

'HERO PAY' FOR GROCERY WORKERS • 2021 IRVINE CONCERT GUIDE • 15 YEARS OF IRVINE RANCH CONSERVANCY

IRVINE

WEEKLY

FEBRUARY 19, 2021
VOL. 3, NO. 7



GREAT PARK

POP-UP PICNIC

PICNICKING HAS BECOME TRENDY DURING THE PANDEMIC

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CULTURE

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together a picnic date for my boyfriend and I in the late summer. I had always loved throwing elaborate picnics for my friends and family beyond just the simple picnic basket and red-and-white-checked blanket, and naturally always put a lot of thought and emphasis into the details of the picnics," explains Madison. "My boyfriend (Riley) posted stories and a TikTok of me setting up the picnic (which I had no idea he was filming) and he posted them. All of his friends started messaging him asking if they could hire me to set up a picnic date for them and their girlfriends. That's when Riley said I could turn my hobby into a legitimate business that people would want to use."

"The more I thought about it, the more excited I got," she shares. "Within a week I had made a sketch of our logo in my notebook and sent it to my uncle who is a talented graphic designer. I had chosen a name and the ideas started bursting in my head."

The company launched on October 24, 2020, to gorgeous fanfare. Undoubtedly a talented designer, Madison's keen eye for aesthetics provide both picnickers and social media followers alike a break from the doldrums of quarantine routine. Her picnic layouts seem to capture the very landscape they are set upon, bursting with dreamy cheerfulness.

"The majority of the themes and color schemes, I have thought up on my own," details Madison. "I take from my own sense of style and what inspires me in my day-to-day life. I love bright, colorful palettes and things that remind me of spring and summer.

POP-UP PICNIC

PROVIDING PANDEMIC-SAFE OUTDOOR CELEBRATION ALTERNATIVES.

BY TARA FINLEY

Fresh air, gorgeous scenery and the perfect picnic – a winning combination that never fails to elicit a happy smile and relaxed sigh.

In a time where we have been stuck indoors for so long with so many of our normal outlets no longer available to us, the pleasure of quality time outdoors has been heightened. The Beach Picnic Co. has taken those delicious moments under the sun a step further by crafting bespoke luxury picnic experiences. From intimate dates and surprise engagements, to community picnics and family beach dinners, founder and CEO Madison Smetana does it all.

Madison began the business last year, deep in the throes of the pandemic, with all the grit and determination required of a young entrepreneur, armed with a well-stocked arsenal of artistic vision and passion. Searching for a safe



pastime herself, the business-minded 23-year-old saw a ripe opportunity to provide a service for others seeking similar dining and date idea alterna-

tives. And thus, The Beach Picnic Co. was born.

"The first 'seed,' if you will, of The Beach Picnic Co. started when I put

CULTURE



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community to be able to come together in a safety-conscious way and enjoy the outdoors in such a beautiful and famous park as the Great Park," says Madison. "We live in such a beautiful place in Southern California, and as we get nearer to warmer weather I don't feel we should stay inside our homes all day. We need fresh air, conversation,



less starting a business in a pandemic. What advice does Madison have for like-minded individuals hoping to pursue their dreams in such an uncertain time?

"It might sound cliché, but believe in yourself. Believe in your business. Believe in your ideas. Because if you don't, other people won't either," she wisens. "You are the most important person to your business, because you are the heart that makes the business beat. We're in a time where there is every reason to discourage you from starting a business or making you believe you're doomed to fail. But circumstances don't change a great idea. Hold onto the idea that makes you excited. There's never a 'right time' to go after something. You just have to trust in yourself and your capabilities. People won't always understand your vision the way you do, and don't try to make them. Just make it happen and people will get it along the way. Don't worry about anyone else, focus and feed the flame of your idea. Despite what's going on, there is always room for you and what you have to offer the world."

From the design to the physical labor, who makes up The Beach Picnic Co. team?

"Right now, it's just me, myself and I," laughs Madison. "I do everything – the social media, bookings, picnic set ups, photography, website, it's all me. Which can be confusing since I refer to my business as a 'we'. I heard that's what you're supposed to do. My mom helps me clean my supplies and wash pillows every now and then and my boyfriend gives me advice with the numbers. I'm hoping to hire very soon, The BPCo. is growing so rapidly I can't keep up. I would love to have a team."

"The future for The Beach Picnic Co. hopefully has a few passionate like-minded employees, a headquarters space we can call home, and there are several ideas for a little bit of merchandise in the works," she continues. "Realistically, I think the possibilities are endless for The Beach Picnic Co. Different locations, new themes, partnerships with other vendors, and constantly seeking new ways to enjoy community whilst staying safe during these times."

With a lot of love and a little bit of sun, The Beach Picnic Co. is sure to be bringing smiles and memories for years to come.

For information on pricing, locations, and how to book your picnic, visit www.thebeachpicnic.co

Sometimes I'll wake up in the morning and a new idea will just come to me and I'll think 'that would look good on a table' and then I bring that thought to life. My newest theme California Dreamin' was actually inspired by the song by the Mamas and Papas. That song reminds me of the golden glow of a late afternoon in the summer, and the theme matches that. It's lots of oranges and yellows and sunset colors and warm tones. It has a very California-dreaming vibe."

A dreamer herself, her can-do spirit is what has allowed her to grow her business seed into fruition. Determined to launch in time to allow her friends a pandemic-safe celebration alternative, she pushed forward with her outdoor business in the middle of fall.

"A part of me thought, 'I should wait til spring when it's warmer weather to start my business, it's too cold right now.' But another part of me said, 'you live in California, and think of how much further along you'll be by spring if you just start it now.' I'm so glad I listened to that second voice, and I just went for it," she emphasizes.

Her gut was correct, and her launch was successful.

"Honestly, I was incredibly excited for the launch," Madison tells us. "I was confident. I knew I had a great idea, and I felt this sureness inside that people would feel the same. Of course I had a little bit of nervousness – will I get business, will people think this is dumb – but ultimately I felt very good about the whole thing and it overshadowed any feelings of doubt. I felt like people would be as excited as I was about a new way to get outside and do something different."



"The Beach Picnic Co. has been received more warmly than I ever could've anticipated," she continues. "I think it got 300 followers in the first 48 hours alone. People were praising the idea in the comments, saying how great of an idea it was, all my friends were reposting it, you could really feel people's excitement. I received multiple messages from strangers saying how badly they needed something like this and couldn't wait to book – a way to celebrate their birthday, an anniversary with their loved one, in a way that felt safe and outdoors."

