

# LAWEEKLY

RETT MADISON CELEBRATES  
ALBUM RELEASE WITH ECHO  
SHOW

RESCHEDULING CANNABIS  
GOES BEYOND INDUSTRY  
BENEFITS

JANUARY 26 - FEBRUARY 1, 2024 / VOL. 46 / NO. 12  
LAWEEKLY.COM

## NET RUNNING

HOW A DEFUNCT TRADING CARD GAME IS  
MAKING WAVES IN THE INDUSTRY'S UNDERBELLY  
BY ISAI ROCHA



CALENDAR

GO EDITORS' PICKS

ARTS

THURSDAY, JANUARY 25

**Dance Camera West at Barnsdall Art Park.**

The renowned festival of dance cinema presents its 22nd edition, a curated selection of 40 films from 20 countries making their World, U.S., or Los Angeles premiere. In addition to screenings, DCW includes workshops, artist talks, and receptions. Highlights include an opening night micro-festival of works by DCW's 2024 Guests of Honor, world renowned choreographer Javier De Frutos; the documentary *Fenomenal!*, *Rompeforma 1989-1996*, which chronicles the legendary performance festival of Latino artists, with its directors Merián Soto and Viveca Vázquez in attendance; and a closing night Screening of the boundary-bashing Talking Heads concert film, *Stop Making Sense*. 4800 Hollywood Blvd., Los Feliz; Thursday-Sunday, January 25-28; \$15-\$150; [dancecamerawest.org](http://dancecamerawest.org).

FRIDAY, JANUARY 26

**Nicole Wittenberg: Jumpin' at the Woodside at Fernberger Gallery.**

The newest gallery in the Melrose Hill district, Emma Fernberger inaugurates their new permanent home in Los Angeles with visions of the natural world. Wittenberg's paintings reveal vivid skies and twilight seascapes, vistas made searingly bright with hot-toned underpainting. The landscapes convey a jolt of sensation that carries the experience of being there—bursts of orange and yellow reflecting off swaying trees, tall grasses, bending flowers, and rolling tides. Titled after Count Basie's 1938 classic swing song, Wittenberg's canvases capture the jazz melody's verve from the forest's edge. 747 N. Western Ave., Melrose Hill; Opening reception: Friday, January 26, 6-8pm; Artist talk, Saturday, January 17, 3pm; On view through March 16; free; [fernbergergallery.com](http://fernbergergallery.com).

SATURDAY, JANUARY 27

**I Will Meet You Yet Again: Contemporary Sikh Art at the Fowler Museum.**

A fresh look at the history and vitality of the Sikh culture through paintings, posters, tapestries, and multimedia installations. A hybrid array of

material approaches reflect personal and gendered perspectives on the history of the community and its visual expressions. The works on view inform a Sikh understanding of "home," as told through the eyes of Sikh and non-Sikh artists. Their narratives find inspiration in holy scriptures, legacies of persecution and protest, and the entwined forces of home and longing at play throughout the Sikh community's struggle for existence. 308 Charles E. Young Dr., Westwood; Opening celebration Saturday, January 27, 6-9pm; On view through May 26; free; [fowler.ucla.edu](http://fowler.ucla.edu).

**Clockshop presents Rodrigo Valenzuela: the underpinning at LA State Historic Park.**

How does our public infrastructure, like parks and housing, invite or exclude some members of our city in their planning and use? Theresa Hyuna Hwang (moderator), Molly Rysman, and Sissy Trinh contend with these questions in their respective positions as architect and facilitator, government worker, and organizer to center residents in addressing equitable development. Responding to Clockshop's commissioned project by

artist Rodrigo Valenzuela, this cohort will examine how we can better imagine public housing and green, public spaces through collective consciousness and action. 1245 N. Spring St., Chinatown; Saturday, January 27, 1:30-3:30pm; free; on view through March 24; free; [clockshop.org](http://clockshop.org).

**Joan Brown at Matthew Marks Gallery.**

Brown (1938-1990) is known for her large-scale, boldly-colored figurative paintings whose subject matter comes from her personal experiences. Family, friends, and pets appear frequently in her work, alongside scenes from real and imaginary travels. Brown explored the essential yet bewildering aspects of life. "I paint the human condition," she said, "things we all experience, or think about, or dream about, or hope for." Brown's affinity for working at a larger-than-life-size scale furthered this goal: "I paint the size I do because I feel like a participant, like I can step into the pictures." 1062 N. Orange Grove / 7818 Santa Monica Blvd., West Hollywood; On view January 27 - April 6; free; [matthewmarks.com](http://matthewmarks.com).

**Steve McCurry: The Endless Traveler at Peter Fetterman Gallery.**

McCurry is universally recognized as one of today's finest image-makers and has won many of photography's top awards. Best known for his evocative color photography, McCurry captures the essence of human struggle and joy. As a member of Magnum Photos since 1986, he has sought and found the unforgettable; many of his images have become modern icons. Steve McCurry has covered many areas of international and civil conflict; he focuses on the human consequences of war, not only showing what war impresses on the landscape, but rather, on the human face. *Bergamot Station*, 2525 Michigan Ave., Santa Monica; Opening reception: Saturday, January 27, 5-7pm; On view through April 27; free; [peterfetterman.com](http://peterfetterman.com).

