

COMPLETING THE JEFFREY OPEN SPACE TRAIL • GREAT PARK GALLERY: "SEASON OF CREATIVITY" • IRVINE'S CARBON-NEUTRAL FUTURE

IRVINE WEEKLY

AUGUST 20, 2021 VOL. 3 • NO. 19



TASTES OF TIJUANA

IRVINE'S **TAQUIERO TACO PATIO** COMBINES A LOVE FOR TACOS, FAMILY COLLABORATION AND TRADITION.



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AERIAL LOOKING SOUTHWEST (DAYTIME)

JOST/I-5 BRIDGE DESIGN CONCEPT | IRVINE, CA

TYLIN INTERNATIONAL



MAINTENANCE ROAD LOOKING WEST (DAYTIME)

JOST/I-5 BRIDGE DESIGN CONCEPT | IRVINE, CA

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IRVINE RECEIVES \$14.5 MILLION TO COMPLETE JEFFREY OPEN SPACE TRAIL NETWORK

WITH THE HELP OF SENATOR DAVE MIN, IRVINE SECURED FUNDS TO COMPLETE THE JEFFREY OPEN SPACE TRAIL, CONNECTING IRVINE TO THE COAST.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

On Wednesday, August 11, the city of Irvine received \$14.5 million in state funding to complete the Jeffrey Open Space Trail, which will eventually connect the Santa Ana Mountains to the coast. Senator Dave Min, who represents the 37th District, presented the funds to Irvine city leaders at the Cypress Community Center.

In his presentation, Min said he was proud to know that open space preservation continues to be one of the core goals of his hometown.

"I'm thrilled that this year's state budget designates \$14.5 million to fund the completion of the Jeffrey Open Space Trail. Open space preservation is a smart policy, which not only supports our sustainability efforts but also improves the quality of life for our residents and brings our community together," he said.

"Thank you to my hometown, the city of Irvine, for being a fantastic partner in this endeavor! I'm excited about the possibilities for hikers, bikers and other outdoors enthusiasts once the Jeffrey Trail is completed."

Irvine Mayor Farrah Khan said the addition of more trails and open space further establishes Irvine's values of sustainability and she expressed her gratitude for the leadership Senator Min continues to demonstrate at the local level.

"Continuing to enhance our great city's open space areas is something I couldn't be more proud of ac-

complishing," Khan said. "Our community thrives on being healthy and enjoying our master-planned community, and I'm so grateful for the partnership with Senator Min."

The Jeffrey Open Space Trail Project will run through Min's district and connect a network of trails between the Santa Ana Mountains and the Cleveland National Forest. The project will extend from Barranca Parkway to Walnut Avenue, and over the Interstate-5 Freeway with the incorporation of a footbridge.

With a total cost of \$16.9 million, including construction, in terms of timeline, the city of Irvine estimates construction will begin next summer with final completion slated for 2023, according to Kristina Perrigoue, the city of Irvine's Public Information Officer.

"We anticipate being in construction this time (summer) of next year 2022," Perrigoue said. "Construction is anticipated to be finished in September 2023 (JOST Extension), and April 2024 (JOST/I-5 Bridge). The bridge will be 15 feet wide and almost 2,000 feet from beginning to end."



MAINTENANCE ROAD LOOKING NORTHWEST

JOST/I-5 BRIDGE DESIGN CONCEPT | IRVINE, CA

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AS ENVIRONMENTAL ALARMS SOUND, IRVINE OPTS FOR CARBON-NEUTRAL FUTURE

IN THE WAKE OF THE INTERNATIONAL PANEL ON CLIMATE CHANGE'S SCATHING ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT, IRVINE HAS BECOME THE THIRD CITY IN CALIFORNIA AIMING FOR CARBON NEUTRALITY BY 2030.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER



COURTESY OF THE CITY OF IRVINE

During the Irvine City Council meeting on Tuesday, August 10, Irvine leaders unanimously agreed to adopt the Irvine ACHIEVES (Address Climate Change in Irvine's Environment, Values, and Energy Sources) resolution, an aggressive climate strategy with a core goal of converting Irvine into a carbon-neutral economy by 2030.

During the July 10 meeting, Irvine Mayor Farrah Khan said the initiatives were aspirational and a "step in the right direction."

"It's great timing for Irvine to show support for climate action, and how that aligns with scientific assessments," Khan said. "With the adoption of the climate resolution, we are the third city in California to set the 2030 climate target and work toward averting climate catastrophe."

Irvine now joins Menlo Park and Petaluma as the only California cities with 2030 carbon-neutral goals.

The ACHIEVES Resolution seemed to

have overwhelming support from the council, with Irvine Vice Mayor Tammy Kim emphasizing her enthusiasm to showcase innovation in climate action locally.

"It is what we need to move forward for a sustainable future," Kim said. "We really are at a crisis point right now, I believe that Irvine can be the leader when it comes to our role in climate change."

While leaders in Irvine continue to fuel aspirations of a carbon-free future, a report released by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change casts a dire outlook for the future health of ecosystems around the planet – based on the impacts of man-made climate change.

Michael Prather, a professor of Earth Sciences at UC Irvine, contributed to the IPCC report, which was released on Monday, August 9. In an interview with KCRW's Press Play Podcast, Prather explained that global temperatures have increased and will exceed the 1.5 degrees Celsius threshold that the sci-

ence community had been eyeing for decades.

The IPCC report confirms that there is no return from this point, and that the detrimental effects of climate change are now permanent.

Still, while Prather admits the circumstances are dire, he said there is a way to dial back the environmental alarms – but that we are entering "a new world."

