

FURAI KOREAN FRIED CHICKEN • IRVINE WEEKLY MOVIE AND TV REVIEWS • WEEKEND WINE GETAWAY

IRVINE WEEKLY

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The Influence of Better Health

Entertainers
Vanessa Hudgens
and Oliver Trevena
leverage their platforms
to encourage a healthy
and eco-conscious
lifestyle. By Tara
Finley



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COVER: PHOTOGRAPHY BY RANDALL SLAVIN

TRAVEL

WEEKEND WINE GETAWAY

IT'S ALL IN THE FAMILY AT TEMECULA'S DOFFO WINERY

BY MICHELE STUEVEN



There's always something happening at the award-winning Doffo Winery in Temecula, a short 90-minute from Irvine.

Whether it's a sidecar tour through the wine valley with tasting stops on the way, an Argentinian BBQ on a hilltop overlooking the rolling hills, motorcycle races or just kicking back at the pool of the Malbec Estate – you don't have to leave the vineyard for a full weekend recharge.

When Marcelo Doffo came to Southern California from Argentina in 1975, he got into the collision repair service and owned a body shop. His two hobbies were collecting and restoring vintage 1960s motorcycles and making wine in his backyard in Orange County.

On a trip to buy fruit in Temecula one weekend, he came across an old schoolhouse next to a pepper tree similar to his native Argentina and bought the property as a place to retire. Together with his son Damian, Doffo spent two years planting vines, laying irrigation systems

for cabernet sauvignon, syrah, cab franc, zinfandel and malbec varietals. His intention was to retire and make a little wine. He never expected it to become a full-fledged award-winning estate winery and event space, excelling at the Malbec varietal.

His obsession with wine is matched only by his love of collecting motorcycles, which is evident by the Doffo Winery's tasting room's décor. The warehouse space displays just a fraction of the more than 300 bikes he's collected over the years alongside rows of signature wine bottles. Plasma screens of live motorcycle racing line the walls, reflecting the family's passion for bikes.

Wine flights in the tasting room are generous and affordable, all made from hand-picked grapes. Nothing is machine harvested. An unusual California find, grab a bottle of the Doffo grappa. Also worth a taste is the late harvest Tiago, the MotoDoffo Super Tinto and their elegant deep purple red Syrah. White wine lovers should sip the delicious concrete

fermented Viognier, with aromas of tangerine, peach, pineapple, mango, apricot and Marcelo's beloved Mr. Lincoln roses that dot the vineyard.

With the help of wife Maria, daugh-

ters Brigitte and Samantha as well as Damian and his wife Vanessa, Doffo Winery has expanded into a family-run experience that is wine, song and food for the soul.

THE MALBEC ESTATE

Maria Doffo runs the Malbec Estate Airbnb tucked behind the Doffo Winery, surrounded by palm and pepper trees. The 2,903 square foot house on 2.5 acres of gated property includes four bedrooms and 2.5 full bathrooms with a private backyard including a furnished pool-side area, fire pit, BBQ area, bar, pool, jacuzzi and is a reasonable deal at about \$533 a night for up to eight guests. It's located five to 10 minutes from the other 60 wineries in the area, hot air balloon rides, vineyard horseback riding and 15 minutes from Old Town. Breakfast platters, poolside charcuterie and other items can be ordered through Vanessa Doffo's FYS catering.

WINE TOURS AND TASTING

Starting with a glass of sparkling Paulina, your tour will be guided by a Doffo family member whenever possible. The tour takes you through the vineyard and details farming practices and family history. It also includes some of the production area and the MotoDoffo collection of antique motorcycles and concludes with a traditional counter tasting for two.

There are indoor tastings in two distinctly different atmospheres as well as outdoor spaces drenched in roses overlooking the rolling hills dotted with vineyards. Choose between the sophisticated tasting area and retail shop designed by Brigitte Doffo or watch MotoGP races on the big screen of the main tasting room



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TRAVEL

Breakfast at the Malbec Estate



MICHELE STUEVEN

while sipping at a red flight. On weekends, Damian's wife Vanessa's Fuego Y Sal catering sets up with breakfast burritos and traditional Argentine fare like beef empanadas with olives from the vineyard cured by Maria as well as churrasco steak and fries topped with the Doffo family chimichurri.

Vanessa Doffo Charcuterie



MICHELE STUEVEN

CRUISE THE VALLEY IN A SIDECAR

Kickstands up by the barrel room. SoCal Sidecars have deals with Doffo and other wineries in the valley and will pick you up for a 45-minute ride through the Temecula Southern California wine country. An exhilarating way to start the day, helmets and blankets are provided. They also offer door-to-door wine and brewery tours as well as cocktail, food and custom tours. If you're lucky, you may get an escort from two generations of the Doffo family, all of which ride and race on a regular basis and will use any excuse to get on a bike – that includes 69-year-old Marcelo on his BMW R1200 RT.

SUNSET DINNER ON THE COLINA

Perhaps one of the most delightful and rejuvenating reasons to come to the Temecula valley is the five-course plated sunset dinner paired with Doffo's best wine selections on a hilltop of the vineyard. The Argentinian inspired BBQ feast is presented by Damian's wife Vanessa and the tablescapes are hand-picked from the vineyard and designed by Brigitte. Damian greets guests with

glasses of sparkling Paulina wine while the rest of the family – Marcelo, Maria, Brigitte and Samantha – mingle and sit down with the crowd for wine pairings complimenting a dinner that includes a charcuterie grazing table, Morcilla crostini (Argentine blood sausage) and Molleja, delicate grilled sweetbreads that even the offal fearful will love.

