

CHOCOLATE BASH OFFERS DECADENT CREPES • TRIO BARCLAY PERFORMS • CITY OF IRVINE PARTNERS WITH BE WELL OC

IRVINE WEEKLY

NOVEMBER 19, 2021 VOL. 4 • NO. 1



SOCCER FEVER

AFTER 11 YEARS IN IRVINE,
ORANGE COUNTY SOCCER CLUB
CONTINUES TO THRILL

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EMPLOYMENT

Closure Design & Release Engineer with Rivian Automotive, LLC in Irvine, CA. Dsgn & dvlp components & systems pertaining to the vehicle closures for our electric auto incl hoods, fenders, side doors, tailgates, & liftgates. RQMTS: Masters degree or frgn equiv in Mech Engg or a closely related field & 2 yrs of exp for a Bachelors degree or frgn equiv in Mech Engg or a closely related field & 5 yrs of prgrsivly resp expl as an Eng in the auto industry. Exp must include: Apply knowledge of closures components and systems & the tradeoffs among dsgn, package, function, & customer exp involved w/ these systems, & apply knowledge of the 1st-principle physics of a closures system the loads, forces, & overall function of the syst, working w/component release for closures components thru prgm lifecycle, incl concept dsgn, supplier engagement, BOM mgmt, systems rqmts, simulation analysis, prototyping builds, validation test, & prod support; perform Comp-aided design (CAD) & Comp-aided engg (CAE) for closure systems, mechanisms, structure, or related vehicle components; & work w/CATIA software to dvlp & manage part system, subsystem, & component info. Email resume to Rivian Automotive, LLC, Attn: Mobility, Job Ref #: CDRE21SM, hrmobility@rivian.com

Project Engineer: Lead CNC Program for production purposes. B.S. in Mechanical Engineering, Engineering or related. KT Tech, Inc. 699 S. State College Blvd. STE A, Fullerton, CA 92831

Database Administrator (Anaheim, CA). BS in CS, Engrg or rel; Know of Microsoft SQL Server, MySQL, Microsoft Office/Excel, Word, & Access; Solid understanding of scripting & programming lang; Strong ability in critical think & data analysis; Highly motivated team player w/ ability to handle multi-tasks w/deadlines. Apply to Excelsior Nutrition Inc., 1206 N. Miller Street, Suite D, Anaheim, CA 92806.

Sr. Engineer, Software Systems with Rivian Automotive, LLC in Irvine, CA. Dvlp and manage comprehensive rqmts lifecycle development plan from development through final certification. RQMTS: Mast degree or frgn equiv in Electrical Engg, Comp Sci, Mech Engg, or a dslly reltd fld & 2 yrs of for a Bach degree or frgn equiv in Electrical Engg, Comp Sci, Mechanical Engg, or a dslly reltd fld & 5 yrs of prgrsivly rpsnbl exp within the rqmt mgmt process of safety critical systems. Exp must incl: Working w/rqmt process planning & executing from program inception to final production certification; performing validation efforts at diff test levels (SI/MI/VEHICLE); understanding of industry guideline processes applied to safety critical auto/aviation systems ISO 26262,

ARP4754, ARP4761, DO-178, DO-254; rqmt mgmt tool selection & execution incl DOORS or JAMA; & utilizing automotive or aerospace applications. Email resume to Rivian Automotive, LLC, Attn: Mobility, Job Ref #: SES521AU, hrmobility@rivian.com

Firmware Test Engineer with Rivian Automotive, LLC in Irvine, CA. Dvlp detailed test plans & scripts to validate component and sub-systems for multiple technical domains within the vehicle. RQMTS: Mast deg or frgn equiv in Electrical, Comp Engg, or a dslly reltd fld & 2 yrs of for a Bach deg or frgn equiv in Electrical, Comp Engg, or a dslly reltd fld & 5 yrs of prgrsivly rpsnbl exp in Consumer, Automotive or Aerospace electronics or related industries that involve embedded systems. Exp must incl: Wrking w/ JIRA, Confluence, REST APIs, Git & Python scripting language; & testing BLE, Wi-Fi, LTE, NFC, CAN, and UART. Telecommuting permitted. Email resume to Rivian Automotive, LLC, Attn: Mobility, Job Ref #: FTE21FP, hrmobility@rivian.com

Finance Manager with Rivian Automotive, LLC in Irvine, CA. Make informed investment decisions by analyzing financial information to forecast business, industry, or economic conditions by performing the following specific duties. Must possess a mast degree in finance, business admin, or accounting & at least 2 yrs of finance exp. Exp must incl the following skis/tools/technologies: IRR & NPV analysis; Discounted cash flow models; Expected spend curve forecasting; & financial reporting including financial statement analysis. Supervises 1 Sr Financial Analyst and 1 Financial Analyst. Email resume to Rivian Automotive, LLC, Attn: Mobility, Job Ref #: SFA20HL, hrmobility@rivian.com

Closures Mechanism DRE with Rivian Automotive, LLC in Irvine, CA. You will be responsible for projects supporting the Body Closures team. RQMTS: Mast deg or frgn equiv in Mech Engg or a dslly reltd fld & 2 yrs of for a Bach deg or frgn equiv in Mech Engg or a dslly reltd fld & 5 yrs of prgrsivly rpsnbl exp as a mech dsgn engineer in the automotive industry. Exp must incl: Applying knowledge of automotive dsgn & development process, closures mechanisms, systm rqmts, & general engg practices; utlizing 3D CAD dsgn incl CATIA V5 and/or V6; wrking w/DFM DFA, GD&T; & handling benchmarking, BOM mgmt, simulation analysis, prototyping builds, validation testing, & production support. Domestic Travel read 10% of the time. Telecommuting permitted. Email resume to Rivian Automotive, LLC, Attn: Mobility, Job Ref #: CMDRE21TD, hrmobility@rivian.com

Chassis Engineer with Rivian Automotive, LLC in Irvine, CA. Dsgn & implement chassis components from concept to production. RQMTS: Bach deg or frgn equiv in Mech Engg, Auto Engg, or a dslly reltd fld & 5 yrs of prgrsivly rpsnbl exp as a dsgn eng. Exp must incl: Reviewing & using DFMEA/DFVR; wrking w/ Catia; providing dsgn concepts

& understanding engg direction; & collaborating w/larger teams of peer designers, engineers, functional teams. Domestic & intl travel required 20% of the time. Email resume to Rivian Automotive, LLC, Attn: Mobility, Job Ref #: CE21GV, hrmobility@rivian.com

