


FIRST PHASE OF THE GREAT PARK FRAMEWORK • SEASONAL DECADENCE AT SOLSTICE • VALENTINE'S DAY ROUND-UP

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IRVINE MOVING INTO FIRST PHASE OF GREAT PARK FRAMEWORK

THE GREAT PARK BOARD OF DIRECTORS DIRECTED CITY STAFF TO MOVE INTO PHASE I OF THE GREAT PARK FRAMEWORK, WHICH INCLUDES ARDA SITE DEMOLITION. THE COUNCIL IS SET TO GET A MORE REALISTIC LOOK AT THE FINANCIAL IMPACT OF THE GREAT PARK'S FIRST PHASE OF DEVELOPMENT IN FEBRUARY.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

On Tuesday, Jan. 10, the Irvine City Council received a status update on the Great Park's new Framework and design concepts. The Council was also tasked with making decisions on the Framework's most recent conceptual designs, which included the ARDA site, aspects of the Cultural Terrace West, and concepts for future food and beverage options.

Other core features within the park will include a 14,000 seat, \$130 million amphitheater, a USA Water Polo aquatics facility, and a 70-acre Farm Hub, to be used for farm-to-table dining options.

Within the next few months, the city will begin working toward ARDA site demolition, which will become home to a sprawling botanical garden, with a veterans park and memorial.

Pete Carmichael, Great Park Director, said he expects to deliver a ball-park cost estimate relating to the first phase of the Framework sometime in February.

"We aim to come back on February 24 with preliminary financial and lease terms," he said.

Since the Council approved the Great Park's new Framework plan with a 4-1



vote in July, Irvine has spent about \$1.2 million on conceptualizing aspects of landscape architecture, engineering, and infrastructure planning, according to a staff report.

Carmichael added that city staff has been working with several agencies, including the Navy, the Federal Aviation Administration, and Southern California Edison to ensure utilities and land use is properly coordinated for the incoming

development at the Great Park.

"Some of the hardest work is the work that's less visible, the staff is working with an alphabet soup of regulatory agencies and interested parties – most notable is utilities Irvine Ranch Water District and Edison to make sure there's wet and dry utilities for the future of the park," Carmichael said.

While no official price tag is set, Carmichael said Irvine has an estimated

surplus of \$625 million on hand and he expects the project to be completed in five to seven years. Carmichael also hoped the Council could provide staff with direction as the project moves forward.

"We think we have about \$625 million over the next five years, and we'll be back before the board in 60 days with a plan that we think matches our available sources and available uses of funds with city resources to get that done, in the next five to seven years," he said.

In its first phase of development, Irvine will focus on the botanical gardens and veterans memorial which will be placed on the ARDA site.

While the project is still in its conceptual design phase, Irvine Mayor Farrah Khan said she has heard from the community that there is fear that money will be spent on larger projects. Khan said she wanted to assure the community that the city was prioritizing the aesthetic features of the park, such as the water features, lakes, great meadow and forests.

"When it comes to the timeline and financing of the Cultural Terrace west – I keep hearing from our Great Park folks that they want the park features – and they are concerned that money and time are spent somewhere else and not on the park features," she said.

Carmichael said he does not view the proposed Cultural Terrace projects, like the Flying Leatherneck Museum as "supplanting." He added the city plans to deliver a financial phasing plan that will dictate the timeline at which projects get greenlit, however, he said the city is focused on delivering a plan based on feedback from the community.

"One of the things we're most focused on is a phasing plan that really delivers on those core park features that the residents mentioned – the Heart of The Park area, some of the passive areas that are open for enjoyment, and not programmable, like the sport park," he said. "We think we can bring a plan in late February that delivers a lot of those – but there's enough resources to do what we want as well."

The Great Park Framework Phase 1 plan is expected to encompass approximately 300 acres, beginning with the 125-acre ARDA site.

ARTS

A SNAPSHOT OF MILITARY HISTORY IN IRVINE

TAKEN AT THE FORMER EL TORO MARINE CORPS AIR STATION, 'THE GREAT PICTURE' MEASURES 32 X 111 FEET. AN EXHIBIT DEDICATED TO THE MAKING OF THE HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPH IS CURRENTLY ON DISPLAY AT THE GREAT PARK ARTIST STUDIOS.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

A picture is worth a thousand words, as the saying goes. For the creators behind *The Great Picture*, the world's largest photograph, a picture is worth decades of military history in Irvine.