She recently invited members of the community to safely experience The Beach Picnic Co. at the Orange County Great Park, a welcome introduction to her services for many of us who have been wistfully waiting for ways to amplify our outdoor experience while following health guidelines.

"I felt it would be refreshing for the

smiling at strangers. Even if it's six feet apart. I believe nature is the best place to be. I would love to have more events like this, where we can appreciate the community and company of Irvine and change up the day-to-day routine of our lives with something new and unique and fun to keep people's spirits lifted."

As The Beach Picnic Co. grows, what would Madison's dream event be?

"My dream event would be one long family-style table along the beach, with a lot of sushi, and other creative individuals whom I've looked up to/ followed for a long time," she answers. "I think it'd be really cool to invite people who have inspired me to something of my own creation, and converse and share ideas under the sunset. I also think it'd be really cool to do a location event on a tropical beach somewhere. Maybe one day!"

Starting a business is no easy task, no

Irvine has become the first city in Orange County to adopt an ordinance that will require retail employers to pay temporary hazard pay, or “hero pay,” for 120 days, to employees working the frontlines in grocery and drug store settings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Irvine’s emergency ordinance, introduced to the council via memo on Feb. 2 by Irvine Mayor Farrah Khan, focused on the difficult situation many grocery store employees are enduring across the nation, including in Irvine.

The ordinance comes at a time when many workers have voiced frustration over hazardous workplace situations, citing the expectation to deal with unpredictable customers, many who refuse COVID-19 guidelines – all while being labeled “essential” – without any form of hazard pay.

In a 3-2 vote on Tuesday, Feb. 9, the Irvine City Council voted to adopt an emergency hero pay ordinance, which will temporarily increase the hourly rate of local essential employees working the frontlines in Irvine grocery and drug stores by \$4.

With the vote, all grocery stores, or pharmaceutical chains with more than 20 employees, that have more than 500 employees and exceed 15,000 square feet in size, will be subject to the hazard pay ordinance.

Irvine Mayor Farrah Khan, Vice Mayor Tammy Kim and City Council member Larry Agran voted to adopt the hero pay ordinance. Council members Anthony Kuo and Mike Carroll voted no. Both Kuo and Carroll expressed uncertainty surrounding the legality of an ordinance of this nature.

Carroll explained that while he supported the kind-hearted nature of the council to provide assistance, he said adopting the ordinance could invite unwanted legal drama.

“I see no path by which we could carry this resolution and provide these benefits – or mandate these benefits – and not end up being a part of a similar lawsuit and a costly one at that,” Carroll said. “I do salute the mayor and the council members that are seeking a path by which to help these people, but from my perspective we don’t have a payroll problem as much as a vaccine problem.”

Currently, there are three cities in Orange County that have considered implementing hero pay. Both Santa Ana and Costa Mesa support the idea.

However, it was reported that Kroger, the parent company of Ralphs, will

‘HERO PAY’ FOR GROCERY WORKERS

IRVINE CITY COUNCIL APPROVES \$4 HOURLY RATE INCREASE FOR ESSENTIAL EMPLOYEES.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER



PHOTO BY GEMMA ON UNSPLASH

close a store in Long Beach in direct response to Long Beach’s hero pay ordinance. The California Grower’s Association also filed a lawsuit against the city of Long Beach, although it is unclear where the suit stands.

In a Tweet on Feb. 1, Long Beach Mayor Robert Garcia said Long Beach would continue to battle for hero pay for the essential workers in his city.

“We go to court this month and we will defend our workers vigorously,” Garcia wrote in a Tweet.

On Tuesday, Feb. 9, several grocery store workers called into the Irvine City Council meeting to express their support for the emergency ordinance. As essential workers, many said they face a greater risk of exposing themselves and their families to COVID-19 – without any extra financial incentives.

One caller, who identified herself as Casey Chambers, who works as a cashier at the Albertsons next to Hoag Memorial and Kaiser Permanente in Irvine, said her store gets high foot traffic due to the close proximity to the hospitals.

“When I walk in I have to go through temperature checks, sanitize and do my PPE in accordance to the mandates from my employer – this is a hazardous job. We don’t know who could possibly be carrying the virus, and I’m interacting with them daily,” she said to the council via phone. “As an essential worker, my job is to help the community here in Irvine. We’re also proud to serve the thousands of hospital workers who come in because of the close proximity, but we’re here at risk while grocery and drug store employers are making record-breaking profits in a pandemic.”

Jose Ortiz, a 29-year employee and meat manager at the Albertsons off Jeffrey Ave. in Irvine, said he works in fear, as several of his workers have gotten ill, leaving him no choice but to work the frontlines.

“For almost a year now, we’ve been working these demanding jobs, exposed and under very stressful conditions as more and more of my co-workers get sick – eight of my co-workers were out

sick at one time,” Ortiz said. “My son and daughter also work at grocery stores in Irvine, and I worry about them and if either of us will be next.”

Linda Martinez, a representative of the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 324 Labor Union, a Buena Park-based labor union, which represents grocery store workers in Irvine, also spoke during Tuesday’s meeting.

Martinez explained that UFCW Local 324 members in Irvine are getting sick in high numbers.

“More than 10 percent of our Irvine members have tested positive for COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic. Workers are calling for hazard pay. We have delivered to the City Council a worker petition with almost 700 of our members urging you to move forward with this ordinance.”

City Council member Larry Agran expressed his support for the emergency ordinance, thanking Mayor Khan via Zoom. Agran added that corporate pharmaceutical chains and large grocery store chains have done well financially during the pandemic, and have not offered incentives to their workers, despite complaints over unfair working conditions from those manning the front lines of retail.

“I think it’s important that a city like Irvine – that we take the lead,” Agran said. “We have so many people out there, who are really at risk, who are suffering, who are doing the hard work to help pull us through from beginning to end.”

In a Facebook post after the vote, Khan provided an update and offered her appreciation for the grocery store employees that called into Tuesday’s meeting to share their thoughts.

“Tonight, the Hero Pay for grocery and drug retail workers ordinance which I introduced passed the Irvine City Council by a 3-2 vote. In the last year since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, our community has relied heavily on front-line grocery and drug retail workers for our basic needs, whilst they have faced unexpected hazardous workplace conditions, without the privilege to work from home or practice social distancing. As Irvine perseveres during this time of uncertainty and begins heading down the path of economic recovery and vaccination, I’m proud to stand with our working families. I’d also like to thank the numerous grocery store workers who called in and shared their powerful testimonies with the Irvine City Council tonight.”

