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IRVINE WEEKLY

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INSIDE THE MASTERFUL, MUCH OBLIGED MIND OF **JOSEPH GORDON-LEVITT**

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TAKES A SURREAL APPROACH TO EXAMINING REAL LIFE PROBLEMS.

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Senior Structural Durability Engineer with Rivian Automotive, LLC in Irvine, CA. Engage in durability simulation and analysis of vehicle structures using finite element tools such as Abaqus, Nastran, nCode DesignLife, ANSA & Hyperview/META. Must possess a Master's degree or foreign equiv in mechanical eng or a similar field & 2 yrs of exp in automotive structures (alt will accept a bachelor's degree, or foreign equiv & 5 yrs of expl. Exp must include the following skills/tools/technologies: ANSA, Abaqus, & Hyperview/META or similar software w/application in the static analysis of automotive structures; Solid mechanics, materials, & structural analysis; Knowledge of material properties associated w/automotive structures; &, Exp preparing formal reports summarizing analysis results. Email resume to Rivian Automotive, LLC, Attn: Mobility, Job Ref #: SSDE21MV, hrrmobility@rivian.com

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in the automotive industry. Exp must include: Working w/ CAD tool CATIA-V5, CATIA 3DEXPERIENCE, and NX; developing CAD surfaces & solid designs using CATIA-V5/GD&T; understanding product dvlpmt, assessing cost improvement (VA/VE) and Design Release; developing optimal design solutions by utilizing interface w/studio, packaging, advanced engineering, manufacturing, and activities; and developing design validation tests as per the change & engineering/design standards. Email resume to Rivian Automotive, LLC, Attn: Mobility, Job Ref #: ECE21RD, hrrmobility@rivian.com

Exterior Design Release Engineer with Rivian Automotive, LLC in Irvine, CA. Dvlp body exterior hardware & mechanisms content. RQMTS: bachelor's degree or foreign equiv in mechanical eng or a closely related degree & 3 yrs of exp in mechanical eng or closely related. Exp must incl the following skills/tools/technologies: product dvlpmt exp within an OEM, automotive plastics, or wiper supplier; automotive design and dvlpmt process, system requirements, and general engineering best practices; exterior trim technologies and hardware & mechanisms content systems; CAD design for exterior hardware and mechanisms, incl injection moldings, blow-moldings, extrusion moldings, rotor moldings, press moldings, and wiper & washer systems;

and, CATIA product design Software. Email resume to Rivian Automotive, LLC, Attn: Mobility, Job Ref #: EDRE21RM, hrrmobility@rivian.com

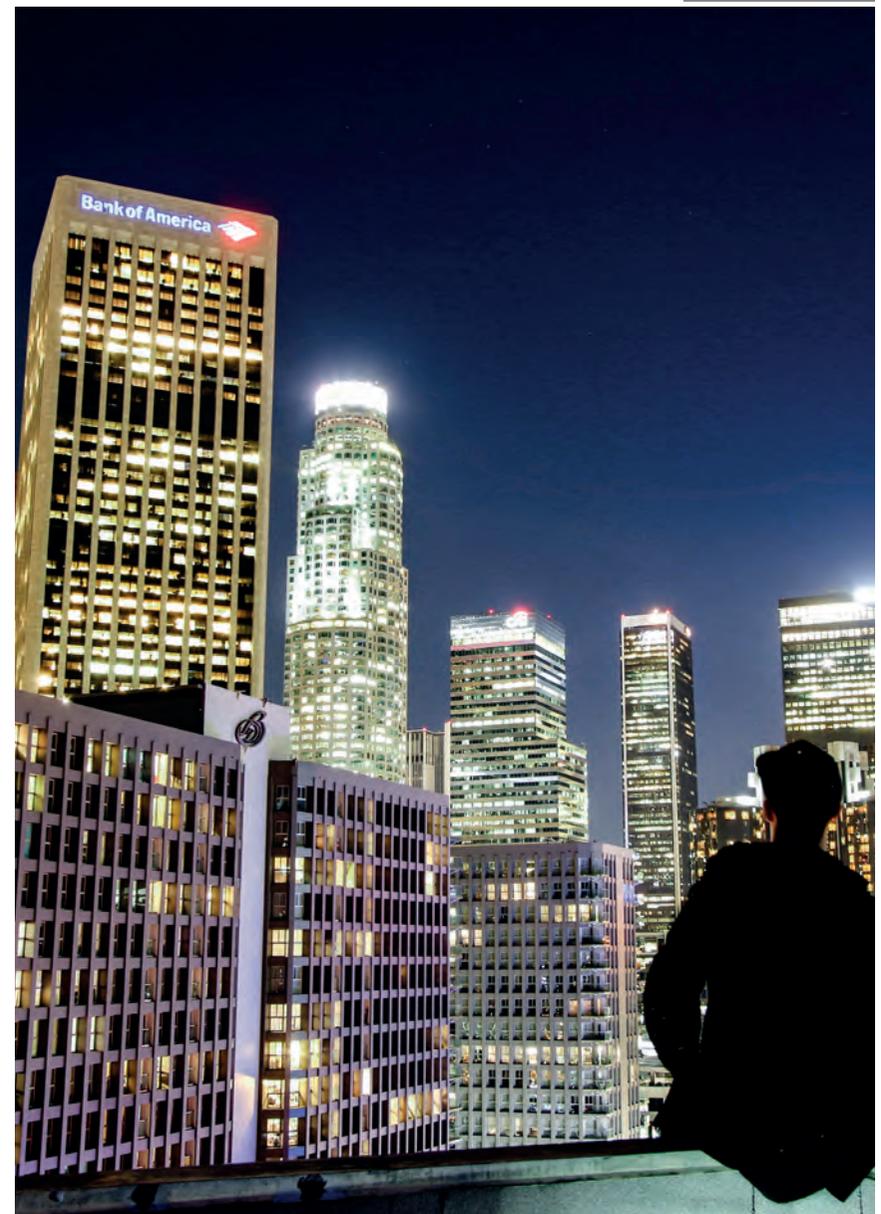
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an engineering discipline. Min of 5 yrs of progressively responsible exp w/ exterior automotive engineering. Exp must incl the following skills/tools/technologies: packaging and functionality of exterior component systems; cad design & manufacturing process exp of body exteriors content (i.e., cladding, glazing, roof, wipers, mirrors, bumpers, fenders, fem, lighting); ENOVIA PLM to CATIA environ., & DFMEAS, DVPS, and functional safety

rqmts. Email resume to Rivian Automotive, LLC, Attn: Mobility, Job Ref #: EDRE21AP, hrrmobility@rivian.com

Vehicles Controls Integration Engineer with Rivian Automotive, LLC in Irvine, CA. Collaborate w/Systems Engineers & Subject Matter Experts to define and iterate rqmts. RQMTS: Bachelor's degree or foreign equiv computer science, computer eng, electrical eng, software eng or a closely rel field & 3 yrs of exp in vehicle

& system dvlpmt. Exp must incl: working w/complex electromechanical devices; handling embedded dvlpmt using C/C++ or MATLAB; taking large concepts & decomposing into realizable deliverables; & developing vehicle & systems. Domestic travel required approx15% of the time. Destination and frequency impossible to predict. Email resume to Rivian Automotive, LLC, Attn: Mobility, Job Ref #: VCIE21SR, hrrmobility@rivian.com



