

LA WEEKLY

**LOVE LIES BLEEDING HOLDS
NO PUNCHES FUSING THE
REAL WITH THE SURREAL**

**MUSIC: MEET THE MEMBERS
OF THE WORSHIP OF DRUM
AND BASS**

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THE SYNANON FIX

**A look at the rise and fall of
LA's first drug rehab**

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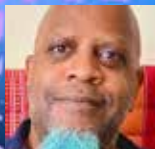
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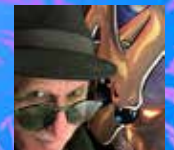
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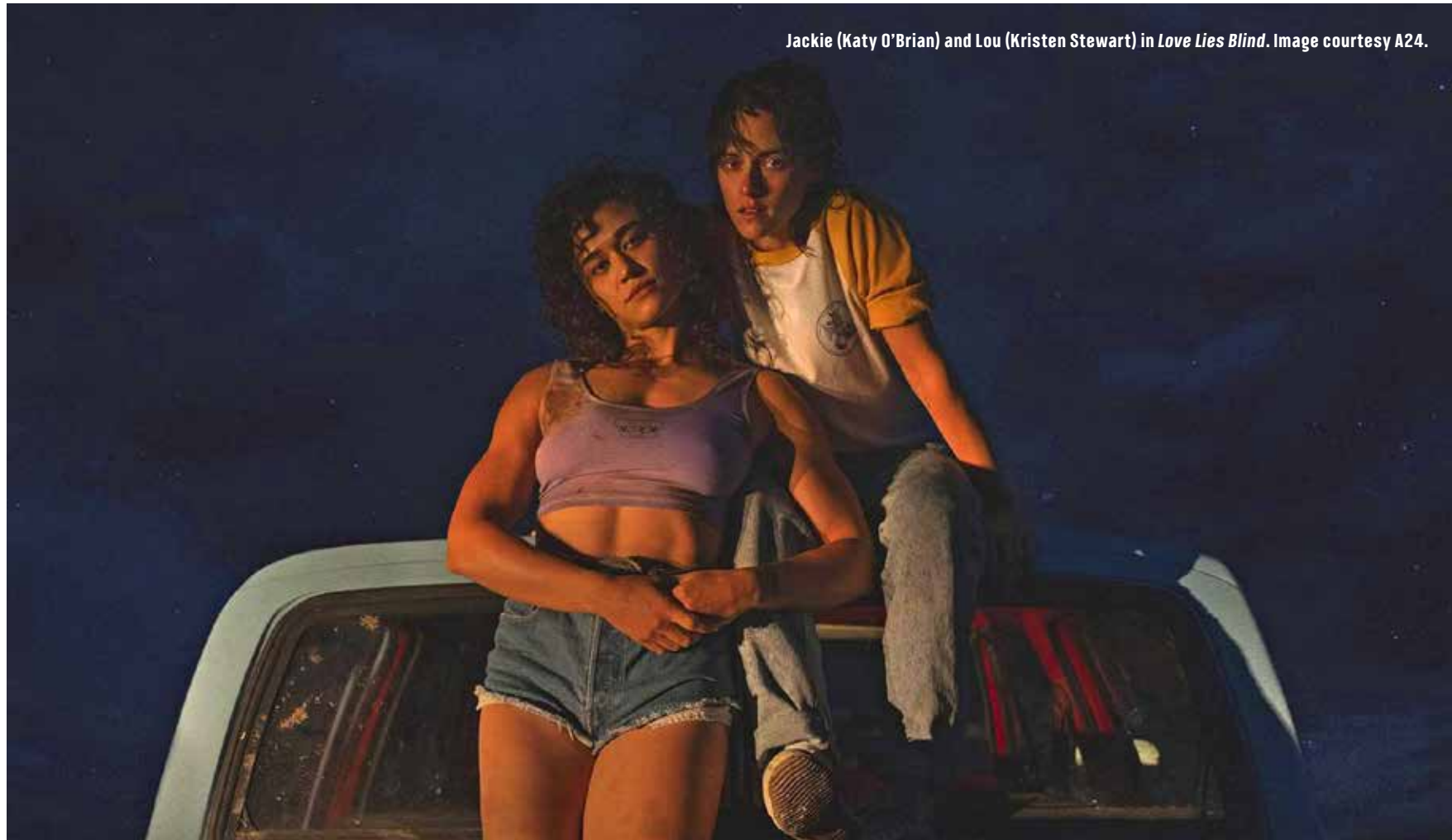


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 Jackie (Katy O'Brian) and Lou (Kristen Stewart) in *Love Lies Blind*. Image courtesy A24.

