

# LA WEEKLY<sup>®</sup>

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## DJ HABIBEATS SELLS OUT THE SHRINE

THE DJ AND PRODUCER RETURNS TO  
THE MIDDLE EASTERN SCENE IN LA  
THAT HE CREATED

BY MARK STEFANOS

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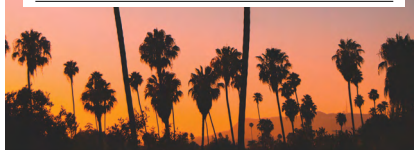
## LAWEEKLY

EDITOR IN CHIEF: MARK STEFANOS  
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### LAWEEKLY CLASSIFIEDS

**EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION**

**Project Director** (JH2603) - Rios Inc., Los Angeles, CA, Req Bachelor's in Landscape Arch or foreign equiv + Landscape Architect License from any US state + 3 yrs exp. Salary is \$102,419/yr. Pls mail resumes, referencing Job ID JH2603, to: Rios, 3101 W Exposition Pl, Los Angeles, CA 90018.



**ART**

# THE SPRAWLING NEW DAVID GEFFEN GALLERIES AT LACMA OPEN TO THE PUBLIC ON MONDAY, MAY 4

BY MICHELE STUEVEN



**D**esigned by architect Peter Zumthor, the 900-foot-long horizontal, glass and concrete structure, which overlooks the La Brea Tar Pits, the Pavilion For Japanese Art and stretches over Wilshire Blvd, **The David Geffen Galleries at the LA County Museum of Art** open to the public on Monday, May 4, after 20 years of development.

The main floor, elevated about 30 feet above street level, is the dedicated exhibition space for LACMA's permanent collection, comprising a winding selection of galleries with varied scales, configurations, and lighting conditions, as well as high ceilings. The David Geffen Galleries were designed to encourage wandering and meandering through 110,000 square feet of gallery space.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LACMA



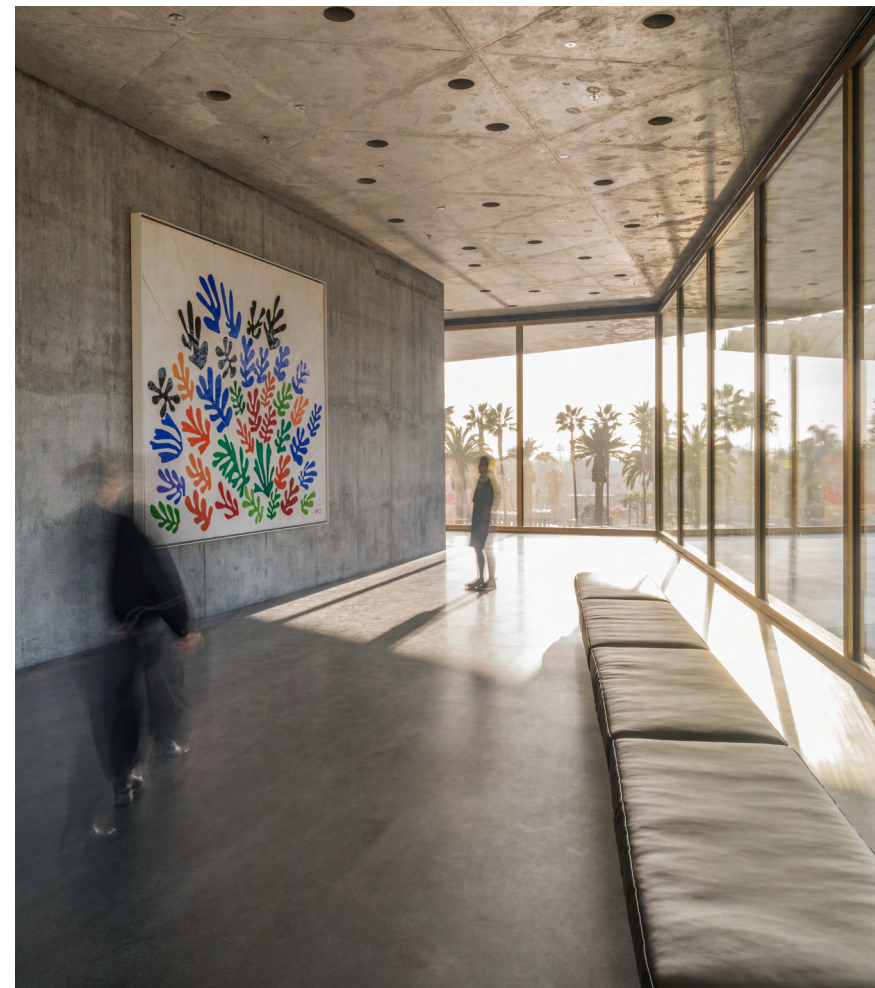
The inaugural exhibition is inspired by four major bodies of water: the Pacific, Indian, and Atlantic oceans, and the Mediterranean Sea, spanning time and geography.

