

TEA AND COCKTAILS WITH HELLO KITTY • "FLAT AS THE TONGUE LIES" AT UCI'S ROOM GALLERY • KOBE BRYANT TALKS "THE PUNIES"

# IRVINE WEEKLY

OCTOBER 29, 2018 • No. 2



# YOUNG THE GIANT



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DONALD P. WAGNER



ANTHONY KUO



LAUREN JOHNSON-NORRIS

## BEST CHOICES FOR IRVINE'S FUTURE

### DONALD WAGNER FOR MAYOR, ANTHONY KUO AND LAUREN JOHNSON-NORRIS FOR CITY COUNCIL

PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE CANDIDATES

BY: IRVINE WEEKLY COMMUNITY EDITORIAL BOARD

#### Donald Wagner is the best choice for mayor

Under the tenure and leadership of Mayor Donald Wagner, Irvine has made noteworthy progress. He has lent a steady hand to a City Council that has had a history of markedly cantankerous politics and replaced it with civility, thoughtfulness and results. For that, we are proud to endorse Don Wagner.

One of the most unnecessarily challenging issues over the last decade in Irvine was the promise by the city to build the Great Park. For years, residents wondered when the park would come alive under the iconic orange balloon visible by anyone passing on the 5 freeway. Today, construction of the park feels like it has been expedited. One example is the recent completion of the world-class athletic complex, already attracting top-tier sporting events and a professional soccer team run by the Orange County Soccer Club.

Wagner's approach to mayoral leadership is praiseworthy. He has adopted a thoughtful style of weighing the concerns of our community's various stakeholders and has achieved, for the most part, compromise and balance on

important local issues.

For the foreseeable future, many critical issues facing Irvine need Wagner's temperament and experience to successfully address them. Temperament in politics today should not be undervalued. We do not want the City Council to revert to a divisive pit resembling the bickering and partisanship in Washington today.

From ensuring the city's commitment to quality education, the veterans cemetery, housing, traffic and the responsible completion of the Great Park, Irvine has important issues ahead. That is why we support one more term for Donald Wagner. Vote Don Wagner for mayor of Irvine.

#### Anthony Kuo for Irvine City Council

Few people exude the passion for the city of Irvine shown by Anthony Kuo. He lives, breathes and sleeps Irvine. That is exactly the type of person we want to see serving on the Irvine City Council.

Kuo has a long history with the city. He has lived in Irvine his entire life and is a product of Irvine's lauded school system. And, he has long been on the city's Planning Commission – a post that well

prepares him for the challenges facing Irvine. From traffic mitigation to housing, Kuo has perhaps the best background to serve on the City Council of anyone seeking the office this year.

What sets Kuo apart from his peers seeking election is his unparalleled devotion of time to civic causes. He is involved in seemingly countless charity and community organizations where he has shown leadership for the veteran community, small businesses and the community college system. Kuo's breadth and depth of knowledge of Irvine would serve the City Council well. Vote Anthony Kuo for Irvine City Council.

#### Lauren Johnson-Norris for Irvine City Council

What we like about Lauren Johnson-Norris for Irvine City Council is that she is independent. And at a time where ideology and special interests dominate most politics, independence is exactly what we need from our elected leaders.

Johnson-Norris is an interesting candidate for council because she is not backed nor beholden to the typical political powers in the city. Even still, she

has been able to develop a groundswell of grassroots support. Her candidacy is much like that of Councilwoman Melissa Fox – who has endorsed Johnson-Norris. Fox originally won a seat on the council without typical support in the city and has proven to be a solid, independent thinker for Irvine.

Johnson-Norris also has the backing of public safety – both the Irvine Police Association and the Orange County Professional Firefighters Association have endorsed her candidacy. That makes sense given she has made community safety the centerpiece of her campaign. Vote Lauren Johnson-Norris for Irvine City Council.

#### Our Editorial Approach

After researching each candidate thoroughly, consulting with community leaders, taking into consideration public comments during the candidate debate hosted by the Irvine Chamber of Commerce and weighing the experience of each candidate against the issues facing Irvine, we believe Don Wagner is the best choice for mayor while Anthony Kuo and Lauren Johnson-Norris are the best choices for Irvine City Council.



## YOUNG THE GIANT

ONE OF IRVINE'S GREATEST MUSIC SUCCESS STORIES

BY: PAUL ROGERS



COURTESY YOUNG THE GIANT

**F**rom a distance, Irvine might look like a rock 'n' roll wasteland: a city of over a quarter million people that boasts only one regular rock venue (FivePoint Amphitheatre) and just three bands who've "made it" in the city's nearly 50-year history: veteran post-hardcore heroes Thrice; defunct Christian rock band East West; and hard-to-define indie darlings Young the Giant.

