



aespa IRL IN LA

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BY MARK STEFANOS

ENTERTAINMENT

CAMERON DIAZ RETURNS TO SCREENS IN 'BACK IN ACTION'

BY ERIN MAXWELL

Netflix's *Back in Action* is the whimsical tale of a super spy couple who leave behind their thrilling lives of espionage when an unexpected pregnancy steers them toward parenthood, swapping high-stakes missions for soccer games. However, when they're called back into their former cloak-and-dagger world, their antics raise the question: will they risk their family — and will their adventures draw audiences to Netflix?

Directed by Seth Gordon (*Horrible Bosses*, *Four Christmases*), secret agents Emily and Matt (Cameron Diaz and Jamie Foxx) were at the top of their field, but when Emily discovers she is pregnant, the two retire from the game. Now 15 years later, Emily finds herself venting to her Alexa about her inability to relate to her teen daughter as the former special ops find it harder and harder to hide their true nature from their offspring. After a scrimmage with club cretins earn

them YouTube infamy, former adversaries come out to the woodwork to settle old scores, sending the entire family on the run.

Back in Action pulls from the *Mission: Impossible* playbook, filling its runtime with high-octane set pieces filmgoers have come to expect from the average spy thriller, including plane crashes in snowy mountains, a fiery showdown at a gas station, and the occasional high-speed chase scene. It meshes a family comedy with an action spectacular wrapped in a spy story featuring a highly-anticipated return of Hollywood A-lister Cameron Diaz to the big screen (well, the streaming screen). However, the film falls short of its intentions by hitting the same tropes again and again, like the steady pace of a drumbeat.

Back in Action isn't exactly reinventing the wheel. In fact, in the last few decades, the premise of a milquetoast parental figure concealing a past (or present) life as an ass-kicking intelligence agent has become a well-worn trope. Films like *True Lies*, *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, *Spy Kids*, *The Spy Next Door*, *The Incredibles*, *Nobody*, and *The Family Plan* have all explored this concept quite thoroughly. And in some cases, better.

With its predictable storyline offering little support, much of the charm of *Back in Action* relies on its cast, particularly Diaz. Nearly a decade after her last appearance, Diaz reunites with her *Any Given Sunday* and *Annie* co-star Foxx. Perhaps best known for the comedy and charisma she brought to comedies, Diaz channels that same energy into her role as Emily. Her undeniable charm breathes life into the otherwise formulaic spy comedy, lifting it above the risk of becoming a bore.

And much of the ensemble helps boost *Back in Action* beyond its uninspired plot points. Glenn Close, Andrew Scott and Kyle Chandler add significant appeal in supporting roles, injecting enough allure to prevent the comedy from sinking into a void of routine clichés.

Back in Action somewhat succeeds in highlighting the charm and wit that once made Diaz a box office sensation. While it may not captivate die-hard action fans, it provides a lighthearted, family-friendly adventure that might capture the attention of fans of the core cast and folks in need of a breezy comedy, as well as char-donnay moms and their adventure-seeking progeny. **A-**



COURTESY OF NETFLIX

WEST HOLLYWOOD ART NEWS: GIORGIO'S DISCOTHEQUE AND PETE KASPRZAK IS LA

BY MICHELE STUEVEN

Bryan Rabin's legendary [Giorgio's Discotheque](#) will return to [The West Hollywood EDITION](#) for a public-facing fundraising event benefiting MusicCares Disaster Relief. The event will feature an auction of iconic images by photographer Greg Gorman.

At [Sunset at EDITION](#), under 400 dazzling disco balls, the night will see an auction of photographic works by legendary celebrity photographer Gorman. Now [live online](#) for bids, historic portraits feature Debbie Harry, Grace Jones, and David Bowie. The winners will be announced during the party. The [2025 Grammy Awards](#) will air on [CBS](#) on Sunday, Feb. 2. [Andaz West Hollywood](#) unveils its latest rotating gallery exhibition, "Is L.A." by multimedia artist [Pete Kasprzak](#), starting on Thursday, Feb. 20. The exhibition is a colorful tribute to the landscape of Los Angeles, capturing the essence of the city

through Kasprzak's blend of graffiti and music influences.