The image, taken at the former El Toro Marine Corps Air Station with the world's largest pinhole camera, is recognized internationally, traveling to dozens of international exhibits over the years.

Depicting a sectional panoramic view of the control tower and runways at the former El Toro Marine Corps Air Station in Irvine, the photo, officially known as 'The Great Picture' measures 32 feet tall and 111 feet wide.

Jacques Garnier, an Orange County-based photographer involved with the creation of *The Great Picture*, spoke with *Irvine Weekly* to share his experience as a member of the Legacy Project Collaborative.

At its infancy, The Legacy Project Collaborative was a group of Orange County-based photographers – Jerry Burchfield, Mark Chamberlain, Jacques Garnier, Rob Johnson, Douglas McCulloh, and Clayton Spada – who were given access to El Toro for the purpose of art-historical documentation.

Garnier and his colleagues within the Legacy Project would become the last eyes to document all of the nearly 2,000 buildings on the former marine base.

The inspiration to document the after-life of the El Toro Marine base, which is



now the Great Park, came from the late Jerry Burchfield, Garnier said.

Burchfield, who died in 2009, was a decorated Orange County-based photographer and professor of photography at Cypress College.

Speaking to *Irvine Weekly*, Garnier explained that Burchfield began taking his photography classes to the Irvine-based military base for photo shoots, after its closure.

"It was basically a ghost town at that time, it had been completely closed. Nobody really had much access to it," Garnier explained. "[Burchfield] started thinking 'this needs to be preserved somehow photographically.'"

As the Legacy Project formed, Garnier explained the group began "systematically" photographing every square inch of the base in an effort to preserve its history in real-time. Moreso, the group also wanted to document the aspect of

ongoing development surrounding the base.

"We would do perimeter shoots where we'd walk the perimeter of the 4,800 acre site – we would do this once a year," he explained. "There are a couple big runways there – we would follow the runways and shoot once a year in four directions, and the idea was to document the changes in time."

As for the photographic methodology behind the Great Picture, the curators sought to use a photography phenomenon known as camera obscura, in which light is used to imprint the image on a surface.

The Legacy Project Collaborative captured the image by transforming a military aircraft hangar at the former El Toro Marine Corps Air Station into the world's largest pinhole camera.

Building #115, a former F-18 Fighter Jet hanger, was enlisted for this project.

Captured on a custom 3,375 foot canvas, the project required the application of 80 liters of gelatin silver halide emulsion, along with the help of dozens of volunteers and artists.

In terms of cost, the project ran on generous donations of materials, equipment and volunteer time.

"For example the chemicals we needed – 90 liters of liquid light to process this image – that stuff is \$100 a liter – we got it donated," Garnier said. "So, we were all very resourceful, we didn't have the money personally to do it, so we had to find the money."

The final image was taken with a six-millimeter aperture, with a 35-minute exposure, developed in an olympic sized-pool developing tray using, "600 gallons of developer and 1,200 gallons of fixer," according to Garnier.

Though he says he was brought into the project as an "outsider", Garnier remains one of three original surviving members of the Legacy Project.

The project began with a 15 year commitment to photographically preserving El Toro in 2002.

"We decided to make a 15 year commitment to photographing the base," he said. "We got really lucky, we got very friendly with the BRAC (Base Reassignment & Closure) commander – he was the person in charge of overseeing the closure of the base – he liked what we were doing and eventually we had pretty much 24/7 access to the base."

For Garnier, the experience was a once-in-a-life time experience.

"Imagine you're an 8-year-old kid and you've been given the keys to the candy store," Garnier said. "It was like we'd died and gone to heaven – you don't get these opportunities given to you very often in life, if ever."

The Legacy Project has documented more than 1,800 structures on the former marine base, submitting more than 150,000 photographs to date. Currently, UC Irvine has taken control of the archives.

Go and Do: The Great Picture: Making The World's Largest Photograph is on display at the Great Park Artists Studios until May 7. Great Park Artists Studios is open on Saturday and Sunday, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. The Great Park is located at 8000 Great Park Blvd.