But look closer – or, even better, talk to local musicians – and you'll discover a vibrant grassroots music culture defined by do-it-yourself ethics and a play-anywhere ethos. And it's a scene poised for wider recognition, propelled in part by its most prominent export, Young the Giant, who've scored a string of hits since forming (originally as The Jakes) in Irvine in 2004. Irvine has boasted bustling, if mostly underground, post-punk and indie rock scenes, energized by the

success of Thrice and Young the Giant respectively – it's just been lacking the clubs, rehearsal facilities and high-profile recording studios to make these more visible and geographically defined. It's all too easy for Irvine bands to simply perform in adjacent cities such as Santa Ana and Costa Mesa, or to make the relatively short trips to L.A. or San Diego. Additionally diluting the city's reputation as a musical incubator has been the reality that many Irvine musicians – including No Doubt guitarist Tom Dumont and Rage Against the Machine's Tim Commerford and Zach de la Rocha – have relocated to nearby cities before finding fame.

"We'd play at Heritage Park Community Center; we'd play in Turtle Rock; we'd play at essentially any community center that would allow us to play shows," recalls Young the Giant frontman Sameer Gadhia of his band's Irvine beginnings. "There was most definitely a

lot of vigor and excitement – I think people wanted to try something different."

Young the Giant's status as local heroes – with hit singles including "My Body", "Cough Syrup" and "Apartment" – is such that not only did the quintet headline FivePoint's opening in 2017, but they also supported Gwen Stefani at two "farewell" shows for the nearby, now-demolished Irvine Meadows (also known as Verizon Wireless Amphitheatre) the previous year. Earlier this month they released their characteristically melodic and gently eclectic fourth album, *Mirror Master*.

**"WE ARE PROUD OF THE FACT THAT WE DO COME FROM [IRVINE]; THAT OUR PARENTS MOVED THERE FOR BETTER OPPORTUNITIES FOR US."**

-SAMEER GADHIA

"I moved to Irvine [from Canada] when I was 15," says YtG drummer Francois Comtois. "Just meeting all these kids who were so passionate about the DIY scene and making their own records and putting on shows was something I'd never experienced anywhere else I'd lived."

While a string of big-selling bands put Orange County on the world's musical map in the 1990s, these tended to be from anywhere but Irvine. Fullerton punk legends Social Distortion found mainstream success at the turn of that decade, while No Doubt exploded out of Anaheim with "Just a Girl" in 1995, and Garden Grove's The Offspring became enduring radio staples.

"Irvine was encapsulated in its own world and kind of, for better or worse, just had its own scene that was not able to really branch out," mulls Gadhia, who worked for the city of Irvine, at its Fine Arts Center, while in high school. "Irvine in itself is entirely different from the rest of Orange County. Yes, it is a suburb and, yes, it is planned and, yes, it has this corporate sense to it, but it is also this crazy, weird social experiment in a lot of ways, because it is such a young city."

The cultural melting pot of Irvine, which was only incorporated in 1971, proved a sound-shaping Petri dish for the fledgling Young the Giant ("Irvine in a lot of ways is a huge inspiration," Gadhia enthuses). The city's population has more than doubled over the past 20 years, with more than 70 languages spoken and (as of 2016) an Asian American plurality. Every member of Young the Giant is the son of immigrants – a theme they explored on 2016 third album *Home of the Strange*.

"Early on, at least, it was really something that we weren't conscious of. I think that's kind of the beauty of it – that you're surrounded by people who come from different parts of the world, who have different traditions and cultures, and you don't really think about it," says Comtois. "So there were all these sort of different perspectives that had bubbled up to us through the decade that we had lived there."

"Even just within our band, the different cultures that are represented made what we were doing more exciting," Gadhia, whose parents came from India, explains. "It was only after leaving and going to college that I realized that there is a great deal of homogene-

# MUSIC



ity, in California even. Irvine really has something going in that sense."

While outsiders might view this young giant of a city as a place of manicured suburban materialism, both Gadhia and Comtois find an almost poetic romance in Irvine's myriad immigrant odysseys.

"A lot of people [in Irvine] are trying to better their family's lot in life," says Comtois. "And there's something very noble about that."

"We are proud of the fact that we do come from there; that our parents moved there for better opportunities for us," Gadhia concurs. "That's why we are who we are."

In a city dominated by colleges and corporations, the members of Young the Giant – which is completed by guitarist/keyboard players Jacob Tilley and Eric Cannata, and bassist Payam Doostzadeh – faced the dilemma of continuing their education towards stable careers or taking a gamble on the band. At the time of recording their debut EP, 2008's *Shake My Hand*, the then-Jakes were all either in high school or attending different colleges. Original drummer Jason Burger left the band to pursue an education at Manhattan School of Music, while Gadhia and Comtois opted to put college on hold to focus on Young the Giant.

As the older of two siblings, Gadhia, who was in his second year at Stanford University at the time, faced a particularly tough decision.

"I was kind of like the guinea pig for American culture, and there was this strong sense that you should work hard and get into a good school," he remembers. "But I knew that I'd regret it if I didn't [pursue music]. And my parents and I most definitely did not agree, but they were at least, with this spirit of the American Dream, willing to entertain

the theory and the idea."

