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IRVINE

WEEKLY

APRIL 22, 2022
VOL. 4 • NO. 6



COMPLEXIONS

A CONTEMPORARY BALLET COMPANY PUSHING
BOUNDARIES AND MIXING STYLES

BY LIZ GOLDNER

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IRVINE CITY COUNCIL DEBATES NEPOTISM POLICIES

WHILE SOME SAY THE POLICY IMPROVES TRANSPARENCY, IRVINE COUNCILMEMBER LARRY AGRAN ARGUES THE CITY'S UPDATED NEPOTISM ORDINANCE IS A TARGETED ATTACK ON HIS FAMILY.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

On Tuesday, April 12, the Irvine City Council voted 4-1 to extend an existing ordinance banning nepotism in order to include city-based boards, commissions, committees and other governing bodies. Currently, the ordinance only extends to compensated positions.

For context, this ordinance bans family members of City Council members or city staff to serve on community-based boards.

Prior to the vote Tuesday, Irvine City Council Member Tammy Kim, who brought the item to the council, said the extension would work to close an "existing loophole" in the city's current nepotism ordinance.

Kim added that she discovered that Irvine did not have a nepotism policy in place for commissioners and that local news outlets began covering the issue in other cities.

"I want to be clear: This is in no way meant to be an attack on any one individual. This will hold true if this were my son, the mayor's son, the mayor's husband – we're all held to the same standard," Kim said. "In the city, we do have a nepotism policy, which is limited to employment and personnel matters and it's not applicable to elected officers and members of boards, commissions and committees. The ordinance that we have is simply closing an existing loophole that we have banning nepotism, and applying it to our appointment."

However, in passing the ordinance, Irvine City Council Member Larry Agran



spoke in protest of the update, adding that the discussion was a direct attack on his family.

Specifically, Agran pointed out that his wife, Dr. Phyllis Agran, a pediatric gastroenterologist, serves as the Chair of the Irvine Youth and Families Commission.

With the council's 4-1 vote, Dr. Agran will no longer be able to serve on the committee. During the meeting, Agran noted that his wife's position was a voluntary appointment, with no compensation.

Agran also debated the concept of nepotism in Irvine, adding that the ordinance seemed more like a calculated effort to enforce arbitrary rules, rather than address "real problems in the city."

"I think it's pretty hard to conclude that this is anything but an effort to have my wife removed from the Irvine Children Youth and Family Advisory Committee, notwithstanding continuing outstanding service on her part and to that committee and to the community at large," he said.

"We don't have a problem with nepotism

in this city. Nepotism, frankly, when it relates to family members, typically is putting someone in a position of power, that is compensated and for which, typically, they are not qualified."

Dr. Agran, who is also a Professor of Pediatrics at UC Irvine, was appointed by then-Irvine Mayor Sukhee Kang when the committee was developed.

During her tenure, Agran helped establish a local child passenger safety seat program, which eventually led to the adoption of child passenger safety systems that are currently recognized nationwide.

Kim objected to Agran's theory, continually emphasizing that this was simply to uphold transparency. Adding that she wanted the council to discuss it after she had read about other cities in Orange County discussing the issue in January.

"The purpose of having committees and commissions is to solicit a variety of voices from the community and provide

residents an opportunity to serve," Kim said. "This policy is building off our trust and transparency. We have to ensure we have broad representation."

Prior to the vote, Agran asked Irvine City Attorney Jeff Melching how the council was prepared to vote on the matter, adding that he was under the impression that the agenda item would just be a discussion.

"How did this get prepared without the City Council giving you direction to prepare it – on what authority?" Agran asked.

Irvine City Attorney Jeff Melching said he was directed by city staff prior to the meeting. Melching then pointed to an ordinance that had been updated during the meeting on March 22, and in accordance with the new rule, "staff is providing as much support as it can for an agenda item."

"I was asked by city staff to prepare the ordinance, and I did," Melching said. "We modified our policies and procedures at the last meeting such that when you have a council initiated agenda item, the old rule was if the request was submitted 12 days in advance, then the staff could give support to assist with the agenda item and it was submitted five days in advance, then it couldn't be."

