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Marrickville loses chance to show courage

BY DR. PETER SLEZAK

- Address to Marrickville Council on the motion to rescind the Boycott, Divestments and Sanctions against Israel.

Not long ago, moral opposition to the Vietnam War and opposition to our complicity in the crimes in East Timor received the same denunciation we witness now against Marrickville Council.

Why would you abandon a largely symbolic policy of ethical investment and spending just because the usual suspects – Murdoch press, the government and Israel lobby – give you a hard time?

This extraordinary campaign of vilification of Mayor Fiona Byrne and Marrickville councillors means that you are doing something right – and something important.

Since the real effects of a Council BDS is not going to bring down the State of Israel, it’s important to understand what is perceived to be the threat that has orchestrated the campaign of confusion and abuse. It’s the threat of a good example.

This is the threat of decent people taking a stand for justice, human rights and international law – through peaceful means – by exercising their choice of where to invest and spend their money.

This is not engaging in foreign affairs or bringing domestic issues to Australia, as critics keep repeating. It is acting locally to raise consciousness and put pressure on our Federal Government. That’s what decent citizens do.

If a protest for justice and human rights is supposed to bring foreign affairs into local communities, what are we to say about the many Zionist organisations such as the JNF that send immense funds to the State of Israel in support of its discriminatory policies, the expulsion of Palestinians from their land, its military occupation and siege of Gaza?

In a different sense, however, the issue has, indeed, become more than a local matter. Letters of support show that the whole world is watching Marrickville to see whether it has the courage and the decency to withstand the predictable bullying from the predictable sources. Marrickville Council has taken a lead and set a moral example. What is “rare” about that – to quote Foreign Minister Rudd? What is “extremist” about that – to quote Greg Sheridan? And what term is appropriate for those who support the crimes of the State of Israel – by vote of Marrickville Council?

- 40 year, brutal military occupation, half a million illegal settlers, the theft of Palestinian land, thousands of home demolitions, regular shooting of unarmed coexistence demonstrators, and the collective punishment of Gaza in violation of international law.

Who are the extremists? Those who support all this or those who support justice and human rights through peaceful BDS protest.

You have the opportunity tonight in the eyes of the world to remain principled and resolve, or to look foolish and cowardly. If you rescind the BDS you will lose the respect of those you have inspired here and around the world, but you will get no thanks, just contempt, from your detractors.

Councillors who opposed the original BDS resolution should now stand up for it in the face of vicious attacks. It’s not just a question of BDS, but a question of the kind of society we should tolerate. To cave in to the intimidation would prove that bullying can silence moral protest.

Crucially, you must not tolerate, or be silenced by, the disgraceful charge of anti-Semitism leveled at decent people who criticize the State of Israel. I speak as a Jew whose parents survived the Holocaust. My mother and grandmother were in Auschwitz. Jews have a special obligation in this case to stand up for the victims of oppression and against violence committed in their name. That’s exactly why growing numbers of Jews here and around the world are speaking out in support of Palestinians.

With these Jews and with so many others, Marrickville Council should have the courage to uphold its stand that is decent and just. Resist the demagogy so that your example can inspire others to help make a difference.

Don’t let your fellow citizens down and, above all, don’t let the Palestinians down by abandoning or weakening your exemplary BDS campaign.

Dr. Peter Slezk is an Associate Professor of History and Philosophy at the University of New South Wales.

Back off, Bully O’Farrell

BY KIERRAN AIDAR

The most dangerous politician in a stupid politician. Last week NSW’s honeymoon Premier, Barry O’Farrell, proved he is both.

Last Friday BOF issued an ultimatum to Marrickville Council – they could halt their plans for an economic sanctions of Israel, or he would dissolve them.

That’s right, Barry’s first move as Premier has nothing to do with fixing our ailing transport, health, or education systems – arenas where voters would applaud almost any action he took after more than a decade of disappointing in Labor.

Barry was handed the opportunity to not only create good will in favor of his party but build on the anti-Labor protest vote doesn’t fall in his favor next election), but also set the agenda for what we can expect for his party’s term in office.

So what does he do? His first move is to threaten to give a democratically elected Government body the sack, just because he disagrees with a motion they have passed.

What a way to usher in a new era of Government! Well bully O’Farrell got his wish last night, as the council backed away from its decision and voted to no longer pursue economic sanctions against Israel.

One has to ask, what is the hell is going on?

The Israeli Government is currently committing war crimes against the people of Palestine, through their use of military violence and illegal occupation of their land. Instead of opposing this, our new Premier seems hell bent on supporting these criminals.

But BOF isn’t only set on undermining democracy overseas, he’s doing it here too by interfering with a democatically elected Council.

Mr. O’Farrell has been given no mandate to govern the people of Marrickville in their local council. If we wanted a Liberal Council, we would have voted one in.

This behavior is dangerous as it sets a precedent for Barry O’Farrell to make similar moves in the future against any council whose decision he disagrees with. Perhaps next he’ll be blackmailing Glover into pulling up her cycloways?

What is even more disappointing however is the lack of backtrack Marrickville Council showed on Tuesday night when they voted to remove the boycott.

The boycott of apartheid South Africa in the seventies was not always a popular choice. It’s hard to stomach it now, but there were plenty who opposed sanctions on a country where one part of the population ruled over the other on the basis of race.

Today however, history has ruled in favor of those who made the just choice, not the popular choice. We respect those who stood up for the rights of black South Africans, they were brave enough to make a stand for a just cause, and stick by it, regardless of public opinion.

Despite what the meek thinkers, and careerists politicians of the major parties may say; justice is something that should take place at every level of Government. It is unacceptable to support any Government who shows such blatant disrespect for human life – be it Israel, Burma, or Libya.

By not sticking by their initial decision the Labor councillors of Marrickville, along with two rogue nongreens, have shown their true colours. They could have been world leaders.

Now they are just cowards who care more about the front page of the Australian, than justice or the views of those who elected them.

Happy Passover, unless you’re in Palestine.
Erskineville towers to shadow the suburb

BY MILICENT CAFFREY

On a bright autumn weekend, many people from the inner city and beyond can be spotted enjoying the green expanse that is Sydney Park. However, the spectacular view of the cityscape may soon be blocked out by six-storey high concrete apartments.

Friends of Erskineville and long time inner city resident Brett Mason believes the construction will have a “wrecking ball” effect on the community. “The apartments would be completely out of scale to anything around them. This puts an extra few thousand people into an area that does not have the infrastructure,” said Mr Mason. “The two closest stations are at Erskineville and St Peters, which service the same line. The trains are already at capacity and I don’t believe City Rail could increase the number of trains on those lines.”

It is feared this will lead to more cars in an area where intersections already bulge at capacity during peak hour. Those living on Belmont Street and Mitchell Road will also suffer from severe overshadowing as the apartments will create a visual block, and what Mr Mason calls “a sense of disconnection” from the broader, village orientated Erskineville community. “We need lower heights with proper street amenities,” said Mr Mason. “Not another strip of cafes, but other types of retail like a butchers, fruit and veg and supermarkets.”

Newly elected Premier Barry O’Farrell scrapped Part 3A of the 1979 Environmental Planning and Assessment Act in early April, which gave the Minister of Planning the power to rule over decisions by local communities. Greens Councillor Irene Doutney hopes that this will stop the Ashmore Precinct development. “This is a big community voice saying it to it.”

“It’s just crazy,” said Councillor Doutney. “The company went straight to the Minister for Planning in June last year. It seems the previous state government approved anything and the closer it got to the election, the bigger the complexes. We’re trying so hard to make the city a liveable place. We should make use of these regeneration sites, but it must be the support of locals.”

