

STUDENT WORKERS STRIKE AT UCI • PUESTO: 20 MILLION TACOS • REVIEWS: THE FABELMANS AND THE MENU

IRVINE

# WEEKLY

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## 'TIS THE SEASON

HOLIDAY PERFORMANCES AND SOUNDS OF THE NEW YEAR

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# STUDENT WORKERS STRIKE AT UC IRVINE, DEMAND WAGE IMPROVEMENTS

WORKERS ORGANIZED BY THE UAW UNION ARE DEMANDING HIGHER WAGES, CHILD CARE REIMBURSEMENTS AND JOB SECURITY.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

**M**ore than 40,000 unionized student workers within the University of California system, including UC Irvine, went on strike Monday, Nov. 15, protesting the UC system's inability to meet the demands of union proposals.

The picket line of 48,000 student workers consisting of teaching assistants, researchers, graduate students and other campus employees across California are demanding the Chancellor's office reconsider its position on several aspects impacting the well-being of UC employees, including higher wages, child care reimbursement increases and guaranteed job security.

Jackie Ku is a UC Irvine graduate student and a UAW2865 union representative. Speaking to Irvine Weekly via phone, Ku said Monday's strike was a last resort response to lengthy contract negotiations with the UC which ultimately failed.

"The strike was planned once our contracts expired – that really has been the precondition – we never planned to get to this point, even hoping to avoid this point," he said. "But really the reason we're on strike now is because UC has acted unlawfully at the negotiation table by withholding vital information that we need to have a substantial negotiation process by making unilateral changes to the workplace."

Ku emphasized that his union was "eager to bargain" but that the picket line at UC Irvine will stand until then.

As of Thursday, Nov. 17, there was no timetable on a resolution for negotiations,



although Ku said he had been informed that the UC was meeting with individual groups.

"We're gonna go as long as it takes until the UC comes to the table with fair terms – terms that actually address the problems, rather than the flowery language that offers no substantial changes," he said. "I've heard that the UC is bargaining with different unions separately. But as for UAW2865, we have no idea when we are going to go to the table."

In terms of demands, several unions – UAW2865, UAW5810 and SRU-UAW, are asking the UC for a base salary of \$54,000 for graduate workers and \$70,000 postdoctoral students, with 14% increases for academic researchers. Unions are also asking the Chancellor's Office to consider, "annual cost of living adjustments," and "experienced-based increases," according to UAW bargaining literature.

In its counter proposal to unions, the UC has offered a postdoctoral minimum salary of \$59,362 with a 3% annual increase, with higher benefit costs. Student researchers would receive a 6%, with 3% annual raises. Academic student employees would get a 7% raise, with an annual increase of 3%.

Another issue highlighted by the strike is the aspect of rent burden which Ku said impacts approximately 70% of unionized workers.

"What the UC has offered at the table doesn't even begin to match inflation, let alone rent burden and cost of living," he said.

In a statement to Irvine Weekly, UC Irvine spokesman Tom Vasich said the university was optimistic to resolve the issue as soon as possible.

"Student employees, graduate student researchers, postdoctoral scholars and academic researchers are valuable members of the UCI community. We look forward to reaching an agreement. Our students' success remains our highest priority, and we are committed to working towards that end."

UC Irvine Professor Dr. Kathleen Treseder has been vocal in her support for student workers. In a phone call with Irvine Weekly on Friday, Nov. 18, Treseder, who is not currently teaching lecture courses this semester, said the clear resolution to this matter is for the UC to meet union demands. Treseder also said she has been marching with the students each day of the strike.

"I'm fully in support of the students, their compensation has essentially been decreasing every year, because it has not increased to match inflation. Many of them have food insecurity, some of them are homeless – in most of the campuses they have to spend more than half of their salary on housing, and that's even campus housing," Treseder said. "They

should definitely have a much stronger raise than what the UC is offering.

As the strike moves into its first week, classes are certainly being impacted, according to Treseder, who explained that some professors rely on teaching assistance to help grade the academic papers and tests of more than 400 students.

"My colleagues who don't have TAs – some of them might have as many as 400 students or more in their classes. It's just impossible to keep up with the grading. I think some of the undergrads are not going to classes in solidarity," she said.

UC Irvine is set to begin finals on Dec. 5, however Treseder said she is unsure what route professors would take if the strike is on-going considering the lack of assistive resources for professors.

"Faculty have a lot of flexibility on how they instruct the classes so I think they'll each be making their own decisions – some may cancel, so may change the finals to a format that's easier to grade," she said. "The workers want to get back to work. The students, and the postdocs and the other students that are striking, work really hard – they do the majority of the work at the university, so they should be paid fairly."