The main plates are tender grilled lamb chops with herb sauce and garlic mashed potatoes alongside roasted vegetables and grilled flank steak with roasted turnip and parsnip puree and an emulsion made from the family's chimichurri recipe (jars are available for sale at the winery). Dessert is inspired by Maria's Dulce de Leche obsession – a traditional sweet alfajor sandwich with flan and vanilla meringue. Golf cart rides are provided back to the Malbec estate from the hilltop.

While this event is seasonal, it's included at a discounted price if you're part of the Doffo wine club, but also available to the public. The winery is open seven days a week, check the calendar for upcoming events. Harvest season is just around the corner.

FURAI KOREAN FRIED CHICKEN

LOCAL OUTPOST BOASTS BIG FLAVORS IN A SMALL SPACE.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER



PHOTO BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

Existing simply as a conduit for Korean fried chicken, Furai Chicken, located inside the Zion Market in Irvine, boasts big flavors in a small space.

With an unquestionable passion for Korean fried chicken, Furai take-out and delivery-only outpost has a menu consisting of whole and halved fried chicken, which are served in a variety of different styles with different sauces and spices.

Furai Chicken is the product of Orange County Chef-Owner Tommy Kim, who currently operates Mokkoji Shabu Shabu in Costa Mesa.

Opened in 2017, Furai started as something small, according to Furai's

Zion Market location's manager, Miguel Elizalde. Elizalde explained that by focusing on a unique niche, the Irvine location usually has a line starting early.

"It's a traditional Korean-style fried chicken – it's all Korean ingredients, Korean recipes," he explained while speaking to *Irvine Weekly*. "We sell it by two portions, the half portion and the whole portion. The half is going to be five pieces, the whole is 10 pieces. The half chicken is literally half a chicken – you will get a leg, a thigh, a wing, and the breast is cut in half."

Furai's menu also offers chicken wings, served in the same variety of styles in increments of 10.

By incorporating a variety of different frying styles, Furai's menu is decorated with chicken cooked in various renditions of crisp, spice and sweetness. From light crispy to a spicy "Fire" version, and even featuring traditional recipes like garlic and green onion.

While Furai Chicken's menu is relatively small, it packs in variety while still offering dishes that give a subtle nod to traditional Korean cooking.

"Original is going to be our traditional, crispy fried chicken, and you choose your sauce – we have 10 different sauces, it varies in spices and sweetness," Elizalde explained. "The old-fashioned is more rotisserie-style chicken, where we don't cut it in pieces, we only batter

it and we deep fry it – we cut it in half, but serve it whole. We called it old-fashioned because it's an old-fashioned way of eating chicken in Korean culture."

Elizalde added that some of Furai's dishes are served pre-sauced, and in terms of popularity the sweet and spicy, soy garlic and Kang Jung were all top choices for those who enjoy getting their fingers sticky.

For those willing to get lost in the sauce, Furai's list of house-made sauces will surely not disappoint. From a regular and spicy ranch, to lemon garlic, to smoke soy, a spicy "volcano" sauce, to a garlic jam and a traditional Kang Jung, Furai is clearly just as passionate about sauce as it is chicken.

While the gist of Furai's Korean fried chicken menu will not get lost on the average KFC connoisseur, another interesting perspective of the Zion Market location is that this to-go only concept is designed to allow grocery shoppers to order food, collect groceries inside the market, and grab their Furai Chicken after they shop.

"Every order does take 15 minutes, but only because we cook to order. Every day it's fresh chicken. Sometimes on the weekend, we tend to sell out because we try to keep that consistency of freshness," Elizalde explained. "Just the fact that it takes 15 minutes to cook, the main concept of being able to come and shop, but place the order before you start shopping, even if it takes 30-40 minutes – it was a good idea."

Now with a few franchise locations, Furai's Zion Market location is the only one in Orange County.

"We started small, but it's getting big though. We've got one in L.A. County, we got one in Riverside County," Elizalde tells us.

If you go, be sure to check out the pre-sauced Kang Jung, a traditional Korean dish.

"[It's] more of a mild Korean sauce, with a small hint of ginger and cinnamon. We cook it with a Korean spicy chili powder as well," Elizalde said. "Once the chicken comes out of the fryer, for the Kang Jung specifically, we toss it with mild Korean sauce, then we top it with bits of rice cakes, which have a very chewy, savory texture. Once we toss it with the sauce, then we top it off with red dried chili pepper flakes, green serranos, sliced almonds, pumpkin and sunflower seeds. It's very good – to look at and taste."

Furai Chicken is located at 4800 Irvine Blvd. #101 Irvine

Vanessa Hudgens has 40.9 million followers on Instagram alone.

Over 40 million people follow her for her advice, likes and updates on her life.

"I just do what I want. I do what I want and do what I like, and you know my interests are constantly evolving as am I," shares Vanessa. "I think that how I live my life reflects that I'm kind of always on the move, but I think that I know my priorities and my fundamentals as a human being and everything else just kind of falls into place."

Vanessa is, as some would call it, the ultimate influencer. From fashion to food and everything in between, she's the first person to go to for what's on trend. Actress, advisor, activist and now entrepreneur, the star has always focused on one thing: using her influence to make the world a better place.

"Don't be afraid to be different," she continues. "I think that it's really easy to conform – and less scary [to do so] – but we're all made differently, our interests are all different, the way we approach life is different, and I think the more that you can embrace your individuality and your weirdness and the things that make you you, the easier it is for you to succeed in life in general."

