

FIRE WINGS BRINGS THE HEAT TO IRVINE • TOP PICKS FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR IN FILM • IAN INGRAM'S ROBOT MENAGERIE AT UCI'S BEALL CENTER

IRVINE

WEEKLY

JANUARY 7, 2022  
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2022



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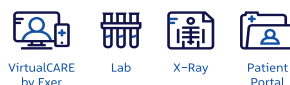
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# O.C.'S POST-HOLIDAY COVID-19 SPIKE MIRRORING SUMMER UPTICK

**AS COVID-19 CASES RISE ACROSS THE NATION, CASE COUNTS ARE BEGINNING TO RESEMBLE RECORD-BREAKING DAILY CASE TOTALS OF THE SUMMER SURGE. WITH BREAKTHROUGH INFECTIONS NOW PART OF THE NORM, EXPERTS CONTINUE TO REITERATE THE NEED FOR BOOSTER SHOTS AND TESTING.**

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

Despite the millions of vaccine doses distributed across Orange County within the last year, the county is battling another steep COVID-19 increase, with more than 15,000 cases reported following New Year's Eve weekend.

Nationally, the United States surpassed one million cases in a single day on January 3, setting the record for the most single-day cases. While the long weekend played a role in the inflated numbers, COVID-19 increases are being seen locally.

On Monday, Jan. 3, the Orange County Health Agency reported 15,427 new COVID-19 cases, between Friday, Dec. 31 and Monday, Jan. 3. The county also reported five COVID-19 related deaths.

On Tuesday, Jan. 4, the trend of high case counts continued as HCA reported 5,930 new COVID-19 cases, with two new deaths.

Locally in Irvine, between December 21 and December 28, the city reported 902 cases, adding that 112 of the cases were among children under 17. Within the Irvine Unified School District, students returned to class on January 3, but the district has asked parents to keep children home if the child is sick or displaying COVID-19 symptoms.

To help combat the spread of COVID-19 between school children, the district is offering several testing options including free COVID-19 test kits for IUSD students and staff. Test kits are available in nasal or saliva swabs.

The district has also suggested that families with access to health insurance contact the family health care provider to locate COVID-19 tests.

Accumulatively, Orange County has now



PHOTO BY MUFID MAJNUN ON UNSPLASH

totalled 351,590 COVID-19 cases. The county has now surpassed 6 million tests. In terms of testing, the city of Irvine is hosting a number of different testing sites at community centers including Irvine Civic Center, Las Lomas Community Center, Trabuco Center and the Great Park.

Along with an increase in daily cases, hospitalizations have also surpassed 500 for the first time since July. Since Christmas, hospitalizations have more than doubled, rising from 256 on December 25, to 614 as of Tuesday, Jan. 4.

The county's ICU capacity is currently listed at 22% with 110 people requiring intensive care.

As of December 30, the Orange County Health Agency reported that more than 2 million people are considered fully vaccinated. However, despite the high percentage of vaccinated individuals, less than 1 million individuals have received a booster shot within the county.

The post-holiday increase in cases comes

as health experts continue to express caution and preach increased vigilance against the newly arrived Omicron variant. While the county has yet to report more than 50 cases of the highly transmissible variant, breakthrough infections continue to occur.

In an email interview with Irvine Weekly, Sanghyuk Shin, an infectious disease epidemiologist and Director of UC Irvine Infectious Disease Science Initiative, said he is concerned with the arrival of the Omicron variant, even in the vaccinated.

It should be noted that it has been less than one month since HCA reported the county's first Omicron case on December 17. Shin added that due to delays in laboratory testing, he believes that the new variant has been circulating in Orange County for some time.

"Unfortunately, vaccinations appear to have limited effectiveness in preventing omicron infection, unless one has received the booster, which does reduce the chance of being infected," he said. "But we've already

seen super-spreading events in groups of vaccinated people, including those with boosters, so it will be very difficult to stop the spread of Omicron with vaccinations alone."

"The good news is that most people who are fully vaccinated will likely have mild disease," Shin continued. "Unfortunately, some vaccinated people will get severe illness, and we also have a large population of people who are not vaccinated, who are at a much higher risk of severe disease. This is why I am concerned about a possible surge in people needing hospital care, which would put a tremendous strain on the healthcare system."

While current case counts continue to increase, health experts continue to reiterate the need for access to vaccines, which Shin said is not occurring on a global scale.

"As a society, living with COVID-19 seems inevitable, and it is expected the severity of the disease will eventually be substantially reduced due to widespread immunity from vaccines or infection," Shin said. "However, as long as the vaccines are not equitably distributed across the world, we will likely continue to see new variants arising in the future. This is why we need to do all we can to ramp up the production of vaccines globally by sharing the knowledge for producing the vaccines, most of which were funded by taxpayer money."

Irvine is hosting city-based testing sites at the following times and locations, appointments are required. PCR tests are free of cost to patients.

## **Irvine Civic Center**

1 Civic Center Plaza

Monday – Friday, 9:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

## **Las Lomas Community Center**

10 Federation Way

Thursdays & Fridays,  
9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

Saturdays & Sundays, Noon – 6:00 p.m.

## **Quail Hill Community Park**

35 Shady Canyon Drive

Tuesdays – Fridays, 9 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.  
Saturdays 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

## **Great Park**

8000 Great Park Boulevard

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## **Trabuco Senior Center**