"If we get to 1.5 [degrees] which we will without a doubt – I think we're going to see serious damage. There's going to be stress at some levels, there's probably going to be environmental issues of insecurity, and threats around the world, because a lot of places will not be livable," he said. "When you exceed 40 degrees C, people cannot work outdoors. And so we're basically going into a new world – that's pretty tough."

Prior to the council's vote, Sona Coffee, Environmental Programs Administrator for the city of Irvine, presented the ACHIEVES resolution to the council. Coffee explained that the ACHIEVES

resolution was created by Irvine's Green Ribbon Environmental Committee and is just one aspect of Irvine's climate strategies on its journey to carbon neutrality.

With the decision, Irvine becomes the third city in California to adopt stricter neutral initiatives than the state of California, which has an overarching goal to convert into a carbon-neutral economy by 2035. This goal was recently pushed up a decade at the direction of Governor Gavin Newsom.

With the ACHIEVES resolution, Coffee explained that on July 29, the city launched a Climate Action and Adaptation Plan (CAAP). Irvine's CAAP will be guided by the Irvine ACHIEVES resolution, as the city transitions to carbon neutrality by 2030, according to Coffee, who added that "significant changes will be needed statewide" in California's production of electricity, agriculture and transportation industries, in order to meet carbon-emissions thresholds.

"In California, we've seen a lot of progress in this area – the state has exceeded its 2020 target, while the economy has continued to grow – showing us that climate action does not hamper economic developments," Coffee said. "One important item to note is that by adopting a climate resolution with a zero-carbon goal by 2030, this is what allows us to apply for funding to help us implement the climate plan and put these practices in place."

As Irvine looks to aggressive climate strategies, it will do so by participating in the Cool City Challenge program, which comes with a top prize of \$25 million in funding for the city that demonstrates the most innovative "moonshot" strategies for carbon neutrality.

"The Cool City Challenge will award three cities with \$1 million in funding this year – the idea is to really develop an innovative climate strategy," Coffee said. "This is an opportunity for Irvine not just to take climate action, but to lead on climate action."

O.C.'S COVID-19 RATES EQUATE TO RED TIER STATUS, AS VACCINE PUSHBACK CONTINUES

WHILE THE COUNTY'S VACCINATION RATES ARE SUBSTANTIAL, OFFICIALS ARE GROWING CONCERNED WITH VACCINE HESITANCY IN HEALTH CARE WORKERS.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

Owners of private businesses in Orange County will maintain the choice to ask for proof of COVID-19 vaccine as a requirement for individuals to enter. However, according to Orange County Deputy Health Officer Dr. Regina Chinsio-Kwong, it is unlikely the county will mandate businesses to do so.

As of Tuesday, August 17, the Orange County Health Care Agency reported 668 new COVID-19 cases, with three new COVID-19 related deaths. The number of COVID-19 hospitalizations in Orange County also continues to rise, now with 549 people being treated for COVID-19, with 126 of that total in the intensive care unit.

Since August 10, COVID-19 hospitalizations have increased by 54 patients, with 30 of those cases requiring ICU admittance.

Dr. Clayton Chau, Director of the Orange County Health Agency and County Health Officer, spoke to the media during a press conference held by O.C.'s 2nd District Supervisor Katrina Foley on Tuesday, August 17. During his remarks, Chau said there was less than 25% capacity in the county's ICU capacity.

"About a week ago, on August 9, we had 84 people in the ICU, now we have 120. As far as pediatrics goes we know we have four kids at CHOC, and about 11 in the entire hospital. But the fact that we have kids in the ICU, I don't like," he said. "Adult staffable ICU beds are 22.2% available – for the entire county."

Chau said COVID-19 patients currently constitute 27.5% of O.C.'s ICU capacity. Under the recent surge of COVID-19 in Orange County, Chau referenced the now-defunct tier system, adding that Orange County would currently be in the Red Tier in terms of case rate and positivity rate.

Kwong added the majority of the COVID-19 hospitalizations that the county is currently processing are individuals who have not been fully vaccinated.

"It's hovering around 90% of COVID-19 patients are unvaccinated," Kwong said on August 11.

While more cities around the country are adopting vaccine verification methods in order to reduce community spread, Orange County is experiencing vaccine hesitation for a number of groups, including health care workers.

When questioned about his knowledge regarding those opposing vaccination mandates within the health care system, Chau said he was aware of the

situation, adding that health care workers have until September 30 to receive a second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

However, Chau said he was unaware of what protocol individual medical companies would follow regarding health care workers opting to remain unvaccinated.

"Each of the business entities, including the county, would have to work with their legal counsel to figure out what is the appropriate disciplinary action that must be taken for any health care workers that have not been compliant with that order," Chau explained to *Irvine Weekly*. "The health care agency is included in that order. The county council is working very closely with our labor union, and eventually going to come up to Supervisor Foley, so she'll probably be the first one to have knowledge of that process before I do."

As cases rise in Orange County, presenting proof of a COVID-19 vaccination as a requirement to enter businesses has become a topic of discussion, as the Los Angeles City Council recently voted in favor of adopting policies that would support vaccine verification.

Said verification would require individuals to show proof that they have received a full COVID-19 vaccination to enter businesses like gyms and restaurants.

Speaking to media during an afternoon news conference on Wednesday, August 11, Kwong said that outside the mandates issued to the public sector by the California Department of Health – health care workers, city employees, and now teachers and school staff – she does not anticipate Orange County finding the need to require businesses to seek that information in order for patrons to enter.

"This will be up to the business. I know there's businesses that are already required to – health care facilities, congregate living facilities and schools – but in terms of the private sector, and businesses that are not part of those categories, it's still up to the businesses to decide if they're going to verify vaccination," Kwong explained to *Irvine Weekly*. "We're still seeing a very slight rise. What we've seen in the past is as our case rates went up, hospitalizations were delayed by about a week or two, so this was expected."