One of the first works on display upon entering the galleries is Todd Gray's *Octavia's Gaze* (2025), a three-dimensional assemblage of framed photographs of landscapes, people, architectural details, and museum interiors, including a portrait of the author Octavia Butler, who lends her name to the work.

Also on view is Do Ho Suh's *Jagyeong Hall, Gyeongbok Palace* (2026), an installation made up of an actual-size contemporary re-creation of a section of the primary Joseon royal palace in Seoul.

Two works commissioned from Lauren Halsey—a 10-foot-long reclining sphinx sculpture and a wall-filling relief—and a newly acquired bust by Tavares Strachan, *Fulani (A Map of the Crown)* (2024), are installed in the Mediterranean galleries, among works that reflect Egypt's ancient interplay with Greco-Roman culture on the one side and Nubia on the other.

Other highlights include Jeff Koons's *Split-Rocker*, the 37-foot-tall living



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LACMA



sculpture that was recently acquired by LACMA, Diego Rivera's Flower Day, and a large and diverse selection of textiles from Central Asia to the Andes. New works from LACMA's collection of 155,000 objects spanning 6,000 years of world history will continue to be added over time.

The building's elevated exhibition level offers sweeping views of Los Angeles while creating open plazas and a roomy new outdoor public space below, making it the perfect anchor for the LACMA campus, which also includes [The Academy Museum of Motion Pictures](#).

New works from LACMA's collection of 155,000 objects spanning 6,000 years of world history will continue to be added over time to the largest art museum in the Western United States.

The Erewhon Cafe is already open on the plaza level, with plans for a larger restaurant and separate wine bar to open in

the fall of 2026.

There's been much discussion pro and con over Zumthor's use of the gray concrete and glass walls throughout the structure. The floor-to-ceiling glass panels shelter interior galleries with custom curtains made of sputter-plated chrome textiles by Tokyo-based textile designer Reiko Sudō.

But coming from someone who remembers the opening of the original LACMA Museum, which was razed to erect the current horizontal design on a single level, this was long overdue.

Gone are the poorly lit, stuffy, little crowded rooms requiring strong elbows to get close enough to study the art. The works in the David Geffen Galleries are much more accessible and dramatic, with plenty of room and natural light to wander. Yes, there are echoes, but they only add to the new energy that is the future of LA's compelling art scene. [L](#)



Dorothea Lange, Resettled, El Monte, California



Diego Rivera, Flower Day (Día de Flores), 1925



Katsushika Hokusai, The Great Wave off Kanagawa, circa 1830-1831

PHOTOS COURTESY OF LACMA

# WHAT'S UP POPPING UP

## Strawberry and Watermelon Festivals

BY MICHELE STUEVEN

For strawberry lovers, the **40th Annual California Strawberry Festival** returns on Saturday, May 16, and Sunday, May 17, at the Ventura County Fairgrounds, featuring chocolate-covered strawberries, strawberry-topped funnel cakes, strawberry pizza, strawberry nachos, deep-fried strawberries, strawberry tacos, and strawberry beer, margaritas, and smoothies.

Other strawberry-themed desserts at Mama Carol's Kitchen booth are sweet strawberry tamales, Dubai chocolate and strawberry cups, and strawberry beignets. Carol Maldonado, owner of Mama Carol's Kitchen, has been selling her creations at the festival for more than 25 years.