Body Structures DRE with Rivian Automotive, LLC in Irvine, CA. Lead collaborative dvlpmt of structures content incl interface with body engg, studio dsgn, & customer exp teams. RQMTS: Mast deg or frgn equiv in Mech Engg or a dslly reltd fld & 2 yrs of for a Bach deg or frgn equiv in Mech Engg or a dslly reltd fld & 5 yrs of prgrsivly rpsnbl exp wrking for an OEM or Tier 1 supplier dvlping Structure / BIW components up to production release. Exp must incl: Underst of structures component systms & the tradeoffs among dsgn, package, func, & customer exp involved w/ these systms, collabing w/ studio engg to find technical solutions to achieve their visions; handling CAD dsgn and mfrg process of body structures content incl extrusions, castings, stampings, forgings, injection mldgs, press- mldgs, compression mldgs, or reltd vhd components & technologies for wide range of materials incl Alum, Steel, composites; wrking w/ mixed metal joining; mngng vhd structure joints from cradle to start of product; handling control & calculate cost, weight, timing & tooling invest of resp; and utlizing DFMEAs, DVPs, Functional Safety rqmts, & 8d/PPS. Email resume to Rivian Automotive, LLC, Attn: Mobility, Job Ref #: BSD21NH, hrmobility@rivian.com

Vehicle Crash Safety Test Engineer with Rivian Automotive, LLC in Irvine, CA. Execute safety-related testing for vehicle developments, incl occupant, structures, battery, ped-pro, full vehicle, others. RQMTS: Mast degree in Mech Engg, Automotive Engg, or a dslly reltd fld & 2 yrs of for a Bach degree or foreign equivalent in Mech Engg, Automotive Engg, or a dslly reltd fld & 5 yrs of prgrsivly rpsnbl exp wrking with auto safety systms. Exp must incl: Applying knowledge of static safety compliance testing FMVSS 201U/L, 206, 207/210, 214s, 216a, 223, 225, 226, wrkg certification and homologation reports per NHTSA rqmts; performing physical testing incl Component / Sub-Assembly / Assembly level - Static Load cases & Full Vehicle Testing FMVSS 207/210, 214s, 216a, 223, 225 compliance testing; & executing test plans & defining work instructions for vehicle compliance testing. Domestic travel required 35% of the time. Email resume to Rivian Automotive, LLC, Attn: Mobility, Job Ref #: VCST21YS, hrmobility@rivian.com

Supply Chain Analyst (City of Industry, CA). Masters in Supply Chain Mgmt, or Logistics; 6 mos rel exp; Proficiency in Microsoft Word, Excel, & Powerpoint; able to use excel to build bid models & forecasts; Xlnt comm & presentatn skills; analytical & negotiation skills; familiar w/ logistics info. sys & tech; Flexible, self-directed, creative, & team

player. Apply: Sunway Express Inc., 15241 Don Julian Rd, City of Industry, CA 91745.

Liverpool FC International Academy Social seeks a Training and Development Program Leader to work in Irvine, CA, to plan, develop, and deliver youth soccer programs. Will also be responsible for staff training/certification, creating new programs, and club development within new and existing regions. Must have a bachelors degree (or foreign equivalent degree) in Project Management, Leadership/Coaching, or a directly related field plus 5+ years of post-baccalaureate and progressively responsible experience in a leadership position. How to Apply: mail a resume, cover letter, references, and salary requirements to 12 Mauchly, #P, Irvine, CA 92618

Purchasing Coordinator: Bachelor's degree in Business Admin, res., 540 5814V/F/T. Resume to Soowan Kim, E-Mart America, Inc., 11165 Knott Ave. #C, Cypress, CA 90630

LEGAL NOTICES

LOCKFORD PROPERTY INVESTMENTS LLC 157 Lockford Irvine, Ca 92602
Re: AUBURN COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION vs. LOCKFORD PROPERTY INVESTMENTS LLC 157 Lockford, Irvine, Ca 92602
NOTICE OF INTENTION TO INSTITUTE FORECLOSURE PROCEEDINGS

Dear Homeowner(s): YOU WILL PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that payment of your homeowners association ("Association") maintenance fees is seriously delinquent. The debt consists of \$3,861.42 in delinquent assessments, late charges, interest (if any) and fines (if any) through October 18, 2021. There has also been incurred \$1,537.50 in claimed attorney's fees, and \$226.95 in costs for a total requested amount of \$5,625.87. Please note it will also cost \$225.00 in the future to release the lien. If you wish this matter to be fully resolved please remit \$5,850.87. PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that an action may be commenced in the Superior Court to foreclose the assessment lien. To prevent a foreclosure action and further legal action, you must either: 1) Pay the total amount due to the Association as set forth above within forty-five (45) calendar days from the date of receipt of this letter; 2) Respond to the Association's meet and confer request; or, 3) Dispute the debt as outlined by the state Rosenthal Fair Debt Collection Practices Act and the Federal Fair Debt Collection Practices Act. If an action is THE DEBT COLLECTOR IS ATTEMPTING TO COLLECT A DEBT AND ANY INFORMATION OBTAINED WILL BE USED FOR THAT PURPOSE

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COVER: PHOTO COURTESY OF THE OC SOCCER CLUB



GAMING JUGGERNAUT BANDAI NAMCO BRINGS HEADQUARTERS TO IRVINE

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

Bandai Namco Entertainment is the name behind dozens of gaming titles, including the well-known Pac-Man, Naruto and Dragon Ball franchises. On Wednesday, Nov. 10, Bandai Namco celebrated a ribbon-cutting ceremony for its new headquarters in Irvine.

Officially BANDAI NAMCO Holdings USA Inc., the company is now occupying a 70,000 square foot office space located at 23 Odyssey in Irvine.

On her Facebook page, Irvine Mayor Farrah Khan shared photos from the ribbon-cutting ceremony that she attended with Irvine City Council member Anthony Kuo.

"Welcome to our newest business, Bandai Namco, making Irvine their headquarters," Khan wrote. "Councilmember Kuo and I participated in the ribbon cutting ceremony, welcoming the international group known for creating PacMan and manufacturing Naruto and Dragon Ball action figures."

Shuji Ohtsu, CEO and president of the company, expressed his optimism for the company's next chapter in Irvine.

"Today is an exciting day and the beginning of a new chapter for Bandai Namco's

long history in the U.S.," Ohtsu said. "With our new office, we're excited to be a bigger presence in the Irvine business community and a responsible corporate citizen of this fine city. There's much work to be done as we bring together our U.S.-based BANDAI NAMCO family under one roof, but it's a task that we're all ready and looking forward to taking on."

Previously located in Santa Clara, Bandai Namco is now looking to fill numerous job positions in Irvine, including a Pac-Man brand marketing manager and a user experience researcher.

With more than 2.5 million followers across Instagram and Twitter, Bandai Namco is a globally recognized brand that has created numerous video games including Jump Force, Dragon Ball-Z and the Dark Souls series and dozens of anime titles.