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Principal Closures Engineer with Rivian Automotive, LLC in Irvine, CA. Guide and train within group, co-ordinate projects as part of the dsgn and dvlpmnt of closure mechanisms, plastics & bent/stamped parts for electric vehicles. RQMTS: Bachelor's degree or foreign equiv in an eng discipline. Min of 5 yrs of progressively resp exp w/product eng at an automotive OEM or tier 1. Exp must include the following skills/tools/ technologies: 3+ yrs of exp in closures in white construction solutions stamping, extrusions & castings (incl corresponding dsgn practices), & 2+ yrs of exp in door systems, incl green house

molding or rubber sealing designs. Exp should also incl parts design using injection molding, thermoforming or compression molding techniques; electrical systems & basic circuit analysis, testing, and validation requirements; design for six sigma (DFSS) during design & validation of products; working on vehicle and product launches; dvlpmnt of specifications, DFMEAS, DVP&RS and other technical documents, and; solidworks and/or Catia v5/v6 exp. Email resume to Rivian Automotive, LLC, Attn: Mobility, Job Ref #: PCE21RC, hrmobility@rivian.com

HIL Systems & Automation Lead with Rivian Automotive, LLC in Irvine, CA. Work on the architectural dvlpmnt of HIL systems for vehicle subsystems (i.e. BMS, vehicle dynamics, thermal mgmt, and central gateway modules). RQMTS: Bachelor's degree or foreign equiv in an eng discipline. Must possess at least 4 years of exp in software eng, automation eng, or a rel field. Exp must include the following skills/tools/ technologies: test plans, test cases, test scripts, test executing, and analyzing test results; Simulink, MATLAB, C/C++, python or another rel language; manual and automation testing for verification & validation of vehicle software; vehicle ecu software fault diagnostics testing production and customer diagnostics tools, can diagnostics,

and UDS; issue tracking tools (i.e., JIRA, CLEARQUEST, BUGZILLA, etc.), &; software issue tracking tools (i.e., JIRA, BUGZILLA) and rqmts mgmt tools (i.e., JAMA, DOORS). Email resume to Rivian Automotive, LLC, Attn: Mobility, Job Ref #: HILSAL21RC, hrmobility@rivian.com

Interior Project Manager with Rivian Automotive, LLC in Irvine, CA. Lead the Interior Engineering team and resp for ensuring all interior system content is successfully delivered in accordance with all vehicle attributes. RQMTS: Master's degree or foreign equiv in Mechanical Eng or a closely rel field & 2 yrs of (or a Bachelor's degree or foreign equiv & 5 yrs of progressively resp) exp in auto product dvlpmnt. Exp must incl: Understanding of automotive interior incl systems and components which surround & interface to the interior; working w/ materials, processes and technologies used to deliver Interior eng content; applying knowledge of auto interior incl interfacing systems and components; utilizing Catia V5; and demonstrating ability to solve problems using a first-principle physics-based approach, overall function of the system and key attributes incl interior engineering simulation & analysis tools and processes. Domestic travel required approximately 35% of the time. Email resume to Rivian Automotive, LLC, Attn: Mobility, Job Ref #:

IPM21HK, hrmobility@rivian.com

Vehicle Controls Validation Engineer with Rivian Automotive, LLC in Irvine, CA. Dvlp test case scripts, exec flow software, test reports, manual GUIs, & simulation models. RQMTS: Bachelor's degree or foreign equiv mechanical eng, auto eng or a closely rel field and 2 yrs of exp in the automotive industry. Exp must incl: working w/ communication networks and testing incl CAN, LIN, FLEXRAY, and ETH protocols; working w/ versed automated rqmts mgmt tools incl DOORS and JAMA; utilizing tracking tools incl JIRA, BUGZILLA, or similar tools; and applying knowledge of engineering principles for problem solving. Email resume to Rivian Automotive, LLC, Attn: Mobility, Job Ref #: VCVE21BS, hrmobility@rivian.com

Senior Principal Management Consultant, F/T, Master's degree in Business Administration, Mail resume to: Bridgewater Consulting Group, Inc. 18881 Von Karman Ave. Suite 1450, Irvine, CA 92612.

Data Analyst (Irvine, CA) No exp/ Bach Comp Sci, Bus Admin, or Info Tech/ Mandarin Chinese req Under direction of supervisor, mine data, maintain data systems, prep reports, provide marketing support. Send resumes to MTurco Greenway Properties, Inc. 930 Roosevelt, Suite 325, Irvine, CA 92620

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COVER: PHOTO COURTESY OF APPLE TV+

IRVINE RESIDENTS SPEAK UP OVER ASPHALT FACILITY EMISSIONS

DOZENS OF IRVINE RESIDENTS EXPRESSED CONCERN REGARDING THE LACK OF DISCLOSURE, REGULATION AND POTENTIALLY HARMFUL EMISSIONS BEING PRODUCED BY THE ASPHALT FACILITY NEAR ORCHARD HILLS.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

The All American Asphalt facility has been a source of frustration for Irvine residents who say the facility's emissions are a burden on their quality of life. Additionally, many say they are living in fear, emphasizing that the Irvine City Council has not done enough to address the community's requests for more independent research on the air quality near their homes.

Despite testing from the South Coast Air Quality Management District that indicates that the asphalt facility was one of the largest producers of known carcinogens in Irvine in 2020, some homeowners near Orchard Hills say the existence of the facility was not disclosed prior to purchasing.

In an interview with *Irvine Weekly* on Thursday, Sept. 8, Irvine resident Sacha McFadden said that after an extensive search, they found a home to purchase in Orchard Hills.

"We put a letter in informing the seller that we're moving in with our baby, we're a family. Paid a couple hundred dollars for inspections, got into escrow with them, sent our deposit in, and basically didn't have any contingencies removed on the property," she said. "The hazard reports came through and there was nothing spoken about the asphalt factory."

McFadden said after researching the area, they discovered the facility was 2,500 feet from their home in Orchard Hills, but was never disclosed in reports.

"It was the closest property to the asphalt factory," McFadden explained. "We are moving back to Los Angeles."

The property's environmental report, which was obtained by *Irvine Weekly*, did not indicate an asphalt facility was located anywhere near Irvine.

On Tuesday, Sept. 14, approximately 50 public speakers, including the McFadden family, local students and a representative of Senator Dave Min, came to Irvine City Council during a presentation to discuss the most recent air samples taken near the All American Asphalt Facility by the South Coast Air Quality Management District.

While AQMD has been adamant that air sampling results do not indicate that emission levels exceed long-term health risk levels, members of the Irvine community continued to urge the council to seek alternative measures for independent research.

Prior to the meeting, *Irvine Weekly* spoke with Dr. Dean Baker, a retired UC Irvine epidemiologist, who has worked with the local community group Non-Toxic Neighborhoods. Baker explained that while AQMD has sampled the air near Orchard Hills for six months, the



PHOTO BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

testing was limited to volatile organic compounds.

"That sampling was 24-hour samples for volatile organic compounds, which are the primary focus of air emission from facilities like that," he said. "But they're not the only possible emissions shown on the AQMD website."

Baker was invited by the Irvine City Council to the Sept. 14 meeting, to share his expertise on what other measures can be done in terms of more independent air sampling studies.

From his perspective, Baker said he understands the frustration of the community, considering the timeline of these issues regarding the emission of known carcinogens, foul odors, volatile organic compounds, and even small metals.

"Apparently, there were some errors in emissions reports from AAA, I believe in 2016, and they're still trying to get corrections on that and do the risk analysis, based on the accurate emission report data, that's due out in October," Baker explained. "It's frustrating to the community just because it's taken so long."

During the meeting, several residents played videos of trucks carrying asphalt departing from the All American Asphalt facility. Many were traveling with uncovered asphalt, through residential streets in Irvine.

This aspect of uncovered asphalt traveling through neighborhoods was a major concern of residents during the meeting. Many said they were under the impression that asphalt trucks were required to be covered while driving.

However, Irvine Police Chief Mike Hamel explained that no such regulation existed.