Atheists vs the Easter Bunny

BY KIERAN ADAIR

Good without God. That was the message Sydney Atheists delivered from the sides of their bright red britbus on Sunday. The group, after being told they were not allowed to pay for religious advertisements on the side of Sydney buses, hired their own, and drove it around the city decked out in Atheist slogans.

Cap Hub sat down with Sydney Atheist organisers – Andrew Lamond, and Fleur Dickinson – on their way to Kirribilli House to hand over a petition calling for removal of the school chaplaincy program.

So what is Sydney Atheists all about?

AL: If you look at the census of 2006 19 per cent of people said they were of no religion, and a lot more said the religion they were born into was not necessarily the religion they practiced. So Atheists are potentially 20 per cent of people, and we are underrepresented. We are here to become known as a sizable part of the population and by being known we want to change the way the Government thinks about its funding. They are taking too much notice of the church.

FD: I’m sick of my tax dollars being wasted on unnecessary religious things. I want my tax going to good things like medical research rather than religious organisations.

What is the School Chaplaincy program, and why do you want it stopped?

FD: It is a Government run program that’s using $400 million dollars of taxpayer money to put chaplains in state schools around Australia. These are religious people disguised as student support, and they are all untrained. If the Government wants to have this kind of system set up in the schools they should put more money into regular school councillors who are all trained professionals, and don’t have religious biases.

What can people do to support this kind of action?

FD: In August there will be a census for Australia, we would like people to tick the box for no religion, if they don’t actually believe in any religion. Government spending is influenced by that result.

AL: We want to make sure our tax dollars end up going to the right places.

FD: Also remember if you write in ‘Jedi’ or ‘Pastafarian’, you won’t actually be counted, tick no religion.

Sydney Atheists hold regular monthly meeting, for more information visit http://www.sydneyatheists.org/
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DRAMA ON THE WATER
Another black death in custody whitewash

BY KIERAN ADAIR

Last year the City Hub reported on the case of Veronnica Baxter, a transsexual Aboriginal woman who died in police custody aged 33.

In March 2009, Veronnica was arrested on drug charges, sent to Silverwater Detention Centre - a goal for men, despite identifying as a woman – and was allegedly found hanging in her cell six days later.

Her family, friends and supporters waited more than two years for a Coroner’s inquest into her death to take place.

This month, an inquest that lasted three and a half hours didn’t explain the mysterious circumstances of Veronnica’s death. The media was barred from reporting the inquest for a week following handing down of the findings.

“It was the quickest inquest I have seen in over 20 years,” says Ray Jackson, head of the Indigenous Social Justice Association.

The circumstances of Veronnica’s death are disputed, with friends speculating that she fell victim to racism, or homophobia within the prison system. While others claim it was another case of criminal neglect in the prison system leading to another black death.

Last year the City Hub questioned the official version of events, after a leaked email claimed that Veronnica’s fingers were broken at her time of death, making her incapable of hanging herself. None of this was addressed during the inquiry.

“It was a total whitewash, with the backing of the Aboriginal Legal Service... [who] just went along with whatever the corrective services barrister put to Magistrate MacMahon and that’s all there was to it,” says Mr Jackson.

Ms Jackson, and other campaigners are critical of the ALS over their handling of the case. They say the group failed to adequately hold the Department of Corrective Services to account over the course of the inquest, and left major questions unanswered.

“Were her fingers broken? Was she in a male goal against her will? Was she on hormone treatment? Did she know about NSW transgender policy? Was she murdered?” These are questions we wanted answered to,” says Rachel Evans, CAAH spokesperson and Justice for Veronnica campaigner.

“We are not convinced... the inquest was not at all thorough and the evidence presented was very minimal and contradictory.”

Throughout the inquest crucial evidence was not brought forth, raising eyebrows, and calls of foul-play. One aspect that failed to be properly addressed concerned Veronnica’s mental state.

“Presume she was suicidal... if they weren’t... how can anyone possibly presume she was suicidal if she was making little chatty calls from her cell?” says Norrie May-Welby, a close friend of Veronnica’s.

Since the inquest Ray Jackson, has been given authority by Veronnica’s family to act on their behalf, and is calling for the NSW Coroner to reopen the case.

Lighting a candle for Fukushima

BY ROGER HANNEY

A candlelight vigil will be held outside the Sydney Opera House starting at 6pm on Tuesday April 26, to commemorate the anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster and to show support for Japan’s suffering in the face of the ongoing Fukushima nuclear disaster.

The evening is supported by a number of groups - Japanese for Peace, Australian Conservation Foundation, the Australian Student Environment Network, Unions NSW, and the Medical Association for the Prevention of War, among others.

Julie Macken, spokesperson for Greenpeace, says that, “This is an opportunity for the people of Sydney to come out and show their support for the people of Fukushima and Chernoby. We want to let them know their suffering is not forgotten and that our hearts are with them as they try to restore their lives and their communities.”

Even now, cancer specialists from four Japanese hospitals are arguing in an open letter the notable British medical journal, The Lancet, that the Japanese nuclear industry is resisting calls to store the Fukushima workers’ stem cells.

Such stem cells would become crucial in any future treatment of workers suffering tumours or other radiation-linked abnormalities. But the doctors have openly pointed the finger - arguing that the nuclear industry has refused to store the workers’ cells for fear of harm to its reputation.

Discussing the nuclear lobby’s push to rebrand nuclear as the eco-friendly solution to global warming, Greenpeace’s Macken responds that “it is offensive that the nuclear industry and those who profit from this devastating source of power should attempt to paint it as safe, green, or as any kind of solution to climate change.”

On the issue of timing, especially when the disaster in Fukushima is still unfolding, and apparently worsening still, Macken recognizes the role of devil’s advocate. “After paying such a terrible price for this industry,” she says, “the people of Chernoby and Fukushima deserve the truth and deserve to have their story told. The nuclear lobby call this opportunistic - we call it speaking truth to power.”

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Your home is a battleground

BY LIZ CUSH

Plump Gallery, an independent, artist-run gallery in Enmore, is currently hosting an exhibition about the housing crisis and squating.

Co-curator Huck Spin said the idea for the show came out of experiences squating last year.

“Everyone’s home is a battleground. The prices of houses are rising dramatically, and this has affected the home owner and the buyer and caused chaos,” Huck told the City Hub.

“Home owners, real estate agents and higher class people think that people like us, squatters and activists are scum. And we think the same thing back,” Huck says.

“The abundance of empty buildings being left to rot is the real crime.”

Huck says the Scum vs Scum show aims to expose and bring to light the housing crisis situation in a creative way.

“I realised that home is a big issue and everyone is affected. We need to change that and not be slaves to housing crisis,”

Huck says the image of squatters is changing along with the housing crisis.

“The more the rents go up the more different people are squating and being resourceful with empty buildings. People are surprised at who they will find squating in there enpicks,” Huck said.

“Scum vs Scum will show all sides of squating and housing crisis and show you a human element.”

Scum vs Scum runs until April 29 at Plump Gallery, Enmore Road, Enmore. It includes a film night at 6.30pm on April 26, and a bike tour departing the gallery at 6pm on April 29 to learn about the history of local squats.

BOF’s environment of disdain

BY ROGER HANIN

In one of his first official and potentially defining acts, Premier Barry O’Farrell did something he had never previously mentioned – he dissolved the Department of Environment and Heritage.

What remains is now the Office of Environment and Heritage, situated within and controlled by the Department of Premier and Cabinet.

This is just one consequence of the Public Sector Employment and Management (Departments) Order 2011.