Another festival favorite is the chocolate-dipped strawberries from the Oxnard Buddhist Temple, where two shifts of 30 volunteers dip giant strawberries into melted Merkins chocolate,

which are sold individually and in three- and six-packs. The booth sells about 20,000 chocolate-dipped strawberries over the two-day festival.

Festival hours are 10 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. both days. General admission is \$15; active military with ID, family, and seniors 62 and over are \$10; youth ages 5 to 12 are \$8; and children 4 and under are free. Tickets can be purchased in advance [here](#) or at the festival. A limited amount of parking is available on-site for \$30 per vehicle.

There are also **free shuttles** that run every 15 minutes to the festival from nearby locations in Oxnard and Ventura. Metrolink and Amtrak's Surfliner make regular stops throughout the festival weekend with discounted fares. The train station is located steps from the fairgrounds.

A San Fernando Valley tradition, the **California Watermelon Festival** celebrates the beginning of summer with a



Strawberry Nachos

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COURTESY OF WATERMELON FESTIVAL



California Strawberry Festival

COURTESY OF MICHELE STUEVEN

vibrant California harvest on Saturday, June 6, from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., and Sunday, June 7, from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. at Hansen Dam Recreation Area Soccer Fields, the size of four football fields.

This year, there will be unique watermelon-inspired dishes and an expanded Kids Zone. Freshly sliced watermelon will be available for purchase, either plain or with chamoy, and whole watermelons will also be sold on-site.

This year, the California Watermelon Festival will host live bands and DJs, as well as demonstrations from graffiti artists. There will be watermelon carving stations, a car show, and a pinup girl contest. For social media influencers, there's

a variety of watermelon-themed signage, props, and mascots, Wedgie and Melony.

Watermelon-inspired dishes include tacos, pupusas, cannoli, cheesecake, bread, corndogs, deep-fried watermelon, Micheladas, gummy candy, waffles, soda, crepes, sushi, funnel cakes, and Italian Ice.

The Kids Zone features live singing and dancing performances of popular princesses and classic children's songs, arts and crafts (make watermelon-themed friendship bracelets), a watermelon eating contest, costume contest, bubble show, face painting, kids' slime and carnival rides, an agriculture area with a petting zoo and pony rides. 🍉

# DJ HABIBEATS SELLS OUT THE SHRINE: THE DJ AND PRODUCER RETURNS TO THE MIDDLE EASTERN SCENE IN LA THAT HE CREATED

BY MARK STEFANOS



DJ Habibeats plays the Do LaB at Coachella 2026.

PHOTO CREDITS ALEX ESTRADA (@FKNSTRADA)

On a morning a few weeks ago in Amsterdam, between tour stops in Brussels and Cologne, DJ Habibeats is having a rare moment of quiet. He's been playing packed rooms — 800 here, 1,000 there — and the crowds are increasingly mixed: Arab diaspora kids pressed against the booth alongside locals who are a little bewildered but just as hyped. “I had messages from people saying, ‘I didn’t understand anything about the music, but I loved it,’” he tells *LA Weekly*. “That’s so cool.” Despite the globetrotting and bustling nightlife, he always has the same demeanor: gracious and measured, delivering thoughtful lines through his bassy, warm voice.

A few days later, he's back in California, prepping for his largest show to date. This Friday, May 1, Shrine Expo Hall will rumble with dabke rhythms, ingenious mashups, and thousands of voices singing along in Arabic. 5,000 people will pack the venue out for the DJ's party *Habibi's House*, a scale that would have been unthinkable just a few years ago.

The show marks the kickoff of his 10-stop North American tour, arriving on the heels of a Weekend 2 set at Coachella and just days after releasing his new EP, *Benzeen*.

For context, the first *Habibi's House* in Los Angeles sold 80 tickets just four years ago. The Palestinian-American DJ and producer from San Francisco, real name Ibrahim Abu-Ali, has spent the years since channeling an identity crisis into infectious music and events, and in the process, created a whole Middle Eastern cultural scene in Los Angeles and beyond.