Melching added that the request to prepare the agenda item for a vote came from the City Manager's office.

"I think that request came from the City Manager, who I work for – and I did what I was told to do," Melching said. "I'm not dodging the responsibility for it, I think that what was requested was consistent with our policies and procedures."

Agran, who offered an amendment that would exclude non-compensated positions, but was not seconded, continually objected to the idea that the only disqualification for his wife no longer being allowed to serve the community was simply based on marital status.

"The only reason that she is being kicked off is because of our marital status – the fact that we've been married for 56 years," said Agran. "If we were just friends with benefits – under those circumstances – those wouldn't cover it would it?"

Melching informed Agran that the language in the updated ordinance begins with "spouse."

ARTS

COMPLEXIONS CONTEMPORARY BALLET

A DANCE COMPANY PUSHING BOUNDARIES AND MIXING STYLES.

BY LIZ GOLDNER



The founders of Complexions Contemporary Ballet – a 24-year-old dance company based in New York City – believe that our complex world is becoming more like Complexions, as “it is becoming more and more fluid, more changeable, and more culturally interconnected than ever before,” they explain. Dance aficionados and those who enjoy innovative cultural events

can attend the company’s performance of *STARDUST: From Bach to Bowie* on April 29 at the Irvine Barclay Theatre, featuring dance pieces set to music by Johann Sebastian and Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, with a tribute to rock icon David Bowie.

Founded in 1994 by choreographers Dwight Rhoden and Desmond Richardson, Complexions reinvents dance through a mix of methods, styles and

cultures with roots in classical movements. The founders believe that dance should be about removing boundaries, while including open, evolving forms, reflecting numerous world cultures.

Complexions Contemporary Ballet has performed on five continents, in over 20 countries, and to more than 20 million television viewers. The company has received numerous awards including The *New York Times* Critics’ Choice Award.

For Complexions company member Candy Tong, performing in the Barclay event will be a homecoming. As a recent student at UC Irvine’s Dance Department in the school’s Claire Trevor School of the Arts, she was privileged to have performed on the Barclay stage.

In a phone interview from her San Francisco hometown, the 26-year-old dancer discussed her background as a dancer and lover of the arts. “From a very young age, my parents put me into dancing classes. I also drew, sang in a choir and played the piano. I am very grateful to them,” she said.

Tong began taking ballet classes at age three. “Then when I was nine years old, I decided that I wanted to be a dancer,” she said. “I told my mom and she was very supportive.”

She joined the pre-professional class of the San Francisco Ballet company, studying “with some of the best dance students in the city,” she said. Two years after joining the ballet school, Tong was cast in the company’s *Nutcracker Ballet* as Clara; a young girl who receives



Gray Dancers Candy Tong and Brandon Gray



PHOTO BY STEVEN TRUMON

foot two.”

Soon after, Tong was invited by Dwight and Desmond to join their programs at New York’s Joyce Theater. They then asked her to join the company after graduation. She became a Complexions company member in January 2018.

Tong has traveled all over the country and the world with Complexions, even performing in Kiev and Odessa. She loves the company’s philosophy about pushing boundaries and addressing political issues such as Black Lives Matter. And she enjoys performing for audience members who have never seen ballet before.

For Candy Tong, becoming a member of Complexions Contemporary Ballet is a dream come true... and a mission to inspire others through the art of dance.

Complexions Contemporary Ballet will perform at the Irvine Barclay Theatre on Friday, April 29 at 8 PM. To order tickets for this and other upcoming performances, check out its Get Ready It’s Showtime brochure. Or go to: www.thebarclay.org. Contact the Box Office, 949-854-4646.

4242 Campus Dr, Irvine, CA 92612.

a nutcracker as a present and then dreams of helping The Nutcracker defeat the Mouse King in a battle. “I was so excited to see my name on the company’s casting sheet,” she said. “I was beaming from ear to ear. I was not only the youngest girl to play Clara. I was the tallest at five foot six. And we performed in a large, beautiful opera house.”

