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Sabrina Claudio & Jazmin Garcia-Larracuenta

ON
HOW

'Fall in Love with Her'

BECAME A FILM, AN ALBUM AND A MIRROR

By Mark Stefanos

CONTENTS



ON THE COVER:

Photo: Chad Brady @cbradyphotography
 Design: Mark Stefanos

MUSIC 2

Singer Naïka delivers captivating performance at Living Room in Hollywood.

BY MARK STEFANOS

FOOD - WHAT'S POPPING UP 3

Cheesesteaks by Matū, Whiskey and Wild Game.

BY MICHELE STUEVEN

MUSIC 4-6

Best friends, singer Sabrina Claudio and actor/writer Jazmin Garcia-Larracuenté's on how they brought "Fall in Love with Her" to the screen.

BY MARK STEFANOS

CLASSIFIEDS 2

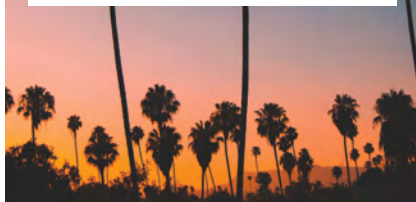


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MUSIC

NAÏKA LIGHTS UP THE LIVING ROOM AHEAD OF 'ECLESIA' ALBUM AND TOUR

BY MARK STEFANOS



Naïka performs at Living Room.

COURTESY MARK STEFANOS

French-Haitian singer **Naïka** delivered a captivating performance at Living Room in Hollywood, last Thursday, Jan. 15, showcasing her upcoming album *ECLESIA*, due out Feb. 20. Known for her blend of world pop, R&B, and Caribbean influences, Naïka brought her signature vibrant energy to the intimate venue, channeling a sonic range from Sade to an *Anti*-era Rihanna.

Supported by drums and sax, she opened the show with "WELCOME TO ECLESIA," and cycled through tracks like "MATADOR," "BLOOM," and "ONE TRACK MIND" — which was released earlier that day.