A spokesperson from the University of California Office of the President provided an update on the status of negotiations to Irvine Weekly. In an email the Office explained that it continues to negotiate with unions in good faith, but did not give a timeline on a foreseeable resolution.

"At this time, we believe that the best path to an agreement is with the aid of a third-party mediator, and have proposed to the United Auto Workers enlisting the assistance of a neutral private mediator so that we can achieve a compromise," the statement read. "We continue to encourage the union's partnership in pursuing mediation. Our campuses are working to mitigate the impact of any strike activity on our students by ensuring, to the extent possible, continuity of instruction and research. This includes encouraging departmental and academic units to provide additional support and resources to students for learning. Additionally, campuses will be prepared for contingencies should a strike interfere with the conclusion of the academic term."

# ART

## HOLIDAY PERFORMANCES AND SOUNDS OF THE NEW YEAR

FROM THE CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTING TO PAJAMA PARTIES IN THE GREAT PARK, THERE ARE PLENTY OF WAYS TO CELEBRATE THE HOLIDAYS AND RING IN THE NEW YEAR IN IRVINE.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

**A**s Irvine residents and others throughout Orange County enter the 2022 holiday season, there is no shortage of festive, live, local entertainment. Heading into December, the Barclay Theatre in Irvine will be staging *The Nutcracker*, alongside several other notable performances going into 2023.

### Annual Holiday Tree Lighting ceremony

**Saturday, Dec. 3,  
4:00 p.m. - 6:30 p.m.  
Irvine Civic Center**

This annual celebration will make "snow" fall over Irvine! Come bring the family to watch the Christmas Tree lighting celebration, get a photo with Santa Claus, enjoy music, games and a winter-theme train ride under the stars.

[www.cityofirvine.org](http://www.cityofirvine.org)

### Hikari - A Festival of Lights

**Nov. 25 - Dec. 30,  
4:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.**

While Tanaka Farms will be closed on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, there's still plenty of time to check out all the festivities. Tanaka Farms has installed more than 1 million lightbulbs of colorful Christmas lights for the 2022 season and

offers two different options to view the lights, Chinese lanterns and other festive installations set up throughout the 30-acre farm.

Hikari is open every day from 4:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. The Holiday Wagon Ride departs at 4:30 p.m., and runs every 10 minutes with the last ride leaving at 8:30 p.m. Entry gates will close at 9:00 p.m.

[www.tanakafarms.com/hikari](http://www.tanakafarms.com/hikari)

### Pajama Party Movie Night Saturday, Dec. 10

The Great Park will host a Pajama Party Movie Night on Saturday, Dec. 10, as a part of Holidayz in The Park. Registration opens Wednesday, Nov. 30. [yourgreatpark.org/holidayz](http://yourgreatpark.org/holidayz)



**Holiday Pet Adoption Fair**  
**Sunday, Dec. 11,**  
**10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.**

**Irvine Animal Care Center**  
 Local animal care groups will be coming to the Irvine Animal Care Center to support the 16th Annual Holiday Pet Adoption Fair. There will be hundreds of dogs, cats and other animals like rabbits available for adoption. The event will also feature a bake sale, food trucks and art.  
[www.Irvineanimals.org/homeholidays](http://www.Irvineanimals.org/homeholidays)

## IRVINE BARCLAY THEATRE PERFORMANCES

**The Nutcracker presented by Festival Ballet Theatre**  
**Dec. 10 through Dec. 24, 2022**  
**— showtimes at 1:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.**

This full-length traditional production is choreographed and directed by Festival Ballet Theatre's Artistic Director, Salwa Rizkalla, and features world-renowned guest artists, FBT's professional company dancers, and exceptional young talent from across the Southland.

In addition to the classic Nutcracker performance, the Festival Ballet Theatre has also announced the return of the pre-show Nutcracker Tea Party inside the Jade Room at the Barclay Theatre. The Tea Party celebrations will be hosted one hour prior to show time — 12:00 p.m., and 5:00 p.m.

Please note there will only be one tea party on the following dates:

December 11 (12:00 p.m.)  
 December 20 (5:00 p.m.)  
 December 21 (5:00 p.m.)  
 December 22 (5:00 p.m.)  
 December 23 (5:00 p.m.)  
 December 24 (10:00 a.m.)

**Trio Barclay: Tchaikovsky and Arroyo**  
**Sunday, Jan. 15, 2023, 5:00 p.m.**

Irvine Barclay Theatre's Ensemble-in-Residence, Trio Barclay, includes Dennis Kim on violin, Jonah Kim on cello, and Sean Kennard on piano.

