

STANDING AGAINST AAIP HATE • MAYOR KHAN: 100 DAYS IN OFFICE • IRVINE WEEKLY MOVIE GUIDE

IRVINE WEEKLY

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BONA FIDE BROTH

MARUFUKU BRINGS ITS 20-HOUR TONKOTSU BROTH TO IRVINE

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FOOD

BONA FIDE BROTH

MARUFUKU RAMEN BRINGS ITS EXTRAORDINARY 20-HOUR TONKOTSU BROTH TO IRVINE

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

Marufuku Ramen, the Bay Area's well-known purveyor of authentic Japanese ramen, featuring a silky, smooth, 20-hour Hakata-style broth, has recently opened a new location in Irvine's Los Olivos Marketplace.

While Orange County is already supplied with a wealth of top-notch ramen joints, Marufuku's approach differs when it comes to the Hakata-style tonkotsu broth, which is the centerpiece of the entire Marufuku experience.

The attention to detail at Marufuku does not end with the broth, but rather begins. One slurp, and you will understand.

The key process behind Marufuku's luscious tonkotsu broth is a 20-hour cook time. In order to fully extract the umami flavor, this authentic broth is made by slow boiling pork bones. This slow-cooking process results in a combination of oily broth featuring a thick, milky layer of umami.

Filling a ramen spoon with this broth will showcase the different layers of fat and umami intermingling as clear and dark layers that seem to glimmer with every shift of movement. If you look closely, you can find shiny bubbles

of flavor that will reflect back at you, just before disappearing in a satisfying mouthful of decadence.

Swimming in this thick hakata-style broth are specially selected "ultra-thin artisanal noodles." Here, guests can dictate their own experience from the style of ramen, to the choice of protein and even the firmness of the noodle itself.

The two main protein choices on Marufuku's menu are chashu pork and chicken paitan. The melt-in-your-mouth chashu pork, which is simmered pork belly, provides a much richer mouth-feel, and all-around more fatty flavor.

If you go, a trusted order would consist of Marufuku's fried squid legs, known as Geso Fry, served with a delightful mayo, followed up by the popular Hakata Tonkotsu, featuring chashu pork, a seasoned soft boiled egg, green onions, kikurage mushrooms and bean sprouts.

If you like spice, you can go medium spice and get extra spices on the side. The spice served is cayenne pepper, which does not alter the flavor of the food.

Originally opened in San Francisco, Marufuku Ramen is the product of Bay Area natives Eiichi Mochizuki and Koji



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF MARUFUKU RAMEN

Kiura. The new location becomes the fifth, and the only Southern California-based location for the Marufuku chain.

"I am extremely proud of our team's ability to execute this restaurant opening, even in the most unpredictable times," Mochizuki said. "We look forward to serving Southern California with our Hakata-style-Ramen!"

Quietly opened in December, patrons have not been able to get the true, sit-down ramen experience anywhere recently. Now, as Orange County reopens in the Orange Tier, Marufuku at the Los Olivos Marketplace location offers plenty of outdoor seating, and indoor capacity is expected to be increasing as regulations ease.

Sitting in Marufuku's patio under the tall palm trees lining the Los Olivos Marketplace, it dawned on me that this giant bowl of amazingly delicious ramen was the first sit-down ramen experience I've had in more than a year.

Overwhelmed by the flavor of the broth upon first bite, I looked at this oversized bowl of ramen piled with huge slabs of pork belly, and a soft simmer egg. I wondered how I would finish this gigantic portion – embarrassed that I might have taken on more than I could chew.

Then I realized – the ramen was so delicious it actually made me forget for a split second – that to-go containers existed.



FINDING A RHYTHM

OC MUSIC & DANCE, ROCK FOR VETS HELP VETERANS IN IRVINE.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

While the COVID-19 pandemic has created challenges for everyone, a large demographic of veterans may still be suffering in the shadows. To bring awareness, and to offer support to the local veteran community, a pair of Orange County-based nonprofits – Irvine's Orange County Music & Dance and the Long Beach-based Rock For Vets – are working to create a music platform for veterans, to play, interact and most importantly, have fun.

Starting in April, OCMD and Rock For Vets will be hosting free COVID-safe jam sessions inside the Orange County Great Park in Irvine – and may even potentially be able to hold live performances.

Doug Freeman, CEO of OCMD explained that while the Irvine-based facility is not large enough to accommodate dozens of veterans each week, the program has secured space at the Great Park.

"We made an arrangement with the Great Park. All the neighborhoods have their own clubhouse," Freeman explained. "We need a place to put our vets – all this is free, and then we decided, if you already play but you just want to gig – we're going to have jam nights three days a week."

In addition to providing free lessons, or regular jam sessions each week, Freeman explained that for those that want to play live, the program will be compiling bands for live performances.

"We're going to build these bands, and every band will have a professional music coach. Don't have an instrument? Don't worry, I'll get you an instrument. Don't have a car? Don't worry, I'll Uber you to the park," Freeman explained. "And back."

Over the past year, OCMD has demonstrated the great lengths to which the nonprofit has adapted to the challenges of the pandemic. Freeman said while establishing new, innovative ways to allow kids across Orange County to play live music, dance and be creative together, he is thrilled to be able to give back to veterans in a way that provides both education and camaraderie.

Freeman, who is a veteran himself,

said he understood the lasting impacts that isolation and quarantine brought to many veterans, adding that music has become a powerful tool for both children and adults.

"There's another group of people that are going to be hit hard for the isolations that are going to be imposed – and those are



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROCK FOR VETS

vets," Freeman said in an interview with *Irvine Weekly*. "These guys have to hang together, now they can't. So we decided we would create a program which would help them get out of the house – and that was music."

Frank McIlquham, founder of the Long Beach-based Rock For Vets, said he started the music-based education program more than a decade ago because he believes the power of music is healing. McIlquham says more than 250 veterans have come through the nonprofit. Through his experience, McIlquham said music has become a tool for many veterans struggling with communication and socialization after returning from battle.

"Music is the great catalyst for your mind – for any ailment – and even if you don't have an ailment, it's a great way to let off some steam and try something new," McIlquham explained. "And you don't have to be a musician to be part of this. You have to have the want and the drive to learn – and they'll teach you."

Army Staff Sergeant and Iraq war veteran Jimmy Perez is a glowing example of this harmonious method of rehabilitation.