**LA Film Forum presents Unsettling Landscape: Experimental Films by Southeast Asian Women Filmmakers.**

Short films and videos that critically engage with questions of land, landscape and the myriad forms of mediation that have been used to capture their image. Like painting and the diorama, the



Ahmanson Theatre  
Rory MacLeod and Monique  
Jonas in 'Matthew Bourne's  
*Romeo and Juliet*'. Photo by  
Johan Persson

camera has been a tool of colonial authority, historical narrative, and scientific knowledge production, laying the groundwork for unfettered development projects and extractive capitalism. Reflexively engaging with such practices of mediation, these works suggest that the moving image also allows space for refusal. *Billy Wilder Theater at the Hammer Museum, 10899 Wilshire Blvd., Westwood; Saturday, January 27, 7:30pm; free; cinema.ucla.edu.*

### SUNDAY, JANUARY 28

**Terry Chatkupt: A Year at Armory Center for the Arts.** Chatkupt uses the vast, wild terrain of the San Gabriel Mountains as a backdrop and inspiration. Referring to the year under lockdown, *A Year* investigates the complex relationships between natural and built environments, outdoors and indoors, and the emotional effects of navigating between these dualities from the point of view of Chatkupt and his young children. The exhibition's video, photography, atmospheric music, and installation works extend this investigation to the complicated, caring, and often magical relationships between parent and child, focusing on the complexities of life during and after the pandemic. *145 N. Raymond Ave., Pasadena; Opening reception: Sunday, January 28, 1-3pm; On view through March 31; free; armoryarts.org.*

**Matthew Bourne's Romeo & Juliet at the**

**Ahmanson Theatre.** The legendary choreographer gives Shakespeare's timeless story of forbidden love a scintillating injection of raw passion and youthful vitality. Confined against their will by a society that seeks to divide, our two young lovers must follow their hearts as they risk everything to be together. A masterful re-telling of an ageless tale of teenage discovery and the madness of first love, *Romeo and Juliet* garnered universal critical acclaim when it premiered in 2019, and now returns to the New Adventures repertoire alongside the very best of Bourne's world renowned dance theater productions. *135 N. Grand Ave., downtown; Performances January 28 - February 25; \$35-\$229; centertheatregroup.org.*

## MUSIC

### JANUARY 26-FEBRUARY 1

#### Poolside The Wiltern

Poolside, aka Jeffrey Paradise, was recently the subject of one of our Not Another DJ columns, and he said of this show that, "The Wiltern show is going to be a big deal for Poolside. We would have never dreamed of playing such a big room in L.A. back when we started. It'll be one of our first shows since the record came out

and I'm really looking forward to playing all of these new songs live. We have 'Hold On To You' collaborators slenderbodies opening things up which I'm very excited about, and who knows, maybe we'll even play that track live together." *7 p.m. on Friday, January 26 at the Wiltern, \$48+, livenation.com*

#### The Bus Boys / The Untouchables Whisky A Go Go

This is a fascinating rock, funk, soul, ska fusion night at the Whisky. The Bus Boys are well known for their appearance in the Eddie Murphy / Nick Nolte movie *48 Hours*, singing their song "The Boys are Back in Town," which is an entirely different song to the Thin Lizzy classic of the same name. They're paired with Silver Lake ska band the Untouchables who have been credited for being America's first ska band. The line up has shifted a lot over the years, but there is still an original or two in there. Audrey Turner, Osairis, Kenneith Perrin, and Gaba Grove also perform. *6 p.m. on Saturday, January 27 at the Whisky A Go Go, \$25, whiskyagogo.com*

#### John 5 El Rey

When Mick Mars left or was thrown out of Motley Crue (depending on who you ask), John 5 was the man chosen to fill his boots. He's also played with David Lee Roth, Mar-

ilyn Manson and Rob Zombie in the past, so he's learned a few things about putting on a show. The guitar virtuoso will likely be a bit more sedate during this solo gig, but who knows? He put out the *Sinner* album in 2021, his most recent solo effort, so we'll probably get some of that here. Jared James Nichols and Atomic Punks also perform. *7 p.m. on Saturday January 27 at the El Rey, \$28, theelrey.com.*

#### The Dream Syndicate The Troubadour

Paisley underground band the Dream Syndicate are celebrating the release of the *How Did We Find Ourselves Here?* documentary and companion soundtrack *Live Through the Past, Darkly* (coming out on February 9 via Label 51 Recordings) with a show at the Troubadour, which seems entirely appropriate for the L.A. legends. "What makes the soundtrack interesting is that it's a career spanning collection of previously unreleased live (or radio) recordings that features nearly every Dream Syndicate line-up spanning the band's entire career; it features Steve Wynn, Dennis Duck, Mark Walton, Jason Victor and Kendra Smith, Karl Precoda, Paul Cutler, Tom Zvoncheck and Vicki Peterson," reads a press release. And wouldn't you know it, Vicki Peterson and John Cowslip also perform. *8 p.m. on Saturday, January 27 at the Troubadour, \$30, troubadour.com.* [L]



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FOOD

# YAKUMI OPENS AN LAX OUTPOST

BY MICHELE STUEVEN

The Burbank-based *Yakumi* has opened the first fresh cut-to-order sushi counter at *Los Angeles International Airport* in the Delta Airlines terminal food court tucked between *Fat Sal's* and the upcoming first outpost of DTLA's *Pizza Please* opening in summer. The Cava Mediterranean grill will also open at that time in the space designed by PGAL Architects.

