

It Costs \$300-Plus to Eat at Dialogue. It's Worth It • Shepard Fairey's Show Isn't Anti-Trump, It's Anti-Apathy

# LAW WEEKLY<sup>®</sup>

NOVEMBER 10-16, 2017  
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LAWEEKLY.COM



## THE REBIRTH OF TOKIMONSTA

Less than a year after brain surgery rendered her unable to comprehend music, Jennifer Lee aka Tokimonsta has released the best album of her career

**BY REBECCA HAITHCOAT**



FINAL LINE-UP ANNOUNCED!

LA WEEKLY

# SIPS & SWEETS

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# CONTENTS //

## 13



### GO LA...6

A gravy-sopped sandwich anniversary, a Latino-specific comic book convention, an especially special edition of *The Special Occasionally Show* and more fun stuff to do and see in L.A. this week.

### HENRY ROLLINS...11

As our president embarks on his own tour of Asia, Henry's continues with a visit to Taipei.

### FEATURE...13

Less than a year after brain surgery rendered her unable to comprehend music, Jennifer Lee, aka Tokimonsta, has released the best album of her career. **BY REBECCA HAITHCOAT.**

### EAT & DRINK...21

Dialogue, the experimental tasting-menu concept from Dave Beran, is a conversation worth having. **BY KAREN PALMER.**

### CULTURE...25

Shepard Fairey's biggest-ever L.A. exhibit, "Damaged," is the renowned street artist's response to Trump's America. **BY ETHAN VARIAN.** In STAGE, Danny Glover is a bewildered husband trying to save his 37-year marriage in East West Players' production of *Yohen*.

### FILM...27

**APRIL WOLFE** wants to know what Mel Gibson is doing in a family holiday film, and **ALAN SCHERSTUHL** reviews African import *Félicité*, plus Frances McDormand in *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, and other movies OPENING THIS WEEK, and YOUR WEEKLY MOVIE TO-DO LIST.

### MUSIC...33

Pity Party (Girls Club) tell **JUAN GUTIERREZ** about the joys and perils of the Inland Empire backyard punk scene, and **JEFF WEISS** revisits Love's *Forever Changes* on its 50th anniversary. Plus: listings for ROCK & POP, JAZZ & CLASSICAL and more.

## ADVERTISING

CLASSIFIED...46

EDUCATION/EMPLOYMENT...46

REAL ESTATE/RENTALS...47

BULLETIN BOARD...47

ON THE COVER:  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANNY LIAO



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# GO»LA

Week of  
**NOV.  
10-16**

**P. 6 FRI**  
**AU JUS CRAZY?**  
**HEAD TO COLE'S**

**P. 6 SAT**  
**LATINO COMIC BOOK ICONS**  
**GATHER IN LONG BEACH**

**P. 7 SUN**  
**ALIENS INVADE DTLA VIA**  
**AIR RAID SIRENS**



**P. 8 WED**  
**MARRIED COMEDIANS SHARE**  
**THEIR WEDDED BLISS**

## fri

11/10

### FOOD & DRINK

#### Old King Cole's

Two L.A. institutions claim to have invented the French dip sandwich: Cole's, "Originators of the French Dip," on Sixth Street downtown, and Philippe the Original in Chinatown. In 2017, it doesn't seem like there's any settling the dispute (or any point in laboring over trying to settle it), but both spots were founded in 1908, which means there's a pair of beefy, gravy-sopped 109th birthdays to celebrate this year. The former celebrates with **Cole's 109th Anniversary**, a multicourse dinner with live jazz and a best-dressed contest. During four separate dinner seatings, chefs Neal Fraser of Redbird and Christian Page of Cassell's Hamburgers serve up a meal of roast lamb, sides, pie for dessert and, from the bar, two classic cocktails. Naturally, there will be lots and lots of French dip sandwiches. Just don't utter the name Philippe. *Cole's*, 118 E. Sixth St., downtown; Fri., Nov. 10, seatings at 6, 7, 8 & 9 p.m.; \$74.84. [facebook.com/events/1748124272155566](http://facebook.com/events/1748124272155566). —Gwynedd Stuart

### FILM FESTIVAL

#### Seeing Red

From the cowboy shoot-'em-ups of the 1950s to more acclaimed and (supposedly) culturally sensitive films like *Dances*

Diavolo/  
Architecture  
in Motion:  
See Saturday.



PHOTO BY GEORGE SIMIAN

*With Wolves*, Hollywood has done a woeeful job of putting Native people in control of their own narratives. Now in its 14th year, **Red Nation Film Festival** screens 46 official selections by Native filmmakers, 22 of those by women. The festival kicks off tonight with the U.S. premiere of *The Women in the Sand*, a documentary about Death Valley's original people, narrated by Edward James Olmos (at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences). On Saturday, 22 documentary shorts by women screen, and Sunday offers a program of "two-spirit" LGBT films. The fest continues at various locations through Nov. 19; ticket prices vary. *Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences*, 1313 Vine St., Hollywood; Fri., Nov. 10, 6:30 p.m.; \$12. [rednationff.com](http://rednationff.com). —Gwynedd Stuart

## sat

11/11

### DANCE

#### On the Move

In 1992, Diavolo exploded onto the L.A. dance scene, literally, with acrobatic dancers bursting out of a staircase. Led by French-born choreographer Jacques Heim, the dancer-acrobat-gymnast-daredevils bestrode an expanding collection of giant architectural structures that opened, closed and moved with flexibility that matched the human performers. The company drew national and international attention, including three successive L.A. Phil commissions

### ARTS & CRAFTS

#### Eternal Flame

In July 2016, a downed power line landed on a stack of wooden palettes, starting a fire that would almost destroy ceramicist Ben Medansky's downtown workshop. Medansky made the best of a bad situation, displaying and selling his charred ceramics, which had been blackened by smoke and flames, and were actually sort of beautiful as a result. He keeps that flame of hope burning at **LIT! A Menorah & Candelabra Clay Workshop with Ben Medansky**, in which he'll teach participants how to

to music by John Adams, Esa-Pekka Salonen and Philip Glass. Recently, Heim and his cohorts forged a special relationship with the Valley Performing Arts Center with a monumental performance of those three L.A. Phil commissions with live music. To mark Diavolo's silver anniversary, Heim, his troupe and some of those amazing architectural constructs return to campus, taking over various locations for 10 hours brimming with workshops, a dance party and performances, including the premiere of *Veteran's Project*. Over the years, the name Diavolo has morphed into the current and descriptive **Diavolo/Architecture in Motion**, flying higher than when it launched 25 years ago. *Valley Performing Arts Center, Cal State University Northridge, 18111 Nordhoff St., Northridge; Sat., Nov. 11, 1-11 p.m.; \$48-\$85. [valleyperformingartscenter.org](http://valleyperformingartscenter.org). —Ann Haskins*

FALL 2017

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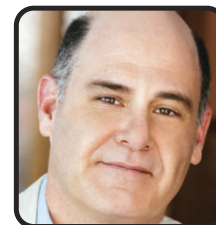
**C. Morgan Babst**  
discussing her debut novel,  
*The Floating World*  
**NOV 12** MLK Auditorium,  
Santa Monica Public Library  
▶ A free event in our  
Newer Voices Series

**Chris Matthews**  
with Frank Buckley  
Bobby Kennedy:  
*A Raging Spirit*  
**NOV 13** Moss Theatre,  
Santa Monica



**Tim O'Reilly**  
with Krisztina 'Z' Holly  
*WTF? What's the Future  
and Why It's Up To Us*  
**NOV 14** Cross Campus,  
Downtown LA

**Matthew Weiner**  
with Susan Orlean  
*Heather, The Totality*  
**NOV 16** Moss Theatre,  
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craft either a menorah or a religion-neutral candelabra using his signature speckled clay. The class fee includes materials, kiln firing and the chance to work with a local master. *Craft & Folk Art Museum, 5814 Wilshire Blvd., Mid-Wilshire; Sat., Nov. 11, 1-4 p.m.; \$100. (323) 937-4230, cafam.org.* —Gwynedd Stuart

## COMICS

### Graphic Content

For decades, mainstream comic books have depicted a predominantly white world, with the subject matter and audience growing more diverse only fairly recently. Now in its seventh year, the **Latino Comics Expo** provides a much-needed showcase of Latino comic book artists and writers, with 65 exhibitors plus workshops and talks. Highlights include an interview with this year's headliners, the Hernandez Brothers, creators of the seminal *Love & Rockets* books, as well as appearances by Cathy Camper, writer of YA series *Lowriders From Outer Space*; Vicko Alvarez, whose *Rosita Gets Scared* focuses on an undocumented girl facing deportation; and cartoonist Lalo Alcaraz, a consultant on Pixar's upcoming film *Coco*, showing just how far Latino comic artists have come. *Museum of Latin American Art, 628 Alamitos Ave., Long Beach; Sat.-Sun., Nov. 11-12, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; \$10, \$7 seniors & students, free MOLAA members & children under 12 (free all day Sunday).* (562) 437-1689, [molaa.org/latino-comics-expo-2017](http://molaa.org/latino-comics-expo-2017). —Matt Stromberg

# sun 11/12

## OPERA

### Fake News

There has never been a more suitable time for an apocalyptic opera. Composer Annie Gosfield's operatic adaptation of Orson Welles' infamous radio drama *War of the Worlds* makes its Disney Hall debut featuring narration by the *Alien* queen herself, Sigourney Weaver. The other-worldly performance — which includes L.A. Phil players and opera star Suzanna Guzmán — is the brainchild of director Yuval Sharon, who recently won an esteemed MacArthur Fellowship, aka "the Genius Grant." Sharon has been responsible for large-scale musical projects that redefine operas and performance for the 21st century. In *Hopscotch*, he coordinated a citywide performance inside a fleet of limos and at various historic places in L.A. neighborhoods. Sharon's opera *Invisible Cities* was enacted in downtown's Union Station, where performers intermixed with travelers in the railway station. Like his other works that engaged communities, *War of the Worlds* also will be broadcast for free at three WWII-era air raid sirens throughout L.A. *Walt Disney Concert Hall, 111 S. Grand Ave., downtown; Sun., Nov. 12, 2 p.m.; Sat., Nov. 18, noon & 2 p.m.; \$25-\$58, free at various air raid siren sites. laphil.com.* —Drew Tewksbury

## ARTS & CULTURE

### Search Party

Argentine artist Adrián Villar Rojas creates immersive, site-specific environments that completely transform institutional spaces through architectural interventions and the juxtaposition of organic, cultural and ephemeral objects. His current project at MOCA Geffen, *The Theater of Disappearance*, incorporates petrified wood from Italy, columns from the U.A.E. city of Sharjah and silicone molds from Istanbul into an installation that explores decay and obsolescence. To celebrate the exhibition, MOCA is throwing a **Day Party** featuring free admission, food trucks, cash bar, DJs and family-friendly events related to the show. *Geffen Contemporary at MOCA, 152 N. Central Ave., downtown; Sun. Nov. 12, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; free. moca.org/program/moca-day-party.* —Matt Stromberg

# mon 11/13

## COMEDY

### Laughs for a Lifeline

Everyone needs someone to talk to sometimes, and tonight's **The Special Occasionally Show: A Trans Lifeline Benefit** helps fund the telephone hotline that believes there should be an ear for every voice. Founded in San Francisco in 2014, Trans Lifeline is the only crisis line run by and

for the trans and gender-nonconforming community. True to its name, *The Special Occasionally Show* happens only, well, occasionally, so make this an occasion to remember by bedecking yourself in irregular resplendence (for real, evening wear is encouraged) and enjoy the comedic stylings of Rhea Butcher, Cameron Esposito, Olivia Haidar, Jeffrey Jay, Danielle Radford and hosts Caitlin Durante and Riley Silverman. *Nerdist Showroom at Meltdown Comics, 7522 W. Sunset Blvd., Hollywood; Mon., Nov. 13, 8:45 p.m.; \$20, \$15 in advance. (323) 851-7223, [nerdmeltdla.com](http://nerdmeltdla.com).* —David Cotner

## BOOKS

### Fascist Times at Ridgemont High

Machine-gunning Jews in Boyle Heights? Hanging Charlie Chaplin and Al Jolson? Those were just some of the demented plans the Nazis had for WWII Los Angeles. Attorney Leon Lewis rallied the local spies who smashed these schemes — and today, Steven J. Ross discusses his book *Hitler in Los Angeles: How Jews Foiled Nazi Plots Against Hollywood and America*. The Nazis were hot on getting control of Hollywood — and all the propaganda that implies — so while the feds were busy chasing commies, it fell to Lewis' network to infiltrate those fascist cells and annihilate them from the inside. *Vroman's, 695 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena; Mon., Nov. 13, 7 p.m.; free, book is \$30. (626) 449-5320, [vromansbookstore.com](http://vromansbookstore.com).* —David Cotner

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LA WEEKLY

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*What Unites Us: Reflections on Patriotism*  
DEC 4 The Novo, L.A. Live