His bold move promptly paid off. After their music was used in high-profile TV shows, and "Cough Syrup" received airplay on L.A.'s influential KROQ radio station, Young the Giant signed to Roadrunner Records in 2009. The first single from their eponymous 2010 debut album, "My Body", hit number five on the Billboard Alternative Songs chart, in part thanks to prominent TV and festival performances.

Meanwhile, Young the Giant had outgrown Irvine's limited music industry infrastructure at the time and moved to Los Angeles, where the band members shared a string of houses right through the writing and recording of their sophomore album, *Mind over Matter*, in 2014. "All of the studios were in Hollywood, and all the showcases were in Hollywood," says Gadhia. "We were tired of just going back and forth and commuting."

But the move to L.A. also made Young the Giant fully appreciate the many pluses of being big-fish-in-a-smaller-pond back in Irvine.

"The limited amount of bands and competition [in Irvine] definitely helped us out. ... We had a built-in audience from very early on and a really great support system," Comtois considers. "We moved up to Los Angeles and all of a sudden we were sort of flailing and there's just about a million bands any given Friday night that you could go see."

Young the Giant persisted and prevailed, though, continuing to hit the charts in North America and Europe, while touring with the likes of Incubus and Neon Trees, earning the endorsement of indie godfather Morrissey, and even being profiled on CNN. Through-

out, the band has stayed true to its approach of musical and lyrical authenticity trumping pre-conceived quests for commercial success.

Following *Home of the Strange's* more externalized exploration of immigrant history and American identity, the thematically-related *Mirror Master* is a more inward-looking search for our place in the world through analysis of self-perception.

"I think this record has a strong tie to what *Home of the Strange* is," says



Gadhia. "Realizing that you need to be okay with the many versions of yourself, who you are, to understand the world at large; to understand America at large."

"A big theme that we were exploring [with *Mirror Master*] is that it's okay to feel sad, depressed or down – y'know, that's part of the human condition," said Comtois. "If everyone sort of acknowledges that ... it makes it a little bit easier for everyone."

While YtG stuck with *Home of the Strange* producer Alex Salibian for *Mirror Master*, they also did some recording sessions with TV on the Radio's Dave Sitek, which proved significant.

"He really challenged us to be more direct and to find a balance between sort of the poetic and up-for-interpretation lyrics that we've tended to work with and also just be as direct as possible, so that when someone listens to, y'know, a verse they know exactly what you're talking about," says Comtois.

The resulting album is a pensive yet optimistic journey rich in atmosphere and texture that – with the exception of rousing first single "Simplify" and the title track – ostensibly appears far removed from the effervescent energy of YtG's early singles. Yet repeated listens reveal all of the band's sonic charms fully intact, if not subtly expanding,

albeit in admirably restrained form.

"We give all of ourselves to [our music] and every record is a snapshot of who we are as a band at that given time," says Gadhia. "And I think that through-line of really caring about what we do and working hard and not just falling on our laurels ... of trying to search for something else ... has been a continuous line in our music."

As with all Young the Giant releases, the wonderfully nuanced instrumentation on *Mirror Master* remains strictly in service to the songs, lyrics and Gadhia's slinky yet masterfully controlled, falsetto-capped timbre.

"We have an amazing singer in Sameer, so there's always that thread that runs through all the songs," says Comtois. "And that in itself allows us to sort of take bigger chances, stylistically, because he is such a force, and it gives a really strong sense of identity to the songs."

As Young the Giant ponders its next moves, as a band and as individuals, they hope to continue to inspire and encourage a new generation of Irvine musicians.

"Maybe [they] see that, hey, these guys were my age, wearing the same shoes, and were able to sort of make a life out of this," says Comtois. "And sometimes that's all it takes: to see that someone already did it, and that gives you the confidence."

Indeed, Gadhia hints at his band possibly having a more tangible impact on the Irvine music scene to which they feel they owe so much.

"For us, Irvine really does feel like coming home, and we will make sure that that's a thing," he says. "We're also trying to figure out ... how we can give back to the music scene and trying to figure out, in the future, hopefully having something that's a more solid enterprise there that we can perform at and other people can perform at as well."

Gadhia's adamant that there's much more to Irvine and its musical culture than most non-residents realize, and that the city just needs a stage – literal or metaphorical – upon which to share itself with the world.

"I hope that comes in the form of a music festival or another venue, or just being able to have a stronger presence and a narrative that kind of binds all these young musicians, and maybe some sort of mentorship," he concludes. "There's not much help that needs to be done – it's just about sharing it with the rest of the world."