In addition to video games, Bandai, a subsidiary of Bandai Namco, has specialized in manufacturing Gundam Universe action figures.

Bandai Namco becomes another well-known video game developer to bring office space to Irvine, where Blizzard Entertainment is also located.

IRVINE JOINS IN MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS RESPONSE PARTNERSHIP WITH BE WELL OC

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

The Irvine City Council unanimously voted to alter the way the city handles police calls involving mental health, addiction or homelessness, starting with a new program that other cities in Orange County are partnering with to reduce violence in the community.

Through a new approach, Irvine will enroll in a partnership with Be Well OC, a non-profit organization that provides mental health support, and establish a Mobile Crisis Response Team.

On Tuesday, Nov. 9, the Irvine City Council unanimously voted to enter into a \$968,580 contract with Be Well OC in order to implement the Mobile Crisis Response Team.

As the program begins, the Mobile Crisis Response Team will operate for 12 hours per day – between 10:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m.

Irvine Vice Mayor Tammy Kim said addressing the mental health crisis has become a "very complex situation," especially considering language barriers in different areas of the county.

"I'm really excited about this – this is one step in a very complex situation dealing with our mental health crisis," she said.

Currently, in response to all calls regarding mental health issues, violence or threats of suicide, the Irvine Police Department will dispatch patrol officers, who are trained to use de-escalation communication techniques, according to Irvine Police Commander Dave Klug.

In addition to police officers, IPD has established the Irvine Mental Health Outreach Team, which assigns Mental Health Officers to

perform case follow-ups for mental health-related incidents in the community.

Irvine's Mobile Crisis Response Team will work in tandem with the Irvine Police Department, in a way that replaces police officers with specifically trained medical staff for non-emergency calls.

The Orange-based Be Well OC opened a 60,000 square-foot 93-bed facility earlier this year. Countywide, both the Garden Grove and Huntington Beach police departments have implemented the Mobile Crisis Response program from Be Well OC.

In the wake of protests following the death of George Floyd last summer, the topic of defunding the police echoed at social justice rallies nationwide.

Councilmember Larry Agran said he was in support of the program, adding that he hopes this may address concerns from the community. Agran said he recalls protesters in Irvine calling for the city to defund the police during the protest in June 2020. He hopes this reformation of policies can showcase the city's ability to make a change, and is looking forward to the results.

"I'm hoping that in a matter of three to six months after initiation [of the Mobile Crisis Response program] we'll be able to get some report back – and demonstrate to those who are clamoring for change – or to defund the police – in response to some significant problem," he said. "Many of us were saying we want to reform our response to these issues – we don't necessarily want to defund anything, we want to fund the right things."

SPORTS

SOCCER FEVER

AFTER 11 YEARS IN IRVINE, ORANGE COUNTY SOCCER CLUB CONTINUES TO THRILL.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER



PHOTOS COURTESY OF OC SOCCER CLUB

In December, the Orange County Soccer Club will celebrate its 11 year anniversary in the city of Irvine.

In recognition of this milestone, *Irvine Weekly* spoke with Oliver Wyss, president of soccer operations and general manager for the Orange County SC about the club's decade of growth in Irvine, the nuances reaching overseas markets locally, and how the city

has established itself as the perfect incubator for Orange County's continuously peaking soccer fever.

For Wyss, who has been with the club since 2014, growth has come in stages. During his first year as general manager, the club defeated the Los Angeles Galaxy on a pop-up pitch, due to the fact that the home field was previously at UC Irvine.

Now, nearly seven years later, the Orange County

Soccer Club regularly sells out home games at the 5,500 seat Championship Stadium inside the Great Park in Irvine.

Currently, OCSC is just two victories away from claiming its first United Soccer League Championship title in club history.

In a phone interview with *Irvine Weekly*, Wyss spoke about the role of OCSC in the Irvine community, and within the soccer industry at large.

"Some of the most successful youth soccer clubs historically have been in Orange County," Wyss said. "When we looked at building a soccer club – a brand – that we could really be proud of, the Championship Stadium in Irvine was obviously a perfect hub. Specifically, also with the 24 soccer fields around it."

While Orange County seems to host an ideal environment for soccer – it wasn't always like that, according to Wyss. Wyss suggested that the increasing surge in soccer enthusiasm could be a sign that the sport is evolving into a staple of American sports culture.

While other sports like basketball and baseball might follow the more traditional path toward the professional level, by way of college, Wyss explained that soccer differs in the sense that overseas it's common to have the ability to reach the professional level as early as 15 years old.

"Everywhere else in the world, the most talented players sign professional contracts at age 15, 16 and 17," he said. "Where historically in the United States, the best young soccer players will still be amateur players, play local youth soccer clubs, play high school, go on to college – and maybe reach the pros in their 20s."

Wyss says this methodology is outdated. With that, he added that OCSC is working to create pathways locally for the most talented soccer players to reach professional distinction – without the caveat of college.

"For the best young, talented players in Orange County, and the United States, there has never been a clear pathway into a professional setting at a younger age," Wyss explained.

Through this approach, Wyss added that players also have access to the global transfer market, which generated more than \$3.7 billion in the most recent transfer window between June and August, according to the most recent FIFA report released in September.



SPORTS



"What we have built with our club here, is that when we do have the right professional player, we are willing to sign them, set their college education aside, and really give them the opportunity to be a professional player," Wyss said.

This strategy is already being put into action. In June 2020, at 16 years old, defender Kobi Henry signed with OCSC. Now 17 years old, Henry is in his sophomore season, tallying more than a dozen appearances in OCSC's starting lineup.

"[Henry] signed with us because he felt his chances of being transferred to Europe at 18 would be bigger, and he's actually starting today in the U-20 against Mexico," said Wyss.

Over the last decade, Wyss said there are heaps of impactful moments in OCSC history, adding that the completion of Championship Stadium in 2015 began to ignite the soccer fever in Orange County.

Wyss said he remains steadily impressed by growth the club continues to demonstrate year after year, not just in terms of transfer ability, but also at the level of performance.

"Fast forward into this season, being back in the

Western Conference Finals, being one of the only four teams left in the entire league that has grown so dramatically from the last 10 years," Wyss said. "It was actually Division III, when it was just eight teams, to now being Division II with 34 teams – it's the fastest-growing 2nd Division in the United States."

Looking ahead to the next decade, Wyss said the goal is to continue to build a soccer club that the Irvine community can recognize and identify with, but added that it starts with building a foundation on a well-rounded and respected club history.

"We are in full swing of building this. We're starting a full-time reserve academy for our boys, and the plan is to do the same for girls in 2023," he said. "I think we have made tremendous progress but we are definitely not resting our laurels."

As the OCSC prepares to continue its playoff winning streak in the Western Conference Finals match against San Antonio, Headcoach Richard Chaplow said this was an exciting time for soccer in America.