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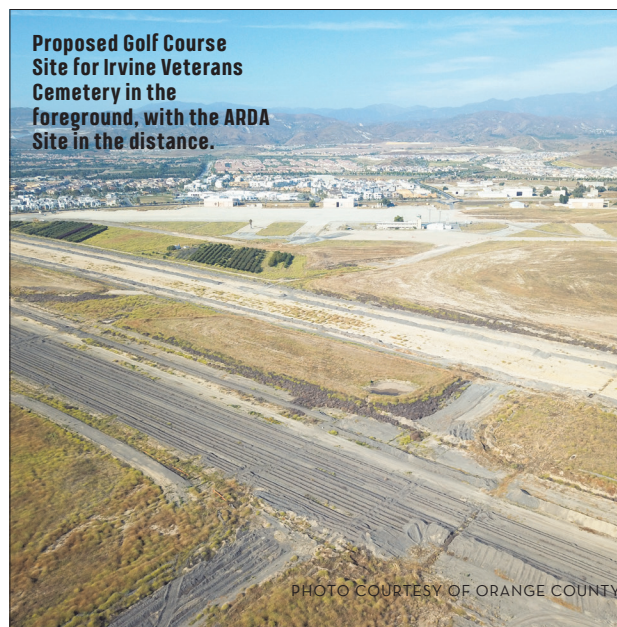
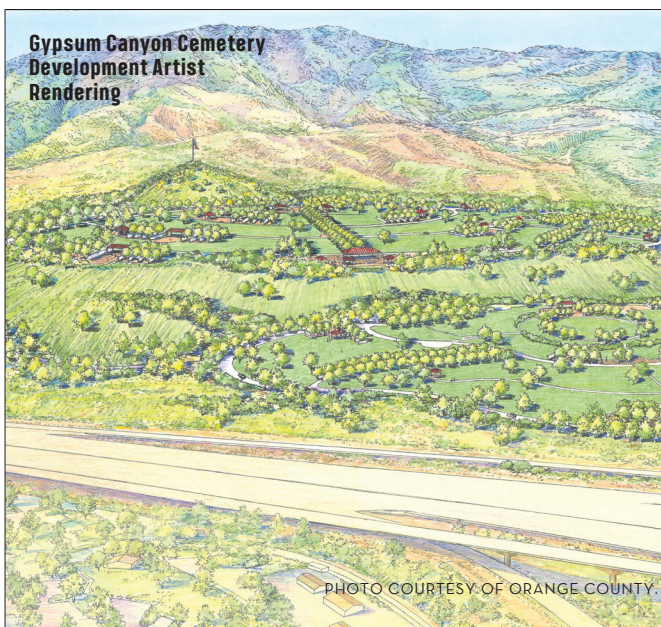
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# NEWS

## NEW VETERANS CEMETERY BILL “DELETES” ARDA, GOLF COURSE SITES

**A BILL INTRODUCED BY ASSEMBLY MEMBERS SHARON QUIRK-SILVA AND STEVEN CHOI WILL SEEK TO DELETE SITE SELECTION REQUIREMENTS FOR PREVIOUSLY STUDIED SITES IN IRVINE.**

BY: EVAN J. LANCASTER



The heavily supported proposed veterans cemetery project in Gypsum Canyon gained more legislative momentum this week, as a new bill looks to remove two previously selected sites in Irvine.

Assembly members Sharon Quirk-Silva and Steven Choi introduced a bill that seeks to remove two previously selected Irvine-based sites that had been studied by the California Department of Veterans Affairs.

On Monday, Jan. 3, Quirk-Silva, who represents Anaheim, Buena Park, Fullerton, Garden Grove, La Palma and Stanton, introduced AB 1595, which targets site selection requirements for

the ARDA and the golf course sites.

The site selection requirements state that the veterans cemetery project could be built on one of two selected sites. The city of Irvine is specifically named within AB 1595, as the bill seeks to “delete” site selection requirements.

Specifically, the requirements stated that CalVet would consult with the Department of General Services to determine which Irvine site to pursue based on, “the economic feasibility, benefits to veterans and city of Irvine residents, and availability of each location,” according to the bill.

Per AB 1595:

“This bill would delete those site selection requirements and would instead

require the department to acquire, study, design, develop, construct, and equip a state-owned and state-operated Southern California Veterans Cemetery in the County of Orange. This bill would declare that it is to take effect immediately as an urgency statute.”

Nick Berardino, Orange County veteran and president of VALOR, said this was an important milestone in the process of finding a final resting place for Orange County veterans who were walking “deep into the evening of their lives.”

He added that this could be a big step in opening the door for more sites for a veterans cemetery in Orange County – including Gypsum Canyon.

“Quirk-Silva has been with us since day one – has now put forth a vehicle that will expedite that process, refine the direction and it’s fantastic,” Berardino said. “What’s incredible is how fast the county legislative team moved.”

In terms of reaction within the community, Berardino admits he is experiencing a sense of bipartisan unity that has not been present in Orange County for decades.

“Since I began my term in the state Assembly in 2013, it has been a priority of mine to establish a veteran’s cemetery in Orange County,” Quirk-Silva said in a statement. “Today, with the introduction of AB 1595, I continue my commitment to creating a final resting place for the many men and women who have honorably served our country.”

Choi, a former mayor of Irvine, who now represents the cities of Irvine, Anaheim, Lake Forest, Orange, Tustin, and Villa Park in the 68th District, said that he has made it his priority to build a veterans cemetery in the county he represents, adding that it is of utmost importance to honor those who have served their country.

“Building a veterans cemetery in Orange County has been a priority of mine for many years,” said Choi. “I am proud to join as a Joint Author with my colleague Assembly member Sharon Quirk-Silva for this priority legislation, which will provide a necessary final resting place for our brave veterans in Orange County.”

In June, the Irvine City Council failed to reach a decision on a future site for the veterans cemetery, despite having the results of the dual site feasibility study performed by CalVet.

Then, Irvine Mayor Farrah Khan presented a motion that incorporated aspects of both the ARDA and golf course site, but the motion was not supported by any council members.

In October, the Irvine City Council voted 4-1 in favor of supporting the Gypsum Canyon site. With the vote, Irvine became the last city in Orange County to support the project.

Irvine council member Larry Agran remains the only elected official in Orange County to vote against supporting the Gypsum Canyon site.



# FOOD

## FIRE WINGS BRINGS THE HEAT TO IRVINE

BY AUDREY FONG



New to Heritage Plaza, Fire Wings is the latest wings spot in Irvine. Fire Wings serves not only wings, but also has chicken tenders, salads and chicken sandwiches on the menu and over a dozen beers on tap. It also boasts an impressive number of sides such as garlic noodles, mozzarella sticks, tater tots, and decadent fries topped with savory sauces and chicken tender chunks. What makes the menu stand out the most from other wing spots, though, is that they offer over 20 sauces and dry rubs for their wings.

With ample seating and large TVs across its wall, it has the potential to be a great hangout spot and Irvine's go-to restaurant for watching sports.