## HELLO KITTY CAFE LANDS IN IRVINE

### SIP TEA OR CRAFT COCKTAILS WITH EVERYONE'S FAVORITE SANRIO CHARACTER

**W**hen you think of Sanrio's Hello Kitty brand, the first thing that comes to mind probably isn't a craft cocktail bar. Luckily for the adult Hello Kitty fan wanting to celebrate the Sanrio brand, there's now a place to go. On Sept. 14, the Hello Kitty Grand Cafe opened its doors at the Irvine Spectrum Center. It's the brand's first permanent cafe concept, and offers both afternoon tea and a cocktail service in its private Bow Room.

The front of the store is the public cafe where customers can buy a bevy of Hello Kitty merchandise, including a gold bow handle mug, exclusive to the

location, as well as branded sweets and menu items, also exclusive to the location, such as made-to-order mini hot doughnuts and a pick-your-own four-piece set of Sanrio character mini cakes. At the back of the cafe, a bow-shaped knocker marks the entrance to the Bow Room, a speakeasy-type experience featuring the afternoon tea service, \$55 per person, and the cocktail bar at night (both offered Wednesdays through Sundays, reservations strongly encouraged).

"I'm taking this quote from one of the brand people at Sanrio, Dave Marchi, but he always says a Hello Kitty fan is 4

to forever, so we really tried to bring the concept to touch every fan," says Urania Chien, one of the three owner-operators of the Hello Kitty Cafe. "The young fan can be outside and they can take their picture with Hello Kitty and watch the doughnuts being made and pick things that are appropriate for their [age]. And [in the Bow Room], there's cocktails and afternoon tea. [There's something] for every fan at any age. They can come here and just do it all."

Chien, who licenses the Hello Kitty brand from Sanrio, got involved about four years ago when she and her partners created the Hello Kitty food trucks;

two mobile trucks now travel on both coasts. The trucks were so successful that the group opened a pop-up in San Diego and a couple of mini-cafes, also in California. "I just love Hello Kitty. From a young age I just really took to her," Chien says.

And she stresses that all the hard work that went into the new cafe is for the fans – and it shows. The level of detail in everything is incredible, from the barstools with bows on their back to the tea stand in the shape of Hello Kitty's head. It's all custom-made and all Hello Kitty-branded, including the cushions and plates.

When you walk into the very pink Bow Room, you're immediately taken by the giant Hello Kitty silhouette, complete with bow, behind the bar. Even the bathroom is decked out in Hello Kitty wallpaper. The room is intimate yet breathable, lively but not chaotic. "I describe [the Bow Room] as walking into a hug, like you walk in and you're

**"A HELLO KITTY FAN IS 4 TO FOREVER, SO WE REALLY TRIED TO BRING THE CONCEPT TO TOUCH EVERY FAN"**

-URANIA CHIEN

surrounded, it feels safe and warm," Chien says. "I've spent a lot of time here, obviously, and every time I walk in I still get the same feeling. It's just very calm and upscale and you kind of want to move in... It's really mellow and relaxing and it's the right size. Anything bigger or smaller would've been too small or too big. The design was done in collaboration with Sanrio, so [we] came together and created this space."

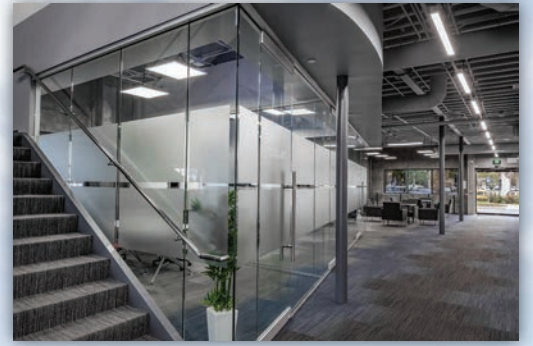
For the tea service, each customer gets to pick a tea from a list of black, green, oolong, blended or caffeine-free teas. Tea also includes a fairly large selection of snacks – fruit as well as sweets, such as macarons and mini cakes – and savory bites, such as a pretzel croissant with smoked salmon and cream cheese or a pesto tart with mozzarella and tomato. All food and tea were hand-picked by Chien and the other owners to be on brand with Hello Kitty. For example, the icing of the cupcake is in the shape of an apple, which is how Hello Kitty measures her height (five apples) and her weight (three apples). **{ 10 »**

BY: MICHAEL COOPER

PHOTOS BY: JAKOB LAYMAN



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# FOOD

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» 7 } It should be noted that most of the tea items cannot be purchased in the front cafe.

Once 5 p.m. hits, the lights are dimmed, some classy piano music plays on the speakers and the tea service becomes a cocktail service. The menu is comprised of delicious craft cocktails curated by bartender Emily Delicce (with Sanrio's approval, of course). Customers can order drinks with practically any alcohol (vodka, gin, whiskey, mezcal and tequila) as well as wine by the glass or Hello Kitty brand wine by the bottle (bottles can't be purchased to take home, though). Delicce, who has a background in craft cocktails, describes the menu as "crowd-pleasers that are also more crafty."