**Jenifer Lewis**  
*The Mother of Black Hollywood*  
DEC 10 Bootleg Theatre, Santa Monica



**Denis Leary**  
with Peter Tolan  
*Why We Don't Suck: And How All of Us Need to Stop Being Such Partisan Little Bitches*  
DEC 6 The Bootleg Theatre, Los Angeles



**Daniel Ellsberg**  
*The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner*  
DEC 13 William Turner Gallery, Santa Monica

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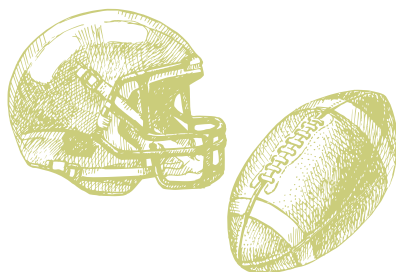
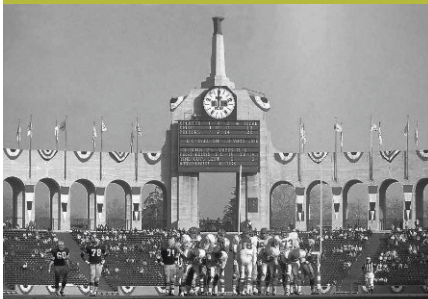
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tue 11/14

### GAMES

#### They Got Game

Located in UCLA's Design Media Arts department, the UCLA Game Lab investigates new ways to make video games by focusing on the field's emerging genres, while exploring innovative possibilities in gaming's aesthetics and contexts. The lab co-presents the **UCLA Game Art Festival 2017**, which unveils a number of interactive projects to the public. The fifth edition of the gaming juggernaut features live music, libations and pioneering new works from the UCLA Game Lab in the Hammer's courtyard. In addition to enjoying a sneak peek at a host of groundbreaking projects, old-school gaming geeks will be happy to hear there's a tournament, too. *Hammer Museum, 10899 Wilshire Blvd., Westwood; Tue., Nov. 14, 7-10 p.m.; free. (310) 443-7000, hammer.ucla.edu.* —Tanja M. Laden

wed 11/15

### COMEDY

#### A Second Honeymoon

For about a year, Natasha Leggero and Moshe Kasher have been comedy's most adorable married couple, without once making us want to barf. Leggero (of Com-

edy Central's *Another Period*) and Kasher (of Comedy Central's *Problematic*) are taking their wedded bliss on the road with **the Honeymoon Tour**, which is being filmed to be a Netflix special. Rather than flaunt their happiness, the duo will be offering live relationship advice to couples in the audience, whose relationships may or may not survive the evening. But either way, it's for the best, no? *UCB Franklin, 5919 Franklin Ave., Hollywood Hills; Wed., Nov. 15, 8 p.m.; \$8. (323) 908-8702, ucbtheatre.com/performance/57862.* —David Cotner

thu 11/16

### BOOKS

#### Novel Idea

As a writer and showrunner, **Matthew Weiner** has given us two of television's greatest sympathetic antiheroes: Tony Soprano and *Mad Men's* Don Draper. He used the latter to channel a sort of suburban, midcentury ennui that smacked, on occasion, of the work of *Revolutionary Road* author Richard Yates. Now Weiner has taken that a step further by writing a novel, *Heather, the Totality*. He discusses the book — praised by the *Guardian* as “captivating” — with author and longtime *New Yorker* writer Susan Orlean as part of Live Talks L.A. *Ann & Jerry Moss Theater, 3131 Olympic Blvd., Santa Monica; Thu., Nov. 16, 8 p.m.; \$43-\$53 (includes book).* [livetalksla.org](http://livetalksla.org). —Gwynedd Stuart

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Hosted by Navy veteran, food aficionado August Dannehl, this new series explores the vibrant "foodie" culture and gourmet culinary practices of the military/veteran community. [kcet.org/mealsreadytoeat](http://kcet.org/mealsreadytoeat)

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## Henry Rollins The Column!



PHOTO BY DANNY LIAO

### OUT IN THE WORLD

I've been in Taipei, Taiwan, for a few days. I've got a routine. By day, I do my desk work, go to the gym, then back to the desk until around 1845 hrs. After that, I hit the streets, eat cheap, find a place to write, drink coffee, listen to music and keep on grinding until near closing time. Then more walking and, finally, back to the hotel room.

Walking around here, checking things out, it occurs to me that I'm in the right place, doing the right thing, not wasting time.

I've tried but so far have been unable to make life off the road nearly as meaningful. In Los Angeles, I drive around at night and install myself at different coffee places, trying to feel I'm somewhere like where I am now. Sometimes I can get it but most of the time, I can't.

Many years ago, the best part of my day was walking back from my job to the apartment. It wasn't that the workday was over but the feeling of freedom being between the two points. I used to have a few different routes, all of them several blocks out of the way.

One afternoon in 1981, I was at Ian MacKaye's house. Black Flag had spent the night and were leaving for their next show. I watched the van pull away and thought of them as wild men, sailing on a mad sea. I tripped on that as I walked to my night shift. Wherever they were going, to whatever situation of unpredictability awaited them, I wanted to go, too. It seemed a much better way to die, compared to the minimum-wage flatline I was heading to.

A few months later, I was in that van. I lucked out. Real life would have been way too much for me to hack.

Here in Taipei, I have little interaction with people. I point at what I want for dinner, smile and nod, get my change ready for my nightly bottle of tea from the 7-Eleven, as the guys behind the counter seem to be quite impatient.

For the most part, I exist among people here almost invisibly. I look into windows of restaurants and tea houses and see Taiwanese versions of people I see anywhere else. The nervous girls and the lonely boys, hypnotized by their phones, elderly often sitting alone, looking at a newspaper or staring down, the just-off-work, tie-part-way-down alphas, prowling for who knows what — martinis, blood. They're all here.

There are a lot of street-food vendors. The

smells are amazing. Crepes, curried meat, garlic — all are omnipresent and all you want to do is eat.

Tonight's designated spot is a Japanese place blocks away. A great, steaming heap of yakisoba for 6 bucks. A 50 percent tip seems to confuse them but I just smile and say, "It was really good! Thanks!" It pretty much all tastes good to me out here.

I like the reality of being out in the world. A place like Taipei makes me work, trying to understand it. The feelings of isolation, of otherness, are not at all unwelcome. Actually, they make me far more observant. There's a lot to see anywhere, of course, but when you're in one place for any length of time, repetition can dull your senses. This is what I fear, sleepwalking through life. We do it all the time.

In the gym earlier, I was watching the BBC weather report for Asia and ticking off all the cities on the screen that I had been to. Kolkata, Dhaka, Kathmandu, Thimphu, Ashgabat, Tashkent, Astana, Kabul, Bishkek, Almaty and so on. I'm resolved to get to as many places as I can. It's never easy but always worth it.

I watched comrade Trump arrive in Tokyo today. Before Air Force One touched down there, he made a brief stop in Hawaii, where members of his citizen comedy brigade greeted him with "Welcome to Kenya!" signs.

How long is this trip? Twelve days through five countries? That's a long time and a lot of terrain for Trump to be immersed in so much unfamiliarity.

### A PLACE LIKE TAIPEI MAKES ME WORK, TRYING TO UNDERSTAND IT.

At the Yokota base outside Tokyo, he addressed members of the military. "Our brave warriors are the last bulwark against threats to the dreams of people in America and Japan and all across the world. ... You are the greatest threat to tyrants and dictators who seek to prey upon the innocent." After describing their job so well, you would figure his statement would have led to Trump being shackled and sent to "Gitmo."

I was at Yokota about 10 years ago. Before I arrived, I went to Shinjuku in Tokyo, to my favorite record store there, Vinyl Record Store, and found a copy of the "Alright Boy"/"Who Can Tell" single by The Afflicted. Score!

Looks like Trump will be in Hanoi. I wonder if his daycare handlers will steer him clear of the Hoa Lô Prison, otherwise known as the Hanoi Hilton, where decades ago, John McCain was getting his bones broken while Trump was rubbing his ouchy feet stateside.

By covering as much ground as my means and schedule will allow, I'm trying my best to remain open. People are great. All over the world, they are beautiful and live with purpose and dignity. They love their children and laugh and try to get through as best they can. I must somehow keep finding ways to be part of that, for it always to mean something to me. I learn and relearn this over and over. Respect. Profound respect for people, for different cultures to be aware of, different ways to adapt to. It's not always easy to hold onto it all. This is why I travel.

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# THE REBIRTH OF TOKIMONSTA

Less than a year after brain surgery rendered her unable to comprehend music, Jennifer Lee aka Tokimonsta has released the best album of her career

**BY REBECCA HAITHCOAT**

PHOTO BY DANNY LIAO

The earth beneath Jennifer Lee's foot vanished. It was autumn 2015, and the L.A. producer and DJ, who goes by Tokimonsta, had recently announced a new album and tour. That fall, she'd grown increasingly aware of puzzling things happening in her body — her fingers would go numb one by one, which was explained away as carpal tunnel syndrome; the side of her lips went numb — but this was alarming. She took a step and never felt her foot connect with the earth.

"There was nothing there. I had a ghost foot," she remembers. It's two years later on a balmy afternoon in late September, and she's about to play the biggest hometown show of her career — a sold-out headlining gig at the Wiltern. Lithe in all black, she surveys the spread from her tour rider, then grabs a handful of cheddar and sour cream potato chips and pours herself a glass of Kendall-Jackson sauvignon blanc. She wrinkles her nose before wandering over and perching on a sofa in one of the Wiltern's gilded dressing rooms.

Alarmed by her foot's loss of feeling, she saw her doctor, who ordered an angiogram. What happened next turned Lee's life upside down. She was diagnosed with moyamoya, a rare, progressive vascular disorder in which the arteries that provide blood flow to the brain, including the vital carotid arteries, begin to narrow. Untreated, the disease is fatal.

In the three months following the diagnosis, Lee's plans for her album and tour were replaced by plans to simply stay alive. She underwent two brain surgeries and woke up to the terrifying realization that she had lost the ability to comprehend language and music.

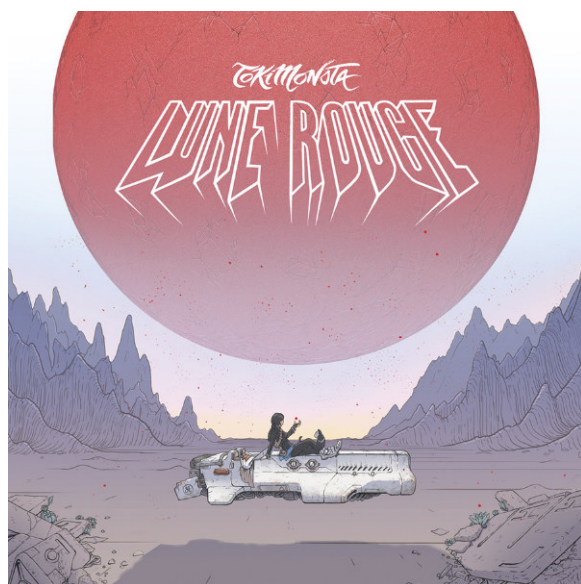
But Lee wasn't unaccustomed to a fight. She'd thrived in Los Angeles' testosterone-laden beat scene, honing her wrist-flicking mixing skills at the weekly, world-famous club night called Low End Theory, smoothing rap and R&B into sleek, electro-kissed tracks and becoming the "First Lady of Brainfeeder," the record label belonging to the city's most exciting experimental electronic musician, Flying Lotus. Within a few months of the surgeries, she would begin work on her just-released album, *Lune Rouge*, and, unbelievably, perform at South by Southwest and Coachella.

But before all that, she had to recover the ability to make music at all.

Lee first heard the word "moyamoya" back in 2005, when she was in college. She was suffering migraines so severe that she went to see a doctor, who discovered a small but curious area of abnormal narrowing in her carotid artery, a typical symptom of moyamoya.

Moyamoya is exceedingly rare; fewer than one person in 100,000 has the disease. So although it occurs more often in both Asians and women, Lee's doctor dismissed the possibility of her having it.

"They were just like, 'It's too rare, you just have one little abnormality. This is fine. It's something weird, but your brain (14) »



Tokimonsta's albums include her latest, *Lune Rouge*, left, *Half Shadows* and *Midnight Menu*.

>> 13 ) is completely fine, all the blood flow is fine,” Lee says. “Until I show up after the ghost foot and the doctors are like, ‘You know, you only have 5 percent [functionality in the carotid artery on] one side and, like, 10 or 11 percent on the other side.’”

In response to the blockage, our self-correcting bodies compensate by developing their own tiny vessels designed to feed the brain. The appearance of that cluster gives moyamoya, which was first defined in Japan in the 1960s, its name, a Japanese word that roughly translates to “puff of smoke.” Because those backup vessels are so delicate, however, they can’t carry enough blood and oxygen to the brain. This triggers crippling headaches that are unresponsive to medication; seizures; hemorrhaging; and, eventually, strokes — which often present as droopy facial features. Or ghost feet.