Tong danced with the San Francisco Ballet company until 2011. “By then at age 15, I was at Level 8, the most serious level.” She left the company, and then lived in various cities, including Seattle and London, England, studying ballet, while auditioning for companies all over Europe and the United States. But a fractured metatarsal caused her to cease leading a peripatetic life.

As Tong was recovering from her injury, her family encouraged her to apply to college. She decided on UC Irvine as it has one of the best dance departments in the country, she explained. She attended UCI from 2014 to 2017, studying with two “very supportive instructors” –

Diane Diefendrfer, who has performed throughout Europe, Asia and the U.S., who favors George Balanchine roles, and Tong Wang who has performed with major dance companies in China and the United States.

“I spent two and a half years at UCI,” Tong said, “graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree.” From her first day there, her instructors said that she should be out in the professional dance world, and told her that they would help her get back out there.

“In my Freshman year, I attended a weeklong intensive Complexions workshop in Atlanta [a master class for dancers of all levels]. I immediately fell in love with Complexions, as the dancing style, combining classical ballet with hip hop, feels second nature to me. And as I’m five foot 10, curvy and not super skinny, it’s a struggle for me to fit into the norm [of ballet dancers]. But Complexions showcases the beauty of all sorts of dancers. One girl in the company is six foot two. One boy is five

Candy Tong



PHOTO BY JOE LYMAN

FOOD

ELEVATED CLASSICS

NEWLY OPENED SOL MEXICAN COCINA SHINING BRIGHT IN IRVINE.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

SOL Mexican Cocina in Irvine is showcasing classic recipes from Baja, California, with a modern twist.

Currently occupying the former El Torito Grille space on Main Street in Irvine, SOL Mexican Cocina offers reimagined Mexican dishes that speak to contemporary palettes, while paying respect to traditional recipes inspired from the coastal regions of Baja, California.

With a list of more than 40 different salsas to a robust selection of mariscos, which include grilled Spanish octopus and peel-to-eat shrimp, inspiration from authentic Baja cuisine is in every aspect of SOL's menu. SOL's Irvine location also offers a vibrant bar scene, with happy hour on rotation between 3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.

SOL Mexican Cocina is backed by the Xperience Restaurant Group, which also represents Chevy's, Acapulco, and El Torito restaurants, and has locations in Newport Beach, Playa Vista, Scottsdale, Denver and now Irvine. At its core, it is designed to transport guests to a sleek, upscale dining experience inspired by the Mexican coast.

The sleek, modern design of SOL Mexican Cocina is not accidental, according to Xperience's CEO Randy Sharpe.

Irvine Weekly spoke with Sharpe about his experience at the helm of these well-known brands, like SOL. As the former Vice President of Operations at El Torito between 2014 to 2017, Sharpe speaks from industry experience.

Having founded the Xperience Group in 2018, the firm also acquired several well-known brands including Alcopulco, Chevy's, El Torito Grill and the Laguna Beach-based Las Brisas.

From the complimentary tostadita (chips), paired with habanero salsa and a



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SOL MEXICAN COCINA

charro bean dip, the experience of flavors begins as guests take their seats.

"You're experiencing flavors and items that you would if you're entering the Baja coast on your way to Cabo," he said. "The chips are called Tostaditas, it's just more authentic. You have several different segments of Mexico that do things great

all the way from Sonora to the Baja coast, but if you go experience flavors of the Baja coast, you're going to find a more unique, bigger chip. We want it to be something special and memorable."

While the list of memorable menu items at SOL is expansive, the list of 17 specialty tacos stands alone.

Combinations range from the surf & turf-inspired Filet & Shrimp "El Jefe" Taco, which features a grilled Angus filet, two agave-chile shrimp, melted cheese, avocado and a roasted green chile salsa, to a spicy "popcorn" cauliflower taco, made with deep-fried beer-battered cauliflower, coconut-avocado salsa, pico de gallo, shredded cabbage, onions and cilantro.