"What we've seen materialize across the nation is a bit of soccer fever, I suppose. It's really starting to take off now," he said.

Chaplow reflected on the growth of the sport in Orange County, which he said is now being recognized globally, and suggested the impact is having a huge influence on the younger generation.

"I think the most pleasing thing for any American soccer fan is that we're starting to see top talents from America in some of the best leagues in the world," Chaplow added. "They're bringing that back now to the U.S. National Team, which will only make us stronger on that front."

Within the next seven years, two of the world's largest soccer events – the 2026 World Cup and the 2028 Olympics – will be held in Los Angeles.

For Wyss, that will only increase means one thing. "Soccer fever is here and it's only getting hotter," he said.



FOOD

CHOCOLATE BASH BRINGS DECORATIVE EUROPEAN-STYLE CREPES TO IRVINE

FUNCTIONING AT A CULINARY CROSSROADS BETWEEN EUROPE AND THE MIDDLE EAST, CHOCOLATE BASH IS PAYING HOMAGE TO EUROPEAN DESSERTS AND IS CLEARLY SATISFYING THE SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SWEET TOOTH.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER



PHOTOS BY
EVAN J. LANCASTER

At Chocolate Bash, an Orange County-based creperie, decadence comes in the form of sushi roll-style crepe desserts draped in curtains of imported Belgium chocolate.

With a four-tiered pancake dish layered with sliced fruit and Belgium chocolate sauce, aptly known as the Bash Burger, it's easy to see how Chocolate Bash is indulgently showcasing its namesake in Irvine.

Recently opened at the Irvine Spectrum, Chocolate Bash, one of the few purveyors of decorative European-style crepes in Orange County, has now opened more than a half-dozen locations across Orange County and Los Angeles since 2015.

The experience at Chocolate Bash begins with a three-step process in which guests select the choice of pastry – crepe, waffle or pancake – and sets of toppings ranging from pistachios imported from Italy to special European chocolate.

With its first location arriving in Newport Beach's Balboa Island in 2015, Rasha Albasha, owner and creator of Chocolate Bash, and her husband Amer Dukhan, have created a small franchise operation with the Irvine Spectrum location becoming the newest in the fleet.

In an interview with *Irvine Weekly*, Dukhan, who resides in Irvine, explained the arrival of Chocolate Bash at the Irvine Spectrum was a long time coming, due to the fact that the family had desired the location for some time.

Dukhan added that the Chocolate Bash location inside the Irvine Spectrum is temporary, but said the goal is to maintain a local presence while expanding franchise opportunities.

"We kept our eyes on the Spectrum for a while now. It's not going to be easy to get a spot here, just considering how popular everything is," he said. "Unfortunately, this spot is temporary – the end of this year – there's

another company that's taking the location, but so far the management likes what we are doing."

Speaking outside of the Irvine Spectrum location on Monday, Nov. 16, Dukhan explained that his wife Rasha Albasha is responsible for the entirety of the Chocolate Bash concept, creating every aspect of the menu from the decorative crepe dishes, to the Turkish coffee recipes.

For the husband and wife team, Chocolate Bash was founded on the concept of uniqueness and variety. Even the imported items used by Chocolate Bash are specifically tailored from recipes developed by Albasha.

A few years ago, Dukhan explained that the idea of importing food from outside of the country would be a way to bring a unique European flair while providing high-quality ingredients.

For example, the pistachios used by Chocolate Bash are imported from Italy as both a way to set themselves apart, and for quality control.

"If you're providing the same pistachios available on the market, you're not doing anything. The concept of Chocolate Bash is to be unique, that's why we went to Italy. When we got this pistachio spread, it's pure – there's no flavor added," he said. "It's a little bit expensive, but it's really unique and people can really feel the difference between what's available on the market."

Functioning at a culinary crossroads between Europe and the Middle East, Chocolate Bash is paying homage to European desserts and is clearly satisfying the Southern California sweet tooth.

"We wanted to do something different from the market. There are lots of burger places, shawarma places – lots of them – but there's no dessert," Dukhan says. "The concept is a mix between the Middle East and Europe, so we try to get the best from here and there."

Still, Dukhan said with a heavy interest in the franchise opportunities, he remains extremely selective. However, as a pair of entrepreneurs in Irvine, Dukhan and his wife remain open to the possibilities of nationwide and international growth for Chocolate Bash.

In fact, Dukhan said he looks to corporations like Dunkin Donuts, Starbucks Coffee and McDonald's as examples of shining examples of successful franchise models that he believes Chocolate Bash can emulate.

When asked if he ever thought of Chocolate Bash proliferating by the dozens, like Starbucks locations, Dukhan quickly responded.

"All the time," he said. "We are keeping our eyes open – McDonald's, Dunkin Donuts – all of those. Just to learn from them – because they are still small businesses."

Chocolate Bash is located at 756 Spectrum Center Dr, Irvine

Waffle



Crepe



IRVINE BARCLAY PRESENTS THE MUSIC OF TRIO BARCLAY

BY SAM MACHADO

Trio Barclay returns to Irvine for another musical experience for the community. Three musicians are set for a dynamic and exciting performance at Irvine Barclay Theater on Sunday, November 21 at 5 p.m. The trio consists of Dennis Kim on violin, Jonah Kim on cello and Sean Kennard on piano. This will be their second performance at Barclay after making their debut last June.

The ensemble will play different hits, including a world premiere by composer Mark Abel, Cafe Music by Paul Schoenfield and the B Major Trio of Johannes Brahms. They're known for playing music as far back as the 18th century all the way to the present day. In an exclusive interview, Dennis Kim said that the trio wanted to focus on living composers. He was also surprised by how easily they were able to perform again at Barclay.

"When we initially decided to partner with the Barclay Theater, we were amazed at the flexibility

and the management's complete trust in our artistic vision," Kim says. "Musicians are used to hearing the word 'no' a lot. The management of Barclay saying 'whatever the question, the answer is yes' was a dream come true for our ensemble."

The Trio Barclay started during the pandemic and each member worked on their own individually. Despite the fear of how long the pandemic would last, Kim was hopeful that the experts would figure it out so live performances would happen again.

"I always believed in the world's scientists, doctors, and leaders to find a way to come back from this horrible pandemic," he says. "Initially, I thought we would find a solution right away, then I felt like it would take much longer, and ultimately, it was somewhere in the middle. I am grateful that we are back to performing!"

Kim also pointed out how this pandemic has changed live performances in general. Now that performers are gradually making their way back to

Dennis Kim



KAREN DREWS

Trio Barclay



KAREN DREWS

what they love, Kim feels like they're seeing everything in a whole new light.