**Aaron Diehl Trio**  
**Saturday, Jan. 21, 2023,**  
**8:00 p.m.**

Aaron Diehl returns this season leading his own trio in a project showcasing his fluency in both classical repertoire and dynamic jazz improvisation. Part of Distinctive Experiences co-presented by Irvine Barclay Theatre and the Philharmonic Society of Orange County, the evening will feature Aaron Diehl on piano, John Webber on bass, and Aaron Kimmel on drums.

**H.M.S. Pinafore by the New York Gilbert & Sullivan Players**  
**Wednesday, Feb. 1, 2023,**  
**7:30 p.m.**

"H.M.S. Pinafore" is as popular in the new millennium as at its premiere more than 100 years ago. With infectious tunes, broad comedy, imaginative staging, lively choreography, and beautiful costumes, this classic comedy still makes a modern-day splash. The New York Gilbert & Sullivan Players' production of "H.M.S. Pinafore" is musical satire at its best.

**Cyrille Aimée**  
**Saturday, Feb. 11, 2023, 8:00 p.m.**

Having won the Montreux Jazz Festival Vocal Competition and the Sarah Vaughn International Jazz Vocal Competition, Cyrille Aimée has established his name in the top ranks of contemporary jazz. Now a native of France, living and working in New Orleans, Grammy-nominated vocalist Cyrille Aimée is being hailed as the new generation of jazz royalty.

**Curtis on Tour: L'Histoire du Soldat (Soldier's Tale)**  
**Saturday, March 11, 2023,**  
**8:00 p.m.**

Co-presented by Irvine Barclay Theatre and the Philharmonic Society of Orange County, Igor Stravinsky's "L'Histoire du Soldat" will come to life by way of a Curtis Institute of Music ensemble. The performance will also feature actor and narrator John de Lancie (Star Trek: The Next Generation), award-winning performer David Shifrin on clarinet, and prominent violinist Soovin Kim.

**Alisa Weilerstein: Fragments**  
**Sunday, March 12, 2023,**  
**3:00 p.m.**

"Fragments" is performed inside a space defined by fragmented wall pieces, re-framing the stage through mutable design that uniquely frames each selection with aspects paying respects to Bach's Cello Suites.

Lighting cues shift the wall pieces in mood in response to each musical "chapter" that Alisa performs. "Fragments" is part of the Eclectic Orange series co-presented by the Irvine Barclay Theatre and the Philharmonic Society of Orange County.

**Zakir Hussain: Masters of Percussion**  
**Thursday, March 16, 2023,**  
**8:00 p.m.**

"Masters of Percussion" is an evening of drumming that crosses cultures and unites audiences in a dance of the heart performed by tabla virtuoso and Indian national treasure Zakir Hussain.

**Swan Lake presented by Festival Ballet Theatre**  
**Saturday, March 18 & 19, 2023**

This beloved classical ballet is choreographed by Artistic Director Salwa Rizkalla, after Marius Petipa and Lev Ivanov, and features world-renowned guest artists in the lead roles. Set to Tchaikovsky's elegantly moving score, Swan Lake is the story of young Prince Siegfried and Odette, the Swan Queen, a young girl doomed to be a swan by day and a woman by night.

**Nathalie Joachim: Fanm d'Ayiti (Women of Haiti)**  
**Saturday, April 1, 2023,**  
**8:00 p.m.**

An evening of voice, flute, string quartet and electronics developed by Grammy-nominated composer/performer Nathalie Joachim, "Fanm d'Ayiti" is a celebration of iconic Haitian female artists and Joachim's Haitian heritage.

**Midori Plays Bach**  
**Sunday, April 16, 2023,**  
**3:00 p.m.**

Midori has shared the stage with renowned artists for more than 35 years. Having collaborated with Leonard Bernstein, Yo-Yo Ma and many other celebrated names, Midori will bring her precision and unmistakable sound to the Irvine Barclay Theatre. This show is part of the Distinctive Experiences co-presented by Irvine Barclay Theatre and the Philharmonic Society of Orange County.

**Selected Shorts: Uncharted Territories**  
**Saturday, April 22, 2023,**  
**8:00 p.m.**

The hit public radio and podcast series returns to Irvine Barclay Theatre with a program of spellbinding original short fiction performed by actors of stage and screen. Selected Shorts is broadcast on over 150 radio stations around the country, attracting over 300,000 listeners each week through the live show and podcast. Past performers have included Catherine O'Hara, Blythe Danner, and Tony Hale, among many others.

**Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles & Villalobos Brothers**  
**Friday, April 28, 2023,**  
**8:00 p.m.**

Mariachi Reyna de Los Angeles is America's first all-female mariachi ensemble and will take the stage with Villalobos Brothers on April 28.