Another SOL specialty taco menu standout is the "Canarditas" Duck Taco. This eye-catching taco is a whole deep-fried duck confit, served with tequila black-berry serrano salsa, topped with avocado, onion and cilantro.

SOL's Canarditas Duck Taco is an original item that's been on the menu since the restaurant was opened, according to Sharpe, who acquired the concept in 2018.

"The duck taco was a menu item that was on the menu when we acquired the concept, but the thought behind it is, how do you make something different and unique – something that you can't get anywhere else – something that's true to the brand?" he said. "I think you hit the nail on the head when you have this roasted duck leg with multiple tortillas, it really is a crowd favorite."

While all of SOL's specialty tacos are served a carte, the Canarditas is served with multiple tortillas, which can be made into multiple tacos due to the size of the duck confit.

As SOL welcomes the Irvine community, Sharpe was excited to see a return of normal regulations at SOL's recent Easter Brunch. In fact, this year was the first year restaurants were able to host service at full capacity since Easter 2019, and Sharpe, Xperience Group and the SOL staff are prepared to celebrate more positive milestones.

"I think what you see in the new SOL in Irvine is the evolution of the brand. It's staying true to the Baja coast, and when you walk in, you're right there in Cabo San Lucas," he said. "I think as we continue to open new SOL restaurants, you'll continue to see an evolution of that brand."

For now, Sharpe says SOL has no plans to add any fast-casual concepts but will be continuing to expand and draw inspiration from local recipes from Baja.

SOL Mexican Cocina is located 1910 Main Street, Irvine.

AI TECHNOLOGY GIVES IRVINE RANCH CONSERVANCY A CLEARER PICTURE OF NATURE

THANKS TO A GRANT FROM MICROSOFT, THE IRVINE RANCH CONSERVANCY IS UTILIZING AI TECHNOLOGY TO HELP IDENTIFY WILDLIFE LESS INVASIVELY.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

For more than 15 years, the Irvine Ranch Conservancy has made preservation of the natural environment, along with the research and protection of native wildlife, part of its core mission. Now, thanks to a \$5,000 grant from Microsoft, the IRC is utilizing artificial intelligence to help better understand the wildlife and natural areas it has vowed to protect for more than a decade.

Nathan Gregory, IRC Vice President and Chief Program Officer, spoke with Irvine Weekly about this new adoption of artificial intelligence technology and how its being utilized in Orange County.

Gregory explained that while the IRC has been studying the natural environment for more than a decade, Microsoft's AI technology has enabled scientists to work more efficiently with the data it collects.

Specifically, Microsoft's AI technology, which is a virtual GPU, is being utilized in wildlife monitoring cameras throughout the IRC. Gregory added that this has become a tremendous benefit to wildlife experts who normally have to access and go through the data manually – without knowing what the wildlife monitoring cameras actually captured.



PHOTO COURTESY OF IRVINE RANCH CONSERVANCY

Sifting through that footage takes hours of physical effort, and is often littered with what Gregory referred to as “trash” in terms of usable data on the research side.

“We’ve been doing this camera monitoring for more than a decade. We get hundreds of thousands of photos a year – and a lot of them they’re what we call “trash.” If there’s wind blowing or vegetation might trigger the cam-

era – someone has to sort through that manually,” he said. “At this stage, having access to Microsoft technology, we can do that initial step of sorting right off the bat.”

Catherine Le, IRC Monitoring and Research Program Coordinator, said the technology within the wildlife monitoring cameras has enabled the team to work more efficiently and effectively. “Wildlife monitoring cameras are an

extremely useful tool for assessing the health of native habitats and wildlife,” Le said. “We were looking into how we could reduce the photo-processing time and made the decision to upgrade our camera equipment, which would lead to better data collection.”

Rachel Kenny, IRC Project Manager, said this technology has allowed the team to focus more on analyzing the data.