'LOVE LIES BLEEDING' - 'LOVE,' AMERICANA STYLE

BY ERIN MAXWELL

Rose Glass's *Love Lies Bleeding* is a fascinating, hallucinatory fever dream set in the American Southwest that utilizes elements of body horror, crime noir, and occasional magical realism to sell its unique love story. Offbeat in all the ways we've come to expect from an A24 offering, the superb performances and sharp script allow the feature to really flourish beyond its quirky premise.

Much like Glass's feature film debut effort *Saint Maud*, *Love Lies Bleeding* places its focus on nonconformists and outsiders who live on the fringe of society. Bodybuilder Jackie (Katy O'Brian) has molded herself into a living being of physical perfection as a means of escape from her life in Oklahoma. She is on her way to a bodybuilding competition in Las Vegas when fate intervenes and brings her to Lou (Kristen Stewart), a mulleted gym manag-

er in Albuquerque with serious family issues. The two immediately spark, but their passion not only sets each other aflame, but the fiery duo soon find themselves at the center of one combustible situation after another.

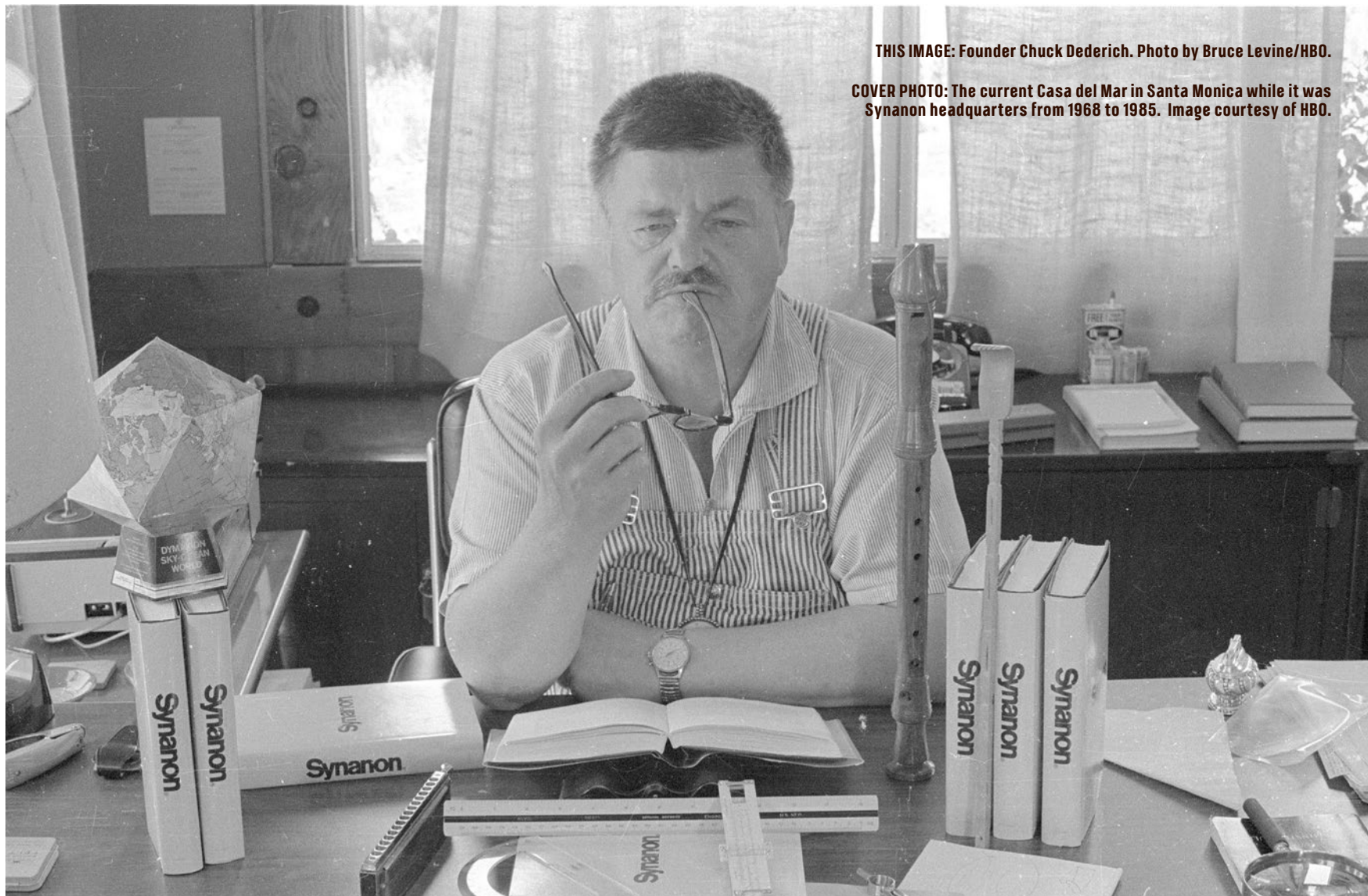
The performances in the film help sell even the most peculiar moments of the vigorous drama. Stewart and O'Brian share an intense chemistry that perfectly captures the blinding lust of a new relationship, the type of white heat that radiates from young love. Ed Harris and his long, flowing locks of hair extensions plays the film's heavy, Lou's father and Jackie's boss, a big wig in the Land of the Enchantment whose illegal activity has bought him almost every local business and law enforcement official. And Jena Malone and Dave Franco round out the cast as Lou's obsequious sister Beth and her scumbag abusive husband, JJ.