Effectively, the Premier’s office is now in charge of Centennial Park, Moore Park, and their associated Trusts, and the Historic Houses Trust.

Meanwhile, the vast and significant areas controlled by the Sydney Harbour Foreshirt Authority and the Luna Park Trust will now come under the control of the expanded Department of Planning and Infrastructure.

Unlike their poor cousin, the new deficit Department of Environment, both the Department of Planning and Infrastructure and the Department of Primary Industries appear already to have clearly expanded authority and access to government resources. Far from being castrated or even reigned in, they will be part of the new super Department of Trade and Investment, Regional Infrastructure and Services.

Although it was often a weak department when it came to legal disputes involving development, mining, and infrastructure - hence the sheer volume of public interest environment litigation in the Land and Environment Court - it is likely that an entirely government-controlled Office of Environment will even less accountable to or concerned by public, community, or environmental wellbeing.

According to NSW Greens MP, by acting on the Department first, it is clear that O’Farrell will be putting the environment last.

With the fresh office paint barely dry, she says that O’Farrell’s “argument that the ‘move elevated’ environment issues is laughable.”

“Meanwhile loss of biodiversity is increasing, fish stocks are declining and the threat of climate change looms over NSW farming and coastal communities.

She expects that this rapid move signals a sharp increase in environmental funding and a weakening of both environmental standards and laws within NSW.

“Already we are seeing the anti-environment influence of the new ultra-conservative Upper House,” said Faethmann. “This just shows the disdain the Coalition will show Marine Parks and National Parks over the coming four years.”
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It was one of those jobs that brings an old PI down. A woman very old before her time came to see me. Could I find her granddaughter? Just out of juvenile detention, he’d disappeared. His mum had disappeared, junkie. His dad was in gaol. He’d beaten his wife. They came from a long line of people left behind by society. Shirty rented homes. Low-wage temporary jobs. The dole. Drugs. The kid didn’t have a chance. Trouble at school. Illiteracy. Foster care. Diagnosed psychological disorder. Trouble with the law. Break-and-enter.


I asked her for a pittance and followed a hunch; found the contact in the welfare sector; pioneered the strategy of hiring influential ex-politicians for contacts and their expertise in 'facilitation'.

But I remember Clarke as he should be remembered. Back around 1998 I did some work for a three dollar company, called ‘Truth About Motorways Pty Ltd’, set up by some community activists. Macquarie’s wholly-owned subsidiary, Macquarie Infrastructure Investment Management Ltd, the promoters of the Eastern Distributor Motorway, were telling a pack of obvious lies to justify the road and sell investors into pouting in money.

I did some snooping and found a few documents the Roads and Traffic Authority hadn’t hidden quite well enough and my clients took Macquarie to the Federal Court, alleging misleading and deceptive conduct.

The Millionaire Factory was angry. They were owed respect. If they said their road would get 60,000 toll-paying vehicles a day by 2011, they should be believed, dammit.

The moment it looked like my clients had bulldozed all the legal roadblocks Macquarie could throw in their path, the bank’s legal team applied to shift the whole thing to the High Court. My clients were stunned. Here they were trying to get the court to hear some evidence about Macquarie’s bogey motorway traffic predictions and the next thing, they’re forced before the highest court in the land to defend the constitutional validity of the proposition that Parliament had a right to pass a law saying any person had a right to “bring a matter before the court”. That “open standing” clause - which was by then found in a few bits of legislation - is a whistleblower provision. It means that if you see something you think is unlawful going on, you don’t need to have a direct material interest (like, in this case being a shareholder) to take the matter before the relevant court. And Macquarie were arguing that the elected representatives of the people didn’t have the right to give citizens that right. They hired a guy who was, by reputation, the finest constitutional barrister in the land to argue this anti-democratic crap.

In the upshot, the High Court judges decided, seven nil, to throw Macquarie down the stairs. It’s not often that you get on inventing increasingly fanciful motorway traffic predictions with disastrous results. And not only that. Under Clarke, Macquarie pioneered the strategy of hiring influential ex-politicians for contacts and their expertise in ‘facilitation’.

Corruption of the political process was Clarke’s enduring legacy, and a bit of charity work won’t wash it clean. More Nick Possum at brushtail.com.au
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Surry Hills library hosts adults only nights

BY MILLY CAFFREY AND LAUREN MACKIE

A reading by the Erotic Fan Fiction group at Surry Hills library lured many away from the Crown Street bars last Thursday night. As 9pm drew closer, an eager audience gathered to hear an hour long special LGBTI edition of the readings made famous at last year’s Sydney Writers Festival. The entire venue was filled, and people kept piling in until many were left standing.

But any discomfort was made worthwhile as four of Sydney’s most talented writers told tales filled with hilarity, wit and ‘infectious it tickled the most prudish listener’. The theme of the night was ‘brief, light jokey story of sexual longing as rivalry between divas into entertaining account of “wogs, civil weddings, lollipops and unrequited gay desire”, read by Pete Palles.

However, the tale that may have stolen the show was one involving a collaboration of Mariah Carey and Beyonce Knowles, read by Kelly Dolan. It transformed the idea of “eat her”.

The crowd chortled as Frances Barrett told a story detailing a liaison between red heads Julia Gillard and Kerry O’Brien, a comical scenario that managed to send a message about sexual rights within the LGBTI community. There was also a piece speculating about the secret love affair between Dawn French and Jennifer Saunders, and the comedy continued with an entertaining account of “wogs, civil weddings, lollipops and unrequited gay desire”, read by Pete Palles.

The readings were part of the Adults Only autumn events at the inner city library which will be open until midnight on Thursday nights throughout April and May. In addition to the steamy Erotic Fan Fiction night, there will be a diverse program of talks, workshops and films. Sexpert Jacqueline Hellyer will instruct busy people how to sharpen their tools in the bedroom on May 12. Also highly anticipated is Law Week, beginning May 19, which will explore Australia’s history of literary censorship and allow readers the chance to borrow previously controversial books.

For those after a fright, Surry Hills Library will host Ghost Stories on April 21, which promises an evening of literary terror.

Acid makes a comeback as MDMA quality drops

BY SHARI NEMENTZIK

A drop in the quality of ecstasy has prompted NSW partygoers to switch to LSD. A survey by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre shows nearly half of the regular ecstasy users questioned in NSW have used LSD in the past year.

Drug Squad Commander Detective Superintendent Nick Bingham said, “It is possible the current low cost and high quality of MDMA may be drawing users to this commodity in NSW.”

Community Program Manager of the NSW Users & AIDS Association (NUAA) Stone Crawford said it wasn’t surprising that when people are faced with unregulated or unsafe MDMA, they may move to another drug they perceive to be of better quality.

“Prohibition inevitably leads to the production of unsafe, unregulated drugs,” Stone said.

Armed with this information, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research says charges involving LSD and other hallucinogens have risen by 28 per cent since October 2005.

“Black market ecstasy has prompted a switch to LSD and other hallucinogens.” Bingham said.

“Someone takes it to get right off their head to see hot pink elephants flying around or purple aliens flying in a helicopter.”

The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research says changes involving LSD and other hallucinogens have risen by 28 per cent since October 2005.

“Black market ecstasy has prompted a switch to LSD and other hallucinogens.” Bingham said.

“The attraction to LSD is that it isn’t detectable, so it’s easy to carry into festivals and it’s also cheaper than ecstasy,” he said.

A tab of LSD costs up to $15, making it more affordable than the popular ecstasy pills that can cost up to $15. But the anonymous source says he also takes LSD because of the unique “fun factor” of the hallucinogen.

Superintendent Bingham explained this attraction to the drug. “LSD is a strong psychedelic drug that can enhance colour and patterns and can create bizarre hallucinations,” Bingham said.

