

# LAWEEKLY<sup>®</sup>

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## HIT-BOY UNLEASHED

BY MARK STEFANOS

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Photo by Josh Flores

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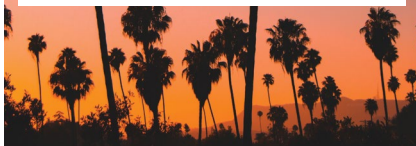
## LAWEEKLY CLASSIFIEDS

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## CULTURE

# THE ICE HOUSE IN PASADENA — THE NATION'S OLDEST COMEDY CLUB — CELEBRATES 65 YEARS WITH A GIANT BASH

BY MARK STEFANOS



The Ice House staff

COURTESY JOSEPH HAAG @JOSEPHHAAG

Pasadena's iconic **Ice House** threw a massive party Tuesday night, Sept. 23, marking 65 years since it first cracked open in 1960, and now holding the distinction as the nation's oldest continuously operating comedy club. From humble folk music roots to a launchpad for comedy legends, the Mentor Ave. mainstay has been slinging punchlines for generations and countless encores.

Pre-show vibes kicked off at 6 p.m. with games, sweets, and a hot dog colab with LA favorite Pink's tossed in with every ticket to fuel the fun. A little after

8 p.m., the stage lit up for an all-star lineup hosted by the quick-witted Frazer Smith and featuring a murderers' row of comedians: Russell Peters, Arsenio Hall, Alfred Robles, Jiaoying Summers, Craig Robinson and Howie Mandel, who brought out his pal from America's Got Talent, Mel B. True to tradition, the laughter spilled off the stage and onto the patio afterward.

The club has a history of reinvention. Opened by Willard Chilcott and Bob Stane as a folk and blues joint that featured comedians, it pivoted under an investor group led by Bob Fisher in 1978,

who turned it into a full-time stand-up spot for over four decades. Then in 2019, Johnny Buss, Lakers scion with a soft spot for showbiz, scooped it up, renovated it, and relaunched it post-pandemic in 2023.

Ice House Executive General Manager **Penny Toler** has been with the Buss family for forever. She was formerly the General Manager and EVP of the LA Sparks, responsible for picking the team that won their first two championships in the WNBA. As a former Sparks player herself, she holds the honor of scoring the first basket and free throw in WNBA history.

Buss brought her over to the Ice House after he pumped in the \$4 million renovation. “He knows I’m not going to steal anything from him,” she said with a laugh. Her recruiting skills are on full display at the club. “We got a great staff — a lot of good people work here in the Ice House that make our customers have this great experience.”

A self-described bugaboo for cleanliness, she’s a big part of why the club is always in tip-top shape. “I’m a clean freak. I always say when people come through the door, I want them to feel that it’s a clean club, it’s a safe club.” And she was there through the massive upgrades — “The biggest change, obviously, is that we have a front entrance versus coming through the back. I don’t know how they ever did that because I’ve seen so many standoffs when we were building the club, like cars that want to move. But now everybody loves coming through the front.”

“We have nothing but top-shelf alcohol, how Johnny wants it. I’m sure we got the best prices in town. And then we have the executive chefs — everybody loves our food here,” she adds.

Along the way, the Ice House has birthed careers and welcomed many greats — George Carlin honed his edge here, Robin Williams riffed wildly, and the likes of Jerry Seinfeld, Steve Martin, Ellen DeGeneres, Jay Leno, Jim Carrey, Billy Crystal, Rosie O’Donnell, Sebastian Maniscalco, and Gabriel Iglesias all took a swing at the mic.

“It’s nice to see all the vets, like Rudy Moreno, Dave Attell, Howie Mandel when he comes in, Arsenio. As a matter of fact, Gabriel Iglesias opened up the club. It was actually on my birthday, March 24th,” says Toler.

Alfred Robles, who worked with Gabriel Iglesias for ten years, first tried his hand in comedy 20 years ago in East LA. The Ice House was one of the first clubs where he got on stage, and whenever he’s in town, he makes sure to pop in.

“It’s a diverse crowd. I feel like if you go to Hollywood, it’s not as diverse. So it’s kind of cool coming to Pasadena, bro,” says Robles. “It’s always a good energy. It’s a family vibe. They treat you right.”

He will be filming his comedy special on November 7, so keep a lookout for it.