Written by Glass and Weronika Tofiliska, *Love Lies Bleeding* is an extremely well-balanced, occasionally darkly humorous, uber-violent portrait of love gone very, very wrong. A story of two misfits who find each other in 1980s Albuquerque made

complicated by dysfunctional families and occasional roid rage is a bit of irresistible storytelling that is hard to turn away from, even at its goriest. A period piece crammed with more acid-washed denim and complicated haircuts than a back issue of *Tiger Beat*, even the over-the-top style of the film can't compete with the top-notch performances and story as it unfolds. Glass creates a world of her own in which to cradle the relationship of Jackie and Lou.

A love story that would make Diane Arbus smile, *Love Lies Bleeding* is a visceral work that holds no punches as it fuses the real with the surreal. Performances from Stewart and O'Brian encapsulate raw emotion while Glass and Tofiliska's script manages to merge elements of neo-noir crime thriller and the WTF psychological horror we've come to expect from A24 films. The end product is an eccentric outing that exudes style, substance, and promise from its creator Glass.

(To be honest, *Love Lies Bleeding* is best consumed when going in as blind as possible. Sorry that wasn't mentioned first.) [A]



THIS IMAGE: Founder Chuck Dederich. Photo by Bruce Levine/HBO.

COVER PHOTO: The current Casa del Mar in Santa Monica while it was Synanon headquarters from 1968 to 1985. Image courtesy of HBO.

THE SYNANON FIX

The Rise And Fall Of LA's First Drug Rehab

BY MICHELE STUEVEN

When Chuck Dederich opened Synanon in a storefront on the Venice Boardwalk in 1958, it was the only residential drug rehab that existed in Los Angeles. There were no doctors or nurses or methadone for the heroin addicts. It was just addicts helping addicts with puke buckets and cold towels to help the dope sick come down.

Dederich was a middle-aged alcoholic

who cleaned up in AA in 1956 and a former PR man. Right out of the gate, he became an immediate media sensation with the success of Synanon saving lives and the introduction of confrontive therapy into the program, popular at the time.

He called it The Game. It consisted of group sessions between addicts discussing their problems three to four times a week with members telling each other what assholes they all were in a supervised verbal street fight. It was emotion-

al catharsis for people who had spent their lives pushing down their demons and feelings with drugs and alcohol. And it worked.

Prolific award-winning documentary producer Rory Kennedy and partner Mark Bailey's upcoming HBO series *The Synanon Fix* takes a fascinating plunge into the rise and fall of the Synanon organization through the eyes of the members who lived it from its early days as a groundbreaking drug rehabilitation pro-

gram to its later descent into what many consider a cult. What began as a story of healing ended in horror.