Kwong added that the increase in hospitalizations are troubling because it takes space away from individuals who need care for non-COVID-19 related issues.

These comments come with the help of Foley, who has been working to provide daily COVID-19 updates, as the Board of Supervisors has recently stopped addressing the COVID-19 situation in Orange County.

In somewhat silence, the Board of Supervisors has ceased COVID-19 case updates, which have been presented by County Health Officer Dr. Clayton Chau in the past.

While no public mention was made of the omission of COVID-19 updates, the move came just weeks after hundreds of public speakers came to address the Board of Supervisors with anti-vaccine rhetoric, and conspiracy theories regarding COVID-19 during several consecutive meetings.

On Tuesday, August 10, the Board of Supervisors approved \$8 million for a Vaccine Equity Engagement Program. The program, aimed at targeting the county's areas with the lowest vaccination rates, was given a \$4 million boost

on Tuesday.

The \$8 million will create a team of volunteers to go door-to-door to encourage the unvaccinated to get vaccinated, and will even walk the individuals to the mobile vaccination clinics. Volunteers will earn \$20 an hour.

IRVINE WILL REQUIRE CITY EMPLOYEES TO SHOW PROOF OF COVID-19 VACCINE

As the highly transmissible COVID-19 Delta variant continues to circulate in Orange County, the city of Irvine has announced it will soon require all city employees to show proof they have received the COVID-19 vaccine.

Announced in a Monday, August 2 release, in addition to following guidance issued by the California Department of Public Health regarding face coverings in indoor spaces, the city of Irvine will follow other Orange County cities and begin requiring all city employees to get vaccinated.

With more than 75% of the city of Irvine's staff having already received the COVID-19 vaccine, Irvine Mayor Farrah Khan said she has confidence that additional safety measures will help protect more individuals.

"I am grateful to our city staff for their ongoing efforts to combat COVID-19, and I want to thank the 75% of employees who have already been vaccinated," Khan said. "The additional measures we are implementing, based on recent data, will further protect the health and well-being of our employees and everyone in our community."

In Orange County, the HCA reports that as of August 9, 1,941,560 individuals are now fully vaccinated on both single and multi-dose platforms.

FOOD

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IRVINE'S TAQUIERO TACO PATIO RECAPTURES TASTES OF TIJUANA WITH TACOS, CRAFT BEER

CONNECTED THROUGH SEPARATE FAMILY TIES BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND MEXICO, THE ORIGIN STORY OF IRVINE'S TAQUIERO TACO IS AN INCREDIBLY UNIQUE TALE BUILT ON A LOVE FOR TACOS, FAMILY COLLABORATION AND TRADITION.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TAQUIERO TACO PATIO

Currently living in Tijuana, the family business behind Taquiero Taco Patio in Irvine has crafted a concept that is replicating the flavors of authentic Tijuana-style tacos, and merging it with the Mexican craft beer scene.

Now, with two locations in Irvine, and soon-to-be opening in Aliso Viejo, Taquiero Taco owners Roberto Fierro and Sean Young spoke to *Irvine weekly* about the inspiration behind their Irvine-based taco shop.

While there are many layers of inspiration, mainly both say they were inspired by their childhood experiences of Mexico – long before meeting one another.

However, it was only when Young, a Huntington Beach native, married into Fierro's family that the two would discover their undying passion for Tijuana taquerias, and later build a partnership over their love for tacos y cerveza.

Young explained that his grandfather lived in Mexico, and his family would cross the border often to visit when he was a child. Although he lived in Huntington Beach, Young credits his time in Mexico for shaping his perspective for years to come.

"My grandpa had a house in Rosarito, so I grew up going across the border and eating tacos down there,"



Young explained in an interview with *Irvine Weekly*. "It's just something that you grow up with – there are such district flavors crossing the border. In Orange County – that didn't really exist."

Prior to meeting Roberto Fierro, Young's current business partner, who grew up in Tijuana, Young met a cousin of the Fierro Family, while attending college at UC San Diego.

It was through this random dorm room connection with Fierro's cousin that Young would eventually meet his future wife – Fierro's other cousin, Lariza.

Young and Lariza Fierro would eventually get married and move to Monterey, Mexico where Lariza attended college. While living in Northern Mexico, Young started a successful frozen yogurt company, where he eventually opened a dozen locations.

Fast forward to 2019, Young said he sold the Fro-Yo biz and took his earnings to invest into the Taquiero Taco concept.

Fierro explained that the pair were initially looking to open the concept in San Diego – as both were (and still

FOOD



currently are) living in Mexico. But, on a whim decided to check out Orange County to see if there was a need for their vision.

"It was amazing where we saw the need for authentic, real tacos. There are other chains, but only in Santa Ana were we able to find something that was worth it – but in Irvine there was nothing," Fierro explained during a phone interview with *Irvine Weekly*.

The core inspiration behind the Taquiero Taco concept aims to recreate Mexico's relatively unknown craft brewery scene. In order to bring this vision to fruition, Young explained that they worked with Mexican architects, and enlisted the help of Tijuana-based muralist, Alonso Delgadillo.

"You get transported to Mexico, if you're having a craft beer from Mexico, hand-made tortilla – that's the feeling we want you to have when you walk in the store," he said. "[Alonso] has been painting a big mural on every wall, he's from Tijuana, he's the most famous muralist from TJ. We worked with a team from TJ, which makes it feel more authentic."

Still, Young and Fierro explained that there was a need to perfect the menu not just in terms of what is being served – but how those dishes are prepared.