"I think many musicians took performing for granted. After such a long period when we couldn't perform, I believe all musicians have a new appreciation for everything. Musicians are grateful for audiences, for donors, for management, and nothing is taken for granted anymore," Kim says. "What I've realized during the pandemic is that there is nothing quite like live music. There is no technology that can replace the feeling of hearing live music in a hall. I truly believe musicians and artists are essential workers, and as essential workers, doing our job well is extremely important."

The violinist is especially glad to perform in Irvine since he believes the city to be one of the best in the world. "The best restaurants, the best schools, and an underrated number of things to do. There are some real gems in Irvine that the rest of the state and country have yet to fully appreciate, including Irvine Barclay Theatre. It's a unique and intimate venue that offers a great experience for enjoying live music."

As the trio makes its way back to Barclay in this new performance, Kim is hoping audiences will experience a jolt of energy as they watch the musicians perform. "Hopefully our passion and energy will be felt by everyone in the hall, and it will translate to a memorable evening for everyone. We hope we can influence young people and we hope that the young at heart will go home with a smile on their face."

For more details, check out thebarclay.org.

ONE MINUTE MAYHEM

JOSH FREESE PUTS HIMSELF FIRST WITH NEW SOLO ALBUM.

BY BRETT CALLWOOD



COURTESY OF JOSH FREESE

Long Beach-based drummer Josh Freese may well be the busiest man in music. The list of bands he's played with is a veritable who's who of contemporary rock: Weezer, A Perfect Circle, Sublime (with Rome), Nine Inch Nails and Guns N' Roses are just a few highlights of a list that's as long as your arm. He's not a one-trick pony either; he's also performed on albums by pop artists such as Kelly Clarkson, Katy Perry and Miley Cyrus. Nowadays, he's working with Devo and Sting, he's filling in with the Offspring, and of course, he's forever a member of his first love, punk band the Vandals.

The guy never stops working. So when the pandemic locked us all down and effectively put a stop to touring, he got itchy. He started writing and recording a bunch of one-minute songs for the hell of it. But when old friend Stone Gossard (Pearl Jam) resurrected his Loose Groove record label and propositioned Freese with the idea of releasing an album, he was all for it. "I started writing and recording these songs with no

intention at all of releasing them, or at least selling them," Freese says. "I didn't want to go through the whole process of making a record. I'm too lazy. I love the process of writing and recording music and doing it on my own. I have a home studio that I always complain about never having enough time to work in, so I didn't have an excuse now. So I went back there and started writing one-minute songs, which is also very non-committal. It's not very daunting to have to write a one-minute song for the sake of a little art project. Some of them turned into songs that sounded like regular rock & roll songs, and some of them just turned into weird little one-minute snippets of things."

Freese referring to himself as lazy is ironic. Or maybe just plain wrong. He's always on the go. Very often though, he's working on other people's music. It's great to hear what pours out when he's not restricted at all.

"The fact that it was done from a 100 percent pure place, not trying to achieve anything or make any money from it or any of that stuff, it was really fun and

something I'd be doing whether it be released or not," he says. "Aside from having it not be some major undertaking, I also wanted to make little fun videos, literally on my phone. Put up these one-minute songs, make full little videos and post them on Instagram, just for the fuck of it."

One of the interesting things about the album, which is called *Just a Minute, Vol.1*, is that it runs the gamut of rock subgenres. Opening track "Ain't Nuthin Funny Bout 2020" is a Revolting Cocks-esque industrial-tinged tune. Then "Where I Have to Go" is more straight-up rock. Then "The Dwarves and the Queens" is a punky riot. That's all great, but Freese had to find a way to make the record flow.

"I don't know if it flows or not," he says. "Some people take that really seriously. There's an art to it and I've watched people drive themselves crazy sequencing an 11, 12 song record. I didn't want that to become a burden. So at first, I was like 'fuck it, the way I listen to it on my computer or in my car is automatically alphabetized.' At first, I was gonna do that. I like starting off the record with the 'Ain't Nuthin Funny Bout 2020' song because that really set a tone for all of us last year."

The fact that the album has *Vol.1* in the title suggests that there's going to be a *Vol.2*.

"Volume 2 is done and mastered, and the cover's done," Freese says. "If I needed to put it out in a month, I probably could. But we're gonna wait. I have to tie up a few loose ends on the artwork and the inner sleeve stuff. But it's recorded, mixed, mastered, and most of it's ready as far as the theme, the look, and the tie-in to the first album. I'm hoping for January, maybe February."

Since concerts started happening again, Freese has played sporadic dates with Devo, Sting, the Vandals and the Offspring.

"The Vandals and the Offspring have been longtime friends," he says. "A few months ago when the drummer wouldn't get vaccinated, Dexter called me and said they need someone who is able to go out in the real world and do this stuff – could I fill in for some shows? There was a handful of stuff I was able to do, and then I had some Devo obligations. I had a Sting obligation a couple of weeks ago and I'm doing some stuff with Sting Vegas. I've probably done a total of five gigs with the Offspring, but I'm going to the UK with them next month."

When you have Sting, Devo, the Offspring and the Vandals all pulling a limb each, you know you're doing something right. Freese has been in the Vandals since his mid-teens and the band remains close to his heart.

"All of us have our real jobs, mine being the drummer in other bands that make decent money," he says. "But I always like to go back and do gigs with them. I always joke that I need to keep the Vandals in my back pocket for punk rock cred while I work with some of these pop superstars."

Josh Freese doesn't need to worry about his "punk rock cred" any time soon. The guy has seen and done it all and, like we say, he never stops working. He's trying to find balance in his life though.

"I'm always balancing how much I can be gone, and how much I can be around for my kids and standard poodles," he says.

The Just a Minute, Vol.1 album is out now.



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“If not for Keith’s compassion and superior defense strategy, we might have lost all of our hard-earned retirement savings to a very opportunistic claimant. The stress prior to retaining Keith was nearly unbearable.”

- Jim and Carol Hoffman

Air travel still feels like a headache, if not a risky endeavor for a lot of us and if you missed the opportunity for a real road trip this Summer, you might be thinking now is a good time for a getaway. It is! This time of year – as temps transition from sweltering to sunny and breezy – provides an easy way to get in some leisure and new scenery. If you've got a weekend to spare, a li'l time off from work or can do it remotely (the boss doesn't need to know that you're finishing that spreadsheet with a cocktail by the pool, right?), you won't regret the recharge. We're big fans of weekenders and mid-week jaunts as a way to re-calibrate, especially during the pandemic. Vegas is an obvious choice, but with mask-wearing seemingly un-enforced and big crowds to contend with, we felt like we dodged a bullet not catching the virus after our last visit there.