When I visited, what initially struck me was obviously how many flavors they offer their wings in and how many of the flavors had an Asian influence to them like their Malaysian curry, sriracha, teriyaki, Peking, Korean kick, Thai chili, and Saigon street. Seeing so many interesting flavors can make it difficult to choose, but the cashier made it easy to order, suggesting we pick from their fusion sauces, which he explained they're most famous for. According to him, their Thai chili and peanut butter sauces are the most popular.

I opted for their wings in peanut butter, Thai chili, and Malaysian curry and a

side of garlic fries. The peanut butter and Thai chili wings came amply seasoned with sauce pooling in the bottom of the container, guaranteeing extra sauce for dipping your wings and fries in, while the Malaysian curry wings were coated fully in seasoning. The wings also came with two dipping sauces; I opted for honey mustard and ranch. However, the wings are so flavorful that the dipping sauces are unnecessary and better saved for your fries.

What was interesting about the wings is that the Thai chili ones came topped with chopped green onions and the peanut butter ones were coated with crushed peanuts, both of which added texture and freshness to the wings. Originally, I was hesitant to try the peanut butter wings, but they ended up being quite tasty and reminiscent of the peanut sauce that's often served with satay at Thai restaurants. The fries were by far the best crinkle-cut fries I've had as they were crispy, unlike other restaurants' crinkle-cut fries which often feel soggy or mushy. They had a slightly sweet, garlic flavor to them and a sprinkle of parmesan shavings over the whole serving.

Overall, the service was pleasant, and I appreciated both that the food was cooked to order, ensuring a fresh batch of wings, and that the wings came in so many different flavors.

*Fire Wings is open daily from 11:00 a.m. -*

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# COMMUNITY

## IRVINE HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR AWARDED YOUNGARTS FINALIST AWARD FOR SCREENPLAY

BY: EVAN J. LANCASTER

Irvine resident Natalie Wang, 17, a senior at Harvard Online High School, has received national recognition from YoungArts, one of the most prestigious platforms in support of blossoming artists. This year, Wang received the YoungArts Finalist Award for screenplay writing, becoming this year's only finalist from Orange County – and just one of two winners in California.

In an interview with *Irvine Weekly*, Wang spoke about the inspiration behind her award-winning screenplay and what she has planned for her future.

"I wrote a screenplay called *The Glass House*, and the screenplay contains elements of mystery, horror and magical realism. But it's also a story about these two girls that learn to navigate friendship, codependency and grief," she explained. "Part of it was inspired by a short story by Shirley Jackson called *The Story We Used To Tell*, but I had the idea of the portraits a few years ago. I only really started working on it last summer at a screenwriting workshop that UCLA offered – and throughout the rest of the year I was sketching out the plot in my mind, and starting to actually write it down."

In *The Glass House*, Wang describes a "supernatural, freak accident" occurring that traps the two main characters (Willow and Cleo) inside a portrait. While trapped, Willow and Cleo must navigate time and space in order to confront deep-seated fears.

Recognized by YoungArts in the midst of applying to colleges during her senior year, Wang, who currently serves as the Editor-in-Chief of *The Chrysalis*, a literary arts publication at the Harvard University-recognized online high school she attends, was among 156 YoungArts finalists across the nation.

"I'm really interested in journalism as

well," she said. "Last summer I was invited to participate in the Stanford Daily's journalism workshop, and that was really exciting for me because I got to learn all about the basics of journalism and I found that medium to be appealing. I think I'm open to writing in all of its forms, so I'm always open to trying new things."

As a student-teacher and peer tutor at her high school, Wang helps international students with creative writing assignments, where she hopes to inspire her fellow students.

"We usually go over the basics of creative writing, like syntax and all of that," she said. "But also to collaborate and see if there's a prompt that I come up with that inspires in other students."

Currently, Wang said she is applying to multiple colleges across the country, including Harvard, and a few universities in the California system. But, even at 17, Wang has her sights set on bigger things.

"I've also been applying to some of my dream schools, which include Columbia and Pomona," she said. "I don't think the location necessarily matters, but I wouldn't mind staying local."

Wang explained that a lifelong passion for writing has been a driving force in creativity, adding that the style of screenwriting required an author to tell a story from multiple perspectives.

"I guess I've always wanted to be a writer, in general, because it's something both really personal and collaborative. But screenwriting, in particular, is that 10x because writing a script means you're thinking about everyone involved," she said. "So, how your words might translate on-screen between directors and actors – I feel like screenwriting really spoke to me."

Additionally, YoungArts Finalist Award recipients are eligible to be nominated for the U.S. Presidential Scholarship, which is one of

the highest forms of recognition available to high school seniors.

Competing through 10 different arts categories, YoungArts National Competition winners are selected by "their caliber of artistic achievement by esteemed discipline-specific panels of artists through a rigorous blind adjudication process," according to the YoungArts website.

Wang said she can recall the moment she became aware she wanted to pursue writing as more than a hobby.

"Before my 6th or 7th birthday, I was gifted this seashell, but it got crushed, so I wrote a poem about it. I'd like to say that moment was my thank you as a writer, but it was mostly a chance to reflect on the emotion I felt at the time," she said. "I found writing to be a really good outlet for that, and later on, I feel like writing is wonderful because you get to connect with other people as well."

In addition to being recognized as a YoungArts Finalist recipient, Wang, who joins the ranks of previous finalist winners that include Timothée Chalamet and Viola Davis, will attend the virtual 2022 National YoungArts Week, which is designed to help finalist winners prepare for the next stage of development in their artistic endeavors.

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# KYLE IS STILL SUPER DUPER

## IT'S NOT SO BAD FOR VENTURA RAPPER AND SINGER.

BY BRETT CALLWOOD



KYLE (KO LEE)

**B**ack in 2020 when Kyle (formerly known as SuperDuperKyle and KiD but born Kyle Thomas Harvey) released his *See You When I'm Famous* album, it felt like a self-fulfilling prophecy. A little cocky in all the right ways. Two years on, and things are going pretty much to plan for the platinum-selling artist. He's just released the "Perfect" single, and his new album, *It's Not So Bad*, drops on January 28. You only have to look at those titles to see that positivity reigns with Kyle right now.

The Ventura artist says that the sound on the new album has evolved hugely from that last one, mainly because he only knows how to create based on what he's currently interested in.