“By collaborating with Microsoft and employing AI software, we dramatically increased the efficiency with which we process the camera trap data,” Kenny said. “This allows our team the capacity to ask more in-depth questions about wildlife dynamics in relation to factors such as our restoration efforts and increasing fire frequency, which in turn will inform land management decisions and improve our understanding of our wildlife communities and their habitats.”

Primarily, the technology helps identify medium to large size wildlife, which gives researchers insight to how the wildlife is interacting with the habitat, without actually needing to physically be there in the habitat.

“Traditional wildlife monitoring cameras are generally set up to capture larger animals like mountain lions and bobcats,” Kenny said. “Smaller animals such as rodents and snakes don’t have as prominent of a heat signature nor do they create as much motion to activate the camera, so they are harder to capture. We are developing pilot programs and testing new technology and experimental designs that will help us capture data on a wider range of animals, not just the charismatic megafauna.”

Gregory added that from his perspective, AI technology is becoming more sophisticated and its utility is becoming more nuanced in practice.

“A lot of this technology allows us to see the world through the eyes of the species we’re trying to study,” he said. “Things like infrared imaging can teach us things like how insects eat flowers – so it’s not how we view the world, it’s how the things we care about view the world.”

MUSIC

RIOT SQUAD

BIKINI KILL IS BACK BECAUSE WE NEED THEM.

BY BRETT CALLWOOD

It took Kathleen Hanna 20 years, between 1997 and 2017, before she decided that she wanted to play the music of Bikini Kill again. Between 1990 and '97, the band created music that was vital for the few people who heard it, but at the time, it didn't reach enough ears. However, in pioneering the riot grrrl sound and scene (drummer Tobi Vail is responsible for the "grrrl" spelling), Bikini Kill has a legacy that only blossomed in the years following their split.

It's not like Hanna went away though. The end of the '90s through mid 2000s saw her return with the phenomenal Le Tigre – the electro-rock group that released three magnificent albums. (Incidentally, Le Tigre are reuniting for the This Aint No Picnic fest at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena.) Since 2010, she's been playing with Bikini Kill's Kathi Wilcox in punk band the Julie Ruin, but that group is on hiatus while she focuses on the former two.

So that brings us back to the now. Hanna tells us that she finally feels like playing Bikini Kill's songs again, although she wishes that she didn't because the inspiration comes from the shitty state of the world.

"When Bikini Kill played in the '90s, there was a lot of violence and aggression towards us, and there were also a lot of people who loved us and were very supportive," Hanna says. "It's really amazing for me to come back as a singer so many years later and get so much love and positivity. I think people don't realize that we weren't a popular band – Bikini Kill was a very niche thing. People either really loved us or wanted to literally kill us. There were a lot of 'you guys don't even deserve to exist,' kind of sentiment. So to come back and be like, we do deserve to exist and actually, these songs – sadly, sadly, sadly, sadly – are feeling more relevant now than they did then. It's great that I



feel like singing the songs again when I didn't feel like singing them for 20 years, but jeez, I would rather that the world was a better place. I wish I could sing about flowers."

Yeah, it's not the time for flower songs just yet. Hanna says that she was performing with the Julie Ruin on the night that Trump was elected and then, during the Brett Kavanaugh hearings for the Supreme Court seat, she justifiably feared for women's reproductive rights. Clearly, the world still needed Bikini Kill.

"So much stuff and so many cops killing black people for no reason," Hanna says. "So many white nationalist vigilantes murdering people. So much stuff going on that I was like, I need to get this out. I'm so fucking pissed. I tend to either turn it on myself, or turn it into song. For me it's all about the live outlet. I like the Bikini Kill records, but for the most part I always considered us a live band. Connecting with the audience and especially after being so isolated – I

feel like I'm going to cry the whole time." Unfortunately, just as Bikini Kill was ready to tour, the pandemic hit. Like pretty much every band, its plans were trashed.

