

UCI ART DEPARTMENT'S FOUNDING YEARS • OC'S VACCINE ACTION PLAN • PROFILE: CITY COUNCILMAN ANTHONY KUO

IRVINE WEEKLY

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SOOHA COFFEE ROASTERS IN IRVINE SERVES UP ORGANIC GROUNDS

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CITY COUNCIL



Photo by: City of Irvine

IRVINE'S QUINTESSENTIAL MAN-ABOUT-TOWN

**CITY COUNCIL MEMBER ANTHONY KUO
EXPLAINS HIS APPROACH TO SERVING THE
COMMUNITY.**

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

If the city of Irvine ever had a #1 fan, Irvine City Council member and lifelong Irvine resident Anthony Kuo would be a top contender.

Kuo, who was elected to the Irvine City Council in 2018 after serving on the Irvine planning commission for eight years, says his family's roots within Irvine's Woodbridge neighborhood date back to 1978.

Growing up locally, Kuo's family owned a restaurant, called Chinatown Restaurant in Irvine, for more than two decades. As an Irvine native, Kuo reflects on being raised in a city that was surrounded by two fully-functioning military bases – El Toro Air Force base and the Marine Corps Air Station in Tustin – and has experienced the city's transformation into the Irvine of today, a diverse hub of culture, commerce and technology.

Speaking on the diversity within Irvine's newest City Council, Kuo added that he is pleased to see partisan boundaries dissolve in the council's early decision making.

"For the first time, in longer than I can remember, you've got three Democrats and two Republicans on the City Council. But even in two short meetings, you've seen that not everything lands on partisan lines," he said. "From my perspective, that's a good thing. Because building out a park, fixing roads – that's not a Democrat thing, that's not a Republican thing."

Considering his longevity in Irvine – as both a resident and an elected official – paired with a self-described characterization as Irvine's biggest cheerleader, Kuo could simply be considered Irvine's quintessential man-about-town.

With a newly formed City Council, Irvine's newest Mayor Farrah Khan and Kuo have become equal in years of experience on the council, as they both ran in 2016, but lost. However, both prevailed in 2018.

Similar to Khan, Kuo added that both of their families come from the hospitality industry, which he said plays a significant role in their relationship as colleagues, and the approach he takes in serving his community.

"From that perspective, we very much get along. She and her family own a catering business, so we commiserate on that point a lot, coming from the hospitality industry. And I think few people understand how to serve better than those who come from the hospitality industry," he said. "Serving someone dinner is not really very much different than serving your community. You make sure people are happy, and that people have what they need."

Kuo is an Irvine lifer, sharing that he guiltlessly enjoyed living life vicariously through supporting local Irvine events. Pre-pandemic, Kuo said a normal evening might consist of some take-out food and a performance at a local school.

"I really don't have a life – my life is Irvine. Pre-pandemic, my day might look like a conference call in the morning, going to work, and then after work, I would look at my calendar, I see Chipotle happens to be having a fundraiser for Stonecreek Elementary PTA, well guess what, that's where I'm going for dinner," he said. "Then when I'm done with whatever I'm having, University High School might be putting on a spring musical – well, that's going to be my entertainment. Now, a lot of those activities obviously stopped."

CITY COUNCIL

He admits that he was born in Newport Beach – not Irvine – but he also points out that he was born before Irvine built its first hospital.

Nonetheless, it seems Irvine was meant to accommodate Kuo.

On any given day, Kuo can be found somewhere in Irvine, showing his support for local restaurants, participating in a local fundraiser, and surely providing detailed COVID-19 updates to share on social media.

Kuo's insightful demeanor, and thoughtful personality pair well with his infectious smile, which is documented often in his detailed social media posts.

Those who follow the city councilman can expect his weekday-themed posts. "Where am I Wednesday" is regularly scheduled programming, where he spends time showcasing some of Irvine's popular – and most obscure – attractions.

Yet, despite his undying enthusiasm for the city of Irvine, Kuo says his social media presence does not come free of criticism, from both political peers as well as the public.

Kuo says he is aware that some qualms range from benign comments about what he chooses to post and the frequency. His COVID-19 updates, for example, can be labeled by the public as fear mongering.

On the political side, Kuo said his constant reinforcement of the pseudo-brand "Anthony Kuo" can be taken as shameless self-promotion.

To block out that negativity, Kuo leans into his self-labeled moniker as Irvine's biggest cheerleader, which helps anchor his unwavering enthusiasm for civic engagement in Irvine.

"If not to be a cheerleader for your hometown – then why else are you here, what is the point?" Kuo asks of



Photo by: City of Irvine



Photo by: City of Irvine

the naysayers. "Why am I doing it? It's to get people engaged, because someone might say, "I know exactly where you are," or, "I have no idea where you are, but it looks good!"

Still, Kuo's knack for showcasing all-things-Irvine on social media has not gone unnoticed. Kuo was recently recognized by Engaging Local Government Leaders, an association "focused on fostering authentic and meaningful connections that are grounded in practices of equity and inclusion," according to the ELGL mission statement.

More specifically, last year, ELGL awarded the top 100 influencers in local government across the nation with the *Traeger Award*.

The award is aptly named after the fictional Pawnee Indiana City Manager Chris Traeger, played by actor Rob Lowe, in the well-known series *Parks and Recreation*. Although fictional, Pawnee's Traeger came to be known for his extreme energy and commitment to

improving local government.

Irvine residents can surely draw parallels between the two. And if not, ELGL made the connection on their own.

Thanks to his commitment to local government, and drive to spark civic engagement through social media, Kuo ranked 15 out of 100 on the 2020 Traeger Award list.

Regardless of the acknowledgments of awards, Kuo's admiration for the city of Irvine is based in an amalgamation of lifelong experiences that he has collected over the decades.

"For me, I have to say it's growing up here. I used to tell people if you chose to move here, there was a reason – a job, you like the parks, or you appreciated that it was a safe community – all of those things that drove many people to move here, I got to grow up with those," he said. "I'm literally the product of all the things that we think are right about Irvine."