We went to our first *Habibi's House* at Melrose House back in 2022 and immediately became hooked. From the perspective of this Egyptian-American and Southland-native journalist: before *Habibi's House*, LA was starved for this. Outside of weddings, hookah bars, or the occasional IYKYK bhangra in a Garden Grove strip mall, you were loath to find events that played anything resembling Arabic music, let alone large-scale cultural gatherings for Middle Eastern folk of any kind.



COURTESY OF @ITSJUSTANTONY

One of our [Best Parties of 2023](#), we've covered the growth of Habibi's House in these pages, watching it expand from a modest few-hundred-capacity room to selling out Academy, then touring the world. The parties have become a pilgrimage for their incredible vibe, but also for the space they create: cousins who hadn't seen each other in years reunited on the dance floor, the warm fuzzies of recognizing strangers who are like us — kooky idiosyncrasies and all, the non-MENA friends who tag along but leave as converts.

Habibi's House, when it's in LA, is still the biggest and best game in town. But suddenly, we have many variations of "Habibi parties" across the city, a shorthand for the wave Habibeats started. And we need a calendar to track the many flavors of MENA events, credited to a diverse and growing community of creatives that push the culture in all its ways: poetry readings, comedy shows,

dance classes, workouts, food, fashion, the boisterous Friday eve pregames in packed living rooms filled with dancing and scream cackling (and the inevitable killjoy nagging at lagging friends, "Uber is here, yalla") — everything.

Maybe it was inevitable, but at least from our eyes, Habibi's House was the catalyst. It proved that the community existed and wanted, actually *needed* this.

"He's created an environment that feels bigger than all of us," says Lena Khouri, founder of the entertainment and media company Between East that highlights and bolsters MENA culture. DJ Habibeats played their first IN BETWEEN Festival in 2024. This year's IN BETWEEN is slated for the fall. "It's so much fun and it honestly feels magical to be in a room with people from all ethnicities dancing to Arabic music," she says of Habibi's House. "He's making history in many ways."

These events reinforce what MENA people intrinsically know about our



COURTESY OF DJ HABIBEATS

culture, a fact that's not always the headline — we're warm, loving, and a hell of a good time.

**When I ask him about that first night at Melrose House, DJ Habibeats laughs.** "It was like a massive flop." He had no grand plan for world domination. The idea for Habibi's House grew from multiple sparks. As a teenager, Abu-Ali learned to DJ from his uncle, who mixed house, freestyle, and Arabic sounds at Bay Area events in the '80s and '90s. For years, Habibeats spun open-format hip-hop and R&B sets in San Francisco and Los Angeles clubs, and Arabic music wasn't in the playlist. "The only situation in which you'd ever find me playing Arabic music was usually a wedding," he says.

Then came law school. He graduated in 2021, passed the California Bar, and faced a choice. His hardworking, practical immigrant family supported the pivot, but not without skepticism. "At first, I definitely got people in the family who were just like, 'Well, if this doesn't work out, you've got the degree.'" He asked for

six months to a year to figure out if music was viable. Things never slowed down.

The real turning point arrived during the pandemic. Stuck in his final semester, Abu-Ali started posting TikTok videos breaking down hip-hop samples and experimenting with cultural mashups. One remix of Nancy Ajram's "Ya Tab Tab" blended classic Arabic pop with Brazilian funk. "I remember thinking to myself, no one's probably going to understand it. It's very niche. But I want to do it because I need to see that through." The video hit two million views and DJs from Greece to Brazil started playing it. "I got tagged every weekend," he recalls. "This is insane."

The inspiration to throw an Arabic music party in LA came locally. A crew of South Asian DJs called No Nazar were having events that mixed their culture with Afrobeats, house, and hip-hop. "I remember going to their events and being just blown away by how cool the community-building part of it was," he says. "We got to have this for our community. We've never had anything like that."

Global stars like Bad Bunny and Burna Boy proved artists could blow up while staying rooted, and Abu-Ali wanted the same for Arab sounds.

He named the party series Habibeats House to reflect exactly that duality. “I wanted to blend both halves of my identity — the American side of me that grew up here and all the things that I love about hip-hop and dance music and house music — with the Middle Eastern Arab heritage part of me that I love all the music I grew up with.”

