

THE PLIGHT OF OC MOUNTAIN LIONS • IRVINE WEEKLY MOVIE REVIEWS • ENTERING COVID-19 YELLOW TIER

IRVINE

WEEKLY

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CONTENTS

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NEWS: 4

Musick Jail expansion, COVID-19 yellow tier, at-large elections, and more.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

COMMUNITY: 6

The unseen plight of Orange County mountain lions.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

FOOD: 9

Irvine's best chocolate chip cookies.

BY BRET KAVANAUGH

MUSIC: 13

Bianco chooses her own adventure.

BY BRETT CALLWOOD

PODCAST: 14

Good Grace – A Genuine Rockstar

BY RYAN LEUTZ

ART: 16

Festival of Arts and Pageant prepare for summer reopening.

BY LIZ GOLDNER

ENTERTAINMENT: 18

Movie Reviews: *Wrath of Man*, *Riders of Justice*, and more.

BY IRVINE WEEKLY CRITICS

COVER: PAGEANT OF THE MASTERS

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LOCAL NEWS ROUND-UP

IRVINE'S MUSICK JAIL EXPANSION, ATTEMPTED ARMED ROBBERY AT DONUT STAR, ORANGE COUNTY ENTERS THE COVID-19 YELLOW TIER, CITY OF IRVINE DEFENDS AT-LARGE ELECTIONS.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

Sheriff Don Barnes Opposes Irvine's Musick Jail Expansion Resolution

On Tuesday, May 11, the Irvine City Council unanimously approved a resolution asking the Orange County Board of Supervisors to hold a public hearing on the James A. Musick Facility. Now, the city will await a decision from the Board of Supervisors.

In an interview with *Irvine Weekly*, Vice Mayor Tammy Kim said after hearing dozens of comments from the public asking the Board of Supervisors to intervene, she decided to file a resolution.

"Clearly we have a lot of residents that are not happy about the Musick expansion – I'm in agreement with that as well," Kim explained. "The residents wanted to see a resolution, confirming our condemnation, and our opposition to the expansion."

In terms of the language, Kim's resolution states that the Board of Supervisors should listen to the concerns of residents.

However, Orange County Sheriff Don Barnes says he does not support the resolution, adding that the community has had ample time to provide public input.

In a statement provided to *Irvine Weekly* from Barnes, the sheriff emphasized that the project would not be paused.

Here is Barnes' statement in full: "The resolution passed by the Council opposing the Musick project and calling for a community forum fails to take into consideration the multiple past opportunities over the last decade to provide public input. This project is one of the most extensively deliberated in Orange County history. Year after year

the Orange County Board of Supervisors has publicly considered multiple recommended actions related to this project.

Some of those who spoke at recent Irvine City Council meetings demanding they have an opportunity to have their voice heard, have in fact previously spoken at past Board of Supervisor meetings during deliberations on this project. The public has had their opportunity to give input and their elected representatives have opted to take advantage of funding provided by the State Legislature to construct new housing modules at Musick.

This project is moving forward because it allows us to further enhance the balanced approach to criminal justice that has resulted in historically low crime rates for the City of Irvine. The new jail modules preserve our ability to hold accountable those that seek to violate our laws and harm others, but also provide these individuals with an opportunity to change their ways, receive treatment if needed, and reenter society as a productive citizen."

As of Tuesday, May 18, the Board of Supervisors had yet to respond to the City Council's resolution.

Irvine Man Arrested For Attempted Armed Robbery At Donut Star

An Irvine man was arrested on May 11, after he was seen on camera allegedly robbing a customer at a Donut Star in Irvine with an airsoft gun.

As a man was buying donuts for his golfing buddies at the Irvine-based Donut Star, a man wearing a camouflage cowboy hat and a black jacket and sunglasses walked up behind him and pulled out a gun. The suspect can be seen pointing the gun directly at the



James A. Musick Facility

back of the victim's head on video.

A Ring Camera mounted inside Donut Star captured the tense moments of the attempted robbery.

On Tuesday, May 11, Irvine Police Department Sergeant Karie Davies confirmed the incident in an email to *Irvine Weekly*. IPD identified the suspect as Kenneth Smith, a 47-year-old Irvine resident.

"It happened at Donut Star on Alton [Pkwy.] and Jeffrey [Rd.] at 5:30 this morning," Davies wrote on May 11. "The victim was robbed at gunpoint by the suspect who fled with \$100. The victim chased the suspect and recovered the gun which ended up being an airsoft gun. The suspect was captured a short time later and arrested."

A screenshot of the incident taken from a Ring recording began making its way around the internet. The screenshot shows an armed suspect pointing a weapon toward the victim, who appears to be held by the suspect's other arm.

After the suspect obtained \$100 in cash from the victim, he ran out of the location – only to be chased down by the victim.

In an email with *Irvine Weekly*, Davies gave an update on the victim's status. Once the victim caught up to the suspect, a struggle ensued, but the victim was able to grab the weapon.

"According to the victim, he was there to grab donuts for his golf buddies as he does quite often. He was approached by the gunman who put the gun to the victim's head and demanded money. The victim reluctantly handed over the money but then his adrenaline kicked in and he struggled with the suspect, chasing him to the Chevron gas station across the parking lot," Davies

wrote. "They struggled again and the victim was able to gain control of the gun which he determined to be an air-soft at that time. The suspect ran away through the shopping center and out of sight. He changed clothes and remained in the area where he was noticed by officers and detained."

"He was arrested for robbery," she wrote.

Davies added that the victim was fortunate that he was not injured in the exchange. However, she said this is a reminder that real danger exists, and to be aware of the consequences.

"He said he wanted to get his money back and just reacted," Davies wrote. "We always encourage the public to be good witnesses and not put themselves in danger. We all have the fight or flight response and sometimes adrenaline kicks in and we react. In this instance, the victim's instinct kicked in and he reacted. Thank goodness he wasn't seriously hurt."

Now In Yellow Tier, Orange County Struggles To Vaccinate The Hesitant

On Wednesday, May 19, Orange County moved into the yellow tier, the least restrictive tier in California's soon-to-be-defunct Blueprint For A Safer Economy.

On Tuesday, May 18, the Orange County Health Agency reported 48 new COVID-19 cases, with no new deaths. Cumulatively, the county has recorded 254,831 cases, including 5,031 deaths.