With menu items like Cochinita Pibil, a recipe from the Yucatán that consists of slow-roasted pork that is marinated in citrus juices and wrapped in banana leaf while it is roasted, and a delightfully crunchy Al Pastor, specifically prepared in a unique style known as Dorado – which translates to crispy.

Dorado is a popular way of ordering meat in tacos and burritos in Tijuana, according to Fierro.

To help execute this authentic culinary vision, Fierro explained that the menu was built with the help of renowned Mexican chef and content creator, Chef Alma Fernanda Regalado – who happens to be another cousin within the Fierro family – and Lariza's sister.

With more than 40,000 followers on Instagram, Regalado has gained massive notoriety for hosting cooking classes online.

"In terms of recipes, my cousin Lariza – Sean's wife – her sister is a renowned chef down in Mexico, and she helped us a lot with the menu, and we also brought in some Taquieros from the best taquerias that we love in Tijuana," Fierro explained. "We wanted to make the best tacos. We make our own tortillas, we make our own masa – we have our own mill in house."

The incorporation of a masa mill at Taquiero Taco was not by mistake, but actually a need discovered after being unable to source traditional, Tijuana-style masa, which according to Young creates a thicker tortilla that is more yellow in color.

"When we came up here, we thought, 'Oh, we'll just buy the masa in Santa Ana' – but in Santa Ana, they use a different type of masa than they do in Tijuana," Young explained. "We couldn't find the masa we liked, so my sister-in-law, the chef, she taught us how to make masa – we weren't even planning on doing that, we just couldn't find a tortilla we liked."

For Fierro and Young, the most important aspect for their vision was recreating the Tijuana-style vibe as a whole, while including aspects of regional Mexican cuisine, which include Monterey and Rosarito.

One example of this regional culinary homage is Taquiero Taco's expansive house-made salsa bar, which features nearly a dozen salsa from different regions in Mexico.

"In Tijuana, there are usually two or three salsas at a taqueria, but when I used to live in Monterey it's more common that they'll give you a big selection of salsa there," Young said. "Honestly, Mexican food without salsa is sort of bland – there are so many different flavors of salsas in Mexico that a lot of people may not have tried."

In the coming weeks, Taquiero Taco will expand into Aliso Viejo, adding a third location to the chain. While smaller than the Irvine locations, the owner of Taquiero Taco expressed excitement about expansion and said their mission is to continue to transcend the flavors of Mexico throughout Orange County.



SUMMER CONCERT SERIES AT PACIFIC AMPHITHEATRE



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"Lights, Camera, Action" fine art print on canvas created from an original oil painting by Chuck Jones.



Lining the walls of the expansive Great Park Gallery are delightful sketches, drawings and paintings, many in cartoon colors, of memorable Looney Tunes characters including Bugs Bunny, Wile E. Coyote, Daffy Duck and Porky Pig; as the exhibition "Chuck Jones: Season of Creativity" provides an extensive description of animation created by the Warner Brothers studio.

This show is also rich in wall text, describing in detail the many steps involved in creating animated films from 1930 to 1970. And as the installation further demonstrates, Chuck Jones (1912-2002), producer/director of more than 300 short and feature-length films, had a profound influence on pop culture, as seen through the lens of anthropomorphized animals.

Jones is described in this show as a Renaissance man, superlative filmmaker, writer, fine artist, lecturer and philoso-

SEASON OF CREATIVITY

EXPLORING A CARTOONIST'S QUEST FOR PERFECTION AT THE GREAT PARK GALLERY.

BY LIZ GOLDNER

pher. He is quoted in a wall label: "The rules are simple. Take your work, but never yourself, seriously. Pour in the love and whatever skill you have, and it will come out." This quote is accompanied by framed versions of his whimsical free-hand drawings of cartoon characters, along with another quote explaining that the cartoon characters "spring

from the imagination of the producers, directors and animators."

Early in the exhibition, visitors are introduced to seven of Chuck Jones's paintings. These delightful artworks, depicting Looney Tunes characters, demonstrate the animator's expertise as a fine artist. Indeed, the world-famous Oscar-winning animator was a painter

before becoming a cartoonist, having graduated from Chouinard Art Institute.

His colorful paintings are primarily figurative renditions of well-known cartoons. On display are "Bugs Bunny Concerto" of the formally dressed rabbit playing a classical composition at the piano; and Porky Pig as Friar Tuck, laughing at Daffy Duck portraying Robin Hood in "It is to Laugh." In the painting "I Claim this Planet," Daffy Duck is standing on a small platform with his hand raised toward the sky, while Porky Pig and Marvin the Martian are holding onto the platform by their fingertips. In "Lights, Camera, Action," Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, the Road Runner and Wile E. Coyote whimsically portray a scene from the silent filmmaking days. And Lola Bunny makes a romantic appearance with Bugs in "Love is in the Hare." Jones's contrasting "Van Gogh Coyote" painting is executed in an expressive Van Gogh-inspired style.

"I Claim this Planet" fine art print on canvas created from an original oil painting by Chuck Jones.



"Love is in the Hare" fine art print on canvas created from an original oil painting by Chuck Jones.



dividual movement of every character – with many different drawings needed for each second of movement. (These animated films were made long before the digital age.)

One of the last steps in cartoon making in the 20th century was "Inking and Painting," or transferring the animation drawings onto translucent plastic sheets. Until the 1960s, this time-consuming process was accomplished by hand, but was simplified when the Xerox company developed a method to photograph and chemically transfer the drawings onto celluloid film, or onto "cels" as the film was referred to back then. The final steps, placing the cels on top of their backgrounds under the camera, resulted in the now-iconic Chuck Jones films that so many of us saw and loved during our childhoods – and perhaps afterward.