Lee Maen and Philip Cummins, founders of Innovative Dining Group and creators of BOA Steakhouse, Katana, and Sushi Roku, together with Crew's Hospitality and Unibail-Rodam-

co-Westfield have brought its fast-casual concept to Delta's newest 178-seat food court under the supervision of Yakumi's Burbank chef Steven Riley.

It's all part of the group's mission to bring a taste of Los Angeles to travelers through strong local startups. They've already opened *Rock & Brews* in Terminals One and Five, *Fresh Brothers* in Terminal Two, *Lemonade* in Terminal Five as well as a *Hilltop Coffee + Kitchen* and *Randy's Donuts* in Terminal Seven.

Perched on the upstairs terrace of terminal three, which was completely renovated during the pandemic, the fast-casual concept offers made-to-or-



der signature Yakumi combos including classic rolls like California, spicy tuna and baked crab, yellowtail sushi with ponzu and serrano chili, salmon with truffle soy and sesame seeds. The artful combo boxes come in three sizes to suit varying appetites and there's a variety of a la carte items as well. The rice is made fresh daily and it's about a seven to ten-minute ticket time to get your custom

order. Additional selections include wine, beer, sake, and baked goods.

Open for lunch and dinner daily, It's not your typical airport food and the space designed by URW has the relaxed ambiance of a restaurant. The sushi bar feels local and friendly – just keep your eye on the time so you don't miss your flight. You might just forget you're at the airport. [E]

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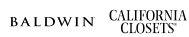
Premier



Media



Platinum



Diamond



GAMING

# NET RUNNING

How A Defunct Trading Card Game Is Making Waves In The Industry's Underbelly

BY ISAI ROCHA

**G**athered in a modest warehouse in Barcelona, Spain, with paint peeling off the walls and the sun peeking through a long glass panel ceiling, more than 200 loyal card gamers

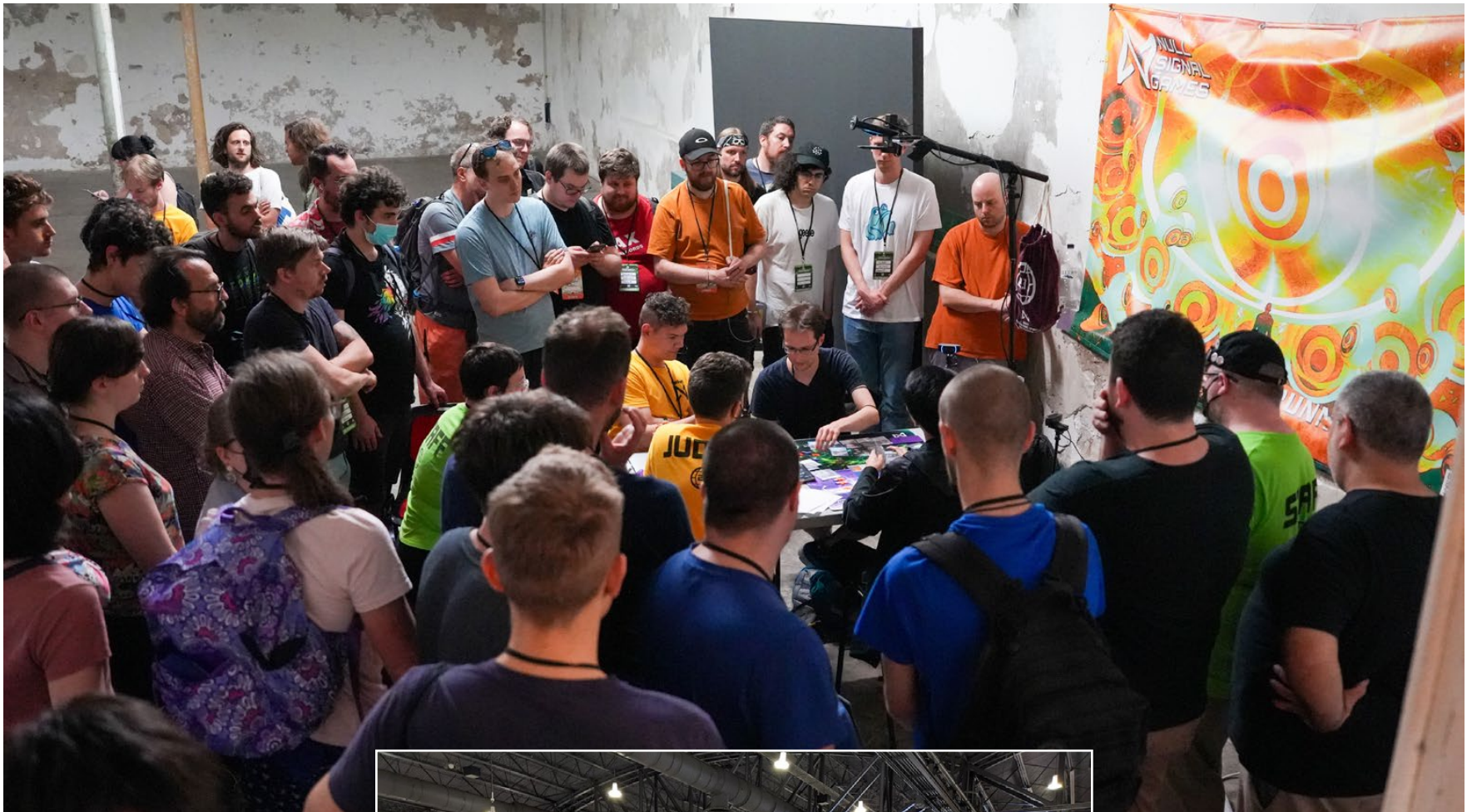
anxiously awaited the final round of the 2023 Netrunner World Championship last October. The championship showdown was between a pair of players skilled in the art of strategic deception, with William Hoang, AKA Sokka in Netrunner circles,