"There is a vehicle code that governs that loads must be covered, however, there is a specific carve-out that asphalt trucks do not need to be covered," Hamel explained. "So there is no provision to enforce asphalt trucks that are not covered."

In addition to the dozens of Irvine residents who addressed the council Tuesday night, James Black, a representative for

state Senator Dave Min, came to deliver a statement on behalf of the senator, supportive of the community's concerns.

In his message, Min said he was thankful for the City Council for addressing the issue and hoped a resolution could be reached, adding that his staff has followed the issue of potentially harmful emissions in Irvine closely.

"I hope we can begin to reach some productive outcome soon which will help address the legitimate concerns of many thousands of residents of north Irvine like Orchard Hills, Portola Springs and others," Min's statement read. "First, there's the concern that these fumes are tied to toxic emissions that negatively impact air quality to the point where this is a public health concern. Second, there's the concern that such fumes simply by virtue of their strong and noxious odors may create an unacceptable nuisance to those impacted by them, negatively impacting their mental health and well-being."

While the AQMD air sampling discussion took more than three hours during Tuesday's meeting, the item did not present the Irvine City Council with an opportunity to vote.

While Irvine Mayor Farrah Khan admitted that the current system for reporting odors was archaic, the city attorney did not present suggestions on how to move forward with relocating the facility, or the possibility of shutting the asphalt facility down completely.

"The limitations on what we can and cannot do change, but that doesn't mean that I don't care or that I've flipped. I don't think we should accept any level of air pollution that negatively impacts our community," Khan said. "I don't want our community to think that the plant will be closed or relocated any time soon, but I do want you to know that we're going to do everything we can to mitigate where we are at right now. This issue is a reminder that government as a whole must do better, particularly when it comes to regulation of the air we breathe."

ORANGE COUNTY SURPASSES 2 MILLION FULLY VACCINATED AGAINST COVID-19

DESPITE IMPROVEMENTS IN O.C.'S COVID-19 HOSPITALIZATION METRICS, HEALTH EXPERTS CONTINUE TO CITE THE NEED TO MONITOR OUTBREAKS AMONG CHILDREN WITHIN THE SCHOOL SYSTEM. IN IRVINE, MORE THAN 25 CHILDREN UNDER 17-YEARS-OLD TESTED POSITIVE FOR COVID-19 DURING THE FIRST WEEK OF SEPTEMBER.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER



In Orange County, COVID-19 hospitalizations not requiring intensive care unit admittance declined by approximately 20% between Sept. 7 and Sept. 14, decreasing from 466 to 372 total patients. As of Sept. 14, the Orange County Health Agency COVID-19 dashboard indicated that 115 people were in the ICU.

On Monday, Sept. 13, the Orange County Health Agency reported 10 new COVID-19 deaths, with 1,583 new COVID-19 cases over a three-day period. A week prior, after the Labor Day weekend, HCA reported 1,651 new COVID-19 cases with 20 COVID-related deaths.

In terms of COVID-19 vaccination rates, Orange County has crossed a milestone of more than 2 million individuals fully vaccinated on all platforms, yet experts in Orange County say more needs to be done to protect children in schools.

HCA Director and County Health Officer Dr. Clayton Chau also expressed concern over a recent pediatric COVID-19 related death, adding that a child under the age of five, with underlying health conditions, died from the virus. In a statement released on Sept. 10, Chau echoed the need for vaccination for individuals over the age of 12.

"My heart goes out to this family who has lost a precious young life. This is an urgent reminder that we must do everything we can to protect our little ones, the children and infants in our community who are not yet eligible for vaccination," Chau said. "This means being fully

vaccinated if you are over the age of 12, as well as wearing a mask indoors, avoiding crowds, maintaining physical distance in poorly ventilated areas, and washing your hands regularly. I cannot stress enough how important these precautions are, not only to protect you, but those you care about around you."

Still, despite the health officer's concern about the spread of COVID-19 within the local school system, the discussion of parental choice regarding face masks at school was a topic of public discussion at the Irvine Unified Board of Education meeting on Tuesday, Sept. 14.

Irvine Unified School District's Board of Education heard public comments regarding a mask choice resolution, which was presented by Let Them Breathe. The resolution encourages more parental choice regarding the use of face masks on school campuses.

Annie Brown, Public Information Officer for Irvine Unified School District, explained that the mask choice resolution was not brought forth by IUSD, adding that the board will not vote on the topic.

Brown also said that members of the public are allowed to address the board with topics of interest.

In an email to *Irvine Weekly*, Brown confirmed that this topic for public comment was made at the request of Let Them Breathe.

Andrew Noymer, professor of epidemiology at UC Irvine, explained that unmasking children in schools is a bad idea, regardless of who makes the decision. While Noymer admits he does not see face masks as a permanent feature, he said it needs to be for the time being.

"They can spread COVID-19 to household members including grandparents and parents – if we're going to turn down the temperature of COVID transmission society-wide, we need to include kids wearing masks," Noymer said on a phone call with *Irvine Weekly*. "I'm not foreseeing a future where everyone goes out in public with masks, but right now, I think we need to mask in schools."

Currently, IUSD is supporting optional student attestation for vaccination status. With more than 30,000 students now

back in daily, in-person education. To help students remain healthy, a message from Annie Brown, Public Information Officer for Irvine Unified, explained that the district will provide free COVID-19 testing kits for students and staff at school sites.

In California, per orders from Gov. Gavin Newsom, students are required to wear a face mask when indoors, while on campus.

In his predictions, Noymer said he expects another wave of COVID-19 before next spring, adding that while vaccinations are trending upward, there is still room for more people to get vaccinated against the virus.

"We've seen in place after place that we're not really at herd immunity yet, so there's still room, unfortunately, for more cases," he said. "It's really well documented that this Delta strain is more transmissible, and when you have greater transmissibility, it's harder to reach herd immunity."

In Orange County, HCA has now reported that more than 2 million individuals are fully vaccinated. As of Sept. 6, HCA reported that there are 2,043,693 individuals vaccinated on all platforms.

While progress has been made, Noymer cautioned against premature celebration of the county's milestone, adding that the number of vaccinated individuals needs to be closer to 3 million for the county to be considered "fully vaccinated."

"The county has 3.26 million residents, and the only people ineligible are under 12 – there's medical exemptions, but basically 2.8 million would be complete vaccination," he said.

While Chau expressed the need to continue to vaccinate Orange County's younger population, First District Supervisor Andrew Do shared a reminder that despite being fully vaccinated at any age, an individual can still be infected with COVID-19.

In a Facebook post shared on Sept. 10, Do explained that despite receiving the Moderna vaccine, he had tested positive, and was under mandated quarantine.

"Although I received both doses of the Moderna vaccine earlier this year, today I was notified I tested positive for COVID-19 after learning I was exposed. Following CDPH's safety protocols, I started quarantining at home since yesterday and will continue for 10 days. At this time, I am experiencing only mild symptoms but will continue to monitor and notify the people I have been in close contact with," Do wrote.

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NEWS

O.C. POWER AUTHORITY PRESENTS ENERGY EFFICIENT PROGRAMS FOR FUNDING PATHWAYS

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

On Tuesday, September 14, the Orange County Power Authority Board of Directors introduced more than a half-dozen new programs that OCPA will use as pathways to acquire energy-efficient program funding from the California Public Utilities Commission.

In a phone interview with *Irvine Weekly*, Antonia Castro-Graham, the chief operating officer of the Orange County Power Authority, explained that the two pathways are "elect to administer," which provides between \$150,000 to \$1 million to the OCPA annually. The other pathway is known as "apply to administer," which provides unlimited funding, which Graham said she is applying for between \$5 - \$8 million.

"You have to prove that each program has a high TRC (Total Resource Cost). It's like a cost-benefit analysis, you don't want to spend a ton of money and save very little energy," Graham explained. "So they want to make sure that you're running programs that are going to save a lot of energy."