And every single cocktail has a cute gimmick or Hello Kitty reference in it, which Delicce says comes from the Hello Kitty philosophy of "small gift, big smile." The You Had Me at Hello (cachaca, aperol, lemon, sherry, pineapple) and the Aloha Kitty (vodka, pineapple, yellow chartreuse, lime) both come in Hello Kitty-shaped containers (the Aloha Kitty even has a hula skirt!); the 1974 (an old-fashioned with black walnut) features an ice cube with Hello Kitty's face in it, and the Picture Perfect (Bison Grass vodka, strawberry shrub, lemon and strawberry popping boba – yes, actual boba) literally comes with an instant photo taken by the bartender.

Some standout drinks were the Pink Bow (gin, raspberry, lemon, Liquor 43 and aquafaba, a vegan substitute for egg whites), which actually features a pink bow in the drink made with coloring spray; the Hello Kit-Tea (Japanese



whiskey, jasmine tea, lime, Depaz cane syrup, yuzu and cream), which comes with a macaron and has a green bow inscribed in it; and the Dear Daniel (mezcal, tequila, pineapple, lime, salted coconut whip), which comes with sprinkles atop the whipped cream.

The guests enjoying the cocktails were an eclectic mix, such as gay and straight couples on dates and groups of friends, including some groups of

women all dressed up for a night out. All of them were lucky enough to have made reservations right when they heard about the cafe on social media (it can be hard to get a reservation now, but the Bow Room is accepting walk-ins on a first come, first serve basis).

"It's been crazy. I would say crazy but amazing because a lot of the fans are coming out and a lot of them come dressed for the occasion and the whole

Hello Kitty costume," Chien says. "It's really fun to see other fans reacting to all the work that we've put into it." Indeed, that work has paid off – now not only do children who are fans of Hello Kitty have a place to go but adults do, too.

**Hello Kitty Grand Cafe, 670 Spectrum Center Drive, #860, Irvine; for hours and reservations, please visit [sanrio.com/pages/hellokittycafe-bow-room-res-ca](http://sanrio.com/pages/hellokittycafe-bow-room-res-ca).**







## EXPLORING SPEECH, SOUND AND SOURCE WITH ELLA DE BÚRCA

### **“FLAT AS THE TONGUE LIES” AT UCI’S ROOM GALLERY**

BY: EVAN SENN

PHOTOS BY: JEFF MCLANE, UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY, UC IRVINE 2018

The role of an art object is a tenacious and assumptive role. What it does or does not do can be decided by artist or viewer. Its singular life and role in our world is complex, always changing and never stationary; it changes as seasons change, as views shift and as history moves forward. Language acts similarly; meanings of words and

sentences change in different contexts, over time and when spoken or written by different people. Ella de Búrca's latest exhibition - and first U.S. solo exhibition - "Flat As The Tongue Lies" at the University of California, Irvine Room Gallery, explores these fascinating complexities in language through sound, text, kinetic sculpture and video.

Walking into the Room Gallery on

UCI's campus, you emerge into total darkness with whispering sounds leading you down a corridor. As your eyes adjust, you notice small amounts of light around a corner, and another small amount of light on a shelf directly next to the entrance, lighting some small booklets associated with the exhibition. "SHH, SHH, SHH, SHE, SHE, SHH, SHAME," you hear. As you walk down the corri-

dor, the sounds change, using alliteration, textured consonants and simplified word-fragment sounds from a woman's mouth. "Is this how you read me?" she asks. "Read us?"

The sensory experience from first entering the gallery is enticing and curious, and as you turn the corner of the corridor and enter the larger space of the Room Gallery, there are sparsely placed works in a variety of mediums to quench that curiosity. Led by intuitive exhibition design, you approach a tilted screen on what looks like a podium. Recalling an illuminated manuscript, this text video has sparse words in bold blue in a poetic pattern down the screen. After only a few moments, more text begins to appear, creating sentences and a larger story.

Just as quickly as they appeared, they fade away and come back with different lines of text. The bolded words remain unchanged, "Line, word, work,





draw, division, output, form, style, one, decay, labouring, part." By themselves, these words mean nothing, but when combined they create meaning. This piece, Act I (When The Flat Fell Down), seems to explore the creative process itself, with all its relative beauty, chaos and anxiety. Like the creative process, a simple idea, line or word appears, then the creator must flesh the rest of the piece out, filling in gaps and holes. The creator must consider presentation of the work to the world and make amendments accordingly, and then it disappears as the audience receives it, uncontrolled and unchaperoned.

In the midst of digesting Act I, the senses begin awakening with the sounds and visual movements in the other corners of the gallery space. With the sound of wind or a kind of breath in the darkness, you are beckoned to turn around and notice the slow breathing, plastic pyramid living quietly in the corner - breathing deeply, inflating and deflating - like a stranger politely waiting for your attention. Thinking about this whole show as a play (with "acts"), makes this kinetic sculptural piece, Stage, seem like an actor or the artist herself, directing your awareness to her

absence, but focusing your attention on her breath, her life, her words. All the while the voices from the corridor continue to project textured words and sounds.