COVID VACCINE SUPPLY

CITY OF IRVINE HOPEFUL FOR THIRD SUPER-DISTRIBUTION SITE.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

While COVID-19 hospitalizations in Orange County are declining, leaders in Irvine have shifted their concern to the overall supply of COVID-19 vaccine, a compounding issue affecting both city and county level operations.

Irvine Mayor Farrah Khan said the county is expecting 40,000 more doses of the COVID-19 vaccine this week, an increase from 37,000 a week prior. The Orange County Health Agency reported 376,735 total doses have been administered as of Monday, Feb. 8.

The Irvine City Council has reiterated the city's ability to host a SuperPOD (Point of Distribution) vaccination site, specifically within portions of the Great Park. However, city officials continue to cite the county's shallow supply of COVID-19 vaccine as the main factor delaying plans for any additional SuperPOD sites – in Irvine or Orange County.

Additionally, in January, a license agreement between the city of Irvine and the county, authorizing the use of the Great Park as a SuperPOD site, was pulled from the Irvine City Council agenda at the request of County CEO Frank Kim.

During the Jan. 26 meeting, Irvine City Manager Marianna Marysheva said the city hoped to receive a final word on the location of a SuperPOD site in Irvine by Feb. 10. As of Tuesday, Feb. 16, the city has yet to publicly address any discussions about the location of a SuperPOD site in Irvine.

In an email with Irvine Weekly, Marysheva explained that the city is ready to facilitate a COVID-19 vaccination SuperPOD when the county is ready to move forward.

"We continue having an ongoing dialogue with the county. As you know, at this time the supply of vaccines provided to the Orange County Health Care Agency by the state is constrained," Marysheva wrote.

"With this, the county currently has insufficient supply to distribute through the existing channels, including the two SuperPOD sites (at Disney and Soka) and

mobile clinics. Together with the county, we will monitor the supply on an ongoing basis, and when it becomes sufficient to warrant opening additional SuperPOD sites, Irvine will be ready."

After her weekly mayor's call with Dr. Clayton Chau, Khan said she expects the Johnson & Johnson vaccine to be approved in the coming days, and with that approval she expects more SuperPODs to follow.

"The county will be opening small equity POD sites at Santa Ana college focusing on individuals in the nearby ZIP codes," Khan wrote in a Facebook post, Friday, Feb. 12. "We are expecting and hopeful that Johnson & Johnson will be authorized on Feb. 26, will enable the county to open a third SuperPOD site."

Khan added that the Johnson & Johnson vaccine is a single-dose vaccine, which is expected to be administered to the local inmate populations, along with migrant farm workers and those with intellectual disabilities.

Still, delays with the current vaccine have caused bottlenecks in distributing all the Phase 1A vaccines before moving into Phase 1B, a problem Khan attributed to the size of the county.

"Orange County is the second largest county with the largest senior population, that's why it's taking longer for us to move from phase 1A to 1B. The county hopes to get through 50 percent of seniors by next week," Khan wrote via Facebook. "In addition, the county is trying to meet the senior equity requirements for the Black, Latino and API seniors."

In the meantime, Khan said Irvine seniors, 65-years and older, seeking the vaccination can do so by way of local pharmacy chains. CVS, which will carry approximately 100 doses, and Rite-Aid, that will carry about 20 doses-per day, will also be points of distribution for the COVID-19 vaccine in Orange County.

Orange County continues to push ahead with Operation Independence, the partnership between Orange County Fire Authority and the Orange County Health Agency, with the shared goal of vaccinating all individuals seeking vac-



PHOTO BY MUFI
MAJNUN ON
UNSPLASH

inations by July 4.

On Feb. 12, the Centers for Disease Control issued guidance to begin vaccinating individuals over the age of 16, with underlying health conditions.

Orange County is quickly approaching the one-year anniversary of its first confirmed COVID-19 case, which was recorded on March 2, 2020. Since then, the county now has an accumulative total of 243,163 COVID-19 cases with 3,617 COVID-19 related deaths.

On Tuesday, Feb. 16, Orange County reported a total of 658 COVID-19 cases with 40 COVID-19 related deaths. HCA noted that Tuesday's daily totals were an accumulative total of from both Feb. 15 and 16, due to the President's Day holiday.

With 235 COVID-19 patients in the ICU, as of Tuesday, Feb. 16, the county intensive care unit capacity increased to 11.3 percent. Tuesday's ICU total marks the highest available ICU capacity since Dec. 9, 2020.

Currently there are 748 COVID-19 patients hospitalized – the lowest total since Dec. 3, 2020.

The city of Irvine has also seen decreased case counts, in comparison to a month prior.

On Tuesday, Feb. 16, the city reported a total of 34 new COVID-19 cases, bringing the city's total to 9,866 total COVID-19 cases with 60 total deaths.

Now with a testing positivity rate of 7.8 percent, Orange County has met the criteria to move into the less restrictive Red Tier, or the substantial COVID-19 risk category.

Within the Red Tier, restaurants, places of worship, along with gyms and fitness centers may reopen for indoor operations, with modifications. While fitness centers will be able to resume operations, capacity must be limited to 10 percent.

Movie theaters will also get the green light to return to indoor services, at 25 percent capacity.

Statewide, COVID-19 rates are on a downward trajectory.

On Jan. 16, the state reported 42,229, a month later on Feb. 16, the California Department of Public Health reported just 5,692 new COVID-19 cases, a stark decrease from a month prior, and also the lowest statewide daily total since October 2020.

The Centers for Disease Control recently released guidance for the safe reopening of schools, which includes a color coded COVID-19 transmission risk chart, along with the universal use of face masks.

The CDC's color coded map for reopening schools for all in-person instruction is categorized from low transmission (blue), moderate transmission (yellow), substantial transmission (orange), high transmission (red).

This chart will be used as a roadmap to determine what mode of education – full in-person instruction or the hybrid model – that will be implemented throughout the district, determined by the COVID-19 transmission rates within the community.

Along with following community transmission rates, Irvine Unified School District will also be implementing more sanitation strategies.

"Five mitigations strategies" in resuming in-person learning – universal masking; social distancing; hand-washing and respiratory etiquette; cleaning and ventilating facilities; and contact tracing, isolation and quarantine protocols.

Currently, all schools within the Irvine Unified School District are operating within the hybrid model, but there are no plans to transition back to in-person education at this time.



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The Black Index - Alicia Henry, Analogous III, 2020, Acrylic, thread, yarn, dyed leather. © 2021 University Art Gallery, UC Irvine.



THE BLACK INDEX AND THE AGENCY OF REPRESENTATION

A NEW EXHIBITION UNPACKS THE POWER OF ARTISTIC DEPICTION.