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FOOD

SPOTLIGHTING SEASONAL DECADENCE AT SOLSTICE IN IRVINE

AKIN TO THE MEANING OF SOLSTICE, WHICH IS TRANSLATED TO PEAK, THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND THE MENU AT THE IRVINE-BASED KITCHEN AND BAR IS TO CURATE LOCAL INGREDIENTS AT THE PEAK OF THE SEASON.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

Opened in 2021, at The Boardwalk in Irvine on the corner of DuPont and Jamboree, Solstice Season Kitchen and Bar is spotlighting the best of seasonal ingredients all year round.

Akin to the meaning of Solstice, which is translated to peak, the philosophy behind the menu at the Irvine-based kitchen and bar is to curate local ingredients at the peak of the season.

The sleek, modern-industrial interior space was designed by Los Angeles-based hospitality architecture firm Preen. Floor-to-ceiling glass panels look into its open kitchen – the focus of Solstice is clearly on the food.

With a cocktail program led by bar manager Dylan Dinsmore, Solstice's cocktail menu also follows a seasonal methodology. For Dinsmore, it's of utmost importance to make all of the juices and syrups used to create the restaurant's signature cocktails in-house.

At 5,030 square-feet, the space at Solstice has an indoor and outdoor vibe, which is designed to offer a variety of dining areas that mimic that changing season. These characterized dining zones are color coordinated and seamlessly blend into one another.

Aside from the main dining spaces, Solstice also offers a private dining area which seats up to two dozen guests. The private dining area is surrounded by temperature controlled wine cellars and



Solstice

a pair of dining vignettes outside.

The seasonal menus at Solstice were created by Culinary Director Chef Demetrio Zavala and Executive Chef Brittany Valles. You may know Zavala from his appearances – and victories – on Food Network TV's *Chopped*, including *Chopped: Grudge Match* and *Chopped: Beat Bobby Flay*.

Zavala and Valles debuted a menu steeped in the Ayurvedic philosophy of *ritucharya*, which is a unique practice of eating with the seasons.

Currently serving its fall and winter

menu on a nightly basis, guests will find elevated dishes, featuring starters like Parker House Rolls with plum glaze and cultured ginger butter and Mason Jar Deviled Eggs served alongside house-made toasted focaccia and relish.

Alternative starter options include the Branzino Ceviche with shiitake mignonette, which is served with radish, cranberry gelée and dashi broth. The Celery Root Tartare with chermoula, red wine vinaigrette and celery root chips is also a popular dish.

Main courses include an assortment of artisan pastas – Poached Lobster Gnoc-



chi, Braised Wagyu Pappardelle and Carrot Spaghetti. Not to be overlooked is the vegetarian-steak dish Celery Root Mignon.

Aside from dinner, which is served nightly, between 4 p.m. and 9 p.m., Solstice also offers a robust lunch menu Monday through Friday from 11 a.m. - 3 p.m.

While lunch and dinner are mostly daily occurrences at Solstice, its Sunday brunch is growing in popularity. The "Boozy Brunch" cocktail menu consists of a Four Roses Bourbon Spiked Coffee with vanilla and whipped cream, along with The Tea Service cocktail, which is made with Leblon Cachaca, Aperol, turmeric ginger tea, Peychaud's Bitters and crystallized ginger.

With an elevated food and cocktail lineup, Solstice has quickly become one of Orange County's most well-known haunts.

Solstice is located at The Boardwalk in Irvine at 18555 Jamboree Rd.

TREAT YOUR VALENTINE WITH THESE AWESOME IRVINE EATS

WITH VALENTINE'S DAY APPROACHING, NOW IS THE PERFECT TIME TO MAKE A RESERVATION FOR A PERFECT NIGHT ON THE TOWN. HERE ARE SOME IRVINE-BASED OPTIONS THAT WILL BE SURE TO SATISFY ANYONE'S SPECIAL SOMEONE.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

Cheferbly

Cheferbly is a new, Irvine-based private dining experience curated by Orange County native Kevin Kim. The goal of the Kim's Cheferbly platform is to "demystify" private dining, while allowing guests to try exclusive pop-up dinners spotlighting private chefs.