Destinations like Palm Springs and San Diego provide the perfect mini-trip option with lots of outdoor sun-soaked amusements for travel-weary Irvine residents. Hotels are eager to revitalize business post-shutdowns, so there are some great deals and in general, the COVID-cleaning protocols are on point. For this reason, we prefer resorts to AirBnBs, especially in S.D.

A little background on our Sunny So-Cal sister city adjacent to the Mexican border. It's named after Saint Didacus (also known as Diego de San Nicolás), a missionary who was part of the territory's first settlement. Often called the birthplace of California, it was the first site visited and settled by Europeans. These days, a lot of us Southern California folk tend to associate it with childhood and tourism, the place where we went with our families to visit **Sea World** (seaworld.com), **The San Diego Zoo** (zoo.sandiegozoo.org/visit) and more recently, **Lego Land** (legoland.com/california/). For many young adults, SD is seen as the city we warm up in before a wild night in Tijuana or other parts of Mexico.

It's also the home of **ComicCon** (comic-con.org), which makes it an annual party pilgrimage. Well, at least it was pre-COVID; the last two years, they've canceled in-person events and done virtual presentations. Just last month, however, the organizers announced a "Special Edition" in-person event at the **San Diego Convention Center** (visit-sandiego.com) on Nov. 26-28, which will bring back a lot of business to the city.

SAN DIEGO STAYCATION:

THE PERFECT PANDEMIC GETAWAY

BY LINA LECARO

Panel are slowly being announced so if you're a movie and TV nerd, or a crazy clothes-loving cosplayer, get your tickets now before it sells out.

San Diego is worth the 3-hour drive any time of year as its own destination if you're looking for drinking spots, nightlife and a lively vibe. There's also a vital arts community, inspired dining and plenty of seaside atmosphere and activities. Renovations of S.D. hotels, shopping centers and parks has been in overdrive lately, so the city is constantly evolving with more and more things to do and see.

Here, we spotlight some of our favorites by region. This list just scratches the surface, but we hope it makes for a nice starting point before your next visit. We recommend the following books (which all came out this year) for more exten-

sive guides and background info:

100 Things To Do in San Diego Before You Die - By David Swanson

San Diego: Unforgettable Experiences In San Diego: 50 Unique Things To Do In San Diego - By Victor Lugardo

Fodors San Diego Travel Guide (various contributors)

GASLAMP QUARTER

Let's start with nightlife, shall we? The Gaslamp district is the place to be for after-dark revelry but its history is almost more interesting than its present. It got its name after the city brought in gas lamp street lights to light the then-new modern part of the area formerly known as "New Town." In the late 1880s, the area was known for gambling halls and bars, evolving into a red-light district known as the Stingaree (referencing the

stingrays in the nearby Bay). Brothels popped up as well and thrived in the area until the early 1900s, or so. Today, Gaslamp is still kinda sexy, with hot date nights at trendy eateries, and a raucous dance club and bar/pub scene.

We generally have disdain for the concept of "pub crawls," but when you're visiting from out of town they can provide a nice overview from a local's perspective. If you want to get the low-down on where to let loose on a dance floor and liquor up, try **San Diego Pub Crawl** (sandiegoclubcrawl.com) which promises VIP front of the line and free entry to some of the area's most popular nightclubs including **Omnia** (omnia-clubs.com/san-diego), **Fluxx** (fluxxsd.com), **Parq** (parqsd.com), **F6ix** (f6ixsd.com), **Bassment** (bassmntsd.com) and **American Junkie** (americanjunkiesd.com).

If you're looking for slightly less hedonistic vibes, there are plenty of restaurants and bars to see and be seen with slightly more low-key surroundings. For dynamic dining check out **Werewolf** (thewerewolf.net), **Metl** (metl.com), **Cafe 21** (cafe-21.com), and **Butcher Cut** (butcherscutsteakhouse.com). For buzzing bars, and we like **Myst Lounge** (mysthookahlounge.com), **Side Bar** (sidebarsd.com) and **Prohibition Speakeasy** (prohibitionsd.com).



Liberty Station

CREDIT: ZACK BENSON

TRAVEL



MISSION VALLEY

The area known as Hotel Circle may not be much to look at, but there are some really great hotels in the freeway-adjacent region that provide a nice place to plant yourself. Sightseeing is fun and good, but sometimes simply staying put at one inclusive property is the best getaway. If mid-century modern vibes are your bag, **Town & Country Resort** (towncountry.com) should fill the bill.

The new home of this past year's first **Tiki Oasis** (tikioasis.com) event post-COVID, it provides a picturesque pool atmosphere you won't want to leave.

Following a recent \$70 million remodel, the hotel brings to mind the trendy cool of Palm Springs spots like The Ace or The Parker, with irreverent furnishings in its lobby and adjoining "Monkey Bar," as well as its new signature restaurant Arlo. We love the



ARLO Patio

Liberty Station



CREDIT ZACK BENSON

marquee-style billboard with silly sayings that used to be outside of the hotel and is now behind the reception desk. A really fun four-story twister water slide and a sassy 15-foot long diver girl neon sign add to the stylish frolic-friendly feel. Just behind the hotel, a 3.3-acre park makes for a nice picnic setting place to sit and wait for the S.D. trolley. The **San Diego River Park Foundation** (sandiegoriver.org) is overseeing the project, which is the first new green space in the area in nearly two decades. And there's more development to come, too.

Other Hotels to try in the area: **Crowne Plaza** (ihg.com/crowneplaza/hotels), **Kings Inn** (kingsinnsandiego.com) and **Handerly Hotel** (sd.handerly.com).

If you like Tiki stuff also check out: **Bali Hai** (balihairestaurant.com), **False Idol** (falseidoltiki.com), **The Grass Skirt** (thegrassskirt.com), **Kona Kai** (resort-konakai.com) and **The Catamaran** (catamaranresort.com).

SEAPORT VILLAGE

Downtown's central waterfront is in the midst of a \$2.5 billion renovation. The Seaport San Diego project is themed around "ocean optimism" and a 500-foot observation tower, education hub, and office space reserved for ocean research are just a few of the things to come in the next several years. Right now, PR for the locale believe a post-Covid renaissance is occurring and they may be right. **The San Diego Symphony's "The Shell"** (theshell.org) is an acoustically engineered stage and concert shell that just had its inaugural concert season this past Summer providing a pretty, immersive park experience.

For biking, skating and strolling go to the **Embarcadero Boardwalk**, which is bursting with outside activity including cruises, harbour tours, whale watching and fishing. There's also history and culture to discover there via the **Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego** (MCASD), the **Maritime Museum of San Diego** and the **USS Midway Museum**.

San Diego is known for its seafood of course, and the Village's popular **Open-air Seafood Market** anchoring its northern edge is can't miss on Saturdays. San Diego's history as a tuna port is clearly evident and this gathering gives the public a chance to see it firsthand, with local fisherman selling their fresh catches at more-than-fair prices.