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O.C.'S VACCINE ROLLOUT

COVID-19 VACCINE DISTRIBUTION EFFORT MET WITH HIGH DEMAND, TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

The rollout of Orange County's COVID-19 vaccine distribution has come with mixed reviews, as the county struggles to keep up with demand.

As of Jan. 19, Orange County's COVID-19 vaccination efforts were underway at multiple points of distribution (PODs) within the county.

However, high winds promoted a Red Flag Warning on Monday, Jan. 18, tem-

porarily pausing vaccinations at the county's only Super POD at Disneyland Resort Tuesday.

On Sunday, Jan. 17, the Orange County Health Agency COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force reported more than 108,000 doses of the COVID-19 vaccine have been distributed within the county's Phase I population. In terms of first and second doses, HCA reports 88,539 first doses, along with 20,272 second doses

Photo by Trust "Tru" Katsande via Unsplash



administered.

The county's inoculation totals are now reported weekly, via a "Vaccines Administered" dashboard on the HCA website. Of the more than 108,000 doses, 61 percent of those who received the vaccine in O.C. are female, with men claiming the remaining 39 percent.

"Operation Independence," which was established on Jan. 7, is a unified com-

mand partnership between the county, HCA and the Irvine-based Orange County Fire Authority. Operation Independence has assisted in establishing three regional PODs in Irvine, Huntington Beach and Fullerton, along with the Super POD at Disneyland.

In addition to vaccination sites, the overall goal of Operation Independence, according to the HCA Director

NEWS

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Dr. Clayton Chau, is to vaccinate all individuals in Orange County by July 4.

On Monday, Jan. 11, Orange County opened its largest vaccination site at Disneyland Resort in Anaheim. Known as a Super POD, the site is capable of inoculating up to 3,000 people per day. However, the county's vaccination program has not come without delays.

Technical issues within the Othena App, the mobile application being used by HCA to schedule COVID-19 vaccination appointments for the public, continue to cause extreme delays. County officials say the demand for appointments is high, which creates increased stress on the system's bandwidth.

During the press conference to introduce the Disneyland Super POD, Andrew Do, First District OC Supervisor, also acknowledged the ongoing issues with the Othena App, and said it would require the patience of the community as the county works to resolve the issues.

"I know people may have a hard time getting through [the Othena App], because the volume of people trying to get appointments is so high, that the system can be overloaded – the server can only handle so many calls, then sometimes it crashes," Do said during Tuesday's press conference at Disneyland. "Be patient. If it's not available today, try again in the future. We are working on the technical side to increase the bandwidth, to get people in – to at least let them know that we have them in the system."



PHOTO BY JOHN TUESDAY
VIA UNSPLASH

Irvine Mayor Farrah Khan also said she has seen a greater demand for the vaccine than expected, and said the City Council wants to ensure everything can be done for residents seeking the vaccine in Irvine and the surrounding cities.

"Our goal is to get everyone in the county vaccinated by July 4th and there's a larger demand for the vaccine than we thought there would be – which is great," Khan said in an interview with Irvine Weekly. "At the same time, we're waiting on the state to deliver the vaccines to us, so that we have enough."

In terms of demographics, the county

is currently vaccinating all tiers of the Phase 1A population, which includes high-risk health care workers, and persons 65 years and older.

The HCA's COVID-19 Taskforce, which was established in September, has also released a COVID-19 vaccine distribution timeline, giving Orange County and Irvine residents an approximated month-to-month schedule of the County's tiered, multi-phased approach to administering the COVID-19 vaccine to the public.

O.C.'s COVID-19 vaccine distribution plan is separated by five phases – Phase 1A, 1B & 1C. Within Phase 1, there are three individual tiers – Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier

3 – used to identify level of risk. In the months to come, Phase 2, estimated to begin in February or March, will include critical care workers and moderate risk individuals.

Leaders in Orange County plan to establish four additional Super PODs. While a second location has yet to be announced, members of the Irvine City Council continue to tout the availability of Irvine city spaces, specifically the Orange County Great Park, as a potential host for an Irvine-based Super POD vaccination site.

Echoing the mayor, City Council member Mike Carroll said he hopes the success of the county's first city-based COVID-19 testing site in Irvine will help spotlight Irvine's ability to take on mass vaccination with a Super POD at the Great Park.

"We would just really hope to be considered as a prime location," Carroll said. "I believe I speak for us all, when I say we'd really like to see that at the Great Park, being a central location for the county."

The city of Irvine has led Orange County in many ways since the pandemic began. In July, as Khan referenced, it became the first city to offer free COVID-19 testing for those living and working in the city.

More recently, Mayor Khan established a pair of dual city-based COVID-19 Task Force teams that will aim at economic recovery and vaccine distribution.

Irvine's efforts may be paying off.

A report presented by Irvine's Assistant City Manager Michelle Grettenberg at the Irvine City Council meeting on Tuesday Jan. 12 indicates that Irvine has the lowest COVID-19 rates per capita, compared to surrounding cities.

"Irvine continues to have the lowest per-capita rate of COVID-19 compared to cities closest and similar in population. The next cities have a rate approximately 20 percent higher than Irvine," Grettenberg said. "This is a testament to the city's support of the community, and our residents' pledge to support mitigation measures to ensure the health and safety of our city."

In Orange County, HCA continues to report drastically high daily COVID-19 cases counts. On Tuesday, Jan. 19, HCA reported 3,995 new COVID-19 cases. It should be noted, however, that Tuesday's totals include totals from Jan. 18, due to the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday.

More troubling, Orange County reported 110 COVID-19 related deaths between Jan. 18 and Jan. 19.