Officials in Orange County are still dealing with waves of vaccine hesitancy, however, as hundreds of Orange County residents continue to attend the Board of Supervisors meetings to push conspiracy theories about the vaccine.

Officials are now worried the state of emergency might need to be extended past the July 4 target date if not enough people receive vaccinations.

In an interview with *Irvine Weekly*, epidemiologist Andrew Noymer, Associate Professor of Population Health and Disease Prevention Public Health at UC Irvine, spoke on the issue of vaccine hesitancy both locally and nationally.

Noymer does not anticipate any catastrophic consequences as a result of vaccine hesitation in Orange County.

"In short, I don't think a Manaus, Brazil or India-style meltdown is in the cards for the United States, even if we have another wave – and I do believe we will have another wave – but it won't be as pronounced as the one we've just been through," Noymer explained.

Noymer said he believes the next wave will come in the Fall or Winter, like most respiratory viruses.

"In the big picture, all of California is doing quite well and the tier system is going away soon. The infatuation with yellow versus orange, at this point, is a little bit ridiculous. We're going to go through a natural low, like this summer, and basically right now and I think people will be like, 'There's no COVID around now – I'll just wait, it just seems like it's not needed now,'" Noymer said. "The thing is, then, they're going to have to play catch up in the Fall. Then there will be lines around the pharmacies – and the hospitals."

Man Who Used Fake Identities To Claim Millions In PPP Loans Arrested

An Irvine man who allegedly claimed more than \$5 million in fraudulent federal COVID-19 Payment Protection Program (PPP) loans, turned himself in to the U.S. Attorney's office on Friday, May 7. The man, identified as 38-year-old Mustafa Qadiri, also had assets seized by authorities.

On Monday, May 11, Qadiri pleaded not guilty to accepting \$5 million in federal PPP loans.

In a statement, the U.S. Attorney's Office said Qadiri was named in a federal grand jury indictment, with more than a dozen charges against him including bank fraud, wire fraud and money laundering.

The USAO said it has evidence the Irvine resident applied for PPP loans with falsified identities in May and June of 2020, for multiple "sham businesses" with addresses listed in Newport Beach.

"In May and June of 2020, Qadiri allegedly submitted false and fraudulent PPP loan applications to three banks on behalf of those companies. The false information allegedly included the number of employees to whom the companies paid wages, altered bank account records with inflated balances, and fictitious quarterly federal tax return forms. Qadiri allegedly also used someone else's name, Social Security number and signature to fraudulently apply for one of the loans," the USAO statement reads.

The businesses listed are: All American Lending, Inc., All American Capital Holdings, Inc., RadMediaLab, Inc., and Ad Blot, Inc.

Per a statement from the U.S. Attorney's Office, Qadiri used PPP loads to fund a lavish lifestyle, including a fleet of foreign sports cars.

Irvine Prepared to Defend At-Large Elections

The city of Irvine will defend its current at-large election process in court, if challenged, according to Irvine City Attorney Jeff Melching.

Melching's comments are in reference to a letter sent to the Irvine City Council by Attorney Kevin Shenkman, who represents the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project, a non-

partisan Latino voter participation organization.

In his letter, sent March 5, Shenkman claims Irvine's at-large elections violate the California Voting Rights Act of 2001, due to vote dilution – which is the impairment of minority groups' ability to elect their preferred candidates or influence the outcome of elections – and demands Irvine adopt district-based elections.

Shenkman concludes that in the event Irvine does not voluntarily change its elections to district-based elections, the Shenkman & Hughes law firm will be forced to seek "judicial relief."

In his written response to Shenkman, dated April 23, and obtained by *Irvine Weekly*, Melching emphasized that Irvine had no interest in adopting district-based elections at this time or in the future, and provided multiple examples countering the argument that district-based elections create a better environment for minority voters.

Melching also emphasized that the demands pushed by Shenkman are framed similarly to previous attempts to bait cities into costly legal battles.

"Your letter appears to be the same 'form' letter that you have sent to jurisdictions throughout California over the past decade – apart from filling in a few city-specific blanks in the last five

paragraphs – which strongly suggests that you have not undertaken a detailed analysis of the city's demographics or its elections."

There has yet to be a public discussion on this topic, as Shenkman's original letter was addressed by the council in closed session. Irvine Vice Mayor Tammy Kim, who was recently elected to the City Council in November – after receiving more votes than any Irvine candidate in the city's history – said she does not see racially polarized voting in Irvine.

"I want to make it very clear that I'm a hardened advocate for the California Voting Rights Act," Vice Mayor Tammy Kim said in an interview with *Irvine Weekly*. "However, I am not in favor – and I'm on record even prior to being elected – of districting in the city of Irvine, because there is no California Voting Rights issue to solve that will be remedied through districting."

Kim is familiar with Shenkman, after hearing Huntington Beach and Glendale received letters threatening legal action over at-large elections.

"The fact of the matter is, Glendale responded, Huntington Beach responded – and he just didn't respond back," Kim added. "Most cities have an issue with the CVRA, the facts are just not in support of particular cities or waterboards – but that is not the case in Irvine."





Photo by Mark Girardeau

THE CONCERNING, UNSEEN PLIGHT OF ORANGE COUNTY MOUNTAIN LIONS

AS THE GENETIC VARIATION IN MOUNTAIN LION POPULATIONS WITHIN ORANGE COUNTY CONTINUES TO SHRINK, EXPERTS SAY THESE LOCAL CATS ARE CLOSER TO FACING EXTINCTION THAN EVER BEFORE.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

As sightings of mountain lions become commonplace in Orange County, the list of urban legends associated with these covert, nomadic cats continues to grow.

Recently, an incident on Tuesday, May 4, left residents in Williams Canyon on edge, after a mountain lion attacked goats inside a livestock enclosure, killing at least one. The mountain lion was sub-

sequently trapped inside the enclosure, unable to free itself after the attack.

In the days following the May 4 livestock attack, familiar rumors began circulating that a rogue mountain lion was responsible and was hunting for sport, not food.

Rebecca Barboza, an Environmental Scientist with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the agency that relocated the animal, said it is not uncom-

mon to find multiple carcasses when mountain lions attack captive livestock, due to pandemonium that ensues when a large predator enters an enclosure.