Her close friend and business partner, Oliver (Oli) Trevena, has been more than willing to help her achieve just that. Oliver, who has 152K followers on Instagram, is a connector. The man knows everyone, and is able to bring people together to encourage social activism and make plans happen. The successful entrepreneur/investor is also an actor – his movie *Rising Hawk* is streaming now.

How did the two meet? Where all great friendships are made: Lance Bass' house.

"One day we met at Lance Bass' house," explains Oliver. "That's it really. And yeah, we connected there and then you know, a couple of times after that [the friendship] just clicked. [We] got closer because life happens ... with the struggles. I think real friendships grow stronger [through struggles] and that was it for me. She's seen me through everything."

"Boyfriends come and go but Oli's been there," chimes in Vanessa.

From their friendship and their shared love of earth-friendly activism, their venture Caliwater was born.

"I think those best moments in life happen [when there is no] kind of game plan or you know, thinking about it. It just happened and then we worked our asses off," says Oliver.

THE INFLUENCE OF BETTER HEALTH

ENTERTAINERS VANESSA HUDGENS AND OLIVER TREVENA LEVERAGE THEIR PLATFORMS TO ENCOURAGE A HEALTHY AND ECO-CONSCIOUS LIFESTYLE.

BY TARA FINLEY



PHOTO BY RANDALL SLAVIN

It all started with a prickly pear margarita.

"I was in New Mexico and I was on a road trip and I am such a margarita aficionado," Vanessa laughs. "This prickly pear margarita came out and I remember just seeing the color and being like,

'Oh my gosh, it's beautiful (A) and then it tastes phenomenal (B).' Then I was like, 'I gotta do some research on this.' I looked it up and realized they've been using prickly pear for centuries for all of its health benefits."

"I'm a sucker for a good life hack... and

I also don't drink water. My friends are always like, 'Vanessa, you gotta drink water' and I'm like, 'I don't like it though.' I'm so happy because now I have something that I actually love and is hydrating for me which is the most important thing," she continues.

Cactus-made Caliwater is good for more than just hydration.

"Immunity, antioxidants, it's obviously great for hydration, low sugar, low calories," lists Oliver.

"Antiviral properties, lowering blood sugar levels, it's just kind of a miracle worker," follows Vanessa.

"Yeah, it's kind of one of those things that the world is aware of, but it hasn't gone mainstream. Kind of like coconut, you know the same way coconut water had this massive resurgence," says Oliver. "When you talk to people in Latin America and [other warm climate countries], they [use it frequently], like you know: 'Someone's got a tummy ache, give him some prickly pear.' I think just the mainstream hasn't clicked, so that's where I feel like there's a real gap in the market for this."

The health benefits are many, but it's not just a tasty drought-friendly drink that's great for staying hydrated. It's also a perfect mixer, and a healthy alternative beverage to water for those that are picky.

"It's a great mixer," affirms Oliver. "I mean, that's the idea behind this drink. But we've found [out from] investor friends, [that] their kids have been drinking this and they love it. We've got everyone from a 5-year-old that loves it to a 60-year-old that loves it and then people that don't drink or do drink. The idea of this company was providing something that really can be drunk by everyone."

A labor of love, Caliwater isn't just a sustainable company influencing better health, it's also actively involved in bettering the lives of children. Five cents of every can of Caliwater sold goes to No Kid Hungry, a charity working to help feed hungry kids. With millions of children experiencing food insecurity due to the effects of the pandemic, Caliwater's support of ending childhood hunger is more important now than ever.

"They make sure that kids are fed. At school, they will make sure they get breakfast, lunch and send them home with dinner if they need it. Kids shouldn't have to worry about how to get through the next meal, so they just make it happen," explains Vanessa. "I love that."

Vanessa and Oliver recently hosted the Caliwater launch party at Mojave Moon

CULTURE



GETTY IMAGES / VIVIEN BEST



COURTESY OF CALIWATER



GETTY IMAGES / VIVIEN BEST



PHOTO BY RANDALL SLAVIN

Ranch in Joshua Tree, the #Caliwater-Escape. Following all COVID restrictions and safety regulations, the launch brought together some of the biggest media influencers to not only spread awareness about the health benefits of cactus and Caliwater, but to raise awareness about No Kid Hungry's mission.

The event combined Vanessa's classic Coachella style and major influence with Oliver's innate ability to connect people and make dreams happen. For Vanessa, Oliver introducing her to Caliwater and letting her take the reins has been a dream.

"I think the fact is, at the end of the day, if you're passionate about something you figure out how to manage your time and Caliwater is something that I've been so invested in and so excited about," she shares. "You know for me it's fun, like I love being crafty, I love trying new things. If I'm into it, I'm going to make it happen."

"And it's authentic," Oliver agrees. "I mean, we both genuinely like it. Even if this was another company, and I tried this drink, I can genuinely say that I'd be buying it and drinking it."

For these influencers, health is a top priority: their own health, the health of their followers, the health of their communities, and the health of the planet.

"I see Vanessa influencing everyone to be a good person," ends Oliver. "She inspires me all the time, she always shows up for people, always there for people."