“If someone takes it to get high out of their head to see hot pink elephants flying around or purple aliens flying in a helicopter.”

“The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research says charges involving LSD and other hallucinogens have risen by 28 per cent since October 2005.”

“Black the rate of detection of LSD is still very low in comparison to other illicit drug types,” Superintendent Bingham said.
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Lotus Asian Restaurant "NEW"
If the idea of pan Asian foods you like, you're not alone. I dined here with a little trepidation and left with a different idea.
If you (like me) love Great Wall Chinese Restaurant, you'll love the South East Asian dishes of Chef Chuan. His name, Lotus, is apt. It brings a lot of bang on the money. From a pasty bunch of succulent Prawns with Chili, Lemongrass, and Lemongrass and Coconut Milk ($15.50), to creamy, coconut-rich Maly. Check out the New York-style Prawn Pot Pie ($15.50), there's a lot to like. The Thai Braised Pork Belly with Green Papaya Salad ($12.00) is genius, winning me over with sticky, porky chunks balanced by fresh mint and coriander.
A Vietnamese-Lao dish of crispy beef and vermicelli ($12.00) is what you need. For those who enjoy a curry, there's a perfect dinner sauce, the Yellow Curry Beef or the Green Curry Chicken ($13.50). As a dessert, the Thai Coconut and Coconut Ice Cream ($6.00) is fantastic. I'm surprised that the diversity of cuisines had no more than a more interesting menu, but you'll still find Aburi Sushi ($11.50) on the menu. The Kung Pao Chicken ($12.00) is perfect, with both plenty of spice and a generous helping of protein. The Century Egg and Omelette ($12.00) is a great choice, and the Chinese Cinnamon and Rice ($12.00) is rich and comforting. Overall, a great choice for those seeking a variety of cuisines.
5 SYDNEY HOT SPOTS

Looking for a way to wow an overseas visitor, or perhaps just somewhere to impress the boss? Look no further than Jackie McMillan's fabulous five:

**Tomislav in Kings Cross**
Overlooking the iconic Coke sign with a balcony above the glistening city, this is frightfully modern food. It's slick, fun, and dreadfully hip whilst still avoiding pretension.
With only thirty seats, bookings are a must. Perfectly placed to combine with some nightlife at Kings Cross.
www.tomislav.com.au

La Scala on Jersey in Paddington
Darren Simpson's modern Italian, produce driven cooking lets Australian produce – like bone marrow, scampi, sand whiting and beef - shine. Make a day of it with an afternoon of retail therapy in Paddington followed by drinks at the Light Brigade Hotel then a stellar meal up the stairs!
www.lascalanjersey.com.au

**Baroque Bistro Patisserie at The Rocks**
This modern French bistro uses Aussie ingredients, and also makes must-est macarons – my favourite being the amazing Olive Oil and Vanilla ones. It'd be ideal to combine with a spot of sightseeing in The Rocks at any time of the day, as they're open for breakfast, lunch and dinner.
www.baroquebistro.com.au

**Restaurant Atelier at Glebe**
Modern European dishes from a husband and wife team in a cute cottage set on Glebe's niche shopping strip. Also boasts a really nice list of unusual Australian wines that are reasonably priced to boot. Degustation here is well priced and amazing; just don't eat a big lunch!
www.restaurantatelier.com.au

Bloodwood at Newtown
Designer, designer but in a Newtown kind of way! A lunch of stellar young chefs who got bored cooking for the rich, are now using excellent technique on comforting yet progressive dishes for the much younger and funnier Newtown crowd. Take in an indie band afterwards for the complete grunge experience.
www.bloodwoodnewtown.com

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**EAT & DRINK**

Alternative Media Group wants to write a profile on your cafe/restaurant. This profile is a special opportunity for advertisers in the food industry.
In your profile we will include a photo, a summary of your restaurant and relevant contact details.
We aim to not only increase sales in your local area but also to create a greater awareness throughout Sydney, from Bondi to Balmain, on what your small business has to offer.
The profile will separate your restaurant from its competitors because the issue we will place your business in will feature a cover story on Pyrmont Food and Wine Festival.
This issue will therefore embody the essence of quality dining.
With this opportunity comes the exciting possibility of being reviewed in our weekly "eat & drink" section.

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PICTURES OF BRIGHT LIGHTS

BY ANGELA BENNETTS

A mythological mixing town by the sea, a visiting carnival, a mysterious Story Teller and a family ruptured by a dark secret. So goes Pictures of Bright Lights, a new work by writer Marje Freeman and director Stephen Nicolazzo as part of the Tamarana Rock Surfers’ all-Australian program. If the high-wattage cast (TV veteran Caroline Craig, Sydney Fringe favourite Eryn Jean Norvill, and Kurt Phelan) and enigmatic description weren’t enough to entice you, we caught up with Nicolazzo to find out more.

What is the significance of the arrival of the carnival in the story? The carnival represents everything we can’t control, desire, change, and the truth. Its arrival is symbolic of these things coming to the surface and penetrating our tightly structured sense of reality.

The premise sounds quite fantastical. As a director, how do you ground the tale and make it seem real? My main focus is the real tragedy of the play and letting fantasy and imagination be used to puncture reality as it acts as a catalyst for revelation. Family, for me as a director, the fantastical seems more real in a way as it allows us more intense emotional stakes to rise up without inhibition. It provides a safe house for truth to fly and I suppose the real tragedy that I speak of the thing that makes the tale grounded, is that we are constantly trying to fight our fantasies, to censor ourselves from dreaming.

The characters are nameless — instead are Child, Mother, Daddy, Story Teller. Why? This is related to the archetypal model of the story. Names suggest a particular individual struggle however what we’re dealing with in this play is storytelling, failure, and myth. This tale is one that could potentially have been told for thousands of years, and will be told again for another thousand. It is familiar (despite being quite bare). A writer’s tale.

This production has scored some great actors — Caroline Craig, Eryn Jean Norvill, and Kurt Phelan. Who do they bring to the stage? They bring a considered and warm interpretation of character structure, and a chance. Actors who are willing to take risks and embrace new Australian work are dedicated beasts, and these three have been so pivotal in the build towards our work on the show.

Your company, Little Ones, straddles Melbourne and Sydney. What do you think the main difference between the two cities is when it comes to theatre? After growing up in Melbourne and producing work there for quite some time, I suppose the main difference I have noticed lies in accessibility for artists to simply put on a show and take a chance. In Sydney, there is a degree of professional expectation, which I certainly admire and respond to, however, it is a little harder to experiment and learn how to find an audience. The Tamarana Rock Surfers though are a company that really push this, which is why I am quite excited to be involved in their season. What I love about Sydney though is that it really pushes you to to fight to find an audience and it is in the fight that you can really solidify what you want to do.

What do you hope people will leave Pictures of Bright Lights feeling? Whenever I watch it, I leave with goose bumps and a strong will to find happiness. I really would like an audience to experience that when they see Pictures of Bright Lights. If they feel something in their heart that makes them want to dream and see a little magic in reality then I will be very happy.

SYDNEY COMEDY FESTIVAL: BULMERS BEST OF EDINBURGH

BY KOMI SELLAH-KIRAI

What do Dylan Moran, Arj Barker, Ross Noble and Stephan Amos have in common? They are all fresh-faced comedians introduced to the world at Bulmers Best once upon a time. We pick the brains of this year’s graduates Carl Donnelly, Tom Allen, and Seann Walsh before they realise their talents are well worth $10 per head.