Perez is a 12-year Army veteran, who was deployed to Iraq in 2010. He said his



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROCK FOR VETS

Perez admits he had to rely on his military training to keep moving forward, but said he did not understand how to control or ignore the emotions of anger, sadness and despair. With that training, he said, comes a sense of pride. Perez said he thinks it is the pride many veterans feel, that prevents them from seeking help.

Fortunately for Perez, he sought help at the veterans hospital in Long Beach. Then, one day at the veterans hospital, Perez said something shifted in his mind when he noticed a baby grand piano during one of his visits.

After picking up a small keyboard, Perez explained that he learned he could play by ear. Perez has now been playing the same baby grand for the last five years.

"I wasn't sure piano was going to be it. So, it dawned on me, when veterans would actually stop me – and literally give me a hug, and thank me with teary eyes" he said. "Because they felt my pain in the piano."

Freeman says he is all too familiar with stories like Perez's and he said he wants other people to experience the enjoyment Perez feels when playing.

"I need the piano with me," Perez said. "For me, I put all my emotions, all the good, all the bad and all the ugly parts into the piano, and once I'm done it stays there. Even the good stuff. For me, the piano is like a soul string to my heart that I can't cut."

For now, Freeman said OCMD and Rock For Vets will be meeting in April, and are looking forward to jamming out.

"What we do is we give our veterans an avenue to have a place where they feel safe, and they're interacting with others who are also making them feel safe," he explained. "We're providing the instruments for them, so all they have to do is show up and have a good time."

NEWS

IRVINE'S AAIP COMMUNITY TAKES A STAND AGAINST HATE

LAST WEEK, IRVINE VICE MAYOR TAMMY KIM, ALONG WITH OTHER AAIP COMMUNITY LEADERS, MET WITH CALIFORNIA GOVERNOR GAVIN NEWSOM TO DISCUSS THE IMPACTS OF WHAT CAN BE DONE IN THE FACE OF ATTACKS AGAINST THE ASIAN COMMUNITY ACROSS THE NATION.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER



PHOTO COURTESY OF GAVIN NEWSOM'S OFFICE

Holding up flyers with the words "Stop Asian Hate," dozens of people came to show their support during a #StopAsianHate rally hosted by the City of Irvine on Friday, March 19.

Held at Irvine City Hall, the rally focused on unifying the community, while addressing the actions taken by Irvine, specifically to reduce racially motivated hate crimes and discrimination from happening in the city.

Prior to speaking at the Friday, March 19, rally, Irvine Vice Mayor Tammy Kim, who is also Managing Director of the Irvine-based Korean American Center, told *Irvine Weekly* that the pandemic created a lot of negative situations for many individuals in her community, and beyond.

"We are hearing from community

members about the pain and trauma that they are going through, as Asian Americans. We have 50 percent Asian American residents here in the city of Irvine. Many are experiencing a lot of grief and sadness," Kim explained. "We want to talk about what we as a city are doing to combat hate and racism within our city."

Kim explained that she introduced an agenda item in January, with the support of Council Member Anthony Kuo. The item modified the method in which the Irvine Police Department reports hate crimes.

"I introduced in January an agenda item, along with Council member Kuo, to have the city do its own tracking and monitoring of hate incidents in the city of Irvine," she said. "Right now, the IPD only reports on hate crimes – not hate

incidents. So what we're doing is actually establishing a portal so community members can report how they're experiencing hate."

In terms of increasing hate crimes and incidents happening in Orange County, Mary Anne Foo, Founder and Executive Director of the Orange County Asian and Pacific Islander Community Alliance (OCAPICA), said she has definitely seen an increase of race-related crimes happening in the Asian community her organization serves.

"We're also here today because of so much increase around hate against Asian Americans and scapegoating and blaming of Asians and Asian Americans for COVID-19, and we're here to say to, 'Stop it,'" Foo explained in an interview with *Irvine Weekly* at the rally. "With the deaths and the murders

in Atlanta, with all the deaths and murders of elderly, we're trying to work with cities and governments around the county, about what to do, how to enforce more hate laws – what can we do for the future to ensure that this doesn't happen?"

During the rally, Irvine Police Chief Mike Hamel announced Irvine Police Department's dedication to reducing these crimes altogether.

"Under the leadership of our City Council, we've been looking for alternate reporting methods for hate crimes and hate incidents, because we know that some members of our community are hesitant to call members of the police directly," he said.

The Irvine Police Department has now launched a submission-based hate crime reporting database, that can be utilized to report hate crimes or incidents in the community.

"Today I'm pleased to announce the launch of an online hate crime, hate incident, reporting portal. The portal is now live," he explained. "I would like to emphasize that the online portal is not designed to replace the response of the professional police officer when needed or requested."

Foo added that from her perspective, there are historical precedents for the type of rhetoric and scapegoating plaguing the Asian community right now, but she has trouble recalling when it has ever been this frequent in terms of "concentration and time period."

"I think throughout history there's been so many hate incidents and crimes against Asian Americans, but it hasn't been as much as it's happening.

I remember growing up in the '80s and there was so much hate against the Japanese because of the auto industry, but now we're seeing it happen every day," she said. "Part of it is when policy makers 'blame us' for COVID-19. That really impacts us, and it causes detriment to our lives."

Jennifer Wang, who has lived in Irvine for more than 30 years, spoke during Friday's rally about her experience watching Irvine evolve into the city it is today. Wang, who is now the Chief Operating Officer of the Santa Ana-based Asian American Senior Citizens Service Center, said she has noticed Irvine become the first to offer residents services before other cities during the pandemic.

"They were the first that I saw, providing the masks, providing the tests – there's so many tools that you need right now, that I think the city is really



PHOTO COURTESY OF TAMMY KIM

taking the steps to secure [these tools] for residents," she said. "People need to understand that there is trauma, and now during COVID-19 there is that invisible threat – whether it's the virus or maybe they're a victim of a hate crime – and that's really living in fear."

In a meeting with few cameras and little fanfare, California Gov. Gavin Newsom met with Asian American nonprofit leaders in Orange County on Thursday, March 25.

Kim was invited to the meeting, which was held at St. Anselm Episcopal Church in Garden Grove.

Kim said the last-minute meeting was led by the Orange County Asian and Pacific Islander Community Alliance, along with a half-dozen other Asian American nonprofits. Kim added that St. Anselm was selected for its historic legacy within the Asian American community.

"It was a really small group, a representative for each group," Kim explained in an interview with *Irvine Weekly* on Friday, March 26. "And the significance of St. Anselm church in Garden Grove is that it is both a Korean and Vietnamese Episcopal church – it was the launching point for many of the Vietnamese refugees when they had come to Orange County back in 1975."