Learn more about Caliwater's cactus water with a conscious mission, where it is available, its founders and their upcoming ventures by listening to the *L.A. Weekly* weekly podcast on Spotify, Cumulus Los Angeles or wherever you get your podcasts and visit www.drink-caliwater.com. Follow on Instagram @caliwater

NEWS

LOCAL NEWS ROUND-UP

MAYOR KHAN SPEAKS OUT AGAINST HATE, BRUSH FIRES NEAR IRVINE AND MORE VACCINE CLINICS COMING TO THE CITY IN JUNE.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER



PHOTO BY MUFID MAJNUN ON UNSPLASH

CREWS QUICK TO BRUSH FIRE NEAR IRVINE

In the early morning hours of Wednesday, May 26, the Orange County Fire Authority reported that a one-acre vegetation fire was ignited by unknown causes near the 241 Toll Road.

In a series of tweets, OCFA gave more details on the vegetation fire that took more than 50 firefighters to extinguish.

In a phone call with *Irvine Weekly*, Thanh Nguyen, OCFA Fire Captain and Public Information Officer, said the call came in at approximately 3:30 a.m. on the morning of May 26.

Nguyen added that one firefighter sustained a non-life-threatening injury.

"The call came in at 3:32 a.m. The fire was confined to 1.66 acres, no structures threatened, and the cause is under investigation," Nguyen said. "I don't know what the knockdown time was, but it started at 3:32, and so we did have crews out there throughout the day to walk the perimeter and mop up hot spots."

Nguyen, who has been with OCFA for more than two decades, said he would not speculate on how the blaze started, but that the cause is currently under investigation.

In terms of weather, Nguyen said that wind, the ongoing drought and dry fuel can create the ideal conditions for wildfires to spark – regardless of heat.

"As far as the conditions go, as we all are aware of, we're in a drought condition, and so the field is dry, the

humidity was a little on the lower side, and I think there was some wind out there, also," he said. "Whatever the cause was – it's just dry conditions and it just took off."

MAYOR, BOARD OF SUPERVISORS CONDEMN THREATS TO HEALTH OFFICER

Irvine Mayor Farrah Khan has denounced actions led by dozens of protesters in Orange County who stood in front of the home of Orange County Health Officer Dr. Clayton Chau, announcing their disapproval of the health officer's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On Tuesday, May 18 and May 19, protesters stood in front of Chau's home, protesting against the idea of vaccination passports in Orange County and threatening Chau.

Despite attempts by the Orange County Board of Supervisors to end the conspiracy discussions about the COVID-19 vaccine at the board meeting by pausing the program within the Othena application in which vaccine passports were being developed, protesters continue to make their voices heard.

In a text message to *Irvine Weekly*, Khan said the actions of protesters crossed the line.

"It is disappointing to see our county health officers harassed at their homes. Protesting is everyone's right but should be done on public or governmental property, not an individual's residence. That's crossing the line," Khan wrote.

Chau is not the county's first health officer to receive

threats. Last year, former Orange County Health Officer, Dr. Nichole Quick resigned from her position at the beginning of the pandemic after receiving death threats due to the lockdown.

Khan also addressed the issue on Facebook, sharing a statement issued by Orange County First District Supervisor and Chairman Andrew Do, co-authored by Fourth District Supervisor Doug Chaffee.

"On the evening of May 18 and 19, 2021, more than 50 demonstrators gathered outside Dr. Chau's house each night until the late evening, chanting loudly derogatory comments, as well as making threats. This has caused great disturbance to Dr. Chau and his family, including stress-inducing confusion and fear to his elderly mother. This conduct is particularly intimidating to Dr. Chau and his family in light of the disturbing rise of anti-Asian hate crime in the recent months," a portion of the statement read.

Third District Supervisor Don Wagner shared his thoughts regarding threats against the health officer, via Twitter, emphasizing that no one should have to endure threats to their safety for performing their public duty.

"[I] equally condemn those at Dr. Chau's home; he's performed his duties with care and compassion. There's no place in civilized society for threats to the personal safety of public servants."

IRVINE OFFERING FREE VACCINE

On Saturday, May 22, a partnership between Hoag Hospital and the Irvine Company led to the opening of a free vaccine clinic at the Irvine Spectrum Center.

Hoag's newest vaccine clinic in Irvine is located at the former 24-hour Fitness space near Regal Cinemas.

Currently, operating hours are Thursday-Saturday 12:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. No appointment is necessary.

In a statement, Robert T. Braithwaite, Hoag president and CEO, said he was proud to be able to offer the COVID-19 vaccine to the Irvine community.

"We are proud to partner with the Irvine Company to offer this convenient and accessible vaccination option in the heart of Orange County," Braithwaite said. "We are making good progress on fighting this virus and the vaccine is our best chance to protect ourselves and our community. The most effective way to prevent serious illness from this virus is to get vaccinated, and with a more robust supply, it has never been easier to get one."

In addition to Hoag's free vaccine clinic at the Irvine Spectrum, the city of Irvine is also planning to open a vaccine center inside the Diamond Jamboree Shopping Center on Sunday, June 6 from 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Irvine's free COVID-19 vaccine clinic inside the Diamond Jamboree will be offering Pfizer for ages 12 and older. The Johnson & Johnson vaccine for anyone 18 years and older.

Advance registration is needed for the Diamond Jamboree Shopping Center vaccine clinic. For more information please call (949) 742-6610.