CARL DONNELLY

It says in the press release that you took up stand-up in 2005. What were you doing before that? I worked in an office as an accounts assistant which was the last of a series of dead end jobs I had done since dropping out of university at the age of 19. I was never cut out for the whole 9 to 5 thing. I had the gift of being able to do the bare minimum of work required to not be fired! One of the worst things I used to do was sneak off for a coffee in the toilets. I would always go to a toilet on a different floor if I was hungover etc and have a 30 minute snooze around 10am. Then when I came back to my desk I’d pretend I had been in a short notice meeting.

TOM ALLEN

What would you be doing covering your feet? What’s wrong with them? I have a strange OCD thing where I feel constantly paranoid when not wearing shoes. I’m convinced I’m going to stand on something sharp or kick a door etc. I’ve had it since being a child! So for as long as I can remember, I can only be barefoot when in bed (or in swimming pools, anywhere where it is necessary). This fact is on my Wikipedia page but I have no idea how it got there.

Are you looking forward to performing in front of an Aussie audience? Of course. One of my favourite things about being a comedian is that danger/excitement of going on stage in front of a room full of people that don’t know you and convincing them you are worth listening to. Doing that in another country is even more exciting as you are talking to people that have a different way of life with different cultural references. Obviously the danger exists that they won’t have a clue what I’m talking about but I’m willing to risk it!

SEAN Walsh

Would you play the movie of your life? The man from Crocodile Dundee possibly.

Carl Donnelly, Tom Allen, and Seann Walsh before they realise their talents are well worth $10 per head.

STAGE
BILLY DISCO

BY ANGELA BENNETTS

“I have an inner teenage girl.” playwright Lashan Pilpate laughingly admits. I’ve asked him how he managed to nail the adolescent aging in his 2009 Griffin Award-winning play Silent Disco. In it, Tai and Terrance (yin and yang) are in love and with the insouciance of youth show it in funny ways, their conversation peppered with “tags” and “tags.” “Y’kink” and “drug” and taking in one rap-a-capella-Class-less succession Tamar humorously sings a poetic word, “I fuck about muck up swell last crumbs of shut phone to silent hide via flick earphones inside collar turn them down real quiet driving away there.” It’s the kind of distinctive language that you can imagine said Phil Ridley. It is the sound of the futility judges, Lee Lewis saying he had an incredible, “surprise of the world that he is writing about.” Lewis, who also studied with Pilpate at NIDA, will be joining the ASC 1 in 2023 as director, along with Sophie Henner as the flirty white girl and Meyna Wyatt as Indigenous boy.

“The story is about two teenagers and is a love story—it’s certainly not a story just for young audiences,” says Pilpate, although he tested the script with schools and it is now co-production with ATP, where Pilpate is Literary Associate and director of the FRESHINK emerging writer program. He loves teaching, thriving on the exchange and watching people grow.” It’s seeing people connecting to each other, he says.

“But a Sydney story as well” continues Pilpate, an inner- west local.”“There are so many good things about Sydney, it’s all about living in the inner city it’s disparity the gentrification and the disconnection.”

And so back to the title, which won some international attention. The silent disco (where participants dance to music on wireless headphones) is a high-tech, hipster thing that has become quite popular in the Netherlands. “I was watching a young couple dancing, and then there was a fight. So it’s literal, but it’s also metaphorical. It’s about a generation of young people who have grown up listening to iPods and their involvement in technology, what are they blocking out?” They’ve put together a full circle for this world premiere staging which will incorporate a silent disco at inner-city club Goodgrove on May 18. And the guy who invented the silent disco just recently moved to Sydney “Pilpate tells me.” Whatever more, the inventor came up with the idea after putting on a show in a theatre festival, and wanting to celebrate afterwards but not wanting to upset the neighbours. “I love the fact that it leads back to theatre in that way…” he says.

And all the human connections line up almost as if Pilpate had scripted it himself: April 22— Jezneen Grimston, The Factory Theatre, 10 Nimrod St, Kings Cross, $14.50, 8091 0292, griffinthetheatre.com

STAGE

DIRDYLAND

BY EMMA SALKIND

Driedly set is in a fantastical place, in the aftermath of a massacre. Poverty is rife and a group of teenagers live on an escape to the city so they can escape to a rotted tooth. The set and costume create the illusion of a dirty land perfectly. The play opens with some thick smog as the town and a dense layer of dirt on the floor and it’s hard not to feel that the squallor is seeping into your skin. The lighting design by New Yorker Ross Graham, is fantastic and adds a bit of colour to a dark and dingy world. Even with light-hearted and humorous moments, good acting and narrative, Dryland comes across as an overall impressive performance piece. It seems like a new script that is making a social comment about something. But what? B.E. White once said,”Be obscure clearly and this is perhaps a novel not followed by writers, but the audience is interested and the world she has created is unique, but audiences may leave the theatre feeling as though they have missed something and been purposely left to play with the result.”

Until May 7, New Theatre, 442 King St, Newtown, $25–30, 9913 9403, newtheatre.org.au

COMEDY

Thursday 21 April
Comedy Store Showcase – Comedy Store (25–30)
Corridor Club – Corner, Newtown (12)
Dion Doukas: International Homewrecker – Corridor (12–18)
Festive International Showcase – Hayden Orpheum (25–30)
Gabriel Iglesias: The Fluffy Shop – The Factory Theatre (44–90)
GiggleS Crazy Circus Show – Parades Theatre Kensington (17–69)
Glen Woor- No Lands Man – The Factory Theatre (23–87)
Heart Impotence – The Factory Theatre (17–30; 25–50)
Kids Comedy Showcase – Parades Theatre Kensington (13–17)
Matt Okas: Being Black N Chicken N Nyt – The Factory Theatre (10–19)
Nina Conti: Talk to the Hand – Sydney Opera House (from 25)
Tammy Dakasoul Bakewell – Corridor (12–18)
Trevor Cook – Laugh Garage (12–15)
Friday 22 April
Comedy Store Showcase – Comedy Store (25–30)
Corridor Club – Corner, Newtown (12)
Dion Doukas: My Generation – Yawamba Wine Bar Newtown (25–30)
Eoin Donovan: International Homewrecker – Corridor (12–18)
Festive International Showcase – Hayden Orpheum (25–30)
Gabriel Iglesias: The Fluffy Shop – The Factory Theatre (44–90)
Glen Woor- No Lands Man – The Factory Theatre (23–87)
Heart Impotence – The Factory Theatre (17–30; 25–50)
Jackie Jee: Being Black N Chicken N Nyt – The Factory Theatre (10–19)
Nina Conti: Talk to the Hand – Sydney Opera House (from 25)
Tammy Dakasoul Bakewell – Corridor (12–18)
Trevor Cook, Ben Darrow & Peter Egger – Laugh Garage (12–25)
Sunday 24 April
Comedy Store Showcase – Comedy Store (25–30)
Corridor Club – Corner, Newtown (12)
Dion Doukas: International Homewrecker – Corridor (12–18)
Festive International Showcase – Hayden Orpheum (25–30)
Heart Impotence – The Factory Theatre (17–30; 25–50)
Jackie Jee: Being Black N Chicken N Nyt – The Factory Theatre (10–19)
Nina Conti: Talk to the Hand – Sydney Opera House (from 25)
Tammy Dakasoul Bakewell – Corridor (12–18)
Trevor Cook – Laugh Garage (12–15)

Seamus McInerney\r
Debbie Kovacs\r
Rebecca Stone\r
Corridor Club – Corridor, Newtown (12)
Daniel Moore: ADDHO (Attention Deficit Disorder, In High Definition) – Corridor (16)
Dead Cat Bounce: Caged Heat – Virgin Mobile Metro Theatre (25–75)
Seth Troxler: Meatball – The Factory Theatre (25–50)