Once inside, the mountain lions may kill more than one animal in the process of selecting the weakest and slowest, she said.

"In an enclosure setting, all of the prey animals are going to panic, so the mountain lion is observing all this

panic, so it's killing all of the animals – just to get the situation calmed down," she explained.

To free the mountain lion in Williams Canyon, the Orange County Sheriff's Department enlisted the help of the CDFW to sedate and relocate the animal. Barboza, who has more than two decades of experience as a wildlife biologist, explained that in terms of capture and release protocol, CDFW determines the best course of action on a case-by-case basis.

"Ideally, the best thing for the animal is just to open the enclosure and let it go," Barboza explained in an interview with *Irvine Weekly*. "It was thought that for the safety of the animal, as well as the safety of the people – the residents and the staff – that we would immobilize the animal inside the enclosure and take it to the nearest available habitat, and release it that way."

Still, local researchers say myths of rouse mountain lions are harmful and overshadow the true plight the mountain lions of Orange County are experiencing.

As the lion's natural habitat continues to shrink due to wildfire and manmade barriers, like freeways and neighborhoods, few pathways exist for the species to expand genetic variation within the local populations.

Now, local mountain lion researchers have grown worried, specifically over the health and well-being of mountain lions within the Santa Ana Mountains.

Dr. Winston Vickers, Director of the Mountain Lion Project at UC Davis, a project that has studied mountain lions in the Santa Ana mountains since 2005, has shown that there are approximately 18-24 lions currently living within the Santa Ana mountains.

He disagreed with the sport-killing mountain lion theory wholeheartedly.

Vickers says regardless of what humans may believe about these cats, the fact is that mountain lions in Orange County are constantly frequenting locations that intersect with human activity, but the animals are largely uninterested in human interaction.

Unfortunately, however, from Vickers' perspective, the mountain lions within Orange County are currently walking a fine line between survival and extinction, which Vickers fears could become a reality within the next 50 years.

"It's a very sad story, but very typical of the mountain lions in this mountain range – one of them was poisoned, one was shot, three were hit by cars," he said.

"Every time I tell these stories I just get reminded that really our research, in contrast to most mountain lion research, is mostly researching how they died, as much as how they live. So, it can get pretty depressing."

Vickers said a female mountain lion, officially known as F121, was killed in the Bond Fire in December, after burning her paws and starving to death.

Vickers, who conducts portions of his research in Irvine, added that he hopes to separate fact from fiction about these animals, emphasizing that reinforcing false narratives about mountain lions causes further damage to the already rocky relationship between mountain lions and humans.

Vickers is currently collecting fur samples from more than 60 "hair snare" traps, which enable researchers to collect hair without being near the animal. Of the half dozen territories within California, Vickers says he is most concerned about mountain lions within the Orange County and greater Southern California region.

"Santa Ana population is the most concerning of all the populations in California, with a close second being the populations within the Santa Monica Mountains, north of L.A. – both populations are severely inbred, and cut off from other populations," Vickers explained.

Through his research, Vickers has found that inbreeding, along with the lack of natural pathways within Orange County, has severely stunted the local mountain lion populations genetically.

"One thing that was really pointed out was the plight, genetically, of this population. Overall, these years of study and sampling, we've only found one animal that came across I-15, from the East to the West, and reproduced," he said. "It's almost always the young male responsible for moving the genetic material around. We had detected two others, but they did not reproduce."

For Vickers, he expected to see at least three or four make the trek from East to West during that same timeframe. If this lack of reproduction trend continues, Vickers fears a tragic road is ahead for these giant felines.

This scenario has led Vickers to a startling statistic.

"We found that if reproduction really began to suffer in this population, and that's what we're trying to evaluate now, that this population could go extinct within the next 15 years," he said.

"Even without reproductive problems, it had a moderate likelihood of extinction within a 50 year period, just because of high mortality – so that's been the really surprising and kind of shocking finding."

After the capture in Williams Canyon, Mark Girardeau, a well-known Orange County-based wildlife photographer, said he recognized the animal after the landowners sent him photos.

Girardeau explained that the specific male that was captured has a few names which include "Scar" due to a long scar across his hind leg. Girardeau said he has come to call the male mountain lion "El Cobre."

Girardeau has spent nearly a decade photographing animals in Orange County, and currently has more than a dozen motion-activated trail cameras located on properties within the Orange County mountain ranges.

He said his trail cameras have documented El Cobre several times within the last few months.

"I don't specifically track him, but I do get him on camera pretty often, in a few spots. There are a couple of other mountain lions I get in a couple of other spots, too," Girardeau said in an interview with *Irvine Weekly*. "But, the last year, it's probably been mostly him."

Girardeau, and other locals in the area, say El Cobre has been spotted as far south as Ortega Highway, and as far north as Silverado Canyon, which are separated by more than 30 miles.

Now, Vickers says El Cobre's recent capture has piqued his interest, and he is awaiting the results of genetic research on hair samples collected from El Cobre.

"He's obviously a little older, he's pretty scarred – that means he's survived a while, that's good news from the survival perspective, maybe he's been producing kittens, so that's good if he has been."

While the data will not be available any time soon, he hopes El Cobre carries enough genetic variation to help with the decreased fertility rates.

"We did get some hair from that animal, that Fish and Wildlife collected, and we're going to include it in the hair study. If we can get DNA from that hair, we may be able to determine who that male is related to, how he fits into the big picture," Vickers explained. "Is he an animal that grew up here, or is he maybe an animal that came over from the side of I-15 – we're really interested in detecting those animals that have crossed the freeway successfully."

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WHERE TO FIND IRVINE'S BEST CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIES

BY BRET KAVANAUGH

Any dessert enthusiast knows you have to respect the classics. The prime example of that is the humble and forgiving chocolate chip cookie. Invented in the 1930s by Toll House Inn owner Ruth Graves Wakefield, its stratospheric rise in popularity cemented it as the quintessential American cookie.

Everyone has their own tips and tricks to make a delicious batch of chocolate chip cookies, and it's easy to make them well. Making the best one, though – now, that's something else entirely.