Locations

Irvine Spectrum Center

517 Spectrum Center Drive – former 24 Hour Fitness location

Diamond Jamboree Shopping Center
2740 Alton Pkwy, Irvine

HOW IRVINE'S STAR GOLF IS INNOVATING THE INDOOR GOLF EXPERIENCE

DESIGNED AS AN INDOOR RENTAL SPACE FOR GOLFERS OF ANY SKILL LEVEL TO PRACTICE, STAR GOLF UTILIZES CUTTING-EDGE GOLF SOFTWARE TO SCIENTIFICALLY ANALYZE MORE THAN TWO DOZEN VARIABLES IN A GOLF SWING.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

The Irvine-based Star Golf facility serves as a state-of-the-art golf training facility where professional and amateur golfers can rent practice space with instructors of their choice, while also getting access to cutting-edge scientific golf-swing analysis technology.

Occupying an industrial space on Von Karman Avenue, this emerging golf simulation technology utilizes artificial intelligence to pinpoint inaccuracies in a player's swing. Specifically, Star Golf is the home to one of the professional golf industry's most well-respected golf swing simulators – Trackman Golf.

Star Golf is also home to other innovative technologies, like Salted Golf's bluetooth in-soles, which are designed to detect pressure points in a player's stance and display the results in real-time on an iPad.

Founder Andy Yoon, a former Korean PGA Tour professional, explained that Star Golf has recently renovated its industrial space, expanding its rental training spaces that are built to accommodate any level of player.

In addition to utilizing Trackman, Yoon said he will soon be introducing his own software to the Star Golf training equipment, explaining that the primary demographic will be children.

Yoon's software, Do Interactive Golf, operates in a 3-D interactive environment, giving young players the opportunity to use physical golf skills, like an actual drive, putt or chip shot, to physically select the correct answer to a math problem that is being displayed on a virtual screen.

In addition to technology that tracks more than two-dozen variables in a player's golf swing, Star Golf also provides access to a blossoming industry that will

soon introduce the American golfers to a new, fascinating world of virtual golf.

A world where golf will be played completely indoors, free from weather interferences, while simultaneously giving players a newfound level of privacy for training and recreation. Star Golf instructor Gun Beck explained that virtual golf is massively popular in Korea.

"This is a model from Korea. People just don't know about a facility like this. Ultimately, what we want to do is A to Z solutions in golfing," Beck said. "We're not bound by the weather, we can have multiple persons, set multiple players on the

game. If it's too hot we have an AC unit, if it's too cold, we put the heater on – we are able to play comfortably inside without any interruptions."

Beck explained to *Irvine Weekly* that in terms of cost, the Trackman costs upwards of \$20,000. However, for that price, the simulator delivers the most realistic, interactive golfing experience that can bring some of the world's most iconic golf courses into Irvine, with just the push of a button.

"The Trackman has preloaded golf courses, just like if you play Gran Turismo – it has a lot of tracks," Beck said. "It's



also the privacy – you can (bring) drink beer if you'd like to but you don't have other people walking around, talking – all that – you get a private session that you can control the environment and you can play however long you want to play."

Considering the intuitive design and room for adaptability of this nuanced golf software, *Irvine Weekly* recently visited Star Golf to get a first-hand perspective on this unique technology, and to discover how this small Irvine-based company is creating new avenues for entertainment, training and education within the game of golf.

"Our main business model should be the other pros that give out lessons, not individuals that live in Irvine," Yoon explained from a translator.

While the COVID-19 pandemic created an unstable playing environment for sports, some industries, like golf, became a reliable outlet for activities, when many sports facilities were closed.

"The numbers have increased dramatically," Beck explained. "At least in Irvine – that we know of – there is no indoor, with a ceiling facility that's currently existing, other than us. If it rains, everyone stops. What we offer isn't the time slots, it's the facility overall that can accommodate all the golfer's needs indoors. We don't need acres of land – we have 18 holes right here."



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF STAR GOLF



ART

A FLUTE TEACHER'S NEW ODYSSEY DURING THE LOCKDOWN

BY LIZ GOLDNER

Susan Fries



Children all over Irvine study musical instruments privately, most of them visiting their teachers' home studios.

Yet since the beginning of the pandemic, the number of music lessons has dropped dramatically, says Irvine flute teacher, Susan Fries. This situation is especially difficult for flutists, as they are unable to wear masks while playing.

Fries is effectively coping with this challenge by teaching her students virtually. "In January 2020, while visiting with my daughter in New York City, I learned an exciting new teaching skill," she explains. "An advanced student phoned me, asking, 'Can you help me on FaceTime?' I had not taught that way before. But I said, 'OK, let's try it.' As we proceeded with the lesson, I was amazed at how effective it was."

In March 2020, just after Gov. Newsom ordered the lockdown, six of Fries' students decided to schedule their lessons with her on FaceTime and Zoom, eliminating in-person sessions.

To prepare for the FaceTime lessons, Fries sets up two music stands, one for sheet music, the other for her iPad. Alternatively, she connects with students through Zoom on her computer. The horizontal screen works well because the flute is horizontal, she says.

How does virtual teaching differ from in-person teaching? "I'm restricted to being in one spot throughout the lessons," Fries says, "and so are my students, whereas in person, I can move around and gesture more actively.

But having recorded for the Hollywood music studios, I am able to sit in one place for long periods, to be present and accurate with my flute playing."

She adds, "I'm so accustomed to hearing my students' tones that I often feel as though I can teach with my eyes closed. I know when their tones are living, when their tones are distorted, and how they are breathing while playing."

Most of Fries' students are more prepared for their lessons than they were before the lockdown, as they have fewer distractions and more time to practice and prepare. And with their parents around more, they tend to get more at-home encouragement.

"Since the lockdown, three students have entered contests," Fries says. "Others have performed in online festivals, and students have the time to develop excellent video recording skills, with a few using videos for college auditions." The one collaborative activity that teacher and student cannot engage in is playing duets, as there are lags with FaceTime and Zoom.