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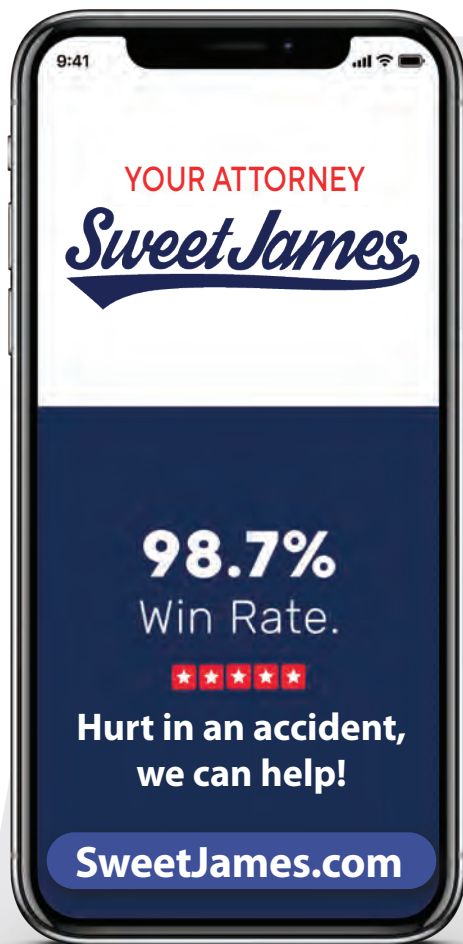
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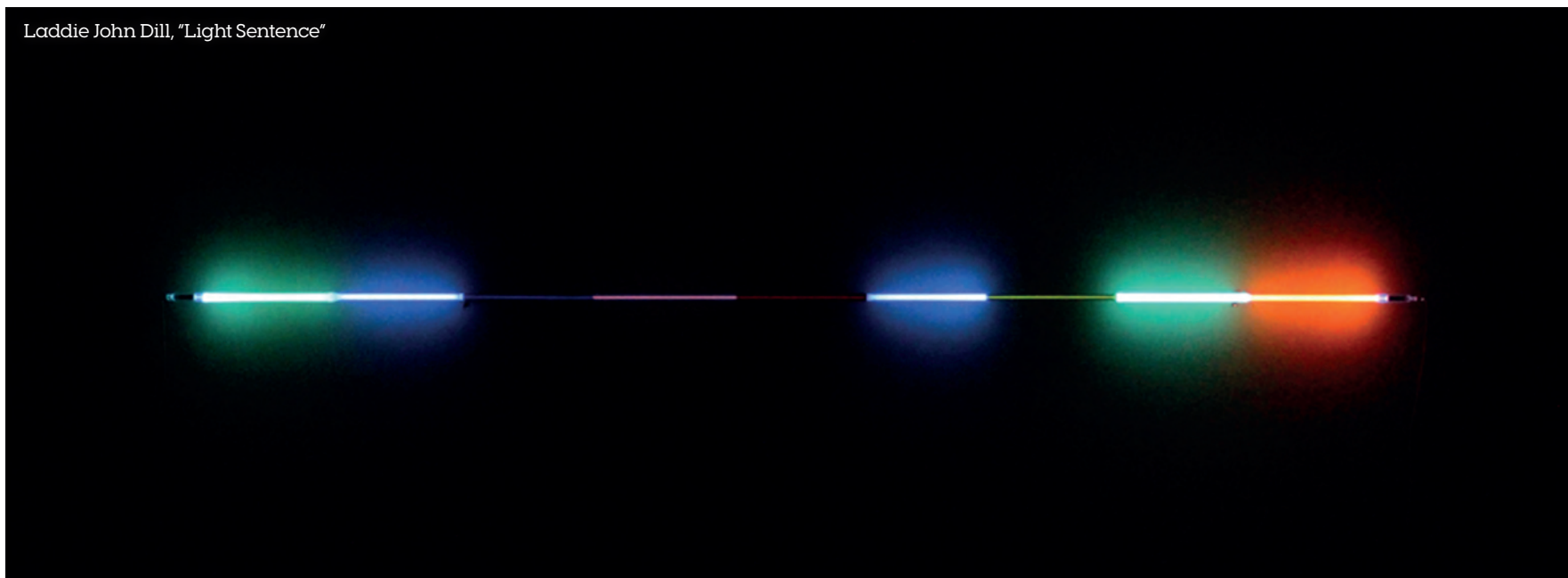
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Laddie John Dill, "Light Sentence"



A RADICAL APPROACH TO TEACHING ART

LOOKING BACK AT THE UC IRVINE ART DEPARTMENT IN ITS FOUNDING YEARS.

BY LIZ GOLDNER

Memories and recollections of live exhibitions can provide solace to art lovers, as we wait for the pandemic to abate and for life to return to a semblance of normalcy.

Among the most outstanding exhibitions I have seen over the years – actually a collaboration of art shows, titled “Pacific Standard Time (PST): Art in LA 1945-1980” – ran from October 2011 to March 2012. For this Getty Foundation sponsored initiative, over 60 Southern California art institutions looked back at, defined and documented in displays, catalogs and dialogues this area’s post war cultural scene.

As these shows demonstrated, influences on the emergence of SoCal as a major art capital included the counter-culture movement, the opening of major art schools (including the UC Irvine art department), and the growth of the

aerospace industry. The latter provided artists with new techniques and materials, such as malleable plastics and acrylic resin/polymer emulsion paint, employed by California Light and Space artists in their art pieces.

Three Pacific Standard Time exhibitions – presented at UC Irvine, the Orange County Museum of Art and the Laguna Art Museum (LAM) – featured the work of UCI artist teachers and students who inhabited their free-spirited art department from the mid 1960s into the early 1970s.

Laguna Art Museum’s “Best Kept Secret,” the most varied of these exhibitions, was on display from November 2011 to the following January. The show’s title was based on UCI art school dean Jill Beck’s (1995-2003) use of “Best Kept Secret” to describe the newly created art school as a formidable force in the advancement of contemporary art.