Located in the rotating gallery space of the notorious Sunset Strip hotel celebrated for its rock-and-roll history, the tribute to the energy and urban landscape of Los Angeles captures everything from the Hollywood sign to aerial views of the city.

"From the Hollywood sign to new freeway signs inspired by the city's music culture, my works represent the fast-moving spirit of L.A.," Kasprzak said in a press release. "I've collaborated with photographers and musicians like Tommy Lee, Lil' Kim, and Rob Zombie to bring new layers to my art. Living in L.A. is a continuous creative process, and I want to share the energy of this city with the viewers."

The hotel bar will be offering A Sip for a Cause cocktail, with proceeds from each drink directly benefiting fire relief efforts. The exhibit will run through March in the hotel's Mezzanine Art Gallery, [@](#)



Sunset at EDITION

COURTESY OF NIKOLAS KOENIG



Andaz Nightswim

COURTESY OF PETE KASPRZAK

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ON THE COVER:

Image courtesy aespa

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LA WEEKLY CLASSIFIEDS

EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION

IT Infrastructure **Project Manager**, F/T, Bachelor's Degree in any Field; 24 months of experience in Computer Science, Information Technology, Management Information Systems, or Related. Mail resume: Bridgewater Consulting Group, Inc., 18881 Von Karman Ave., Suite 1470, Irvine, CA 92612



AESPA IRL IN LA: THE K-POP SUPERGROUP TAKES THE FORUM

BY MARK STEFANOS



COURTESY OF AESPA

When K-pop powerhouse aespa takes the stage at the Kia Forum on Saturday, fans will be getting a glimpse into the future of pop. It's the LA stop of their *SYNK: Parallel Line* world tour, which has the group bringing their signature sound, intricate choreography, and immersive storytelling to fans worldwide. The LA show holds special

significance, marking a reunion with a city that has embraced K-pop's global wave like few others. And it will showcase why aespa represents the ever-evolving, boundary-pushing force of K-pop.

For aespa, the journey began under SM Entertainment, one of K-pop's "Big 4" companies, responsible for iconic groups like H.O.T., Super Junior, Girls' Generation and NCT. The four charm-

ing members — Karina, Giselle, Ningning and Winter — range in age from 22 to 24 and were carefully selected not just for their vocal and dance skills but also for their ability to bring aespa's futuristic concept to life.

The name "aespa" is a portmanteau of "avatar," "experience" and "aspect." When they burst onto the scene at the height of the pandemic in 2020, they brought a

virtual element that was quite fitting for a time when in-person interactions were stifled. Beyond existing In Real Life, aespa also lives as a virtual concept, with each member of the group having an AI avatar counterpart called "æ" that exists in a metaverse.

SYNK: Parallel Line blends their signature AI-inspired musical storytelling with larger-than-life visuals. "This tour



COURTESY OF AESPA



Members of aespa perform during the SYNK: Parallel Line tour on Aug. 9, 2024 in Taipei

COURTESY VCG/VCG VIA GETTY IMAGES

is extra special for us as it's our second world tour," said Giselle. "What really sets it apart is how richly we've woven aespa's distinctive universe into the performance. The concept of the multiverse is central to the show, and we wanted to create an experience where both aespa and our fans from all over the world can come together, transcending dimensions."

A new highlight of this tour is the inclusion of solo stages, allowing each member to showcase their individual artistry. "We had a hands-on role in the creative process — developing our own music, direction, and choreography — which makes these performances even more personal and meaningful," Giselle added.

The visual representation of the group's concept also lives in their fashion, which Winter says plays a vital role in expressing the group's identity, "each look and concept is a reflection of who we are as a group."

aespa fans — called MYs — can expect a heck of a show, with recent concerts running close to two hours, packed with long setlists of energetic performances. Over the next five weeks, aespa will be taking their SYNK: *Parallel Line* tour across both U.S. coasts and the Midwest, Mexico City, Toronto, and five countries in Europe.