BY SHANA NYS DAMBROT

In the ongoing, intensifying quest for true social equity, curator Bridget R. Cooks' exhibition *The Black Index* makes the case for examining the volatile intersection of not only who is represented in visual culture but by whom they are depicted. In other words, as this remarkable exhibition posits, it is not enough that images of Black people are produced by artists and creatives – it specifically matters that it be Black artists who make them. Cooks, a UC Irvine associate professor of African American studies and art history, organized and curated the exhibition, which debuts at UCI before traveling to Palo Alto Art Center in May; the University of Texas at Austin in the Fall; and Hunter College in January 2022.

The artists featured in *The Black Index* – Dennis Delgado, Alicia Henry, Kenyatta A.C. Hinkle, Titus Kaphar, Whitfield Lovell and Lava Thomas – take the power of self-representation to heart as not only an act of reclaiming the sovereign voice from the violent and insidious legacy of colonialism, but as a more perfect path to truth and complexity in art, and from there, in society as a whole. Across drawing, performance,

mixed media, sculpture, and digital media, these artists take issue with the imposed mechanisms of “classification” endemic to the dominant American understanding of race, offering a poignant and self-determined set of alternatives.

Because of everything, the exhibition is only online (for now) but a well-produced virtual tour and other performance and conversation resources and even a curated playlist enrich the presentation. As you enter the site, perhaps the best place to start is with Kenyatta A.C. Hinkle's *Breathing Meditation*, an unguided slideshow of drawings from her *The Evanesced*, *The Untouchables* 2020 series, whose gentle fades are timed to create serene breathing and a quiet state of open-mindedness and non-expectation with which to enter the exhibition. Hinkle's large and growing suite of drawings represents the historical and present-day unsolved disappearances of Black women in loosely abstract, ethereal yet visceral “un-portraits” anchored in powerful details that somehow embody both erasure and endurance.

Dennis Delgado interrogates the racism built into policing and surveil-

lance – and social media – technology, especially as run through facial recognition. Though we often think of tech as dispassionate, the reality is that the encoded structures and implicit biases of the largely white, male programming and algorithm workforce have follow-on effects in our society that can cause very real damage in application. Delgado uses the faces of icons of Black cinema as engaging touchstones for unpacking these dangerous dynamics.

Similarly, Titus Kaphar worked in collaboration with Reginald Dwayne Betts, a civil rights lawyer to examine the oppressive, destructive and probably unconstitutional effects of the cash bail system, which like so many other public institutions and policies, disproportionately impacts Black communities. The *Redaction* features poetry by Betts by sampling and excising texts from Civil Rights Corps lawsuits, overlaid on Kaphar's etched portraits of incarcerated individuals. The works are quiet and pensive but also jarring as they express the absurdity of this pernicious inequality in a hybrid language that reveals the individual humanity behind the statistics and court battles.

Whitfield Lovell combines drawn portraits of remembered figures from the African Diaspora – specifically people who lived in the time after the Emancipation Proclamation and before the Civil Rights Movement – with suites of ordinary playing cards. In these works, the cards symbolize the role of “chance” or indeed the power of larger forces beyond our control to shape our lives, while at the same time creating intimate works that evoke the energy of playfulness, social gathering, forecasting and inheritance. Cards are held

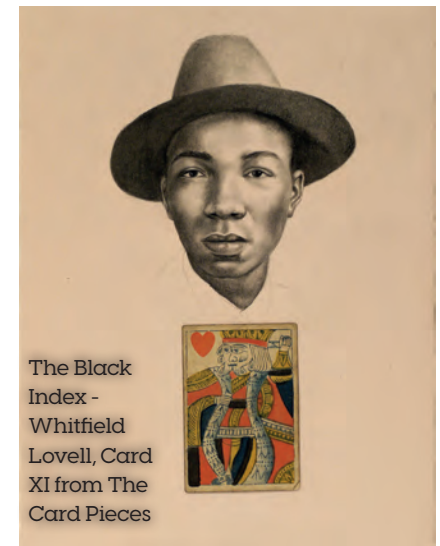
in the hand, the energy of their users leave traces behind, and in this way something of the stories of bygone lives remains and gives even more life to the enchanting portraits they accompany.

Alicia Henry too is interested in the energy transferred through materials – from the recycled leather she works by her own hand or buries in the ground to soak up all that earth magic, before transforming these skins into families of “witnesses.” Her suite of sculptural masks suggests the waiting cohort of ancestors and the gathering of collective testimony as to the unsettled past and the urgent present.

And finally, Lava Thomas' *Mugshot Portraits: Women of the Montgomery Bus Boycott*, transforms these records of arrest, intended by contemporaneous authorities to shame and frighten, into proud, emotionally rich depictions of these pioneering activists on par with the regal kind of imagery of a fully realized studio portrait. By showing the self-possession and inner strength of these early heroes not as dangerous criminals but as the valiant protectors of their communities, this series blends the past and the present into a march of quiet strength with which to face the future. The specific way in which this series in particular exists within the current political and social climate – not least in their centering of Black women on the vanguard of change – is the perfect capstone for this affecting and timely exhibition.

Online at UC Irvine Contemporary Arts Center through March 20, along with online programming including streaming conversations and soon-to-be-released filmed music, dance and performance art. For more information, visit www.theblackindex.art

The Black Index
- Lava Thomas,
Mugshot Portraits -
Alberta J James



The Black Index -
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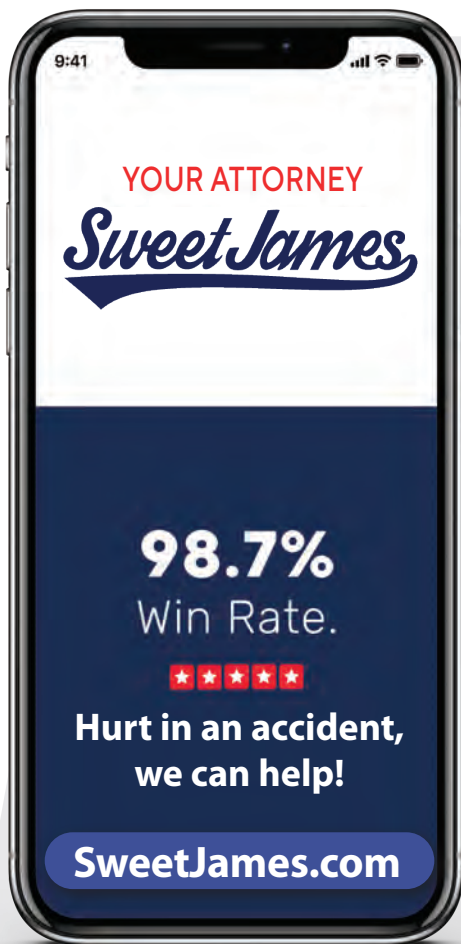
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2016 Limestone Canyon IRC Land Steward Training



15 YEARS OF OVERSEEING IRVINE RANCH'S NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED SECRET GARDEN OF BIODIVERSITY

THE IRVINE RANCH CONSERVANCY CONTINUES TO DEVELOP INNOVATIVE METHODS TO MITIGATE NATURAL THREATS TO HABITAT DEGRADATION, WHILE STILL PROVIDING THE COMMUNITY WITH CRITICAL OPEN SPACES.