"I'm like a kid where my interests will change from one genre to the next, from one tone of voice to the next," he told us by phone. "On *See You When I'm Famous* I was speaking on Ventura, my hometown, and it was very surf rock influenced. But on *It's Not So Bad*, I kinda got really into R&B and house

music, and UK garage started influencing me. So the sound has really just gotten more mature. It feels more sexy and relationship-focussed. I realized I want to speak on things that I'm educated on, and I happen to have been in love for a really long time so I know about those topics, rather than reaching till I rap about stuff that I have no clue on."

The ongoing lockdown naturally had an impact on the recording and release of this forthcoming album. Initially, Kyle says that the entire story came from him being locked up in the house and having nothing but negative things to focus on. At first, he says, he was going to make a lo-fi album that was very sad. But then his mindset changed.

"I have a bunch of songs like that," he says. "Longing to connect with people in a real way and having that stripped from me confronted me with a bunch of work I need to do on myself to come to the conclusion that life is not so bad and there's a bunch of things to be grateful for and happy for. I was depressed when I was trying to connect

with people over the phone, and my phone doesn't really love me at all. It's not real. All Instagram and social media does is give you this false sense of dopamine, but it's not real life. When I lost that connection with my fans, I had to discover again for myself why life is not so bad, what is there to be happy about, and how to deal with things when I'm by myself. That's what a lot of the album speaks on. So yes, the pandemic fully helped it along. Through working on these sad songs, I had to go to Miami for a little bit and realize that I want to dance and make uptempo music. It's like one long therapy session. Every album is with me."

On that theme, the new single is "Perfect," a song that Kyle describes as self-help music.

"I'm trying to say nice things to myself and I'm doing it over this house music," he says. "The studio session when I made 'Perfect' was inspired by trying to come up with a phrase that people could say either to themselves or to other people that made them feel better about themselves. I feel like

so much music nowadays, even if you repeat the hook, is some pretty messed up, negative shit. I wanted to come up with a phrase that simply adds some positivity into somebody's ethos when they say it. 'Perfect' turned out to be that record. It's like an awesome, body-positive, self-help club song. People in the club don't know that secretly we're doing therapy with them."

As we're writing, we're still coming to terms with the death of Drakeo the Ruler. Kyle was a fan.

"It's just really sad," Kyle says. "I feel sorry that a life was cut so short so young, with so much promise ahead of his career. Not just for him but for his family and people depending on him. I feel like festivals and venues, when you're hosting artists that are maybe dealing with things, you should take extra precautions to make sure everybody is safe."

Looking ahead, 2022 should be another great year for Kyle. He's getting ahead of the tech game too, releasing the new album as an S-NFT.

"Essentially, in simple human terms, my fans or anybody else have an opportunity to participate in ownership of this music with me," Kyle says. "So I'm selling 50 percent of the ownership of this album to the open market. You have the ability to buy a share of the album. If the album blows up and becomes a platinum-selling album and has all this success, your investment is now earning you money. It's just like being able to put your money into somebody you believe in. You're putting the ball into their court. They're the people who buy the music, and now they can promote the music for you because they're invested in it. We're doing this together. Why don't I split the royalties with people who love me and see what we can do together? I really think it's the future of the music industry."

Beyond *It's Not So Bad*, Kyle has much more planned for next year.

"I have multiple albums planned," he says. "Now that I'm independent, I feel inspired to move at the pace I want to move and I want to give my fans as much music as possible. There's a short film coming for *It's Not So Bad* that I'm excited about. So expect more films, albums, and an entire tour. I'm also working on getting a six pack, so we will accomplish that as well."

Good for you, sir.

The "Perfect" single is out now. *The It's Not So Bad* album is out in January.

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# ARTS

## IAN INGRAM'S ROBOT MENAGERIE INHABITS THE BEALL CENTER

**A NEW EXHIBITION EXPLORES HOW ART FACILITATES INTERSPECIES COMMUNICATION.**

BY LIZ GOLDNER



The Beall Center's Ian Ingram exhibition explores what the eponymous artist refers to as "animal morphology, robotic avatars, interspecies communication and technology in natural environments." The 21 pieces in the exhibition involve 14 robots – all appropriating animal forms and behavior – that Ingram built and filmed over 20 years in the

high, desolate landscapes of arctic fells, in city streets, parks and ponds, and in back-country lakes and mountains.

Ingram, who created several pieces in this show during his recent residency at the Beall Center, has a Bachelor's degree in Ocean Engineering and a Master's in Ocean Acoustics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, plus an M.F.A. in Visual Art from Carnegie Mellon

University. He has exhibited his work nationally and in Halifax, Copenhagen and Amsterdam, among several other foreign cities.

Much of his work focuses on "synanthropic animals," or on those "most closely tied to ourselves and our places." He explains that the robots function similarly to the animals they communicate with when the subject of their focus (whether

raven, lizard or worm) appears on the scene. He adds that the robots have detailed flashbulb memories of the times when the subjects of their intent (the real animals) are perceived to be nearby.

Indeed, the animal universe that Ingram replicates robotically and in films is fraught with challenges and danger, along with delights including liaisons with flowers and mating. Beyond the scientific and artistic aspects of his robotic experiments, Ingram is engaging in a deeper understanding of the animal world. If all of this sounds fantastical and futuristic – and a little hard to wrap your mind around – you're not alone. Irvine Weekly asked the artist to introduce us to his ecosystem of avatars, creature by creature.

IRVINE WEEKLY: When did you first begin creating robots?

IAN INGRAM: I made my first real robot when I was 10. It gathered chalk from our schoolroom's chalkboard tray, and then signaled success when it reached the end of the tray by doing a kind of dance. In 1995, I started to build a robot that would inhabit and somehow belong in the tiny habitat formed by islands off the New Hampshire coast. I am still working toward finishing that project.

Please describe Lizardless Legs.

It is one of a series of robots that attempts to enter the border disputes of Western fence lizards by watching for the lizards' territorial push-up signals and responding with its own push-ups. The push-up gesture dominates (as it is the robot's main function) and is also a mating display. So to a degree, Lizardless Legs is a lizard sexbot (or a robot designed for sex).

And Nevermore-A-Matic?

This piece tries to tell our stories about the end of the world to ravens using coded beak wipes. The birds likely don't really understand, but from the biosemiotics (signs and codes) of excessive beak-wiping, they might gather that the robot is deeply worried about something.