In a statement provided to *Irvine Weekly* on Friday, March 26, Newsom said he was honored to be able to listen and converse directly with API leaders in Orange County. Adding that there is no place for hateful rhetoric in California or the nation.

"Hate has no place in California and the recent attacks against the AAPI

community are reprehensible. I stand with AAPI Californians – and AAPI communities across the country experiencing these senseless acts of violence," Newsom said in a statement to *Irvine Weekly*. "It was my pleasure to hear directly from Orange County leaders about their experiences as well as their resilience in the face of these difficult circumstances."

Reflecting on the meeting, Kim said Newsom made it a goal to discuss the hardships currently being experienced by the Asian American community nationwide, including access to services like health care, and of course the increased racism and hate crimes toward the community.

Kim added that the Asian community



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CITY OF IRVINE

is the third-largest community in the country, and is currently the fastest-growing demographic within Orange County.

"We had a discussion regarding the issue impacting our community, which includes access to health care, access to human services ... the expansive nuances of our histories and generational change that's happening in Orange County, and obviously the hate and xenophobia that exists," Kim explained. "A lot of the nonprofit organizations here in Orange County are beholden to the Orange County Board of Supervisors, who often can act as a middle man when it comes to funding your resources for the community."

Kim, who met for the first time with

Newsom while he was campaigning for California governor, said he spent most of the meeting listening to what community leaders had to say about the issues impacting the Asian American demographic, adding that his feedback was positive.

Additionally, considering Newsom's recent appointment of Rob Bonta, the first Asian-American California Attorney General, Kim said the appearance was well timed.

"It was extremely meaningful, because he could've used it as a photo opp, as a press [opportunity] – and he didn't," Kim said. "He did not use this as a tokenizing opportunity – he used it as an opportunity to really understand what was happening at ground zero."



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CITY OF IRVINE

On Tuesday, March 9, the Irvine City Council unanimously approved a \$3.3 million contract with Axon Enterprises, Inc. for body-worn camera and mobile video system solutions for the Irvine Police Department that will come out of the city's \$98 million police fund.

Of the \$3.3 million, 10% – or approximately \$300,000 – will be set aside for a contingency fund should any issues arise.

In addition to the physical technology that will include the body-worn and patrol vehicle integrated cameras, the city requires a Digital Evidence Management Software that will store all the recorded data. IPD will also integrate Axon video surveillance into its interview rooms.

In a presentation to the Irvine City Council on Tuesday, March 9, Irvine Police Chief Mike Hamel explained the contract will be paid over the next five years.

Currently, in the "contract award" phase of the project plan, the council's recent approval gives IPD the green light to move forward, with the physical deployment of the cameras happening between June and September.

"We'll move into the system configuration and training phase that will take place in April or May, also in the beginning part of May we expect to take delivery of the actual cameras and we are expecting deployment to be around the turn of the fiscal year," Hamel said during his presentation.

Irvine Mayor Farrah Khan is supportive of the investment. Khan, who has just surpassed 100 days as mayor in March, said she spoke with community organizations prior to being elected mayor, adding that her discussions within the community resulted in positive feedback for the idea of police wearing body cameras.

"Right after the Black Lives Matter protests that happened in our city, I actually held roundtable discussions with many of our Black community members. We had meetings with over 40-45 people," Khan explained. "One of the first meetings we had – with our police chief in attendance – one of the requests was to initiate body cams."

However, on Tuesday, March 9, that support was largely vacant from the council's public comment and e-comments on the agenda item.

In fact, of the six speakers who called in to comment, all said they opposed the item. Of the four e-comments, two opposed the body-worn camera program,

and one remained neutral.

Other than the City Council members, there was only one e-commenter that voiced support for IPD's body-worn camera program.

One of the half-dozen callers, Sylvester Ani, voiced his disapproval for the investment during public comments on March 9. Ani emphasized that body cameras do not actively prevent crime.

"With these body cameras, we're again continuing to over-invest in this system of policing, which doesn't prevent

police cruisers for the last three decades, in terms of wearable technology, Irvine is behind other police departments in Orange County cities, like Huntington Beach and Santa Ana.

In the request for council action, filed by Irvine's Director of Human Resources, and Hamel, the analysis conducted by IPD indicates more than 50% of Orange County police officers wear body-worn cameras.

"Currently in Orange County, over 70% of law enforcement agencies have

worn cameras will function in tandem with the officer's taser, meaning that once the taser is removed from its holster, it will activate the officer's front-facing body-worn camera.

However, the removal of the officer's firearm will not activate the camera. Rather, the officer will need to manually activate the camera by pressing a button.

"The taser will automatically activate the body-worn camera. When the firearm is drawn it will not automatically activate the body-worn camera," Mazzio said. "We did explore adding a piece of hardware equipment to the holster of the firearm that would potentially activate the body-worn camera on a firearm draw, but we did check references on that piece of technology and there were issues with the technology that we felt need a little more development before we would like to implement it here."

In an email to *Irvine Weekly*, Sergeant Karie Davies, who works within IPD's Office Of Public Relations, said the installment of cameras will likely happen in July.

"Chief gave an approximate rollout date of April/May for officers to be trained on the system and the policy with a projected date of July for field personnel to go live with them," Davies wrote. "These dates are approximate and could change. We will put the policy on our website once the system is live, if not before."

Currently, IPD's policy 438.6, regarding the release of video images gathered by public safety officers, states that the images and videos are for the "official use of the Irvine Police Department." The policy, which was updated in December 2020, states that requests for the video surveillance footage will follow the same protocol as a request for public records:

"Requests for recorded video images from the public or the media shall be processed in the same manner as requests for department public records. Requests for recorded images from other law enforcement agencies shall be referred to the watch commander for release in accordance with a specific and legitimate law enforcement purpose. Recorded video images that are the subject of a court order or subpoena shall be processed in accordance with the established department subpoena process." – Public Safety Video Surveillance System, Policy 438.6

It is unclear how this policy will change with the implementation of Axon services.



IRVINE CITY COUNCIL APPROVES \$3.3 MILLION CONTRACT FOR POLICE BODY CAMERA UPGRADES

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

crime," Ani explained over the phone. "Part of what people don't see – what police do – is not only the violence that you see when talking about situations like George Floyd around the world, but it's the resources that they sack from the community that's also violent. Now, that might be the sensationalized violence you see when someone breaks into a store, or if someone has a knee or their neck, it might not be that type of violence, but then it deprives the community of the resources they need to thrive."