Reading the results of her MRA, in December 2015, Lee’s radiologist in L.A. confirmed she was symptomatic of moyamoya.

“It sounds like a cliché, but in a wink of the eye everything could be taken away from you. I was face-to-face with the fact that I might not live,” says Lee, who’s soft-spoken but steely. “It’s very sobering, and also very much came out of nowhere, because up to that point I was really fine. There were no extreme symptoms for me.”

Such reduced capacity in her arteries was startling. But even more terrifying was the unpredictability of the new transportation system taking blood to her brain. It was only a matter of time before the fragile, makeshift vessels exploded, and there was no means of gauging how long that might take. Without surgery, most people with moyamoya do not live past the age of 40.

“I think I have a pretty strong will to survive,” says Lee, who is in her early 30s. “How I exist on this planet, how I was raised, I’m very resilient. I had to persevere.”

Still, as holiday merriment swirled around her, Lee sat down and started writing her will.

**Moyamoya is an apt name** for such a nebulous disease. Simply diagnosing it is hazy territory, says Dr. Gary Steinberg, the vascular neurosurgeon who treated Lee. Once, he admitted a woman with moyamoya who had been misdiagnosed as suffering from

## LEE WAS DIAGNOSED WITH MOYAMOYA, A RARE DISEASE THAT CAN BE FATAL IF LEFT UNTREATED.



PHOTO BY DANNY LIAO

multiple sclerosis for 20 years. Even understanding what causes the disease, or why people of Asian ethnicity are more prone to having it, has been elusive knowledge. Only in 2011 did researchers identify the first Moyamoya susceptibility gene, RNF213.

“What we believe happens is that the smooth muscle within the blood vessel in the base of the brain overgrows and blocks off the vessel,” explains Steinberg, chair of neurosurgery and director of the Stanford Moyamoya Center. He treated his first moyamoya patient in 1991: A woman driving across the Golden Gate Bridge was pulled over for drunk driving, then discovered she was suffering a hemorrhage from the disease. Since then, he’s treated almost 1,000 patients, establishing Stanford as the largest moyamoya referral base in the world

— which makes wrangling an appointment considerably difficult.

“Desperate and scared shitless,” Lee googled the head nurse’s email address and pled her case. To Lee’s surprise, the nurse asked for her paperwork and told her to come in.

“Jennifer’s email was very clearly that of someone who I was concerned was at high risk for a stroke based on the information she was conveying,” Teresa Bell-Stephens, the neurosurgery nurse coordinator at the Stanford Moyamoya Center, tells *L.A. Weekly* via email. “She told me she was actively having what I considered stroke-like symptoms that were progressing from intermittent loss of sensation to include intermittent motor (muscle) weakness. I was very worried that if we didn’t get on

top of her case right away, she might have a major and irreversible stroke leaving her with permanent damage.”

The only treatment for moyamoya is brain surgery. With the carotid arteries shutting down and the baby vessels constantly on the verge of bursting, a surgeon must create another source of blood flow to the brain.

“What’s interesting about moyamoya patients is that they have a very high tendency to develop new vessels from any vascular tissue you place on the surface of the brain. In Jennifer’s case, I placed a scalp artery on the surface of the brain,” Steinberg says.

First, he removed the bone and opened the topmost membrane and first interior line of defense against harm, the dura. Next, he sliced into the arachnoid, a thin membrane that also covers the brain. Finally, he took an artery he had dissected from Lee’s scalp and laid it down on the brain’s surface, a procedure called an “indirect revascularization.” If all goes well, that artery grows new vessels in three to six months, taking over for the damaged carotid arteries.

Both sides of Lee’s brain were occluded, so she needed two different surgeries. Instead of scheduling the surgeries several weeks or even months apart, she chose to book them back-to-back.

“I kind of faced it head on. That’s very much my style. If there’s a problem, let’s fix it,” she says. “It made that period of time extra difficult for me, but at the same time that means I didn’t have to deal with the same surgery again later. It meant I didn’t have to think about dying twice.”

Lee was fortunate: As it turned out, dying from moyamoya wouldn’t be a lasting concern. But losing the ability to make music was.

**Jennifer Lee grew up** in Torrance with a single and very traditional Korean mother. As a child, she played classical piano and harbored a serious cartoon habit, but by the time she entered UC Irvine, she’d settled on a business major.

Yet her real education wasn’t happening on campus; it was happening in L.A. She’d been making beats for fun and wanted to test them out at Leimert Park’s famous Project Blowed. Laughter rippled through the crowd when Lee took the stage, (16 »

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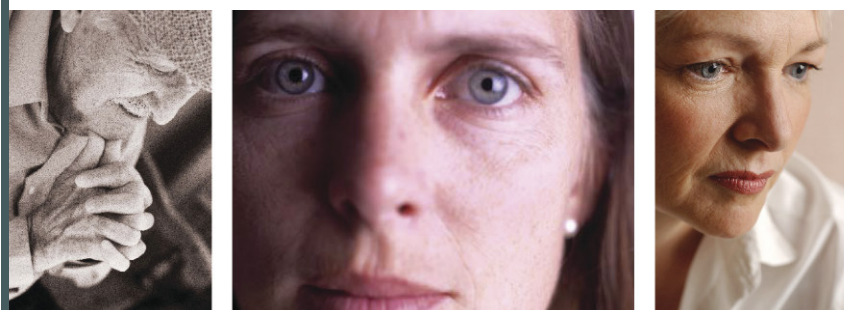
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>> 14 ) but they shut up fast when she let her music loose.

As Project Blowed fizzled out, Lee moved over to Low End Theory, a new club night for beat junkies at the Airliner. Music is serious business at Low End. Some people dance, yes, but the dense, mostly male crowd generally stares intently at the producer-performers, studying them. Soon Lee was a regular, one of the few girls playing with the boys. Her signature style has always been a balance of sexiness and elegance, and her sets injected a welcome, warm sensuousness into Low End.

After graduating she got a 9-to-5 as a business development coordinator for a video game publisher. She liked the gig but was laid off. Her reputation as a producer was rising, but she still considered it a hobby. It was only in 2009, after she lost an advertising job she despised, that she decided to dedicate herself to making music.

A year later, Lee dropped her debut album as Tokimonsta, *Midnight Menu*, and was invited to sit at the cool kids' table with Fly-

why I don't know what anyone's saying," she says. "It's almost like Charlie Brown when the adults speak."

But if losing comprehension of language was difficult, for an artist, losing music comprehension was worse. It wasn't that Lee heard nothing—it was that she heard harsh, dissonant sounds instead of the songs she loved. She often described it to her friends and family thus: "Imagine sleeping 10 hours and waking up to thrash metal."

"It was pretty brutal once I came to the realization that music sounded weird," she says. But then she would remind herself of the reason she wanted to live: "I wasn't like, 'I need to stay alive so I can make music.' That wasn't what I was thinking. I was thinking, 'I need to stay alive because I have so much life left to live.' My mom's had two husbands pass away. All she has is me and my sister, and all my sister has is me and my mom. I can't do that to them. That was another one of those epiphanies I realized at the end: Our life is never our life."

On her birthday, Jan. 26, 2016, Lee was

"HOW I WAS RAISED, I'M VERY RESILIENT. I HAD TO PERSEVERE." —TOKIMONSTA



ing Lotus and his Brainfeeder crew. Since then, she's been prolific, releasing almost 10 projects, including *Lune Rouge*, and numerous remixes.

Dr. Steinberg warns his patients. He tells them not to freak out if they wake up and can't move their tongue, or if they try to text and the message is gibberish. Or if, having spent their lives turning to and creating music when they needed comfort, they flip on a record and it sounds like ... noise.

The brain has to adjust to the new blood flow and besides, his fingers and scalpels were just inside the control center. Auditory malfunctions and lapses in speech are to be expected and are nearly always temporary.

When Lee woke up on the second day after her first surgery, the changes did not feel temporary. "It's very strange to not understand something that you know you're supposed to. 'Cause you're just inside your own head being like, 'I don't even understand

discharged from the hospital. Sitting or lying down most hours of the day had weakened her musculature and left her almost unable to walk, but her speech had increased to about 70 percent. The next month, she tried to re-enter her life, but her brain could not figure out how to make music. Everything she put together sounded wrong. She'd always been able to create music without much thought, and the loss of that effortlessness gutted her.

So she stopped trying. Instead of music, she watched a lot of *South Park*. She cut out a casual cigarette habit and began doing cardio even though she hates it. She visited the very active (and only) online moyamoya forum, searching for answers to questions like, "Is it normal for your head to squeak?"

Small things grated on her nerves, like the show *Portlandia* (she didn't get the jokes) and not being able to eat a sandwich (her jaw, still healing from where they



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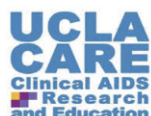
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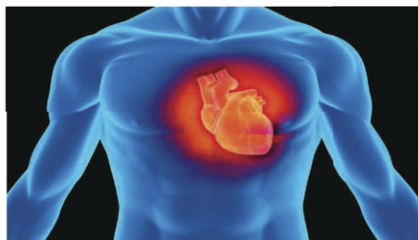
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>> 16 ) had to cut through muscle to get to her skull, wouldn't open wide enough). In the mornings, she could feel her vocabulary swelling, but as the day progressed, exhaustion set in and the pool shrank again. She became a touch agoraphobic and that, combined with the residual stress from the surgeries, made her prone to panic attacks.

Still, she pressed on, clinging to the positives, such as the 95 percent revascularization success rate, or simply being alive.

"You're reminding yourself how grateful you are that you woke up from the surgery. Both surgeries are very long, so you're under anaesthesia for a very long time, which carries great risk. Everything basically carries great risk," she says. "But not getting the surgeries carried a greater risk."

And then, just as she was feeling comfortable in her body again, she was dealt a completely unexpected blow that left her gasping for air: Her boyfriend broke up with her.

"That was the worst I felt during the entire experience. I'd never felt so alone. I [was still] not fully functioning, and this guy I love just left me," she says. The couple had been together only six months before Lee's diagnosis, and she knew it was a heavy

Purp and Ambré swagger through the sparse, cocksure "NO WAY," while "Don't Call" is the opposite, a fluttery, delicate track perfect for Yuna's powdery vocals. It's a more confident, bolder album than Lee has ever released, one made even more impressive considering she began working on it less than two months after brain surgery.

"I'm always very grateful just to be alive, but knowing I wasn't able to make music would have been a very crushing reality. Now I hope to make tons and tons more music, until, you know, something else stops—" She halts, pauses. Tries again. "Unless—until whatever, you know? I guess at this point, the reality is the future doesn't exist. What we have is what we live."

**Tokimonsta wants to dance.** It's nearing midnight, and she's hunched over her turntables at the Wiltern, orchestrating a party. She's a hummingbird: The ruby red bolero wrapped around her black-on-black ensemble billows as her arms flit across the boards, hands twisting knobs, hips ticking to and fro, head nodding in time to Missy Elliott's jittery "Get Ur Freak On." She lets it play a minute before downshifting to a glistening, sexily unbut-

## THE DAY AFTER HER BOYFRIEND BROKE UP WITH HER, SHE MADE HER FIRST POST-SURGERY SONG.

burden, but she thought the ordeal had strengthened their bond.

Lee was devastated, but the breakup shook something loose in her. The day after he cut off the relationship, she found that her musical abilities had come flooding back. Before she knew it, she had made "I Wish I Could," the first song that ended up on *Lune Rouge*.

"If I hadn't made that song I definitely would've thought I was a musical potato. Music is very cathartic and therapeutic, so I just needed to try to make something. Then I did, and it ended up being a good song," she says of the upbeat, piano-driven ballad, on which guest singer Selah Sue emotes such deeply felt lyrics as, "I will feel the sorrow/But the night is full of day/I'ma hold on to life."

She and her boyfriend have reconciled and are now in therapy together, something the stoic Lee says has been hugely beneficial to her. But "it's still a very emotional song. I've heard it a zillion times and it really fills me with a kind of sadness. The good thing is that it's also very uplifting."

In a stunning turn, the breakup dislodged not just her creative block but whatever mental barriers the brain surgeries had erected. "I felt extra excited to be able to make music, so I made a lot," she says. So much so that she plans to put together an EP of the songs that didn't make *Lune Rouge*.

*Lune Rouge* pulses with the power of that pent-up creative streak. "Lune" and "Rouge," the twinned openers, are cinematic and symphonic. Bright strings lend the former a dramatic feel, while the showy latter is populated by curious sounds that instantly engage you. Isaiah Rashad, Joey

toned house vibe. A smile breaks across her face as she grabs the mic.

"It's a really good day to turn up!" she says. "I just wanna dance with you."