Irvine is home to giant birds of prey like the nationally cherished bald eagle, and also to smaller, lesser known amphibians like the Arboreal salamander. Yet these rare species are just fractions of the ecosystem integrated within the historic landmarks of the Irvine Ranch, which has served as Orange County's naturally preserved, 93,000 acre secret garden of biodiversity for more than a century.

Now celebrating its 15th anniversary, the Irvine Ranch Conservancy, the agency responsible for maintaining these nationally recognized landmarks, has found a balance between habitat restoration, while providing natural space for recreation for Irvine and the

surrounding communities.

Mike O'Connell, president of the IRC, explained that while the IRC is proud of its long list of ecological accomplishments, which has connected more than 200,000 people to these tranquil coastal shrublands, it cannot function without the help of valiant volunteer effort.

For the last 15 years, IRC's long list of accomplishments has enlisted the involvement of more than 1,200 local volunteers, who have dedicated more than 300,000 hours to overseeing conservation efforts within the historic landmarks of the Irvine Ranch.

Through these efforts, the IRC has constructed more than 29 miles of new

trails, installed more than 50 remote wildlife habitat monitoring cameras,



and allowing for the collection of a robust database of nearly 1 million images of local wildlife, like the local mule deer population, mountain lions packs, bobcats and red tailed hawks.

Through the better part of two decades, the IRC has found success mitigating the risk of severe wildfire, the effects of prolonged drought, along with natural habitat degradation overall.

Of all the natural threats facing the ecosystems and human communities surrounding the Irvine Ranch, O'Connell admitted that wildfire is the greatest. A threat O'Connell refers to as the "issue that unifies everybody," and says it is increasing in frequency.

"These habitats, called shrublands, normally burn every 70 to 100 years. They are now burning every seven to 10 years – which means they're burning 90 percent too often," O'Connell said.

Last year, the Silverado Fire, which was sparked in Irvine's Silverado Canyon, prompted the evacuation of more than 90,000 residents of Irvine and Lake Forest. The fire burned more than 13,000 acres. Then, in December, the Bond Fire burned more than 6,000 acres and destroyed more than 30 structures near Orchard Hills.

Yet despite the risk of wildfire, the last year has presented impactful challenges that showcase just how critical this land is for the well-being of the community.

Despite more than a decade of experience of habitat preservation, the COVID-19 pandemic has created a new set of challenges for the IRC, and impacted the natural areas of Irvine in unforeseen ways.

Since last March, the pandemic has become a catalyst for people reconnecting with the natural lands around them, especially in Irvine. A phenomenon O'Connell said mimics a double-edged sword, based on the core values

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

COMMUNITY

IRC Stewardship 2016 Limestone Canyon



IMAGE COURTESY OF IRVINE RANCH CONSERVANCY

of the IRC – which is mainly to achieve a balance between providing areas for open space recreation, while simultaneously working to preserve the natural environment.

For O’Connell, along with the core mission of the IRC, is providing the community with open space, but it cannot do so without impacting the natural areas – or disturbing the ecosystems within.

“One of the things that was confirmed for us during the pandemic was just how critical open space and nature-based recreation is to the health and well-being of the community,” O’Connell said in an interview with *Irvine Weekly*. “That was something we kind of knew, but the pandemic showed it – we’ve had between 200 to 400 percent increase in the use of some of the areas we manage, as a result of that, and that just speaks to the inherent value of these open spaces to people’s well-being.”

O’Connell pointed out that in 1996, the Irvine-based National Communities Coalition agreed to set aside large portions of the Irvine Ranch to be protected within the Natural Community Conservation and Development Plan for Central Coastal Orange County. While not necessarily intentional, this preservation effort alleviates wildlife regulation responsibility for future generations, considering the areas are protected.

“The core of what Irvine Ranch Conservancy does is to manage these lands sustainably and ecologically healthy, while balancing the demand for recreation and outdoor experiences – that’s really the crux of what we do,” O’Connell said. “We want to encourage people to enjoy it in sustainable ways, so that these lands remain healthy

and vibrant for years and years to come.”

Managing the line between these natural and urban areas requires a lot of innovation. While the IRC’s effort does not involve regulating the wildlife populations, it does manage habitats through innovative, non-intrusive projects.

One project in particular is the installation of a remote camera monitoring program, which are now installed at numerous locations within the landmarks of the Irvine Ranch. Since 2007, the IRC has accumulated a database of more than 1 million images that help determine patterns in wildlife ecosystems.

These patterns can be compared



IMAGE COURTESY OF IRVINE RANCH CONSERVANCY

with the patterns of community use to therefore create a well-rounded picture of how an ecosystem is being impacted as a whole.

“The pandemic has added another layer of challenge in that people are wanting to get out and recreate in nature for their well-being. That just means

that the more people, the more natural resource impact, the more impact on wildlife,” O’Connell said. “Now with [capture cams] you’re really starting to get some scientifically valid conclusions about what happens when use goes up – in time and in space – and it helps us be better managers long term.”



IMAGE COURTESY OF IRVINE RANCH CONSERVANCY



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Shordie Shordie and Murda Beatz



HOW MURDA BEATZ IS KILLING THE GAME

BY RYAN LEUTZ

If you listen to hip hop, it's more than likely that Murda Beatz has produced one of your favorite songs. In addition to being one of the most in-demand producers in the music industry, his resume includes credits on 8 GRAMMY-nominated projects, a spot on Forbes 30 under 30, and songs with the biggest artists in the world like Migos, Drake, Nicki Minaj, Lil Wayne, Ariana Grande and many many more.

What fans might not know about Murda Beatz is that he grew up in the small town of Niagara, Canada, and came to the states to achieve his version of the American Dream; being a successful producer and beatmaker to the hottest names in the music industry.