- **Chocolate walnut.** The soft inner layer of this cookie is interrupted by crunchy little morsels of walnut for a unique and delicious texture.
- **Peanut butter chocolate.** Salty, creamy peanut butter morsels liven up the classic chocolate chip cookie.
- **Triple chocolate.** This is for the true brownie lover. Made with imported Belgian chocolate (milk and dark combined), it's incredibly rich and satisfying.
- **Blueberry coconut pecan.** This is a blueberry pie captured in the form of a cookie. The nutty, chewy addition of co-



Photos by Max Milla (@mxmilla)

Tea lovers: Try the strawberry jamaica (made with heart-healthy hibiscus petals), the minty citrus refresher, or the not-too-sweet pineapple tea. They'll refresh your palate and take the edge off of their indulgent pastries.

If you need a little bit more caffeine than that, try the South American cold brew coffee or the Vietnamese iced coffee (sweetened condensed milk mixed with highly concentrated coffee).

Paderia Bakehouse also has a full menu of horchata, including:

- **Classic horchata.** This drink is a blend of rice, sweet vanilla, crème and cinnamon.
- **Matcha horchata.** Trendy matcha goes well with this famous Mexican drink.
- **Strawberry horchata.** Strawberries and cream are the perfect combo, and this drink takes it to another level.
- **Dulce de leche horchata.** Caramel and velvety crème perfectly accentuate rich rice and cinnamon flavors.

Paderia Bakehouse's Irvine Hours
Great news for pastry lovers! Paderia

Bakehouse has extended the hours at its Irvine location. It's now open from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday through Friday, and 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. on the weekends. These new hours offer plenty of time to fit a cookie break into your schedule, so you can go multiple times a day if you want to. This reviewer definitely does!

Where to Find Paderia Bakehouse
The Irvine location of Paderia Bakehouse is located right off the 55 and 405 in The Square at Skypark Circle. If you're surrounded by office buildings, you'll know that you're in the right place. If you're lost, just look for the airport. It's only two blocks down.

The shopping center that Paderia has plenty of parking available at both the back and front lots, so don't worry about getting the timing just right. The location does get packed during the lunch rush, but you'll still be able to find a spot.

Show us your pics! The Irvine Weekly has a Facebook and Instagram page, and we always want to hear from our foodie fans.



Not content to stick with delicious Portuguese egg tarts and Filipino ensaymada, Irvine's Paderia Bakehouse decided to take on the challenge of making the best chocolate chip cookies. They definitely succeeded.

What's on the Menu at Paderia Bakehouse

The cookies at Paderia are as thick as a fist, with chewy edges and a warm, gooey center. They combine the best qualities of cookie dough with the warmth and texture of a well-baked treat, and the flavor – indescribable.

There are a few different options on the cookie menu at Paderia:

- **Classic chocolate chip.** You'll taste the high-quality chocolate in this cookie as you bite into its scrumptious center.

conut flakes and pecans adds volume, body, and flavor. If you love fruit pies, you'll love this.

While each is amazing in its own right, I have to be honest: the sheer goodness of the classic chocolate chip cookie kept me from trying the rest for a long time. Why mess with perfection? When I did, I realized my folly – I thought their cookies couldn't get any better, but I was wrong. Instead of picking just one favorite, I would urge you to try them all. Seriously, get all of the cookies from Paderia. You won't regret it.

Delicious Drinks at Paderia Bakehouse
Forget Starbucks – it's all about the drink menu at this Irvine bakery. From fruit-sweetened tea to strong Central American coffee, Paderia has a wide variety of beverages available.



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BIANCO CHOOSES HER OWN ADVENTURE

SO CAL ELECTRO-POP ARTIST LETS HER CREATIVITY FLY FREE DURING LOCKDOWN.

BY BRETT CALLWOOD

SoCal-based artist BIANCO is a classically trained pianist, a guitarist, a producer, a singer – you name it. As far as she's concerned, a career in music was her only option. It's been, she says, the singular love of her life since childhood and her primary focus.

Things are going well. She's described in her media kit as a "queer-femme producer, singer-songwriter, poet, director, and multi-instrumentalist," which about covers it. She describes her sound as "music to dance and ugly-cry to," a dichotomy highlighted by recent single "Teeth Bared" and new single "That's What Friends are For."

"I feel most comfortable in my skin when I'm writing from a deeply raw and emotional place," she says. "I find that's the voice that comes to me very naturally when I'm examining really intimate themes like that. It's ultimately electronic music, but I went to school for film scoring. My influences are strings, really big drums, arranging for different things. So it's highly emotional electronic music. That's probably where I live."

It's an effective songwriting approach. Other artists might pull influences from a variety of different places, but BIANCO writes about whatever she's experiencing at that time. However, she can collaborate too.

"I write with a lot of artists too," she says. "I have sessions a lot and produce a lot of other artists' stuff. I sometimes pick up on their energy too, and we can write from their perspective. But ultimately, it's always personal experiences. Like looking at my diary with a microscope."

BIANCO was born in Manhattan Hospital and grew up in the Yonkers, just outside of the city. In high school, she was in a bunch of bands that would perform in the city as she learned her craft.

"We lived right outside of the city," she says. "I remember playing at Trash Bar, Sidewalk Cafe and Pianos. I had shows at the Bitter End. All different iterations of my musical identity. But those were my early stomping grounds. By the time I got to L.A., I was so used to being on stage at dive bars and stuff, it wasn't like I was starting from scratch getting in front of an audience."

BIANCO attended UCLA and ended up staying in SoCal. She's been in L.A. for a decade now and feels fully enveloped by the



Photo by Scott Fleishman

scene. There are, she says, big differences.

"It's funny because I feel like there are way more dive bars in New York City, and it probably has to do with the size," she says. "Either you're gonna play a smaller dive bar or a really big venue. There's not really a middle ground. But in NYC, there are a lot more options to play. In L.A., I feel like all the starter venues are still a little bit more elite. In New York, you can just fuck up on stage a lot more. There's places to do it at. In L.A., your dive bar is like The Echo. That's still a fucking great venue. Don't fuck up on stage at The Echo."

If New York acted as a giant music school, honing her skills for the discerning venues in Los Angeles, then the education has served her well. While there's little in the way of "rock" in her pop-electronic sonics now, the DIY lifestyle intrinsic to punk is something that she has fully embraced. In lockdown, it allowed her to thrive. Rather than drown, she swam in creativity and came up with the idea of a *Choose Your Own Adventure* style video for the "That's What Friends are For" single.