taking the victory in the 3-day tournament and crowned as the best in a game played in the shadows.

The trading card game industry is currently dominated by popular games such as Yu-Gi-Oh, Pokemon, and Magic: The Gathering. However, Netrunner stands as an anomaly, carrying a small but mighty fanbase that has carved its own lane since the late 1990s. Using chat apps such as Discord and sometimes location-specific Facebook groups, Netrunner communities organize tournaments and conventions with a digital underground feel that aligns with the game's dystopian influence.

Built with thematics related to the Cyberpunk 2020 role-playing game that was first released in 1990, the Netrunner game involves hackers (Runners) fighting back against a worldwide

megacorporation (the Corp), attempting to steal information and data that can foil further expansion by the power-hungry Corp. It is a two-player game, where the player who takes the Corp side must fulfill their given agenda without being thwarted by their opponent, the Runner. The Runner will try to jumble the Corp servers by building the proper software and hardware. There is an option to attempt to "flatline" the Runner with cards that dish out damage, while the Runner also has the option to try and stall the Corp long enough that their plans are unsuccessful. Unlike many other card games, where you can log on to eBay and buy yourself the strongest deck of cards, Netrunner is set up so all players are on equal footing, with equal access to all decks, meaning you cannot buy a



victory. You must rely on strategy and a little bit of luck.

The popularity of *Cyberpunk*, which has carried out multiple iterations of its game throughout the last 30 years, would lead one to believe that *Android: Netrunner* would hold a much larger piece of the trading card game world than it does. The *Netrunner* design also had a strong foundation, as it was developed by Richard Garfield, who also invented *Magic: The Gathering*. Still, there was one problem: the printing of cards and coordination of tournaments abruptly stopped in 2018, with little explanation from its developers at Fantasy Flight Games, outside of the expiring licensing agreement with Wizards of the Coast publishing.

“With the announcement of the end of the *Android: Netrunner* product line, I’m sure many of you are wondering why,” Head of Studio at Fantasy Flight Games, Andrew Navaro, said in a statement. “While I cannot speak to the specifics, I would like to provide as much insight as I can, and hopefully lessen the consternation that this announcement has undoubtedly caused.

With the success that *Android:*



*Netrunner* has enjoyed over the last six years, I don’t think there would ever have been a good time to end it in the eyes of many fans, and in the eyes of many of us here at the studio, but the license agreement has reached its conclusion, and so the product line must do the same.”

As *Netrunner* picked up steam in

the 2010s, with new card sets rolling out consistently and fans clamoring for tournaments, it came to a complete stop and was abandoned by its publishers. In its final days, the words of the *Netrunner* team reverberated through the souls of its fans, with Navaro saying, “Just because we won’t be printing it anymore doesn’t suddenly turn it into

a game that’s not worth playing.”

Echoing Navaro’s sentiment, Lead Developer Michael Boggs said, “I hope and believe the community will keep it alive for years to come.”

That is where the “Original 8” at a UK-based nonprofit called Null Signal came into play, not only keeping the spirit of *Netrunner* alive, but also physically creating new cards that not only picked up where the original *Netrunner* left off but continued to do so, five years later.

“I was devastated, as were a lot of people,” Serenity Westfield, former Vice President of Engagement at Null Signal and one of the original eight Project Nisei members, told L.A. Weekly. “That’s when Null Signal was born basically because there was a group of people who just said ‘No, we’re not accepting this.’”