Love this name – Danger, Squirrel Nutkin.

Prey animals alert each other to danger using alarm signals. Danger, Squirrel Nutkin – a robot looking for squirrel predators like dogs, foxes, cats, hawks and people – alerts the local squirrels us-

PHOTO BY YUBO DONG WITH OF STUDIO



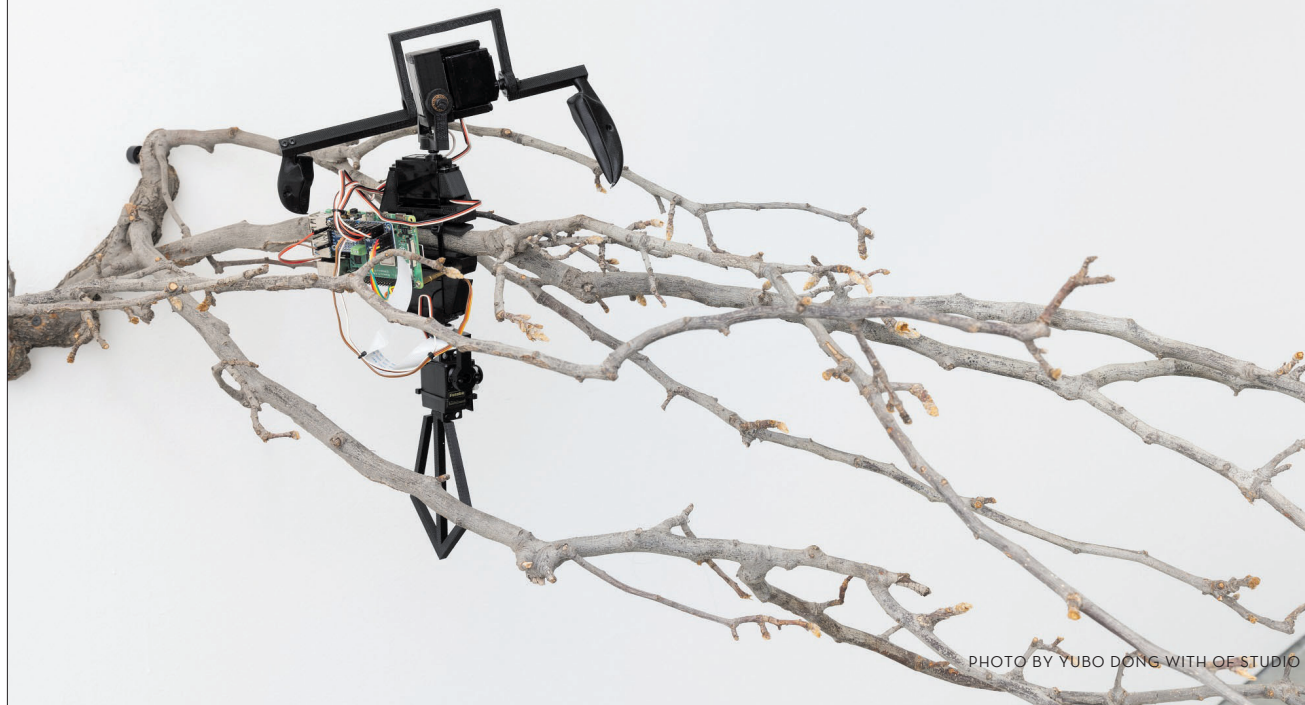
**Nevermore-A-Matic (2016)**

PHOTO BY YUBO DONG WITH OF STUDIO

ing their own alarm signals, which is tail flagging. The robot has three tails, so its message could amount to a supernormal stimulus.

And Elongate Evans?

My residency at the Beall and collaboration with neuroscientist Steve Mahler there led me to a deliberate turning towards synanthropic animals. Steve keeps as pets a breed of rat called Long Evans. I spent time with them at night in the dark in his garage. I became interested in how synanthropic animals' bodies fit into the built environment, and how they find facsimiles there of the places where they evolved. And because of the rat's proclivity for chewing, I armored and enclosed my robot's vitals in ways that I have rarely done.

Now tell us about *Marvelous Meat*.

*Marvelous Meat* is a short film, akin to a nature documentary of *Nevermore-A-Matic* in arctic Finland, where it broadcasts its message of doom into a supposedly pristine landscape full of crows, magpies, foxes, flies, and molt-

ing reindeer. It oversees a carcass made of pig, cow, sheep, and reindeer parts, bought shrink-wrapped in plastic at the supermarket.

Please describe the *On Beyond* series – *On Beyond Duckling*, *On Beyond Pond*, and *On Beyond Mother Goose* at the Lake.

In the early 2000s, I was trying to create artificial symbiosis. When I failed at that (symbioses are really million-year projects), I tried to create what I called sculptural symbiosis. This led to a series of robots engaging in their own mating rituals in wild places while cohabiting with the animals and plants there. *On Beyond Duckling* never had a mate, making its overtures plaintive and forlorn. To make up for that, I made *On Beyond Mother Goose* who did have a mate, *On Beyond Father Gander*. They executed their synchronized mating ritual of bows and spins aligned with the Earth's magnetic fields while miles apart because they had a linked sense of time's passage.

Last but not least, tell us about your rat-related installations.

There are quite a few rat projects. Two are new bodies for rats: *Rat King*, the entanglement of these new rat bodies;

and *A Whiskerer*, a rat re-embodied in a form that allows it to have gentle liaisons with flowers. They are built from surveillance cameras. With the piece, *Drop-ping*, the robot's surveillance camera goes physically all the way down to the floor from the gallery ceiling because its focus is on that plane and on the scurrying and activities occurring there. *Rats With Wings* connects rats with their feathered counterparts, the pigeons and gulls. *Sleeping Beauty* gives surveillance cameras a chance to rest from their vigilant watch, dreaming during the day in REM sleep about the rats it saw during the night.

In working with Mahler and talking with his colleagues about efforts to understand how the brain encodes memories during flashbulb memory, I became interested in engaging with my robots' memories. With a prey animal like a rat, life is a risky business with an associated need for vigilance and crystallizing lessons from traumatic and near-traumatic events. The surveillance cameras I use, beyond the similarities in color and form they have with rats, exist in a world of vigilance with the presumption that something bad is always about to happen.