"I grew up in a small town of 30,000 people," Murda Beatz began on this week's episode of The Rockstar Experience, a music podcast hosted by publisher Brian Calle and myself, hip hop journalist, Ryan Leutz.

"What led you from being a kid in Canada to moving to Atlanta and working with artists like Migos?" I asked.

"Around the time when I was learning how to make beats, in my first few

months, Chief Keef popped off. I was talking to him on Facebook, sending him stuff and then I went out to Chicago and linked with some of the GBE guys. When I came back [to Canada] I was like, I feel like a big thing that's gonna get me goin' is I need to get my sound into Atlanta."

This is when Murda Beatz decided to take his talents to Atlanta, the birthplace of trap music as we know it, to work with the Migos before they were a household name.

"So literally I spoke that into existence. I went on Live Mixtapes and saw these guys the Migos. I hadn't heard nothin' about them and I hadn't seen anything on them but I started listening to their music. I thought it just sounded so different, like the way they were rapping, like everything sounded different from everything else. It was refreshing. I saw the vision so I got in contact with some of the people around them on Twitter and they loved my beats," Murda said.

"So I started goin' out to Atlanta and staying with them in the studio until they got their own cribs and stuff. And then we started staying in the mansion and that's how everything started."

Since defining the sound of Atlanta

trap music, Murda is starting to shift his focus from the trap scene he helped pioneer, especially within the past year.

"This year I feel like I've turned a new chapter and I've evolved in a way where I started working with Ariana Grande. At the beginning of quarantine, we got linked through text and started workin' on a lot of stuff together. Started working via FaceTime and then we linked in the studio."

"That Doja cat song is f****g sick," Brian added in reference to "Motive," a song on Ariana Grande's latest Positions project, produced by Murda Beatz and featuring Doja Cat.

"Yeah, so that was one of the songs we made. We also did some more stuff that's going to be on her deluxe album dropping soon," Murda told us. "I feel like this is another era for me too and the evolution of getting into the pop space and having fun making pop music with the biggest pop stars as well. It's another side of Murda Beatz. I don't want anyone to ever look at Murda and think, 'oh he can only make Migos beats.' Like, literally if you go to Ariana Grande's album and listen to that beat, you would never think I made it. I wanna differentiate myself from all the other producers and show that I can really do anything."

In addition to his latest pop music wave, Murda Beatz is gearing up to drop Memory Lane. Memory Lane is Murda Beatz' collaboration album with Shordie Shordie, a rapper who you might know from his platinum record, "Bitchuary."

"I've been a fan of Shordie Shordie's music for the past couple of years and decided to get in the studio with him 6 months ago roughly around there. Then the first night we banged out like 7 songs and I was like, man, let's make an EP or project. So that's what we've been doin'."

Murda seems genuinely excited for his Shordie Shordie project and in particular, the latest single and music video from the album, "LOVE" ft. Trippie Redd.

"We just dropped LOVE with Trippie Redd, like last Friday, with a video and that's doing very well. So yeah man, just having fun with it releasing music. Actually, the LOVE song is one of my favorite records I've made in a long time so I'm happy that that song is finally out for the fans to enjoy, ya know?"

Murda Beatz and Shordie Shordie's "LOVE" ft. Trippie Redd is on all streaming platforms and Murda and Shordie's album Memory Lane, is due out February 25.

The podcast can be found on Spotify, Apple Podcasts and iHeartRadio.





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- Jim and Carol Hoffman

MUSIC

THE SHOW GOES ON?

SCHEDULED CONCERTS AT FIVEPOINT AMPHITHEATRE OFFER HOPE TO IRVINE MUSIC FANS.

BY PAUL ROGERS

At the time of writing, Orange County concert venues are closed due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. According to the official website for California coronavirus response, these facilities are classified as “non-essential indoor business operations.”

But there's hope for Irvine-area music lovers. Some outdoor shows are still scheduled, subject to health and safety guidelines put forth by the county of Orange (including limited audience capacities to enable safe social distancing).

Irvine's largest concert venue, the outdoor FivePoint Amphitheatre, has a number of concerts scheduled for May through October this year. Or rather rescheduled, as all are replacement dates for shows previously postponed due to the pandemic.

While all the advertised FivePoint concerts will be subject to health and safety guidelines in place on their respective dates, which are subject to change, the 12,000-capacity amphitheater is unusually well placed to accommodate these. With its flexible seating and thoughtful design, the Live Nation-operated FivePoint (which is intended as an interim replacement for the old Irvine Meadows Amphitheatre) can quickly and easily adapt to limited audience capacities and recommended



social distancing practices.

With that said, all concerts are subject to postponement or cancellation due to the shifting risks and regulations resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Prospective attendees and ticket holders should keep a close eye on current health and safety guidelines and the FivePoint Amphitheatre website as the date of a given concert approaches.

With fingers firmly crossed, we took a look at all the concerts advertised on FivePoint Amphitheatre's website at the time of writing.

CHAIN FEST, May 29

Chain Fest is a co-presentation between Live Nation and storied Anaheim venue Chain Reaction. An all-ages bastion since 1996, Chain Reaction has been central to both bringing touring punk, metal and ska bands to O.C., and to nurturing successful local acts including Irvine's Young the Giant and Huntington Beach heroes Avenged Sevenfold. With its focus on punk-lite and post-hardcore, Chain Fest comprises co-headliners Jimmy Eat World and Taking Back Sunday alongside Circa Survive (playing songs from 2010 album *Blue Sky Noise*); a “greatest hits” set from Saves The Day; Anberlin; Glassjaw (performing songs from 2000's *Everything You*

the current 11-piece touring outfit are founder members. Trading their earlier more experimental, jazzy sound for sentimental, brass-flecked ballads made Chicago all-powerful in the 1970s, when they were the leading U.S. singles charting group (according to *Billboard*). Classic weepies like “If You Leave Me Now” and “Hard Habit to Break” remain “our song” to couples worldwide, and massively nostalgic to millions.

5 SECONDS OF SUMMER, June 25

One of Australia's most successful musical exports, Sydney's 5 Seconds of Summer went from YouTube cover-song sensations to global chart toppers in the space of just their first three years. Essentially a boy band injected with a visceral dose of pop-punk, the astonishingly youthful foursome (still only in their mid-20s) bravely changed direction with third album *Youngblood*. This 2018 collection ushered in a more of-the-moment, synthy and sophisticated dance-pop exploration of industrial and goth sensibilities, which continued with last year's *Calm*. Maintaining their record of every album to date debuting at number one in their home country, *Calm* also confirmed 5 Seconds of Summer as a serious, here-to-stay pop phenomenon.