While IPD has used dash-cams in

already implemented, or are in the process of implementing, [body-worn camera] programs."

The analysis also provides references for Axon's services, which were submitted by Burbank Police Department, the Garden Grove Police Department and the Santa Monica Police Department.

As part of the March 9 presentation to the council, Jade Mazzio, business services manager for IPD, gave a more detailed look at the features associated with IPD's new surveillance technology.

Mazzio explained that the new body-

MAYOR KHAN REFLECTS ON 100 DAYS IN OFFICE

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER



PHOTO COURTESY OF FARRAH KHAN

Irvine Mayor Farrah Khan's first 100 days in office have been highlighted by some notable first-ever accomplishments, like helping Irvine become the first city in Orange County to establish a COVID-19 task force. Khan admits, however, that there have been some policy issues, like the veterans cemetery project, that continue to present challenges.

Khan has now spent just over three months in her role as mayor, leading Irvine amid the unknowns of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Khan has managed to keep Irvine residents informed on issues pertaining to foul odors from the All American Asphalt Plant, updates on CalVets' involvement with the veterans cemetery project, and ensuring Irvine's senior population has adequate access to the COVID-19 vaccine.

Reflecting on her first 100 days as mayor, Khan said she personally views establishing a pair of task forces for COVID-19 and business reopening, as her most important accomplishments.

Established in December, Irvine's COVID-19 Task Force enlisted health care professionals from around Orange County, including Orange County Health Care Director Dr. Clayton Chau.

Khan said these recent partnerships will help prepare Irvine's health care and small business infrastructure for the future, and it may already be paying off.

"I thought [the task forces] really set the stage for what we were going to accomplish this year and really brought the community together," Khan explained. "It's important, as a city of our size, that we start working partnerships more, not only in our city, but regionally, to make sure that we're bringing the best to our city."

Since Orange County began establishing SuperPODs for the COVID-19 vaccine, Khan has been vocal about Irvine's ability to host a super vaccination site. However, Khan said it was through her conversations within the COVID-19 task force, that the city was able to adapt to the shifting landscape of vaccine availability and distribution.

While Irvine has not yet received a SuperPOD site, Khan said that thanks to the connections established with the COVID-19 task force, the city obtained valuable insight, which led to a major focus on the city's demographic of at-risk seniors.

In fact, Khan said even Chau was impressed to report that Irvine had vaccinated more than 70 percent of its senior population – one of the highest rates within the county.

"Within those conversations, we saw the county was moving in a direction to meet their equity metrics, and that didn't include Irvine. So how do we bring vaccines into Irvine to help our residents, especially our most vulnerable seniors?" she said. "From that, came

the partnership with MemorialCare and Hoag, where they started setting aside vaccines to help us, so we set up our vaccination clinic at Lakeview Senior Center vaccinating anywhere from 200-300 people a day."

Looking back, Khan said she is unsure how much the last three months have changed her, but admitted that as mayor, her decision making can "set the tone" for decision making in the city.

"I don't think it's changed me much, but it has given me the ability to be in a position where I can direct which way our city goes," she said. "As a council member we all have an equal vote, but at the same time it's the mayor that sets the tone for the city."

In terms of challenges, Khan referenced the on-going discussions regarding the site selection for the veterans cemetery. Currently, the California Department Of Veterans Affairs is performing a feasibility study on two alternative sites in Irvine. The studies will be funded by \$700,000 set aside for CalVets in the state budget.

The veterans cemetery has become a frequently discussed topic at Irvine City Council meetings. In fact, CalVet recently presented an update and addressed concerns from City Council members that the project was being delayed by allowing the CalVet study to continue.

"I'm really hoping that this year will be the year that we actually settle where the cemetery is going to be, and get it in a position where we won't be debating it anymore," Khan said. "I think it has to do with the fact that a lot of our development at the Great Park is being held up because of the cemetery. There's uncertainty about the cemetery being built or not built – that's holding up a lot of our projects that we'd like to get started on."

As Orange County continues to meet requirements to reopen under California's Blueprint for a Safer Economy, Khan said she is looking forward to the city's primary focus shifting away from COVID-19, and being refocusing on future growth.

"We're not only taking care of the pandemic, but building on the relationships within the business community, making sure, when we talk about us as a growing city, we're talking about making space for those start-ups and providing a landscape that when companies look at Irvine, they don't see us as a small town," she said. "Really, just making sure that we have a system in place where we are safeguarding our current villages because people moved into these areas because of the way they are – master-planned. Yet looking at areas to urbanize a little bit – think more arts and entertainment, and lifestyle to our city that accommodates various ages."

Khan credits her vision for the future to a lesson she learned through her years of public service.

"If you don't upgrade your city, you become the sleepy town that doesn't accomplish much. I think Irvine has so much more to offer, that's why it's important to have these conversations with our many partners to see what the city is going to look like," Khan explained. "It's going to grow. I know people don't want it to grow, but with our current RHNA numbers and the land that's available, our city is going to grow more, and we just want to make sure it's a sustainable type of growth where we're balancing things out."

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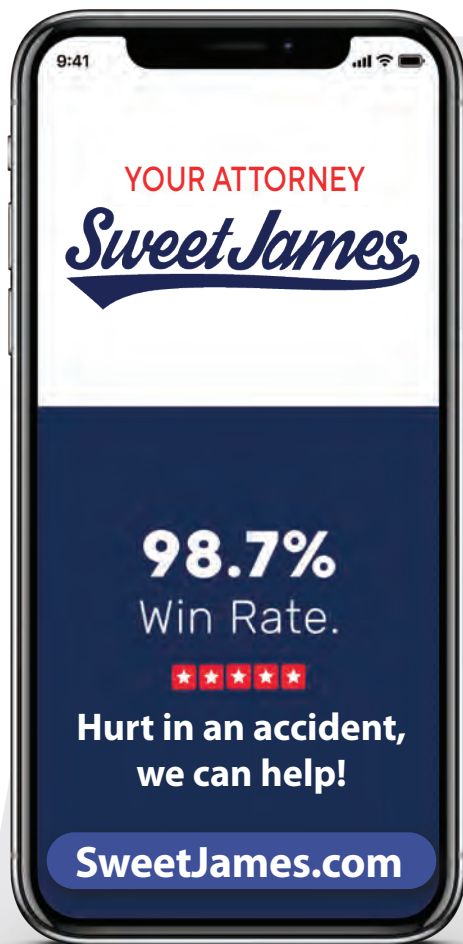
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WAYNE THIEBAUD, CLOWNS: AN IMAGINATIVE APPROACHABLE EXHIBITION

BY LIZ GOLDNER

Clowns pique our imaginations and memories. They also reflect the panoply of human emotions, from despair to pathos, to delight, to jubilation. Indeed, clown portraits pervade art history, going back to modern art, as with the work of Picasso, to the Renaissance and to the Middle Ages, with artists from the latter often drawing clowns as caricatures. Clown portraits as parodies of humanity delight us all, from the very young to the very old.