On Sunday, September 5, 10 a.m. - 1 p.m., the Great Park Palm Court Arts Complex will host activities including a Chuck Jones Doodle Wall, Termite Terrace Character Drawing, and Acme Animation Experience. Participants can collaborate on personalized stop-motion animated short cartoons using some of Jones's favorite characters.

"Chuck Jones: Season of Creativity" is on view through September 12. Great Park Gallery, Palm Court Art Complex, Orange County Great Park, Irvine; Thu. & Fri., noon-4 p.m.; Sat. & Sun., 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; free. cityofirvine.org/orange-county-great-park/arts-exhibitions.

While these artworks were created after the invention of the Looney Tunes characters, they demonstrate Jones's lifelong expertise with color, form and harmony – skills that he employed during his 70-year career as a cartoonist.

Exhibiting/describing Jones's expertise and detailed methods used as an animator might seem a daunting task. Yet "Season of Creativity," three years in the making, is the most comprehensive display of his creative output, according to the curators.

Each of the following cartoon-making steps is lavishly described in pictures and words. One of the earliest steps, as the exhibition explains, is character design. This process often begins with the drawing of an animal; then there is the anthropomorphizing of that animal, and finally the illustration of its range of motion in successive drawings.

Storyboards illustrating cartoons in sketch forms are then described in images and in the following text: "Every crucial scene is drawn in semi-detail form on cards and pinned in sequence on a board to allow the director to visualize the finished cartoon."

The next step, creating the cartoon script for the voice actors, is similar to writing a film script. Jones is again quoted: "Once you have heard a

strange audience burst into laughter at a film you directed, you realize what the word joy is all about." Scriptwriting is followed by the painting of the colorful and illustrative backgrounds for the cartoons. These scenes – often depicting the outdoors – are painted by traditional artists. The exhibition text explains, "The

backgrounds are designed to allow the animated characters plenty of movement and must not distract from the main characters."

The "Animation Process," following the background painting, was one of the most complicated and essential steps, as a new drawing was created for each in-

"Bugs Bunny Concerto" fine art print on canvas created from an original oil painting by Chuck Jones.



"Stop Steamin Up My Tail" fine art print on canvas created from an original oil painting by Chuck Jones.



CULTURE

FRIDAY NIGHT LIVE JAZZ RISES AT OC FISH GRILL

BY SCOTT FEINBLATT



There aren't a whole lot of places in Orange County that come to mind when one is in the mood for some live jazz. Fortunately for Irvine residents, there's a new hot spot in the neighborhood. SoCal Jazz Academy has begun a weekly series, called Friday Night Live Jazz, at OC Fish Grill. This series is the latest step in Dr. Karim Yengsep's mission to champion a world-class jazz community in Southern California. As the event's organizer and founder / director of SoCal Jazz Academy, bassist and educator Dr. Yengsep's new performance series not only features a rotating roster of accomplished musicians performing first-rate jazz sets, but the series also serves as an opportunity for his academy's students to showcase their skills and sit in with pros in a concert setting.

When this reporter went to check out the show on Aug. 13, it seemed as though news had already spread. The place was packed. The quartet was situated in a corner of the patio's

faux-ivy-draped pergola, and in the minutes before and after the combo promptly began playing, at its 7:30 p.m. start time, employees of OC Fish Grill brought out additional tables and

chairs to accommodate the growing number of guests. Throughout the evening, diners soaked in the classy vibes as they enjoyed their meals, wine and the advertised \$3 craft beers.

After performing the first set, which lasted over an hour, Dr. Yengsep and his guest players took a break. Following this, students from his academy rotated in to get their taste of the limelight. Notably, the music appreciation did not end at the outskirts of OC Fish Grill. Folks waiting to be seated at the neighboring I Can Barbecue Korean Grill and random passersby also got caught up in the music. At one point, a dog walker was pulled to a halt by his pup, who stood transfixed by the music. That dog knew what was up.

The road Dr. Yengsep has traveled to make this magic happen has been a very long and deliberate one. Born in Kazakhstan, where he studied music from an early age, Yengsep first came to the U.S. in 2000, at which point he attended several universities, produced the excellent album "Bossa Nuevo" with his ensemble of the same name, and earned his doctorate. Following this, he returned to Kazakhstan, where he taught and held administrative positions at various colleges and universities, while producing dozens of radio essays for Jazz Review, on Kazakh Radio. In recent years, Dr. Yengsep has made his way back to the states and, in 2019, he realized his vision for "creating a community jazz education program that address[es] the needs of ... youth and adult learners at the street level."

Dr. Yengsep explained to *Irvine Weekly* what it was like to build the momentum that led to all of his accomplishments soon after moving to SoCal, which he did with his family, in 2018. "Most of my life, I was working



CULTURE



Elena Gilliam (vocals) and Korim Yengsep (bass). Photo by Edip Arat, c. 2020

for hire, and then you're like, 'All right, now take your personal finance and invest it into something you believe in: go!' So it was a very scary time, and especially given the fact that I was not part of the local scene. I actually didn't know a single jazz musician in the area. And I could see how [my plans] may have come across as kind of like, 'Wow, man, who is this guy?' But, you know, that's the market economy. You just go for it. And I did."

Very quickly, he began making connections within the local jazz community. "I started building relationships from scratch, just from jam sessions," Dr. Yengsep explained. "And slowly but surely, the network began expanding, and I was very blessed to meet incredible people who, to this day, I work with most of them."

When Dr. Yengsep launched the SoCal Jazz Academy, it was a tough call. "Jazz education is sort of like an underdog in the educational process," he explained, stressing that most community music schools are not wholly focused on jazz. With a jazz emphasis, the curriculum includes studying improvisation, relevant literature, composers, traditions, etc. And while with such a strategic approach, many would-be students with an interest in certain instruments like violin or styles like rock and roll are not going to be interested, the setting is highly appealing for educators. "They're amazed at this opportunity... because, ultimately, every jazz

educator and music educator wants to connect with students, and if there is this platform, which allows them to meet community members who are studying jazz repertoire, that's incredible."