"The process for booking catered dinners was so complicated, time-consuming, and seemingly antiquated, given restaurant reservations can be made with the click of a button," adds Kim. "I wanted to simplify the relationship between private chefs and consumers by creating a solution that would make their service accessible to everyone. Cheferbly was created to bridge that gap."

For more information on private Cheferbly's Valentine's Day Events in Orange County, please visit Cheferly.com

Kura Sushi

Kura Sushi is well-known for its rotating sushi bar concept, and its adorable robotic table assistant Kur-B the KuraBot, which was introduced in July. This year, Kura Sushi is celebrating Valentine's Day with limited time Valentine's Day Chirashi bowls. The bowls, wrapped with a bright red bow, are filled with a variety of seafood.

Kura Sushi will be offering these special V-Day themed bowls between Feb. 10 and Feb. 14. They're stuffed with shrimp, real crab and crab claw, salmon, tuna, eel, red snapper, scallop, tamago, ikura



Cheferbly's Caviar Brioche

and cucumber. Guests will also find a heart-shaped ramekin inside these specially-themed Chirashi Bowls.

Kura Sushi in Irvine is located at 2700 Alton Parkway #133

Monday - Friday 11:30 a.m. - 10 p.m.

Twenty Eight

Three words: Wine. Whisky. Wagyu. 19530 Jamboree Rd, Irvine, CA 92612
Wednesday - Thursday 4 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
Friday - Saturday 4 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.

Solstice Kitchen + Bar

Currently serving its fall and winter menu on a nightly basis, guests will find elevated dishes, featuring starters like Parker House Rolls with plum glaze and cultured ginger butter and Mason Jar Deviled Eggs served alongside house-made toasted focaccia and relish.

Alternative starter options include the Branzino Ceviche with shiitake mignon-

ette, which is served with radish, cranberry gelée and dashi broth. The Celery Root Tartare with chermoula, red wine vinaigrette and celery root chips is also a popular dish.

Solstice is located at The Boardwalk in Irvine at 18555 Jamboree Rd.

Lunch, Monday through Friday 11 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Brunch, Sunday only 10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Dinner, nightly - 4 p.m. - 9 p.m.

Puesto

Thanks to its master brewer-backed cervecería, a well-rounded cocktail menu and some incredible Mexico City-style tacos, Puesto has become one of Orange County's most well-respected eateries.

How respected? In addition to a decade of service, Puesto has another milestone to celebrate in 2022 - a quest for 20 million tacos sold. In April, the *San Diego Tribune* reported the company had sold

approximately 18.3 million tacos since 2012 - roughly 1.8 million tacos annually.

With a few locations in Orange County, including two in Irvine inside Los Olivos Shopping Center and Park Place, taking advantage of Puesto's tequila and mezcal flights seems like an incredible way to spend any Valentine's Day.

8577 Irvine Center Dr., Irvine, CA 92618

Sunday - Thursday: 11 a.m. - 9 p.m.

Friday - Saturday 11 a.m. - 10 p.m.

Hive & Honey Rooftop Bar

Boasting spectacular rooftop views of Irvine, Hive & Honey is a must for any date night. With access to Heirloom Farmhouse Kitchen, Hive & Honey is the perfect way to begin a relaxing evening admiring the sunset with that special someone.

7905 Irvine Center Drive Irvine, CA 92618

Tuesday - Thursday: 4 p.m. - 10 p.m.

Friday - Saturday: 4 p.m. - 12 a.m.

Postino WineCafe

Welcoming guests with a boastful umbrella-lined outdoor patio, the recently opened Postino, a new 5,200 square foot "WineCafe" at Park Place in Irvine, looks as desirable from the outside as it does from inside.

With the opening of her first location in California, Postino Co-Founder Lauren Bailey explained to *Irvine Weekly* the "WineCafe" has expanded out of Arizona, and is designed to accommodate casual meetings with friends, dinner dates, or simply a quiet place to work and enjoy a glass of wine.

Postino at Park Place is located at 2981 Michelson Dr, Ste. E, Irvine

Daily 11 a.m. - 11 p.m.