Of course, keeping up with the schedule can be daunting. "The most challeng-



Winter, Karina, Giselle and Ningning of aespa attend the 1st Korea Grand Music Awards at Inspire Arena on Nov. 17, 2024 in Incheon, South Korea
COURTESY OF HAN HYUNG-GU/WIREIMAGE/GETTY

ing aspects of international touring are definitely the long flights and adjusting to different time zones,” Karina shared. “But the thought of our fans waiting for us makes all the difficulties worth it. Their energy and love give us the motivation to push through every challenge.”

Behind every performance is rigorous preparation, something aespa embraces as part of their group dynamic. “When we’re preparing for our performances, we always make sure to communicate openly and honestly with each other,” Karina explained. “We share feedback, give advice, and encourage each other — whether it’s pointing out strengths or constructively discussing areas to improve.”

That level of trust and teamwork has helped aespa develop a near-telepathic connection on stage. “Over time, this has allowed us to develop a deep sense of understanding without needing to say much,” Karina continued. “We can sense each other’s moods — whether someone is feeling tired, happy, or down — and that unspoken connection is incredibly

powerful.”

The concert will be stacked with many of the hits they’ve accumulated over the past four years, and expect performances from their most recent mini-album *Whiplash*. But creating *Whiplash* in the midst of rolling out songs and performances wasn’t an easy feat.

“The process of working on this album while also preparing for ‘Supernova’ and ‘Armageddon’ and balancing our Asia tour was exceptionally intense, and there were times when we worried whether we’d be able to give *Whiplash* the attention it deserved,” said Winter. “But knowing that our fans were eagerly anticipating the release kept us motivated and inspired. With this album, we wanted to show our fans that aespa is always evolving, exploring new sides, and pushing creative boundaries.”

aespa’s music doesn’t follow K-pop’s sonic norms. Later tracks, especially, like “Supernova” and “Armageddon,” boast punchy basslines and unconventional arrangements, with surprising switch-

ups and breakdowns. Package that with catchy songwriting and slick vocals, and you get earworms that can’t help but go viral. On Melon, one of Korea’s top streaming platforms. “Supernova” set a record for the longest-running No. 1 song, at 15 consecutive weeks.

The LA crowd will soon witness the secret sauce that makes aespa so exciting, and it will be in a region that has embraced K-pop as few others can. We have a heavy pan-Asian population that stretches in every direction, from the South Bay deep into the 626. But LA is where you can truly see that K-pop is a global phenomenon — walk into any K-pop shop in K-Town and you’ll see its diverse fanbase on full display, with patrons of all colors queuing up for their favorite group’s lightstick.

The show will be an opportunity for local MYs to show out, as K-pop concerts are as much conventions for the fandom, as they are celebrations of the music. At the tour, expect to see fans from all walks of life decked out in aespa costumes and

hairstyles, ready to join in costume and dance contests.

“What excites us the most is seeing how our fans, no matter their age, gender, or background, interpret our concepts in their own innovative ways. It’s beautiful to witness how fashion becomes a way for our fans to connect with us and express themselves through aespa’s vision,” Winter said. “Just like our motto, ‘the truest version of myself,’ our style allows us to be unapologetically ourselves while also creating a deeper bond with our fans.”

“Every time we step onto the stage and see our fans completely embracing our concepts, whether it’s through matching outfits or styling their hair like ours, we’re absolutely blown away by their dedication and creativity,” Giselle added. “It makes us immensely proud to see how our style and concepts inspire them, and we can feel the love they pour into their own expressions of support.”

Fans play an active role in shaping the concert experience, often preparing surprise events that leave the group in awe. “There’s always a sense of excitement and curiosity about what they’ve planned and how they’ll surprise us,” Winter shared. “It’s profoundly touching when they’ve kept it a secret, and then, at just the right moment, they reveal it with a joyful ‘ta-da!’ — those moments always leave us in awe.”

Of course, aespa is performing in a city still reeling from the devastating fires that raged for most of January. The group will be donating a portion of the proceeds from the show to the LAFD Foundation.

“We were deeply saddened to hear the heartbreaking news of the wildfires. It weighs heavily on our hearts, and our thoughts are with those affected. We truly hope that everything is resolved soon, and that the LA community can find peace and safety once again.” Karina said, “In light of this, we hope that our music can offer even a small bit of comfort and healing to those who have been impacted. Our thoughts are with everyone, and we will continue to send love and strength to the LA community.”