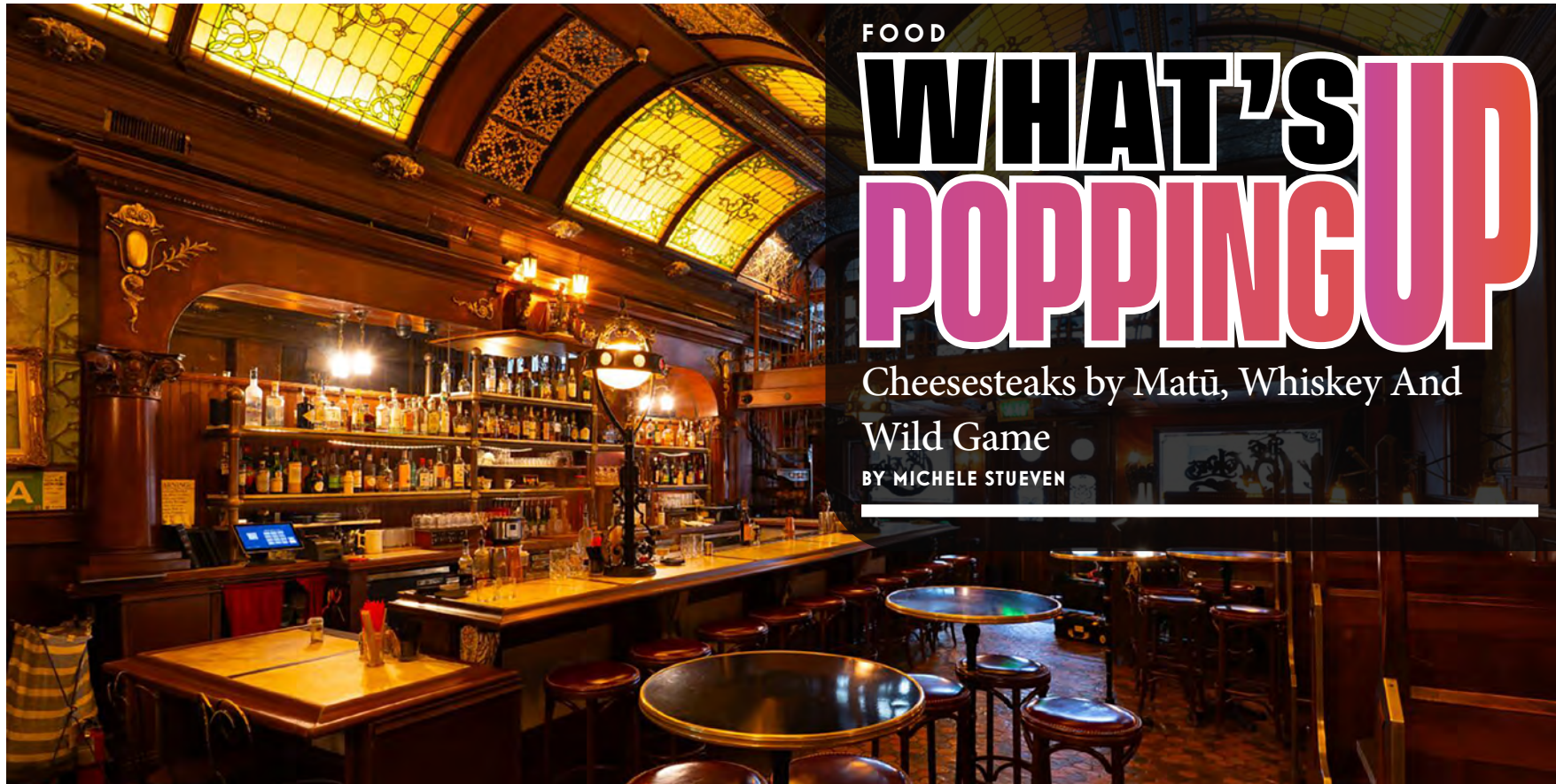
Singing in English, French, and Haitian Creole, Naïka showcased her live prowess in the cozy setting, delivering a delectable vocal performance and charming the audience with her natural and warm stage presence.

"Eclesia" comes from a Greek word meaning "gathering of people," a central theme to her music and background, which traverses the globe — she has ethnic roots in the Levant, and was raised across the Caribbean, Africa, Europe and U.S.

The tour kicks off in Europe on Feb. 28 and arrives in North America in late March. Her LA show will be at the Novo on March 27.

Visit her website for tickets and information: naikaofficial.com/tour. 📍





FOOD

WHAT'S UP POPPING UP

Cheesesteaks by Matū, Whiskey And
Wild Game

BY MICHELE STUEVEN

Shochu Month

COURTESY THE WOLVES

The team behind Matū and Matū Kai has opened **Cheesesteaks by Matū** in Pasadena, a casual cheesesteak spot that serves only one thing: their now-famous Matū Philly Cheesesteak and potato chips.

Cheesesteaks by Matū joins HiHo Cheeseburger in a shared space in Pasadena's Playhouse Village. Both feature their own walk-up order window and an open-concept layout with shared tables and seating designed for lingering.

Redbird will host the return of its Whiskey & Wild Game Dinner on Thursday, Feb 5. Chef Neal Fraser and team will present a four-course menu paired with a curated selection of whiskeys by Bar Director Tobin Shea, with pairings guided by Benny Hurwitz, National Ambassador of Wild Turkey. A limited number of highly allocated whiskey bottles from Shea's personal collection will also be available for purchase.

The evening starts with a Wild Turkey Eight Year Old Fashioned welcome cocktail, followed by gnocchi fritto with braised rabbit, Oregon chanterelles, dried cherry, Reggiano and Périgord truffle alongside Russell's Reserve Single Rickhouse, California squab with baby yam, green mole, and pomegranate, rack of elk and opera cake for dessert topped off with an ounce of Russell's Reserve



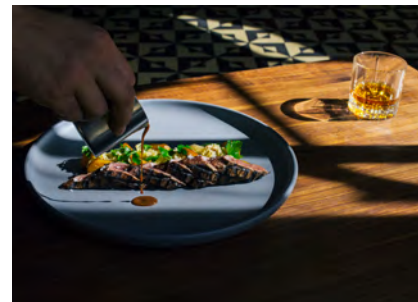
COURTESY FLAVORTOWN

Single Barrel.