Julia Wong, age 18, was Fries' first FaceTime student. Wong called her teacher while she was in New York City, requesting last-minute help for an audition scheduled for the next day. And that virtual lesson was the beginning of the flute teacher's new odyssey during the lockdown. Wong's mother, Mary Frances, explains that the regularly scheduled FaceTime classes encourage Julia to practice her flute on a regular basis, resulting in consistent advancement in her music studies. She adds

that in this age of superficial learning and online schooling, Susan insists that Julia examine deeply and authentically how she approaches her flute playing and how she brings the composers' music to life.

Fries says, "My main goal is for my students to have impeccable rhythm, clear articulation, tone with nuance and color, and a good sense of the composer's intent and atmosphere. We study the languages of rhythm, of phrasing and of the story or dance inherent in the composition. I also teach my students how to practice effectively so that they can develop the ability to teach themselves and hopefully continue to grow musically for a lifetime! While a beautiful tone comes from the heart, skills, technique and character development can be taught. Most of my students inevitably realize that the more basic skills they develop, the more fun they will have!"

She adds, "While working with my students, I honor and evoke the methods that my teacher, Marcel Moyse, a 20th century flute master, taught me and many others. As I wrote in the book, 'MY TEACHER: Remembering Marcel Moyse,' 'Moyse used humor as his unique method of breaking down students' resistance to learning new concepts. He always had a humorous situation or joke to tell that uncannily related to the music being studied...he told fables using animals and purposely-foolish human characters or situations.'

"And perhaps most importantly, Mr. Moyse often talked about the importance of having fun with music!"

Susan Fries resides in Irvine. As a professional flutist, she is equally comfortable in chamber ensembles, symphony, opera and ballet orchestras. She has performed with Detroit Symphony, Philadelphia Lyric Opera, has toured with American Ballet Theater and New York City Opera, participated with members of the Metropolitan Opera, played numerous European concert tours, and solos on Hollywood film and television soundtracks. She can be contacted at susanflutel2@cox.net.



GABRIELLE CURRENT'S EP IS HER DIARY

BY BRETT CALLWOOD



PHOTO BY NICOLE LEWIS

For a blossoming Gabrielle Current, enjoying her formative years, the influence of Jennifer Lopez was key. The pop-R&B artist's mom was obsessed with J-Lo, and from the age of five, Current would soak in the live performances regularly screened on the family TV.

"I fell in love with her set – just the look, the lighting, how everyone in the audience was feeling this collective emotion," Current says. "So I would stand on the coffee table with a broomstick or a piece of paper stuck to my face as a microphone and I would copy her every move. I knew that I wanted to pursue this as a career. Just be a performer."

When she was done with school, she was able to take proactive steps, writing her own music and making connections with producers and co-writers.

"I love collaboration, so through meeting all of those creatives, I was able to learn tools along the way to help with my EP which is finally here. So that's when I knew I wanted to make a career

out of this and get serious."

That EP is *Virgo*, a sweet and introspective body of work that highlights her glorious blend of R&B, jazz, pop and neo-soul. She thinks of the EP as a "Sonic Diary."

"It's a timestamp of the point in my life a couple of years ago when I was writing it," she says. "I was so desperately longing to find love and validation through other people that I noticed this pattern around that time where I was losing a lot of relationships, whether that be friends, romantic relationships or family members. I realized along the way that what I was looking for was the love that can only come from myself. So all of the songs are talking about a specific relationship that has ended, but me choosing myself and that's the only thing that matters in the end."

New single "If I Fall" is a great example of that journal approach, resulting in a conclusion of self-love.

"There are five tracks on the EP, and I placed them in order," Current says.

"The beginning of the EP is clinging on to this relationship, and as we get towards the end, it's when I finally realized 'OK, I am all I need.' So 'If I Fall' is towards the end of the project, and that is talking about a relationship that has ended but I am able to reminisce on it and find that it wasn't so bad that it ended because I was able to gain an understanding of that person and myself, and why I'm better off being on my own because what I needed in that moment, that relationship was no longer serving me. I was able to feed that love and freedom within myself."

That's an incredibly healthy message – that people don't need to rely on the love of others in order to feel valuable, worthy and important. Current's lyrics are empowering and relatable which, blended with the accessible melodies, is a potent recipe. The EP was produced in L.A. by Austin Brown.

"We did go to New York to mix the project a couple of times," she says.

"We spent a good year and a half just tweaking over and over, whether it's production or coming up with new vocal arrangements. Just making sure everything was as perfect as possible. I'm a perfectionist, so after sitting on the project for so long, I just found myself wanting to redo it or change parts along the way. The production was all done in Los Angeles, and then we would fly to New York to mix and master it."

Current was born and raised in L.A., and she says that it's inevitable that the city would have an influence on her sound, style and vibe.

"I think just being young and surrounded by entertainment every single day, this city is dominated by it, so it definitely has inspired the sound whether it be through the visuals or what I was writing about," she says. "I feel like L.A. is such a crazy melting pot of people that you meet along the way, so it's those relationships that you get into. It feels like everyone is in their own world, and so it's meeting those different people and writing about it, almost like a diary."

There's more in that melting pot though; Current has Korean, Filipino and Swedish roots as well as American.

"I have such a mixed nationality, that really lends to how the sound itself is not just one thing," she says. "It's not just R&B, it's not just pop. So I've really tried to take inspiration from my background and my culture, and just use things that inspire me to make one thing. That's who I am as a person."