"It was awful," Hanna says. "We were about to go on tour and literally everything got shut down the day before. We'd been rehearsing and we were all in great shape, and we were sounding really great, and it was like, 'OK, you're going back home.' How do you make big plans that you have to make far in advance that involve a lot of people? I think that's what a lot of bands are dealing with. I was able to play music with some friends. I don't really jam, but I kind of learned to jam in COVID. But I was still a mess like everyone else. I wrote some songs every so often, just because I had to, but it was really hard to just focus."

Finally, they're able to get going again and all of that work hasn't been in vain. Hanna, Vail and Wilcox are joined by

new guitarist Erica Dawn Lyle so Bikini Kill is all-female now (Billy Karren played guitar in the '90s). That, Hanna says, naturally changes the sound a little.

"She's amazing," Hanna says of Lyle. "I can't tell you how it feels to stand on stage and play songs that are so familiar and yet so far away. We're older now, we have a new guitar player, so there's a certain different excitement in the songs. When you're on stage standing in the whirlwind of the songs, it's a joyous feeling because it also feels like a triumphant return, like Rocky running up the steps. Maybe we don't suck. Maybe we got better. There's something about being older that makes me appreciate these experiences, especially travel, so much more than I did back in my 20s."

It's clearly different now. Bikini Kill is performing at venues, like the Greek Theatre, around the country, rather than basements. The crowds are loving, rather than angry meathead men calling them "manhaters."

"We've grown an audience that's very intergenerational," Hanna says. "I think that's one of the most satisfying parts of the tour for me. Right now, everybody is so fucking focused on 'you're a boomer, you're Gen X, you're a millennial – here's the jokes about millennials. Here are the jokes about Gen Z.' It's all marketing. It's, let's divide and conquer. We're all on social media, just feeding into it. So to have an audience that's intergenerational where they're all in the same room, enjoying, critiquing, whatever, the music that is happening, feels really positive to me. I just want to be part of positive stuff, because there's so much evil around. I want to bring joy and righteous anger. Anger's not a bad thing. We should all be angry."

Thank god, then, that Bikini Kill is back.

Bikini Kill performs at 8 p.m., on Friday, April 29 at the Greek Theatre. The Olympia, Washington shows will be a benefit for the Interfaith Works Nightly Shelter – shelters for unhoused people who are trans or cisgender women. Hanna also has a company called tees-4togo, which sells T-shirts for the \$40 that it costs to provide a woman in Togo, West Africa with an education.

ARTS

JAZZ PHOTOGRAPHY
AT THE GREAT PARK GALLERYA POWERFUL EXPRESSION OF THE HUMAN
SPIRIT

BY LIZ GOLDNER

52nd Street
at Night Manhattan,
New York, 1948PHOTOS COURTESY OF WILLIAM P. GOTTLIEB/IRA AND LEONORE S. GERSHWIN
FUND COLLECTION, MUSIC DIVISION, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

"52nd Street, Jazz and the Photography of William Gottlieb" features compelling images of mid-20th century jazz greats, including Louis Armstrong, Billie Holiday

and Charlie Parker.

But the exhibition is much more than pictures of jazz celebrities in the 1940s, shot when they were breaking into the mainstream of American culture. It is about depicting the musicians' charisma

and joyful devotion to their art form – while performing and even posing for photographer Gottlieb (1917-2006). While these dozens of photos were taken with bulky analog equipment nearly 80 years ago, they express so much creative

energy and vitality today that viewers are naturally drawn into them.

As the show's wall labels explain, "Manhattan's 52nd Street formed a hub of musical creativity in the years immediately following World War II. It was here where legacies were created giving recognition to musicians such as Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Ella Fitzgerald, and other emerging jazz geniuses of the era."

The didactics further extol the valiant efforts of Gottlieb who haunted New York's jazz clubs in the 1940s. Working as assistant editor and unpaid photographer at *Down Beat* magazine, he shot more than 1,000 photos of jazz performers, most of them African American, along with club doormen, managers and the mostly white audience members. "Gottlieb's images are rare glimpses into the New York jazz scene of the 1930s and 40s and helped found a tradition of jazz photography that remains a vital subgenre today," the show's didactics explain.