"I grew up with *Goosebumps* books, the *Choose Your Own Adventure* stories," she says. "That was probably the number one influence for the game. Horror really influ-

ences a lot of the visuals for my brand and my creative expression. I've explored a lot of different horror film themes, and I'm going to continue to do that with a couple of videos I have coming out. But I was like, a zombie video would go perfectly with this song, and we did it as a *Choose Your Own Adventure*. That was how it was born, and then we spent a couple of months unpacking what that meant and how much harder it would be. At the end of the day, everyone was like 'Fuck it, we're doing it.'"

That final statement sums up BIANCO's energy during the difficulties we've all faced this past year. While it's hard to hire people, she says that she feels blessed to be surrounded by talented actors and actresses, makeup artists, etc.

"I was able to mine my peers for help on that front," she says. "There's a lot of trust that went into a lot of these sets, everyone getting tested beforehand. Smaller productions, no one on set. You had to be really meticulous. But actually, it fostered a super intimate environment where we were really isolated and people were more focused. We shot all that stuff back in October, right as the industry was just starting to figure out shooting schedules again. It was a breath of relief to actually be on a

set and not just super locked down."

It's impressive. Gone, she says, are the days when musicians can rely on others. They have to fend for themselves and figure it out. That, despite the fact that we're all emotionally exhausted.

"We're just so over gaslighting, so over toxic behavior, everybody is just calling shit out," she says. "There's no tolerance for bullshit. I probably would have lived in the horror genre anyway with my visuals, but it's nice that it might be resonating more with people because the whole world felt like a horror movie for a minute."

With an album on the way and the earliest signs of touring possibilities, 2021 should be another great year for BIANCO. But there are things she learned during lockdown that she doesn't want to let go of.

"I really love how quarantine and being isolated like this has forced me to connect with my fans digitally way more," she says. "Whether it's Twitch livestreams, DJ sets, more videos in the studio, things like that. No matter what, even when we start touring again, I'm going to always lean into that."

BIANCO Chooses Her Own Adventure: Her "That's What Friends are For" single is out now.

PODCAST

IRVINEWEEKLY.COM | MAY 21, 2021

14



Photo by Atlantic Records

GOODY GRACE - A GENUINE ROCKSTAR

BY RYAN LEUTZ



Photo by Atlantic Records

In the age of viral fame and meme music, Goody Grace stands out as a rockstar in the truest sense of the term. He unapologetically makes the music he wants to make, stays true to his roots, is stylish as hell, and comes across as a genuine person while doing it. In line with his air of authenticity, believe it or not, Goody Grace is not a stage name.

"I love the name. Can we just talk about that?" asked Brian Calle, host of the Rockstar Experience Podcast.

"I mean, Goody Grace, is that your birth name or a stage name? Because that name is fire," he continued.

"It's not a stage name, it's my real name, man," Goody humbly replied with a

chuckle, CBD joint in hand. Goody is the latest artist to sit down with the Rockstar Experience podcast and at only 23 years old, he is already in tune with his own rockstar experience.

Although Goody Grace is a real-life rockstar these days, having collaborated with some of the biggest names in the industry like Juicy J, G-Eazy and Blink-182, he honed his craft in the woods of Manitoba, Canada before relocating to L.A.

"Yup, I'm from the sticks. I love it back home. Where I came from is a very particular and special place that really made me who I am," he began.

"Culturally it's so diverse there, because it's really country, but there is also a lot

of crime there. Half of my friends drove Cadillacs and sold weed and half of my friends drove trucks and listened to country music."

Goody holds this balance of influences in high regard, and they are reflected in his music and style.

"I think the dichotomy of that creates a special and weird type of culture and I like country music as much as I like punk music as much as I like hip hop music."

His sound, although well cultivated, is as indescribable as it is varied. Goody considers himself genreless.

"I've always been kind of all over the place, but that's not out of confusion or indecisiveness, it's just out of versatility. I just like music and I always want there to be something for everyone in my music," he explained.

"How would you describe your music to people who haven't heard it?" the Rockstar Experience hosts asked.

"It's always been a struggle to put into words for me," Goody responded. "But, I like my music to be, first off, emotional, second, cinematic, and I think the most important is nostalgic. I think it's more about the themes and the feelings than the sound. Whether it's an acoustic song or something with 808s and trap hats that I might be rapping on or it's a punk song; it's still the same energy."