The husband and wife team collected more than 35,000 photos and more than 3,000 pieces of archive video from different places and sources and interviewed a wealth of Synanon survivors, including Dederich's daughter Jady and others born into Dederich's movement, and Lance Kenton (the son of famous bandleader Stan Kenton) who went to jail for alleg-



Casa Del Mar. Photo courtesy of HBO.



Casa Del Mar. Photo courtesy of HBO.

edly placing a live rattlesnake in the mailbox of attorney Paul Morantz in 1978 by orders of the charismatic leader, in an effort to silence his investigation into Synanon practices.

"I've been making documentaries now for 30 years and I would say on average most of my interviews are about two hours," Kennedy told L.A. Weekly recently. "I did a longer one for the Vietnam documentary that was about four hours. A biopic like I did with my mother was over a few days. None of these interviews were less than seven hours. Many of them were nine hours or longer and I never got bored. They're great talkers and all know how to tell a story. The changes that went on in their lives were fascinating. To see how they made sense of this organization that went from the pillars of synanon in the beginning when the only rules were no drugs, no alcohol and no violence. By the end they had bought more firearms than anybody in the history of California and had an open bar. I mean how do you go from A to Z like that? When you're inside of that bubble, how do you make sense of that?"

The series, which premieres on HBO on Monday, April 1, makes sense of it by approaching the story with an understanding of the context of the times. It gets down and dirty and is unflinchingly honest about everything from child abuse to birth control mandated by Dederich, including vasectomies for men as part of its lifetime rehabilitation. Children were subjected to the same Game sessions as adults in chilling original footage.

"There was a lot of damage done," says Bailey. "Some of the children who either came in young or were born into and grew up in Synanon ended up as collateral damage while the adults were on their journeys of discovery. But parenting in general at the time was different than it

is now. You have to see it through the lens of the time and what they thought that relationship should look like."

By 1961, they outgrew the Venice storefront and expanded, moving to the vacated armory on the beach in Santa Monica, where about 60 people were fed and housed. It was free to those in need. The recovering alcoholic started running it like a corporation and Synanon became a nonprofit organization, becoming inundated with donations.

He was the edgy darling of the time with international coverage, and in 1968, his social movement continued to grow and made what is now the ritzy and restored Casa del Mar hotel in Santa Monica the group's headquarters until 1985.

Amid the growing cultural revolution, Dederich and his wife, Betty, opened Synanon's doors to nonaddicts, known as "lifestylers," and turned the organization into a culturally forward attempt at communal living. Membership swelled to the thousands and Synanon's facilities grew in number around the country.

"I have fantastic memories of growing up in Synanon," says world-renowned choreographer Bill Goodson, who grew up in the group and went on to work with Michael Jackson, Diana Ross, Paula Abdul, Stevie Wonder and Gloria Estefan. "It saved my mother's life and it probably saved mine as well. I can't think of a better place to have grown up in, living in a community with other kids that became my brothers and sisters of every different race and color. It wasn't perfect and there were some dark moments as well, but my memories on the whole are very fond."

"I think it changed when the kids started playing The Game," says Goodson, who with his mother, an admitted "dope fiend" appears extensively in the series. "Up until then, we were a community of children who grew up like most children,



Photo by Bruce Levine/HBO.



Photo by Bruce Levine/HBO.



Mark Bailey and Rory Kennedy speak onstage the Los Angeles Premiere of "The Synanon Fix" on March 21, 2024 in Santa Monica, California. Photo by Jon Kopaloff/Getty Images for HBO.

we went to school together and played outside. There was always a mother if not mothers in the house where we lived, so we were fed and looked after and spent a lot of time going down to the Del Mar club, immersed in a place that was helping people. There were people who came in needing help who were sick and, yes, sometimes you'd find yourself emptying a puke bucket or giving somebody a cold towel who was on the couch. That was part of our lives. Other than that, we had pretty great childhoods growing up on the beach.

"Synanon didn't know anything about raising kids, so they began to implement these therapeutic methods that they used on adults and dope fiends on us," he says, holding back tears. "Looking back, it was a dreadful mistake. Kids who were strong enough and able to roll with the punches and bounce back survived these difficult moments. Then there were others who didn't and couldn't. My heart always goes out to them."

Goodson left the group in 1976 and says he never underwent therapy or deprogramming.