SLIGHTLY STOOPID, July 16

San Diego's Slightly Stoopid personify not only a distinctively West Coast music genre, but also an entire lifestyle. Their freewheeling blend of reggae, folk, hip-hop, rock, punk and blues is born of beachy, bong-fueled good times and speaks to those of a sunny, hang-loose outlook. Yet while their style is SoCal through-and-through, it has translated

Ever Wanted to Know About Silence); Cartel (playing a selection from 2005's *Chroma*); and Acceptance.

CHICAGO, June 12

Billed as “An Evening with Chicago and Their Greatest Hits,” this epic occasion promises a multi-generational journey through the best-known songs of Chicago's 53-year career. Though the band has seen countless lineup changes over its famously hit-laden history, which includes an incredible 47 gold and platinum awards, four of



Lamb of God



BY TRAVIS SHINN

amazingly well around the world. Over their 27-year career, the septet has sold-out shows on multiple continents and graced many of the top festivals, while also co-headlining a U.S. tour with Snoop Dogg. Slightly Stoopid's latest album, 2018's *Everyday Life, Everyday People* straddles no-worries dub reggae, breezy ska, and funky psychedelia with help from UB40's Ali Campbell, Chali 2na, and Yellowman.

FISHFEST 2021, July 17

Southern California's largest Christian music festival returns in fine form, headlined by Grammy-winning Texas worship leader Chris Tomlin ("How Great Is Our God"). Rounding out this year's impressive bill are *American Idol* alumnus Danny Gokey, who remains best-known for 2009 hitlet "My Best Days Are Ahead of Me"; San Diego's Phil Wickham (of "This Is Amazing Grace" fame); Irish transplants We Are Messengers; 20-year-old Nashville sensation Riley Clemmons; and rapper/singer Aaron Cole ("Right on Time," "One More Day"). Riverside author/pastor Greg Laurie will be the event's speaker. The throughline of this ostensibly diverse lineup is its message of hope, which has surely never been so pertinent and universal.

DISTURBED, Aug 23

When they broke out with debut album *The Sickness* in 2000, Disturbed appeared to be wafting in on the fumes of the already over-saturated nu-metal genre. Yet, unlike the bands they were initially lumped in with,

the Chicagoan quartet made no nods to hip-hop, and there were never any JNCO jeans or Adidas tracksuits in sight. Ultimately, Disturbed's commitment to melodic, timeless hard rock inspired by bedrock bands like Black Sabbath, Iron Maiden, Metallica and Pantera saw them outgrow and outlast nu metal, thanks in no small part to the percussive, pseudo-operatic abilities of vocalist David Draiman. Reassuringly, Disturbed have become mega-selling arena fixtures by putting songwriting and performance firmly ahead of fashion and fad.

IRATION, Aug 27

When the original members of Santa Barbara's Iration relocated from Hawaii, they brought oodles of island attitude and sunshine reggae with them. A band whose rep revolves around live performance, there are few so apt for an outdoor SoCal summer concert. Just as they broke through with 2013's *Automatic*, Iration had to weather the departure of one of their two vocalists, Kai Rediske (eventually replaced by Micah Brown). Yet the five piece's relentlessly uplifting music belies any internal strife, and last year's seventh album, *Coastin'*, is in fact their most collaborative effort yet. The collection also finds Iration continuing to embellish their reggae roots with genre-blurring flecks of pop, rock, R&B, and funk on the eternal search for the ultimate vibe.

MEGADETH & LAMB OF GOD, Sept 1

While he may forever be known as

"that guy Metallica booted" to many, singer-shredder Dave Mustaine has enjoyed his own mega-success with Megadeth ever since. His band's 15 studio albums since 1985 include five consecutive platinum sellers in the '80s and '90s, and some bona fide metal classics. Though it's been five years since a new album (2016's *Dystopia*), Megadeth remains a ferociously technical live draw which, despite myriad lineup changes, currently boasts its founding core of Mustaine and bassist Dave Ellefson. Formed a decade after Megadeth, Lamb of God represents not only the subsequent generation of American metal, but also a more punk-adjacent take on the genre, particularly in the timbre and 'tude of frontman Randy Blythe.

DAVE MATTHEWS BAND, Sept 10 & 11

The Dave Matthews Bands is one of those rare acts that has been so successful for so long that they can completely pick and choose what, if anything, to do next. Ever since major-label debut *Under the Table and Dreaming* exploded at the turn of 1995, the genre-straddling septet – which marries Grateful Dead jamminess to pop sensibilities and elements of funk, jazz and worldbeat – has been a commercial juggernaut, shifting 33 million albums in the U.S. alone. While DMB conjures massive late '90s college-days nostalgia for listeners of a certain age, their largely acoustic compositions and Matthews' lived-in melodies have long transcended that association. Today, the Dave Matthews Band is a veritable institution, still worthy of back-to-back headline slots at FivePoint.

KIDZ BOP LIVE, Sept 19

What seemed like a niche concept upon launch in 2001, Kidz Bop – kid-friendly cover versions of hit songs recorded by session musicians and a chorus of child singers – has become an incredibly enduring brand, including more than 40 albums, a SiriusXM channel, a fashion line, and live events. The Kidz Bop M.O. is more nuanced than it initially appears, spicing-up predictable covers of Britney Spears, Hilary Duff, Taylor Swift and Christina Aguilera singles with tunes by the likes of Modest Mouse and Franz Ferdinand, perhaps with parents in mind. Last year's *Kidz Bop Party Playlist* included charmingly infectious cuts originally recorded by Tones and I, Dua Lipa, the Jonas Brothers, BTS, Bruno Mars, and more.

MATCHBOX TWENTY, Oct 3

Like the Dave Matthews Band, Matchbox Twenty is all-but-synonymous with the strummy, ultra-sincere college-rock of the late 1990s. Indeed, MB20's 15-million-selling debut album, *Yourself of Someone Like You*, represented the commercial pinnacle of that radio-friendly trend. After a couple of hiatuses, including one while frontman and principal songwriter Rob Thomas launched a successful solo career, Matchbox Twenty resumed business in 2010, with four-fifths of their original lineup intact (guitarist Adam Gaynor left in 2004). Today, the band's focus is firmly on touring rather than recording, but an ultrafans-only limited-edition vinyl box set comprising all of MB20's studio albums, some of which will be available on vinyl for the first time, is currently available for pre-order.

