance, has been described in various quarters as a punk manifesto, and even as punk opera. But as ever with Pussy Riot, it's the message that's important:

"That freedom is actually something which everyone should fight for," Alyokhina says "It's important for us to perform it in the United States now, because quite soon you have elections, and even being Russians, we experienced what it was to have Donald Trump as a president and the closest partner and friend of Vladimir Putin who is a terrorist. We don't want this situation to be repeated. We support Ukraine."

tion to the Pussy Riot ranks.

"She joined us only this year, but she's great," Alyokhina says. "She's a great violin player. Super smart. Amazing musician and composer. Also, we have a lot of video in the show, and it's original Pussy Riot video from preparations to the actions, and from the actions itself."

While Alyokhina and Tolokonnikova have never performed together, Alyokhina's respect for her Pussy Riot colleague is clear and strong, while acknowledging that their approaches are different.

"So Nadja has her concerts and they're pure musical concerts with a list of songs which she wrote during her life in the United States, and I appreciate it a lot because that was super, super important in my opinion to stand for women's rights during Trump's presidency and in general, and her support of women's organizations and women is just incredible," Alyokhina says.

While the Riot Days show is based on the *Riot Days* book, the set does change from night to night as world events shift. There's an organic evolution taking place, to keep things current. That is both artistically impressive, and horrifying. It's rare, after all, that they're adding to the show because good things are happening.

Moving forward, Alyokhina plans to keep voicing her support for the Ukraine. Portions of the tickets and merch sales from the Riot Days tour are being wired directly to the Ohmatdyt Ukrainian Children's Hospital and foundation: [www.ohmatdytfund.org/en](http://www.ohmatdytfund.org/en).

"This is my personal issue and it's something that I believe in," she says. "I'm doing it through different types of art. Concerts like *Riot Days*, exhibitions which I open now in Canada, in Montreal. I'm actually writing my second book and I'm halfway done. So I really hope to have it finished and then I will start to live, because if you're writing something, it just takes your soul. Who knows what will happen, but I have a hope that one day I will be back home because I miss Russia. The Russia which is standing against Vladimir Putin all these years and has suffered a lot. This is something which I want to show because it exists."

Having spent plenty of time in the United States, Alyokhina understands our plight, too.

"When I came to America, I felt it chanbe," she says. "I felt the catastrophe which was happening all these years. The society is so divided and a lot of people are so frustrated. Somehow they lost hope. This is a disaster, how that was possible during one presidential term plus a pandemic, to crush that inside you. This is terrible."

She's right, too, so be sure to vote.

*Pussy Riot's Riot Days takes place on Thursday, Nov. 16, at the Belasco.* [A]

While, and we can't stress this enough, Pussy Riot isn't a normal band, this *Riot Days* incarnation of the group is filled with people who each have an interesting story of their own.

"For example, Diana (Burkot), she was inside the Cathedral of Christ the Savior during this famous 2012 punk prayer," Alyokhina says. "The police didn't catch her so she continued to support us, even while being in danger. She continued to write songs in support of Pussy Riot, during our trial and sentence, and after that. She was a part of the action in 2020 when we put five rainbow flags on different state buildings. She was detained for that. So she's very much standing for LGBT rights. With Olga (Borisova), who is an editor of the *Riot Days* book — she made *Street Actions* in support of Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov when he was sent to prison in Siberia and got 20 years. Finally, there was a big campaign worldwide for his freedom and he was exchanged for two Russian spies at the end of the story and now he's fighting for Ukraine inside the army."

It's worth noting that Borisova is also an ex police officer who quit the force to join Pussy Riot when she was 19. Alina Petrova, meanwhile, is the newest addi-

## ART

# PHRANC'S QUEER CARDBOARD FASHION SENSE

BY SHANA NYS DAMBROT



**A** butch lesbian who came out early and with gusto; a singer/songwriter who started out a punk legend but embraced a more progressive folk; a sculptor with a gift for transforming paper and cardboard into charming, meaningful objects—Phranc is a rebellious spirit with a taste for the retro and nostalgic. A new exhibition at Craig Krull Gallery examines the artist, musician, and one-time Tupperware Lady's 40-year archive of multidisciplinary gestures of affection and activism.