**Null Signal Games** was a product of passion meeting execution. Merely weeks after Fantasy Flight Games announced the death of *Netrunner*, Null Signal on-boarded several of *Netrunner*’s original artists for their, and in a life-imitates-art moment, hacked its way into the game world, forming the



collective that at the time was called Project Nisei, which roughly translates to “second generation” in Japanese.

“Within three days, the first conversations about taking over the game had started,” Westfield said. By August the original eight people in the organization and the original eight board members had been selected and we’d started recruitment on our teams. The moment the license ended, we posted a series of seven articles detailing our plans for taking the game forward from that point. As far as we’re concerned, there was a three-day drop in signal between [Fantasy Flight Games] running it and us starting up, then we took over pretty much the moment the license ended.”

Reaching out to the Netrunner fanbase, Project Nisei had to nail their attempt at making new cards that not only met the previous standard of cards, but were compatible with the original decks.

The organization succeeded and the new, fan-made cards were immediately accepted by the community and deemed the new standard for Netrunner games around the world.

While Netrunner shares a smaller piece of the pie, the trading card game industry has seen a mainstream surge in the last five years.

There is a pop culture moment happening where celebrities have more outwardly expressed their geeky sides and are seeing an embrace instead of the teasing of walking around with a

deck of fantasy-based cards produced in times past. It is no longer unusual to see a celebrity such as YouTuber and podcaster Logan Paul, make public appearances with a \$5 million Pokemon card hanging from a chain on his neck.

Similarly, for \$2 million, pop star Post Malone famously purchased a 1-of-1 Magic: The Gathering collaborative card with the Lord of the Rings franchise. For Post Malone, it was not a vanity purchase, as he is arguably the most famous fan and player of Magic: The Gathering and those \$2 million were “life-changing money,” for Brook Trafton, the card’s previous owner, who posted a TikTok video about his experience meeting Post Malone and going through with the sale.

“This is my dream come true,” Trafton said. “Meeting Post Malone and him buying the One Ring card from me is literally a moment straight out of a fairytale.”

While Netrunner may not have global stars flashing exclusive cards, it may be the best trading card game that collectors do not know is still running.

The *Frank & Son Collectible Show* in the City of Industry is among the largest hubs for all things related to comic books, trading cards, video games and more. It is geek heaven. Post-pandemic, the number of trading card posts at Frank & Son has increased to the point where they added a room dedicated to rare cards from Pokemon, to Magic: The Gathering and even the up-and-



coming Disney card game, Lorcana. The 5,000-square-foot warehouse houses more than 200 vendors and as you make your way toward all the card vendors asking about Netrunner, you may get nostalgic responses such as, “Man, I haven’t heard that name in a long time,” or see raised eyebrows followed by, “Those are impossible to find these days.”

Yet the few in the know can quietly find Netrunner meetups in L.A. County at card shops such as Odyssey Games in Pasadena, or the Game Cellar in El Monte, with out-of-towners finding their way to get a few games in.

It is not unusual for a player to visit other cities and seek out other players through Discord chats. While global, the community is tight-knit, and Westfield says it is why Null Signal has successfully kept Netrunner alive.

“You can have the best card game in

the world, but if your community is not welcoming, people won’t be coming back and this is something I hear a lot,” Westfield said. “You need people on the ground to be organizing local tournaments... like, over here in the UK, we have something we call ‘Pubrunner’ where you meet at the pub with your friends and play Netrunner. You need enthusiastic and happy people to do that for you and if you don’t have a bunch of people who love the game, you’re not going to get that, your game is going to suck.”

Although no mega-corporation backs Netrunner, the runners continue to fight in the shadows, which Null Signal is OK with.

“Aside from loving the community, I firmly believe that Netrunner is the greatest card game ever made,” Westfield said. “I don’t see it ending anytime soon.”



## MUSIC

## GET RETT-Y!

Rett Madison Celebrates Album Release With Echo Show

BY BRETT CALLWOOD



**L**os Angeles-based vocalist, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist Rett Madison is preparing to release her second album, *One for Jackie*, and will be celebrating with a show at the Echo on Jan. 26. What is likely to be a triumphant hometown show is just the latest chapter in a career that remains on an upward trajectory.

Madison started singing when she was very young and when her mom heard her, the artist's path was set.

"She was so supportive and really encouraged me, and her and my dad were able to put me in some voice lessons when I was like four or five," Madison says. "It wasn't until I was maybe 16 years old that I had more of a feeling

that I really wanted to pursue music professionally. But I was very lucky that I got to study music throughout my childhood and enjoy it as an outlet through all those years before I knew I wanted to do it as a career."

While her sound evolved between her two albums, Madison says that the storytelling is the throughline.

"On *One for Jackie*, I leaned into referencing more artists, arrangement-wise, that my mom would have really liked," she says. "We referenced Bruce Springsteen for a song. My mom was a big fan of Fleetwood Mac. And so I feel like we lean into some of those elements for *One for Jackie* more than maybe for (the debut) *Pin-Up Daddy*. But I would say the storytelling aspect, how I lean into that, hasn't really changed between the first record and second record."