Bosscat Kitchen & Libations and TEN Sushi + Cocktail Bar

Having celebrated a dual grand opening at its newest location at Lakeshore in August, Bosscat Kitchen & Libations and TEN Sushi + Cocktail Bar has been a go-to for Orange County nightlife for years.

Designed like a modern whiskey room, the establishment features more than 5,000 square feet of restaurant space and 1,200 square foot outdoor patio.

Lakeshore is located at 18101 Von Karman Ave.

11 a.m. - 10 p.m.

MUSIC

POP GOES THE MAESU!

WORLD-POP STAR MAESU RELEASES NEW SINGLE AS HE HEADS OUT ON TOUR.

BY BRETT CALLWOOD

Atlanta-bred, L.A.-based singer, songwriter and producer Maesu (pronounced ME-soo) pops onto our Zoom interview like a blur of pink. Sharply dressed and looking dapper in a pink jacket and similarly colored sunglasses, the man obviously pays a lot of attention to his appearance.

He is, after all, a lover not a fighter. His smooth lyrics, which often delve into life and love, the latter in all its forms, attest to that. He's also an immediately likable soul – all smiles and good vibes. He should be happy – he had a good 2022 and it's looking increasingly like he'll have a great 2023.

Maesu began his musician journey when he was in high school, influenced by a friend who was knocking out great stuff and getting attention for it.

"He was uploading it to YouTube and everyone was receiving it," Maesu says. "Something in me was just, 'you know what – I want to do that too.' So I started there. At first it was just because I thought it was cool, and then as I did it, everyone else kinda petered out. Since high school, this was my Plan A. I never came out with a Plan B at all. And here we are."

Not having a Plan B sounds great, committed, in retrospect. But parents usually want their kids to have more solid career plans. However, having late Temptations legend David Ruffin for a cousin offers some family perspective regarding the music industry.

"It was predicted that I was going to be into music for real," he says. "My mom used to encourage me to take piano and trombone lessons at the Birmingham (Georgia) Jazz Hall of Fame. Every weekend, I used to walk a literal mile to the Jazz Hall of Fame to take piano and trombone lessons. It's funny because it seems like a lot of my musical startings were from me being just like, 'that's



cool.' I wanted to mimic what I just saw. I wanted to learn certain songs. Like, my favorite songs. I wanted to learn to play just them, and it progressed from there."

Being related to a great like Ruffin gave Maesu, he says, a close example of what a star looks like, and what is possible. He's certainly going his own way though, with a sound that he calls "world pop."

"It's really an amalgamation of everything around me, put into one," he says. "I live a more nomadic lifestyle now – I'm all across the world. I'll probably be in Ghana for a month working with Amarae on her project, or I'll be in London working with Ayra Starr, or wherever I may be. Or just visiting a random place in Spain, for some period of time for a love connection or whatever it may be. I'm just all of those things around me put into one. I let go of the concept of anchoring myself

into a specific patch of dirt. I'm Alabama, or I'm Los Angeles, or New York. I'm me, and I see my home as the people around me and the people I surround myself with."

That sound is on display in new single "Sex on GPS," a provocatively titled ditty that actually works on a number of levels.

"What I like to do, at least my formula with pop music, is write the song in layers," Maesu says. "So if someone wanted to enjoy the song on that first layer of the cake, they can. It's about sex with me on location please. It's just a nice, sexy record. If you wanted to take it one more layer, the song is about me beckoning for sensual validation in a strained relationship. That was a real life thing – I was in a long distance relationship and it was quite strained. And to add a third layer to it, if you look at the lyrics, I'm speak-

ing Spanish at certain times, sometimes a little French in there and also a lot of black American culture – when I say world pop, that's what I mean. I think the point of pop music is to identify with as many people as possible."

The song was recorded on Maesu's family property in Eastman, Georgia, and it's going to be a part of a bigger Jampak project – a pair of EPs.

"I have two EPs coming this year, and we're calling them *Jampak*," he says. "Like, *Jampak Spring '23*, and *Jampak Summer '23*. They're like tasters – appetizers, for the different sounds that I journey to. We wanted to figure out a way to package an eclectic wave of sound into one, to make it more comprehensible for listeners. We all like to understand. That's where we find comfort. So if it's too all over the place, or too difficult to understand, people may fear it."