The Butch Closet aligns Phranc's parallel pursuits in music and art, beginning from her twin stories of influence—studying at the Feminist Studio Workshop at The Woman's Building in the mid-70s, while simultaneously cutting a major figure in the Los Angeles punk scene—and offering a more thorough examination of the overarching garment motif that continues to express in her visual art to this day. The famous Jewish Lesbian Folksinger and the beloved Cardboard Cobbler are, after all, one and the same person; and clothes are one thing

that plays an outside role in how we construct our individual and group identities—consciously or not—and how they are constructed for us.

One room is dedicated to a full-scale recreation of Phranc's studio-cum-cobbler shop and workbench shelves in a convincing organic jumble of tools, toys, snacks, collectibles, odds and ends, bits of fabric, reusable containers, notebooks and sundry—all made out of cardboard of course. It gives the distinct sensation of rummaging in your grandparents' garage, a mix of wonder and ordinariness with a trace of childlike curiosity at the cleverness of the tactile clutter. Nearby are large, unfurled scrolls of pattern and plaid paintings on paper—this is Phranc's textile stock, which she makes by creating all-over abstraction in the form of bolts of fabric, before cutting from them in the manner of a tailor to create the sculptural wardrobe.

Exceptional and biographically salient pieces from this wardrobe are showcased in the closet-themed gallery, in an array touching on some of Phranc's most



It reminds viewers of themselves, their parents and grandparents, Nick at Nite, and the oppressive enforcement of binary and other conformities in society of the kind Phranc has spent her whole life acting to upend. Including the time she worked, in yet another fusion of revolution and retro, as a remarkably successful Tupperware salesperson—a true story told in the 2001 documentary *Lifetime Guarantee: Phranc's Adventure in Plastic* now screening on the Criterion Channel.

Whether the message is that queer people can still dig Americana, or that reinvention can manifest in many kinds of dimensions, or that magic can be found in the commonplace and made from nothing, or that activism can take as many paths as self-discovery, or simply that being yourself is its own reward—really, it's all of the above—Phranc is a melodious and inventive messenger.

Treasures from the closet range from a cozy and inexplicably sinister Lamb Chop Halloween costume to the gorgeous vintage-style and extremely flirty red dress and cutesy-core pleated skirts she hated being forced to wear, to more breezy and boxy menswear style Hawaiian shirts, and safety orange (but rather unsafe to use in an emergency) paper life-jackets, and a pivotal pair of cardboard combat boots borrowed for the exhibition from the collection of Ed Ruscha.

Whether the message is that queer people can still dig Americana, or that reinvention can manifest in many kinds of dimensions, or that magic can be found in the commonplace and made from nothing, or that activism can take as many paths as self-discovery, or simply that being yourself is its own reward—really, it's all of the above—Phranc is a melodious and inventive messenger.

*Phranc: The Butch Closet* is part of the citywide *Circa: Queer Histories Festival* organized by the ONE Institute. Phranc will give an artist talk and performance at the gallery on Saturday, November 4 at 3pm (limited seating, contact the gallery to RSVP). The exhibition is on view at Bergamot Station through December 2; [craigkrullgallery.com](http://craigkrullgallery.com). [A]