She has plenty of reasons to be in a celebratory mood. Her album *Lune Rouge* comes out in a few weeks. The hometown crowd loves her, and she parades out a couple of old friends, including breakout star Anderson .Paak.

And she's alive. Less than two years ago, she was writing her will and booking two brain surgeries. She was confronting the possibility that she might never make music again. She was confronting the possibility that she might never do anything again.

Life after moyamoya is a little different, she admits, but not in the drastic ways you'd expect from brain surgery.

"I have, like, two holes in my head. My head's really bumpy now, so I can't get head massages anymore, which is kind of a bummer," she says. Dehydration can cause her blood pressure to drop, which can cause symptoms of the disease, so "I have to drink at least three liters of water a day." But at her six-month checkup, they told her she could live without restrictions.

"My outlook has changed. I have a new zest for life. It can be taken away," she says. "I realized that I just want to make music that made me happy, because at the end of the day, if I have to say goodbye, I wanna know that the last few things I did on this planet were things that I was like, 'I had fun.'"

Onstage, she hooks the mic back into its stand. She throws her hands up and her head back and starts to dance.

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# SO MUCH TO SAY

Dialogue, the experimental tasting-menu concept from Dave Beran, is a conversation worth having



King crab, popcorn, orchid, Earl Grey tea

PHOTO BY ANNE FISHBEIN

## BY KAREN PALMER

**A** good massage. An overdue trip to my colorist. A Springsteen ticket.

Those are some of the things I've determined are worth \$125 an hour. It's not lost on me that they're all luxuries, and so is eating at a place like Dialogue, the new Santa Monica tasting menu-only restaurant from Chicago transplant and longtime Grant Achatz collaborator Dave Beran of Next and Alinea.

A lot of fuss is made about the cost of fine dining, including the \$250 ticket (before wine) to attend space oddity-meets-experimental theater Vespertine. And rightfully so: The tasting menu is a decadent, and perhaps unnecessary, style of eating. You're at the whims of the chef,

which can feel oppressive for the steep price tag.

When it comes to the 21 dishes I recently ate at Dialogue, though, the experience was worth the trust and the investment, which is not small. The meal alone is \$200, paid for ahead of time through ticketed reservations on Resy. Tack on wine or mixed beverage pairings at \$175 or \$125 a pop, and you've got an approximately three-hour, \$325 to \$375 meal.

Tasting menus aren't typically my jam. The night usually ends one of two ways: I'm wild-eyed with lingering hunger and desperately seeking a slice of pizza on my way home, or completely sapped, my feet blown up like a tick from the excess of fat and salt. I approached the meal at Dialogue with trepidation.

The restaurant itself feels like a discovery, a plush jewel box accessible only with a code, tucked in next to a fish sandwich shop on the second floor of the Gallery Food Hall. Eight of the 18 seats are at the walnut counter of the open kitchen, where Beran and his cooks not only plate dishes but find time to chitchat with guests. Given the Rustic Canyon-esque minimalism —

there's really not much to look at except the kitchen — it almost feels as if you're hanging at a friend's. That is, if your friend casually ferments rhubarb for a year and has won a James Beard Award.

I'VE NEVER SEEN A CHEF WHO TAKES THE CHILDLIKE DELIGHT OF BURNING THINGS AND APPLIES IT TO FINE DINING.

The current menu, which is changing soon, is based on the season. When I heard this, I was initially unimpressed. (Seasonal cooking in California? Groundbreaking.) But Beran is winking at Los Angeles — we don't really have seasons, get it? — as he runs from spring to fall with unexpected through-lines. For example, peanuts show up in one course blended into a silky white peanut butter, and the spirit of the peanut (though not the peanut itself) appears a few dishes later, thanks to a tar-black

sauce of burnt lettuce that perfectly mimics the legume's nuttiness.

Because the dinner is served *kaiseki*-style, with no printed menus, you're in Beran's hands — and in his head — for the entire night. And his head is a good place to be: equal parts earnest, light-hearted and obsessively thoughtful. All you have to do is glance at the guy's Instagram captions to know he's cerebral.

That intelligence doesn't mean his food is in any way tedious. Smoky charred scallions — “for Sean,” as in Charleston chef Brock — are meant to be twirled like pasta, an ingrained way of eating that's instantly elevated by intertwining the scallion “noodles” with astringent caviar and smearing it through a pool of that pearly white peanut butter. The popcorn in a king crab dish, smashed through a China cap strainer, then pureed to create a snowy texture, is a nod to childhood summers spent watching movies with friends, a story Beran may recount for you at the counter. A course called “Everything Is Burnt” is just that, from the soft, blackened chunk of onion terrine to the jammy-sweet syrup Beran made by setting ablaze 100 pounds of onions, blending the liquid with sudachi, and aging it in oak barrels for a year. The plate's piece of hanger steak — chosen intentionally over a more expensive cut for its relative chewiness and its association with backyard barbecues — is the color of coal thanks to a burnt marinade.

In each of those dishes, there are flavor touchpoints that feel familiar: butter and crab or butter and popcorn, steak and onions. Beran's talent, though, lies in creating something new with those touchpoints. And I've personally never seen a chef who takes the childlike delight of burning things and applies it to fine dining. He's obviously razor-sharp with technique, and I found it impossible not to smile when I was handed a plate of purposely burnt food — albeit beautiful and perfect in its presentation — on a plate that itself was burnt by the potter.

Some of the sweeter courses, such as an early palate cleanser in the form of a small tumbler of roasted banana tea that's anointed with browned butter foam, can be jarring, and that's intentional. Beran has admitted that courses are meant alternately to challenge and to reward. While that approach may sound calculating, the more unexpected courses kept my eyes (and palate) from glazing over during several hours of sitting and eating.

I wouldn't want to eat every single course in a larger portion on its own, but the shock of a mid-meal dessert — rectangles of bitter chocolate filled with cherry, served alongside a dish composed of sheets of chewy dried rhubarb dusted with matcha powder and presented on a spiky golden orb — is oddly fitting. With their mostly tart notes, both desserts are a perfect transition to a savory course of *choy sum*, its stalks piped with an aggressive strawberry *nam phrik*.

The beverage pairings can be equally challenging: I don't know if it was necessary to pour blackberry vinegar (23»

### CRITIC'S RATING

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We are fortunate to have a wealth of excellent Jalisco-style goat birria options in the L.A. area, from El Parian to Birrieria de Don Boni and beyond. But L.A. is also home to a few specialists in *birria de res* done in the style of Tijuana, beef birria served in snack form, as tacos, *mulitas* or quesadillas with a Styrofoam cup of consommé on the side. Three of the best versions in town can be found at three trucks in South L.A., which makes this the ideal place for a *birria de res* taco crawl.

### Birrieria Gonzalez

On the corner of Maple and Adams it looks like there's a barbershop with a birria truck out front; in fact, it's a birria truck with a barbershop behind it. There are plenty of people inside Casa de Cortes Gonzalez getting buzz cuts and clean fades, but on a typical sunny day there are about twice as many people sitting on the tarp-covered patio or lined up in front of the truck to get some of Birrieria Gonzalez's fabulous *birria de res*. Tacos come wrapped up in little cones in classic Tijuana style, slick with red broth but sturdy enough to maintain their form, heavily spiced but still deeply beefy. The tacos are good but the consommé is spectacular, rich and layered and completely addictive, with a concentrated intensity of flavor that will linger in the back of your mind for days to come.

### Birria La Tia Juana

It must be something about barbershops: Like Birrieria Gonzalez, La Tia Juana truck posts up outside a spot called Fade Masterz, a narrow shop on a busy section of Main Street just across the 110 from Exposition Park. There's less seating and usually a smaller crowd than at Gonzalez, but the birria is just as worthy. The tacos here have the perfect snap, a hit of bright chili flavor and a rush of liquid beef when you bite into the generous lump of birria in each double-stacked tortilla. The *mulitas* are extravagant, loaded with birria and



PHOTO BY BEN MESIROW

Tacos and a *mulita* at Teddy's Red Tacos

then overstuffed with cheese, stacking rich on top of rich, cut with a hit of salsa and a spritz of lime. You can't cure Friday's bad decisions on Saturday morning, but these *mulitas* can provide some palliative care. 4027 S Main St., Historic South-Central; (213) 985-9778, @birria\_la\_tijuana.

### Teddy's Red Tacos

Teddy's Red Tacos sets up its operation by the defunct train tracks along Slauson, a handful of picnic tables under a big white pop-up tent next to the truck. A single large speaker connected to someone's iPhone pumps out ballads at top volume, punctuated by the occasional ping of an incoming text message. Teddy's standard tacos are a little different from its compatriots', with tortillas dipped in consommé and then fried, creating a crispy contrast with the tender birria and staining them bright red. The effect is pretty excellent, almost like the similarly dipped-then-fried *pambazo*, or Philippe's French dip. 731 Slauson Ave., South Park; (323) 495-9654, @teddysredtacos. —Ben Mesirow

## HISTORIC RESTAURANTS

### Formosa Cafe Will Use a National Trust Preservation Grant to Reopen

A \$150,000 grant has been awarded to 1933 Group, a hospitality company with a number of bars around L.A., to rehabilitate West Hollywood's iconic Formosa Cafe.

The restaurant, which closed at the end of 2016, was opened in 1925 next to some of L.A.'s earliest movie studio lots, and immediately attracted a movie star clientele. And some mobsters, too.

The Formosa lost some of its luster in its later years but was still beloved by nostalgics (and played itself in the 1997 film *L.A. Confidential*).

A remodel of Formosa Cafe was attempted in 2015, but fans of the restaurant were so pissed off by it that the project was aborted and the interiors were, as much as possible, returned to their original state.

The grant comes from an initiative from the National Trust, American Express, National Geographic and Main Street America called “Partners in Preservation: Main Streets.”

The Los Angeles Conservancy nominated Formosa Cafe, and 1933 Group will use the money to refurbish the restaurant — back to its original glory, of course. The owners anticipate reopening next year.

Partners in Preservation awarded \$1.5 million in grants this year to 11 sites around the United States. —Katherine Spiers

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» 21) into my sparkling wine to create a "rosé," but it was fun nonetheless. For a relatively classic course of black cod that straddles sensibilities both French (beurre blanc) and Japanese (the beurre blanc is spiked with *yuzu kosho*), you're presented with a choice of a red or a white: Jolie-Laide's Russian River Valley Trousseau Gris 2015 or the Finca Parera Penedès Fins Als Kullons 2016. The idea is that whichever one you pick is the right choice, with the white's astringency cutting through the course's butter and the red picking up the *yuzu kosho* notes. I was hoping that the mixed-beverage pairing, which is described on the website as offering tea, beer, cocktails and sake, would be more boundary-pushing in offering different types of drinks. Save for one plum sake, my mixed pairing was entirely wine, so it didn't feel all that different from my dining companion's reserve pairing. Perhaps more unusual drinks are in the works for future menus.

A couple of presentation flourishes are Achatzian in nature but less grandiose: A homemade rosemary, thyme and bay leaf candle adds extra aroma to liquid-bursting French onion soup balls served on a candelabra, and the final bite of the evening is a sweet, chewy, sugar-dusted carrot held by a black ceramic rabbit. I couldn't help but smile when I noticed my rabbit had a dusting on its nose, which might suggest he was having a better time than anyone.

Touches such as that are part of the reason why I enjoyed Dialogue: While this is clearly a Serious Restaurant (Beran has been making syrups and vinegars for the place for over half a year now — you can view them on the shelves above the tables), Dialogue isn't above sending out a bunny who's done a sugar bump. And although you're obviously paying someone royally to treat you well, the staff is friendly without overstepping bounds. Servers will leave you alone if you're deep in conversation but are happy to answer questions when you want to engage.

I do wish we'd had more interaction with Beran during the meal: Because we were seated at the far end of the counter, we only chatted with him after we'd finished our carrots. I don't mean that as a fan girl who didn't get to make eye contact from her front-row seat. It's just that Beran has a lot to say, and I think that right now — and moving forward — this conversation of his is going to be a very interesting one for L.A. diners.

**DIALOGUE** | 1315 Third Street Promenade, Santa Monica | [dialoguerestaurant.com](http://dialoguerestaurant.com) | Tue.-Sun., ticketed seatings from 5:30 to 9:15 p.m. \$180-\$210 per person for dinner; \$175 reserve wine pairing, \$125 mixed-beverage pairing | Prepaid reservations only

Following the September departure of restaurant critic Beshia Rodell, L.A. Weekly will be publishing reviews in the coming weeks from a number of voices. Karen Palmer is the former editorial director of Tasting Table; you should read her recent piece "In the age of the influencer, do restaurant critics still matter?"