**Christian McBride's New Jawn**  
**Saturday, April 29, 2023,**  
**8:00 p.m.**

Christian McBride is a seven-time Grammy-winning jazz bassist with more than three decades of experience. From jazz to R&B, McBride's breadth of talent has spanned many genres working with some of the most well-known names, including The Roots, D'Angelo, Sting, and Paul McCartney.

# FOOD

## PUESTO: 10 YEARS & 20 MILLION TACOS

FEATURING MODERN MEXICAN CUISINE, AWARD-WINNING TACOS, A SIGNATURE CERVECERÍA AND A ROBUST LIST OF TEQUILAS, MEZCAL AND SIGNATURE MARGARITAS, PUESTO SHOULD BE ON EVERYONE'S RADAR THIS HOLIDAY PARTY SEASON.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

With locations across Orange County, including Irvine and San Diego, Puesto Mexican Artisan Kitchen & Bar has celebrated a decade in Southern California. With two locations in Irvine – Puesto Park Place and Puesto Los Olivos – the chain has become familiar for its warm plates and welcoming vibes.

With a signature interior design by renowned architect Paul Basile, Puesto's Park Place location features a 5,800 square foot floor plan with stunning Douglas fir timber, juxtaposed against metallic features, mixed with eye-catching architectural patterns that make use of a dynamic floor plan.

Puesto has been a family-owned and operated business since opening its doors in La Jolla in 2012. Founded by a trio of brothers – Eric, Alan and Alexander Adler – and their cousins Isidoro and Moy Lombrozo, Puesto continues to symbolize the family's love for modern Mexican cuisine.

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



PHOTO COURTESY PUESTO

had sold approximately 18.3 million tacos since 2012 – roughly 1.8 million tacos annually.

Puesto's highly sought-after taco begins with a non-GMO blue corn tortilla. From there, Executive Chef Luisteen Gonzalez has created a tasty list of specialty tacos that include their Chicken al Pastor made with Jidori chicken, hibiscus and chipotle tinga, avocado and piña habanero pico, and a Tamarindo Shrimp taco

made with tamarindo-chile sauce, classic guacamole and cilantro. Not to be overlooked is the Short Rib Quesabirria taco, featuring crispy melted cheese, braised short rib, Jalisco salsa, pickled radish and classic guacamole.

This holiday season, Puesto is sharing the love for cocktails and tacos with all its fans, with a Puesto Happy Hour and Taco Tuesday celebration, starting with half-off tacos from 3:00 p.m. to close,

every Tuesday.

This year, Taco Tuesday can be combined with Puesto Happy Hour which goes from 3:00 - 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. The Puesto Happy Hour includes a long list of margaritas, including a \$9 Perfect Puesto Margarita made with reposado tequila, fresh lime and organic agave nectar. Another favorite is the Hot Sauce (Spicy) Margarita, which is made with blanco tequila, pineapple juice, cucumber, fresh lime and habanero. Aside from cocktails, Puesto is also offering \$5 draft beers.

For those that want a true brewery experience, the Puesto Cerveceria is located at the Mission Valley location. Doug Hasker, a Veteran Brewmaster from San Diego, is the Head Brewer at

Puesto Cerveceria and has refined a well-rounded list of beers. Earlier this year, Puesto's Mexican Lager, Mexican Amber and Mexican Negra Lager were awarded silver medals at the 2022 Great American Beer Festival.

Hasker is well known in the brewing industry, with more than three decades of experience working with spirit industry heavyweights Gordon Biersch and Ballast Point.

# UCI ASTRONOMERS LEADING JAMES WEBB SPACE TELESCOPE RESEARCH

A TEAM OF UC IRVINE ASTRONOMERS PART OF NASA'S EARLY SCIENCE TEAMS GET IMAGES FROM THE JAMES WEBB SPACE TELESCOPE AND ARE CONDUCTING THE MOST DETAILED RESEARCH TO DATE ON A NEARBY GALAXY.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

**A**stronomers within the Department of Physics and Astronomy at UC Irvine are conducting the most detailed observations of the universe ever. The department recently became one of 13 astronomy programs selected by NASA to begin research on the first-ever images sent back from the James Webb Space Telescope.

Launched by NASA in December 2021, the James Webb Space Telescope returned the first images back to earth on July 12. Due to the amount of detail, the images drew awe-inspiring reactions from the astronomical research community.

Unlike its predecessor the Hubble Telescope, JWST captures images within the infrared spectrum, giving astronomers the most detailed views of surrounding galaxies ever captured. Hubble was only able to capture images in the visible light spectrum, prohibiting astronomers a chance to peer behind the galactic dust to surrounding galaxies.