Tony DeLap, “Fawkes” – 1968



As the LAM exhibition revealed, UCI in its early days was a haven of forward-thinking creativity where instructors transcended the limits of formal art styles, while employing tolerance, dialogue, diversity and experimentation in their teaching methods. And students were encouraged to explore new approaches to performance art, body art, video and film, among other genres. Or as art writer/poet Peter Frank explained in the catalog accompanying the show: “Instructors stressed attitude rather than practice, intellectual inquiry instead of manual dexterity, discourse in lieu of production.”

UCI art instructors, including SoCal pioneers Larry Bell, Tony DeLap, Robert Irwin, Craig Kauffman, John Mason and Ed Moses, mentored students and even

collaborated on art pieces with them. Additional inspiration to teachers and students was provided by the modernist free-form UCI campus buildings, designed by William Pereira. (The 1968 movie, “Planet of the Apes,” about a crew of astronauts that crash-lands on a far-away planet, was filmed on the futuristic-looking UCI campus.)

Perhaps the most famous student to emerge from the UCI art department was Chris Burden (creator of the “Urban Light” [2008] sculpture at the L.A. County Museum of Art) who did several conceptual performance pieces there. In his “Through the Night Softly” (1973), he crawled nearly naked over glass; in “Five Day Locker Piece” (1971), he locked himself inside a locker for five days.

Barbara T. Smith, a former suburban

Larry Bell, "Bette and the Giant Jewfish"



housewife and UCI art student, grew into a performance artist there with her "Ritual Meal" (1969), a nightmarish video of dinner guests wearing hospital scrubs while eating with surgical instruments. Nancy Buchanan created "Hairpiece" (1971-72), a large rug woven from human and poodle hair. And feminist student Marsha Red Adams' submitted her "Woman Bound/Woman Withdrawn" (1971) to the show. This installation of eight photographs of a naked woman in various constraining poses features hand-painted and stitched string binding each individual pose.

John Mason's tall "Unfinished Arch" (1973) made of traditional clay bricks was held together through physics and carefully placed components, not with mortar. At a walk-through of the show, he explained how he painstakingly constructed the sculpture, while the museum staff looked on with anticipation.

Light and Space works in the exhibition by now renowned artists demonstrated the use of industrial materials, including plastics, resins and polymers. Larry Bell's "Bette and the Giant Jewfish" (1963) and "Untitled" (1969), large square boxes of vacuum-coated glass and chrome-plated metal, attracted refracted light. Tony DeLap's "Fawkes" (1968), a shaped painting – he referred to it as a "hyperbolic paraboloid" – appeared to change shape as the viewer moved around it. And Ron Davis, who evolved from painting minimalist

canvases to creating fiberglass and polyester resins, to building his 12-sided "dodecagon" wall sculptures, contributed his "Round" (1969) to the show; it is a dramatic abstract work of varied pigments.

Other Light and Space artists represented in the exhibition included Laddie John Dill, Robert Irwin, Craig Kaufman and James Turrell. The works of installation artists Jay McCafferty and Richard Newton were displayed there as well.

In the decade since "Best Kept Secret" was exhibited, UCI's early efforts advancing innovative art have received increasing notice. Perhaps curator Grace Kook-Anderson plays a part in that recognition; as during the show's display, she spent long hours promoting it and dialoguing with the exhibitors,

John Mason, "Unfinished Arch" – 1973

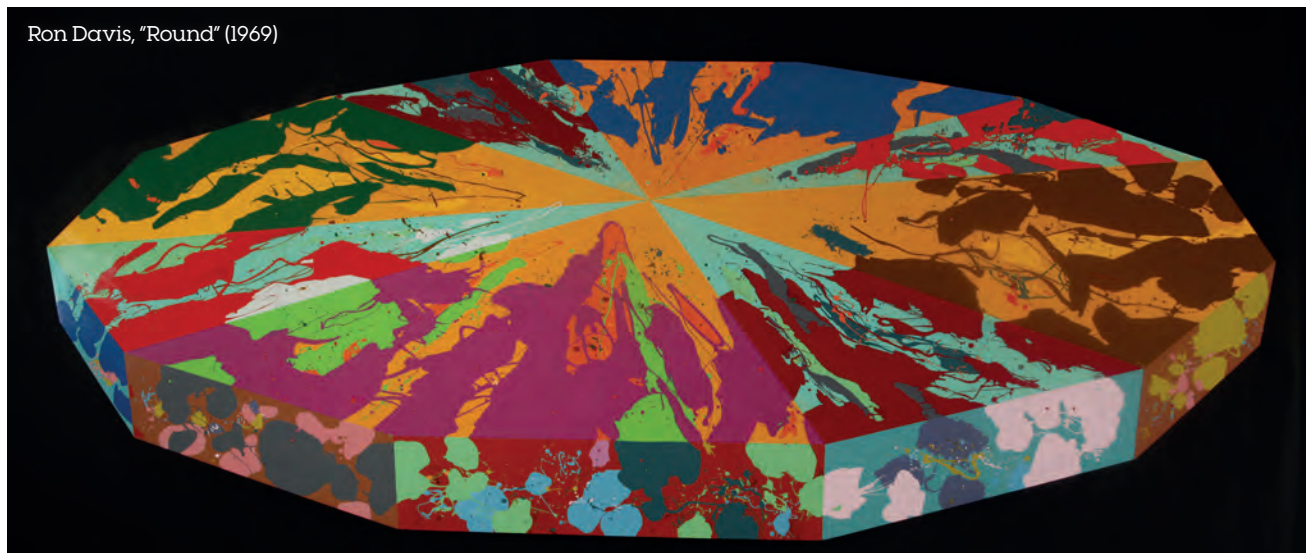


often in public forums.

At UC Irvine today, mentoring continues as a prominent teaching style by faculty-artists including Kevin Appel, Juli Carson, Liz Glynn, Antoinette LaFarge, Daniel Joseph Martinez, Jennifer

Pastor, Amanda Ross-Ho, among many others. This ongoing practice enables the art department to carry on its five decade legacy of empowering students to express their creativity unfettered by conventional standards.