Seamus McInerney: Addictive Discourse (Deficit Disorder, In High Definition) – Corridor (18)
Jude Mandrake: Drag Queen (from 30)
Pedro Syndicate – Comedy Store (25–30)

Corridor Club – Corner, Newtown (12)
Daniel Moore: ADDHO (Attention Deficit Disorder, In High Definition) – Corridor (16)
Dead Cat Bounce: Caged Heat – Virgin Mobile Metro Theatre (25–75)
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Pyrmont’s top chefs team up with Mudgee’s finest wine producers in a series of wine matched lunch and dinners, cooking classes, wine appreciation, and Mother’s Day Specials. Visit the Pyrmont Uncorks Mudgee festival finale on Sunday 15th May from 11am - 5pm at Pirrama Park. Try over 120 wines from 30 of Mudgee’s top winemakers. Bring your picnic rug and choose from a range of cuisines for lunch, be entertained by live music from the best local musicians. Entry is free with wine tasting packages including souvenir wine glass starting at just $15.00. Show off your creativity by taking part in the 5th annual Pyrmont Art Prize. Over $10,000 worth of prizes to be won.
Science and art have always had a symbiotic relationship. It’s been said that Cezanne’s paintings helped define our modern understanding of the way vision works, and that Virginia Woolf perfectly expressed the fractured and regenerative self in modern science. Awfully Wonderful, which opened as part of Performance Space’s Unaeyes Futures program last week, explores this relationship, taking it as its theme: science fiction in contemporary art. Twelve Australian artists have produced as eclectic a range of responses as may be expected. The works range from 3D sci-fi kitsch to retro futurism to more sophisticated blends of real and fictional.

Technologically made incomprehensible by age, set alongside carnivalesque ‘shrinkering machines’, a fully-operational Mars Gravity Simulator is circled by a melancholy Metropolis robot. One of the most striking works, by Hayden Fowler, is a large-scale ‘living doma’, which sees the artist inhabiting a strange post-apocalyptic landscape of boulders and grass, a rare human element in the show. For me, the best of sci-fi is encapsulated in a video work by collaborators Ms. & Mr., in which they use old home movies to digitally insert each other into a collective past. Frame Drong, based on the concept of Time Dilacite (theoretical human time travel), is eerily simple, yet infinitely complex. It’s a reverse Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind...

ADAM RODEN on Mars...2010, courtesy of NASA and Craig Bender

Adam Norton on Mars...2010, courtesy of NASA and Craig Bender

THERE IS NO BETTER WAY TO SPEND A SUNDAY AFTERNOON THAN AT THE NAKED CITY EXHIBITION AT THE BARTER-HUMAN PROJECT.

BY KATE BRITTON

THE NAKED CITY

WITH COFFIN ED, MISS DEATH & JAY KATZ

What is it like with our recent fascination with urban laneways? Atmospheric, intimate, a gallery for contemporary art, a respite from the madness of the city, a home to bars, coffee shops and music festivals and a gathering place for like-minded souls. All very positive and only one thing is missing when it comes to Sydney - the laneways themselves!

The problem for the Harbour City, unlike Melbourne, is that many of our funky little conduits disappeared during the 70s and 80s when developers ran riot and large bottomless holes appeared all over the city, remaining that way for many years to come. The older generation will remember the bohemian delights of the Rowe Street laneway near Martin Place, with its numerous coffee shops and quaint little art galleries, ripped from our heart and soul to make way for the neo-brutalist monolith of the MLC Centre.

Sydney has now been left with a kind of festering pustule away for its southern cousin’s burgeoning laneway culture. The few laneways that we have left have become almost an endangered species, feted with Chinese lanterns and adorned like historical relics with the personal blessing of Cloer & Co.

So what’s the solution if we are to approximate the success of Melbourne’s now internationally famous laneway precocity. Sure the City Council has been admirable in its attempts to revitalise what’s left of Sydney’s laneways with programs such as the Laneways Business Development Project and the fostering of small bars therein — it’s probably less keen on the idea of graffiti artists being granted laissez-faire as has been the Melbourne experience.

Sydney’s current laneway culture developed as a spontaneous phenomenon over the past 20 years - Sydney is very much an artificial construct in 2010 and has a highly gentrified, graffiti free version of the bleak city model. Maybe we just need to loosen up a little, turn a blind eye to a bit of illegal street art, put a bit of elasticity into the licensing laws and employ Banksy for a year as the artist in residence.

THE HOT LIST: IRMA THOMAS is the undisputed soul queen of New Orleans and widely regarded as one of America’s all-time best, up there with Aretha and Etta James. Her numerous hits include songs such as Time Is On My Side, Break-’em-off and Someone Would Have Cared. Surprisingly she has never visited Sydney before but all that will change when she plays The Factory on Thursday 21 April along with her all star New Orleans band.

THE BAT-HUMAN PROJECT

“Bats and humans need each other. They desperately need us to protect and build their habitat and, in turn, we need them to pollinate our native forests,” says new media artist Dr. Keith Armstrong, who is behind the interdisciplinary arts initiative, the Bat-Human Project. In case you haven’t heard — our little Naked City gang has trumpeted the bats’ cause a few times in these pages — there are plans afoot to boost the bats from their Royal Botanic Gardens home. The Bat-Human Project, which is less a scientific experiment than it sounds, gives us the chance to find out more about our flying fox friends. MCed by Adam Hills, the set get together promises bat-baring workshops, face-paintings, Q&A’s with scientists, urban planners and artists, plus wildlife doves and more. Pack a picnic and witness some of the thousands of bats that call Sydney home wheeled overhead. (AB)

THE BAR-PIED PROJECT

Apr 29, 5-8pm, Cook & Phillip Park, Sydney (next to St Mary’s Cathedral), free, remnantartlab.com
LIVE WIRE Sydney Live Music Guide

BY PAT HARRIS

Thursday 28th finds cheeky Newtown electro pop duo Snout Cassette launching their latest E.P. with the Blush Foundation, Porn Porn and Mathematical Equation of Sound in support. U.S. R&B a capella group Naturally can be found on Friday 29th at the majestic State Theatre as they tour their album, VexlPop – think Take 6 + 1. Also on Friday, Louisiana blues legend Tony Joe White is in the country for Byron Bay Blues Fest and can be found at The Basement in Circular Quay for his Sydney side show – a great opportunity to catch a true legend in an intimate setting. Veritable hipsters and Triple J faves Tim & Jean are playing Oxford Art Factory on Saturday 30th, a good chance to catch this young Perth duo on their way up. Also on Saturday, the only two Bone Thugs allowed in the country, Krayzie Bone and Wish Bone are back after a recent tour, this time they can be found at the very strangely chosen Club Marconi in Bexley Park. Wednesday 6th finds UK collective The Go! Team playing The Metro in the CBD, where they will play a selection from their third album Raging Blackouts - upbeat party fun times guaranteed. Also on Wednesday, Romanian singer and Dereb The Ambassador is starting a May residency at The Mac on Wentworth Avenue, a very special treat for Sydneyiders as this man is gaining increasing popularity and interest here and overseas. Norwegian electro rocker Datarock are back in town, this time playing at Oxford Art Factory on Thursday 7th.