Graham explained that the funding for these programs is already accounted for, through contributions that everyone pays into via their electricity bill every month.

"It's a non-bypassable charge that Edison collects, or whoever your utility provider is, and it goes to the PUC and it sits in this 'pot,'" she said. "Edison is not very good at doing customized programs, so they roll out programs that have a high TRC – but to their entire service area, so they don't know what the residents of Irvine need or the residents of what the residents of Fullerton need."

Since August, the OCPA has held community workshops in all of its partnering cities – Irvine, Fullerton, Buena Park and Huntington Beach – to introduce these programs and get feedback from the community.

During the presentation to OCPA at the board meeting, Laurel Rothschild, vice president of the Energy Coalition

explained that these programs will be introduced as a way to lower energy costs for customers who join the Orange County Power Authority.

"As we were looking and working to propose some program, leveraging this energy efficiency funding, we kept these four goals in mind – what programs would really help lower customer bills, what kind of programs can be designed to spur local economic development, also thinking about unique communities under OCPA, what programs were designed while keeping these communities in mind," she said. "Lastly – meet the California Public Utilities Commission requirements."

In total, there are seven programs currently under consideration. Out of the seven, three – the Business Energy Analysis & Targeted Energy Efficiency Rebates, the Hands-On Energy Project Support for Customers that are Large Energy Users, and the Green Small Business Certification Support focus on lowering energy costs for business.

In terms of residential programs, OCPA has introduced two programs called Residential Energy Analysis and Targeted Energy Efficiency Rebates and Multifamily Tenant-Focused Improvements, which will focus on lowering costs and rolling out rebates.

And for municipal customers, the Municipal Incentives for Energy Efficient Upgrades will use targeted energy efficiency rebates for city-owned properties in partnership with Southern California Regional Energy Network.

The OCPA is also looking for ways to help stimulate the workforce in Orange County and help create a "green-collar workforce," starting with training at the community college level.

OCPA's Worker Match and Training Program is designed to help implement more education around and job placement in the energy sector.



Mr. Corman (Apple TV+)

INSIDE THE MASTERFUL, MUCH OBLIGED MIND OF JOSEPH GORDON-LEVITT

WITH HIS NEW APPLE TV+ SHOW MR. CORMAN, THE ACTOR, WRITER, DIRECTOR TAKES A SURREAL APPROACH TO EXAMINING REAL-LIFE PROBLEMS.

BY LINA LECARO

Joseph Gordon-Levitt is a grateful guy. But chatting by phone with the actor, director and content creator last week, we aren't surprised by how relatable and real he is, talking about himself and his success. If you follow him on social media, his good dude vibes are undeniable. The SoCal native is more than an accomplished actor, he's a music-maker and a storyteller, into celebrating creativity and connecting with others in a positive way. He even started his own social media platform to do just that. He's played lots of likable people and stretched himself to play some not so likable ones. But *Mr. Corman*, the new Apple TV+ show he created, stars in, writes and directs, aims for something headier and harder to peg. The titular figure is his most complex character ever, and as JGL (as many call him) tells it, there are a few reasons for that, starting with his own gratitude.

"It really came from me just thinking about my own life a lot, and feeling so grateful for so many things," he explains. "I found a woman I love and she's a perfect partner for me. We have our two kids. I have two parents that are cognitive and reliable people. I get to do work that I care about. I'm healthy and I get to live in a safe place... And I think a lot

of those things come down to luck. That is something I think about all the time. How much do I deserve any of these things that I'm so grateful for? How much is just luck? It got me thinking about a character who is a lot like me,

but who maybe just had a few different strokes of luck. That's where this character comes from. He grew up the same place I did, went to high school the same place I did – Van Nuys High – and he's like me, but there are some differences."

So basically, Mr. Joshua Corman is Mr. Joseph Gordon (minus the hyphenate Levitt) in an alternate universe, but the real point – which becomes pretty clear while watching the show – is he could also be you or me if circumstances/timing/choices were different. Life is precarious and *lifestyle* even moreso. Most of us are damn lucky to be who we are. But, especially in today's world of self-absorption (and selfies), the exercise of counting our blessings when we feel down or sorry for ourselves doesn't always work. The show's not-so-subtle subtext tackles this disconnect and shows how privilege (recognized or otherwise) and mental health problems can create some confusing inner conflicts.

"Anybody who's able to watch TV or read *L.A. Weekly* has it pretty good compared to a lot of other people alive on the planet today who are struggling with really big life-threatening problems," Gordon-Levitt says. "I think that we can all probably appreciate that experience. Still, I can sit here and list off the good things in life and I'm happy a lot of time, but sometimes my brain doesn't want to let me be happy, and why the fuck not?"

The character Mr. Corman is kind of your typical depressed L.A. millennial –

CULTURE

SEPTEMBER 17, 2021 | IRVINEWEEKLY.COM



Mr. Corman (Apple TV+)

and that's sometimes as hard to watch as it sounds. A 30-something failed musician turned 5th grade teacher in the Valley, he only seems truly engaged when he's in the classroom talking to kids or in his bedroom making weird but wondrous soundscapes that will probably never be heard. Every other moment in his life seems to be filled with unease, worry and contentiousness.

It's not just that the protagonist is unhappy. He is stressed and distressed to the point of paranoia, which manifests with a persistent pounding sound in his head, meant to remind him (and the viewer) that all is not OK with the world. War, a pandemic or a fiery meteor colliding into earth could end it all at any time. And until that happens, humanity's got plenty of struggle and ugliness, big and small, to contend with on a daily basis.

It's some dark stuff, but it's contrasted with moments of exuberance and light, thanks to the smattering of surrealist sequences, meant to convey each character's thoughts and feelings in intriguing ways. JGL is having a lot of fun visually with this show. Some scenes look like paintings, others like scrapbook pages or collages. There are cool angles, trippy animated components, dream sequences, unique intros and even a couple song and dance numbers. What starts out feeling like a woe-is-me experience, becomes something richer and more exploratory as the first season's 10 episodes progress, ultimately ending on a figurative and literal high note.

"I've been privileged enough to work as an artist and I definitely consider that



very lucky," Gordon-Levitt elaborates on his alter-ego vision. "Anybody who is successful as an artist, a lot of that comes down to luck. Josh is an artist who didn't get those lucky breaks. He still loves music and a big part of the season is him wrestling and figuring out his relationship to his own kind of creativity. Also, I always thought if I wasn't lucky to make money as an artist, I'd be

attracted to teaching. Teachers are such heroes. I wish we lived in a world where teachers were celebrated more than entertainers."

As an entertainer, Joseph Gordon-Levitt has definitely had some luck over the years, though he worked hard for his breaks. At 14, he was cast as an alien elder stuck inside a human kid's body in the popular sitcom *3rd Rock From the*

Sun, working with acting heavyweights John Lithgow and Kristin Johnston for six successful seasons. He also scored a pivotal part in the Shakespeare-inspired teen classic *10 Things I Hate About You* alongside Heath Ledger and Julia Stiles as a teen. Then he took a break from acting to go to Columbia University. As an adult actor, he's turned in several memorable performances, in hits such as *Inception*, *Looper* and *Snowden*. But before he was really busy, it was his role in *500 Days of Summer* opposite Zooey Deschanel that cemented his star power. To this day, that film has been the subject of debate. It wasn't a love story, but an un-love story, with two sides (his and hers) and dueling views of a relationship and why it imploded. But who was right and who was wrong? As a big fan of the film who wavers on its message, we had to ask Joe (which his friends call him) for his take.