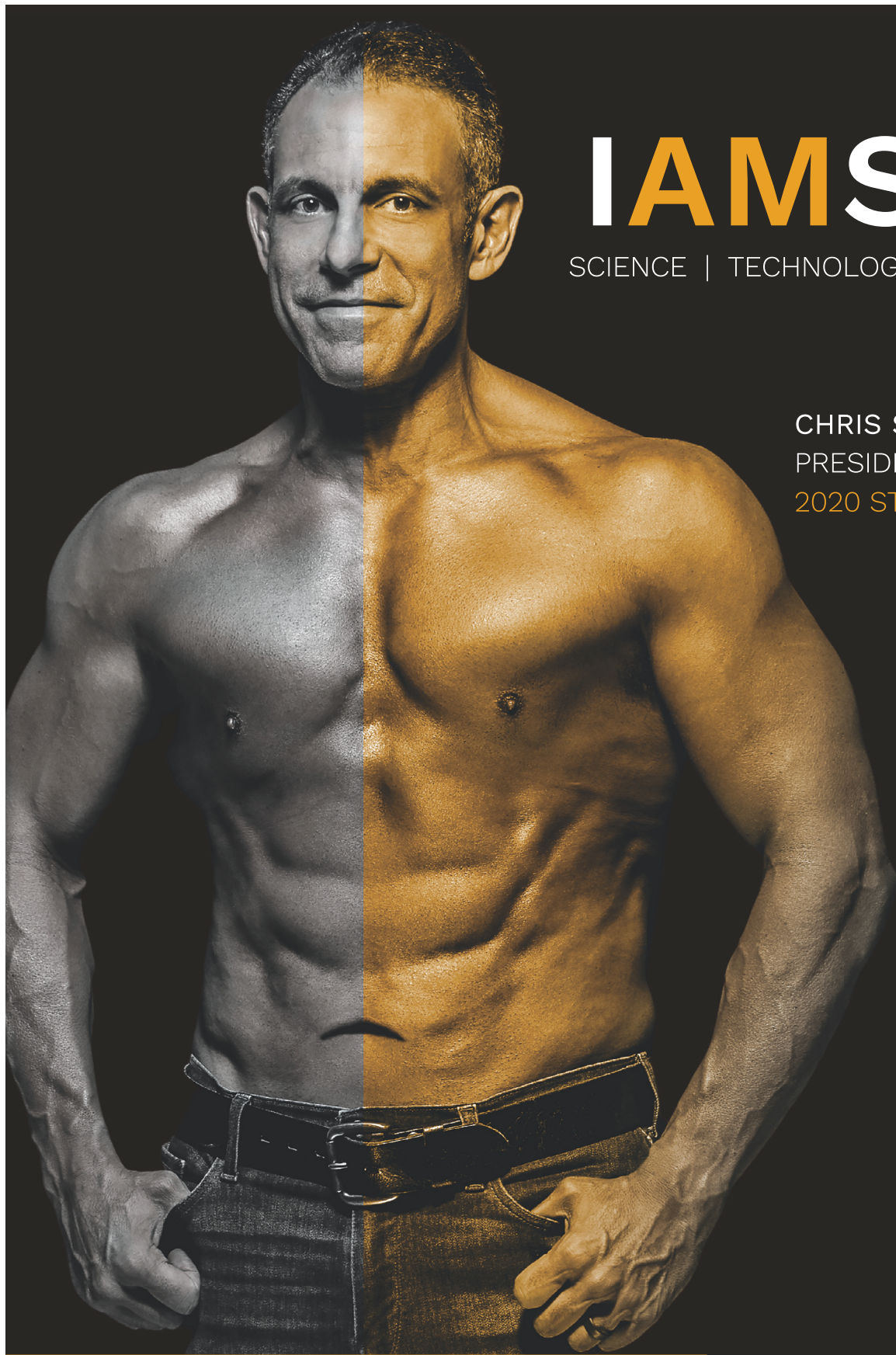
Goody has always been quite the musical workhorse; he began recording himself and producing music at the age of 9. We can assume he is always working on something creative, whether alone or with his friends.

"Since like December I probably made like 135 songs," he professed.

"It's crazy when you make music, just living life is making the music. Because if I just sat alone all day what would I make music about? My friends mean a lot to me so I like to keep really good people around me. I'm really thankful for my friends. If I'm not making music I'm with like 1 of 10 people who mean the world to me and we're probably working on something creative too. I think that no matter what I'm doing I'm always thinking of what's next... but also living in the moment, in a good way not a bad way."

Although his debut album, *Don't Forget Where You Came From*, is out now, we can obviously expect more innovative music from Goody in the future. Until then, stream Goody Grace on all music platforms and follow him on his socials.

You can check out the full Rockstar Experience Podcast interview on Spotify, or wherever you get your podcasts.



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RETURN OF THE MASTERS

FESTIVAL OF ARTS AND PAGEANT OF THE MASTERS PREPARE FOR SUMMER REOPENING

BY LIZ GOLDNER



Pageant of the Masters

It's happening. The world-renowned Festival of Arts and Pageant of the Masters will reopen this summer on July 5 and 7 respectively, with both festivals running through September 3.

How are the Festivals' management teams planning and presenting this year's events, considering last summer's closings and new health guidelines?

These questions were posed to Sharbie Higuchi, Director of Marketing/PR and Merchandising for the Festival, and to Diane Challis Davy, Director/Producer, Pageant of the Masters. Here are their answers.

IRVINE WEEKLY: How many artists will be exhibiting in this year's Festival?

Sharbie Higuchi: The 2021 Fine Art Show will showcase the 120-plus artists who were juried into the 2020 art exhibit, but were unable to display their work last summer.

When did the FOA board decide to hold an exhibition this year?

The decision to move forward with plans and preparations to open both shows was approved by Festival officials during the organization's board meeting on April 14.

What significant changes/modifications will there be this year due to the pandemic?

The health and well-being of the nonprofit's patrons, artists, volunteers, vendors and staff remain a top priority for the Festival of Arts. The city has been incredibly supportive throughout this process in advising the Festival on health and safety protocols and making recommendations. We will continue to work to ensure a safe reopening in compliance with the latest government and public health guidelines.

Do Festival visitors need to make reservations in advance?

Tickets to the Fine Art Show may be purchased the day of your visit at the box office. We encourage advance ticket purchases for the Pageant of the Masters show, "Made in America: Trailblazing Artists and Their Stories." For more information, visit our Pageant tickets page or call 800-487-3378.

Will the Festival have a fashion show this year?

The Fashion Show will not return this year.

Will there be art demonstrations and concerts this year?

The Fine Art Show will have art demonstrations, live music performances on select nights, with opportunities to meet the artists and more. Also returning is the Junior Art Exhibit, which is regarded as one of the highlights of the show. Since 1947, the exhibit not only showcases art from new generations of young Orange County students, but is a vivid testimonial to the value and importance of continuing arts education in our school systems.

Guests may reserve limited seats on Thursdays for the Art, Jazz, Wine + Chocolate series. Concerts on the Green will return on Saturday afternoons, and Saturday nights will feature tribute bands. Musical offerings will be showcased on Friday through Sundays. Interested people can reserve seating online.

Will there be art classes this year?

At this time, a decision has not been



made on having art classes or not. It will be dependent on COVID health and safety guidelines.

Will the restaurant, Terra Laguna Beach, adjacent to the Festival be open?

The restaurant will be open this summer. Reservations are recommended and can be made by calling 949-494-9650. Intermission by Terra (which replaced Gina's) will be open for walk-up window ordering.

Will there be an opening night party?

At this time, a decision has not been made for a private (by invitation only) opening event for the Fine Art Show. Like past years, the Festival will have a private (by invitation only) VIP Night preview of the 2021 Pageant of the Masters production before opening to the public on July 7.

The following answers were provided by Diane Challis Davy.

IRVINE WEEKLY: Was this year's Pageant of the Masters show originally planned for 2020?