Had Gottlieb not fallen in love with jazz, befriended the musicians, and decided to photograph them, along with their magnetic jazz club scenes, images of many performers of that era might not be preserved for posterity. Exhibition curator Benjamin Cawthra, Ph.D. explained that Gottlieb revisited the photos in 1979, and soon after published his book *The Golden Age of Jazz*, presenting his historic images to the general public for the first time. He donated his jazz photographs – possibly the most widely reproduced images of jazz musicians from the mid-20th century – to the Library of Congress in 1997. Filmmaker Ken Burns used many of the photos for his 2001 PBS documentary, *Jazz: The Story of America's Music*.

Cawthra added that the pictures not only displayed stories; they also helped to shape them, as the images often provided publicity for emerging musical artists. He explains in *Blue Notes in Black and White: Photography and Jazz* © 2011, that jazz photographers may "seize a moment just as their subjects do in the midst of a performance" (recalling "the decisive moment" quote by French photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson). As Gottlieb wrote in 1995: "I learned to shoot very carefully. I knew the music, I knew

Ella and
Dizzy

Charlie Parker



Frank Sinatra

Louis
Armstrong

Billie Holiday

the musicians, I knew in advance when the right moment would arrive. It was purposeful shooting."

Perhaps the most striking picture in the exhibition is *52nd Street at Night: Manhattan, New York*. The color shot of jazz's main passageway displays a row of several jazz clubs' neon signs, which are simultaneously reflected onto the rain-soaked street. The photo evokes paintings from the Impressionist era, particularly those of Vincent Van Gogh who often created urban scenes at night.

Gottlieb's portrait of Billie Holiday belt-

ing out a song, which Cawthra says may be the most widely reproduced photograph of her, captures her beauty and anguish. The contrasting photo of singer Ella Fitzgerald performing, with Dizzy Gillespie blissfully looking on, reveals the two more sublime and content performers.

A photo of the young, serious Thelonious Monk (composer of the renowned *Round Midnight*) at his piano in 1947 helped give him much-needed publicity – along with Gottlieb's articles about him in *Down Beat*. Cawthra wrote: "Monk's

distinctive voice on his instrument, his gentle and idiosyncratic persona, and his lasting legacy as a jazz composer make him one of the most important American musicians."

Belgian-Romani guitarist Django Reinhardt playing his guitar while peering intensely at the audience is included in this stunning exhibition. There also is a photo of an exuberant Lionel Hampton playing percussion, alongside Arnett Cobb on the saxophone, and another of the dapper pianist Duke Ellington preparing for a performance.

Viewing a portrait of Charlie Parker intently playing his saxophone, you can almost hear his "inventiveness, speed, and command of jazz's harmonic and rhythmic language," as Cawthra wrote for the exhibition. And the compassionate photo of Louis Armstrong, playing his trumpet with his eyes wide open, portrays the musician when he was young but already confident and successful.

Other photos depict singers Cab Calloway, Mary Lou Williams, Nat King Cole and Frank Sinatra, guitarist Josh White, Harry James on the trumpet, Benny Goodman on the clarinet and several others.

If this exhibition was displayed in a larger venue, the photos might be accompanied by performance videos. (The Smithsonian's Museum of African American History contains numerous videos of pioneering black performers.) Yet the images are so powerful that they stand alone in their artistry and excellence, expressing the truism that art, whether it is visually or musically oriented, is a powerful expression of the human spirit.

"52nd Street, Jazz and the Photography of William Gottlieb" is on view through May 1. Great Park Gallery, Palm Court Art Complex, Orange County Great Park, Irvine; Thu. & Fri., noon-4 p.m.; Sat. & Sun., 10 a.m.-4 p.m.; free. cityofirvine.org/orange-county-great-park/arts-exhibitions.

ENTERTAINMENT

FANTASTIC BEASTS: THE SECRETS OF DUMBLEDORE – MORE MESS THAN MAGIC

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(WARNER BROS.)