Though from Georgia, Maesu acknowledges the influence that Southern California has had on him and his music.

"Los Angeles pushes me to dream bigger," he says. "That's what I love about here – there's always a bigger fish. So even when you get to the most beautiful locations to make music, there's always up to go in Los Angeles. I do enjoy that a lot. I've been here since 2016, back and forth. It's not even a second home, because the home is myself. But this is a place that I keep returning to. It's a hub for the world, so it makes sense to make world pop music here."

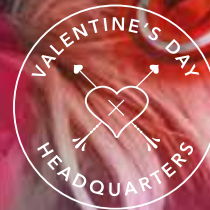
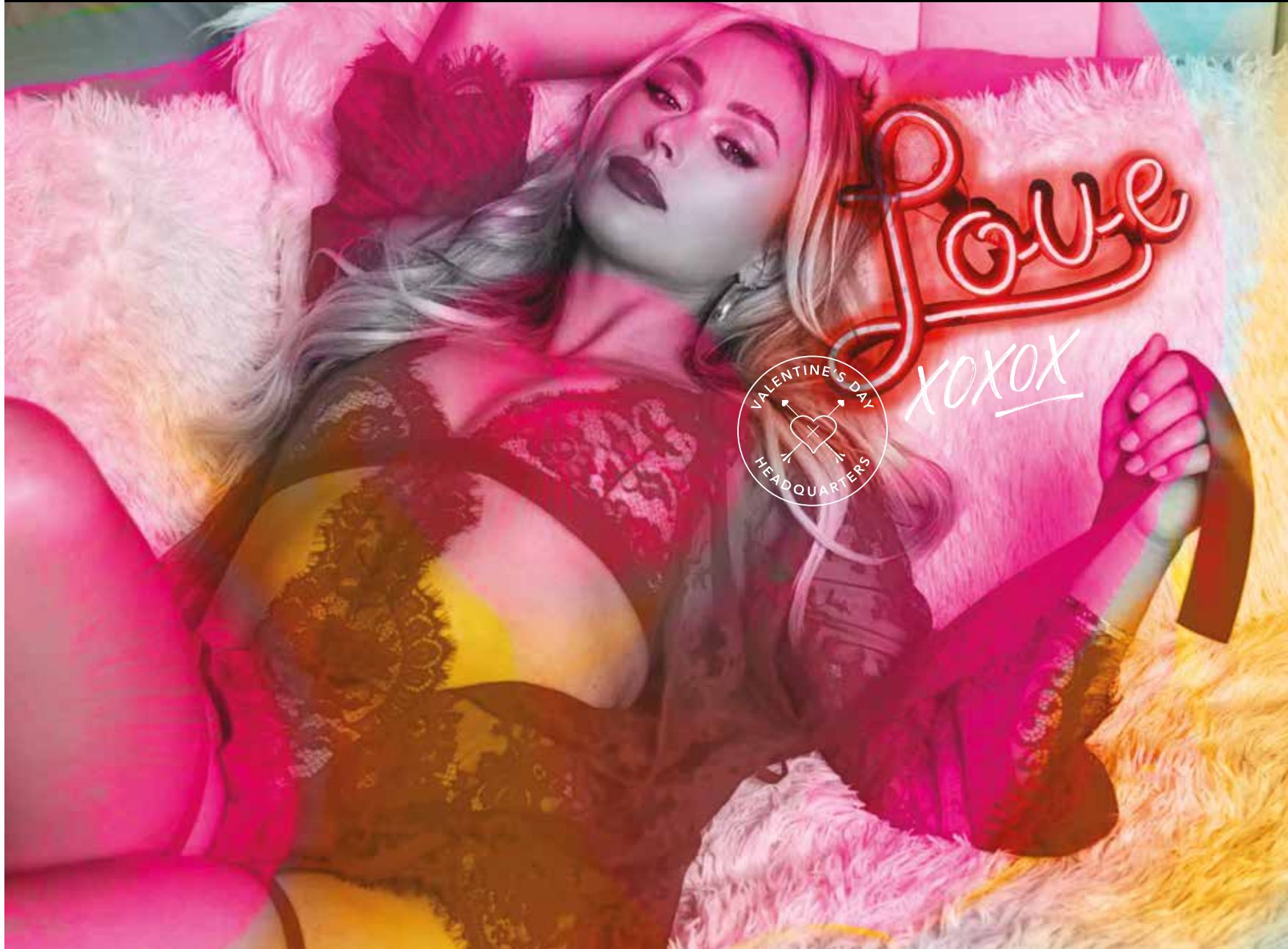
Maesu is about to go on tour with like-minded soul Teo, and those will undoubtedly be great shows. He plans to spend Valentine's day wearing more pink, falling in love, and listening to his favorite slow jams ("Get it Together" by 702, "Why" by Ria Sean and Ayra Starr, and, of course, "Sex on GPS"). And after that – more new music.