*One for Jackie* was recorded with Madison's producer, Tyler Chester, at Sonic Ranch Studios, about half an hour outside of El Paso, Texas.

"We all stayed on site," she says. "And it also happens to be a pecan farm. So it was really peaceful to walk, you know, between the pecan trees, between recording certain songs and doing certain takes."

While she learned a lot from the experience of recording her debut album, Madison is still early in her career and she said the experience this time was still pretty daunting.

"Especially with this new record, I feel like it's in its own league, its own category, because the content of the album is so personal to me," she says. "So much about losing my mom, almost five years ago. I felt like I was pretty candid and honest about so many things even on *Pin-Up Daddy*, but *One for Jackie* is a whole other level of vulnerability that I hadn't really gone into in my previous writing. So I think for that, because of that, I would say this is almost maybe more intense of an album cycle for me just given the content and the nature of the songs."

Her mom suffered with depression, PTSD and alcoholism for Madison's whole life, before suicide took her in 2019. Naturally, this is an album that tackles some very difficult subjects.

"It's very, very much about my journey, after losing my mother in 2019," she says. "I talk very candidly about suicide on the record. Obviously, grief and loss. I talk very openly about my mom being a survivor of childhood sexual abuse. It's a very heavy record, I would say. But I wrote it and I recorded it and put it into the world in hopes that it would help anyone else that's gone through those kinds of challenges and that kind of pain in their life, to feel less alone."

That's clearly invaluable and impor-

tant work. And not only for the listener — Madison says that this was a very therapeutic experience.

"It was very much a cathartic and a healing process for me," she says. "Ever since I was 12, when I first started writing, it's always been very therapeutic for me. Kind of like just writing into a diary, except I would write songs. So yeah, the *One for Jackie* record was a huge, monumental part of my healing process. And moving through grief with my mom."

The album is fulfilling its purpose and connecting with people, according to Madison.

"The most rewarding and fulfilling feedback that I've gotten is, whenever I play some of these songs live, if I meet folks afterwards, they connect to the song specifically, because they've lost somebody close to them," she says. "They feel some type of catharsis at the show or feel moved or seen in some way. That's the only thing I care about for the most part — am I going to reach people that I really need to?"

Madison is signed to Warner Music, and she's refreshingly positive about life on a major label in these DIY days.

"I feel very comfortable there," she says. "I feel very supported by all the folks at Warner. I was approaching music from a DIY perspective over the years. At this point in my career, I'm really grateful to have some more infrastructure and to honestly, just transparently, have more financial support for the record. I'm grateful to work with the team there. They are so passionate and care so much, and yeah, I feel really lucky."

With all of that in mind, the show at the Echo promises to be a stellar night.

"I'll have my four piece band, and two string players with me," Madison says. "And we'll play pretty much the entirety of *One for Jackie*. Maybe I'll play something I haven't released yet. But yeah, it'll be kind of a presentation of the album. It's an album release show. So I'm really excited about it."

When that show is done and the album released, Madison has big plans for the rest of 2024.

"After the Echo show, I'm really excited to make my Carnegie Hall debut in New York City," she says. "I've really always wanted to do that. And I'm lucky that I can do that for the first time. I'll be a part of a show called *The Piano Recital*, where a lot of songwriters come to Carnegie Hall and play a few of their songs. I think Mandy Moore is on the bill, Margo Price, and some other wonderful names. So that's what I'm really excited about. That'll be Feb. 23."

*Rett Madison plays the release show for the *One for Jackie* album at 7 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 26, at the Echo. [A]*

## CANNABIS

# RESCHEDULING CANNABIS GOES BEYOND INDUSTRY BENEFITS

We Looked At Some Of The Deeper Aspects Of Rescheduling Beyond Taxes And Banks

BY JIMI DEVINE

**D**ating back to last summer, the vibes had been in the air. But Matt Zorn getting his hands on the Department of Health and Human Services' recommendation letter to the Drug Enforcement Administration put the hype levels into overdrive.

First and foremost, this isn't some kind of finish line for anything. The real endgame that comes out of this is cannabis being that much easier to research and then push off the controlled substances list period. But it's a tricky thing to get excited about. NORML Deputy Director Paul Armentano reminded everyone that no drug that has not gone through the FDA approval process has ever been made Schedule III in an interview with Forbes last week.

He also emphasized descheduling as an end goal. And that's fair, as many have noted over the last few weeks, alcohol isn't even on the controlled substances list. That's despite over 10,000 people a year losing their lives in accidents involving drunk drivers. In total, there are roughly 95,000 alcohol-related deaths annually in the country.

We hit on many of the core parts of the conversation last week when covering the 13 state attorney generals that came out supporting rescheduling. Those included tax deductions, housing, and immigration rights, and bank accounts for the cash-heavy industry in constant fear for its safety.

But there are plenty of other parts of the discussion. Moving out of Schedule I is like beginning the walk to the starting line for the international distribution of California cannabis. Sure,

it's still a good distance away, but any kind of progress on the subject had to start with this first step. Here we are a decade removed from legalization first starting to pop up in North America. Who would have thought countries like Canada and Colombia would beat us to shipping products to Europe?! But here we are.