Dr. Vivian U is an observational extragalactic astronomer who works as an assistant researcher in UC Irvine's Astronomy Department. U explained that this galactic dust has plagued researchers for decades but with the emergence of infrared imaging telescopes, a clearer picture of space and its chemical elements is emerging.

"My group here at UC Irvine observes how galaxies in supermassive blackholes



The galaxy system. Image from the James Webb Space Telescope

interact with each other. In particular, my interest is in merging galaxies – these galaxies that are interacting and colliding with each other. This is kind of a phase in galaxy evolution, not all galaxies go through it but when it does, it does introduce dramatic changes to a galaxy's life span – altering the phase of its evolution," U explained. "During this phase we know that a lot of the dust gets filtered into the center of the system and blocks our view of the center of the system."

U is the lead author for one of the 13 early-release science teams – composed of researchers from UC Irvine, CalTech and the National Radio Astronomy Observatory in Virginia – that is getting early data from the \$10 billion telescope.

U explained how UC Irvine became involved with this state-of-the-art research,

adding that the role of these early-release science teams is not only to analyze the findings, but also to help NASA explore the capabilities of the JWST.

"Because this is a brand new instrument, NASA was hoping that teams of astronomers would basically step up to help calibrate the new instruments and demonstrate the wide range of instruments on board the JWST," she explained.

To be a part of NASA's Early Release Science Program, U and her team had to submit a proposal to compete to be one of the first teams to use the data. "But also its first guinea pig," she added.

Specifically, U and her team researched nearby galaxy NGC 7469 using JWST's infrared technology. In a paper published in *The Astrophysical Journal Letters*, U wrote that her team of researchers have viewed the interactions between the nucleus of a galaxy and a supermassive black hole – "face-on."

The images provided to U and her colleagues are so detailed, the team was able to see wind being generated from the supermassive blackhole inside the galaxy.

"[The galaxy NGC 7469] is just the first of three targets that were observed as part of our larger program. We are basically looking at a blackhole that is rapidly growing – but at the same time it is spewing out energy that is affecting the vicinity gas that's around it," U explained. "We're seeing this blackhole that's driving

out wind, and how that wind is depositing energy into the surrounding gasses and influencing how stars may be forming in this blackhole region."

U explained that NGC 7469 is more than a million light years away, but is considered one of the closer galaxies. However, regardless of NGC 7469's distance, the view was unprecedented for the research group.

"Viewing this galaxy face-on, we are able to see not only winds from the supermassive black hole blowing in our direction but also 'shock heating' of the gas induced by said winds very close to the central active galactic nucleus, which is something we had not expected to be able to discern so clearly."

As U and her team of researchers begin to digest this data, it's also important to explain the meaning of these recent discoveries.

"We are all working on understanding our galaxy's fate. As a human civilization, we want to understand where we are – why we're here in this point and time in the universe. So, a lot of that is trying to understand this history of the universe – how galaxies came about, how we had the Big Bang, and how we've evolved since the beginning of time to where we are today. Perhaps, more importantly, where we are going from here on," she explained.

As the team of researchers at UC Irvine continues on their journey with JWST, U said she is confident there are still vast unknowns.

"What I think interests all of us – what are we going to see that we didn't expect? We don't know. We have assumptions of how the world works – theorists are able to come up with models that best work with what we have seen previously," she said. "We have seen evidence of galaxy merging. We know that if each galaxy is believed to have its own black hole, then the merging of those galaxies should produce a larger galaxy and a larger black hole, but we haven't actually been able to witness the merging of this event. From what we know now, there's just not as many of these merging events as we predicted – why is that?"

She continued, "I would say there's still a lot of known unknowns – but who am I to say?"

# MATT SORUM CELEBRATES JUDGEMENT DAY

## THE DRUMMER RELEASES NEW SINGLE WITH BAND KINGS OF CHAOS.

BY BRETT CALLWOOD

**F**ormer Guns N' Roses / Velvet Revolver drummer Matt Sorum wanted to be in a band again. Following the breakup of Velvet Revolver in 2009 and the subsequent, tragic death of Scott Weiland, Sorum has kept himself busy but he admits that he's missed the band dynamic. Initially, Kings of Chaos was one of those endeavors – a party jam band that sees him pull in various famous friends to perform rock & roll classics. But it's evolving.

"I got involved in doing that kind of thing going on 15, 16 years ago," Sorum says. "I started an L.A. band called Camp Freddy – that was me and Dave Navarro, and we used to invite a hit list of people. We had a pretty good run for 11 or 12 years. At one point I decided that I wanted to do my own version of this, because it was all over the place. We did all kinds of stuff and had a really good time, but it was time for me to move on. I started reaching out to friends of mine, saying hey, you guys want to go to South Africa? I called Slash and Duff, got Glenn Hughes and Robin Zander, Billy Gibbons, Steven Tyler, and all these guys said yes. I started putting together collectives of all these musicians."