"That is the beautiful thing about having a more nomadic lifestyle," he says. "A lot of it is no-telling. From here, we strive to make it to the Coachella stage – that's the big dream this next quarter. Just more music right now. And being able to take the music and bring people along on a more visual journey, as well. So being able to release more elaborate visuals."

We can't wait.

Maesu's "Sex on GPS" single is out now.

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ENTERTAINMENT

THAT RETRO SHOW: THE RETURN OF VELMA, WILLOW AND 'HANGING OUT' IN THE BASEMENT

STREAMING SERVICES ARE BRINGING NEW SPINS ON CLASSIC SHOWS – WITH MIXED RESULTS.

BY ERIN MAXWELL



an easy win for networks, streaming services and the audience. But if done wrong, they become the ire of fans who feel like their memories have been toyed with, and they have no qualms sharing these feelings on social media. This month, we review *That '90s Show*, *Velma* and *Willow*, a trio of shows that have had their moments as trending topics bringing back classic characters with very mixed results.

That '90s Show (Netflix)

Back for more 420 humor, bedroom rock posters of yore and 30-year-old pop culture references, *That* (change decade here) *Show* returns to the fictional suburb of Point Place, Wisconsin where the Foreman family's basement is once again crawling with stoned teens looking for something to do, now some 20 years after their parents did it.

The follow-up series to *That '70s Show* follows the exploits of Leia Foreman (Callie Haverda), daughter of Eric and Donna, as she spends the summer with her grandparents Kitty (Debra Jo Rupp) and Red (Kurtwood Smith). She quickly gathers a group of confidants that include Gwen (Ashley Aufderheide), Ozzie (Reyn Doi), couple Nikki (Sam Morelos) and Nate (Maxwell Acee Donovan), and even a Kelso of her very own (Mace Coronel). Soon enough, they are going to raves, wearing flannels, and doing all the things writers born in 1989 think '90s kids did.

Most of the gags come from fatigued retro references – one after another after another. Yeah, the original show

Streaming services, cable TV and Primetime television are fighting for your viewership now more than ever. UNBINGED is here

to help you weed through it all, with reviews of the latest shows that highlight what we love, what we hate and what we love to hate-watch, too. As a new

year of entertainment gets underway, TV is once again looking back. Revamps, rehashes, and remakes are nothing new, of course. When done right, they're

followed much of the same format, but there was a hilarity in the writing and delivery that's notably lacking here. Maybe it's because '70s wasn't aiming for a family-friendly audience the way this Netflix series seems to be. In the original series, the writing took more risks, so the banter felt less forced.

Though lacking the sharp wit of the original, this one is still a fun binge, mostly due to the efforts of the original cast. It's nice to catch up with most of the gang again. Seeing Eric (Topher Grace) and Donna (Laura Prepon) married with child, Kelso (Ashton Kutcher) and Jackie (Mila Kunis) become bickering yuppie scum, and Fez and Leo (Tommy Chong) are still doing their thang, will take fans to a happy place. And Kitty (Debra Jo Rupp) and Red (Kurtwood Smith) steal the show, reprising the chemistry and quirks of old, and keeping things interesting even when the grandkids' storylines get tedious.

At times, *That '90s Show* is reminiscent of a Disney+ series. It doesn't live up to the standards of its predecessor, but the PG-rated antics might be amusing to younger audiences, unaware of the salacious humor its forebear did so well. Fans of the original will want to tune in to see what happened to old friends, and the answer is simple: they grew up. By the way, so did we – don't be surprised to find yourself relating a bit too much to ol' Red's point of view about the kids these days.