Jiaoying Summers started doing stand-up in 2019, and she’s a true product of the Pasadena institution. “I remember I started doing the open mic here at Stage 2. I was doing the lottery mic, where comedians buy a drink, there’s a bucket, and your name gets pulled. So I paid my dues,” she recalled. “I went from doing the open mic to selling out my residency here every month for a year and a half straight.”

Now, as an internationally touring comedian, she has many reasons for making the Ice House part of her routine — “I love how the people are very happy here. They treat comedians like human beings. And it’s clean. Nothing smells like piss. The food is amazing and it’s gorgeous. I love it. Also, personally, there’s other clubs, but the Ice House treats me like a queen. I feel like home here.”

Summers’ current tour is called “What Species Are You?” She hosts the Tiger Mom podcast and has a comedy special coming out on a major network later this year.

The audience members and comedians we spoke to agreed that the Ice House’s charm comes from its ability to feature world-class talent while keeping an upscale, hometown feel — a perfect fit for Pasadena.

In a country that feels increasingly divided, spots like this are where people of all stripes can gather for a shared gut-bust. Says Toler, “I think right now there’s a huge appetite for comedy in America with everything that’s going on. You’d be amazed at some of the people that come in here, and when they leave, they’re just like, ‘this is exactly what I needed.’”

What should we expect for the next 65 years of the Ice House? Toler tells us, “More great comedy, more laughter, and the legacy continues. The legacy continues.”



Howie Mandel, Penny Toler, Mel B. and Arsenio Hall



Alfred Robles



Jiaoying Summers



Russell Peters



Frazer Smith

ALL IMAGES COURTESY JOSEPH HAAG @JOSEPHHAAG

MUSIC

# HIT-BOY UNLEASHED: FREE AT LAST FROM A STIFLING 18-YEAR CONTRACT, THE GRAMMY-WINNING ARTIST IS PLANNING A PROLIFIC RELEASE SLATE

BY MARK STEFANOS

**H**it-Boy can't stop moving. When I caught up with the producer/rapper/musical tour de force in the lounge of his LA studio earlier this week, he never sat still once — whether he was hitting threes with a foam basketball on a pinned-up rim, sorting through groceries, or trying to find a working lighter.

When I followed him to the control room to watch him work, it was the same deal but turbocharged, clicking furiously over the track he was editing on his desktop, then jumping up and punching in vocals. As he'd play the track back for a listen, he would roll his blunt with the precision of someone assembling a microchip, never a movement or moment wasted.

His physicality is a lot like his music — deliberate and forceful, meticulous and artful.

If Hit-Boy comes off like a man on a mission, it's because now's not the time to sit around. At 38, he's shaped the sound of modern rap music and beyond, producing hits for Jay-Z, Kanye West, Drake, Kendrick, Nas, Rihanna, Beyoncé, and the list goes on, winning three Grammys along the way. But for nearly two decades, his career was shadowed by a publishing deal that began when he was just 19. That contract ended on July 1 of this year, releasing him from what he describes as a stifling constraint.

"I really feel like I got held back in a slingshot by God," he says, "where He was like, let me just let you keep learning, keep stretching, keep burning, keep hurting, keep fucking fighting. And then when it's time, I'm gonna let you out."

This moment marks a turning point: free from the deal, he is channeling personal growth, family challenges and Southern California roots into a flurry of projects coming out over the next few months. When we talked, he had just gotten back to LA from New York, making a stop on the way back in Vegas for a studio session with some A-listers.

"I'm free now. So it is what it is," he



Hit-Boy at his Los Angeles studio, September, 2025.

COURTESY MARK STEFANOS

says, dismissing lingering resentment. "Now it's like, you can't trick me no more. You can't fuck me over. I see shit with a bird's eye view."

**Born Chauncey Hollis Jr. in a Whittier hospital,** Hit-Boy spent his early years in Pasadena. Music was woven into his family's fabric, particularly through his mother's side. His grandmother, known as Mama Jean, managed his uncle Rodney B, a member of the R&B group Troop. She secured their deal with Atlantic Records in the 1980s through rigorous oversight. "She whipped him into shape," Hit-Boy recalls. "She was

the one who got them a record deal with Atlantic Records back in the day. She was strict. She would make them rehearse for hours, and if they mess up, make them do it again. She was on them heavy."

The household echoed with Motown classics, Tevin Campbell, Mary J. Blige, Jodeci. "They just love soul music. Always playing Motown and shit. Always playing R&B from the 90s," he says.