Ron Davis, "Round" (1969)



For anyone craving the freshest cup of coffee in Orange County, Sootha Coffee, a small batch coffee roaster in Irvine, should not be overlooked.

Located in the Northwood Town Center, Sootha Coffee is a small, family-run outfit, featuring a rotation of all organic, specialty beans from different regions like Bali, Columbia and Tanzania.

In some respects, Sootha Coffee is a coffee aficionado's dream, executing the entire roasting and packing process in-house.

U Kim, a former Marine and the owner of Sootha Coffee, said his focus since opening Sootha's doors in 2012 was to sell the freshest, most organic, Fair Trade coffee beans possible – as long as he enjoyed the taste.

Kim loves coffee, and spends his time roasting high-quality coffee beans in line with his palette's preferences. From Kim's perspective, Sootha is simply a conduit for him to support his love affair with coffee, while simultaneously sharing that passion with the community.

"We're just a neighborhood coffee shop. This is the only location," Kim said in an interview with *Irvine Weekly*. "We are nowhere near sustainable level, as far as our revenue is concerned, but there has been some help in terms of loans and grants from the city of Irvine."

Kim's process begins with selective bean sourcing, then moves to roasting small batches with a tiny, lab-sized roaster. Kim uses an in-house cupping method to taste all his brews, then, if the roast is right, it can be packaged. This is all accomplished behind the counter inside the Irvine-based coffee shop.

Perhaps the unique, and important, quality of Sootha Coffee is the years Kim

SOOHA COFFEE ROASTERS

QUIETLY SELLING ORANGE COUNTY'S FRESHEST BREW IN IRVINE.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

spent researching, experimenting and learning how to acquire the equipment and skills needed to perfect this method of roasting small batch coffee.

The art of roasting coffee is a tedious, delicate process that requires precision and scientific knowledge of heat and weight distribution, not to mention requires very specific machinery to accomplish properly.

In fact, the Santa Ana-based Specialty Coffee Association estimates coffee can lose its freshness just 10 days after being roasted. While the SCA estimation does not suggest that coffee needs to be discarded after the 10-day mark, it serves as more of a "best-by" date.

For context, when a bag of coffee beans is purchased at a grocery store, those beans have already been roasted, giving them a brown, dark tint. However, prior to roasting, coffee beans are actually green.

Sootha Coffee Roaster selects organic, "green" coffee, then roasts, packages and brews their selected beans on the daily – something even the corporate giants neglect to offer at most coffee shops.

Kim and his family have owned and operated Sootha Coffee for almost a decade. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Kim said he was roasting approximately

650 pounds of beans per month, which breaks down to about 25 pounds daily.

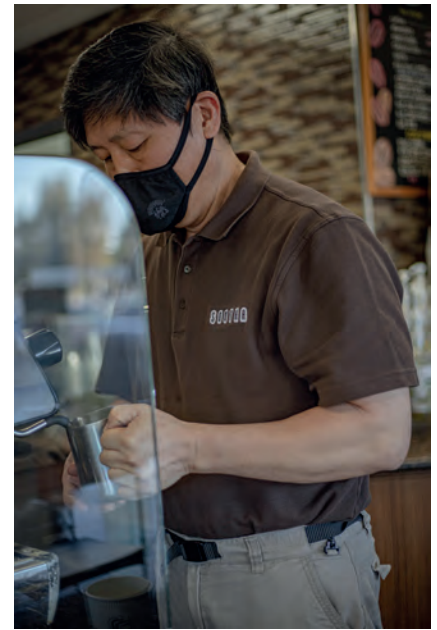
Considering Kim's small, modified lab roaster can only fit about five pounds of beans at a time, Kim's love for roasting coffee has become his full-time job.

While the pandemic has created many challenges for Kim and his family's business, he uses his passion for the art of coffee as motivation to serve the community. Prior to the pandemic, Kim would host barista classes in Irvine.

"I'm just trying to do my best to stay in business," he said. "If we take precautions and do the right thing, and save one life, I think it's worth it."

For Kim, a slender, soft-spoken Korean man, who can likely be found lightly tapping the bottom of his silver frothing pitcher to gauge the temperature and readiness of milk while steaming it, said the two most important things are community – and coffee.

"Right off the bat, we wanted to be organic, partly something to differentiate ourselves. To me, a coffee shop should be a place to make community. About three-fourths of customers are regulars. I address them by their first names as they come in, and often know their drinking habits," he added. "People have been so



kind, even as far as paying it forward and buying gift cards. We're just blown away by this kindness."

Kim said he came to Irvine as a Marine when he was younger, and Irvine has been his on-again, off-again home for many years, also living in Long Beach and overseas for a time.

With a professional background in engineering, Kim added that becoming Irvine's most organic coffee roaster was not exactly in the mission plan.

"This is not what I wanted to do for the rest of my life, but it's a part of me. And because I care about the coffee I drink, maybe I can find the clientele that would like something better – like Columbian coffee," he said. "Roasting coffee to me is like cooking food. People have been cooking coffee for thousands of years – it should not be rocket science."

The on-going COVID-19 pandemic has created a future of uncertainty for many businesses in Irvine, including Kim and Sootha Coffee. Unfortunately, Kim has experience with these situations of uncertainty, pointing to the financial crisis of 2008.

"We lost our home because of the 2008 fiasco, and we've been through the ringer," he said.

Still, Kim leans into his love for community and coffee to remain optimistic.

"Although I should feel more intimidated by the situation, somehow I think I have a coping mechanism – believe it or not," he said. "My attitude is, this will pass and we'll come through, but it may take some doing to recover."

Sootha Coffee is located at 4840 Irvine Blvd #111, Irvine, CA 92620, in the Northwood Town Center. Open 7-days a week.



Photos courtesy of Sootha Coffee



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SCREENS AND QUARANTINES

IRVINE WEEKLY FILM CRITICS LOOK BACK AT 2020 FILM & TV.