Diane Challis Davy: Yes! The 2021



Pageant of the Masters was planned for 2020 when the pandemic forced worldwide shutdowns of live performances and events. With the sudden halt in building the production in early 2020, the Pageant team is now up against the clock. In addition to building sets, many of the volunteers (especially children) have changed in size and growth over the last year, and need to be cast for different roles. Everyone involved is determined to do all we can to make sure our audiences experience thrills, amazing and inspirational stories, beautiful music and extraordinary living pictures under the stars.

How and why did you decide on this year's show?

In 1976, Don Williamson introduced the idea of themed Pageants with a tribute to this nation's bicentennial. Twenty years later in 1996, in my first production as director, a large portion of the show was devoted to American artists. Now, thanks to advances in digital imagery and video projection, I thought we should revisit the theme and bring to it not only many new artworks, but also a whole new arsenal of dramatic and immersive theatrical effects.

Will the performers be required to wear masks?

Backstage everyone will be required to wear masks, but cast members will not wear masks during the performance on stage.

Will the show include a parade, and will there be other performers such as singers and dancers?

We don't want to give away too many surprises. What we can tease is that guests can prepare themselves for an inspirational adventure, a plot line from start to finish, and a moving look at American history through a collection of tributes to artists who made their mark in American art.

As the show will be outside, will spectators be required to wear masks?

The Festival of Arts anticipates that masks will be required, but will take guidance from local and state authorities as we get closer to and continue through the summer months.

Will Richard Doyle be the narrator again this year?

For his 10th season, Richard Doyle, the Pageant's narrator, will be performing live every night from his booth at the back of the Irvine Bowl. He is looking forward to personalizing the lives of the artists included in the Pageant's gallery of artists for whom America has proved to be so much more than just a backdrop.



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IRVINE WEEKLY MOVIE REVIEWS

WRATH OF MAN, THE MITCHELLS VS. THE MACHINES, RIDERS OF JUSTICE AND HERE TODAY.

BY IRVINE WEEKLY CRITICS



Photo courtesy of MGM

WRATH OF MAN HAS VIGOR, BUT LACKS VISION

Guy Ritchie's penchant for transforming the crime genre into something that borders on Monty Python-esque farce was his calling card for years. Breaking out with 1998's stylish noir comedy *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* and following up with similar capers like *Snatch* and *Revolver*, Ritchie seemed to be cementing his reputation as the British Tarantino. That is, before he had an identity crisis and helmed splashy family fare like the live-action *Aladdin* and most unfortunately, *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword*.

Now Ritchie is back with his old friend Jason Statham, once again exploring man's penchant for violence and quipped dialogue in the self-conscious but compelling, *Wrath of Man*. This time around, the director loses the British snark, but still favors convoluted storylines over human complexity.

Statham stars as Patrick Hill (or simply "H"), an iron-jawed, introverted new addition to a Los Angeles security firm that just had one of their armored trucks robbed and security guards killed. Although H tries to disguise himself as an amateur by barely passing the company's driving and marksmanship

tests, when some gangsters try to rip off his armored truck in his first week and he kills them swiftly, it's apparent there's something unique about this new British employee. As it turns out H is on a revenge mission, and as revenge fantasies go, we soon find out the reason behind his unabated vengeance (his deceased son), as well as who all the players are on the chessboard.

The second act jumps back in time, where we meet H's old ruthless associates Mike (Darrell D'Silva) and Moggy (Babs Olusanmokin). We're also introduced to a band of former soldiers from the war in Afghanistan with itchy trigger fingers, all of whom choose to rob armored trucks instead of seeking therapy for PTSD. The narrative wriggling and overwrought exposition can be a little exhausting and it weighs down the second act, but these stories ultimately converge, leading to an elaborate shootout that could give Sam Peckinpah a run for his money.

Based on the 2004 French film "Le Convoyeur" ("Cash Truck"), the film has a lot of weapons in its arsenal to stretch a thin story to its brink. Although Ritchie switches visual techniques like a businessman changes socks (one minute we're in Michael Mann territory with its gritty realism, the next we're dropped

into dark rooms with crimson palettes that feel like wandering into a Nicolas Winding Refn flick), these stylistic flourishes have a way of embellishing the subplots and keeping us engaged. The dialogue is hilariously self-aware and the masculine bravado unabashed. The action sequences are expertly choreographed and there are some great supporting performances by familiar faces like Holt McCallany and Josh Hartnett. There's even a fun Post Malone cameo. But it all needs a more cohesive vision.

As a follow-up to the director's 2019 hit *The Gentlemen*, *Wrath of Man* is undeniably a good time. But you can't help but think that it had the potential to be more introspective, beyond just another heist-filled action flick. Maybe if Ritchie slowed things down and developed a character or two, we could lose ourselves more in the story, instead of merely following directions on a meticulously constructed map. Then again, falling headlong into a life of crime and absurdity is how Guy Ritchie became a household name. Why ruin a good thing?

Wrath of Man is in theaters now.

— Chad Byrnes

THE MITCHELLS VS. THE MACHINES - AN ANIMATION MARVEL AND A HECK OF A MADCAP RIDE

The Mitchells vs. The Machines is the textbook definition of wacky hijinks, and it might be the best animated film you'll see this year. The latest from Phil Lord and Christopher Miller – written by Miller, Jeff Rowe and Mike Rianda – is somehow even wackier than the filmmakers' previous works (*The Lego Movie*, *Spider-Man: Into The Spider-Verse*). But what else could one possibly expect from a movie where a family of

weirdos takes on a legion of robots?

The movie is whimsical and wild in all the ways it should be. The directors throw 20 different genres into a blender, making for a thematically delicious, multi-textured and manic mix that works. They've got half of Hollywood in the picture, and you can bet they're going to give every single actor a moment to shine. It's a colorful, cuckoo-crazy, surreptitiously creative family adventure and one that you can't take your eyes off for fear of missing the next madcap gag.

But it's not all fun and games. The story centers on Katie Mitchell (Abbi Jacobson), a teenager who is ready to fly the coop. She clashes with her nature-obsessed father, Rick (Danny McBride), who pitches Katie a last-minute road trip to college with Linda (Maya Rudolph), Katie's over-protective mother; Aaron (Rianda), Katie's dinosaur-obsessed brother; and Mochi, their dog that drools all over the place. Somewhere along the way, robots take over the planet, an iPhone (Olivia Coleman) takes over the robots and an army of Furbies take over a shopping mall.