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**Firestone Walker Brewing Company's Propagator pilot R&D brewhouse in Venice is the place for beer drinkers and locals to dine, hang out and sip on Firestone Walker's latest creations.**

The Propagator is the third location from Firestone Walker – which was created by brother-in-laws, David Walker (aka the Lion on the logo) and Adam Firestone (aka the Bear) – and it's a unique experience from start to finish. Unlike the two other locations (the main brewery in Paso Robles and the Barrelworks wild ales facility in Buellton), The Propagator is a state-of-the-art small scale Kaspar Schulz brewhouse that operates as a hub of experimentation, setting the pace for what is next from Firestone Walker. Most recently, it has been the driver behind the brewery's new Leo v. Ursus chronology of beers, as well as the Generation 1 IPA. In addition to Firestone Walker favorites, The Propagator offers one-off beers, and experimental beers that may or may not make it into the brand's official lineup. The adjoining restaurant and bar feature pizzas (we'd try the Rustica Carne complete with Italian sausage, brisket, pepperoni and mozzarella), burgers,



tacos (like the Drunken Cauliflower) and of course desserts (like a seasonal berry cheesecake). Even better – at least in our opinion – is that The Propagator has a Beer Brunch that is to die for. It features two signature beers, as well as coffee and OJ, and lots of delicious brunch food options. Deep fired bacon PB&J anyone? Yes, it's a real thing, and you need it in your life. What are you waiting for? The Propagator is calling and you should listen... drink up!



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Shepard Fairey at work

PHOTO BY JON FURLONG / COURTESY OBEY GIANT ART

Culture //

# WHAT COMES AFTER “HOPE”

Shepard Fairey’s biggest-ever L.A. exhibit, “Damaged,” is the renowned street artist’s response to Trump’s America

BY ETHAN VARIAN

Shepard Fairey’s iconic “Hope” poster remains one of the most enduring symbols of Barack Obama’s historic first presidential campaign. Contrast the piece with the “Make America Great Again” hats and mean-spirited Pepe the Frog memes from the 2016 election, however, and it serves as a stark reminder of just how unhinged so much of our political discourse has become.

Fairey, previously one of the art world’s most vocal activists, stayed relatively quiet during last year’s election season. Now he’s ready to voice his opposition to Donald Trump’s vision for America.

Starting Nov. 11, Fairey will hold his largest ever L.A. solo exhibit at a warehouse downtown. The show, a collaboration with Detroit-based gallery Library Street Collective, addresses today’s pressing social and political issues through a series of new paintings, collages, sculptures and installations in addition to various “DIY tools of empowerment,” such as graffiti stencils and a running printing press.

Fairey says one of the exhibition’s primary goals is to combat the creeping urge to retreat from the outside world and into our respective Instagram feeds.

“Apathy is a really big problem, and choosing sides via social media is not enough,” Fairey says. “You actually need to vote and be rigorous about understanding the deeper dynamics of issues that matter to you. And if you’re a compassionate

person like I am, [issues that] matter to people who might be more vulnerable than you are.”

The exhibit, which he’s titled “Damaged,” takes its name from Black Flag’s 1981 hardcore classic, a nod to Fairey’s roots in punk rock and skateboarding. Inspired by the DIY aesthetic of artists such as Raymond Pettibon, who created the album art for Black Flag’s early work, Fairey designed the “Andre the Giant Has a Posse” sticker campaign while a student at the Rhode Island School of Design in 1989. The rogue operation quickly evolved into the now ubiquitous, revolutionary-themed “Obey Giant” project and made Fairey one of the most prominent street artists on the planet.

“Shepard’s great genius is distribution,” says veteran California poster artist Robbie Conal, whom Fairey credits as an influence. “He’s like Sherwin-Williams paint: He covers the earth.”

Conal collaborated with Fairey and fellow street artist Mear One on a series of satirical anti-war posters depicting President George W. Bush before the 2004 election. Conal says he’s been impressed with Fairey’s ability to penetrate the dialogue of popular culture. “He’s very earnest and sincere about what he does,” Conal says. “I try to get him to have a sense of humor about it and, every once in a while, it succeeds.”

In his new work, Fairey has largely refrained from portraying Trump because doing so risks furthering the president’s “image repetition and celebrity,” which the artist says is one of Trump’s primary goals. “This isn’t an anti-Trump show,” he says. “This is a show about issues that I’ve cared

about for years that are even more critical under Trump.”

Like his well-received “We the People” poster campaign, which Fairey debuted on Inauguration Day earlier this year, many of the pieces featured in “Damaged” are meant to be empowering portrayals of marginalized people. The new posters incorporate striking portrait photography to highlight issues ranging from the demoni-

“THIS ISN’T AN ANTI-TRUMP SHOW. THIS IS A SHOW ABOUT ISSUES THAT I’VE CARED ABOUT FOR YEARS THAT ARE EVEN MORE CRITICAL UNDER TRUMP.”

—SHEPARD FAIREY

zation of immigrants to the high incarceration rate among African-Americans.

In the past, Fairey has run into trouble when incorporating existing images or photographs into his art. He famously sued the Associated Press in 2009 after the news organization accused him of copyright infringement for using one of its photographs of Obama as the basis for the “Hope” poster. While Fairey maintained that using the photograph was legally protected as “fair use,” he ultimately settled

the dispute after admitting to misleading the court about which photo he had used.

“Damaged” comprises both original and transformative works that pull from a variety of references and photo-licensing sites, as well as direct collaborations with photographers. Fairey had been criticized in the past for failing to properly acknowledge the source of certain images associated with social movements, particularly those created by people of color. As an artist of privilege, his critics argued, Fairey stripped these images — such as a photograph of Black Panther leader Angela Davis — of their cultural context and often reduced them to commercial products. (In addition to selling prints of his posters, Fairey also founded the popular Obey clothing line.)

Fairey argues that he is not only immersed in the issues on which he chooses to comment but that he regularly works alongside grassroots organizations such as Black Lives Matter and raises money for social justice causes from the sale of his prints.

“I still get the ‘We don’t need a white savior’ thing now and then, but I look at all of that as very counterproductive,” Fairey says. “I don’t need to be the same color as someone else to identify with their humanity.”

Arlene Mejorado, an L.A.-based Chicana photographer who collaborated with Fairey for the “We the People” series, says she was familiar with the criticism and appreciated the way Fairey and his team reached out to her and other photographers of color to work on the campaign.

“I was worried that because of the type of photographer and artist I am, that something about [the series] wasn’t going to sit right with people in my own community,” Mejorado says. “But I got a lot of good feedback from people who were inspired by it.”

The poster featuring Mejorado’s photograph, titled “Defend Dignity,” depicts a Chicana educator and community organizer in Texas named Maribel Valdez Gonzalez. Mejorado says using an everyday citizen working for social justice as a subject for the piece sent an empowering message. “The campaign was very solution-based,” she says. “It represented hope and positivity.”

The poster, along with the rest of the “We the People” series, will be on display in “Damaged.”

At a time when political rhetoric seems to reach a new level of bombast by the day, Fairey says he wants to address injustice on a direct, human level. “At this point in my career I’m not going for just shock value,” he says. “If there’s something [in my work] that’s antagonistic, then there’s a strong justification in my mind for it.”

While the revolutionary propagandist imagery Fairey is known for remains present in “Damaged,” many of the new pieces strike an aspirational tone reminiscent of 2008’s “Hope” campaign. Fairey says he wants the work to encourage people to take an active role in the political process.

“Everything I do, my aspiration is to get people to think about things that they might not normally [think about] and then adjust their behavior,” Fairey says. “All I can do is try.”

Stage //

# LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Danny Glover plays a husband trying to salvage his nearly four-decade marriage in *Yohen*

BY DEBORAH KLUGMAN

**S**et in 1986, Philip Kan Gotanda's *Yohen* depicts the unraveling of a 37-year marriage. Although it tumbles off-track in its final third, the play to that point is an astute portrayal of the dynamics of a failed intimacy. Directed by Ben Guillory, in a co-production by East West Players and the Robey Theatre Company, the production gravitates around Glover's affecting performance as a bewildered husband trying desperately to please the woman he loves.

African-American James (Danny Glover, reprising his role from a production in 1999) and Japanese-born Sumi (June Angela) met years earlier when he was a young soldier stationed abroad; she, atypically, was a young divorcee once again living with her family. Now in their 60s, the pair have other differences besides race and height (he towers over her) — namely culture and class, and the propensities commonly attached to

them. She comes from a wealthy family and grew up accustomed to nice things and decorous manners. He comes from working-class Gardena and was a boxer with championship aspirations.

THE PRODUCTION GRAVITATES AROUND GLOVER'S AFFECTING PERFORMANCE AS A BEWILDERED HUSBAND TRYING DESPERATELY TO PLEASE THE WOMAN HE LOVES.

Sumi had been attracted to this big strong American soldier, and besides, she had wanted to get away from home, where the stigma of her divorce still enveloped her. In America she had problems adjust-

ing, but the marriage had survived, relatively happily. But in the last few years, she's grown restless and unhappy. She wants to spend her time differently — study pottery, for example — and she wants James to do other things also. But he is set in his ways, so in a desperate effort to get him to change, she asks him to leave their home.

All this takes place prior to the play's opening but emerges in the fluid give-and-take of the dialogue. Gotanda's shaping of these characters and the male-female dichotomy that serves as the play's axis are sensitively rendered. The night I attended Glover was spot on as the frustrated and vulnerable James, while Angela, in a performance with somewhat less texture, nonetheless came through as credible and sympathetic in depicting her character's torn priorities.

Unfortunately, what starts out as an organic narrative after a while begins to feel contrived. James' choices later on seem out of line with his character, while Gotanda's introduction into the narrative of hitherto unrevealed secrets with racist



June Angela and Danny Glover

PHOTO BY MICHAEL LAMONT

implications seems forced; it's hard to believe that these two people could be so long together and not have shared these sentiments with each other.

Christopher Scott Murillo's set aptly evokes the couple's tasteful middle-class home, while Michael Ricks' lighting and Corinne Carillo's sound add to the subdued poignancy.

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# HOLLYWOOD SHOULD FIRE MEL GIBSON

What is the toxic actor-director doing in a family holiday film?

BY APRIL WOLFE

Why is Mel Gibson in the holiday family comedy *Daddy's Home 2*? When Gibson's relentlessly bloody, morally incoherent 2016 film *Hacksaw Ridge* inexplicably became a critical darling, I watched in horror at the love and attention lavished on the director. In what world were we living where, when Gibson's name appeared in the public record, it didn't automatically come with an asterisk? Nick Kroll and John Mulaney joked in their 2017 Spirit Awards monologue, "People wondered, 'How long would it take Hollywood to forgive someone for anti-Semitic, racist hate speech?' The answer? Eight years." Here's who *Daddy's Home 2* invites families to laugh along with. In 2006, as you'll recall, Gibson had been arrested for a DUI, where he verbally berated the officers, told them he owned Malibu and would "fuck" them, called the female cop "sugar tits" and espoused his belief that Jews have ruined the world. If this were an isolated incident, it'd be difficult enough to come back, but at least Gibson would be able to blame his outbursts on alcohol, as so many other toxic men have and continue to do.

In 2011, Peter Biskind found a large handful of industry people willing to go on the record to defend Gibson for his *Vanity Fair* article "The Rude Warrior." Some sources speculated the incident in Malibu was prompted by Gibson's wife leaving him, that it wasn't actually hate speech but instead a way to provoke the police into shooting him and ending his life. Sure, OK. Maybe I can buy that.

But Biskind counters that theory by reporting other stories of Gibson's warped and hateful views, such as Winona Ryder's encounter, where Gibson called Ryder an "oven dodger," a hideous reference to the Holocaust — the kind of remark we now expect from alt-right white supremacists. Gibson also confessed on a recording to punching a girlfriend, Oksana Grigorieva, knocking out her two front teeth while she was holding their child. He also said on that tape that for

dressing provocatively she deserved to get raped by a "pack of n—s."

There is anger, and there is alcoholism, both of which a person can work through with hard, ongoing effort. And then there is a complete and total lack of respect for other humans who aren't your high-powered friends, which is much more difficult to overcome. So I return to my original

## CASTING MEL GIBSON IN STUDIO FILMS ALLOWS HIM TO SHRUG OFF HIS PAST OFFENSES.

question: Why is Mel Gibson in *Daddy's Home 2*?

Based on the trailers, Gibson plays Mark Wahlberg's character's father, Kurt, a hard-nosed tough guy who's got a story about dead hookers ready to go when he needs some attention from his grandchildren — "Hey, kids, I got a good one for ya. Two dead hookers wash up on the shore ..." It's



Guess who really shouldn't be one of the guys: Mel Gibson, left, appears in *Daddy's Home 2* with Mark Wahlberg, Will Ferrell and John Lithgow.

symptomatic of Hollywood's treatment of women that the filmmakers still find the death of sex workers funny. From what little we're given of Kurt in the trailers, Gibson seems to be playing a caricature of his own darker side, a tiresomely inappropriate, unapologetic button-pusher.