"One of my favorite things about that movie is how it plays with perspective and reality," he answers. "It does some clever but subtle things that show a certain reality and make you think 'oh, I'm seeing the truth,' when in fact there's sort of an unreliable narrator in the mix. You have this very seemingly trustworthy narrator that speaks in the third person, and says... 'Tom felt that blah blah blah.' And you trust it because usually, the narrator is telling you what's really happening. But if you look closer it's actually not really happening the way Tom thinks it's happening. And if you look closer you see that Tom has a lot of growing to do. He's seeing things in a selfish way. I've mentioned this before, but the scene where Zooey – Summer – is telling Tom about a dream she had last night... the narrator comes in and just talks over her. And you don't even get to hear her dream. I think that's a brilliant way of showing that Tom is not even listening. He's just thinking, 'oh she's telling me her dream. I must be really special, she must really like me.' And it's really no wonder that she breaks up with him. A lot of people say to me about that movie, 'how could she break up with you?' But if you look closely, the writing's really on the wall."

Talking more about the film, we agree that his approach to telling Mr. Corman's story is similar (in that it shows what's inside the character's head) but quite the opposite in approach. In *500*, we get an idealized version of his character Tom and his relationship because the story is told from his point of view. In *Mr. Corman*, we see rather than

CULTURE



Mr. Corman (Apple TV+)

hear Josh's thoughts (and he clearly has growing to do as well), but his flaws are on full display. "And we are not hiding that," JGL says. "It's definitely two different watching experiences. I totally get that if you're watching Tom's idealized understanding of himself, that makes for a dreamy screen presence. But with Josh, you know all of his flaws are exaggerated, especially in the beginning of the season. He's pretty insecure and has a lot of self-doubt, and that's not as immediately dreamy. What I was going for in *Mr. Corman* was something honest above all else. Keep watching and see how he grows. And with each episode, he is getting a better understanding of himself."

If you're like us, you might not even like Josh from the first couple episodes, because to paraphrase RuPaul, "If you can't love yourself, how in the hell is anybody else going to?" The kind of insecurity Josh reveals to the viewer is a huge turn-off and that's intentional. Similarly layered new shows such as HBO's *The White Lotus* and FX's *Dave*, for example, ring true in their cringiest moments, making points about privilege and other inequities of humanity that really resonate. The best television right now isn't always pleasant, but the ultimate payoff can be bigger and better. Still, in the real world, no one wants to show their vulnerability or self-pity to others, they want to project who and what they aspire to be.

Which brings us to HitRecord, JGL's social media platform that's really more of a community. "I started it with my brother many years ago," he says. "It's all

about being creative together. A lot of social media right now is about being competitive. You're competing for followers or you're competing for likes. The whole framework is set up to get people vying for attention."

With HitRecord, the tagline is, "It's not a competition, it's a collaboration," and in the current climate, it's a refreshing change from what we all see on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Tik Tok. That's by design. "The joy and meaning and fulfillment that can come from making something with other people, when you forget about how many likes you get or how many followers you have, is what makes me happy," Gordon-Levitt asserts. "HitRecord is all about trying to reorient art and creativity around that. It is a bit different from how today's social media platforms work. That's because they make money by what I call mass surveillance advertising. That means that they have to optimize those platforms for the attention economy. They get people hooked on that feeling of getting attention. The more attention, the more ads they can sell. It's addictive the same way that slot machines are addictive. But when you're addicted to getting attention, I think that it can be poisonous to your creativity."

HitRecord encourages its users to make and share their lives in fun ways on its site, and it also serves as an incubator and producer for many of JGL's endeavors, including short films (*Morgan M. Morgansen's Date with Destiny* and its sequel *Morgan and Destiny's Eleventh Date: The Zeppelin Zoo* and

Hong Kong Never Sleeps) and full length works like his acclaimed 2013 directorial debut, *Don Jon*, which saw him playing a porn addict trying to have a healthy relationship with Scarlett Johansson and later, with Julianne Moore. *Mr. Corman* also brandishes the HitRecord production logo before each episode.

Without spoiling the full story arc for Apple TV+ viewers (and we hope that people who don't have the streaming service also get to see this transcendent television eventually, too) it must be mentioned that the show's most powerful episodes, the ones that really make you think and feel, are set in the reality of the COVID-19 era. The pandemic has amplified anxiety, depression and feelings of isolation for so many, and Josh serves as an awkward reflection of what that looks like, from teaching his kids and trying to have a date on Zoom, to obsessing over hand-washing and arguing over the efficacy of masks

with his roommate Victor, played with affable warmth by Arturo Castro.

The virus made the show move from Los Angeles to New Zealand for a year to finish filming, but not before capturing plenty of the city in outdoor shots and settings. There are also frequent references to Southern California traffic, landmarks and nightlife (Josh's deadbeat dad goes on a long reminiscence about performing at the Troubadour, for example). Gordon-Levitt says the city's energy and presence on the show is intentional. "Los Angeles gets represented in a narrow way. The world image of L.A. is Hollywood. I didn't grow up in Hollywood," he stops himself. "Well, I grew up working in the Hollywood industry. But I lived in the Valley. I really wanted to show L.A. in a different light because there's so much in this city, and I love it dearly. I think if you watch *Mr. Corman*, you'll see an L.A. that maybe feels more like an Angeleno made it."

It does, and its realness is unflinching sometimes. In a few scenes, Josh is shown staring into the night, transfixed by homeless people and encampments around L.A. Most of us don't need an explanation as to what he's thinking, and it all goes back to what inspired the show to begin with: any one of us could find ourselves in the same situation if bad luck came our way.

"It's not exactly light entertainment," JGL admits. "But that's my taste. When I watch something, I want it to make me feel, or think or even challenge me. That's what I was going for. It's less about an objective telling of a certain plot. When we depart from reality, that's because real life doesn't always feel like reality in my experience and sometimes you have these feelings that are just too big to show on the outside. Even if we don't show what reality looks like, we show you what life feels like."



Mr. Corman (Apple TV+)

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SECOND HARVEST FOOD BANK LAUNCHES 45-ACRE SUSTAINABLE FARM

WITH A NEW 45-ACRE FARM IN IRVINE, SECOND HARVEST FOOD BANK AND SOLUTIONS FOR URBAN AGRICULTURE WILL PRODUCE MORE THAN 30,000 POUNDS OF PRODUCE WEEKLY.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

On Tuesday, Aug. 31, Irvine's Second Harvest Food Bank and the Irvine-based Solutions for Urban Agriculture celebrated the launch of a sustainable farming initiative that will bring more than 30,000 pounds of fresh, locally grown produce to Irvine each week.

Located within UC Irvine's South Coast Research and Extension Center (South Coast REC), near the Orange County Great Park, this new 45-acre farm will help Second Harvest Food Bank, along with the Orange County Pantry Network, by supplementing produce supply chains that have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

To kick off the Harvest Solutions Farm project, volunteers helped plant a portion of the 45-acre farm's first 26,000 cabbage plants.

With the first official harvest expected in November, A.G. Kawamura, Chairman of Solutions for Urban Agriculture and former California Secretary of Food and Agriculture, estimates the first harvest could bring in more than half a million pounds of produce in less than six months.

"After this initial planting of cabbage, which is a hearty, versatile vegetable that's easy to grow and a nutritional mainstay in a variety of cultures, the second planting of spring and summer vegetables will begin in March of 2022. It will include zucchini squash, cucumbers and mini-sweet bell peppers," Kawamura said. "With another 45 acres

fully planted, we can harvest a cornucopia of nutrient-dense fresh produce, delivering well over 100,000 pounds per month throughout the summer and fall."

Second Harvest Board Chairman Dave Coffaro said he is proud to be a part of this project, adding that he hopes this sustainable addition to the city of Irvine will inspire others.