A family move to Fontana in the Inland Empire at 13 disrupted this world, leaving him isolated from childhood friends. "I was about 50 minutes to an hour away from all the people I went to school with

from first grade to sixth grade. People that was real homies and shit. And I was sad for it, walking to school, fucking crying sometimes. Like, damn, we way the fuck out here. What is this?"

But after a while, he started getting used to it, and in the wider expanses of the I.E. came an opportunity. "I met the kid that put me on with the beat-making shit. He lived in Rialto at his apartment called the Meadowlands. My uncle knew somebody he knew, and they connected us. And he had the whole shit in his mom's apartment: desktop computer with the CD burner, with the labeler,



COURTESY KEVORK DJANSEZIAN, GETTY IMAGES

with the Acid Pro to record. That was our Pro Tools back in the day, Acid Pro. He had FL Studio — Fruity Loops. And we was making albums, making songs at like 15, 16.”

Captivated by FL Studio’s interface — “It look like Tetris” — he convinced his paternal grandmother to buy him a computer. “I’m putting FL on it illegally, downloaded it off Kazaa. And then I just kept having fun with the shit, recording songs and making beats. I just took off with it.”

The I.E. had a pulse that young Hit-Boy was tapping into. Teen nights at the all-ages club Gotham in San Bernardino became his lab. “I started going at 13. All the cool kids used to go up there. All the girls — that’s when I started seeing what music makes girls move, how to dress and all this shit. It was just like little kids in there really partying. And we was not even drunk at all, but we was in there partying like we was lit.”

By 16, the number of local artists he was producing for was stacking up. “I used to have this black wall in my room and a silver marker. People used to sign that shit. My whole wall was full of local artists.” That wall’s echo lives in his discography of over 500 credits, from Jay-Z and Kanye’s “Ni\*\*as in Paris” to Nipsey Hussle’s “Racks in the Middle” — both of which he was awarded Grammys for.



COURTESY CHRISTOPHER POLK, GETTY IMAGES

But the road to those statues twisted through Atlanta and back. At 18, a connection he made with producer Polow da Don on MySpace promised an opportunity most teenagers dream of: “He’s more than a producer. He can help guide me through my career,” Hit-Boy remembers how it was presented to him. That summer, he moved to Atlanta with producer Chase N. Cashe, forming a team under Polow, then signed a publishing deal



COURTESY MATT WINKELMEYER, GETTY IMAGES

with Universal Music Publishing Group at age 19.

He returned to California in 2009, staying briefly with his mother in Fontana. A reconnection with Kanye West led to his 2011 breakthrough: producing “Ni\*\*as in Paris” for Jay-Z and West’s *Watch the Throne*. The collaboration led to him signing to G.O.O.D. Music, which brought visibility but financial strain. Managed by Polow’s team, he paid them

20% and Kanye’s group took another 20%. “So 40% of all my money was gone. If you really look at it, I got to get 50 to tax it. So I was making like 10% of my money,” he notes.

But the glow-up was real. “Being around Kanye, I got a lot more eyes on me, a lot more attention, a lot more respect. And that’s what came with it. That’s what put me on that concept of, if you around a big brand, you automatically just get looked at as a higher level brand.”

The deal’s restrictions surfaced soon after. “Whatever language they had in there — they didn’t have to give me an advance. And there was a couple of things that made it impossible for me to get out of the deal,” Hit-Boy says. Four years in, frustration mounted. “It just felt like a dark cloud, man. It felt like I was truly stuck mentally and had those times where I was burnt out on this shit.”

Interscope Records president Jimmy Iovine offered him a label deal to develop his own acts, but Kanye sought involvement. Hit-Boy chose independence: “Jimmy was like, you can either keep being under this guy or you could go and really learn the business for yourself, and I’ll give you a couple million dollars to do that. And that’s what I did.”

He invested that advance at studios like Record Plant, Chalice, Glenwood Place, running up million-dollar budgets in studio time for him and his artists. “This shit was like going to college.” He moved into a condo near La Cienega Boulevard and Pico, which became a collaborative hub that devolved into excess. “All my homies started fucking trying to come live with me. It turned into a party house.” He learned the hard way — “Until I’m really where I want to be, it’s always going to be a struggle trying to help somebody else.”

Hit-Boy continued to work furiously the following years, producing hits for a list of artists across genres. Then in 2021, under Roc Nation management, he pushed for release from the Universal publishing deal. He wasn’t able to get out immediately, but with the help of Jay-Z, they were able to negotiate a four-year cap, which ended July 1, 2025. The wait built resolve, Hit-Boy says. “The last four years, I’ve just been getting myself together, getting prepared for this moment.”