*"Tan Ingram" is on view through March 5. UC Irvine Beall Center for Art + Technology, 712 Arts Plaza, Irvine. 949-824-6206. Mon.-Sat., noon-6 pm. beallcenter.uci.edu*

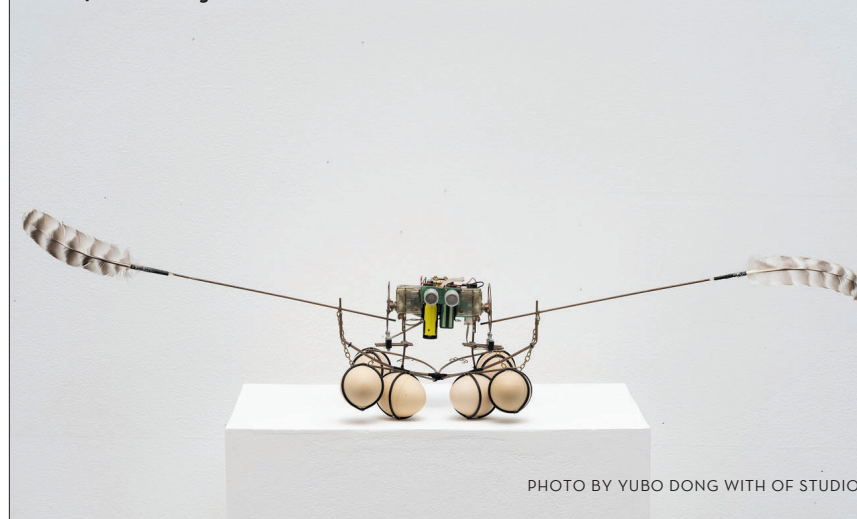
**On Beyond Duckling (2004)**

PHOTO BY YUBO DONG WITH OF STUDIO

# ENTERTAINMENT

## THE BEST FILMS OF 2021

**IRVINE WEEKLY FILM CRITICS SHARE THEIR PICKS FOR THE BEST MOVIES THEY SAW IN 2021 - AND THEY VARY AS WILDLY AS THE YEAR ITSELF.**

BY IRVINE WEEKLY CRITICS



When it comes to movies, 2021 marked a moment of major transition. With the year's Oscars pushed back, some acclaimed films that qualified and won actually came out just before the awards early in '21. *Nomadland* and *The United States vs. Billie Holiday*, for example, were released in 2021, but feel much older, more connected to 2020's struggle and isolation (they made many best film lists last year since critics saw them early). There were so many more great film releases that followed throughout this past year, it was easy to move on anyway.

Due to COVID-19's still-very-real presence, we didn't get to move as far forward as we would have liked, though. The movie experience is best shared in a dark

room with strangers, munching popcorn and looking up at a giant screen – but for many, it still felt too risky. Streaming remained a lifeline for a lot of us, and we waited patiently for many anticipated films to get through short theater runs and then became available on Netflix, Amazon, Hulu or Disney+.

A slew of very strong, Oscar-buzzworthy titles just came out the past month (many only in theaters), so making a definitive list of the best of the entire year is next to impossible. And as anyone who enjoys reading movie reviews knows, the only thing you can really count on from any critic is a subjective opinion.

Some of us wanted escapism this year, some wanted nostalgia, but others wanted to learn or be challenged. Consider these

Top 10 lists from Irvine Weekly's film critics as heartfelt rankings that are also quite fluid, each reflecting fine filmmaking, but more so, connecting on a personal level with our writers for different reasons. As these varied lists make clear, 2021 provided a little bit of everything and despite the year's struggles, we were nothing if not entertained.

### NATHANIEL BELL'S TOP 10

Several of the year's best films are linked by a shared theme of artistic inspiration springing from grief and loss (*Drive My Car*, *Bergman Island*, *The Souvenir Part II*). Let that be a lesson for us.

1. *The Tragedy of Macbeth*
2. *Drive My Car*
3. *Licorice Pizza*

4. *The Power of the Dog*
5. *Bergman Island*
6. *The French Dispatch*
7. *Undine*
8. *The Souvenir Part II*
9. *Cry Macho*
10. *Things Heard & Seen*

### CHAD BYRNES' TOP 10

The best movies in 2021 seemed to have an artistry and vintage quality that's been lacking for too long. Even the major studios took a break from their CGI noise-fests by releasing a couple of gems that spoke to the human condition, none of which starred Ryan Reynolds.

The subject of childhood loomed large in many of the year's best films. In Paul Thomas Anderson's *Licorice Pizza*, adolescence is seen as both liberating and innocent, even as a dark reality encroaches from the wings. In *C'mon, C'mon*, Joaquin Phoenix reluctantly learns about the intricacies of youth when tasked to care for his rambunctious nephew. Although the protagonist of Norway's *The Worst Person in the World* is in her late twenties, her transformation into adulthood is every bit as painful as a teenager's.

In 2021, we also got a one-two punch with *The Power of the Dog* and *The Card Counter*, two auteur-driven films which tackle subjects like guilt, repression and hidden secrets. Noir made a comeback with *Nightmare Alley* and *No Sudden Move*, two films that bask in the glow of the past even as they address contemporary issues. Documentaries also shined in 2021. *The Velvet Underground* is as psychedelic, dark, and engaging as the band it explores, while *Roadrunner: A Film About Anthony Bourdain* effortlessly delineated a figure who was multifaceted as he was inspirational. This year, cinema got real again. Let's hope it continues into 2022! Enjoy.

1. *Nightmare Alley*
2. *The Card Counter*
3. *The Power of the Dog*
4. *Licorice Pizza*
5. *The Velvet Underground*
6. *C'mon C'mon*
7. *No Sudden Move*
8. *Roadrunner: A Film About Anthony Bourdain*
9. *Summer of Soul*
10. *The Worst Person in the World*





LICORICE PIZZA

## ASHER LUBERTO'S TOP 10

Great movies look great no matter the size of the screen, but they overwhelm the senses when projected large. You don't just watch them; you feel them, fall into them, linger on every detail, texture and flake of snow. When I saw *The Green Knight* back in July, it was the first time I had been in a theater in eight months and my body literally froze. The Arthurian epic was magnificent, the images grand, lyrical, spellbinding, and the score was maybe the best piece of music released in 2021.