Losing Time in Movies

By Chuck Wilson

Back in March, in the surreal new Covid world, movies intended for release in theaters began arriving in homes via Video on Demand. Devoted movie fans could rent new films from iTunes or Amazon or cable On Demand ... but should they? Audiences knew what they'd be getting if they blew \$20 on *Trolls World Tour* but did they want to risk six or eight bucks or more on a low-budget indie or arthouse film?

There weren't many reviews to go by. Left and right, film critics were being furloughed, or worse, their newspapers and websites shuttered forever. It was crushing that so many film voices were being silenced at the exact moment movie audiences needed them most. But the *Irvine Weekly* was still here. Maybe we could use that space to help people figure out what to watch. And so it was that a smaller but no less passionate team of movie lovers including myself, began reviewing new movies for this publication. The idea was to be upbeat and focus on the good stuff. It was our version of rolling bandages.

These days, with the Oscars on the far horizon, film critic inboxes are brimming with screening links – that's true privilege – but as good as the new stuff is, I find myself dwelling on the movies I reviewed in those first few months of Covid. Why is that?

Life was heightened then, and a movie like *Swallow* had a strangeness that seemed true to our newly weird moment, whereas the comedy *Straight Up*, so brilliantly precise in its point of view, simply made me happy. I live alone (with my dog Janey) and that movie made me smile out loud. I watched it in the middle of the night, I remember, and I was so grateful. *Time* and *Residue* both showed me worlds I thought I knew but didn't and did so in ways that altered my perception of how memory both tricks and sustains us – a good lesson in this year of lost time. Here are the 10 movies from among those I reviewed in 2020 that mean a lot to me. They car-

ried me along. They're my bubble.

Chuck Wilson's Top 10 2020 Movies:

1. **Driveways**
2. **Time**
3. **The Truth**
4. **Swallow**
5. **Residue**
6. **Straight Up**
7. **My Dog Stupid**
8. **Crip Camp**
9. **The 24th**
10. **River City Drumbeat**

Arthouse at Home

By Asher Luberto

It was a strange year for movies. With cinemas opening and closing due to COVID-19 restrictions and a release

it did offer smaller movies – films that otherwise might have been lost among glitzier releases – and gave them a spotlight. In terms of accessibility and quality, it was a year of riches, indies, documentaries and period pieces.

The best of those was *Martin Eden*, director Pietro Marcello's personal, astonishingly vivid WWII epic. It was shot to look like a Bertolucci film, which transcended mimicry and created an intensely pleasurable experience. Another epic that had people talking was Autumn de Wilde's *Emma*, an adaptation of Jane Austen's 1815 novel, starring Anya Taylor Joy, Johnny Flynn and Bill Nighy. It turned out to be one the biggest releases of the year, and was as moving as it was colorful (and it was plenty colorful). Read my take on this film and more in this Summer movie survey.

But they say size doesn't matter, and this time, that's actually true. My year began with a pair of heartwarming gems: *Driveways*, starring Brian Dennehy in his final role, and *Crip Camp*, a documentary about a summer camp for the disabled. One of my favorite viewing experiences this year, the latter was the one film I was glad I watched

be more? Will they make money? Will streaming services take over the theatrical experience?

What's certain is good, bad and indifferent movies will continue to be exhibited, one way or another, and this year wasn't any different. The bad stuff stunk; the good stuff delighted. *Gunda*, *Vitalina Verela* and *Fire Will Come* delivered hypnotic, meditative chills, while feel-good movies delivered light, ebullient thrills. There's almost too many to name here: *Hamilton*, *Wolfwalkers*, *Boys State*, *Lovers Rock*, *American Utopia*, *The Climb*, *The Trial of Chicago 7*, *Dick Johnson is Dead* and *Shaun the Sheep: Farmageddon* were all happy surprises.

And here are a few more surprises: You won't find *Dear Santa* on anyone else's list, but I found the documentary to be as giddy as a child on Christmas morning. Andy Samberg gave a career-best performance as Bill Murray 2.0 in *Palm Springs* and Ninian Doff made a memorable directorial debut with *Get Duked!* And then there's *Borat: Subsequent Moviefilm*, Sacha Baron Cohen's follow up to the 2006 *Borat*. It didn't make my list, but like 2020's release slate as a whole, it's strange, confusing and ultimately rewarding.

Asher Luberto's Top 10 2020 Movies:

1. **Martin Eden**
2. **Nomadland**
3. **Lovers Rock**
4. **Wolfwalkers**
5. **Minari**
6. **Crip Camp**
7. **Driveways**
8. **Fire Will Come**
9. **Bloody Nose, Empty Pockets**
10. **Dear Santa/Get Duked!**

Searching for Identity on Film

By Chad Byrnes

As we all know, it's been a dark and pretty depressing year. Thanks to this unexpected and rampant pandemic, which pulled humanity under its colossal tide like something out of a bad Michael Bay movie, we've been forced to recalibrate how we live and how we entertain ourselves. On the positive side, we're all in the same boat.

Whether cooped up in a mansion or a single apartment, we're all getting take-out, playing board games, stupidly gawking out the window like Jack Torrance in *The Shining* and streaming lots of movies (old and new). You can say that this pandemic has been the great equalizer – not only on a human level



DRIVEWAYS (FILM RISE)

schedule that kept shifting to match, it was hard to keep track of which movies actually came out this year. The good news: plenty of films did come out this year, and many of them would have been extraordinary achievements in any movie season.

In fact, 2020 was a lot like an arthouse. It didn't give us the James Bond's and Black Widow's of the world, or any blockbuster that would have played at AMC for three-straight-months. But

at home instead of at a theater, only because theaters aren't stocked with tissues.