Speaking of seafood, fish tacos are pretty much the city's signature. Definitely try some at the following spots: **Flight Deck**, **Mike Hess**, **Malibu Farm** and **Pier Café**.

LIBERTY STATION

One of our favorite parts of San Diego is Liberty Station, an area with a laid back, artisanal feel that infuses its food options, shopping and atmosphere. Handfuls of on-site museums, artist studios and dining await here, including the must-see **Liberty Public Market**, a giant food hall located in a former naval base commissary, the 25,000-square-foot-venue offers over 30 food and drink options under one roof.

If you enjoy shopping, especially vintage, a best-kept secret here is the **Sea Hive Station**, a colorful co-op retail experience inside a huge 23,000 square-foot historic hardware building in the central **Arts District** (libertystation.com/directory/arts-district). Over 150

local and independent designers, collectors, crafters and merchants curate their own little boutiques inside the space with clothing, accessories, furniture, art and more from the 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s and present for sale at fair prices. Upon our last visit we bought a lip-shaped ashtray, a maxi dress made out of an Indian sari and some sunglasses. Plan your visit on the second Sunday of the month to shop its "Second Sunday" outdoor flea market.

Also check out: **The Presley** (thepresleysd.com), a hot new al fresco spot adjacent to the station, retro-styled marble tables, fire pits, custom swinging benches, lounge chairs and greenery accents, and flavorful food options.

Moniker General (monikergeneral.com), a curated boutique, café and 1950s-style cocktail bar that takes the hybrid concept to a hip new space with clothing and custom furniture;

Stone Brewing World Bistro & Gardens (stonebrewing.com/visit/bistros/liberty-station), the famed indie craft brewers known for their devilish labels offer 40 taps, a 23,500-square foot space with quaint courtyard, landscaped gardens, fire pits, bocce ball and outdoor movies screenings;

The Loma Club (thelomacub.com) new 18-hole mini-course and stunning new indoor/outdoor clubhouse, from the co-founders of San Diego's award-winning **You & Yours Distilling Co.** (youandyours.com).

Seaport Village



KIMBERLY MOTOS

LA JOLLA

La Jolla is one of the most picturesque parts of San Diego and if you're looking for rest and relaxation it's a great option. There are plenty of fine hotels in the area and some even offer day passes if you're focused on pool time and cabana life.

The **Hyatt Regency** (hyatt.com/en-US/hotel/california/hyatt-regency-la-jolla-at-aventine/jolla) for example, has shaded, fully-stocked poolside cabanas to indulge in. Targeted mostly to business travelers the hotel has an upscale atmosphere and clean, modern look. With rooms and suites on 16 floors, the hotel features a Junior Olympic-size heated outdoor pool, a bar, fire pits, hot tub, lighted tennis courts, and restaurants like the bright and inviting lunch and dinner spot called **Drift. Estancia Hotel & Spa** (meritagecollection.com/estancia-la-jolla) also offers plush cabanas and daybeds, plus a heated saltwater pool and whirlpool, exotic hacienda decor and one of the area's best spas. They just opened a new restaurant called **Greenfinch** that's worth a pop-in. Both hotels are also great for the golfing crowd. **Torrey Pines Golf Course** (torreypinesgolfcourse.com) is nearby, and while we don't focus on it here, golf is of course huge in all of S.D. For more good swinging check out: sandiego.gov/park-and-recreation/golf.

MORE S.DELICIOUS STUFF

San Diego rivals Los Angeles and San Francisco in terms of food and dining –

fine, casual and everything in between. Here are some of the eateries that don't disappoint:

Cesarina (cesarinarestaurant.com/welcome-to-cesarina) in Point Loma is helmed by 26-year-old-wunderkind chef Cesarina Mezzoniis. With intricate Italian dishes and a charming vine-enveloped indoor-outdoor patio space, it's a great place for date night. The atmosphere is as rich and romantic as the dishes served; the wait staff are all Italiano and they really know their stuff too. Many dishes are made in its open-air pastificio (pasta factory) which diners can see from virtually every seat. Despite the pandemic, this cafe has thrived with an online retail shop to buy their pastas and sauces, a made-to-order cake company "Le Torte

di Cesarina," and catering, but it's the alfresco ambiance that must be felt as you feed.

In SD's Little Italy neighborhood, **Barbusa** (barbusa.com) is another modern Sicilian restaurant, and it's helped put the neighborhood on the map. Pasta mainstays and a secret menu (try the Busa Board, a six-foot-long sharing platter) make it a *deliziosa* dining option.

Honky tonk women and men should head to **Moonshine Flats** (moonshineflats.com) where dancing cages, spinning chairs and beer pong provide a head-spinning good time. SD tourism has been marketing towards the bachelor/ette crowd as of late and this party hub is tops (there's a celebration guest list on their website that waives bridal groups' cover charges).



Town and Country Waterslide



Spaghetti Pomodor

CREDIT ARLENE IBARRA

ENTERTAINMENT

WES ANDERSON'S THE FRENCH DISPATCH: VISUALLY DAZZLING, EMOTIONALLY DEVOID

BY CHAD BYRNES

You only have to watch a few seconds of Wes Anderson's *The French Dispatch* to know who's pulling the strings. Reminiscent of J.D. Salinger or Anthony Trollope – two writers whose books possess distinct airs, whimsical personalities and cursory speech patterns – Anderson's cinematic realm is populated with naturally gifted, overly-poised but deeply neurotic characters who scurry and flit through their lives without ever stopping to reflect on them. They're not necessarily multifaceted, but they do speak to the obsessive nature of human frailty.

And if ever there was a filmmaker whose greatest attribute was world-building, Anderson would be it. Well, him and George Lucas. It's undeniable that his true passion lies in the storybook look and tone of his films. From the muted color palettes and dollhouse-styled production designs to his soundtracks filled with British Invasion bands, an Anderson movie is like a collective homage to French New Wave cinema, '30s screwball comedies and '60s pop culture. Sometimes this alchemy weaves seamlessly into his stories as in the engrossing tragicomedy of *The Royal Tenenbaums* or the madcap fantasy of *The Grand Budapest Hotel*. At other times, the style overwhelms any substance the script might have to offer (*Isle of Dogs*).

The master of quirk's return is both a tribute to his adopted country of France and a nod to American magazines that nurtured his talents like *The New Yorker*. It's a dazzling celebration of cinematic aesthetics and a feast for the eyes. Every frame is tactfully conceived down to the last speck of dust. However, Anderson's characters, which are usually drawn with a sliver of empathy and individuality, are mere mannequins in this grand fantasy. This isn't necessarily a shortcoming, considering Anderson's visionary originality, but it's hard to ignore the movie's soulless bearing and detached feel.