As noted, he’s not one to wait around. Between 2020 and 2023, he produced six albums with Nas, earning him the Best Rap Album Grammy for *King’s Disease*.

**Southern California runs deep in Hit-Boy’s identity**, influencing his versatile production style — from West Coast grit to broader appeals. “That’s just in my DNA,” he says. “That’s just embedded in me, just to be attracted to like, gangsta music or West Coast music with like,

the lingo and just the way we talk and all that.” Collaborations with local talents like Kendrick Lamar, Snoop Dogg and the late Nipsey Hussle reflect this affinity. The Atlanta years honed his adaptability without diluting this foundation. Listeners often misplace his origins.

“Some people’s like, ‘Yo, I thought you was from the East Coast or I thought you was from Atlanta.’ I be hearing that shit a lot.” He embraces it. “I always wanted to be more versatile than just known as just a West Coast producer. I just make what I make in a moment and keep it pushing.”



COURTESY JOHNNY NUNEZ. GETTY IMAGES



Still, the West has never left him. Today, it manifests in ties to Inland Empire artists, such as Spank Nitti, whose sharp wordplay captures the region’s humor and edge. “He from Hemet, California. Super dope MC. Got the craziest lingo. With these certain bars that he says, I’ll literally cry tears laughing. This shit is so witty, it’s so funny. It’s dark, but it’s humorous.” Their collab nods to the region’s great landmarks — “Going to the Cabazon. Just like, going to Ontario Mills and shit. Like just fly shit.” A good example of this gritty humor, check out their recent collab track “Eat Couch.”

And to the coastal elites who turn their noses up at the I.E., don’t forget that the move inland is a quintessential SoCal story, straight out of *Next Friday*. “I literally bought my mom a house in Rancho Cucamonga when I got my first real check.”

**Hit-Boy has so many projects in the pipeline, it’s hard to keep track.** He bought a building that will serve as a hub for his creative agency — “film, photos, podcasts, studios, everything.” From there, he’ll also run a foundation he’s launching called The Next Hits, which will help underserved kids whose parents are incarcerated who need a creative outlet, “to put them on the business side, and also teach them how to engineer, produce, songwrite, whatever they want to do.”

This commitment aligns with his admiration for forward-thinking collectives like Kendrick Lamar’s pgLang. “Everything they do is grounded, it’s humble, but it’s still like a step above and they’re pushing this shit forward, visually, musically, presentation-wise,” Hit-Boy notes.

With his stifling deal behind him, Hit-Boy is entering his most musically active period with a slew of projects slated for release by the end of the year.

Leading off is *Yeast Talking*, a 22-track collaboration with Spank Nitti. October brings a soul-infused project with producer The Alchemist, emphasizing sampled breaks and chops. Accompanying it is a short film. Hit-Boy explains: “It was really just supposed to be a promo piece just to go along with the album, but it just came out so artsy and fly that we about to take the shit around the world. It’s like something that I feel like people need to see. Like some cult classic type shit. And I feel like it’s going to make people look at me and Alchemist in a whole new light.”

His solo effort, *SFTWRE UPDTE*, will follow. Inspired by therapy and family strains — including his father’s recent imprisonment — it is introspective and focused. “I’ve been making that project for a little while. Like it really started once my dad went back to prison,” he

explains. That’s where the software update came from, full transparency, where it’s like, man, I gotta fucking focus on me.”

More will follow. “I got a whole ‘nother album ready too that I’m conceptualizing how I want to put the visuals together for and tell more of my story through it,” Hit-Boy says.

How does he keep all these projects straight? “Same way, I just go every day, man. I just put the effort in. Just leave it on the floor, man, like being in the gym.”

Personal cycles inform this drive. Hit-Boy’s father, Big Hit, has faced repeated incarcerations — a pattern spanning over 30 years. “He ain’t been out for more than a year since I was three years old,” he says. Efforts to support his father’s music career provided a brief reconnection, but a recent three-year sentence resumed the loop. “I just put all that time and effort into giving my dad a career and a life, and his mind just still wasn’t fully prepared to accept it.”