Which is not to say that I didn't see my share of tear-jerkers at home, or that Hulu, Netflix and other streaming services didn't keep the content from pouring in. From HBO to Quibi, Disney+ to Apple TV, it almost seemed like there were more streaming platforms being released than actual movies, which brought up a few questions. Will there

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but cinematically as well. In normal times, most of us would be throwing down twenty bucks to see a new high-octane flick in the theaters. Not this year. Now, with the simple flick of a button, we can watch new big-budget flicks and smaller, more personal films on the same TV. There they stand, side by side, ready to be screened for a small fee – a little indie gem and a gargantuan studio flick. You can't even find that kind of variety at your local Arclight. Now, independent films, which usually have a lifespan of two days in the theaters are rubbing elbows with the big boys. Apparently, it took a pandemic to create a fair playing field in the cinematic market. Let's delve into them both.

This year's best movies came in all shapes and sizes. Some of them are indie film festival favorites. A couple of them have major budgets and big stars. Some were even produced by major streaming services (a trend we better get used to). Differences aside, they all have one thing in common: they reflect the tumultuous world we live in. Cinema (good cinema) remains the definitive artform for examining our modern sociological history, warts and all, and this year's movies were no exception.

Thematically, my favorite films were concerned with identity. Is it a coincidence that they speak to this subject during a time when the country has been undergoing its own identity crisis? Perhaps. Whether it's Brandon Cronenberg's foray into a future where we can slip into our enemies' skin to reverse corporate interests in his horror/sci-fi masterpiece, *Possessor*, or Amazon Prime's *The Sound of Metal*, in which a drummer must completely shed his old persona in order to co-exist with an unexpected disability. Consider Sean Durkin's long awaited second feature, *The Nest*, where a family must be uprooted and dropped into unfamiliar territory – in this case a castle in England – in order to see the cracks in their carefully crafted armor.

There was *The Invisible Man's* revisionist approach to wrestling the consequences of trying to escape your old life; and HBO's *Bad Education*, with a perfectly gleaned Hugh Jackman as a smiley superintendent at the local high school who's been secretly embezzling millions. Even my favorite music documentary of the year, *The Bee Gees: How Can You Mend A Broken Heart*, is about the band's struggle to change its identity as each decade threatens to invalidate them.

Some of my top movies this year were also centered on the worlds protagonists live in and how these realms threaten their personas. David Fincher's *Mank* dealt with maintaining one's political and artistic character in the belly of the old Hollywood system. Or consider Julia Garner's turn in *The Assistant* or Rachel Brosnahan's fierce performance in *I'm Your Woman*. Although different story-wise, both are concerned with women locked in systems (corporate and criminal, respectively) where they're forced to either change their values or adhere to a new set of rules. Finally, the new Paul Greengrass western, *News of the World*, features a withered Tom Hanks and a young immigrant (Helena Zengel) as they travel across a country that's been decimated by opposing views and a Civil War. This has been a tough year, last four years really. It got harder with the pandemic, but the year's films showcased the kind of human resilience and strength that gave us hope we'd get through it.

Chad Byrnes' Top 10 2020 Movies:

1. **The Nest**
2. **The Sound of Metal**
3. **News of the World**
4. **Mank**
5. **Possessor**
6. **I'm Your Woman**
7. **The Assistant**
8. **Bad Education**
9. **The Bee Gees: How Can You Mend A Broken Heart**
10. **The Invisible Man**

The Year of the Binge

By Erin Maxwell

2020 was the year that small screen entertainment became a lifeline to the masses. As folks were forced to stay indoors due to a pandemic, murder hornets, Big Foot sightings, UFOs, raging wild fires, and an election that refused to end, people sought comfort in the warming light of their televisions. As movie theaters remained empty for the better part of the year, streaming services became the escape everyone turned to, and thus got the bounty of attention in a weird-ass year.

2020 was the year of the streaming service. It became a window into life and an escape route from reality. It offered original movies, amazing series and mind-boggling bizarre documentaries. And while Netflix was the big winner with a Tiger's share of programming, every service got a chance to shine in a year when it seemed every



THE NEST (IFC FILMS)

single program was mandatory viewing ... except Quibi.

The second season of Disney+'s *The Mandalorian* was not only some of the best television of the year (if not the decade), but it managed to revive an entire franchise. In addition to reinvigorating the *Star Wars* universe, it also brought beloved fan favorite characters into a new continuity while proving that event television can still exist in a bingeing world. The weekly series gave people something to look forward to each week other than the mounting horrors of the outside world, and the finale offered a reason to stand up and cheer for.

The final season of *Schitt's Creek* was another reason to smile as it indoctrinated American audiences with the comedic escape Canadians have been turning to for six seasons. The fish-out-of-water cliché was elevated thanks to great writing, hilarious acting turns, one hell of a cast and plenty of heart. The Daniel and Eugene Levy-created comedy was rightfully celebrated at the Emmy's as it gave Netflix audiences a reason to laugh again.

Netflix's limited series *The Queen's Gambit* was able to reinvent the classic sports movie by giving it a *Mad Men* sense of style and charismatic leading lady. The story of chess prodigy Beth Harmon managed to avoid a Lifetime-movie template by creating a compelling character-driven story that was truly one of the very best of the year.

2020 was also the year of the dark superhero tale. While 2019 offered HBO's

critically-acclaimed *Watchmen*, 2020 offered second seasons of Netflix's *Umbrella Academy*, Amazon Prime's *The Boys*, and HBO Max's *Doom Patrol*, all of which excelled from their freshman outings to become social-conscience programming about fuck-ups with super powers. While it seems each property is tromping on well-worn, subversive superhero ground, they all work in their own unique way.

And finally, who the hell expected Netflix's *Tiger King: Murder, Mayhem and Madness* to be just the thing we all needed to help us through the early days of the pandemic? The strange story of Joe Exotic and his rivalry with leopard lover Carole Baskin was just the perfect amount of insanity needed to make a stay-at-home order seem a little less bonkers. The deranged dealings of exotic animal dealers and big cat owners was told with some incredibly crafted storytelling making its bat-shit insane true story the must-binge distraction of the year.