"This is a historic day for Second Harvest Food Bank of Orange County," Coffaro said. "Few food banks, if any, have attempted to grow their own food on this large a scale. Our unique good fortune to have access to 45 acres in the heart of an urban center like Irvine where we are able to cultivate an array of crops and supply our food pantry partners with fresh, nutritious produce brings us a huge step closer to making nutritional security a reality for our

Photos courtesy of Second Harvest Food Bank



entire community."

Nathan Gipple, Senior Director of Solutions for Urban Agriculture, helps maintain the day-to-day activities at Irvine's Farm + Food Lab inside the Great Park said he is excited about this project, adding that the new framing space inside the UCI REC adds a more permanent feel to the possibility of small-scale urban agriculture in Irvine.

"The vision came about as a rebirth of what has been a collaborative partnership here in Irvine prior. The Incredible Edible Farm, that the ice hockey rink is on now, was a collaborative partnership between our operation, Solutions for Urban Agriculture and Second Harvest Food Bank," Gipple said in an interview with *Irvine Weekly*.

For Gipple, when the Incredible Edible Farm was demolished to make way for the rolling rink, he said it eliminated space that could have been used to grow produce, which became magnified by the pandemic-born food supply chain shortages.

"When that got turned into the ice

hockey rink there really wasn't an opportunity for that level of food production here. Fast forward to the pandemic and the interruptions that took place in the food delivery system, as well as revisiting what good quality food looks like for an underserved group – in this case, food insecure, nutrition insecure," he said. "I think people recognize the value of what's being done and for my part, the opportunity to build soil, build production into underutilized spaces.

As the Second Harvest Farm grows, Gipple added that it is adding about an acre a week in terms of what is being grown. Gipple said he hoped this would spark more innovation in the urban agriculture landscape, and potentially increase the number of small farms locally.

"I think you have two different schools of thought. One is that you can have a 50,000-acre farm that grows the one crop that goes all over the world – or you can have 50,000 one-acre crops all over the place – and you see the inherent problem with having it in one location."



JIM JARMUSCH'S SLICES OF LIFE

THE ACCLAIMED FILMMAKER'S PAPER COLLAGES TURN HISTORY INTO ART.

BY SHANA NYS DAMBROT

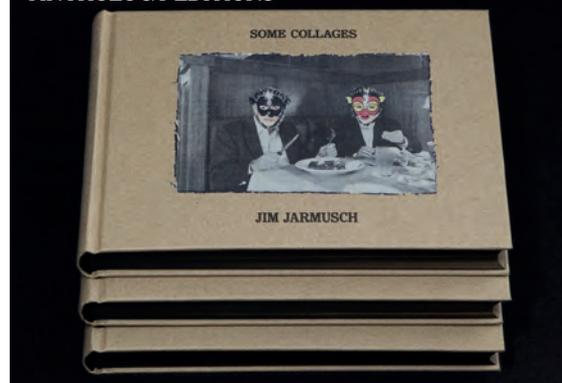
A small but substantial book bound in beautiful, thick brown paper is filled with almost miniaturist images composed largely in black and white and occupying the chestnut pages like a turn of the century estate sale photo album. But the clippings and photos in this volume have been interfered with, disambiguated, spliced and diced, and transformed into surrealist collages that are smart, creepy, witty and poetic – not unlike, say, a film by their creator, the director Jim Jarmusch.

Some Collages (Anthology Editions) collects scores of such works, culled from an archive of many hundreds, spanning years of Jarmusch's collage practice and some 200 years' worth of printed matter amassed and stored for this purpose. The works are small because they are life-sized, faithful to the original newspapers and magazines. But still, the effect of the small scale is to communicate a profound intimacy, the lingering energy of the artist's hand, and prompt the viewer to lean in closer, as one would toward a whisperer.

"For years now I've been constructing these small very minimal collages. I use only newsprint for their sources, and most involve only the removal and/or replacement of heads – possibly the most minimal way of reorganizing visual information," explains Jarmusch. "Faces and heads become masks for me, and I can change or switch identities, details and even species. The reproduction on newsprint of a drawn or painted head can replace a photographic one, or vice-versa. Sometimes I decide to just remove a head or face completely, leaving only a blank background. Or I replace it with typeface – always with a text that accompanied or pertained to the original image."

Art history mixed with absurdity is a recurring and cheerful motif throughout the book, as is the lampooning of ridiculous and/or hypocritical politicians and their power posturing. A lot of the individual works are genuinely funny, especially the proliferation of Warhol ones – almost analog memes really – which are never not hilarious. Philip Glass and Salman Rushdie play-

SOME COLLAGES by Jim Jarmusch, Published by ANTHOLOGY EDITIONS



ing golf is pretty good too. You can't lose with animal heads on fancy people. Most of the works, however, are far more subtle, nuanced and many cleverly function as social critique, while still others are completely unsettled with war and pathos.

The beguiling effect of the works is not only down to Jarmusch's unassailable compositional eye and wry humor, but also to the evocative qualities of his chosen medium – newsprint. Rife with nostalgia and history, an assertion of accuracy, susceptibility to subsequent interpretations and a unique materiality of its own, as Randall Kennedy writes in his gorgeous essay for the book, "The simultaneous significance and worthlessness of newsprint – a practically negligible distance between knowledge and garbage – has always constituted its chief allure."

"I remember as a kid, I received a microscope for my birthday," says Jarmusch. "The first thing I examined through its lenses was a tiny scrap of torn newspaper. I was astounded. Instead of a single, solid sheet-like material, it was in fact a tangled mass of threadlike fibers, a chaotic jungle of microscopic pulp. Ever since, the fragility and inherently temporary nature of this particular (and now nearly obsolete) material has



attracted me. Even when watching an old movie and I see the big 'presses rolling,' my newsprint neurons fire up immediately."

The word collage comes from the French verb *coller*, Jarmusch reminds us, "meaning to paste or glue things together [and it] appears to have been coined by Braque and Picasso in the very early 20th century. Anyone can make them... But many of the most innovative artists have used this form for well over a century, including the Cubists, Dadaist, Surrealists, Expressionists, Pop artists, minimalists, punk artists, street artists, etc. Now, of course, we also all are familiar with the cut and paste functions we employ daily on our digital devices."

One interesting subtext running through the works is how the newspapers and magazines themselves change physically over the years. For example, the introduction of color into a mostly black and white world and the appearance of photography into a world of drawings. Even as it tracks the flourishing of early technology, in its resolutely analog form, these works and this book hold the line against a total digital surrender. But then again, there is no better way to describe the essence of our modern visual culture's hyperactive post-everything dynamic than collage. These are the kinds of poetic paradoxes that Jarmusch's work sets up, and leaves to the viewer to resolve.

Some Collages will be released in September. A corresponding solo show of Jarmusch's original artwork opens at James Fuentes Gallery, New York from September 29 - October 31.

interior pages from SOME COLLAGES
by Jim Jarmusch, Published by
ANTHOLOGY EDITIONS



21ST CENTURY LOVERS

BRIT ROCKERS THE WILDHEARTS DON'T DO BAD ALBUMS.

BY BRETT CALLWOOD

PHOTO CREDIT - TONY WOOLLISCROFT



Nowadays, we seem to be regularly told that rock & roll is dead. Honestly, people have been ringing rock's death knell for decades, at least since electronic music made its way out of illegal warehouse raves and started bothering the charts. The recent golden period of hip-hop only furthered those cries. And of course, they are and have always been utter bullshit.

Music doesn't die. The media spotlight might focus more brightly on different areas at different times, but that doesn't mean that the music in the shade isn't blooming. The dark art, "underground" if you like, is very often the most interesting. Rock & roll will never die, and the walking, talking embodiment of that bloody headedness is Brit band the Wildhearts.