On that note, May is AAPI (Asian American and Pacific Islander) Heritage month. It's a happy accident that the release of *Virgo* fell in the same month.

"It's nice that this month is so special, and that people are really taking extra time to find Asian-American artists and showcase them a bit more," Current says.

Virgo is out next week. Meanwhile, Current dreams of performing these songs live.

"That's all I wanted to do – tour and play live shows," she says. "So hopefully, with things opening up more and vaccinations going out, I hope that I will be able to perform these songs live. Whether that's in person, but regardless, I'm definitely going to be doing some livestreams and live performances. I have no idea what this year holds. I feel like everything is so up in the air, but hopefully I get to perform."

We can dream.

Gabrielle Current's EP is her Diary: The Virgo EP is out May 27.

ENTERTAINMENT

IRVINE WEEKLY MOVIE & TV REVIEWS

THE FRIENDS REUNION TOOK FAWNING TOO FAR; CRUELLA IS A DEVILISH, FASHION-FILLED DELIGHT; HALSTON TURNS ICONIC DESIGNER INTO COUTURE CARICATURE; AND CRUEL SUMMER IS A HOT GIRL WHODUNIT

BY LINA LECARO



The Friends Reunion / HBO Max

For a show that was always very clear about who it was for and what it was about, *The Friends Reunion* (which premiered last night on HBO Max) was pretty all over the place. There was the candid walk-thru by cast members on the old set, a sit-down live talk show thing with host James Corden, clips of fans from around the world talking about the show's impact, famous people (Lady Gaga and Justin Bieber!) and co-star reflections, a game night memory test with the guys against the gals, a table read-thru of a couple old episodes,

and even a fashion show. It was weird and fun but some segments definitely worked better than others.

Friends ended 17 years ago and ran for 10 years (making it 27 years old). I'm the same age as most of the cast are now, and I watched it every week with my own roommates at the time, so it was relatable to some degree. As creator Marta Kauffman shares in the special, the comedy aimed to capture young adulthood and that time in your life when your friends are your family. Did it reflect me and my crew? Not really. It was in New York and the

gang could actually afford apartments in Manhattan without having to turn the living room into another bedroom. Everyone was white, straight, cute and reasonably well-adjusted/problem-free. Okay, Phoebe was a wackjob, Monica had OCD, Ross had ADD and probably depression, Rachel was a narcissist, Joey was a fuckboy and Chandler was a dick – but they were lovable at the same time (and they clearly loved each other) and that made all the difference. Just like it does in real life.

The reunion piled on the praise to an almost embarrassing level and I'm sure I'm not alone in admitting that it made me wonder if the show really deserved it. Was it *I Love Lucy*, *Cheers*, *Seinfeld* great? Never thought so. Unlike some of the celeb fans on the show who shared that they regularly watch syndicated repeats, I never have. I won't change the channel if the other aforementioned three shows are on, but *Friends* never felt classic in the same way, it actually felt really dated.

Still, the table read-thru of the Ross and Rachel first kiss episode and the ugly naked guy episode, plus the dissection of the couch "pivot" episode (which had me cackling, again) confirmed that yes, these actors – Courteney Cox, Jennifer Aniston, Lisa Kudrow, Matt LeBlanc, Matthew Perry and David Schwimmer – were and still are damn good, and that the writing was clever, sexy and indeed, timeless-funny most of the time. Everything on *Friends* just clicked and guest star Reese Witherspoon says, "each character is so distinct that they could hold a television show all by themselves." In this way it is a lot like *Cheers* and *Seinfeld*, a potent ensemble with edge (re-watching a few episodes last night after the special, I realized just

how adult the humor could be, especially for '90s network television).

Last night's love-fest glossed over a lot, though. The lack of diversity, Monica's problematic fat suit, and Matthew Perry's past – hopefully not present – drug problems (social media has been abuzz with speculation after he slurred a bit in the teaser last week; he seemed fine on the special, if a little low-energy).

The reunion's everything-and-Monica's-kitchen-sink adulation was made for *Friends* super-duper fans/stans, but it's hard to believe that anyone (especially David Beckham, who kisses major arse here) is still this passionate about the show today. There's simply too much good stuff out there to give time to; stuff that's fresher, wittier and cooler. A show about privileged NYC quasi-hipsters from the '90s can still be funny, but social media and streaming TV have changed things, even if Botox makes everyone look like it hasn't. And please: if anyone from the show is reading this, the reunion was nice, but no one needs a reboot, remake, revamp, re-imagining or regurgitative next generation *Friends* project, at least not for a while. If the show has to be "on a break," it should be a long one, like at least 17 more years.

Cruella / Disney +

It's hard to pinpoint when exactly Disney's villains became more interesting than their princesses, but somewhere along the way the company's marketing geniuses figured out that ominous figures driven by revenge could be just as aspirational – at least in a figurative sense – as beautiful ones driven by love. With some contemporary exceptions, the goal for female characters in the Disney universe has always been about snaring Prince Charming (or Prince whoever) and living happily ever after. Its animal-driven animated films are another story, but even those tend to idealize innocence and oversimplify evil, creating a black and white narrative that never went too deep into motivations and never had to consider the target audiences were children.

Which makes *Cruella*, the latest live-action take on a classic character angled at the dark comedy/goth crowd, so refreshing. The backstory here is bodacious but it has actual depth and a twist you might not see coming, with complex characters that you'll enjoy in spite of their flaws. There's no romance here whatsoever, and yet, there are moments when Cruella (Emma Stone, in one of her most charismatic portray-



(DISNEY)

als ever) pulls at your heart strings. It's to the actress's credit that she does so as the sinister two-tone tressed Cruella De Vil, but equally so as her meek and awkward alter-ego Estella.