As for the students who love jazz, the progression to begin playing gigs with professional musicians at the Friday Night Live Jazz series is waiting for them. "Every jazz gig would allow you to [rotate] in members of the community, friends of the band, but... the purpose of this series is to allow faculty, friends and specifically students of the academy to come out and play." He provided an example, "A couple of weeks ago, we had a nine-year-old piano student. She came out and did two songs. Imagine for a nine-year-old to be able to hang with professionals from start to finish – what an incredible opportunity that is for their learning process to see everything in action, everything they've learned about the piece, how to improvise, how to listen to other band members, how to finish the song. Really, you learn it on the bandstand."

Friday Night Live Jazz runs from 7:30 - 10:00 pm on Fridays at OC Fish Grill and is free to diners. To learn more about the SoCal Jazz Academy, including updated information on the Friday Night Jazz line-ups and to RSVP for their free shows, visit their website at www.socaljazz.com/ and follow their social media at Facebook and Instagram.

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MUSIC

THE SWEETEST SOUNDS!

DIRTY HONEY ARE PUTTING THE ROLL BACK IN ROCK.

BY BRETT CALLWOOD

PHOTO BY MIKE SAVOIA



Dirty Honey feels like a vital rock & roll band right now. We don't mean that in a hackneyed, journalistic "you gotta hear this" sort of way, but rather in the sense that rock music genuinely needs the fresh, sweet sounds of Dirty Honey.

They're far from the only group of youngish musicians creating this sort of a racket. But unlike, say, Greta Van Fleet, they're managing to pay homage to the past without being accused of pilfering from it. They've toured with the likes of Guns N' Roses man Slash, and they're currently on the road with the reformed Black Crowes – all of which makes sense. These guys have a dirty blues sound in their rock, a swing that has been missing in new music for a while. Put simply, they're putting the roll back in rock.

The band formed in 2017, when Marc LaBelle (vocals), John Notto (guitar) and Justin Smolian (bass) were joined by drummer Corey Coverstone.

"He joined us for this gig that we were actually playing on the street of Sunset Boulevard, in front of a weed shop," Smolian. "At the end of the gig he stood up

and said that he wanted to be in the band. After we got him in, it was all engines go. We recorded our first demo a couple of months after that, and by the end of the year we had management. It's been an amazing ride since the four of us got together. It's been really fast. Our mission has really been to be the best rock band in the world if we can, and that's what we're trying to do."

In the four years since, the band has evolved at a frightening pace. They found their feet, and their sound, fast. Got management, all of the business shit straight. Now, they're flying. Smolian is the L.A. native in the band, the other three transplanting in. But they feel proud to be based here.

"We cut our teeth in L.A.," says LaBelle. "But we're definitely not like a Sunset Strip band, to me. We avoided the Sunset Strip like the plague. There wasn't a scene happening, and it wasn't like the '80s or even the early '90s for us. We cut our teeth in bars and clubs all over L.A., Santa Monica and Ventura County. I think our style is a little bluesier than the typical L.A. bands."

The band understandably counts the

Slash tour among its career highlights, especially Smolian and Notto who consider Gn'R a favorite band. But this current Crowes tour is right up there.

"I grew up listening to bands like the Black Crowes, Aerosmith and the Rolling Stones," says LaBelle. "Chris and Rich Robinson have been heroes of mine for a long time. I got somewhat emotional before our first show on this tour. That's the first time that's really ever happened to me. This is pretty high for me. There's a couple of other bands that might not be around much longer, but so far this is the big one for me."

Dirty Honey and the Black Crowes share management, so a touring arrangement was a no-brainer. When LaBelle traveled to NYC to catch the Crowes' first reunion gig on the Bowery, he was determined to make something happen.

"I went out there, and we had been talking to our manager who is also their manager about doing some shows together, and Chris was literally saying, 'Hey man, I hope you're ready to do some shows,'" LaBelle says. "The early conversations were like, maybe it'll be 10 shows with them on this tour. As time went on, with COVID

restrictions and trying our best to be safe, we were getting bigger too. It became a marketable show. It's a good bill and people are really enjoying it."

These two bands on the same bill just makes so much sense. Both share that rock & roll swagger, the Keith Richard thing. Sexy and fun, and absolutely danceable. It's also great to hear the Dirty Honey guys say that the Robinsons are cool – not only with their support band but also with each other after years of falling out.

"I see the two brothers walking around together, chatting and having a laugh," says Smolian. "It's not contrived, they actually have mended the bridge. It's good to see."

Dirty Honey's self-titled debut album came out in April, and they say that they've been overwhelmed by the positive response it's received.

"I think a big moment for me and probably for all of us was when KLOS in L.A. played the whole record," says Smolian. "I grew up in L.A. and I've been listening to that station my whole life, and I've never heard them play an entire record front to back. I was freaking out when that happened. That was the coolest thing."

While it's far from a concept album, there are themes that permeate the record. The usual stuff – relationships, sex, living life and making mistakes.

"It's meant to be a sort of bluesy, soulful rock & roll record that at times can pull on your heartstrings a little bit," says LaBelle. "Other times, make you want to have fun and dance. Other times, make you get introspective and think about past relationships, mistakes, stuff like that."

We'll get to hear it when Dirty Honey, and the Black Crowes of course, roll into the Forum on August 19. It's a gig that means a lot to the hometown boys.