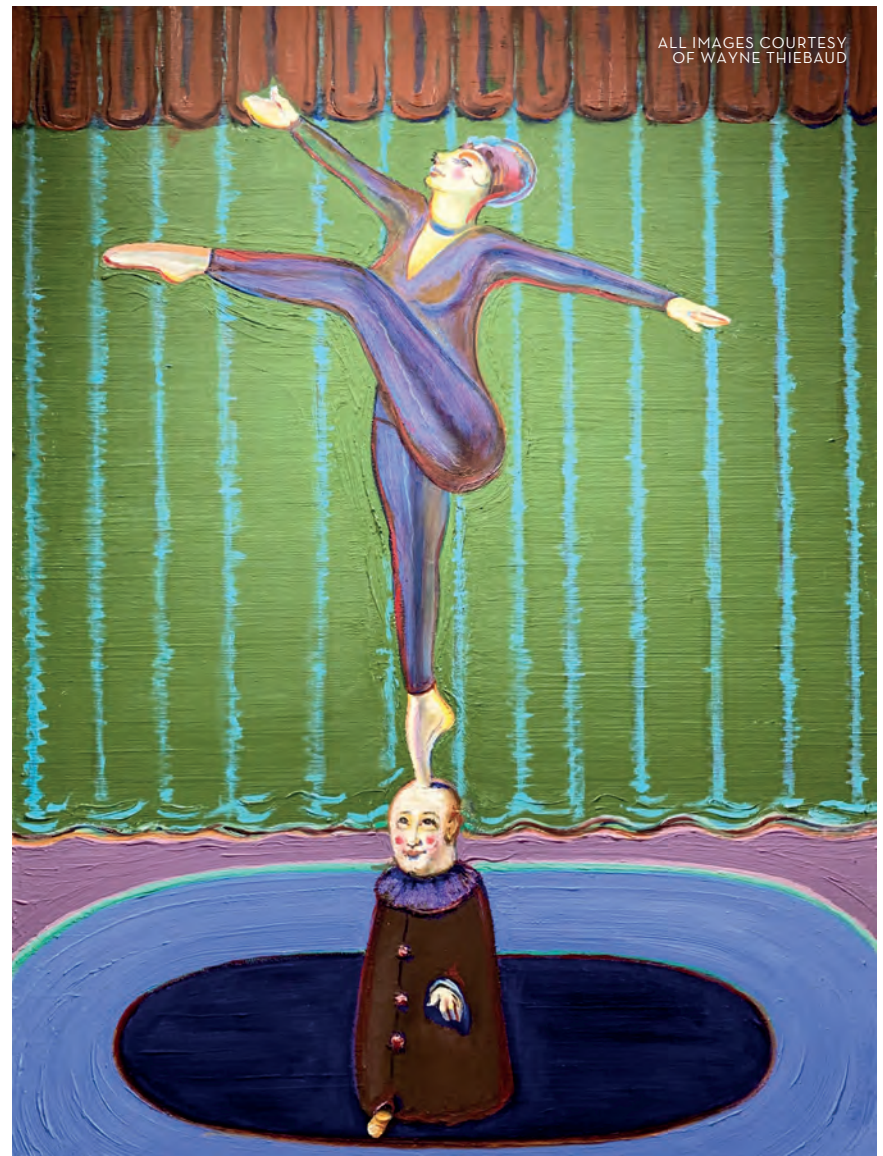
It is fitting then that "Wayne Thiebaud: Clowns" is on exhibit at the recently re-opened Laguna Art Museum. The compelling background to this show is that these portraits were created by 100-year-old Wayne Thiebaud, a California native who has been called the quintessential American painter.

While Thiebaud is well-known for his whimsical still-life paintings of pies, cakes

and desserts, his clown portraits represent an entirely new series – which he began working on just seven years ago to deal in part with recent family difficulties.

Looking back to his childhood in Long Beach, Thiebaud explains that he often visited the traveling Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus, and even worked there to "bring water to the elephants and help the clowns pick up the tent," as he said in the catalogue accompanying the exhibition. He got to know many Ringling Brothers clowns, delighting in their make-up, behavior and even physical strength. He also worked as an animator at the Walt Disney studios as a very young man, and later as a cartoonist in the Air Force. He employs these early experiences and developed skills in his "Clowns" series.

This exhibition of 56 portraits has several noteworthy aspects. Most clowns are unique in attire, setting and



expression. All paintings are based on carefully drawn figures, an aspect that the artist is known for. Many figures are placed in settings that are unusual, even for clowns; for example, a tiger pinning a clown to the floor in "Clown and Beast." And in several paintings, the artist appears to be making fun of the clowns – a reversal of the more traditional clown stance. Yet these sometimes-sardonic portrayals are spontaneous. Or as Thiebaud is quoted as saying in the catalog, "If I make decisions ahead of time I usually get into trouble, so I have to kind of let the painting develop from the ongoing process."

One of the most endearing portraits in this exhibition is "Clown and Makeup" of a seated clown, nude from the waist up, smiling peacefully at a plate filled with makeup and a brush. The artist said that this piece, "is probably the most puzzling painting for me. Can't quite figure what that is."

"Clown Disintegrating" features a clown attired in red set against a red wall, as bits and pieces of the figure are dissolving into the atmosphere. The brushwork in this painting echoes the dissolving aspects of impressionism, demonstrating the artist's mastery of a range of styles.

"Clown with Two Cigars" depicts a fierce-looking dark-skinned creature with a green brimmed hat and suspenders, and with cigars spewing smoke protruding from both sides of his mouth. The contrasting "Clown Juggler" is a joyous figure, juggling three pies while wearing a face mask.

The exhibition also presents "Clown Boots," illustrating clown faces, one smiling and one frowning, adorning two boots; "Clown Tie" of a tie decorated with a clown face; and "Clown Cloud" with a tall cloud showering rain on a small, dejected clown.