Set in the fictional city of Ennui-sur-Blasé, where the local zine, *The French Dispatch*, is closing its doors due to the death of its editor, Arthur Howitzer Jr. (Bill Murray, in pure narcoleptic mode). The town is introduced by bike-pedaling travel writer, Owen Wilson, in a sequence that's so grand in tableau but flat in temperament and humor, you hope the rest of the movie doesn't follow suit. But it does.

Structurally, this is a triptych of stories that constitute the magazine's final edition with each one narrated by its most eccentric writers. First, there's art critic J.K.L. Berensen's (Tilda Swinton) tale of homicidal painter Moses Rosenthaler (Benicio Del Toro) and his prison guard lover Simone (Lea Sydoux), which is easily the best of the bunch. Then there's the dreary saga of a 1968 student occupation, featuring chain-smoking Lucinda Krementz (Frances McDormand) and her curious affair with protest organizer, Zefferelli B. (Timothee Chalamet). Finally, Roebuck Wright (Jeffrey Wright), a



James Baldwin-inspired scribe, delves into the kidnapping of the police commissioner's precocious son and the antics which ensue. These tales are intercut with scenes where Murray drifts into the writers' offices to confer on the pieces which could've burst with personality and shown writers at their most precious and juvenile, but are instead, as dry and lifeless as the Sahara.

An ensemble of venerated actors such as Willem Dafoe, Bob Balaban, Christoph Waltz, Henry Winkler, Elisabeth Moss, Saoirse Ronan, Edward Norton and Mathieu Amalric pop up for a couple of minutes before disappearing into the ether. None of their performances stand out since they all talk in the same impassive cadence (only Wright really stands out). This isn't completely unusual in Anderson's universe, but *Dispatch* takes it to a new level of uniformity and tedium.

As for the stories themselves, they are told with such a frenetic, lightning-speed momentum, so it's difficult to keep track of events, or even care. Anderson is basically displaying what it's like to flip through a magazine and ingest its essence before returning to normal

life. Still, it's strange that a movie that pays homage to writers and literary ingenuity is desperately lacking in human emotion or connectivity. The narrative never feels like a tribute to journalism of yore as much as an opportunity to construct interesting set pieces for its filmmaker.

Even with its inherent flaws, there are some twisted and endearing moments in *The French Dispatch*. If you're a Wes Anderson fan, you'll find plenty to enjoy. Aesthetically, it's one of his most densely layered undertakings. With his longtime production designer, Adam Stockhausen, and a captivating score by Alexandre Desplat, the director implements every cinematic device known to man. He switches from black and white to color photography with the snap of his fingers; he implements split screens; he even injects an animated action sequence. From the first frame on, Anderson lets it rip, Stallone style, presenting his signature stylistics on steroids. Too bad the same filmmaker who went to dreadful pains to design the house and hang the drapes, forgot to inhabit it with actual human beings.

ENTERTAINMENT

CHLOE ZHAO'S SUPER POWERS ARE LOST IN MARVEL'S ETERNALS

BY ASHER LUBERTO

In the past few years, Chloe Zhao has established herself as an indie filmmaker with an intimate approach to imagery and tone. Which makes her an interesting choice to direct Marvel's *Eternals*. In 2017, Zhao put her stamp on neo-realism with the laconic, meditative cowboy film

The Rider, and in 2020 she proved she could take that style to new and exciting places with the Best Picture-winner *Nomadland*.

From Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther* to James Gunn's *Guardians of the Galaxy*, many indie filmmakers have tried to adapt their sensibility to the Marvel Cinematic Universe, with mostly reliable results. But with the size and tone of this project, Zhao's sensibility gets lost in the ether.

Clearly, we're in a galaxy far, far away from *Nomadland*. Watching the intro, where a group of superheroes throws on spandex, fly above earth and start shooting lasers out of their eyes, your first thought will be: "Wait, Chloe Zhao directed this?" Where's the emotion? Where's the people? Where's the sense of scale?

It opens with a long scroll about the Celestials (giant robots), the Deviants (bad monsters) and the Eternals (sent to Earth to stop the Deviants). The title characters are immortal and include the leader, Ajak (Salma Hayek), weapons expert Thena (Angelina Jolie), laser eyes Ikaris (Richard Madden), shape-shifter Sersi (Gemma Chan), computer nerd Phastos (Brian Tyree Henry), mind controller Druig (Barry Keoghan), super strength Gilgamesh (Don Lee), super speed Makkari (Lauren Ridloff), love interest Sprite (Lisa McHugh) and comedic relief Kingo (Kumail Nanjiani).

Their mission results in a 7,000 year

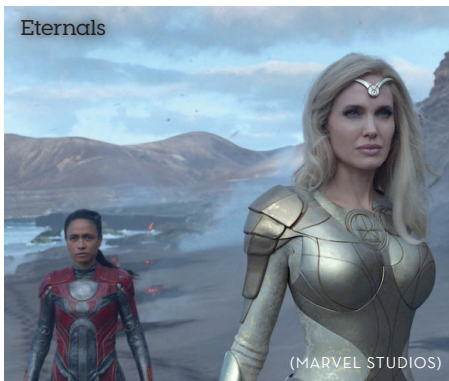
stay on earth, in which they must wait for the Deviants to surface. In the meantime, they watch as humans colonize, inflict genocide and develop. Starting in 5,000 B.C. Mesopotamia and ending in present-day England, the Eternals stand idly by as humanity suffers tragedy after tragedy (Pompeii, Hiroshima) until the Deviants arrive and they can finally intervene.

Zhao brought a level of poetry and adventure to her early work, so it's very, very strange that *Eternals* is as formulaic as it is. No doubt this is due to studio execs, who always have a hand in production, but it just does not work with Zhao's take on the universe. Not to mention the dialogue is terrible. Nanjiani's comedic relief is initially funny, until his one-liners become tired and incredibly repetitive. Hayek peppers her speech with Bible verses, while Madden, regrettably, sounds like an Australian Batman.

But it's not only the dialogue that derails here. The exposition that starts from minute one doesn't let up – including flashbacks to Sersi's love life. The plot is cluttered and hard to follow, and after a while, you just give up trying to understand anything as the Eternals batter arway at the Deviants.

Jolie as Thena is a bright spot, a callback to her mid-2000's action-run (*Salt*, *Wanted*). But the bursts of violence won't satisfy anyone looking for Zhao's pacing, and the long takes featuring characters basking in golden-hour light won't satisfy anyone looking for Marvel's rapid-fire clip. With *Nomadland*, it seemed Zhao had found her voice – a unique blend of neo-realism, Terrence Malick and Western archetypes. With *Eternals*, that voice is nowhere to be found. It's been steamrolled by the generic, rotating gears of the Marvel machine.

Eternals



(MARVEL STUDIOS)

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