There were other spectacles, too. In *the Heights* was a reminder of what a big-screen musical can be, while *The Power of the Dog* was a reminder of what a big-screen western can do. On a smaller scale, Paul Thomas Anderson's joyride through 1970's Los Angeles (*Licorice Pizza*) was a golden haze of nostalgia that wafted off the screen and into our hearts. Ryusuke Hamaguchi's road movie (*Drive My Car*) cast a unique spell, and Sian Heder's ode to youth, music and family (*CODA*) made me cry more than any other movie... ever? Anyone who says the theatrical experience is dead clearly hasn't been to the cinema in 2021. One look at *Dune* and they'd know theaters are in good hands.

1. *The Green Knight*
2. *In the Heights*
3. *The Mitchells Vs. The Machines*

### 4. *This Is Not a Burial, It's a Resurrection*

#### 5. *CODA*

#### 6. *Licorice Pizza*

#### 7. *Dune*

#### 8. *Drive My Car*

#### 9. *Quo Vadis, Aida?*

#### 10. *The Power of the Dog*

## MICHAEL ATKINSON'S TOP 10

In what could hardly be defined as a "year in movies," it was even less possible than usual to glean satisfaction from whatever the mainstream "industry" managed to produce and get seen, and so my list goes where the mad doctors are. While a thorny Romanian is no surprise, a Bosnian one is, much less the first film ever from Lesotho. While in his roundabout way Hamaguchi schooled everyone with his Elvis year, young Georgian filmmakers dented the few filmgoers who bothered.

At home, one Anderson (PT) makes what's for him an almost typical grab-bag of grace and invention, while the other Anderson (Wes) crafts a wonder cabinet so self-involved and opaque it qualifies as an experimental film. Forget trends and studios and franchise slavery; it's every filmmaker for themselves.

1. *Drive My Car*
2. *Quo Vadis, Aida?*
3. *Licorice Pizza*
4. *Beginning*
5. *Brighton 4th*



POWER OF THE DOG

### 6. *Bad Luck Banging or Loony Porn*

#### 7. *The French Dispatch*

#### 8. *Wheel of Fantasy and Fortune*

#### 9. *This Is Not a Burial, It's a Resurrection*

#### 10. *The Power of the Dog*

## CHUCK WILSON'S TOP 10

The 10 films listed below are in alphabetical order because I don't love one much more than another. If I was voting for the Best Picture Oscar, I'd choose *Passing*, but otherwise, these are movies that grabbed my heart and squeezed it tight. One or two made me laugh out loud (an extra blessing this year).

It's the performances that will stay with me, particularly Frankie Faison's devastating work in *The Killing of Kenneth Chamberlain* or the gorgeous mid-film drunken conversation between Clifton Collins Jr. and Molly Parker in *Jockey* (in limited release until December 29). I think a lot about Ron Rikkin's beautifully understated work in *Minyan* and when I flash on Jamie Dornan singing "seagull on the tire, can you hear my prayer?" in *Barb and Star Go To Vista Del Mar*, well, I'm just plain happy. I'd give him an Oscar, too.

#### *Barb and Star Go To Vista Del Mar*

#### *The Human Voice*

#### *Jockey*

#### *The Killing of Kenneth Chamberlain*

#### *The Last Duel*

#### *The Lost Daughter*

#### *Luca*

#### *Minyan*

### *Passing*

#### *Pig*

#### *Tick, Tick... Boom!*

## LINA LECARO'S TOP 10

My top movies of 2021 list might be controversial, but I've never been one to fancy up my views so they jive with "serious critics." Sometimes – often actually – I finish a "puff-picture" blockbuster feeling more satisfaction than I do an acclaimed indie or foreign title.

This year I wanted and needed the following from the films I viewed: music, nostalgia, escape, badass female leads, a few surprises/tears/laughs, and more music! If it wasn't presented on TV in four parts as a docuseries, Peter Jackson's *Get Back* would've topped this list... it still kinda does in my mind. That said, some incredible documentaries have stayed with me this year.

### 1. *TIE: Respect and The United States vs. Billie Holiday*

#### 2. *Summer of Soul*

#### 3. *Licorice Pizza*

### 4. *TIE: The Sparks Brothers and The Velvet Underground*

#### 5. *Nomadland*

#### 6. *Zola*

#### 7. *The Power of the Dog*

#### 8. *Pig*

#### 9. *Swan Song*

### 10. *TIE: Black Widow, Cruella and Shang-Chi & the Legend of the Ten Rings*



# ENTERTAINMENT

## SPIDER-MAN: NO WAY HOME IS WHERE THE HEROIC HEART IS

BY ERIN MAXWELL



**Warning: This review contains lots of Spider-Man spoilers.**

*Spider-Man: No Way Home* is the third installment for the Tom Holland-led web-slinger saga, but it's more than just the latest chapter in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. The highly-anticipated and already high-grossing film is also a heartbreaking tale of loss, an action-adventure sci-fi romp, a homage to previous Peter Parkers and his foes, and a powerful adhesive cementing different aspects of the Marvel Universe together, be it Disney (*Doctor Strange*), Sony (previous Spidey films), or Netflix (*Daredevil*). And on every front, it's successful.

When we last left poor Peter Parker, it seemed the high school senior just couldn't seem to catch a break. Already having difficulty trying to juggle his alter ego with his teenage angst, Peter

now has to deal with being outed by the muckraking J. Jonah Jameson (who should forever be played by JK Simmons). Peter's life is in shambles, causing him and his Aunt May (Marisa Tomei) to live on the lam as he becomes the friendly neighborhood scapegoat. There is only one solution: magic. But after a visit to Doctor Strange causes a spell to go awry, Peter now has to deal with a handful of Spider-Man's greatest foes from previous franchises.

Once again, Marvel taps into the concept of the multiverse as a means to propel stories and characters into the next phase of the MCU. Initially using Disney+ shows to help audiences understand upcoming theatrical storylines, *No Way Home* cultivates the small screen homework given to audiences over the pandemic.

And it's here that the MCU is revolu-

tionary in its storytelling. Thanks to *No Way Home* and its use of the multiverse, Marvel has morphed into a place where characters from competing franchises are not just valid, but part of the larger picture.