The largest visual work in this exhibition is projected onto the wall - a minimalist stop-action animation using only lines. The use of black and white colors only is a calming visual addition to this project, but not very visually compelling. In front of the projection is a low pedestal with a huge stack of large papers on it, each identical. Upon closer examination, it is a play titled Act II (Mouthing).

This one-page play has the backwards mirror reflection of the exact opposite visual on the back of the paper, as if the paper is see-through, but it is not. This short play is very reminiscent of a singular Samuel Beckett play. It is a strange conversation between two characters, X and Y, with a narrator, O, who seems to come in and out of being a part of the scene. They discuss etymology, the older meanings of words, and how they've changed over time. Like the meanings of the words "sky" and "cloud," the narrator's role seems to shift and change throughout time. This play is playing

with our perception of language, meaning and of the artifice of the art object.

De Búrca seems to have created a three-part play with this installation and exhibition. Each act of this production gives us more information about the larger intention and mission of this project. A more complete and compelling understanding of this exhibition only seems to come to the surface after view-

ing every act, similarly to how words are attributed meaning after they are spoken in statements or sentences.

In the accompanying booklet of the same name, "Flat As The Tongues Lies," we are provided with further details related to the research, concepts and goals of the exhibition and artist, as told through the words of the Curator, Allyson Unzicker. The booklet references de Búrca's work with regard to Samuel Beckett, Hélène Cixous, Sigmund Freud and Roland Barthes.

In the current political climate of the American #MeToo movement and the Irish #IBelieveHer movement, women have utilized different avenues of writing and speaking to call out abuse and harassment in an effort to expand women's rights all over the world. Ireland-born de Búrca finds interesting commonalities in the shared use of text and voice to gain momentum and build bridges, while also finding pathways that others have used to turn around the same words used to empower women to disparage them.

De Búrca's "Flat As The Tongues Lies" is a sensory experience that is playful and thought-provoking while engaging in timeless cultural queries of language, meaning and text, it also seems to touch on the longstanding struggle of a female perspective.

**"Flat As The Tongues Lies" is on view through December 15, 2018 at Room Gallery, Claire Trevor School of the Arts, University of California, Irvine, 4000 Mesa Rd., Irvine, CA 92697-2775. <http://www.arts.uci.edu/venue/room-gallery>.**

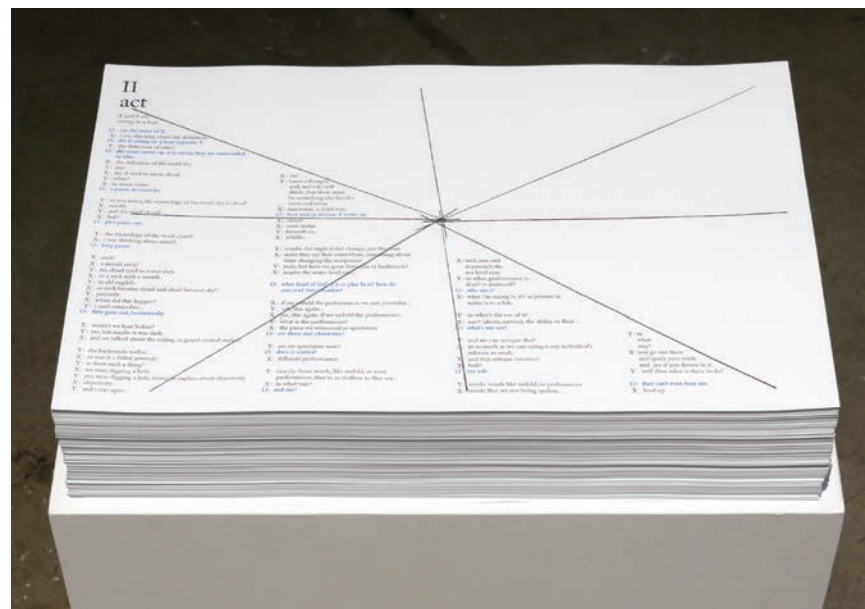






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## KOBE BRYANT TALKS "THE PUNIES"

### THE BASKETBALL SUPERSTAR'S NEW PODCAST TEACHES KIDS LIFE LESSONS THROUGH SPORTS

BY: BRIAN CALLE

**K**obe Bryant has created a new podcast called "The Punies" aimed at teaching children life lessons through sports. Irvine Weekly Publisher Brian Calle caught up with Kobe at Children's Hospital Orange County - where he was doing a surprise special reading of the series for the patients - to discuss Kobe's new venture in the podcast space.

Each 15-minute episode of the podcast follows main character "Puny" Pete, as he tackles a different sport with his friends. "The Punies" can be found on Apple's Podcast app, Google Play, Spotify and elsewhere and is currently the #1 family rated podcast in the market.