While Camp Freddy was an all-star cover band, Kings of Chaos played catalog from the beginning. If Billy Gibbons was singing, they'd play ZZ Top songs, and so on.

"It was a really cool stage full of great rock & roll characters," Sorum says. "You're awestruck, going 'woah, how did this come together?' And hearing different interpretations of those original songs. For me, it was slightly based on bucket list stuff. If I make the call and they say yes, I get to be in a band with Steven Tyler, or Billy Idol. It's been happening over and



PHOTO BY ENZO MAZZEO

over again for the last 10 years."

That's how it's been for a few years now, and it's been a successful enterprise. But people kept asking Sorum if a Kings of Chaos record was forthcoming, and that idea got his wheels spinning.

"I'd say that it's not really a band," he says. "It's just me, making phone calls and getting people together. I toured around the States a little bit with Chester Bennington, Billy Gibbons, Billy Duffy from the Cult, the DeLeo brothers from Stone Temple Pilots, a lot of one-off gigs and a lot of corporates. I kept getting offered record deals. Putting a record together isn't easy, especially when you don't have a band. So I said that I'd see what it would take me to do. I finally completed my own recording studio out here in the desert. That cuts a lot of costs in recording the music."

Sorum ended up putting pen to paper on a deal for Kings of Chaos with AFM, a German label that he felt was supportive enough to be the right choice.

"I met with them and they just had a really good supportive attitude about this, the kind of rock & roll I wanted to make," Sorum says. "They weren't looking for a radio band. Obviously, modern rock radio would be great. But they approached me and there's a lot of those sort of classic rock labels out there but these guys seemed to have the right attitude and I think that was a lot of it because this is going to be a work in progress. They believed in me, that I could pull it off. So far so good. I have a lot of work ahead of me. We have to record nine more songs, so I'll have to bring in a lot more of my friends. They helped me make the recent video, and mix it and

master it. They hadn't heard me sing rock before. I sent in a track that I'd done with Slash and Duff. It was something I'd been sitting on, and I'd love to put it out. They agree and that's what you hear for the first single."

That first single is "Judgement Day," a driving, scorching rock & roll beast. As well as Slash and Duff McKagan, it also features Davis Kushner of Velvet Revolver.

"It was after Scott left – we got in the studio and cut a lot of music," Sorum says. "A lot of great stuff that should see the light of day in my opinion. We recorded all the way up until five years ago. We were still trying to pull it together. Me and Duff were pushing and pushing especially, to try to get there. Slash veered and started doing more solo records and it never really happened. We just couldn't find the right guy. It wasn't an easy fit, replacing Scott Weiland. It had its run and that was it. It was a great experience for all of us. We toured the world and made a couple of cool records, especially the first one."

The plan is to put out a Kings of Chaos album by next fall, dropping singles at regular intervals along the way. As of right now, Sorum isn't sure if the lineup will continue rotating or if he'll have something more permanent in place.

"It would really be up to the other guys and what organically happens," he says. "Velvet Revolver happened that way. We went to play a tribute concert as the three guys from GnR, and we all knew that we needed to be a band again. At that point, we decided to use the name Velvet Revolver because AxL was off doing Guns N' Roses. We created a new brand for ourselves, and that could happen here. Let's see what the public perception is, and see where the songs go. Why knows?"

There might be some shows in the near future but nothing is booked at the time of writing. As with all things Kings of Chaos, it's about seeing where the chips fall.

"It's really based on where things organically fall," Sorum says. "Next year we'll keep going as we have with Kings of Chaos. Just see what happens as the record starts to unfold."

*Kings of Chaos' "Judgement Day" is out now.*

# ENTERTAINMENT

## THE MENU SERVES MESSY AND MACABRE GOURMET SATIRE

THE FILM DIRECTED BY MARK MYLOD STARS ANYA TAYLOR-JOY AND RALPH FIENNES.

BY CHAD BYRNES



Courtesy Searchlight Pictures

Some people are begging to be skewered like lamb shanks over hot flames. At least that's director Mark Mylod's take in his dark comedy *The Menu*, which takes aim at the nouveau riche, particularly those with expensive epicurean tastes. Actually, the film targets several tiers of douchery, not just the foodies: tech-bros, pompous celebrities, professional critics (yikes), high-end investors, and spoiled ivy league brats who don't know what a student loan is, are all thrown on the spit. In one grisly evening, these pantheons of mediocrity will be served a meal they'll never forget.