Perhaps director Sean Anders and his producers find that funny somehow, in an ironical way, something like how convicted rapist Mike Tyson got laughs for parodying himself in *The Hangover*. But every time I walk past the benches and billboards for *Daddy's Home 2* in my neighborhood, I literally want to spit on Gibson's face. Casting him in studio films, especially a cheery comedy, invites him to shrug off his past offenses, to charm audiences into accepting him, to show us with a few self-referential laugh lines and a big wink for the camera — "Don't worry, it's all a big joke — I'm not really an asshole!"

The *Daddy's Home* movies pit the weak dad against the badass dad, so the two can learn from one another, but what ultra-masculine traits of Kurt's will the filmmakers exemplify as desirable? Will he

punch someone? Will he sexually harass a woman? And will the writers be compelled to craft for his character a happy, redemptive ending, one that invites us to forgive Gibson all his sins? Even if he stays the crude prick in the end, Gibson is in on the joke, which somehow seems as though it's supposed to reassure us that he knows he's a terrible person, and that self-awareness is a kind of redemption in itself.

It might be time for Gibson to politely leave the screen. That might seem a harsh fate for a talented man who's spent his life working at his craft, but that's exactly what numerous women and minorities have had to do throughout all of time, because of toxic men like Gibson. Why doesn't Gibson have to leave? Because men like Anders would love to give him a job and write those dead-hookers lines for him, a life of shame turned into one giant apology tour. But hell, maybe Gibson is actually a great match for *Daddy's Home 2*, where the women in the cast will get a couple of jokes here and there as long as they look hot. Who wants to take a bet that Kurt calls a woman "sugar tits"?

## FRANCES MCDORMAND RULES, BUT MARTIN MCDONOUGH'S *THREE BILLBOARDS* ASKS US TO FORGIVE RACIST COPS

At first, the prospect of Martin McDonagh (*In Bruges*, *Seven Psychopaths*) skewering some racist Missouri cops delighted me. Frances McDormand as Mildred, a grieving mother who taunts the local police for not solving her daughter's rape and murder, is imperfect rage personified, a lady vengeance for the ages. But as McDonagh's story turns toward the redemption of one very bad cop, Jason Dixon (Sam Rockwell), I found the Irishman McDonagh out of his league in handling uniquely American ills. McDonagh painstakingly humanizes a character whom we find has unapologetically tortured a black man in police custody. And then *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* seems to ask audiences to forgive and forget wrongs like police violence, domestic abuse and sexual assault without demonstrating a full understanding of the centuries-long toll these crimes have taken on victims in real life.

Mildred pays the twerpy little ad man of Ebbing, Red Welby (Caleb Landry Jones), to raise up three successive billboards reading, "Raped while dying," "And still no arrests?" "How come, Chief Willoughby?" Rac-

ist, incompetent cop Dixon flips a lid over this, threatening Red. Dixon is protective of the reputation of his boss Chief Willoughby (Woody Harrelson), enough to commit battery against Red. But as we quickly find out from the gossip of nearly every character in Ebbing, Dixon would rather be arresting and torturing black people.

And yet despite the gripes I have with McDonagh's handling of urgently of-the-moment storylines and archetypes, he has also created a character in Mildred who has inspired me to buy maroon coveralls. It is, as with all McDonagh projects, his wicked dialogue that wins my affection, and Mildred's is some of the grouchiest, sharpest I've heard. —April Wolfe

**THREE BILLBOARDS OUTSIDE EBBING, MISSOURI** | Written and directed by Martin McDonagh | Fox Searchlight | Landmark, ArcLight Hollywood



Frances McDormand in *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*

PHOTO BY MERRICK MORTON/COURTESY 20TH CENTURY FOX

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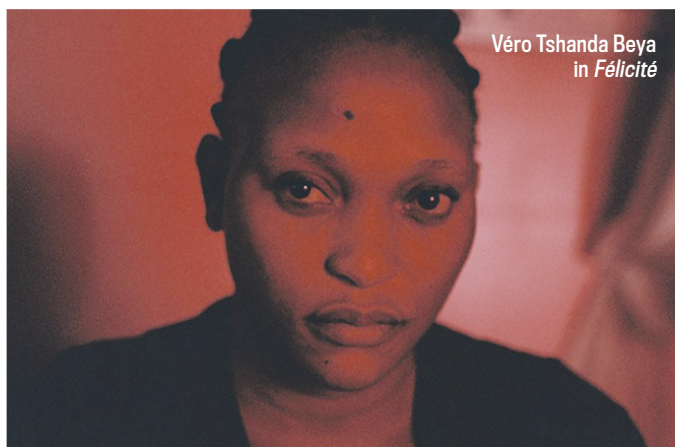
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Véro Tshanda Beya  
in *Félicité*

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## Film //

# A FURIOUS WOMAN

*FÉLICITÉ* IS BOTH A ROUSING AFRICAN MUSICAL AND A SCARIFYING PORTRAIT OF ONE WOMAN'S INDOMITABILITY

BY ALAN SCHERSTUHL

**V**éro Tshanda Beya, the Congolese singer turned actress making her screen debut in Alain Gomis' tough-minded life-in-Kinshasa character study *Félicité*, can pierce your heart with her croon, rouse your soul with her shout, move you with her mien of cussed indomitability, cut you with her look of wary, weary appraisal. As *Félicité*, this powerhouse presence at first gets to dazzle us, singing with storied local trance-boogie "Congotronic" combo The Kasai Allstars. But the show is in a dive without a stage, and the fact that the bills that a bewitched customer rubs on *Félicité's* head as a sort of tip say "500" on them speaks more to the troubled Congolese economy than to our heroine making a serious payday.

Soon, we see her at the apartment this single mom shares

with her teen son Samo (Gaetan Claudia), bickering with handyman Tabu (Papi Mpaka) about how many hundreds of thousands of local francs it will cost to fix her refrigerator's fan. Not long after, Samo gets hurt in a motorbike accident, and *Félicité* must raise the money to save his life.

## A WOMAN WITH LITTLE POWER STILL FINDS WAYS TO EXERT HER WILL.

Much of the first half of the film finds this resolute woman shoving her way into places she's not wanted, often to ask for money. Samo's father browbeats her as if he's some Greek chorus whose job is to make the themes explicit: "The strong woman," he sneers,

"look at you now!" Another loved one says he'd donate to a funeral but not to surgery for a kid who's not likely to recover.

The scenes that follow will have anyone who suffers from any vestige of social anxiety fighting not to cover their eyes: Desperate, *Félicité* barges into the gated homes of Kinshasa's wealthy citizens, asking for money while the help gets charged with dragging her away. One of these scenes turns disturbingly violent, and as the film presses on, over two often despairing hours, even *Félicité's* occasional musical performances stop offering relief. That voice of hers, a honeyed rasp, eventually seems, for a sequence, to lose its power.

But the film — a little too long, a little too relentless, a little too blunt — is about a woman with little power still finding ways to exert her will upon the world. No matter how bad things get for her, *Félicité's* face is that of someone who will not back down, even if she must turn to thievery.

Gomis' handheld cameras work to keep up with the actors, who seem to move with rare freedom, but he also stages some exquisite and complex flourishes: a scene of *Félicité* fading in and out of the moment as she's surrounded with friends and family offering their condolences, and the many passages where she wanders alone through some woods at night, her world a haze of inky blue. *Félicité* also sings in a choir that is rehearsing soothing, solemn, spectral Arvo Part pieces, the kind that sound like what God would hear when listening for the ocean in a seashell. These moody interludes suggest that *Félicité* has methods for finding peace even as her life has gone to chaos, and the best news I can give you is that she eventually finds someone else to share them.

**FÉLICITÉ** | Directed and written by Alain Gomis | Strand Releasing Royal, Playhouse

## OPENING THIS WEEK

**BILL NYE: SCIENCE GUY** After making a name for himself as a goofy TV scientist loved by schoolkids, can Bill Nye inspire a grown-up audience? Wide-reaching documentary *Bill Nye: Science Guy* tests this hypothesis as Nye navigates life after the *Science Guy* TV series. Directors David Alvarado and Jason Sussberg have tapped into something deeper than vanilla hagiography. Neil deGrasse Tyson and Ann Druyan, along with Nye's old television show cohorts, James McKenna and Erren Gottlieb, offer insights into the man behind the camera — but this isn't just a bunch of talking heads. The filmmakers aren't afraid to show Nye's less bubbly

side, including his early thirst for fame that led to a DOA pre-*Science Guy* pilot, and the trust issues Nye has developed after decades in the limelight. The doc follows Nye as he battles climate change and evolution deniers, works on a solar sail and relives memories at his childhood home. Nye's passion for learning is as evident as his skepticism when he steps onto the infamous re-creation of Noah's ark built by the creationist Ken Ham. Ham's an easy nemesis, but Nye is inspiring in his drive to broaden the perspectives of even those who are relentlessly anti-science. In an intimate moment, a researcher talks to Nye about fame, asking about why he sacrificed starting a family in order to work. For a moment, Nye continues performing

for her and for the camera before quietly reflecting: He chose this life. It's a small but human moment that gives even more gravity to an imperfect man who has dedicated his life to making the world better. (Tatiana Craine)

**FRANK SERPICO** "If I get angry enough, I'll live," Frank Serpico, the NYPD undercover cop and outspoken opponent of police corruption, said to himself as he lay dying after a botched 1971 drug deal bust-up. Made legendary by Al Pacino's portrayal in Sidney Lumet's 1973 film *Serpico*, he still believes his near-fatal shooting was set up by bribe-taking superiors and colleagues who openly despised him. But Antonino D'Ambrosio's new documentary, *Frank Serpico*, though sprawling and seething,

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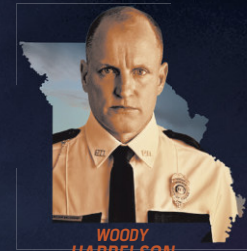


**"A TERRIFIC, PROFANE  
FIREWORK DISPLAY  
OF A FILM."**

*theguardian*



FRANCES  
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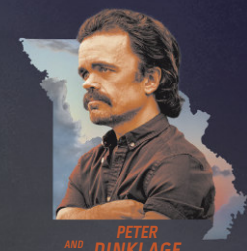
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YOUR WEEKLY MOVIE TO-DO LIST

**Sean Baker With a Double Feature**

**Friday, Nov. 10**

The Norton Simon Museum concludes its film series **Meeting Death: Conversations With Mortality** with Ingmar Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1957). This medieval meditation on mortality is free with museum admission and pairs nicely with current exhibition "R.I.P.: On Art and Mourning." Norton Simon Museum, 411 W. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena; Fri., Nov. 10, 5:30 p.m.; free with museum admission. (626) 449-6480, nortonsimon.org.

**Sunday, Nov. 12**

Sean Baker's speedy ascent to the top rank of independent auteurs is evidenced by his two latest features, neatly assembled on a double bill at the Aero. *The Florida Project* encourages the viewer to see through the eyes of a 6-year-old girl (Brooklynn Prince) during a languid summer in the American Southeast. *Tangerine*, famously shot on an Apple iPhone, chronicles the efforts of a transgender sex worker (Kitana Kiki Rodriguez) to locate her cheating pimp. Each is an example of a newly emerging brand of cinematic humanism in an increasingly technocentric age. Baker will discuss his work between films. Aero Theatre, 1328 Montana Ave., Santa Monica; Sun., Nov. 12, 7:30 p.m.; \$12. (323) 466-3456, americancinemathequecalendar.com.

**Tuesday, Nov. 14**

LACMA's Tuesday Matinees shows *The Girl From Mexico*, the first in the popular "Mexican Spitfire" series starring Lupe Velez. A popular leading lady at a time when Latina roles were scarce, Velez returned to Mexico in 1944 to star in *Nana*, based on the Zola novel. Less than a year later she passed into legend as one of Tinseltown's most notorious suicides. LACMA, 5905 Wilshire Blvd., Mid-Wilshire; Tue., Nov. 14, 1 p.m.; \$4. (323) 857-6000, lacma.org.



*The Long Goodbye.*  
See Thursday.

COURTESY UNITED ARTISTS

**Thursday, Nov. 16**

*The Long Goodbye*, Robert Altman's hip Chandler update, contains some of the best L.A. location work of the 1970s, but it's the forlorn tone that sticks with you. Elliott Gould saunters through the picture as Philip Marlowe, a private eye with a knight's heart. His mounting anguish at the corruption around him finally lets loose in a controversial ending that cynically subverts the Chandler ethos. Laemmle screens the film as part of its **Throwback Thursday** series co-presented by Eat/See/Hear. *Laemmle NoHo*, 5420 Lankershim Blvd., North Hollywood; Thu., Nov. 16, 7:30 p.m.; \$12. (310) 478-3836, laemmle.com.