**Brian Calle:** I'm here with Kobe Bryant, who's got a new adventure in his life. Kobe, how exciting is this for you?

**Kobe Bryant:** It's actually pretty exciting.

**BC:** It's a super-cool new podcast called "The Punies." What was the inspiration?

**KB:** Every 4th of July we watch "The Sandlot" at our house while we grill burgers. After watching, I was like, "We need a movie like this. We need a sports film for kids, again." So at that point I started writing ... and writing and writing and writing.

**BC:** So it wasn't going to start as a podcast, it was going to start as a film?

**KB:** Well, it wasn't going to start as anything, it was just some film ideas. Then, October came around, and we watched The Peanuts, "Charlie Brown's Thanksgiving," which is a family tradition, and as I am watching, I just sat up off the couch and [gasped]. My daughter was like, "You had an idea, didn't you?" And yes, yes I did. Because I had "Puny" Pete as a character already written for some short stories, independently. And I had B.B. LaBelle written

for short stories as well, I thought put them together, right?! Good ol' Gang, announcers and a podcast. Announcers are the lense into the world. And then we set the stakes. You set the stakes and

it keeps kids interested. Got it! And that's how "The Punies" were born.

**BC:** What's the vision for it? What do you hope to accomplish with the podcast?

**KB:** Well the thing is, as parents, we're in constant danger of becoming preachy to our children. And sports is the greatest metaphor for life.

It can teach you things about the emotional journeys that you have in life, feelings you experience like anxiety or fear of fitting in, dealing with pressures, working hard and all sorts of other stuff. Those lessons are inherently there in sports as well. So as a parent, we encourage our children to play sports because we hope that they can learn some of that stuff. So if we can see that into our content so that when kids are playing softball, baseball, soccer or whatever sport, and they're having those feelings, they can understand or learn or be more aware of how to navigate through those. So I hope that parents will trust the fact that the content I put on "The Punies" will teach their kids a valuable lesson that they don't want to hear from me over and over and over again.

**BC:** Right, and it's meant to be family content, safe content.

**KB:** Always, all our content will be that. I believe that the best way to change the world is to help teach kids who are going to carry our world forward.

**BC:** And it's probably too early to ask this, but do you see this becoming a cartoon or a feature film or something like that?

**KB:** So when I came up with the idea for "The Punies," I called my guy Glen



ANDREW BERNSTEIN - NBA HALL OF FAME PHOTOGRAPHER



# ENTERTAINMENT

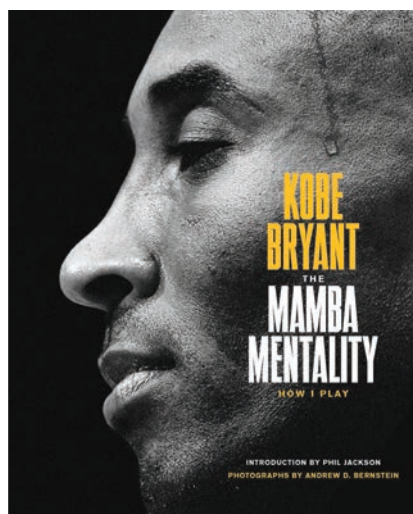
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Keane, who I worked with on "Dear Basketball." I said, "Glen, I got this idea for this show, I need characters." He goes, "Kobe, I'm directing a film, like I'm really busy." And I was like, "Glen, I really need you to do these characters." And he said, "Well, I can give you a couple of recommendations." And I was like, "Dude, I can't go backwards, you're the guy." And he said, "Alright, alright, give me a day." So I sent him the characters and the history of the characters and he did the animation. So the characters that you see are Glen's creations. So yes, 100% we're taking it to an animated series. 100%.

**BC:** That's awesome. Is there a timeline



ANDREW BERNSTEIN - NBA HALL OF FAME PHOTOGRAPHER

for it, or no?

**KB:** No. So ... how we operate is very ... obsessive. So, we'll take our time. But that's to say that we're going to rush, but we'll take our time while rushing to make sure that every detail is cared for. I'll direct the series. I already see how the series should be laid out and where we're going with it and it's going to be unlike anything you've ever seen for kids before.

**BC:** That's awesome. I met with some of the voice actors and I'm gonna meet with them again.

**KB:** They're awesome!

**BC:** And they're really cool. Were you part of the process for selecting all of them?

**KB:** Yeah, so, the writer John Howard knew some of them from working at the comedy store. Then other ones were found through talent agencies. But when they came in, as soon as they read the first ... Like Diamond, the first time she opened her mouth, I'm like, that's B.B. That's 100% B.B. And then Rebecca, like, that's Lily. She did Lily's lemonade at our first table read, and I almost fell out of my chair. I'm like, this is crazy. But they just have leeway. We came in, and we practiced, and rehearsed for about four days. We had a practice plan and we went through everything because it was important for them to be so comfortable with the material that they're conversing. A pod-



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cast can't feel like a "you go, I go, you go, I go." Especially with children. You need to feel like they're just vibing. We gave them the freedom to listen to their own lines over in the studio, and say, OK, what would they do differently? If you say it's cool, I'm cool. If you feel like you can do it better, do it better.