The world's biggest tailgate is heading to the Bay, and it's free for thousands of fans. NorCal native and self-proclaimed Mayor of Flavortown, Guy Fieri, alongside presenting sponsor SpotOn, returns to the Bay Area for the fourth year, welcoming 10,000+ fans to the largest free all-ages pre-kickoff celebration of Big



Cheesesteaks by Matu Pasadena
COURTESY JAKOB LAYMAN



Whiskey game dinner
COURTESY REDBIRD

Game Weekend with live performances by LoudLuxury & Tucker Wetmore.

Tickets will be available, with fans able to register now at GuysFlavortownTailgate.com.

Taking place Sunday, Feb. 8, from 11:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., the event delivers a one-of-a-kind community tailgate featuring the Food Network star's gameday culinary creations, Northern California food, hospitality, and culture with live entertainment just hours before Super Bowl kickoff.

Now through Friday, Feb. 13, the Japan Food Product Overseas Promotion Center will celebrate **Japanese Shochu Month** in collaboration with seven of LA's most popular bars: **Baby Gee**, **Death & Co LA**, **No Smoking Bar**, **Redbird**, **The Wolves**, **Thunderbolt**, and **Tokyo Noir**. Throughout the month, each participating bar will feature a signature shochu highball and an original shochu cocktail. In addition, the campaign includes a citywide pop-up series, Japanese Shochu Guest Shift, where bartenders from the participating bars take over another top LA bar for a one-night-only collaboration.

Japanese Shochu Guest Shift Schedule

- Tuesday, Jan. 27: Tokyo Noir at [Florentin Rooftop Bar](#)
- Monday, Feb. 9: Death & Co LA at [Night on Earth](#)
- Tuesday, Feb 10: No Smoking Bar at [Lowboy](#)
- Wednesday, Feb. 11: Baby Gee at [Old Man Bar](#) 🍷

SABRINA CLAUDIO AND JAZMIN GARCIA-LARRACUENTE ON HOW 'FALL IN LOVE WITH HER' BECAME A FILM, AN ALBUM AND A MIRROR

BY MARK STEFANOS

F*all in Love with Her* opens with a deceptively quiet emotional center. In the short, Lola, played by singer-songwriter **Sabrina Claudio** in her debut film role, is taking a contemplative stroll through a park where she notices a cute elderly couple. A handsome young man tells her the couple are his friends, Ruth and Charles, and they've been together 60 years. "They're beautiful," Lola says, as she meets the man, named Jackson, played by actor Ta'imua. From there, Lola and Jackson's romantic relationship buds — in contrast with her music, which she's struggling to develop alongside her writing partner Mae, played by **Jazmin Garcia-Larracuento**, who also wrote the film. Jackson is a romantic and has a clear picture of where he sees his relationship going with Lola: grandkids, a home, the Ruth and Charles route. Lola is more ambivalent and career-minded. The differing visions of their future cause turmoil in their relationship. And that conflict — ambition, intimacy, and the fear that choosing one may mean losing the other — then seeds the music Lola and Mae are writing.

Written by Jazmin and directed by her husband **Brandon Larracuento**, the film exists alongside Sabrina's album of the same name, with each informing the other.

"The story is loosely based off of conversations that I've had with Jazmin about myself," Sabrina Claudio tells *LA Weekly*. "We also relate to a lot of people in our industry who prioritize their careers above everything else. And for me, it was a fear of mine, of where I was heading, because I was prioritizing my career so much that I was kind of not focusing on anything else ... If a man was getting in the way of my goals or where I was heading, I was willing to just let that go immediately. But there's always a fear to end life alone because of prioritizing the wrong thing at the wrong time."