A few paintings contain clowns in



a stylish dancer with one toe balanced atop the head of small, mindful clown. These two are among a handful of paintings expressing the more elegant aspects of circuses, particularly those of the one-ring genre.

As our museums and galleries open up, it is gratifying to see a museum exhibiting art that is approachable to novices and art aficionados, featuring a centuries-old, enduring subject.

Laguna Art Museum, Laguna Beach; Mon.-Tue., Thur.-Sun., 11 a.m.-5 p.m.; "Wayne Thiebaud: Clowns" on view through October 24, 2021; advance tickets for timed entry, available on the museum's website, are required with capacity limited to 25 percent. lagunaartmuseum.org

boxes. In "Boxed Clown," the poor clown has fallen into a large circus box, with only his long colorfully clad legs and one hand holding an American flag hanging out. In another, two dejected clowns are descending into a box. Yet the artist claims to not know why he portrays his subjects in certain ways. Or as he says in the catalog, "It's always a kind of

desperate journey and a fascinating one and that's what I think keeps me going." Still, these portraits suggest the plight of clowns and of the larger humanity as being boxed into desperate situations. Several paintings of dejected circus performers in this show are balanced by three others titled "Bumping Clowns," all of airborne clowns hurtling toward each

other with their faces about to collide.

The show also exhibits finely detailed paintings of graceful female circus performers. "Woman on a Ball" showcases a woman wearing turquoise pumps, G-string, skimpy bra, long gloves and a mask, as plumes of colored smoke – or perhaps feathers – emanate from her head. "Clown with Ballerina" illustrates





GOLD RUSH

24KGOLDN GOES TO LOST CITY TO FIND HIMSELF

BY BRETT CALLWOOD

PHOTO BY JONATHAN MANNION

Bay Area rapper 24kGoldn is near bouncing out of the Zoom session as he meets with us to be interviewed for this story. The guy is jovial – full of life – and a charming conversationalist.

It's no wonder that he's so infectiously cheerful; the pandemic and lockdown have been challenging for everyone but Goldn has seen his career thrive thanks in no small part to the global smash that is his "Mood" single (with Iann Dior). It didn't hurt when it was later remixed

by Justin Bieber AND J Balvin. It's been a crazy year.

"I'm having the biggest career moments of my life so far, in the middle of a global pandemic," Goldn says. "What the fuck is going on?"

It's a fair question. Nobody saw the success of "Mood" coming, least of all the artist.

"I don't think unless you're at the Drake, Taylor Swift, Weeknd, Ariana Grande level, you can't expect a song to go number one like that," he says. "I hadn't

had anywhere close, I hadn't even had a top 40 song at that time. So I knew it was a great song, if it gets 300 million plays, I'm ecstatic. It did that in like three months. I knew we had something special. I think it's over a billion between everything now."

That's incredible, and perhaps it points to the fact that the world needed a song like "Mood" to literally lift the collective mood. The song was included on Spotify's mood-boosting playlist, only increasing the feel-good factor. And

now, life has completely changed for the artist. Hell, he has even performed on Ellen.

"In every way possible, from where I live to what my day-to-day basis is," he says. "I would say literally, my entire life has changed. Now it's readjusting and figuring out the new normal."

It's all a long way from his 15-year-old self, rapping at home to YouTube beats. "At 15, I was going to this sneaker store, DreamTeam SF, and I had developed a mentor relationship with the owner Paypa Boy," Goldn says. "I came in one day and said I want to make a song. He said, 'Don't even worry about it, we've got the studio upstairs. You're good.' I go to the studio upstairs, make my first song, drop it on Soundcloud, send it to literally every single person I went to school with. Then when I came to school the next day, kids were bumping it in the courtyard and at lunchtime. I thought, this could be nice."

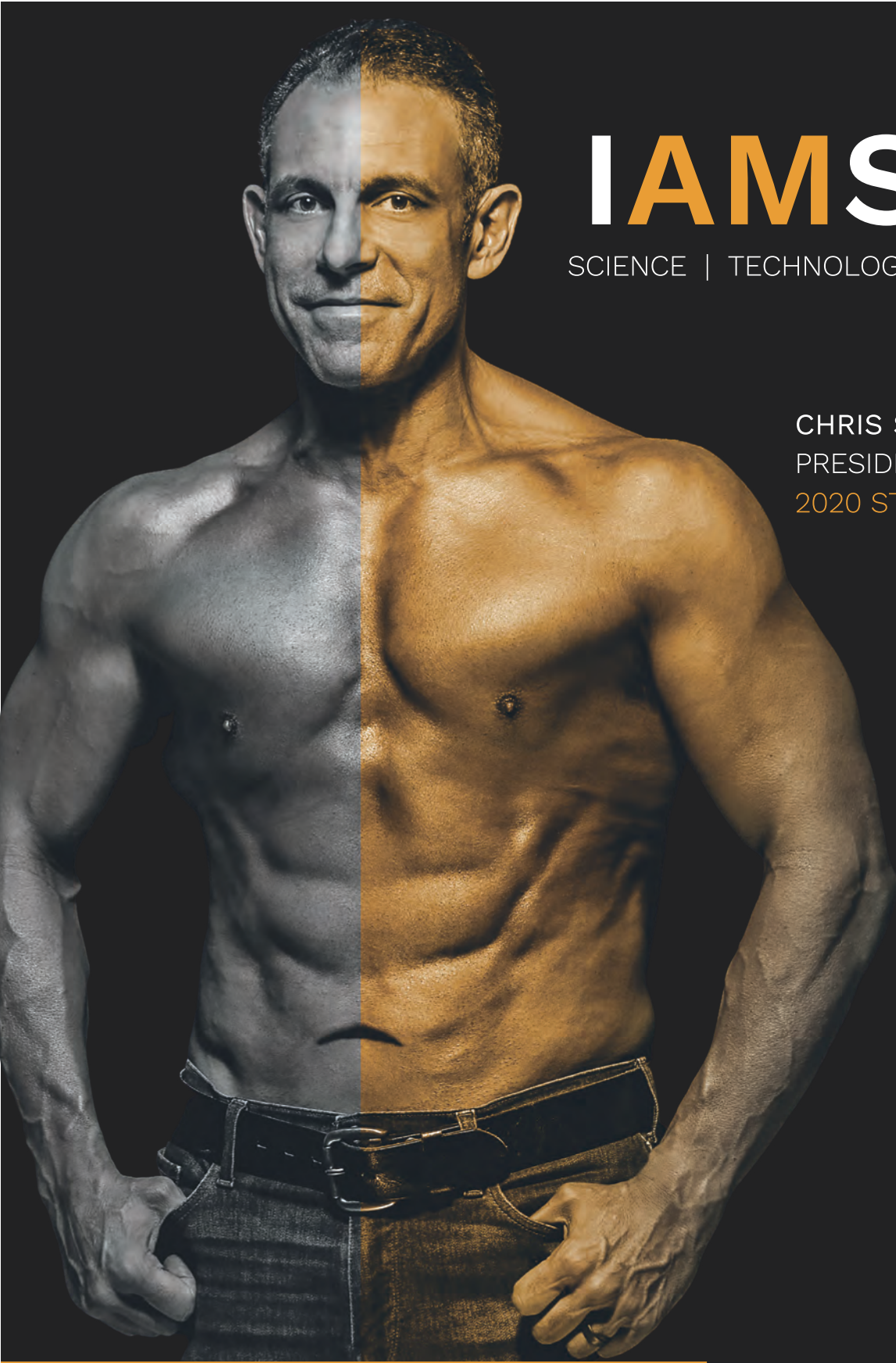
24kGoldn (genuinely born Golden Landis Von Jones) has two former models for parents, so he was stylish from the get-go. A career in advertising beckoned.