There was no hope at the end of the tunnel of that changing anytime soon, but if rescheduling makes it through the DEA despite the lack of FDA approval, there will be at least a flicker.

The conversation on rescheduling in recent weeks has been very business-oriented. But what impact would it have on the people still serving time for cannabis convictions?

We reached out to Luke Scarmazzo a few weeks ahead of him celebrating a year since his release from federal prison. Scarmazzo ran a state-legal cannabis dispensary in Modesto until he got raided in the 2000s and went on to serve 14 years of a 22-year sentence.

He was quick to agree with the wider descheduling sentiment but the move to further normalization will certainly benefit those still serving time.

"It's not perfect, but it's a step in the right direction. And it's a step towards the descheduling, which is where we ultimately need to be," Scarmazzo told L.A. Weekly. "As far as how rescheduling affects people that are in the justice system, it is nuanced."

Scarmazzo went on about how much of the time you hear people talking about Schedule I — you hear them speaking on what is seen as the two primary qualifiers. Those are the high risk of addiction and no recognized medical value.



"It's the highest potential for abuse, no efficacy, no medical use, but also, it's supposed to carry the highest penalties, because it's the most dangerous," Scarmazzo noted.

He thinks a combination of a move to Schedule III and the U.S. Sentencing Commission's move last November to modify how compassionate release works could really be beneficial to cannabis offenders still in prison.

We asked Scarmazzo if he was someone still incarcerated, would he wait to push for a compassionate release until after the smoke clears around the Schedule III move.

"You wait. Absolutely. If I were an attorney advisor, I'm not, if I were an attorney advising someone and they're fighting an old cannabis offense right now, I would absolutely tell them to wait at least until a few months before the election," Scarmazzo replied. "I think we're going to see a rescheduling before the election happens."

He argued a lot of the lifetime-appointed federal judges are very by-the-book. That's how they got there. So if they have a new book to work with in a few months, cannabis offenders may very well be a lot better off in their attempts at getting home. 📖

# MEET MAXIMALIST MULTIMEDIA ARTIST YOSHIE SAKAI

BY SHANA NYS DAMBROT



**Y**oshie Sakai's interdisciplinary practice cavorts across sculpture, environmental installation, performance, and filmmaking—engaging in quirky, emotional world-building scenarios that center her lived experience within broader conversations about what our society values. “Loosely autobiographical,” her narratives and videos are written, produced, directed—and of course, costumed and performed—by the artist herself. With aesthetic, narrative, and material influences ranging from East Asian soap operas to Hollywood musicals, the wellness industry, and her own poignant memories of her grandmother that came to live with them when Sakai was a child, she gathers found and meaningful objects to engineer surreal, yet intimate, experiential scenarios.

Equally interested in subverting the rankling trope of the model minority, especially in the context of the Japanese American community in South L.A., as well as in shedding light on the abysmal state of elder care in American society, Sakai's current exhibition at Vincent Price Art Museum in East L.A. fuses these threads into a sublime three-part installation re-imagining the world as if old folks were the target demographic, receiving the respect and attention they deserve. Bouncing between the carnivalesque and the deadly serious, celebratory and critical, nostalgic and disorienting, affecting and hilarious,

Sakai intentionally deploys humor as a way of creating shared, safer spaces to have difficult conversations.

Grandma Entertainment Franchise is on view at the Vincent Price Art Museum at East Los Angeles College until February 3, 2024. Further manifestations of this work will be featured as part of Acting Against Ageism: Performance and Films at LACMA on Saturday, January 27.

**L.A. WEEKLY: Did you go to art school? Why/Why not?**

**YOSHIE SAKAI:** Yes! I was working as an administrative assistant for a mobile phone company creating presentations and doing things for other people, but one day I decided that I wanted to make a living doing something creative and for myself. At the time, I was living in Hawaii, so I applied/enrolled as a fine art student with plans of becoming a graphic designer, as I thought that was the “practical” creative field to go into. However, I didn't know anything about anything in art, so I needed some direction in learning how to draw and in understanding the basics. Once I started doing that, at the age of 30, I just kept going—from the University of Hawaii at Manoa, to Golden West College in Huntington Beach, to CSULB for my BFA in Drawing and Painting, and then to Claremont Graduate University for my MFA. It was a long route, but yes, I

did go through the school system, as I needed the structure to learn and to be a part of a community who were of like mind.

**When did you first know you were an artist?**

I didn't know I was an artist for the longest time even while working on my BFA and MFA degrees. I knew I was creative, and people have always told me that, but it was not until right before graduating from Claremont Graduate University when I was able to say, “I am an artist. This is what I do, and that is me.” Until then, I felt I was just going through the motions of doing what I thought needed to be done by getting a BFA, then an MFA. Even while in graduate school, a faculty member questioned my purpose of being there and whether I was just a hobbyist. But as I met with other artists and talked about my ideas and had the space to experiment, I moved out of my comfort zone from painting to video, sculpture, and installation. I felt at home and knew art was the right place for me.