"When I sat down to write these

conversations, I poured in more vulnerability than I originally intended," Jazmin Garcia-Larracuento adds. "So it basically became Sabrina and my fears just thrown into a film."

The creators resisted the temptation to resolve Lola's story neatly. "We wanted it to be relatable and we didn't want this picture-perfect ending, because a lot of the time, that is not the case," Jazmin explains. Lola's uncertainty isn't framed as selfishness or coldness, but as a genuine internal conflict.

Lola's friend Mae serves as both a collaborator and emotional counterpoint, someone whose life appears to be moving forward while Lola remains stuck in place. That, too, was inspired by the real lives of the creators.

"There was a time when me, Sabrina and Brandon were all hanging out that I would notice that she was always left alone," Jazmin says. "I was moving on and she was kind of staying stagnant — not stagnant in the sense of everything in her life, but just like how I'm always leaving the house with my husband, and she's in her home alone."

That observation shaped one of the film's punchier emotional threads, the sense of time moving unevenly between friends. "I think that even people who are going through grief, like if somebody dies, they can feel like everything around them is still moving on, but they're still stuck," Jazmin says.

Sabrina and Jazmin's chemistry is palpable, both on screen and off. "We are real-life best friends," Sabrina says.

Both from Florida, they met about five years ago at a birthday party in LA — "I had never heard her music, thought she was beautiful," recalls Jazmin. "I complimented her behind," Sabrina reveals, with a laugh. A dinner date would follow, and soon the two were fast friends, long before becoming creative collaborators.

That aspect of their relationship would proceed organically. Jazmin was already working as a writer and producer, while



COURTESY OF CHAD BRADY @CBRADYPHOTOGRAPHY



her husband Brandon was building his career as an actor. Sabrina, curious about film scoring and interested in expanding her creative language beyond music, spent time on the set of a short film Jazmin and Brandon were developing called *Pickleback*, observing their process.

"I loved how they worked so much that I asked if I could score their film," Sabrina recalls. "So I did that. And then that kind of led into what is now *Fall in Love with Her*."

The project began modestly. Sabrina only had the title track, long before there was an album or film attached to it. She played it for Jazmin to see if anything from it resonated with her, and if that could lead to creating something with it together. At first, that idea was a music video, "but then it turned into something much bigger — a much bigger story," says Sabrina.

Jazmin would go on to write a full script — a process that took over a year — and the album followed the narrative laid out

on the page. The approach reversed the usual album-first rollout, allowing the music to function as an extension of character rather than accompaniment.

"We had the script for the film first," Sabrina explains, "I then started creating an album and all the music and all of the visuals were connected directly to what the script was about."

It indeed inspired music videos as well, which were released earlier than the film, in tandem with the album. The videos, "*Before It's Too Late*," "*Need U To Need Me*" and "*Memory Foam*," serve as pieces of the short film's story, two of which star Ta'imua in his Jackson character. "Once the short is out, you'll be able to watch every music video and find where the placement is within the film," says Sabrina.

For Sabrina, *Fall in Love with Her* marked her first experience acting in a scripted narrative with dialogue — a significant shift from music videos. "I've never had to memorize a script and do a whole narrative-based 33-minute-long film," she says. "It was a challenge,"

particularly as the script continued to evolve.

"My memory is not that great," Sabrina admits. "And Jaz changed the script about 20 times. And I wanted to kill her through it all because it took me a month to memorize the script, and then she would change it."

Jazmin notes that once casting was finalized, the characters themselves evolved. "Your script has to adjust based on who's in the seat," she says. "When we solidified our Jackson, I had to change everything."

Those adjustments extended to the dynamic between Lola and Mae — a role Jazmin didn't intend to play herself, but took on after conversations with producers about how her real-life friendship with Sabrina could be of benefit.

Still, Sabrina describes the set as unusually supportive. "It was a great and very lenient first experience, because I was able to do it with my friends," she says. "And they were gracious and patient and understanding and inspiring."