Looking ahead, aespa hopes to continue growing artistically, pushing the global K-pop movement. “Our biggest goal is to keep evolving and challenging ourselves with music and concepts that feel authentically ‘aespa,’” said Ningning. “We want to continue exploring fresh ideas and showing new sides of ourselves, all while staying true to the distinct identity that makes us who we are.”

With such a vibrant group of talent, aespa’s journey seems to be just starting. “If you’re thrilled to see what’s next for aespa — whether it’s new projects or collaborations — keep cheering us on!” Ningning added. “Your love and support mean everything to us, and the best is yet to come.” [A]

FOOD

WHAT'S UP POPPING UP

DineLA Deals Are Just What We Need

BY MICHELE STUEVEN

[DineLA](#), the annual 15-day dining event produced by LA Tourism, will move forward now through Friday, Feb. 7, a decision made in collaboration with local chefs and restaurant owners who are eager to revive the culinary spirit of Los Angeles that has taken an extreme hit since the wildfires.

More than 400 restaurants across LA County will offer lunch and dinner deals to fit all budgets. For each DineLA reservation, LA Tourism and Banc of California will donate \$10 to the American Red Cross (up to \$100,000) towards wildfire recovery efforts across LA.

For this year's DineLA, [Maple Block](#) will offer \$15 wood smoke barbecue lunches for \$15 at both the Culver City location and the Grand Central Market in downtown Los Angeles. It includes a non-alcoholic beverage, tri-tip sandwich and onion rings, spicy BBQ sauce and house pickles, or Santa Fe chicken salad with market greens, wood-grilled chicken breast, black beans, roasted corn, cherry tomatoes, avocado, red cabbage, tortilla strips, and BBQ ranch dressing.

Over at [Lunetta](#), for \$68 per person, dinner includes roasted Frog Hollow stuffed pear with Fourme d'Ambert cheese, Maine sea scallop ravioli with winter truffles, braised Japanese wagyu beef cheeks with celery purée, hakurei turnips, and dried apricots, grilled Loup de Mer served with winter tabouli and lemongrass ginger rice pudding with a coconut shortcake cookie for dessert.

[The Hideaway](#) in Beverly Hills DineLA menus offer lunch for \$25 and dinner for \$65. Start with a choice of guacamole or guacasabi, followed by a three-course selection that includes dessert. For dinner, each meal begins with a glass of sparkling cava and an amuse-bouche, with a choice of appetizer and entrée options such as branzino frito, carnitas, and vegan mushroom fiesta. Additionally, The Hideaway will donate 10% of every DineLA purchase to Palisades Charter Elementary,



Luigi Fineo at Al Dente COURTESY MICHELE STUEVEN

which burned down in the fires and was attended by the sons of co-owner Sylvain Bitton.

[Firefly](#) in Studio City is offering dinner for \$65, with 10% of the proceeds benefiting those affected by the LA fires. The prix fixe menu includes a glass of champagne and offers vegetarian-friendly options. Menu highlights include big-eye tuna tartare, duck confit, steak frites, and mushroom pappardelle. For dessert, choose between sticky toffee cake and white chocolate crème brûlée.

Tucked away on a mom-and-pop shop section of Pico Blvd. in Cheviot Hills is prolific chef Luigi Fineo's new pasta shop, [Al Dente](#). Housed in the redesigned shotgun space that was previously the home of [Delicious Arts Cakes](#) and longtime friend Donna Liu-Brown, Fineo offers Roman-style pizza by the cut using dough matured for 72 hours with toppings that change daily, including porchetta, mortadella, grilled broccoli rabe, and smoked mozzarella. There's also classic Barese focaccia with fresh tomato and homemade fresh pastas including bucatini, tommarelli, spaghetti, tagliatelle, fettuccine, pappardelle and short cut versions like fusilli, maccheroncini and rigatoni. Ricotta and spinach ravioli, Kennebeck potato gnocchi, and agnolotti can also be found in the custom case with sauces to go with them. Al Dente also offers catering options. 🍷



Al Dente

COURTESY MICHELE STUEVEN



Tri tip sandwich

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