Does it all make sense? Heck no. But it doesn't have to when the script is packed with so many hilarious moments (a run-on about our cellphone-addicted kids is particularly great). The breathtaking visual style mixes 2D and 3D animation, doodles and photo-realistic robots, all of which sees Lord and Miller driving in the same lane as *Spideverse* and *The Lego Movie*, just with bigger, better and more emotional results. Although it's wackier than anything else out there (including Disney fare), you'll learn to embrace it all the same way *The Mitchells* learn to embrace each other: with an open mind, loving heart and the ability to laugh out loud at the absurdities of life.

— Asher Luberto



Photo courtesy of Netflix



Photo courtesy of Magnet Releasing

RIDERS OF JUSTICE IS DADSPLOITATION AT ITS FIERCEST

Dad movies are back, baby – the guns, the beards, the revenge. The dadsploitation genre is all the rage right now, and the Swedish action-thriller *Riders of Justice* is here to capitalize on the moment. Mads Mikkelsen stars as the scruffy hero in this gloriously violent *Taken* knockoff, doing his own spin on Liam Neeson, as a husband and father with a particular set of violent skills. Directed by Swedish veteran Anders Thomas Jensen, the film tries for a fresh interpretation of the formula, but it nevertheless goes down a familiar path.

Mikkelsen (who most will recognize as the deliciously devious Lecter character from the series *Hannibal* and the villain in *Doctor Strange*) is perfect as the cold, blank-faced Markus, dispatched from the army after his wife is killed in a subway explosion. Though the police say it was an accident, Markus isn't so sure. *It isn't normal for trains to just explode, is it?* And it's probably no coincidence that a member of the biker gang *Riders of Justice* was seen leaving just before the place blew up.

Some answers arrive in the form of Otto (Nikolaj Lie Kaas), a data analyst who was also on the subway. Otto shows up at Markus' doorstep with his pal Lennart (Lars Brygman), explaining how he hacked into some servers and found out who was behind the bombing. When the police don't listen to his story, Markus has no choice but to go rogue.

The tone of *Riders* is far more grim than the sardonic deadpan of *Taken* or the dazzling, played-for-laughs *Nobody*. The weight makes it feel depressing at times (do we really need so many shots

of people crying?). But some scenes hit a real nerve, like the shootout in a field of dead leaves, frightened trees, trembling rain clouds and thundering wind chimes – clearly a reflection of Markus' state of mind.

What's even more unique, however, is that our lone ranger isn't actually alone. He goes into battle with dumb and dumber (Otto and Lennart), and teams up with computer whiz Emmenthaler (Lars Brygman) and Ukrainian sex worker, Bodashka (Gustav Lindh), who saw the first killing in Markus' spree. Using Markus' barn as a base of operations, they set up their next move and learn how to assemble their weapons, as well as help Markus and his daughter, Mathilde, sort out their long-standing issues.

At the heart of the dadsploitation genre is the affection between a father and his offspring, and Mikkelsen has always had great chemistry with young actors. That spark in *Riders* comes from his scenes with Andrea Heick Gadeberg, who plays the kind yet distant daughter. It's Mathilde's younger, wiser perspective that pushes Markus to take control of his life. And shockingly, the tough guy is willing to grow and evolve, along with the genre itself – even if it is as bloody and violent as it's always been.

Riders of Justice is in select theaters now.

– Asher Luberto

HERE TODAY BALANCES BUDDY BANTER AND BRAIN DISORDERS

Sometimes even the schmalziest and most contrived stories turn out to be engrossing on film, saved by the charisma

and chemistry of the stars involved. The dialog might elicit an eye-roll or two, and situational set-ups might be formulaic, but the actors are so committed and hence real, that we not only buy it all, we become beguiled by the back and forth between them to the very end. *Here Today* pulls this banter-filled balance off nicely.

Billy Crystal and Tiffany Haddish are obviously an odd pair and their first meeting at the start of the film feels terribly forced (sassy restaurant orders, snarky waiter, allergic reactions to seafood and all). But you can tell that they enjoy each other on screen (and probably off) and soon, you're sucked in. Will this become a budding May-December romance, a father-daughter thing or something else?

Turns out it's something else. Crystal, who wrote, directed and produced the relationship-driven comedy, is exploring mental illness/aging here, specifically what it's like for a 70-something writer to suffer through the onslaught of dementia. Some scenes will be triggering for people with older parents battling such mental anguish, but that's because they ring so true.

Crystal plays seasoned comedy writer Charlie Burnz, a legend whose current gig is as an advisor for a *Saturday Night Live*-style show on "the Funny Channel." He meets Emma Payge (Haddish) after she takes the prize won by her ex-boyfriend at an auction – a free lunch with the writer.

Charlie keeps his diagnosis secret, even from his son (Penn Badgley) and daughter (Laura Benanti), the latter of whom still blames her dad for working too much and not being there when her mother died in a car accident

decades ago. The family drama plays out predictably, and Emma's presence brightens the tension, especially when she attends Charlie's granddaughter's bat mitzvah, which leads to everyone assuming the pair are an item.

Even the viewer isn't sure if this will evolve into a love story, but soon it's clear; our protagonist is still obsessed with his departed wife (Louisa Krause) to the extent that part of his dementia symptoms include reliving special moments in their relationship and ultimately the horror of her death. Charlie and Emma's unique (platonic) relationship was destined to help Charlie share his struggles, accept his fate and prepare for it by writing a family memoir.

Co-written by former SNL contributor Alan Zweibel (who penned a short story called "The Prize," which served as the starting point here), there's also some interesting behind the scenes and on-set stuff in the writers room of the sketch show, where the younger comic scribes question Charlie's chops (and the viewer is likely to question theirs). Some cringey show moments ensue – some intentional, some not – but everyone is likable and believable either way.

Here Today's subject matter is too dark for a typical rom-com, but Crystal hasn't been this lovable since *When Harry Met Sally*. Haddish has almost as many shining moments as Meg Ryan did in the Rob Reiner classic, a film that suggested men and women really couldn't be just friends. Decades later, this take on the buddy flick proves otherwise and suggests that unconventional relationships, especially later in life, can be just powerful as traditional courtships.

Here Today is in theaters now.

– Lina Lecaro



Photo courtesy of Sony Pictures



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