Fantastic Beasts: *The Secrets of Dumbledore* is the third installment from the Harry Potter offshoot based on a Magizoology textbook that at this point, has very little to do with either fantastic beasts or where to find them. For the most part, the series is a bit of a disjointed mess laden with small Pottermore morsels meant to feed the fandom. But it really only teases the palate. Though the newest film attempts to right some of the previous wrongs by harkening back to the franchise's origins, there isn't enough lore to keep the story coherent.

Written by J.K. Rowling and Steve Kloves and directed by David Yates, *The Secrets of Dumbledore* picks up where the second installment left off: with the revelation that Obscurial Credence Barebone (Ezra Miller) is actually Aurelius Dumbledore, a long-lost Dumbledore who was

somehow betrayed by his birth family. The truth is a bit more complicated, as both Albus (Jude Law) and his brother Aberforth (Richard Coyle) have their fair share of dark secrets.

The real crux of the movie centers on Gellert Grindelwald, a role that is as cursed as the Defense Against the Dark Arts position at Hogwarts, as it's been cast for a third – and hopefully – final time. Now played by Mads Mikkelsen, Grindelwald seems set on destroying the Muggle world for... reasons. His blind hatred and distaste for non-magical folks is evident, but unclear. What is clear is that he needs to be stopped. Also for... reasons. Though Mikkelsen is obviously not the first actor in the Grindelwald role, he is the best suited. His menacing demeanor is more nuanced than Johnny Depp's previous attempts, which were exorbitant at best.

Sadly, the most powerful man in the

magical world and the only one capable of deterring Grindelwald, Professor Albus Dumbledore (Law), is not up for the task. He is held back by the bonds of a blood pact made when he and Grindelwald were young. And so, they must have others do their dirty work, relying on ineffective strategies carried out by questionable people.

In this installment, Newt Scamander (Eddie Redmayne), his story and his love life take a backseat, as his sweetheart Tina is completely set aside in lieu of hula-dancing scorpions and trips to Hogwarts. Newt becoming a secondary character in his own story and the removal of one of the franchise's main characters is just one of the film's many faults.

The story structure is a bit of a mess, filled with plot holes, continuity gaps and logistical issues. Small problems,

such as timeline questions between story setting and the age of Professor Minerva McGonagall (Fiona Glascott) already had the fanbase reeling. But this might be the least of the film's problems and unanswered questions.

For example, half the film deals with a turbulent election campaign, but later, the selection of a candidate is made by a rare, magical creature. Why is there a correctional system that involves murderous, dancing scorpions? Why are they trained to kill visitors? And what is Queenie's (Alison Sudol) reasoning for joining Grindelwald? Certainly as someone with a natural talent for "Legilimency" (the practice of using magic to enter another person's mind), she can see that he does not have her best interests at heart? Also, for a secret society, why do they use fireworks at every turn? Won't Muggles see that? The film just seems to be a collection of set pieces with a loose story to tie it all together.

On a more positive note, *Dumbledore* does finally give fans what they want: more *Harry Potter*. With trips back to Hogwarts, visits to the Room of Requirement, and fragments of John Williams' iconic score, a starved fandom is finally fed as the film dips both into the books and the movies for its lore. The movie shines in its ability to expand the world beyond the corridors of Hogwarts, too. Whereas *Harry Potter* stayed mostly within the hallowed hallways of the great school with occasional visits to the Burrow or Hogsmead, this tale has the world as its playground. The scale of which *Fantastic Beasts* is able to construct its story is ambitious, and it helps build upon the Wizarding World.

Fantastic Beasts: The Secrets of Dumbledore is a spectacle, but it isn't a very well told story. It's the result of not taking the time to carefully construct a narrative that's both respectful of the fanbase or its origins. Though it is filled with fully-realized characters who are brought to life by capable actors, the shabby writing and careless world building is a bigger threat to the Wizarding World than any dark force. How Warner Bros. will even attempt to squeeze out two more films from this empty husk of a franchise is going to be a fantastic magic trick all its own.