The MCU version of Spider-Man is unique in that it doesn't spoon-feed audiences yet another origin story. After all, fatigued fans can only watch Uncle Ben bite the dust so many times. Marvel knows that a good portion of its current ticket-buying audiences is already familiar with the material, thus it pushes its own story, one without murdered relatives, over-the-top adversaries, or dead girlfriends. Still, by acknowledging other narratives of the Spider-verse, this film borrows from their collective histories to help advance the current Peter.

It also doesn't hurt that everyone

involved puts in the work to make *No Way Home* a sensational spectacle. Darker than previous *Spider-Man* outings, Peter matures before our very eyes as the film places the young genius in upsetting situations that would shatter any other person, much less a teenage superhero with an image issue. Holland brings an emotional vulnerability to the role of Peter, while Zendaya's MJ and Jacob Batalon's Ned support their friend and the story in their own amenable way. Even Benedict Cumberbatch as Doctor Strange turns in an impassioned performance when he's not delivering savage clapbacks.

But the real joy comes from watching former Spider-Men and Spidey foes alike back in the spotlight in what can only be described as a victory lap. Alfred Molina and Willem Dafoe continue to impress as Doc Ock and Green Goblin, but the film is also a redemption for Jamie Foxx as Max Dillon / Electro, Thomas Haden Church as Flint Marko / Sandman, and Rhys Ifans as Dr. Curt Connors / The Lizard, whose past turns were overshadowed by overcrowded outings.

Tobey Maguire and Andrew Garfield are a joyous addition to the film as they reflect on their own highs and lows, offering this Peter a helping hand in lieu of becoming a throwaway mention for mere fan service (looking at you, Matt Murdock). Watching all these characters from various parts of a shared pop culture past is not just evocative use of sentimentality, but thoroughly entertaining, a little heartbreaking, and often very, very funny.

The tale is not without fault. There are a few plot holes and inconsistencies that will no doubt be discussed and dissected on podcasts, vlogs, and nerdy think pieces galore. But it doesn't distract from an emotional center previously unseen in past Spidey efforts.

In the end, what we are left with is a movie that pays homage to the past. Those Spider-Men walked so that MCU's Spider-Man could run. The end result is a whole new origin story to a whole new Spider-Man, one steeped in tragedy and loss, but now geared to become a superhero to the likes audiences have never seen.



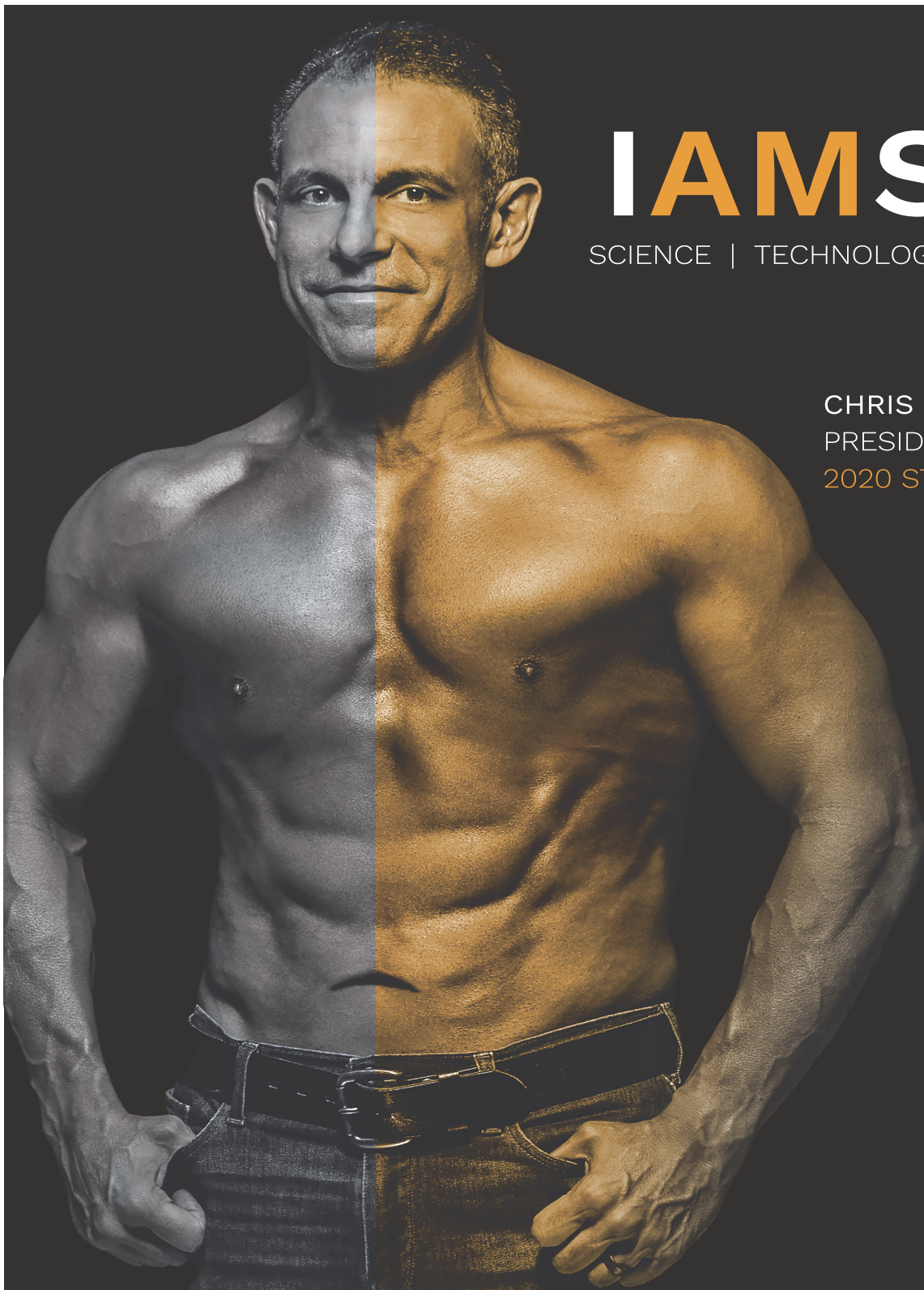


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