The American Cinematheque's annual celebration of Italian cinema launches with *A Ciambra*, Italy's official Oscar submission. Written and directed by Jonas Carpignano and executive produced by Martin Scorsese, this slice-of-life story of a street-tough teenager is a direct descendant of Italian neorealism, the post-WWII genre that invented a new movie language. A discussion with Carpignano will follow the screening. *Egyptian Theatre*, 6712 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood; Thu., Nov. 16, 6:30 p.m.; free through AFI Fest. (323) 466-3456, americancinemathequecalendar.com. —Nathaniel Bell

about their families' experience during the long-ago massacres, the 100-year diaspora that followed, and the terrible success of Turkey's efforts to pretend it all never happened. (Alan Scherstuhl)

**MAYHEM** If *The Belko Experiment* didn't sate your appetite for seeing corporate drones murder and mutilate each other, here comes *Mayhem*, with a wild mix of white-collar beatdowns and bloodshed that will satisfy all the hard-working, nine-to-fivers who've always wanted to put hands on their most dickish bosses/co-workers. Steven Yeun — the beloved Glenn from *The Walking Dead* — stars as a ladder-climbing exec at a consulting law firm who gets set up as the fall guy when the company louses up an account. Before he gets escorted out by security, a virus that turns people — including him — into murderous, libidinous psychos hits the office. The building gets quarantined and a neutralizer pumped through the vents to calm these poor souls down, but it will take a few hours, and Yeun's rabidly disgruntled employee has a limited amount of time to reach the higher-ups so he can get his job back — or die trying. As that synopsis suggests, a lot of insane shit goes down. Indeed, director Joe Lynch and screenwriter Matias Caruso pile on the cubicle-ensconced carnage, often making that top priority above having the bulky, obviously satirical plot make any goddamn sense. But I'm sure the movie was made for Yeun (who also serves as executive producer) to finally have a chance to prove he has leading-man

chops — and Hollywood should start giving him movie-star, action-hero gigs, like, yesterday. (Craig D. Lindsey)

**NO GREATER LOVE** The recently released studio drama *Thank You for Your Service* took audiences on a dreary-yet-dedicated journey with U.S. soldiers struggling to get back to living after having their psyches rocked in Iraq. But documentary *No Greater Love* presents a more authentic look at the lives of 21st-century war veterans, giving actual survivors a chance to talk about their experiences both during and after their deployments. *Love* (the title comes from the brotherly, John 15:13 quote) is the work of director Justin Roberts, who served as an Army chaplain with the "No Slack" battalion of the 101st Airborne Division as it went into Afghanistan. Roberts didn't have a gun but he did have a camera, capturing all the insane moments these boys faced. As he rounds up most of the vets he served with and records their testimonials, he gets some graphic, tear-soaked accounts of how soldiers risked life and limb to defeat the bad guys, even returning to action not completely recuperated from their previous war wounds. Maybe it's me, since I've been watching a lot of war movies lately (especially movies about the Iraq War), but *Love* reminded me what I already knew: War is a jarring, intense experience that's equal parts traumatizing and adrenaline-pumping. It shakes a soldier to the point where there's no way that person could possibly go back to civilian life as they once

were. But I'm thankful *No Greater Love* is around to make people realize how much war heroes need our love, help and support once they come back home. Just telling them "thank you for your service" ain't gonna cut it. (Craig D. Lindsey)

**THE PRICE** Has there ever been a movie about Wall Street whose story doesn't hinge on insider trading? The temptation for an easy score is one of a handful of shopworn plot elements in Anthony Onah's debut feature, *The Price*, yet the interaction of the film's many tensions nonetheless brings it to complex life. Seyi (*The Maze Runner*'s Aml Ameen), a young Nigerian-American stock analyst, has a chameleon's gift for blending in, bantering with the financial bros but adopting a Nigerian accent as he drops off a home-cooked meal for the building's security officer, an immigrant like his parents. Off the clock, Seyi is pulled between nightlife (basically a networking chore) and helping care for his ailing father, whose recent stroke was brought on by an illness his family doesn't talk about. And for once he's met a girl he's into, a med student (Lucy Griffiths) who disrupts his careful balancing act. Onah puts Seyi in the center of a sharply drawn world, from the fearful racism he encounters on the streets to his struggles to please and/or ignore his mom (the excellent Michael Hyatt). Ameen holds that world together with his grounded presence, a driven young man struggling to calibrate his moral compass in the face of intense pressure. (Rob Staeger)

**THUMPER** Movies set in the world of undercover law enforcement are understandably plentiful, as they so reliably offer the thrill of possible discovery and subsequent extermination by criminal elements. What haven't been as prevalent are those featuring female protagonists (the various *Miss Congeniality* films notwithstanding). That's where Jordan Ross' economical *Thumper* comes in, flipping the protagonist's gender as well as the usual romantic dynamic. There's a new student at the local high school, and she of the frosted tips has certainly caught the eye of Beaver (Daniel Webber). Kat (Eliza Taylor) is initially standoffish but warms to the young man after he presents an opportunity to enter the inner circle of Wyatt (Pablo Schreiber), an Iraq vet and local heroin supplier. Sure enough, before you can say "narc," Kat's flimsy narrative begins to unravel, putting both her and the hapless Beaver in peril. Writer-director Ross' résumé is heavy on reality shows, and his handheld approach contributes to *Thumper*'s gritty aesthetic. The film also is buoyed by Schreiber's intensity (the ease at which Wyatt turns from doting father to potential murderer is chilling). Wyatt is surprisingly layered, pushed to his chosen career beyond the usual "get rich or die tryin'" motivation. Lena Headey gets in on the action as a police handler who's increasingly impatient with Kat's reluctance to bring any of the teens to justice. And while Kat does the minimum

to keep us engaged, Beaver provides the story's moral focus. Not yet hardened by the streets, and hustling only to get his special-needs little brother out of their abusive home, Beaver is who we sympathize with, and about whom we fear the worst. (Pete Vonder Haar)

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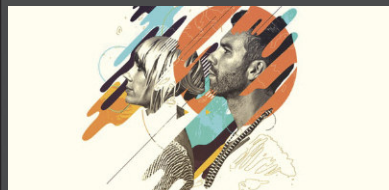
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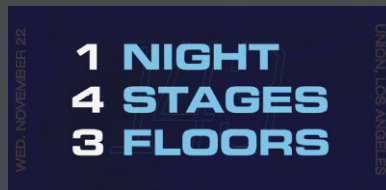
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Pity Party (Girls Club)  
in action

PHOTO BY OSCAR MORENO

## Music //

# BACKYARD HEROES

After cutting their teeth in the Inland Empire's DIY party scene, Pity Party (Girls Club) are ready to make the leap to playing festivals

BY JUAN GUTIERREZ

**B**elow the radar of L.A.'s bustling music industry, a DIY backyard scene in the Inland Empire has thrived for years. "It was a really big scene," says Julian Amparo, guitarist and lead singer for Pity Party (Girls Club), who got their start as a backyard band in the I.E. and graduate this weekend to performing at the Tropicália Festival in Long Beach, alongside such bigger local and international names as Chicano Batman and Café Tacvba.

When they started out, based in Rancho Cucamonga, Pity Party were too young to get booked into a proper music venue (all the members are still under 21), so they took their raucous yet melancholy punk/emo songs about suicide, drinking and breakups to the backyards, outside the law or parental supervision. Out in the desert outskirts of nowhere, they found everything they needed to establish themselves as a band — including a devoted group of friends and fans nicknamed the Girls Club, who came to so many shows that the band eventually added Girls Club to their official name and made it the title of their debut cas-

sette, which came out on Lolipop Records in December 2015.

Pity Party (Girls Club) haven't blazed a trail out of the I.E. alone. Several other bands from the region join them at Tropicália, including The High Curbs (from Chino), Red Pears (from El Monte) and Beach Bums (originally from the I.E. but now based in L.A.).

Pity Party (Girls Club) are excited to share the stage with so many of their fellow backyard bands, as well as Tropicália's eclectic headliners. "It's cool because the Tigres del Norte are there," says Jose "Juice" Guzman, the drummer. "My dad has a bunch of their CDs out there," he adds, gesturing toward the living room of his father's South L.A. home, where the band have gathered for this interview.

"My dad is definitely excited," Amparo says. "All my friends are still in denial."

This has been a big year for Pity Party, and not just because of Tropicália. They are preparing to tour the East Coast for the first time and putting the finishing touches on their latest record and a new video for their upcoming single, "Red" (which is about wanting to kill yourself over a breakup).

Pity Party still play backyard shows, which they describe as now being "fucking huge." However, as far as they're

concerned, the scene has already seen its heyday. "2015 was like the best," says Amparo, who is the principal songwriter and the sole constant member of the band's three-year existence.

Playing DIY backyard shows does have its downside. At some point, the cops get called and all hell breaks loose. "That was our life for the longest time," Amparo says with a chuckle.

## PITY PARTY (GIRLS CLUB) HAVE USED THE INTERNET TO TAP INTO A NATIONAL DIY PARTY CIRCUIT.

But police are the least of their worries. Thieves are an even bigger problem.

"One time someone tried to rob our show and shot a gun," says Angel Gaxiola, Pity Party's bassist and sometime drummer (he and Guzman occasionally swap instruments). The band members point to that incident as the pivotal moment when they shifted their focus from backyard parties to more traditional venues.

"It was at the house I was living at, too," Amparo says. "I was living in my friend's back garage. Their mom was really cool and they would let us throw shows back there."

The trio met playing the backyard scene. Amparo and Gaxiola started the band together, but Gaxiola quit for a while to focus on school. He would eventually drop out and rejoin. Drummer Guzman was the final piece of the puzzle.

"I had a band," Guzman says. "[Julian] had Pity Party. To tell you the truth, we weren't very close." But Guzman's and Amparo's bands always ended up playing backyard shows together, and when Pity Party's previous drummer left, Amparo convinced Guzman to take his place.

Pity Party's sound is primarily an expression of Amparo's influences, which range from The Cure and Bright Eyes to Alex G and Tyler, the Creator. Guzman adds a more punk influence and Gaxiola serves as the bridge between the two.

In the year since Guzman joined Pity Party, the group's sound has clicked, and their profile has risen. They've begun touring outside Southern California, to places like Vegas, Seattle, Miami and San Antonio. They drive everywhere, smoking weed to pass the time. Sometimes Gaxiola will initiate an impromptu rap session but more often, to Guzman's consternation, they listen to Amparo's Cure tapes.

"I don't even like The Cure, but by the end of the trip I knew all their songs," Guzman says, laughing.

Despite their different tastes, they all agree that they can't see themselves playing music with anyone else. "We work really well together," Amparo says. "We have this sound in our head that we don't even have to articulate."

Largely through Amparo's efforts, Pity Party have successfully used the internet to tap into a national DIY house party circuit, which lets them mostly bypass traditional venues. "We do a lot of house shows on tour," Amparo says. "I do all the booking through social media, find the local bands there, and follow people and then get to know them. I contact the band and they help us; [in return] we help them book a show in L.A. They're usually very nice about it."

They've managed to book shows everywhere from New York basements to rented-out Miami warehouses. Each city has its own DIY music scene, and the band already have some favorites. "The Vegas scene was crazy. I thought I hit a goldmine," says Amparo, describing the backyard circuit in predominantly Hispanic North Las Vegas.

According to the band, San Antonio has one of the most fertile DIY scenes out there, with an anything-goes attitude that turns even vape stores and boba shops into temporary music venues. "Everyone says Austin is the place for music, [but] San Antonio is way better than Austin," Guzman says. "Everyone is nice. There is no competition there. Out here [in L.A.], everyone is competing."

The best thing about San Antonio, according to Pity Party? When the cops show up, they don't even shut down the party. They just make sure everything is cool.

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## Music // Bizarre Ride //

# FOREVER LOVE

FIFTY YEARS AFTER THE RELEASE OF THEIR GREATEST ALBUM, LOVE REMAIN L.A.'S MOST EMBLEMATIC BAND

BY JEFF WEISS

If you believe the accounting ledgers, yellowing newspaper praise and surviving band members, Love's *Forever Changes* was released exactly 50 years ago this month. But no carbon dating or nostalgic recollection can shake my belief in its agelessness. It's the rare, unblemished masterpiece worth constant reconsideration, a deathless meditation on mortality, a psychedelic symphony immune to the paisley trappings of the Aquarian age.

Despite *Forever Changes*' frequent inclusion on all-time-greatest lists, it's easy to be unfamiliar with arguably the greatest album ever made in Los Angeles, from the city's emblematic band. Overshadowed by marquee records from more marketable names, the Elektra release slipped through the cracks as the summer of love failed to successfully merge into the fall. Radio shunned it, both then and now.

*Forever Changes* stalled at No. 154 on the *Billboard* album chart. Its lead single, the Bryan MacLean-penned "Alone Again Or," couldn't pierce the Hot 100; to date, its biggest exposure remains its inclusion in Wes Anderson's *Bottle Rocket*. (In the U.K., the album fared better, debuting to critical raves and rising to No. 24.)

Even at the time, Love was the proverbial favorite rock band's favorite rock band. Robert Plant called *Forever Changes* one of his all-time favorite albums. Neil Young was an admirer brought in to do the arrangements for "The Daily Planet."