# LA WEEKLY CLASSIFIEDS

## EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION

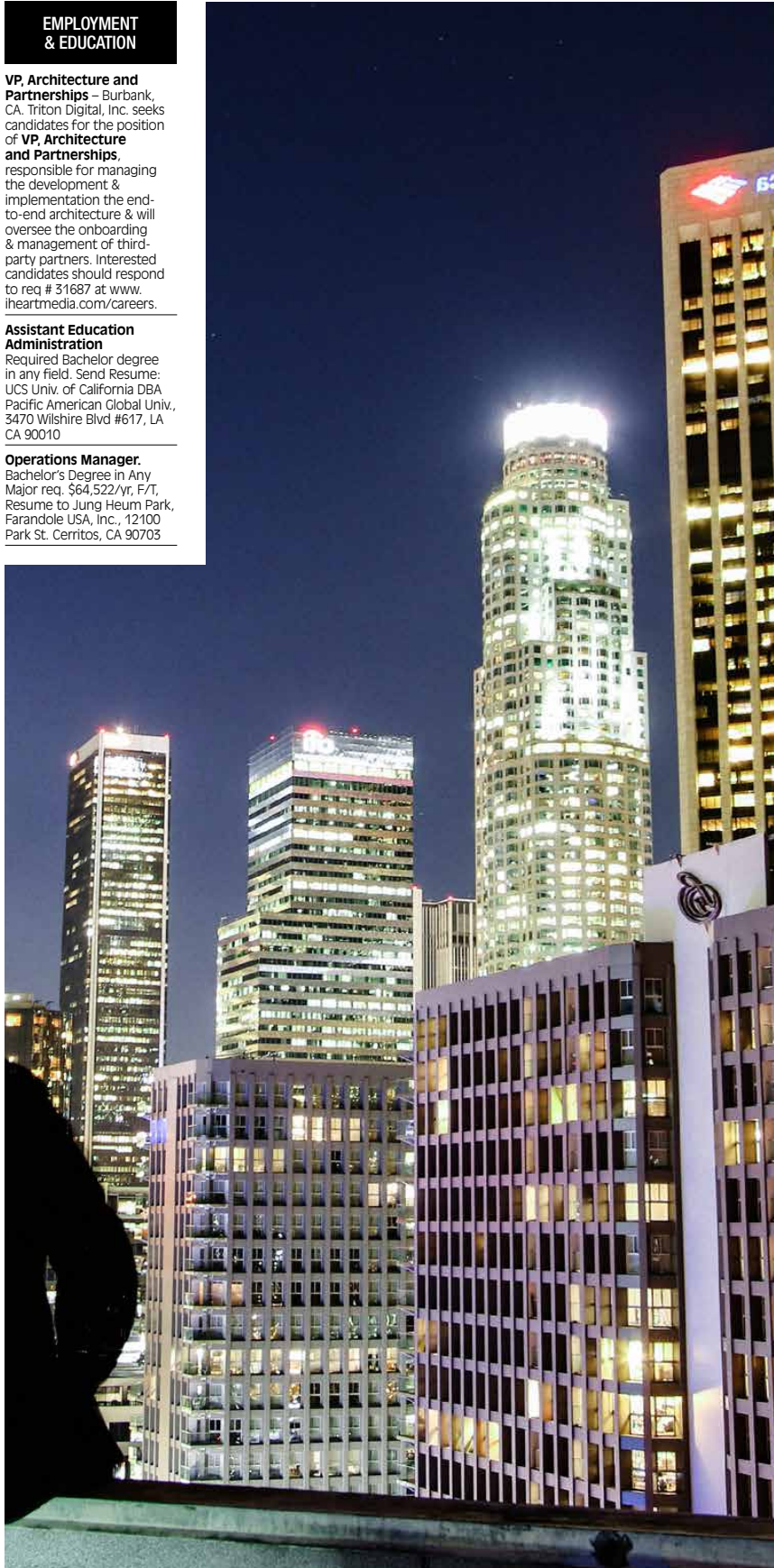
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## SECURITY GUARDS NEEDED

Rio Gentlemen's Club - 13124 S Figueroa St, Los Angeles, CA 90061 \$18 to \$20 an hour. Outside security needed for patdowns, ID checks and monitoring parking lot of the club. Please contact Dave Carlson at [Rmckinney@jjmfirm.com](mailto:Rmckinney@jjmfirm.com)