"I had this crazy big afro, and nobody had an afro back then," he says. "I'd walk into an audition and they'd be like, that kid's different, we gotta put him in. So I did Lunchables commercials. Blue Diamond Almonds, Honda, Toyota. When you're 14, 15 if you get \$1,000, it's like you got a million dollars. You can buy any video game you want. I was enjoying that."

Financial success was understandably addictive to the young man, and he was even tempted to a career in finance due to his admiration for a family friend who worked as a hedge fund manager.

"I was like, I like this house, I like this lifestyle. I want to be able to provide that for my friends and family," he says. "I'll be a hedge fund manager because I can do whatever I want. I went to school for business, but at 15 I had just gotten my ears pierced, trying to get into that rapper mode. I go to the house, and he's like, 'If you're trying to get into finance, they're going to try to block you out by any means necessary. You're already a black man, they don't want to see you win. Having earrings gives them another reason to write you off.' I didn't want to be in a career where I can't be myself and live the way I want. So I decided to be a rapper."

Clearly, it worked out for the best. Goldn has a chill style that has been evident from the start – even when he was rapping "B**ch I Go to USC" and raising



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PHOTO BY JONATHAN MANNION

a ruckus. Forever a hustler, a cease and desist letter from the college wasn't what it seemed.

"Now that it's been enough time, I can admit that I photoshopped that to create the hype around the song," Goldn says. "The truth has been revealed. I was like, people like controversy and how can I get the song out."

In fact, Goldn soon dropped out of school to pursue his career, releasing the *Dropped Outta College* EP in 2019 to celebrate. The evolution from then to now, and his about-to-drop *El Dorado* debut album, is huge.

"The EP was more me figuring out what I can do," he says. *El Dorado* is my own sound. R&B, pop, rock, alternative. I mixed them all together to create something that's uniquely me."

The title of the album is of course a reference to the lost city of gold, a continuation of the theme in his name.

"It also means the 'golden one,'" he says.

"That was a nickname I had gotten from my mom. It always stuck with me. Hundreds of explorers came looking for this mythical treasure and nobody found it. I just think music takes you to another world. I mixed it all together, made some music, and we're here."

The rapper is convinced that *El Dorado* features the best music that he has made in his life (unsurprising seeing as it's his debut album). His goal, he says, was to create a world, rather than lump a bunch of songs together.

"This is the start of my world," he says. "Something I learned during this pandemic with 'Mood' was, music really does have the power to transport you to a whole other reality. So many people told me that 'Mood' saved their quarantine. It's literally helping people. With *El Dorado*, let me create this world that people can escape to if they're stuck in the house or not feeling what their current situation is. Just live in the music."

Things are clearly going swimmingly for Goldn, though the yin to that yang is the pressure that comes with success. There's no resting on laurels now.

"After the song was going crazy, I was like 'fuck, how do I do it again? Can I do it again?' But that wasn't even a song I thought was going to be that big," he says. "All I can control is the music. I can control what I say, the production we use. A little bit of marketing too. But anything beyond that is more up to the world. So if I'm trying to force these situations or getting upset because things aren't happening just like 'Mood' did, that's unreasonable expectations. All I've got to do is be happy and proud of the music I put out there, and then let the universe take care of the rest."

He's playing humble though – it's not just the universe. Goldn hustles harder than most anyone else.

"Hard work is gonna beat talent every time," he says. "I was in the studio so much, trying to meet people and make all these plays for so long. One day, it had to pay off. You've got to believe in the vision, believe in the dream, but if you don't put the work in, ain't shit gonna happen."

El Dorado is the culmination of all that

hard work to this point. "Mood" is the song that closes the album, while the ultra-emotional "Don't Sleep" precedes it.

"It's important to show people that not every day is a party," he says. "Have music to help people process and understand those feelings too. There are two types of sad songs – the songs that let you wallow in your feelings, and the songs that offer some perspective. Some days you're happy, some days you're sad. I wanted to give people ways to work through those feelings."

So that's where we are. No surprises on the album (unless he's looking to genuinely surprise us) – he's laid out his work over the past year or so, proudly, for all to enjoy. And then, as 2021 shows signs of life, he's hoping to take it out to the people.

"I'm ready to go but it's not under my control so I've just got to roll with the punches," he says. "There's been a lot of virtual shows, and things are starting to open up in the south which is cool. I'm trying to see the world. I'm an international superstar right now and I've only been to three

countries – USA, Japan and Tanzania – in my whole life. What's up with that?"

24kGoldn's El Dorado album is available on all major streaming platforms.



PHOTO BY JONATHAN MANNION



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- Jim and Carol Hoffman

ENTERTAINMENT

IRVINE WEEKLY'S MOVIE GUIDE

REVIEWS OF THE HOTTEST FILMS AVAILABLE ON YOUR TV SETS, ELECTRONIC DEVICES, AND IN SELECT THEATERS AND DRIVE-INS THROUGHOUT SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA.

Irvine movie theaters are slowly starting to open again, and there's no shortage of diverse and engaging films out there. The past few months have been particularly fertile for film. As always, our film critics let you know what's worth the watch time and what's not – from indie art house gems to popcorn-perfect blockbusters to new movies garnering buzz. Here, our critics review some of the biggest titles that should be on your radar.