"The Forum is the biggest show for me of this tour, especially growing up in L.A.," says Smolian. "We found out that we were going to be doing the Forum last year, so we've been waiting for 18 months. I really can't wait to get on that stage. I've seen so many shows there and it means so much to me to grace that stage."

After that? Well, the tour ends in mid-October and they'll take a well-earned break.

"I'm going on vacation, so that'll be cool," says LaBelle. "As soon as I get back, I have a lot of stuff I want to work on with the guys in terms of songwriting, and getting some new tunes ready to go."

No rest for the wicked!

The event takes place at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, August 19 at the Forum. The self-titled debut album is out now.



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- Jim and Carol Hoffman

ENTERTAINMENT

HEART OF A POET

NEW DOCUMENTARIES VAL, ROADRUNNER, AND SEARCHING FOR MR. RUGOFF PORTRAY CONFLICTED MEN IN A COMPLICATED WORLD.

BY CHAD BYRNES

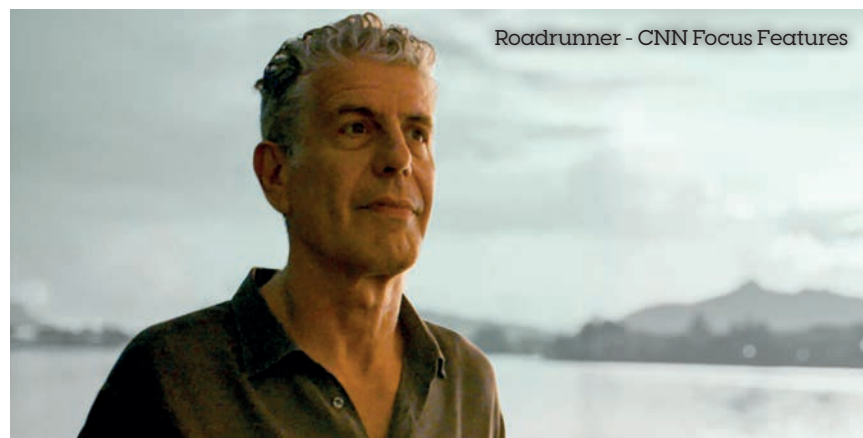
If there was ever a time to step into someone else's shoes and experience another place and time, this would be it! While we continue to sit in our homes and wait for the COVID-19 nightmare to end, documentaries provide a unique, somewhat voyeuristic experience. Coincidentally or not, a few covering cantankerous, visionary men and their strange, tragic lives have been released in the last month. The subjects in question are multifarious troubadours who invested their souls into their respective trades and maybe even sacrificed their lives in the process. Their biographical journeys are a little on the dark side, but they're never boring and collectively, they suggest that it might be a good time for men to take a cold, hard look at themselves in an ever-fluctuating modern landscape.

VAL (PRIME VIDEO)

The new documentary on the inscrutable Val Kilmer is an exercise in distilled subjectivity. There isn't much in the way of breathing room or impartiality since *Val* exists within its own cocoon

— the point of view of Val Kilmer. From the opening scene (featuring a home video of Kilmer and his *Top Gun* co-stars hanging out in a trailer while making fun of Tom Cruise) we quickly realize we're entering a personal arena. It's an intimate, insider journey, and the rules are only dictated by the subject himself. This is a little disappointing since he's a notoriously difficult celebrity whose career suffered due to a problematic reputation. Even as Kilmer rose to stardom in the mid '80s, the rumor mill circulated stories about a combustible method actor with a penchant for perfection and callousness to his crews. It would've been more interesting to get a neutral voice in the room. At times you'll wonder if this is a grandiose vehicle for self-promotion or a genuine exploration. Actually, it's a little of both.

Ting Poo and Leo Scott might have directed the movie, but it's obviously Kilmer's passion project. Narrated by his son Jack, *Val* consists of home video footage Kilmer obsessively amassed throughout his life. From 16 mm movies he made with his brothers in Chatsworth, Califor-



Roadrunner - CNN Focus Features

nia as a teenager to his days at Julliard, the movie doesn't disappoint in displaying an artist in the making. There's also plenty of behind-the-scenes footage from movies like *Tombstone* and *The Doors* before they cut back to the present where Kilmer makes appearances at Comic-Con and screenings of his most popular films. There's some juicy stuff in his video archive, including a cool bit with a young Kevin Bacon and Sean Penn on a Broadway show they starred in together and a nasty row with director John Frankenheimer on the doomed production of *The Island of Dr. Moreau*.

The movie continually switches back to the present day where we see Kilmer struggling with throat cancer. It's indisputable that his battle is brave and heart-wrenching, as is his close relationship with his children. Kilmer himself also retains a unique charisma and humor even as he goes through this daily hell. The narrative moves at a breakneck speed and has a certain magnetism, but it's also self-serving and evades the darker side of his persona. Though there are some news clips regarding his terrible rep on various productions (it would be an absurd omission if there wasn't), Kilmer never addresses this himself. It's confusing that a man who's obviously going through a soul-searching journey wouldn't confront the stories about his past abusive behavior. Has he made any amends? We are talking about an actor who *Batman Forever's* Joel Schumacher called "childish and impossible," and Marlon Brando famously took aside and said, "Your problem is you confuse your talent with the size of your paycheck."

ROADRUNNER (IN THEATERS)

Unlike *Val*, which is clearly biased and definite in its approach, director Morgan Neville's documentary *Roadrunner*:

A Film About Anthony Bourdain is a more inquisitive and complex study of a mysterious public figure. Friends and fans alike were stunned when the famed chef, author and TV host took his own life in 2018 at the age of 61. After gaining fame with his book, *Kitchen Confidential*, Bourdain became a modern cultural ambassador, traveling the world on his shows *No Reservations* and *Parts Unknown*. He wasn't simply a celebrity chef introducing his audience to world cuisine. Bourdain challenged the ugly American stereotype with his Byronesque humor, deadpan wit and punk rock ethos.