Jimi Hendrix collaborated with frontman and chief songwriter Arthur Lee and undoubtedly swiped some stylistic flourishes. Eric Clapton tapped Lee as an opening act. The Rolling Stones' "She's a Rainbow" is just a ripoff of Love's "She Comes in Colors."

As for The Doors, Lee bore responsibility for convincing Elektra boss Jac Holzman to check them out. The admiration was mutual.

"You know Ray, if we could be as big as Love, man, my life would be complete," Ray Manzarek remembers Jim Morrison telling him during the early years of The Doors. "Love was one of the hottest things I ever saw," Manzarek adds. "The most influential band in L.A. at the time, and we all thought it was just a matter of time before Love conquered America."



Love's *Forever Changes*

COURTESY VELEKTRA RECORDS

You can point to any number of reasons why Love didn't blow up: Lee refused to tour or ingratiate himself within the industry; their drug use became debilitating; and, inevitably, prejudicial elements might have been in play. Lee and lead guitarist Johnny Echols grew up in West Adams and, in the latter half of the '60s, were two of the few black people in an almost entirely all-white scene.

But it's possible that Love's prophetic brilliance afforded it a timelessness that took decades to slip into focus. Lee's lyrics are inscrutable enough for almost any interpretation yet specific to his experiences wandering the Sunset Strip, writing in his hillside aerie and listening to Vietnam vets harangue him about how, in the obliterating tropical rain, blood mixed with mud becomes gray.

## FOREVER CHANGES SOUNDS AS VISIONARY NOW AS THE DAY OF ITS RELEASE.

"I thought this might be the last album I'd ever make," Lee once wrote about the creation of *Forever Changes*. "The words represented the last words I would say about this planet. I made it after I thought there was no hope left in the world. I thought I was going to die."

*Forever Changes* sounds as visionary now as the day of its release. It's ideally suited for all times of crisis, lyrically poetic and orchestral in its arrangements. It's both a personal requiem and one for a period about to vanish.

Arthur Lee wrote these songs at 22, already aware that flux is the only constant and art is the only hope for something eternal. He has rested underneath the turf at Forest Lawn for over a decade but somewhere right now, someone receives these revelations and falls in love for the first time.

An L.A. native, Jeff Weiss is the founder of *Passion of the Weiss* and *POW Recordings*, and hosts the monthly *POW Radio* on *Dublab* (99.1 FM). Follow him on *Twitter* @passionweiss.

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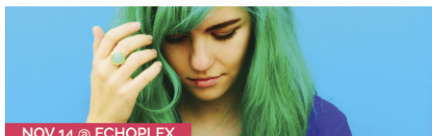
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Music //  
Picks //

fri

11/10

## Morrissey, Billy Idol

@ HOLLYWOOD BOWL

Apparently united only by Britishness and mid-1980s career explosions — Morrissey as singer for indie untouchables The Smiths; punky ex-Generation X frontman Idol as a solo artist — this incongruous bill pairs special guest Idol's swaggering "Rebel Yell" with the headliner's signature misfit mope. Judging by single "Spent the Day in Bed" and recent live teasers, Morrissey's imminent *Low in High School* album, while acknowledging his lifelong love of distinctly unhip '60s female crooners such as Cilla Black and Lulu, incorporates throwback synths, some glam-rock strut and even grungy guitars. But it's his instinct for earworm melodies and semi-sardonic lyrics that will carry this Morrissey record, just as all those before it. The paranormally age-defying Idol's polished, arena-intended hard rock will surely morph the Bowl into a massive sing-along — but the backstage banter between him and Moz remains hard to imagine. Also Saturday, Nov. 11.

—Paul Rogers

## Cold Waves L.A.

@ REGENT THEATER

It's best to look at the two-day Cold Waves festival as a mixtape you forgot to give someone back in 1992. There are some bits you're going to fast-forward through, and some you'll just barely tolerate — but when those bands strike sonic gold, you'll rewind and replay that tape so many times that it'll start to disintegrate. Founded in Chicago in 2012 to celebrate that city's industrial-music legacy, Cold Waves debuts in Los Angeles with a lineup featuring performances on Friday from Front Line Assembly, 16 Volt and Ascension of the Watchers (featuring Burton C. Bell of Fear Factory). Saturday reveals unto you Revolting Cocks — performing their fun, catchy landmark album *Big Sexy Land* in its entirety — plus Meat Beat Manifesto and the highly welcome return of MC 900 Ft. Jesus.

—David Cotner

## Ying Yang Twins

@ THE ECHOPLEX

Remember when crunk was the party soundtrack of 2003? Kaine and D-Roc of Atlanta duo Ying Yang Twins sure do, and they've been chasing those heady days ever since, never quite recapturing the magic of "Salt Shaker," "Wait (The Whisper Song)" and "Get Low," the massive hits that put them and frequent collaborator Lil Jon in heavy rotation at every strip club and hip-hop night in America for a good chunk of the mid-2000s. At this performance, they're the featured guests for Echo Flex, a 2000s-themed hip-hop party that should be the perfect setting for the Twins to dust off those old hits and maybe even drop a few recent tunes, such as



Liam Gallagher: See Tuesday.

PHOTO BY RANKIN

the rollicking "Miley Cyrus," that update crunk's booty-shaking minimalism with the rolling snares and laser-beam synths of today's club hip-hop. —Andy Hermann

sat

11/11

## Tropicália Festival

@ QUEEN MARY

The one-day Tropicália Festival could be one of the last big outdoor concert events of the year, and its existence reinforces the idea that the Long Beach area has become a nexus point for ambitious music gatherings. As with the LBC's recent Music Tastes Good and the inaugural Growlers Six festival in neighboring San Pedro, Tropicália features a surprisingly varied combination of musicians. It's ostensibly a Latino music festival, but the lineup ranges from the relatively traditional norteño combo Los Tigres del Norte and mainstream pop-rockers Café Tacvba to such wildly disparate performers as soul groovers Chicano Batman, Brazilian psychedelic magicians Os Mutantes, Puerto Rican reggae diva Ivy Queen, juiced-up cumbia twisters Very Be Careful, rockabilly fireball Wanda Jackson, R&B soother Jhené Aiko, San Pedro pop-soul charmer Brenton Wood and madly intoxicating East L.A. garage-surf trio Thee Commons. —Falling James

## Immortal Technique

@ EL REY THEATRE

"With the twirl of my tongue I encompass worlds and volumes of worlds," Walt Whitman once wrote. He could have been describing Felipe Andres Coronel, aka Immortal Technique. Born in Lima, Peru, and raised in Harlem, the rapper contains a multitude of influences and contradictions in his work and life. Coronel's sense of justice was shaped by a stretch in prison that helped him gain perspective, not just about his own violent life but also about the greater world of racism and social inequity around him. One of Immortal Technique's most chilling parables, "Dance

With the Devil," reads like a horrific short story as an emotionally unmoored narrator realizes he's beating and raping his own mother, perpetuating a cycle of tragedy. At tonight's "Viva Mexico" benefit concert, he's joined by Sick Jacken, Chino XL, Tha Mexakinz, Warporn Industries and veteran Beat Junkies turntablist Mr. Choc.

—Falling James

## Susie Glaze New Folk Ensemble

@ BECKMAN INSTITUTE AUDITORIUM

Nashville-born, Burbank-based folk singer and musician Susie Glaze is a phenomenal talent, with poise, grace and restraint balanced by equal measures of heat, passion and intensity. With the support of her very capable New Folk Ensemble, Glaze operates at an unusually high musical altitude. They have a spirit and sophistication that blends the old-timey string band's taut aesthetic with some unusually opulent arrangements, providing an ideal platform upon which Glaze conjures folk's dark, raw emotional messages with striking originality and deep respect for tradition. —Jonny Whiteside

sun

11/12

## The Sounds

@ THE FONDA THEATRE

"I thought it was best to keep moving forward/I am the one standing still," Maja Ivarsson declares forcefully over a surge of Félix Rodríguez's guitar on "Thrill," from The Sounds' recent EP, *The Tales That We Tell*. The EP's four songs represent the first new material from the Swedish pop-rock quintet since their 2013 full-length, *Weekend*. The new tracks literally shift thematically from night (urgent rocker "The Darkness") into day (the gentle acoustic ballad "Sail Into the Sun") before culminating in the sleek, Duran Duran-style funk-rock of "Turn to Gold." As usual, much of The Sounds' appeal is rooted in the way that Ivarsson's exuberant, poppy vocals blend with her bandmates' harder delivery. Also at

the Fonda on Monday, Nov. 13; the Glass House on Thursday, Nov. 16; and Pappy & Harriet's on Friday, Nov. 17. —Falling James

**mon** 11/13

**Ari Hoenig Trio**  
@ CATALINA JAZZ CLUB

When he first moved to within a short train ride to New York, drummer Ari Hoenig spent many nights at Smalls, the aptly named Greenwich Village jazz club, where he impressed the likes of saxophonists Joshua Redman and Chris Potter, guitarists Mike Stern, Jonathan Kreisberg and Wayne Krantz, and pianists Kenny Werner and Jean-Michel Pilc — all of whom he would go on to work with. Hoenig became such a fixture at Smalls that he eventually was given every Monday night there to do as he pleased, creating an ongoing showcase for emerging stars such as guitarist Gilad Hekselman and pianist Tigran Hamsyan. With the unique ability to play any multilayered rhythm, Hoenig has become a venerable jazz master within the New York jazz scene and beyond. He celebrates his birthday at Catalina with his new trio, featuring Israeli standouts Nitai Hershkovits (piano) and Or Bareket (bass). —Gary Fukushima

**tue** 11/14

**Liam Gallagher**  
@ THE WILTERN

The often misunderstood Gallagher brother, Liam, vocalist for the defunct Oasis, is enjoying a renaissance of sorts. This is due, in part, to his nakedly honest interviews, his riveting Twitter feed, and many respected musicians voicing their appreciation for both him as a person and his music. Mostly, however, it is due to his absolutely stellar debut solo album, *As You Were*. Gallagher has lost none of his signature vocal abilities or his enviable rock-star swagger. If anything, they are showcased to their fullest on *As You Were*. Performing live for the better part of this year, Gallagher has constructed set lists that are a tidy balance of his personal Oasis favorites, such as “Morning Glory,” “Live Forever” and “Be Here Now,” and future classics from *As You Were* such as “Bold,” “I’ve All I Need” and “Chinatown.” —Lily Moayeri

**Ani DiFranco, Madame Gandhi**  
@ PALACE THEATER

The title track of Ani DiFranco's new album, *Binary*, is a funky mélange of Todd Sickafoose's intricate bass lines and Terence Higgins' tight drums. Tying it all together is DiFranco's even more nimble wordplay, which weaves in and out of the chords with a message of global hope and unity even as she warns, “They got networks like insects with webs of deception/They'll trap you, cocoon you like a department of correction.” Elsewhere, she declares autonomy over her own body (“Play God”) and returns



Thee Commons at Tropicália Fest: See Saturday.

to her acoustic-folk roots (the humble and disarming “Pacifist’s Lament” and the ruefully resigned ballad “Delayed Gratification”). The coolly grooving and jazzy “Telepathic” warns of the dangers of too much empathy when soaking up everyone else’s feelings. Former M.I.A. drummer Madame Gandhi provides a distinct contrast with her electronica-laced reveries. —Falling James

**wed** 11/15

**Crowbar**  
@ WHISKY A GO GO

Since forming in 1990, Crowbar have sounded exactly as you would want a metal band from New Orleans to sound: like they literally crawled out of a Louisiana swamp, battling ‘gators on the way, then plugged in, brushed the dripping weeds from their instruments and started cranking out the heavy riffage. Alongside the likes of Eyehategod, Crowbar pioneered sludge metal by grabbing hardcore punk by the Negative Approach shirt and blending it with the doomy power of Sabbath, Kyuss and Cathedral. The magnificently monstrous results are proof positive that metal doesn’t have to be played at lightning speed in order to be brutally heavy. Band members have come and gone over the years, with frontman Kirk Windstein the only mainstay, but the albums have remained remarkably consistent, right up to last year’s *The Serpent Only Lies*. —Brett Callwood

**thu** 11/16

**Elbow**  
@ THE WILTERN

The title song from Elbow's newest, *Little Fictions*, begins with ominous piano joined by a marching-band beat. It's eight minutes-plus of building, battle-cry rock. With a voice like a purer, more English Peter Gabriel — but always on the verge of tears — frontman Guy Garvey leads his band from slow-building to all-out storming. Garvey is a poet full of poignant and wrenching lyrics, and his band engulfs his words with lush, dense melodies. On “K2,” he alludes to Brexit with both wit and sorrow: “I’m from a land with an island status/Makes us think that everyone hates us.” Many of the songs have a serene savagery, with soft/hard, rousing choruses that everyone in their adoring crowds sings along to as if they're auditioning for the band. —Libby Molyneux

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