For more album reviews go to www.altmedia.net.au

SAMPOLOGY’S SUPER VISUAL MONSTER MASH

Baby-faced with a mop of unruly curls, Brisbane’s Sampoology aka Sam Poggioli is at first glance an unlikely candidate for international great. DJ Yoda and hip hop Australian (who quipped “Sampology makes me wanna breakdance?”) Known for his elastic-limb mastery of his mixers Pane and Serato, and his quirky piffing of YouTube, TV and VHS clips for a combined form of sound/visual turntable, this year the Parklife and XSSW laureate is following up his Super Visual Smackdown tour with a Monster Mash at Oxford Arts Factory May 6. On the night you can witness the wondrous action as he manipulates the video hitting the big screenvia two turntables as well as live-triggers custom animations via his drum machine. Judging from online videos, the results are kind of like rapidly flicking through every channel on American cable, after you’ve accidentally taken a tab of acid. If you like what you see, and have, look out for Sampology’s debut EP slated for a late April release on label Top Bites. The Monster Mash will be joined by beatboxer Tom Thum and his loop pedal craziness. (AB)

May 6, 8pm, Oxford Art Factory, 38-46 Oxford St, Darlinghurst, $20-$25, 1300 GET TIX (438 849), mosstix.com.au
SCREAM 4

In 1996, Wes Craven and Kevin Williamson helped invigorate the teen slasher movie sensation with Scream. Eleven years and one truly horrible sequel later, Craven and Williamson are back to grace audiences with the fourth entry, Scream 4. The good news - Ghostface is back with a bloody vengeance. While the basic premise might remain unchanged, Scream 4 provides everything fans could ever want. Thankfully the series has been returned to its genre twisting, self-aware roots, with Ghostface easily racking up a solid round four stab coats. Ultimately, with a twist bound to shock most and an applause worthy finale, if you love your horror, you'll be too foolish to ignore Scream 4. It'll be your favourite scary movie. (AG) ***

BARNEY'S VERSION

Every story has at least two sides, every event more than one version. Barney's Version, the new film by Richard J. Lewis, based on Monroe Richler's prize-winning comic novel, is seen through the eyes of a man who is so unknowable in so many different ways, you somehow can't help but take his side. (LS) ***

BATTLE LOS ANGELES

is one hour and 57 minutes of blowing things up with the shards of a plot buried somewhere in the mangled bodies of the dozen or so supporting characters that bite the dust throughout. Highly recommended if you think pies are a food group unto themselves and your preferential cortex is still developing. (LH) ½/2

BIUTIFUL

tells the story of Ubaldo (Javier Bardem), petty criminal, single father, and terminally ill. Even though film is essentially about death, its bleak and relentless hopelessness is a two-dimensional approach to the theme, and left me wanting more. Definitely not a date movie. (KB) ³/5

BORN TO BE WILD

is a 3D IMAX documentary about two animal orphans, and is narrated by none other than one of the stars of Scream 4. Two ornaments elephants in Kenya and the other keeps orangutans in Borneo. This remarkable story has spectacular cinematography and you’ll feel as though you’re actually in the jungle or African savannah. (ES) ***

BRIGHTON ROCK

appreciates the original Graham Greene novel from a 1938 England living in the shadow of war to a 1944 of mood, rockers and adolescent unrest: a move that means the difference not only of costume and context, but unfortunately believability. Directed by Rowan Joffe of The American and 28 Weeks Later fame, this regrettably once again follows the paranoia-drenched plummets of wadable ganglord Pinkie (Sam Riley) and his twisted romance with a naïve waitress (Andrea Riseborough). It's slick, but not great. (AB) ***

BURLESQUE

in the illustrious tradition of Can You Keep A Secret, Possession, and the Step Up trilogy, Burlesque is a formulaic small-town girl with a troubled past deadend mum moves to the big smoke and dances her way to the top into our hearts’ movie. BUT WITH BONUS CHER (NC) **

CERTIFIED COPY

Palm d’Or winner Abbas Kiarostami's new film Certified Copy is an intelligent and fascinating film. Exploring questions of the real and the fake, it follows the story of two warring strangers, whose real relationship becomes increasingly unclear as they stroll through the villages surrounding Tuscany. (KB) ***

THE COMPANY MEN

Almost everyone was forced to tighten their belts during the GFC. Many lost their jobs, their homes, their livelihoods. In The Company Men, writer/director John Wells (ER, The West Wing) explores the recession’s impact on two corporate overpaid white collar workers (a slogging Ben Affleck), Perforatory subplots aside, the film’s core message about the pitfalls of affluence and status is powerful. (PH) ***

THE FIGHTER

already nominated for a slew of awards, and bound to round up a few more, The Fighter is a consistently intriguing, often harsh tale of one man's struggle to truly account for something more. (AG) ***

THE GIRL WHO KICKED THE HORNET'S NEST

I'm going to miss Lisbeth Salander. Her black eyebrow, her multiple piercings, her cigarette smoking hunch, her banal there braids, her steel glasses and her utter unprejudiced-ness. The Carin Bradshaws, I will miss the coolest female character to grace the big screen in a long time. And this is the third and final installment of the Millennium series, so we have on board an array of tough-sal Nail character, can’t make up our minds on the kitsch. A captivating watch. (KS) ***

GRIFF THE INVISIBLE

Like Kick-Ass and The Green Hornet before it, Griff the Invisible trades on the reality of the audience's existence. Leviathan's extended cameo is to bring with him the hero's countenance, everyday lead. Pathetically shy office worker Griff (Troy Gentry, Ryan Kwanten), is bullied by a slick-haired alpha-male (Toby Schmitz) by day, while he tackles the dark alleyways of a comic book Sydney by night. Unlike Kick-Ass et al, Griff is truly dedicated - he sees insubstantiality as something drenched in lemon juice. If not for a romance with an attractive young woman: Melody (Moeve Darmody), this would be a sad and uncomfortable tale of social outcast. (AD) ***

A HEARTBEAT AWAY

A young rodeo is forced to become the leader of his father's band just weeks before his major competition. Making sure the geriatric members aren't brash off, he must rearrange Ironic rock song and save the town. (AH) ***

HEREFORE

A film that promises to search the meaning of death and the possibility of an afterlife with a talented, octogenarian director is more than just appealing - it feels like compulsory viewing. Unfortunately, the great Clint Eastwood's latest drama is lacking in ideas and audacity. Unlike Cat in the Hat, Hereafter enjoys a ladder to the afterlife, but it's too late, leaving audiences unstalled by what should be a hard-hitting philosophical film. (KS) ***

HOW DO YOU KNOW

After being dumped from the USA softball team, Lisa starts a relationship with... Nothing to do with men or women, just straight-laced businesswoman, George. How Do You Know is not a terrible film, but it is not a film worth seeing unless your commitment to the romantic comedy genre is above average. (LH) ½/2

HOWL

The film adaptation of Allen Ginsberg's much-loved poem Howl sadly never quite hits its mark. Extended (cringe-worthy literal) animation sequences, and a somewhat flat rendering of Howl's 1957 obscenity trial combine to overshadow Franco's flawed performance as a young Ginsberg. Best fans should leave their expectations at the door, or risk being disappointed by the lack of insight into this generation-defining poem. (KB) ***

INSIDE JOB

is a doco tracing the causes of the 2008 global financial crisis. A poke-in-the-eye exposé of the greed, self-interest, and loose morals of the Wall St set, the film is a good rundown of the finer points of the still-decaying GFC. (KB) ½/2

JUST GO WITH IT

Danny (Adam Sandler) pretends to be married to score with chickens, until he falls for one. His assistant (Jennifer Aniston) then acts as his wife who's divorcing him. Go in with low expectations and you'll find this film is lighthearted fun with lots of chuckles. (ES) ***