Velma (HBO Max)

Velma is yet another update to the Scooby-Doo gang, only this time sans the talking Great Dane, the Mystery Machine, or anything remotely charming, interesting, or humorous about it. In the '70s cartoon's place, we are left with a mean-spirited, deplorable attempt to modernize a beloved property for an adult audience that fails on every level.

There are porn parodies featuring the Scooby Gang that are funnier than *Velma*. There are inadvertent cellphone videos inside of purses and pockets that are funnier than *Velma*. There are traffic accident videos that are funnier than *Velma*. Yes, the only thing actually comical about *Velma*



is that someone thought it would be enjoyed by others.

When a serial killer runs amok thru Crystal Cove High School, Velma (voiced by exec producer Mindy Kaling) must prove her innocence against incompetent cops, accusations by former bestie Daphne (Constance Wu) and Daphne's boytoy, highbrow snob Fred (Glenn Howerton). Unlike early remakes of *Scooby-Doo* which kept the crux of the characters intact, *Velma* completely eradicates everything familiar and endearing about the Scooby Gang. Brilliant Velma is now an oversexed basket case, Daphne is a drug-dealing mean girl, Fred is a teenage manbaby, and Norville (the "new and improved" Shaggy) borders on incel mentality.

Velma begs the question: who is this for? The answer is no one. This is for no one. It isn't for Scooby-Doo fans. (Who wants to see their Saturday morning superstars broken down into lecherous assholes?) It's not for animation fans, as the style is a lazy man's version of the classic cartoons that once flooded Nickelodeon and Disney Channel in the early aughts. If the gratuitous sex jokes (involving minors, no less) and violence don't keep the kids away, the atrocious writing will definitely keep grown-ups at a distance.

Poking fun at cherished characters and their tropes, the show fails so spectacularly hard that it is difficult to watch. Thanks to the craven actions of all its characters, there is nothing appealing



about *Velma* for fans of *Scooby* or otherwise. It's an empty shell of a farce that's not clever or engrossing. Just gross. How Kaling thought she could get away with a remake minus the sleuthing, silliness, ghouls and "meddling kids" that made it a joy really is a mystery.

Willow (Disney+)

Disney once again attempts to capture the hearts and minds of '80s kids looking to relive their childhood by capitalizing on a title that gives 'em the warm fuzzies. It worked with *Mandalorian* and *Hocus Pocus*, but sadly, with *Willow* the magic is lacking.

Originally directed by Ron Howard and starring Warwick Davis, Val Kilmer, and Joanne Whalley, *Willow* was the story of a powerful wizard who attempted to save his world by rescuing its savior, a baby named Elora Danan. Though it's remembered fondly by some, *Willow* didn't leave a big impact on pop culture. It lacked the kind of poignant moments and humorous references that people like to relive on Twitter these days. There were no moments of Artax sinking in the swamp to rally behind.

Howard's films were never edgy enough to create long-lasting childhood trauma or inspirations, unless you count *Cocoon*. Regardless, the film was sort of sweet, and it found a fanbase over the years. The new version bears

little resemblance to the film beyond the general aesthetic and a handful of characters, and that doesn't help matters.

Evil forces have kidnapped Queen Sorsha's (Whalley) son, Airk (Dempsey Bryk) and it's up to his sister Kit (Ruby Cruz) and her ragtag group of misfits (Erin Kellyman, Tony Revolori, Amar Chadha-Patel), including a grown up Elora (Ellie Bamber), to get him back. They go on a journey, fight evil, encounter old friends, and meet new foes.

Much of the story and the characters within it are a jumbled mess of ancient lore and modern themes with a tone that can only be described as chaotic. Little of this world makes any sense. Though the story itself is somewhat sound in its structure, the dialogue is often dreadful with jarring tonal shifts. Some actors speak in a modern dialect while others seem to have gotten different production notes. Meanwhile, characters use little logic in their decision making process and magic itself seems to come and go regardless of experience or ability.

Willow's fantasy realm is filled with disproportionate contemporary sensibilities and inconsistent rules, and its Spotify '80s hits playlist only makes things worse. Ultimately, the heart of the original movie is missing, which wasn't strong enough to give it lasting appeal to begin with.



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