The movie opens with twelve diners boarding a ferry which will take them to Hawthorne, an exclusive restaurant located on a private island. Each customer has paid \$1,250 to savor the gourmet delights of celebrity Chef Slowik (Ralph Fiennes), whose reputation as a true culinary artist

is only exceeded by his anonymity. He's like Howard Hughes with an apron.

Our entrance into this gastronomic universe is through the doe-eyes of Margot (Anya Taylor-Joy), the last minute-date to food elitist and man-child, Tyler (Nicolas Hoult). While Margot seems blasé about the whole affair, Tyler can't stop fidgeting since he's about to meet one of his heroes in Slowik; you'd think he was meeting Keith Richards. Other guests include a washed-up movie star (John Leguizamo) and his petulant assistant (Aimee Carrero); a simpering food writer (Janet McTeer), whose malicious reviews have murdered multiple culinary careers; a trio of technology whiz kids who think they're on Spring Break (Rob Yang, Mark St. Cyr and Arturo Castro); and Hawthorne regulars (Judith Light and Reed Birney). When they land on the 12-acre island, the diners are met by the head of staff and Slowik's assistant (a

frightening Hong Chau). She gives them a tour of the island's natural beauty, which provides the restaurant with its organic ingredients, not to mention a small barracks where the staff sleep on cots like soldiers going to war. These people take food seriously.

The bulk of the film takes place in Hawthorne's dining room; a sleek, wood-paneled dining room that's connected to the open kitchen where the patrons can clearly see the staff work with robotic precision. After they sit down for the tasting, Slowik enters the domain with the air of a dictator... or a serial killer. "Slowik is not just a chef," Tyler gushes, "He's a storyteller." And so he is. With a sinister, deliberate drawl, Slowik introduces each course with a backstory from his childhood that's straight out of *Grimm's Fairytales*. Food is not to be eaten, he insists, it's to be "savored." If anyone interrupts these mono-

logues, he glowers at them with frosty contempt. Fiennes hits all the right notes playing Slowik with a calculated madness that's both hilarious and unnerving.

Taylor-Joy is equally hypnotic as Margot, the only customer who doesn't buy into the affected pageantry of the place. She just wants some real food, not the dabs of fish eggs and leaves they keep bringing her. With her expressive gaze, she's a perfect avatar for the audience as she reacts with a droll skepticism to all the posh nonsense. She induces the movie's biggest laughs when she guffaws at terms like "mouth feel," and reacts to her fellow patrons' mannerisms, or simply glares back at Slowik when he follows her to the restroom and asks what she's doing there — she's not a part of the menu.

The first act is a masterstroke in pacing, comedy, and suspense. Mylod and screenwriters Seth Reiss and Will Tracy ratchet up the tension while inducing some uncomfortable chuckles. Each time Slowik claps his hands and serves a new course, the pressure in the room escalates as the diners' reactions grow in confusion. It's a beautiful ballet of dark humor and anxiety.

But once the secret is revealed and the tension breaks, the movie starts to fall apart. What started as a provocative satire with some interesting ideas regarding narcissism and societal hypocrisy devolves into a series of horror clichés. Instead of embellishing the Battle Royale aspects of the movie in which several players attempt to escape the island, the filmmakers could've focused on the story's Agatha Christie-like qualities. The satire lies in the characters and the reason they're there in the first place, not knife fights and action sequences.

The movie serves a fantastic appetizer but it leaves you hungering for more, even when it delivers wonderfully macabre moments and tops them with a surprisingly nihilistic ending. There's also a memorable scene featuring the most mouth-watering cheeseburger in the history of cinema (this critic rushed to In-N-Out the minute the credits started rolling). Even if the film's social commentary and satirical edge feels like a badly-tossed salad of ideas, its controlled directing, quick pacing, and fantastic performances provide some flavorful textures and cinematic bites.

# SPIELBERG'S *THE FABELMANS*: AN ARTFUL YET UNFOCUSED ODE TO FILMMAKING

THE COMING-OF-AGE DRAMA IS A SEMI-AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL LOOK AT SPIELBERG'S BEGINNINGS AS A DIRECTOR.

BY CHAD BYRNES

After entertaining audiences for nearly fifty years with groundbreaking blockbusters and epic dramas such as *Jaws*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Jurassic Park*, and *Schindler's List*, Steven Spielberg turns the lens on himself with his latest film, *The Fabelmans*. The recent trend of filmmakers reexamining their lives (Sam Mendes' *Empire of Light*, James Gray's *Armageddon Time*) sees Spielberg's foray as a coming-of-age confessional and heartfelt ode to cinema. As you'd expect, the director's signature childlike wonderment sparkles in every frame. With the brilliant cinematographer Janusz Kaminski by his side, and a moody score by John Williams, it's a nostalgic, sun-dappled, visually arresting journey into an artist's origin. If only the plot was as compelling as the filmmaking.