In *101 Dalmatians* (the cartoon and the live action film from 1996 starring Glenn Close) we didn't know a lot about Cruella other than the fact that she wanted to kill puppies to make a fabulous fur coat. *I, Tonya* director Craig Gillespie and writers Dana Fox and Tony McNamara clearly strove to humanize what's essentially been one of the craziest Disney villains in history. But even if they hadn't, there's enough eye candy styling and raucous rivalry on screen to delight regardless.

Set in '70s London, Cruella unravels the childhood of Estella, a girl with strange hair and lots of moxie. When she sees her mother die after falling off a balcony at a fancy gala, she loses her spark, blames herself and takes to the streets, hooking up with two mischievous thieves and becoming roomies. Estella's dream was always to be a fashion designer and when she gets a job at Liberty of London as a cleaning person, it ultimately leads her to a gig with Baroness von Hellman (Emma Thompson), a legendary designer who's been in a slump and seeks the kind of edgy energy the young hopeful displays when she goes rogue on a Liberty window display.

The Baroness is narcissistic, abrupt and ice-cold. Her dynamic with Estella is a shameless reference to Meryl Streep in *The Devil Wears Prada* (and there are in fact, a few fierce Prada-like ensembles

on display worn by both characters) but it rings right because women have to act that way to get ahead. Well they don't actually, but as we saw in *Maleficent* and its sequel, Disney always seems to need another villain to make its reconsidered protagonist less distasteful by comparison.

Thompson is effortless as The Baroness and though her cruelty is cartoonishly over the top, it matches what ensues – a riotous back and forth romp filled with heists, grand events and outlandish runway take-overs that capture an anarchy-in-the-U.K.-style energy. The film is set around the time of what the press materials call “the punk revolution” which makes the lack of a Vivienne Westwood mention a glaring omission, especially as the iconic designer's attitude and aesthetic are an obvious inspiration for everything Stella/Cruella creates. The styling, makeup and hair are stunning, regardless.

To this end, the *Cruella* soundtrack is pretty incredible too; we're talking The Stooges, The Stones, The Doors and two Ike & Tina Turner covers (“Whole Lotta Love” and “Come Together”), all of which informs both the narrative and the movie's splashy montages in a way that's on the nose and music video-like, but maintains a wicked edge and sensibility, especially for a Disney vehicle. This duality is in fact the essence of the film, which aims to give its anti-heroine a relatable rationale for her provocations while still keeping her de-vil-ish. With fiendish performances and striking production, they more than succeed.

Halston / Netflix

Ewan McGregor revisits the flamboyance and ghastly attitude he displayed as the villain in *Birds of Prey*, the last Harley Quinn movie, for this un-likeable but nonetheless captivating take on Roy Halston, the American designer who basically defined chic in the '70s. Seriously, watch that movie before this, and tell us it's not the same guy?

In this new biopic series Halston is pretentious, at times nasty and impulsive to the point of seeming adolescent, but he had the talent to make up for it all. This Netflix series – executive produced and co-written by Ryan Murphy – is so dazzling and unflinching in its portrayal of a flawed but utterly fabulous figure, that you can forgive its faults as well. Murphy often walks the line between substantive character study and cartoon-like portrait, especially when it comes to queer characters, and this

is slapped on any number of subpar products to this day), but as this series reminds us, personal brands are more fluid than any one product or label, and time has a way of leveling out a legacy. Halston's style-defining hits ultimately resonated more than his misses. This Netflix project (and a few docs out there) wouldn't exist otherwise.

Cruel Summer / Hulu

This Jessica Biel-produced teen drama obviously aims to toy with the viewer, weaving in and out of 1993, 1994 and 1995, during which times, main character Jeanette Turner (Chiara Aurelia) goes from nerdy 15-year-old to blossoming 16-year-old to outcast 17-year-old.

Things go south after popular girl Kate Wallis' (Olivia Holt) is abducted by the local school's vice principal and Kate accuses Jeanette of knowing about the whole thing. She certainly has motive,



(NETFLIX)

series is no exception.

But the fashion, backdrops and real life story here suck you in completely. We binged all five episodes in one long night and felt like we were on a “contact high” watching the cocaine-fueled exploits of the designer and his friends including Liza Minnelli (Krysta Rodriguez) and Elsa Peretti (Rebecca Dyan).

Director Daniel Minahan has a great eye, capturing the glamour of New York and Studio 54 (which we've all seen depicted hundreds of times by now) in a fresh yet gritty way. The series manages to be an aspirational escapist treat and a tragic cautionary tale at the same time, and it resonates right now more than ever. Halston may have sold his soul to JC Penney (and his name

as she almost completely takes the golden girl's place when she's gone, dating Kate's boyfriend Jamie (Froy Gutierrez) and hanging with her girlfriends. Jeanette denies it all and says it's just jealousy; but she *did* have a key to the abductor's house, so... who's telling the truth?

Each episode thus far has revealed another piece of the puzzle, and the series is clearly designed to make the viewer switch back and forth in surmising guilt. We honestly aren't sure who we believe yet, but thanks to solid acting by the young leads, careful character development and mostly, the period soundtrack, we're invested enough to watch it unravel each week. Hopefully, the truth will be revealed by Summer. It'd be cruel if it wasn't.



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