Despite not having any formal acting training, Sabrina delivers a convincing and moving performance. She received guidance from both Jazmin and Brandon, whose background as an actor informed his approach as a director.

"I think it helps when you have somebody that directs the way that Brandon does, because he's also an actor," Sabrina says. "The way that he guides us on set helped so much."

"From the very beginning, the entire project from start to finish was a true collaboration," Brandon tells us. It also marked a continuing creative relationship with his wife — "a lot of people, for whatever reason, would shy away from that. But it has been one of the most fulfilling experiences," he adds.

The film had a sold-out premiere last Wednesday, Jan. 14, at the Chinese Theatre in Hollywood, leaving many in the audience in tears. The two stars looked ravishing — Jazmin, a suited stunner, and Sabrina, Jessica Rabbit come to life.



COURTESY OF @CBRADYPHOTOGRAPHY



At a Q&A following the screening, Sabrina articulated why the film seems to resonate so deeply with audiences, particularly women. “I really think it’s all fear-based. You watch the film, and you see yourself in one of the characters and relate to it, whether it be career, or your own personal love life.”

Jazmin connected that response to generational patterns. “I grew up in a divorced family. They had kids young,” she said of her parents. “I was born when my dad was 19 or 20, and I noticed that they sacrificed literally everything to have kids . . . And then you see the repercussions of that. You see people having midlife crises because they didn’t chase their wildest dreams.

“So I think that inadvertently we’re overcorrecting as generations. We’re like, I’ve got to be alone. I have to chase my career. I can’t have both.” The film, Jazmin suggests, exists in the tension between those instincts.

An instinct that, perhaps, has carried through the generations, was the one for the creators to have an enterprising faith in their craft, as *Fall in Love with Her* is entirely self-funded. “I have bet on myself since the very beginning of my career,” Sabrina said. “I bet on myself every single day.”

She frames the decision as both practical and philosophical. “If we’re not willing to invest in ourselves, then we cannot expect anyone else to take us seriously or invest in us,” she says.

“This film would have lived and died in post-production if you guys didn’t buy seats to come and see it,” Jazmin added

with gratitude to the crowd. “That’s the reason we get to keep doing this.”

So, how true to life is the film? Is Sabrina following in the same footsteps as her character Lola?

“Over the past year, my perspective on that has completely changed,” Sabrina tells us. “I spent the last 10 years of my life really, really, really hyper fixated on my career.”

But she describes a shift toward balance — “I have love in my life currently,” she says, pointing to a romantic relationship. “I want my career, and I want to be happy in that. But I also want love, and to be loved by my friends, my partner, my family. I want to have a family on my own, and kids, and a beautiful house, and, you know, to live the wife life.

“I don’t want to die alone. I’m going to be honest with you. I really don’t.”

For Sabrina’s character Lola, Jazmin sees the film about reconciliation rather than resolution: “She did get everything she wanted, but she didn’t leave room for what she needed,” she says, adding that it may be “the most authentic thing we’ll ever make.”

Sabrina continues, “When Jazmin wrote this film, I was where Lola is.” But things have changed. “I’m at a point in my life where I want no versus.”

The film does not offer answers so much as it offers a space to sit with discomfort, to examine choices, and to imagine futures without certainty. Like the quiet scene that opens it, *Fall in Love with Her* lingers on the distance between who we are now and who we hope to become. [E]



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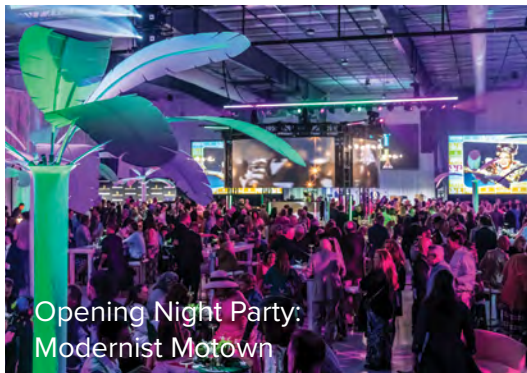
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