THE LINCOLN LAWYER

Street-smart defence lawyer Mickey Haller (Matthew McConaughey) is used to rubbing shoulders with the criminals of downtown Los Angeles—but his latest client, a playboy accused of bashing a hooker, proves to be an entirely different creature. This riveting, old-school legal thriller will seduce viewers with its slick production values, snappy dialogue, delicious wit, wry characters and McConaughey's versatile performance. (FJ) ***

RABBIT HOLE

Following the untimely death of their young son, a despondent Nicole Kidman and Naomi Watts find their marriage unraveling as they seek solace in one of the most haunting love stories of the year. "Utterly satisfying... this is a tender and touching story that is not only honest, but also beautifully optimistic. (PH) ***

SUCKER PUNCH

is an abysmal failure of a film by the Hollywood cheese magnet Zack Snyder (300, The Hitchhiker's Guide). Snyder's flamboyant style and outlandish plot has resulted in a film that is so bad it's good. (ES) ***

TITANIC 3D: GHOSTS OF THE ABYSS

James Cameron is riding the Titanic again and this time it’s a 3D documentary. With a hypersensitising Bill Paxton as narrator/guide we experience the enormity and the breathtaking beauty of the ill-fated ship through their eyes. (AH) **

WAGNER & ME

is a multi-talented and always delightful Stephen Fry as he delves into the life and work of Richard Wagner – composer, conductor and racist. (NC) ***

THE WAY BACK

is a harrowing World War II survival story about a group of men who escape a Soviet gulag with the aim to walk 4,000 miles to freedom. The cinematography is exquisite and the film boasts a fabulous cast including Jim Sturgess, Ed Harris and Colin Farrell. (ES) ***
ARIES (March 21-April 19): How comes one of the supreme tests that most every Aries must periodically face...Will you live up to your holds? Will you follow through on your rousing start? Will you continue to stay passionately committed once the fiery intensity stage evolves into the earthy foundation-building stage? Here's a secret to succeeding at this test: You can just try to force yourself to be good and do the right thing. Nor does it work to use shame or guilt to motivate yourself. Somehow you've got to marshal pure, raw excitement for the gritty detail work to come. You've got to fall in love with the task of actually flushing out your dreams.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20): In his book on intuition, psychologist David G. Myers defines it as “the capacity for direct knowledge and immediate insight, without any observation or reason.” Another expert on the subject, Malcolm Gladwell, describes intuition as the “power of thinking without thinking.” Both authors encourage us to cultivate this understanding way of grasping our raw experience. But Myers also warns us of the perils of intuition if it is unfettered by logic and analysis. It can lead us down rabbit holes where we lose track of the difference between our fantasies and the real world. It can cause us to mistake our fears for accurate ESP or get lost in a maze of self-fulfilling prophesies. I bring all this to your attention, Taurus, because the coming weeks will be an excellent time for you to hone and purify your intuition.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20): One of the most impressive elements of the Egyptian uprising in January and February was the role that social media played. When Mohamed Morsi finally resigned and reforms began percolating, thousands of demonstrators returned to the streets. Rubbers, gloves and garbage bags to set the place back in order. I urge you to follow a similar sequence in the coming weeks, Gemini. Agitate for change; rebel against the stale status quo; fight corruption and ignorance; and once your work has led to at least a partial success, clean up after yourself.

CANCER (June 21-July 22): Sometimes nature seems more beautiful than strictly necessary,” said physicist Steven Weinberg. As he admired a hackberry tree swathed in blue jays, yellowfinches, vireos, and a red cardinal. You may find yourself thinking similar thoughts in the coming weeks. Cancerian, from what I can tell, life is primed to flood you with simple joys and exotic revelations, with signs of eternal splendor and hints of sublime meaning, with natural wonders and civilization’s more interesting gifts.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): I became an ordained minister in the Universal Life Church when I was 19 years old. Since then I have officiated at numerous baptisms, initiations, weddings (including marrying people to themselves), divorces, cremations, housewarmings, ghost-bustings, and the taking of primal vows. In all my years of facilitating these ceremonies, I've rarely seen a better time than right now for you to seek out the cathartic rite of passage you may be tempted to try. I recommend you do no more than two, however. Are you ready to break a taboo or smash an addiction? Renounce a delusion or pledge your devotion or commitment?

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): It would be an excellent time for you to acquire the Zombie Apocalypse Preparedness Kit. A package of tools and gear prepared by domestic expert Martha Stewart. I say this not because a Zombie Apocalypse is occurring, but because another kind of apocalypse for that matter. Rather, it's the presence in your life that might encourage you to make a plan of your fears. And that would be a perfect way to cooperate with the current cosmic tendencies, which are conspiring to diminish the inhibitions that your anxieties hold in place. Remember one of the key rules in the game of life: Humor dissipates worry.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): Eighty years ago, an explorer who visited the Maori of New Zealand found they had such good eyesight that many were able to detect Jupiter’s four largest moons with their naked eyes. That’s the kind of vision you could have in the coming days, Libra – metaphorically speaking, at least. The astrological omens say you have the potential to see further and deeper into any part of reality you choose to focus on. Inner truths that have been hidden from you are ready to be plumbed by your penetrating probes. For best results, cleanse your thoughts of expectations. Perceive what’s actually there, not what you want or don’t want to be there.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): You should ventilate your house periodically, even when the weather’s cool. The air indoors gets stale; you need to flush it out and welcome some fresh stuff into your astrological opinion. It’s especially important for you to do this right now. So please consider opening all the windows for a while and inviting the breeze to blow through. In addition to its practical value for your respiratory system, it could serve as a ritual that gently blows the dusty crud out of your mind, thereby improving the circulation in your thoughts and emotions and fantasies.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): What do you like most about work? What are the pleasurable experiences that happen for you when you’re engaged in demanding tasks that require you to be focused, competent, and principled? I think it’s important for you to identify those hard-earned gems and then brainstorm about what you can do to expand and intensify them. You’re in a phase of your long-term cycle when you can make a lot of headway toward transforming your job situation so it serves you better.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): The next phase of your life will be excellent time to unbreak your heart. Here’s what I mean by that: You will have extra power to dissolve any pain that still lingers from the romantic disappointments of the past. You’ll be able to summon acute insights into how to dismantle the sudden and unnecessary defenses you built to protect yourself from loss and humiliation. You will find it easier than ever before to forgive and forget any close companion who hurt you. So get out there, Capricorn, and launch the joyful process of restoring your love muscles to their original potency.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): “Search For Sex Called Off After 38 Years,” read the headline in The Onion. “I always thought that, if I kept searching and exploring, I’d discover who I truly was.” The report was quoting 38-year-old Andrew Speth. “Well, I looked deep into my innermost recesses of my soul, and you know what? I found! An empty windowless room the size of an aircraft hanger. From now on, if anybody needs me, I’ll be sprawled out on my couch drinking black-cherry soda and watching Law & Order like everybody else.” I wonder if Speth is an Aquarius? Many of my Aquarius acquaintances seem to have hit a dead end recently in their quest to fulfill the ancient maxim “Know thyself.” If you’re like that, please hang on. The floodgates of self-discovery will open soon.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): Odds are high that you know very little about Africa. Can you name even 20 of its more than 50 countries? Are you aware that its land mass is bigger than Europe, China, and the U.S. combined? Did you realize that about 2,000 languages are spoken by the people living there? I bring this up, Pisces, because from an astrological perspective it’s an excellent time for you to fill the gaps in your education about Africa — or any other subject about which you are deeply uniformed. Don’t get overwhelmed by this assignment, though. Choose maybe three areas of ignorance that you will concentrate on in the coming weeks.

Homework: Though sometimes it’s impossible to do the right thing, doing the right thing may be a viable option. Give an example from your own life http://www.freewillastrology.com

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