NOMADLAND / IN THEATERS & VOD



Based on the book by Jessica Bruder, Chloe Zhao's *Nomadland* is so finely tuned and masterful you won't even discern its machinations. Frances McDormand plays Fern, a struggling widow who works part-time at an Amazon factory in Nevada. She's lost everything to the recession and lives in her van. Once winter hits, Fern drives to Quartzsite, Arizona where a group of vagabonds live in a commune. Most of the people in the commune are retired, spit out by society, and

forgotten. Zhao smartly casts real-life people, who are fascinating, and McDormand's performance is so good that you can't tell the difference. She's "acting," but you wouldn't know it for a second. (Chad Byrnes)

THE UNITED STATES VS. BILLIE HOLIDAY / HULU



The main reason to see this movie is Andra Day, who inhabits the soul and physique of Holiday with an effortless grace. There's not a moment when the Grammy-nominated singer is onscreen that you're not mesmerized and it's extremely hard to believe this is her first acting role. Of course, she can sing like the legend by adjusting her rich, sultry vocals, but she also personalizes her take with a naturalness that shatters any preconceptions that might feel like basic mimicry. With her bruised stare, fierce humor, impulsive fits of anger and gravelly-voiced passion, Day taps into Holiday's complexities while simultaneously reveal-

ing her humanity. It's an extraordinary performance, and deserving of her Golden Globe win and Academy Award nomination. (Chad Byrnes)

LAND / IN THEATERS & VOD



In her feature film directorial debut, Robin Wright gives her finest screen performance yet while establishing herself as a director with an innate sense of timing and tone. The film's first third is beautifully concise. Unable to find solace through therapy or family, Wright's Edee heads west, buys a cabin in an isolated Rocky Mountain spot surrounded by a magnificent, god-high green forest and begins teaching herself the ways of the wild. She's brought along a thick hunting manual, but she is quickly undone by nature's whims and her own naiveté. She soon suffers a mental collapse and for a long, painful screen moment, she is a woman completely alone in the universe. In the mountains, nature doesn't worry over backstories or language. All that matters is the present and the trust you have for the human at your side. (Chuck Wilson)

BIGGIE: I GOT A STORY TO TELL / NETFLIX

Now streaming on Netflix, Emmett Malloy's documentary is a hip-hop doc about the artist who created his own sound and became a staple of the genre. Much like Christopher Wallace himself, the film is a shot of adrenaline, humor and personality. While other documentaries about Biggie have chronicled his glory days, what's refreshing about this one is the way it explores his modest, humble beginnings. Raised by a single mother – a Jamaican immigrant, who worked as a school teacher – Biggie spent most of his time as a boy hanging out on a few blocks in Brooklyn, including a street run by drug dealers. While he and his friends were selling crack, he was also working on his music, honing a lyrical flow that was unlike anything

ENTERTAINMENT



anyone had ever heard before. After his charisma is demonstrated in archival footage of concerts, recordings and radio freestyles, Biggie's death hits like a freight train at the end. He was gunned down in Los Angeles at the age of 24, just three weeks before his second album, *Life After Death*, was to be released. It's easy to think about what could have been if he had survived, but Malloy's doc is about his life, not his death. It's about celebrating what he did while he was here, which is what Biggie's brash, braggadocious, semi-autobiographical music was all about. (Asher Luberto)

COMING 2 AMERICA / PRIME VIDEO



In Hollywood, everything gets a sequel. As much as we whine about what's being released these days, intellectual property rules because it's easy to remake, reboot, restore. Remember *Coming to America*? How about more *Coming to America*, but with the same

old jokes and the same old premise? Um, how about no? Eddie Murphy reprises his role from John Landis' 1988 film, *Coming to America*, as prince of a fictional nation called Zamunda. Akeem (Murphy) will soon be king but he doesn't have an heir himself – that is, until his loyal sidekick Semi (Arsenio Hall) breaks the news. It turns out he has a son with a woman in Queens, who he met on the dance floor and who kind of/sort of raped him while he was passed out, which is played for laughs. Ha. Ha. Ha. What ensues is a rehash of the original set-up, this time with Akeem's son Lavelle (Jermaine Fowler) and his mother, Mary (Leslie Jones), being fetched from Queens and dropped into a country with real queens. With its stale humor and rehashed, haphazard direction from Brewer, there isn't much *Coming 2 America* can do to win us over. A last-minute appearance by the charismatic *Sexual Chocolate* reminds us why these characters are so great. But it just makes you wish you were watching Landis' original film, which is genuinely hilarious. If this sequel proves anything, it's that stealing jokes from the original makes for a pretty pointless affair. (Asher Luberto)

CHERRY / APPLETV+



The Russo Brothers' harrowing and hollow drug addiction drama, *Cherry*, utilizes the camera to re-create the mental effects of trauma and drug abuse. The movie is a visceral gut-punch, an aesthetic representation of a shattered mind, in which Tom Holland goes for broke as Cherry, in a role that asks him to navigate the highs and lows of a heroin addict in Cleveland, Ohio. In flashbacks, we meet our troubled protagonist at the age of 18, going to college and skipping classes. He falls in love, joins the army, moves through basic training and the Iraq war, and comes home

pretty messed up, rapidly descending into addiction and crime to finance his habit. Though the narrative could use some structural integrity (it crams way too much in the middle), the Russos create a courageously visceral, experimental piece, tapping into the mind of a junkie who is always one phone call away from getting clean. (Asher Luberto)

MOXIE / NETFLIX



Built on Amy Poehler's name recognition and all the good intentions in the world, Netflix's *Moxie* is an optimistic, coming-of-age romp about female empowerment that does its best to instill a positive message in its storytelling. But is it successful? The answer: kinda sorta, but not really. The crux of *Moxie* is about power: who has it, who uses it, and who needs it. In this case, power is abused by the athletes of the school who are protected by the senior staff, while fringe groups are nullified by the system. It is one of many tropes that run rampant in the hallways of this particular high school as the story falls victim to every cliché in the John Hughes handbook of mainstream teen movies. And unlike her cohort Tina Fey's *Mean Girls*, there's no self-aware satire to make this tolerable. All this can be forgiven with good acting and writing, and for the most part, the cast really tries to sell the messaging even with pigeonholed characters, but it doesn't quite cut it. (Erin Maxwell)

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