It's the early 50's and Burt (Paul Dano) and Mitzi (Michelle Williams) Fabelman wait in line at a movie theater with their seven-year-old son, Sammy (Mateo Zoryon Francis-DeFord) to see Cecil B. DeMille's juggernaut drama, *The Greatest Show on Earth*. Since it's Sammy's first time at the movies, his parents do their best to quell his fears. His father, an electrical technician, explains how the projector works, while his mother, a former pianist and full-time eccentric, tells him that watching a movie is like "stepping into a dream." As we'll see, Sammy adopts both of his parents' character traits (the technician and the artist) as he embarks on a love affair with film.

We jump a few years to Sammy as a teenager (Gabriel LaBelle, in a star-turning role) after he moves with his family to Ari-



zona. There, he directs mini-Westerns and WW-II epics with his pals in the Boy Scouts. At first, Burt and Mitzi are merely bemused, but quickly realize their son's interest in filmmaking isn't just a passing fancy, but an obsession. These scenes possess a genuine joy and love for creativity which the rest of the film has a hard time matching.

Soon, the cracks in his parents' marriage start to show. While Burt, played by Dano with a quiet dissonance, loves his wife and wholeheartedly accepts her outlandish behavior, Mitzy descends into bouts of hysteria where she maniacally dances in front of her children or drives them into the eye of a passing tornado. Williams gives an unflinching turn as a woman who defiantly seethes against her hidden emotions. Although her performance teeters on the edge of bombast, it's one of the best things in the movie. If anything, she's simply too gritty for Spielberg's sugar-coated universe. The script, written by Spielberg and Tony Kushner, keeps us at bay with dialogue that switches between artfully wise to ridiculous and schmaltzy. Compared to

movies that deal with similar themes like *Wildlife* (Dano's own directorial debut) and *Marriage Story*, it's a pretty lackluster depiction of a difficult subject.

The movie comes back to life when we spend time with Sammy and his love of filmmaking. You just wish there was more of it. Why weren't there more scenes where Sammy goes to the movies, talks about his favorite filmmakers, and burrows deeper into his education? The narrative should take us down a rabbit hole of cinema with Sammy leading the way. As it is, the movie is satisfied with skimming the surface. And we never really get to know Sammy himself. As portrayed, he's more of a faint representation than a full blooded teenager with the requisite quirks and frailties.

What Spielberg lacks in characterization he makes up for molding his theme regarding the burdens of becoming an artist. This becomes apparent in a scene when Sammy is editing some of the family footage he shot and discovers that his mother is probably having an affair with his father's best friend, Uncle Bennie (Seth Rogen).

There's also a superb visit from his Uncle Boris (Judd Hirsch), a one-time carnival barker and silent movie actor. Recognizing a fellow creator in his nephew, Boris gives a fiery monologue about the nature of being an artist, warning him that art and family will always be at odds. "Art," he screams. "Will tear you apart!"

As his family begins to crumble, Sammy loses his ambition and relinquishes his camera. After they relocate to Northern California, Sammy's life spins out of control. In his new high school, he's not only bullied by a pair of antisemitic jocks but falls for a girl with a penchant for extreme Christianity. That's when he retrieves his camera from his closet and reclaims himself. Tasked to film his fellow classmates during their beachside "ditch day," Sammy screens the finished product to everyone on prom night, and in one fell swoop, he not only cements his talent as a filmmaker but exacts his revenge on his enemies. Cinema is powerful.

The movie concludes when he's on the precipice of starting an exciting career in Los Angeles. Frustrated with his inability to get a job in Hollywood, Sammy starts having panic attacks and questioning if he's doing the right thing. However, things change when he goes to a studio lot for an interview and unexpectedly meets one of his idols (played by a real-life director we won't spoil). The scene is worth the entire film.

*The Fabelmans* is an exhausting and unfocused experience. The narrative swings back and forth like a pendulum and never finds a comfortable place to land. As a family drama, it requires more emotional density and psychological nuance than Spielberg's capable of providing. Yes, he's a master craftsman but human complexity has never been his strong suit. Like his filmmaker hero, David Lean, Spielberg makes films that don't require him to explore the pathologies of his characters; their complexities are already hardwired in the story. Basically, he's a classicist. For this incredibly personal endeavor, the 75-year-old veteran needed to kill his darlings and take more chances. Still, he's an original visionary, and there are enough transcendent moments, genuine laughs, and fantastic performances to keep it from sinking into the morass of his memories. Even as Icarus flies too close to the sun, you'll still enjoy the burn.



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