Fatherhood offers a contrast. He shares 50-50 custody with his five-year-old son, an arrangement Hit-Boy navigates amid challenges. But he’s effectively broken the generational cycle set forth by his own dad. “I just tell him I love him every day, man,” Hit-Boy says of his son. “I’m present, whatever he wanna do, I’m with it.” Whereas he’s had limited connection with his own father, Hit-Boy’s son is constantly with him, whether he’s just chilling in the studio with him or tagging along on red carpets.

Looking ahead, he senses flux in the industry. “Everything is just all over the place. Rap is kind of not on the charts at all no more. There’s a role for somebody to come through.” The role he sees for himself is innovation. “I think I’m about to do some shit that people never saw done — usher in a new energy.”

**Success, for Hit-Boy, transcends metrics.** It’s understood when he’s listening back to the tracks he’s produced in the car ride home after a session. “If I can’t stop playing the shit, that’s the real victory, every day. More than the money, more than everything,” he says. His musical progress is what fuels him: “Being able to just make the beats bend and move and do what I want them to do. That makes me want to make more music.”

In a shifting industry, his story resonates: from Southern California’s quiet corners to global stages, resilience produces something enduring.

As his new releases approach, and with an endless list of hits and accolades already under his belt, Hit-Boy stands liberated, reflective, ambitious, and on the verge of even more. “I’m about to make the biggest hits of my career right now. The sky’s the limit at this point.”

FOOD

# WHAT'S SUP POPPING UP

Tenderfest And A Home For Genghis Cohen

BY MICHELE STUEVEN



Genghis Cohen

LUCKY TENNYSON

The world's largest celebration of chicken tenders, Tenderfest, is returning to Beverly Hills for its fourth year on Sunday, Oct. 12. The brainchild of John Terzian of the h.wood Group and Lawrence Longo of Prince St. Pizza, Irv's Burgers and Bar Next Door, are bringing together some of the most buzzworthy fried chicken concepts from LA and beyond at the festival, including Box Chicken, Chimmelier, Delilah, Happies Hand Made, LaSorted's, Le Coupe, Pioneer Chicken, and Popeyes, for an all-you-can-eat experience at the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts.

A standout of the event is the return of the conTENDER Competition, hosted by Billy Harris. Culinary giants will battle it out for best tenders bragging rights and a cash prize benefiting the charity of their choice. This year's entrants include returning champ Bun B from Houston, Marcus Samuelsson of Red Rooster, Iron Chef Alex Guarnaschelli, and Otium's Tim Hollingsworth.

The competition will be judged by a surprise VIP panel, following last year's lineup that included Benny Blanco, Andy Wang, Trippie Redd, and Shay Mitchell. Tickets are now live on [Eventbrite](#) with VIP and general admission options.

The 42-year-old Fairfax institution, [Genghis Cohen](#), opened its doors this week, at its new, temporary home just down the street from the original location.

While Genghis Cohen has offered take-out & delivery since it moved locations at the end of May, they will officially open the new space soon, and reservations are now live via [OpenTable](#). Located in the former Sweet Chick space, just south of their original location, owners Marc Rose and Med Abrous have preserved some of the original elements like the fish tank, red booths, silk dragon and lanterns, and the floral upholstered chairs, while introducing bold red carpet, teal accents, mirrored walls, and even more neon.

The bar has expanded to 12 seats, and the cocktail menu has some fun additions like Oolong Island Iced Tea and a frozen Dole Whip-inspired Dole Survivor cocktail, as well as a new late-night, bar-only menu featuring dishes like Szechuan Chicken Sliders. New dishes for the new location include Volcano Chicken, a five-spice marinated and spicy glazed chicken that's flamed tableside, and shrimp and chive dumplings. Genghis Cohen is collaborating with fellow Fairfax legend Canter's Deli and is doing a weekly "Genghis Cohen Live" at the Kibitz Room on Wednesdays and Thursdays. 🍗

Tim Hollingsworth from Otium Restaurant at Tenderfest Part II at the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts on August 20, 2022 in Los Angeles, California.  
PHOTO BY JEFF KRAVITZ  
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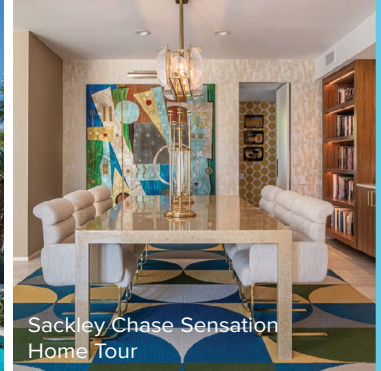
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