The first events were intimate, but within a year, they outgrew the two rooms at Melrose House. Subsequent nights at Avalon and Academy would quickly sell out. The Shrine feels like the logical next chapter.

The growth wasn’t just local. Abu-Ali’s recently wrapped third European tour packed houses in Paris, Brussels, and Amsterdam. “The last three nights were all insane,” he told me from Amsterdam. “Crazy energy.” Venues have scaled up each trip. London, in particular, has exploded: a sold-out 1,200-capacity Coco last year, followed by a full takeover of the legendary Fabric (three rooms, 2,000-plus people).

**Then came Coachella.** On Weekend 2, Habibeats made his debut on the Do LaB stage with a high-energy B2B set alongside Zaynab. He had joked for years that he’d only attend the festival if booked. When the offer came, he was ready. “I’m really stoked for the opportunity to showcase what I’m up to to people who might not know who I am,” he said before the set. “So that we can broaden this whole thing.”

The new EP *Benzeen* arrives at the perfect moment. Five tracks, no filler. It leans hard into the club while honoring folk roots. “DAL3OUNA!” featuring Giovanni Khoury flips a classic Levantine dabke refrain into a bass-heavy monster. “It has the roots and inspiration of what you might hear at a wedding dabke-wise,” he explains, “but then is turned up to 11 in terms of the bass and the kicks.” Other cuts pull in dancehall, hip-hop, Brazilian funk, and house. The goal is crossover without compromise. “You don’t need to know anything about Arabic music to enjoy it. It’s very club-oriented. It’s very dance-oriented. It’s very high energy.”

Abu-Ali signed with Empire almost two years ago, drawn by the label’s independent spirit and its founder, Ghazi Shami — also Palestinian and from the Bay Area. “We grew up around a lot of the same community,” he says. The partnership has given him studio time in San Francisco and connections across the region. “They’ve always really supported my voice. They’ve never tried to tone down the fact that I remain loud and

proud about being Palestinian.”

**Family pride also runs deep.** His parents and uncle, who taught him to DJ, remain stunned by the trajectory. “They’re stoked. My uncle is so proud and can’t believe where this has all gone.” Abu-Ali still visits the Bay Area four or five times a year for holidays and studio sessions. When he’s home in Los Angeles, life is quieter than it used to be. “These days I’m never home,” he admits. “When I am, I just stay in, play video games, get coffee with friends. It’s my only time to recharge.”

That balance feels especially poignant right now. As a first-generation Palestinian-American, Abu-Ali navigates what he calls a “strange and uncomfortable dichotomy.” His nights are spent creating joy in nightclubs while headlines from Palestine, Sudan, and beyond weigh heavy. “It’s a strange season. My job entails me partying and throwing parties. At the same time, you have the genocide of Palestine happening. The world is insane.” He refuses to turn away from the news, yet he also refuses to let despair win. “Music’s been my thing. I’m good at creating community around music. I’m good at connecting people through music. I’m good at making people feel good with music. So that’s my strength. That’s how I feel that I’m contributing to this world.”

Tonight at the Shrine, that contribution will be loud and collective. Ten stops will follow — Brooklyn, Chicago, Canada, the South — as the North American tour rolls out the *Benzeen* sound to new crowds.



Habibeats wants the culture to keep expanding, not for validation, but for visibility. “I would like all of this to go to the point where everybody has bought into this culture and this energy and it’s beautiful, and it’s cool, and it’s become such a normalized thing that, who knows, there’s someone performing at the Super Bowl in Arabic. That would be crazy. But why not?”

The most striking thing about Habibeats’ rise isn’t just the numbers or the venues, it’s how quickly a cultural void turned into a movement, and how that movement is now starting to stretch beyond its original box.

Whether it was Melrose House, Academy, or wherever you first caught on, you can feel the throughline — the feeling that something is happening in real time. The party is bigger now, the idea behind it is still growing, and LA finally has the Arabic-centric nightlife scene it never knew it was missing until Habibeats built it.

Follow DJ Habibeats on Instagram @djhabeats. [IG]