From various interviews with his compatriots, all of which are impassioned and engaging, the movie sketches a persona of a man who was as comfortable with fellow chefs (David Ripert), as he was with artists (David Choe) and musicians (Josh Homme, Alison Mosshart). He was both a sensitive everyman and a forceful intellectual. Studying Bourdain's life with a patient zeal, *Roadrunner* mostly skips over his childhood. Neville touches on his addiction to heroin as a young man, his start as a chef in a shabby '70s New York, his meteoric rise to fame with his bestselling book and his awkwardness as an inexperienced television host. The eventual love he cultivated with traveling the world affected his second marriage which produced a daughter, leading to frustration at not being able to just stay home and be a normal father. Conventionality was not Bourdain's forte and yet a part of him yearned for it.

Director Morgan Neville walks a tightrope in his portrayal here. He doesn't want his movie to look like a basic CNN retrospective, with the usual clips of Bourdain eating in different countries, and he wants to pose some profound questions regarding Bourdain's suicide. This narrative tug-of-war feels strained at times. The movie's emotional cur-



Val (Prime Video)

ENTERTAINMENT

rency and unabashed passion helps it transcend its somewhat basic architecture. It's a messy affair, but then again so was Bourdain. Above all, he was a romantic with a poet's soul. *Roadrunner* is a heartfelt film that's both a celebration of a man who encouraged people to step outside their comfort zones and a genuine eulogy for a public figure who battled very private demons.

SEARCHING FOR MR. RUGOFF (IN THEATERS)

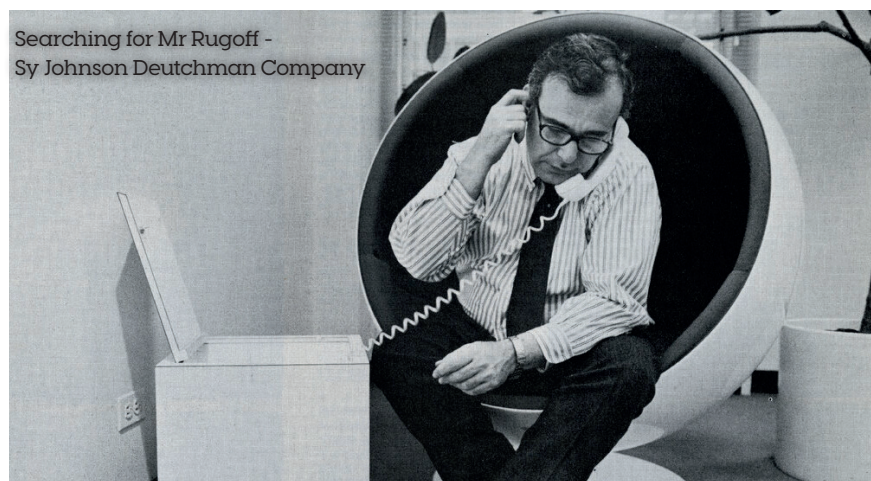
Have you heard of Donald Rugoff? Unfortunately, hardly anyone has, although he should take his place alongside other eccentric movie moguls such as Robert Evans, Dino De Laurentiis and Menahem Golan, and Yoram Globus. Rugoff was a complicated, irascible New York film distributor and marketing visionary of '60's and 70's independent and foreign films. An old-school Jewish entrepreneur, Rugoff made going to the movies an intellectual and sexy experience before that was even a consideration. Directed by Ira Deutchman, Rugoff's former employee and now a film distributor himself, *Searching for Mr. Rugoff* is not only a fascinating exposé of a bullheaded businessman who changed the face of cinema, but also a remembrance of a time when seeing new and strange movies was a special experience.

Rugoff started Cinema 5, the company that released such groundbreaking films as *Swept Away*, *Seven Beauties*, *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, David Bowie's film debut *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, the exceptional Rolling Stones documentary, *Gimme Shelter*, and many more. Rugoff saw something in these movies other American distributors did not at the time. While the big studios relied on brash musicals and silly melodramas for their revenue,

Rugoff was flying to Italy and France and meeting with new and exciting filmmakers to buy their movies. Cinema 5 also owned the best, independent theaters in New York, such as Cinema I and II, the Beekman, the Plaza, the Gramercy, and others.

A businessman is responsible for creating a culture of cinephiles in this country, because let's face it, it's not all about art, but marketing and exposure too. Without Rugoff, who knows if these movies would've made a dent in this country. Throughout the doc, Deutchman travels to Martha's Vineyard to find out what happened to the now-deceased mogul. It's a weak subplot, but it only takes up a small part of the narrative. Most of the movie features interviews with luminary filmmakers (Robert Downey Sr, Lina Wertmuller), as well as Rugoff's former employees and his ex-wife and sons. Deutchman sketches a portrait of a cantankerous, maniacal genius who dressed badly, chain-smoked, only ate pastrami sandwiches and left food stains all over his clothes.

Reminiscent of another brilliant documentary, 2004's *Z Channel: A Magnificent Obsession* (which chronicled Jerry Harvey – the brilliant albeit tragic cinephile who created an L.A.-based cable station dedicated to important films), *Searching* attempts to deconstruct a pioneer who also had "an element of madness in him," as Wertmuller says. It's no surprise that Rugoff ended up severely depressed and penniless in his later days, as his myopic obsession with his business became an unhealthy compulsion and his ultimate undoing. It's impossible to measure his influence on contemporary cinema, but at least this wonderful documentary gives him the same spotlight he placed on so many others throughout his life.



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