**What is your short answer to people who ask what your work is about?**

The crux of my work is about subverting expectations through humor and narrative whether it be those of the mass media, cultural identity, gender roles, or familial and personal relationships. With my maximalist multimedia installations, I am creating a world where anxieties, fears, and hopes coexist and find meaning amid the challenges that come with everyday living. I am inspired by the interactions I have and the connections I make with those around me—my friends, my family, my coworkers, my neighbors, even the people I meet for the very first time.

**What would you be doing if you weren't an artist?**

Gosh, if I weren't an artist, I may still be back in college as a professional student and training for the Winter Olympics to “Go for the Gold” in the ski jump. My other thought is that I would be a “tarento” or “talent,” a sort of television celebrity in Japan as a Japanese American on variety shows because it seems like it would be a fun job. I could meet Japanese celebrities/comedians and talk and joke about the quirks of daily life from my Japanese American perspective and to hear theirs. I know, very random, but true.

**Why do you live and work in L.A., and not elsewhere?**

When I was younger, I would have said that I was trying to get out of L.A. or the South Bay where I was born

and raised—Torrance and Gardena, respectively. I wanted to leave and “see the world,” and I did live elsewhere for a bit, not having traveled too far, to Northern California for a moment and to Honolulu, Hawaii for five years. It has been many years since then, but I am back at home in Gardena and living with my 89-year-old mother. My work is very much inspired by my daily life—my interactions with those who are immediately around me. I am finding the charm, uniqueness, and really seeing how special it is to live at home and in Gardena, which is a place like no other. To be honest, this may change again, but for now, this is it, and I am living and learning here. Come visit!

**When was your first show?**

I like to joke, but it is the truth. My first solo show was in 2016 in the other “LA” in New Orleans, Louisiana, at a very special art space called Antenna. It was the first time I was able to exhibit one of my ongoing works “KOKO's Love” as a video installation that occupied the second story of a house, as Antenna operated from a two-story home. It was perfect for my loosely autobiographical, fictional Asian/Asian American soap opera series where I play all the characters and celebrate the dysfunctions of growing up and living as a Japanese American woman in the South Bay.

**When is/was your current/most recent/next show or project?**

My first museum solo exhibition Grandma Entertainment Franchise or “GEF” for short, is currently open at the Vincent Price Art Museum until February 3rd. The GEF is an immersive multimedia installation that includes a Grandma Nightclub, Grandma Amusement Park, and Grandma Day Spa. My hope is that by creating this alternate reality to Disneyland and Hollywood's emphasis on the “new” and its preoccupation with the “next big thing,” I could celebrate and honor our disenfranchised elderly community by making them into larger-than-life heroes, who they are. I have a special place in my heart for my “obaa-chan” (“grandmother” in Japanese), who would never have thought of herself as a hero—but the most unlikely truly are.

**What artist living or dead would you most like to show or work with?**

Hmmm.... I would have to say Pipiloti Rist, Mike Kelley, and Paul McCarthy!

**Website and social media handles, please.**

yoshiesakai.com  
IG: @yoshie\_sakai\_studio

## LA WEEKLY CLASSIFIEDS

### EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION

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**Marketing Research Analyst.** Eval data using statistical techniques & s/ware. Devise & eval mthds for collecting data, such as surveys, focus groups, questionnaires, & opinion polls. Wage: \$47195/yr. Resume to HR: Bathroom Vanities Wholesale Inc. 13506 Shermay Way, Van Nuys, CA 91405.

**Sr Software Engineer** to design +implement tier-one microservices in Java or Scala in support of in-app purchases + their related data + analytics. REQS: Bach in Comp Sci or related field, +5 yrs exp in offered position, or Software Engineer, or in a related position performing software development work. Worksite: Burbank, CA. (Work-from-home permitted.) \$177,500 to \$187,500. Email resume to Disney Entertainment & Sports LLC, Job ID#46587-188, Corp.GM.Recruitment@Disney.com. No calls/ Principals only/ EOE

GIS Applications Developer: Wk on long-range transportation planning, incl rsrch, public participation, & proj mgmt. Anlyz & present technical staff analysis on planning cases. Dsgn & modif GIS prgms, dvlp maps & reports, & review dvlpmnt-rttd GIS apps for compliance w/ City Code & Paratransit svc policies. Master's deg in planning, Transportation or rtrd is req'd. Send resume to 3449 Santa Anita Avenue, El Monte, CA 91731

**Designer.** All work performed supervised by a licensed Architect. Design 2D&3D renderings, designs, drawings, models of residential, commercial, interior design proj., submit designs to Sr. Architect for review, submit new design iterations as instructed by Sr. Architect using ArchiCAD & Rhino. Bachelor's deg. in Architecture req'd. Salary: \$60K to \$65K/yr. Resume: Laney LA, Inc. 725 Cypress Ave., Hermosa Beach CA 90254.



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## LA WEEKLY Bulletin

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*Thank you Saint Jude, Saint of the Impossible, EC*

## 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)