**BC:** What do you feel has been the most challenging part of putting this series together?

**KB:** I think it's just not knowing if people will like it.

**BC:** People like it so far!

**KB:** But that's the thing, though, you don't know. When you're playing sports, either the ball goes in the basket or it doesn't. The ball goes in the net, or it doesn't. You win, or you lose. It's pretty

black and white. But when you're making content, you don't know. And so what I always keep coming back to is we just make content that is truthful. Something that we can enjoy. Something that my family, our kids, find entertaining and meaningful. And you just hope and pray that other people will have that same connection.

**BC:** I know you don't want to play favorites, but who's your favorite character?

**KB:** That's really tough. I kinda feel the need to say B.B., because she's named after our youngest daughter. You know, her name is Bianca Bella, and we call her B.B. for short. But I just think her spunk and her tenacity ... she's unapologetically competitive and I really felt like her character was important for my children because I want them to feel like it's OK to be competitive, it's OK to

want a challenge and as a young girl say, "No, I want to be the best."

**BC:** There's definitely, most certainly, a girl power element to "The Punies."

**KB:** In all the stuff that you see coming out it is there because I have three daughters. So I'm a little biased. Every piece of content I try to create is something that I feel can help them.

**BC:** Yeah of course. And in each of the characters, is there a little bit of your daughters?

**KB:** Oh God yes. I put a little bit of everyone in there and how they talk to each other, like the little sarcasm. ...That's our house.

**BC:** Well that's awesome. Thanks for taking the time to chat with me.



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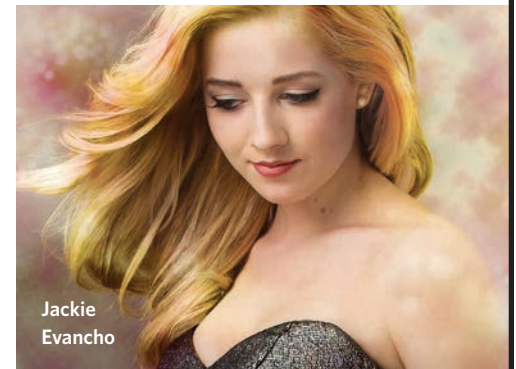
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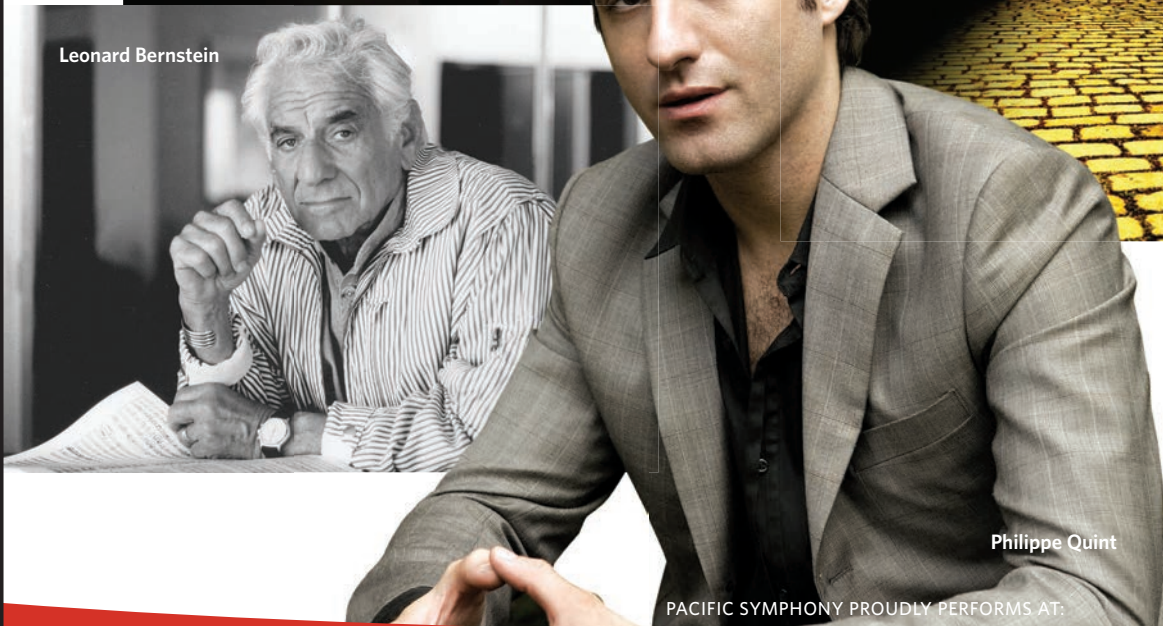
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