This writer has been a fan of the Newcastle band since their 1993 *Earth vs the Wildhearts* debut and has been covering them since embarking on this career in mid '99. Life has seen many changes, but the joy brought by these wildest of hearts has remained constant. Their new album, *21st Century Love Songs*, is their 10th studio full length. There are countless other live albums, compilations, EPs and singles (the latter generally packed with b-sides better than most artists' best material), plus various other projects featuring the band's members, past and present, that are all worth dipping into.

The heart of the 'hearts is frontman and main songwriter Ginger. A complex soul, anyone who follows the singer, guitarist and songwriter on social media will know that he doesn't suffer fools gladly. Or as he put it during this Zoom interview, "I don't do well with dickheads." As a result, he can come across as abrasive and that side certainly makes itself known in the Wildhearts sound, to its immense benefit. But so does Ginger's capacity to empathize, to fucking feel. Get drunk and lairy with him in a bar and he might knock your block off. But he's also among the first to raise his voice for society's most vulnerable. For human rights, and animal rights too.

The title track to the new album, for example, includes the line, "He said a man needs a woman at the end of the day, what a moronic crock of shit for anybody to say, 'cause if you're bisexual, asexual, lesbian or gay, then you are not represented by the radio anyway."

Ginger and the Wildhearts have long had the capacity to distill sentiments and emotions into their basic components, and then expand on them all. Rearrange them. The approach to the actual music is similar. You'll think a song is going in one direction, and they'll pull a handbrake turn on you and go in another direction entirely. The new album is no different, following 2019's excellent *Renaissance Men*.

"On the last one, the jury was out on how the critics were gonna receive it," Ginger says. "It was a bit of a 'we like it, we don't care what anyone else thinks.' Now, we're a bit cocky thinking that people are gonna like it. Which you do when you've done one critically acclaimed record. I guess this one, you hope people like your music but you never can tell. We kinda understand because it's not very commercial in as much as it's not obvious. Not a very generic sounding record. The last one was a bit more expected – traditional song arrangements and stuff."

The lineup of the Wildhearts has shifted over the years, with Ginger the one constant. But the current band – completed by guitarist CJ, bassist Danny McCormack and drummer Ritch Battersby – is generally considered the "classic lineup." McCormack was the most recent to return, following a slew of health problems that eventually saw him lose a leg. With a few miles on the clock, the band appears to be as stable as it's ever been from the outside. Appearances, however, can be deceiving.

"It's never settled," Ginger says. "[McCormack's] a fucking nightmare. It's never going to be settled. We're four very different types of people and that'll always be the case. I don't think at this point in our lives we're going to turn any corners or learn anything that we haven't already learned. All the stupidity in the band is there to stay. I write the music though. If he wants to have his own little fantasy world, then great. It's not going to affect the songs either way. It's not going to make them better or worse, it's just he could do with taking it a bit more seriously. But that's just the way that he is."

If chaos still has a hand over the Wildhearts, the music on *21st Century Love Songs* hasn't suffered one bit. It never has, because Ginger is a perfectionist and he won't let it. He does say that writing for this band is relatively easy these days.

"It's like being married," he says. "It's like having sex with the missus. It's great, and you know what you do well, and there's not many surprises. I know what we'd do badly. We wouldn't do reggae, or country music very well. I've got another band called Ginger Wildheart & the Sinners who do country music great. That's more of a challenge for me. The Wildhearts is quite a comfortable gig now, and none of it is that taxing."

Ginger has been back and forth to L.A. over the years – he had a short and ill-fated spell in Tracii Guns' Brides of Destruction, and he also wrote and played with Courtney Love for a bit. A suspended sentence after a UK bar fight meant that he couldn't come out for a while, and when that fell away the pandemic happened. Hopefully, he'll be able to return soon enough, with the Wildhearts or otherwise. He does like the place.

While we wait on that, there's the new album to enjoy, plus an album from his Sinners project next year. He's working on a solo album, and there's going to be a deluxe rerelease of the Wildhearts' second album *phuq*.

"I'll stay busy," Ginger says. "Don't you worry about that."

The 21st Century Love Songs album is out now.



Shang-Chi (Marvel)

Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings didn't kick off the fourth phase of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, but it sure as hell launched it into the stratosphere. Prior to the picture, Phase Four of the MCU was off to a lackluster start. While Disney's *WandaVision*, *Falcon and the Winter Soldier*, and *Loki* were ingenious in forwarding the overall plot of the MCU, *Black Widow* was more of a setup for Yelena's position in the cinematic universe than furthering the Marvel mythos. But with *Shang-Chi*, Marvel plunges audiences headfirst into the new stage of the MCU, creating an epic narrative worthy of holding a high spot among the best Marvel movies.

Directed by Destin Daniel Cretton (*Just Mercy*, *I Am Not A Hipster*), the story follows Shaun (Simu Liu), a San Fran transplant of wasted potential who slums it with his bestie Katy (Awkwafina) as they spend their days valeting cars and their nights drinking in karaoke bars. But Shaun is more than he seems, on the run from his past, his progenitor, and all that plagues him.

Like *Black Panther*, *Shang-Chi* creates a pocket universe within the MCU that not only celebrates Asian culture, but tries to fix sins of the past. *Shang-Chi* feels like an effort to make good on previous fumbles such as the boring and racially

SHANG-CHI AND THE LEGEND OF THE TEN RINGS IS CHOCK FULL OF PHASE FOUR SURPRISES

BY ERIN MAXWELL

awkward *Iron First* on Netflix and *Iron-Man 3*'s hot take on the Mandarin. And with *Shang-Chi*, Marvel performs a magic trick: retconning botched storylines and characters so that they not only work with new initiatives, but also make up for previous misfires.

In addition to bringing more Asian representation to the MCU, the film also channels the flavor and feel of traditional Hong Kong cinema, particularly in its fight scenes. Choreographed and coordinated by members of the Jackie Chan Stunt Team, Eastern fighting style is heavily emphasized in the film. It's used with jaw-dropping perfection allowing the action and fight sequences to stand out from any other Marvel

movie. (Brad Allen, the supervising stunt coordinator and former pupil of Jackie Chan, passed away prior to the film's release and the film is dedicated to his memory.)