Taking Back Sunday



BY ARIFF DANIAL

In *Bliss*, Salma Hayek's new movie, the actress plays a mysterious woman who comes into Owen Wilson's life and shows him that everything he thought was real, wasn't. Mike Cahill's mind-bending new film poses a lot of questions about reality, manipulation and the power of love, and a lot of it is quite dark. But Hayek, who has been acting for three decades now, brings her zesty charisma and joy to the role, which requires a dual take on the character, living in two alternate dimensions.

The Veracruz, Mexican actress, born Salma Valgarma Hayek Jiménez, made her mark first in telenovelas in her homeland, then moved to L.A. and won memorable parts in American films such as Robert Rodriguez's *Mariachi Trilogy* and in *From Dusk 'Til Dawn* (Rodriguez's film written by Quentin Tarantino). Some hit comedies followed, including *Fools Rush In*, *Wild Wild West* and *Dogma*, which led her to producing and a career highlight on both sides of the camera, *Frida*, her loving cinematic portrait of Frida Kahlo, for which she earned an Oscar nomination.

She's stayed busy ever since, both as an actress and a producer. We spoke with the passionate star by Zoom, talking about the new film, what she has coming up (big stuff!), and her enduring ability to stay hot in Hollywood while representing women over 50 and Latinas everywhere.

IRVINE WEEKLY: Were you interested in topics and theories about alternate reality before making this movie?

SALMA HAYEK: I was always into in quantum physics and string theory. I had some knowledge about that. I was not interested in the idea of living in a simulation, but once I started researching, it was mind blowing how much was there. And kind of scary... But the movie works in two main ways. Two different people can watch the movie and interpret it completely differently.

How so?

Besides the alternate reality story, the other choice would be that they're drug addicts, and they use substances to create their own reality where they can escape from the mess of their lives. I decided to choose that take as an actress. Of course my character doesn't know that, and in less than a week of shooting, the character took over me and then I said, 'No, no, wait, this is real. This is actually happening.'

So you changed your perspective on

Salma Hayek in *BLISS*



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SALMA HAYEK TALKS *BLISS*, BEAUTY AND BREAKING BOUNDARIES

BY LINA LECARO

the story?

Yes. I never thought of her as drug addict anymore. I thought about a scientist that lived in the bliss world and created a parallel world so that the bliss world could be appreciated. Because we had lost the appreciation. This is first time that I completely changed my take a character in a film and that's been really helpful after the film too. I'll tell you why...

Yes, why?

When we came out of making the movie, we entered this parallel reality world where everything has changed and it's hard to understand but most importantly, we don't have to go to another dimension in this dimension to live in completely different realities. And it taught me not to judge them. I'm sure it's happened to you. That somebody that you thought you knew all of sudden has a logic that makes no sense to you about

certain things – like politics or where does the coronavirus come from? Or is the earth flat? Or even crazier things.

Like they can say to you we all have 6 fingers in each hand and you can say no, there's only 5 (raises hand) I only see 5. But they go no, there's 6! It's a secret but the scientists have been proving it and I can show on the internet a hundred articles about it... I understand the world we're living right now, that's what it is right now.

It's so true. This all makes the movie very relevant right now doesn't it?

And if you think about it, when we went into quarantine, everybody created their own bliss world. Through technology, through social media, movies, television, video games, chats... it was the escape. Everybody designed their own bliss world. Not to mention how it's taught us appreciation for how it was

before – going out with friends to have dinner, like not being afraid of the person walking next to you on the street because they don't have their face covered. Or that somebody's going to be upset with you because you do have your face covered. I miss the day when somebody sneezed and I could go to them and say politely, as my parents taught me, bless you without being afraid.

Let's move on to your impact as a successful Latina actress. Representation is so important, but what I love about so many of your roles is that often your ethnicity is irrelevant to the character's story, just like in real life.

This one particularly that true but not only my ethnicity but my age. How often do you see a Latina that is 54 on screen? The guys get away with it. But in sci fi especially the leads not so much. And Mike [Cahill, the director] didn't think about that at all. Either one of them. So

ENTERTAINMENT

Hayek and Wilson in the BLISS world.



HILARY BRONWYN
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it's not that I'm trying to look for roles that don't play up my ethnicity, but I do try to look for filmmakers that see beyond my age ethnicity or my sex.

You are beautiful and when you were younger you played your share of sexy or femme fatale roles... even now you can play those. But at this point in your career are you looking for other kinds of characters to play? You play a doctor in this one which is different and great. What made you decide to do this film?

I was a fan of the director. I think he's very interesting, that's number one. Also this role didn't require me to look beautiful. I have a huge belly. You can see it in some scenes.

I think you look really great in both realities. Even as the homeless lady. You look very bohemian with your braids and styling.

I was not required to be a certain weight, a certain look, age or a certain ethnicity for either. He [Cahill] saw something in me and something that he felt about me and it had nothing to do with any of that.

You've always been such a versatile actress. My favorite of your films are *Frida*, *Desperado* and *From Dusk*

***Til Dawn*. I also like the *Grown-Ups* movies with Adam Sandler. You're really great at comedy. Do you have a preference between comedy and more serious roles like this?**

I love comedy. But I have a preference for good writing. Then it doesn't matter what it is. If there's good writing and a good director... Comedy that's badly well written with hard to pull off jokes, is a struggle.

Is comedy harder than drama?

If it's badly written yeah. But for me it's not harder, for me it's so much fun and easy. And I love improvising. And you know it's very cool because his movie is serious, but my relationship with Owen [Wilson] was very light and beautiful because he's also very funny. We really had fun doing this.

So you finished the film before the pandemic really hit but now that we are in it, what's your life been like? I know you're a mother and you always have projects happening. How are you managing?

This has been a good opportunity to have more time to be a mother. I do have a production company and we've had to shoot things during COVID and shooting under COVID circumstances has not been fun as a producer. I still work regular hours and I work a lot out of my house. It's been a lovely time to just be really close to my family and my animals who are the happiest creatures about this quarantine.

Working on anything else coming up?

Yes. Coming this Summer I have the sequel to *The Hitman's Bodyguard*. And guess what? I had a small part in the first one and now I have a lead with Ryan Reynolds and Samuel Jackson.

Wow! I loved you in that one. Very badass and quite a cast.

I'm 54 and have a lead in an action film. And I do my own stunts! And then at the end of the year I'm going to be a superhero in a Marvel movie called *The Eternals*. A Latina superhero at my age!

That is amazing. As a Latina right behind you in age, I must say you are such an inspiration for all of us.

Thank you. Power to Latinas and power to our generation!

BLISS is now streaming on Amazon Prime Video.

Salma Hayek and Owen Wilson in a BLISS scene



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