Erin Maxwell's Top 10 2020 TV (series):

1. **The Mandalorian**
2. **What We Do In the Shadows**
3. **Unorthodox**
4. **The Queen's Gambit**
5. **Doom Patrol**
6. **The Boys**
7. **The Flight Attendant**
8. **Schitt's Creek**
9. **The Crown**
10. **Big Mouth/ I May Destroy You**

ENTERTAINMENT

UNBINGED

COBRA KAI, SABRINA AND THE STAND REINTERPRET NOSTALGIC STORIES FOR A NEW GENERATION.

BY ERIN MAXWELL

There's a battle brewing, and it's being fought by streaming services, cable TV and Primetime television. If you're too weak to resist, *UnBinged* is here to help, telling you what to hate, what to love and what to love to hate. In pandemic times, we need it more than ever. This week: a new season of *Cobra Kai* waxes on; *Sabrina's Chilling Adventures* come to an anti-climactic conclusion, and Stephen King's *The Stand* gets a chronological makeover.

COBRA KAI - SEASON 3 (NETFLIX)



Based on the *Karate Kid* franchise of yesteryear, the former YouTube series follows the exploits of Johnny Lawrence (played to perfection by '80s bad boy William Zabka), a one-time bully trying to get his shit together after 25 years of bad decisions. To do so, he re-establishes his former karate dojo to foster a new generation of misguided teens, much to the dismay of his high school nemesis Daniel LaRusso (Ralph Macchio). Now on Netflix, the third season explores the tension between the two rivals and their students, takes a moment to appreciate *Karate Kid II*, and spotlights a common enemy: Johnny's former sensei/leg-sweeping enthusiast John Kreese (Martin Rove).

Much like *Stranger Things* and *GLOW*, *Cobra Kai* relies heavily on nostalgia to garner the attention of 40-somethings, but its ability to reinvent '80s movie tropes is what makes it clever. The show breaks the mold set by the original movie, rewriting the standard underdog

format. Watching Johnny's arc develop after a three-decade hiatus adds depth to a previously two-dimensional character, while following Daniel and Johnny as they repeat past mistakes with a new generation through the lens of adulthood.

With this, *Cobra Kai* ably adapts the legacy of the *Karate Kid* into an action-packed dramedy that is both relevant and incredibly fun. Pulling tension and humor from a historic rivalry the show also offers well-choreographed fight sequences fans would expect. With a touch of heart and soul thanks to crack-jack writing, *Cobra Kai* leaps from enjoyable flashback to something new and exceptional.

CHILLING ADVENTURES OF SABRINA (NETFLIX)



Netflix's *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* has come to an end following a flurry of cancellations from the streaming service that left the cast and crew seemingly scrambling to conclude their storylines. And sadly, this led to a few tragic decisions regarding the tale of the teen witch.

The white-haired sorceress of Archie Comics made her debut on Netflix back in 2018. Starring Kiernan Shipka and following in the footsteps of its campy older sibling *Riverdale*, the show had a mirthful feel and a devilish sense of humor. An *American Horror Story* for the teenybopper sect, the series was filled

with enough blood, guts, Lovecraftian monsters, and bitchcraft to keep even the most cynical Satan worshipper happy. However, as the story traipsed on, the teen witch melodrama lost its footing and got a little messy. Story arcs and characters felt underdeveloped while the narrative suffered under the weight of its own complexity. Now in the final season (aka Part 4), the series slugs its way over the finish line like a horse with a broken leg. In its rush to finish the season, the show disregarded continuity, character development, and good storytelling, leaving gaping plot holes and disappointment in its wake.

The final season is not without some merit. The show goes all-in for its conclusion, doubling-down on gore and absurdity, including a fantastic and hilarious callback to the '90s *Sabrina* sitcom. But talking cat puppets and walks down memory lane aside, the season was rushed, and it showed. Storylines were left unfinished, leaving dozens of threads hanging from the fabric of the show. Worse is the fate of poor Sabrina Spellman/Morningstar, an icon who transcended the funny pages to become a small screen sensation and who warranted an ending worthy of her hero's journey, but got shafted by stilted writing and unforeseen circumstances. A hex on you, Netflix. You have done these characters dirty. They deserved a fate much better than what they got.

THE STAND (CBS ALL ACCESS)

Back in 1978, horrormeister Stephen King debuted *The Stand*, his behemoth tome about a virus that wipes out 99% of Earth's population and pits good against evil in a battle for the planet. It was a sensation ripe for adaptation and it is especially relevant right now. But sadly, this is not the version of *The Stand* you are looking for.

When adapting a beloved book that defined a generation, not everyone is going to be happy, of course. It is hard to satiate a devoted fanbase. This CBS All Access' miniseries is filled with good intentions and offers moments of bliss for



any King fan to dig into, but as a whole, the decision to butcher the chronological order of the original narrative creates an uneven viewing experience riddled with confusion.

For the most part, *The Stand* delivers on a lot of promises. It's extremely well cast with actors that embody the characters, physically and emotionally. Stand-outs include James Marsden, Owen Teague, and Brad William Henke, but Alexander Skarsgard deserves a special shout out as Randall Flagg, who brings to mind his old vamp character in *True Blood*, evoking evil on a low simmer.

Also great are the many small details, Easter eggs, and modern touches that were added to modernize the 40-year-old story. It's clear that the creators of the series are super fans who respect the material. It's a shame the change in continuity sinks the adaptation for anyone not well versed in the King universe.

Parallel timelines and flashbacks are narrative devices that have been used to success in recent reboots such as 2019's *Little Women*. But this strategy only works when everyone knows the story. *The Stand* has dozens of characters, locations and story lines, so using this format to do all the heavy-lifting is not only jarring, but destructive. There are gaps in the plot that remain unexplained for those unfamiliar with this story and character development becomes nil due to the new framework.

In the end, *The Stand* is a series built on good intentions, but with little thought for the indoctrinated, creating a bumpy ride for any newbie looking to get into Stephen King. For morbidly curious super fans, it's worth a look-see but those unfamiliar with the story should read the book and skip the series, as it doesn't clearly represent what is considered King's greatest work.



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