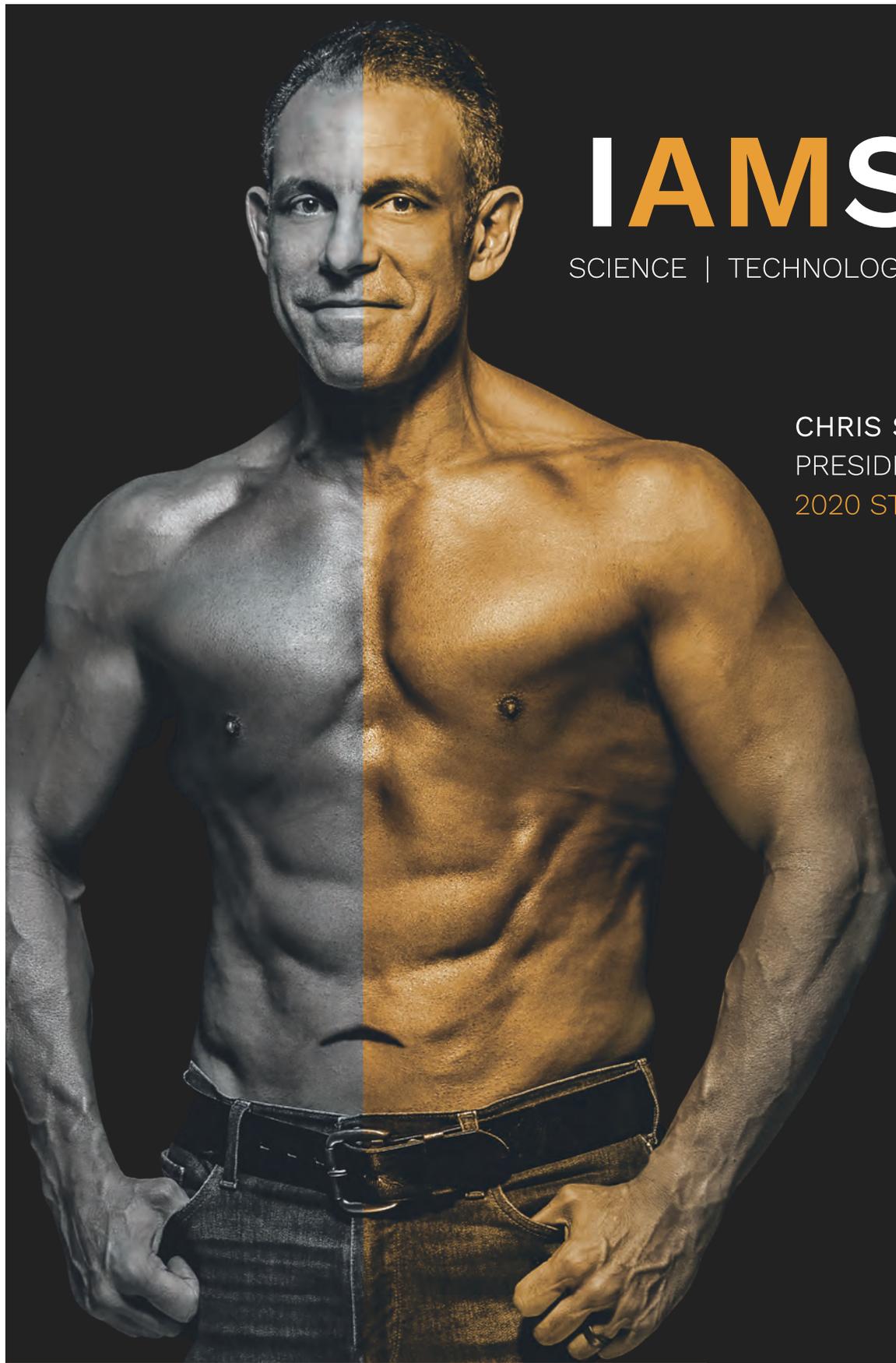
Shang-Chi is also chock full of surprises. Much like *Fat Thor* or *Professor Hulk*, Disney's marketing team did a bang-up job when it came to keeping certain developments, characters, and storylines under wraps as a few familiar faces make an appearance. (There are two post-credit scenes you are going to want to stick around for.)

But the real highlights of the film are the characters – multifaceted individuals whose story arcs are as compelling as the movie itself, with Liu as the high

point of the picture. In his first foray into blockbuster territory, the break-out star of *Kim's Convenience* (a comedic import from our friends in the Great White North) is charismatic as Shaun/Shang-Chi, holding the attention of audiences even against the impressive special effects. His ability to juggle drama, action, and comedy creates an engaging figure that makes him approachable to audiences.

Hong Kong's celebrated celluloid icon Tony Leung as Shaun's estranged father Xu Wenwu is also a standout, with a backstory that makes him one of Marvel's most complex and interesting villains. Awkwafina also takes center stage here, finally getting a part that requires more than delivering one-liners (aside from *The Farewell*, of course). Acting as the guide for the audience, the role of Katy helps clarify aspects of the story and the language to English-speaking audiences.

Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings isn't just a great addition to the MCU, it is one of its tentpoles, offering a solid foundation in which to build new stories and create new heroes that fit perfectly within the ever-expanding Marvel universe. In addition to setting the stage for Phase Four, it shows that Marvel is trying to right past wrongs. So far so good.



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YES, IT'S CLICHE - IT'S CINDERELLA FOR GODMOTHER'S SAKE

BY LINA LECARO



In a world that grew up with the original Disney princess cartoons' romanticized views of the good, evil and life in general – then later realized just how sexist those films were – finding the right take and tone for modern versions has been challenging to say the least. For *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty* and especially *Cinderella*, the central message was: women need to be competitive and spiteful towards each other in their quest for happiness and fulfillment, and only a man – a man of privilege at that – can help us to achieve it.

Which brings us to the latest subtly-feminist stab at the fabled tale, written and directed by Kay Cannon (*Blockers*, *Girl Boss*) and starring pop singer Camilla Cabello. It's no surprise it's getting

mixed reviews – journalists basically hate it and audiences really, really love it. It's a shamelessly on-the-nose crowd-pleaser for modern times, complete with a fabulous queer godmother (no fairies here, girl), mash-ups of pop-hits informing the story, and a message about empowerment and following one's dreams that might be trite, but is self-aware enough to know it, stand (and dance) by it, and embrace the cheesiness.

Billy Porter plays the godmother and he is indeed fabulous, which is all he needs to be. Idina Menzel plays the evil stepmother and she could not be more perfectly cast, conjuring her old *Wicked* vibes and belting out a few numbers with the powerhouse vocals that made her famous (and a Disney icon when she "Let It Go" as Elsa in *Frozen*). Relatively

unknown British actor Nicholas Galitzine is fine enough as the prince being pressured to marry by his dad the king (Pierce Bronson, who's really having fun with this one) and defended by his mom the queen (a gaunt but great Minnie Driver).

In this version there is also a sister princess who is smarter and more qualified to take the throne than her unstable brother but – trope alert – she can't because women in this kingdom don't get to have careers. If you saw Eddie Murphy's gaudy *Coming 2 America*, you'll recall this storyline, which yeah, you probably also saw in a hundred other films about the antiquated rules of royalty.

Yes, it's cliché, it's *Cinderella* for godmother's sake. But it's also extremely en-

tertaining: from the gorgeous costuming and sets to the musical numbers, which include a town crier who raps the news of the day to townspeople, and chart-topping hits from the '80s-present that work so well into the narrative, you'd think they were actually written for the movie.

Janet Jackson's "Rhythm Nation" used to portray a bustling town's square (nice!); Galitzine singing Queen's "Find Me Somebody to Love" backed by a choir after the ball is announced (great – he's no Freddie obviously – but still pretty great); Menzel crooning Madonna's "Material Girl" as she teaches her daughters about what's important (genius!); and a weird but wonderful mash-up of Salt n' Pepa's "Whatta Man" (sung by the prince's female suitors at the ball; yeah he so crazy, but they still "want to have his baby") into The White Stripes' "Seven Nation Army" (women from seven or more nations do make for an army of would-be wives, and anyway, the minuet reference begged for it).

If you're not a fan of Broadway musicals and more so, "jukebox musicals" that infuse modern tracks into the storyline, you probably weren't gonna like this *Cinderella* no matter how fresh the writing or how good the acting. As it is, the writing is just OK, but it does have some clever moments and the acting is as good as it needs to be for a colorful, family-friendly fantasy of this sort. We could've done without another silly James Corden movie moment (he's one of the mice who becomes human to take her to the ball and he's basically playing himself, again, which was probably unavoidable considering he has a producer credit).

Cabello is a likable and spunky, cinder-covered Ella (her real name). And by the way, we must commend the producers – or Rihanna – for not succumbing to the obvious inclusion of an "Umbrella (ella-ella)" number here. It's nice to see a Latina in the role, even if her culture isn't really addressed, save for a salsa-infused closing number, J-Lo's "Let's Get Loud." And if we're ranking portrayals of the down-trodden damsel forced to dress in rags and act as a maid to her step-monster and less attractive sisters after her father dies, C.C. is somewhere behind the original cartoon, Drew Barrymore and Lily James, but definitely ranking before Brandy and Hillary Duff. Also, glass slippers are a ridiculously uncomfortable idea for footwear, and we're really glad someone finally said so.

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