"I found myself suddenly in a dance and arts community that was thriving and alive," he says. "It was California in



Rory Kennedy. Photo by Rainer Hosch.

the '70s. There were a lot of people embracing new ideas and I fell into a situation that wrapped its arms around me. In many ways it felt like Synanon. I didn't feel a void. At 19 and recently divorced with the work ethic I learned already in jobs at 16, I had a step up on my peers. I started a dance career pretty late in life and was dancing with Diana Ross in no time. I attribute that to my upbringing. I tried to take the best with me when I left."



Mark Bailey. Photo by Joe McDougal.

The Synanon Fix is a comprehensive first-hand look at the social movements of Los Angeles in the '60s, integration, cults, communes and greed.

"I was reading about cults recently and that there are about 10,000 cults in the U.S. today, depending on how you define it, which was way more than I expected," says Robert F. Kennedy's daughter, Rory, who was born six months after her father's assassination. "It said that during

times of chaos or where society itself feels out of control — which was true in the early '60s in the streets of America and Vietnam — it feels very unsettling. In times like that, much like now, people are searching for ways to be grounded or for a new way to help them make sense of the world in friendships, relationships and community. The feeling of community seems more crucial when the world around us is so chaotic." [A]



Photo by Sam Neil

THE WORSHIP OF DRUM & BASS

BRETT CALLWOOD

The Worship of Drum & Bass: UK drum & bass collective Worship, consisting of Sub Focus, Dimension, Culture Shock and 1991, had been friends for a long time before they decided to collaborate a few years ago.

“Me and Dimension made our first collab ‘Desire’ together back in 2018 which went platinum in the UK,” Sub Focus says. “We had all linked up with the same management team by then and decided it would be fun to join up to do some shows together. We did our first US tour together in 2020 and the chemistry that we had together was undeniable so we decided to make it a regular thing. Our mission is to take (our genre) drum & bass to the States and show people the best that it has to offer. We’ve also been collaborating on new music with a bunch of US DJs like John Summit and NGHT-MRE amongst others.”

Sub Focus describes the Worship

sound today as, “Drum & bass with strong influences from across the electronic music landscape. I’m inspired by ’70s synth music like Vangelis, through to ’90s trance, jungle and modern house and techno.”

“I think growing up in London in the ’90s had a huge impact on my sound,” adds Culture Shock. “I first heard D&B and jungle on pirate radio stations that were prevalent in London alongside mainstream dance music. My family were very into classical music so all of that feeds into the mix. That juxtaposition of classical and contemporary electronic music is where I’m most interested.”

Worship performs at the Hollywood Palladium on March 30, and it promises to be a special show.

“It’s an iconic venue and when we did our first tour together here in 2020 we set selling out the Palladium as one of our long term goals,” Sub Focus says. “It feels

great to have got here and we can’t wait to show people what we have in store.”

“I’ll definitely be bringing my A game for this one,” adds 1991. “Like Nick says, this is a venue we set our sights on a while ago so this set is going to be extra special — including a ton of new music.”

Sub Focus believes that electronic music is in “rude health” at present.

“In particular, drum & bass is having a moment in the UK at the moment,” he says. “As an example, drum & bass producers Chase & Status just won producer of the year at the Brit awards (our equivalent of the Grammys). We feel like it’s gaining real momentum Stateside.”

“Electronic music definitely feels widely accepted now more than ever — it seems like all sub genres are thriving and co-existing in a way that feels very harmonious,” adds 1991. “Lately there’s been a huge amount of underground dance music crossover into the mainstream which is a testament to how popular it

is right now.”

Looking ahead, the men of Worship have plenty planned for 2024.

“I’m DJing around the world and performing my two visual shows: Circular Sound and Evolve alongside working on a batch of new music,” says Sub Focus.

“I’ve just dropped the second in a new series of releases,” adds Culture Shock. “I’m aiming to release regularly this year building up to a larger project alongside a busy touring schedule. I go on from L.A. to New Zealand for a two week run after the Palladium show.”

“I’ll be touring throughout the rest of the year alongside a pretty stacked release schedule, I don’t think I’ve ever had such a steady stream of music ready to put out to the world so I’m super excited for people to hear what I’ve been working on,” says 1991 in conclusion.

The Worship of Drum & Bass: Worship performs at the Hollywood Palladium on Saturday, March 30. [L]

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