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SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
JANUARY 2026

**SURVIVING. STRUTTING.
THRIVING.**

**Tom LeNoble
on Living Fully
No Matter the Storm**

**POWER DOWN
IN LORETO**

**Where Wellness Meets
the Sea of Cortez**

MOVIE MEMORIES OF 2025

**Top Films, Bottom Flops
& the Stories That Defined the Year**

**LOOKING
AHEAD
IN 2026**

**Queer Entertainment
Worth the Wait**



Happy New Year

LIFESTYLE

EVENTS

FASHION

ENTERTAINMENT

NIGHTLIFE

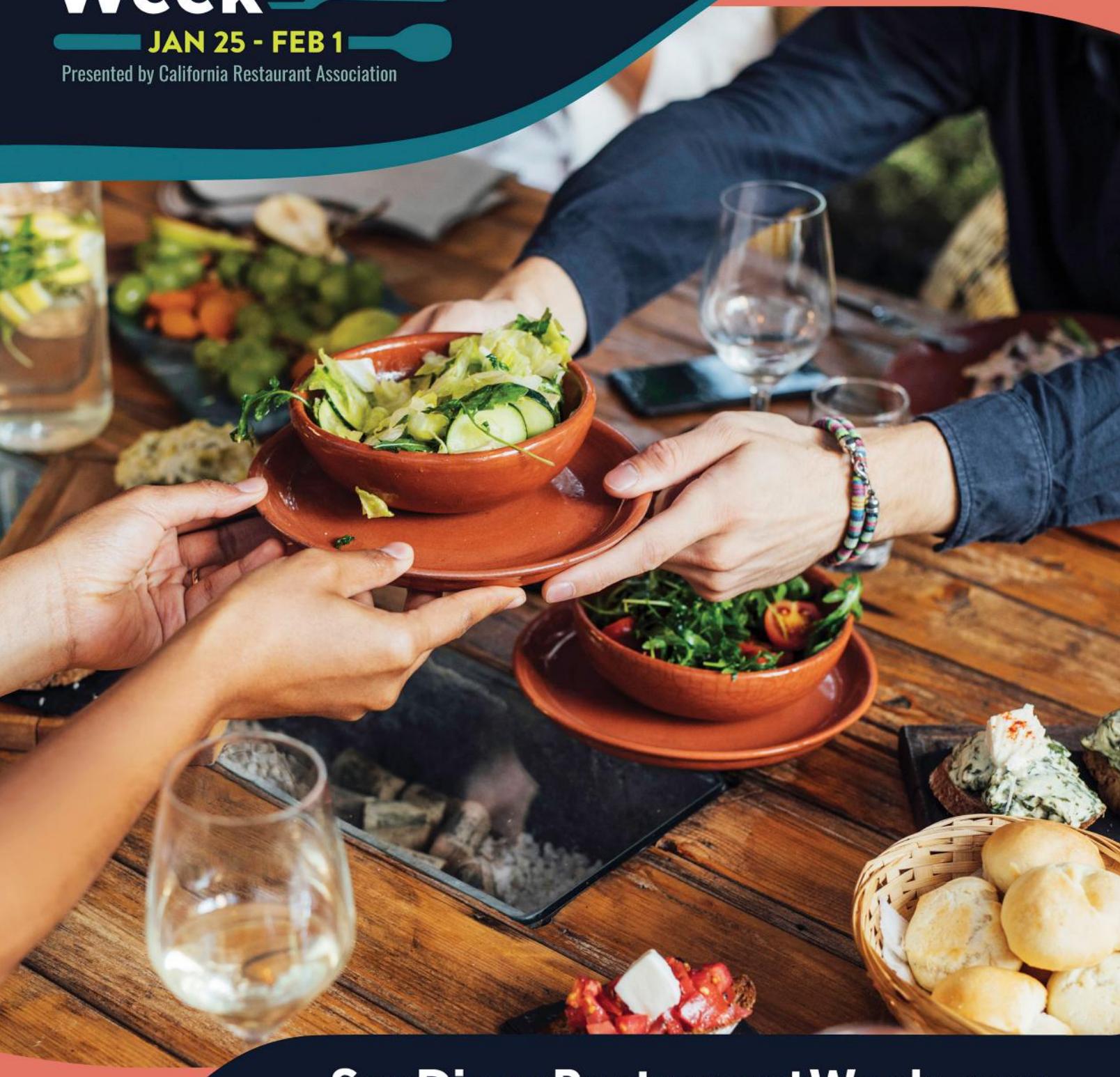
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FIT CHECK: FABULOUS

Look Sharp with *My Life in Business Suits, Hospital Gowns, and High Heels* by Tom LeNoble

If you're reading this, then you're a survivor. You navigate a world that doesn't understand you in a timeline that doesn't fully celebrate you. For gawd's sake, you made it through 2025 alive — give yourself a hug!

Every breath you devour is an act of defiance, so inhale proudly and exhale all the unnecessary negativity. To illuminate your way through the darkness, let Tom LeNoble be your guide.

"I've been radiated enough on my cancer journey that I glow in the dark," he jokes. "I could be a nightlight!"

It wasn't the first time that LeNoble has laughed in the face of adversity. He was diagnosed with AIDS in 1989, but instead of crumbling under the news, he accepted it with courage and courtesy. "I called those terrible gifts," LeNoble says. "The terrible gifts that happen in our lives that don't make sense at the time often turn out to be something that we can learn from and grow from."

Evolution is the cornerstone of LeNoble's DNA. Every setback just pushes him forward, charting a meteoric rise from obscurity to icon. "I actually did grow up in a shack," he says. "I remember thinking there's something different about me and this isn't what's supposed to happen."

Unwilling to accept the *status quo*, LeNoble instead established the *status queer*.

"I love the beginning of my gay life when I was at the Melody Club in Gainesville, Florida. There was only one gay bar back then," LeNoble recalls, "so everybody was there in whatever drag they were wearing. There were the leather guys, the business guys, the preppy guys, the drag queens, the trans people. Everybody was under one roof, and what I hope that we realize today is that throughout our history, when we are together, we win. When we fracture, we don't."

Ever since those formative experiences, LeNoble has woven inclusivity from diversity: "It was the beginning of my coming out in many ways, being away from home and seeing the world out there, getting in touch with my sexuality and what that meant, and that there are other people like me."

He found kinship in contrast, capitalizing on his staggering intellect at powerhouse companies like Verizon, Walmart and Facebook. "Being in these corporate places was very hard and yes, you feel insecure," LeNoble says, "but by being there, by doing our best there and excelling, we help our brothers and sisters along the way because people see that we're just as capable, have the same abilities, maybe even more."

Wearing confidence like a cape, he kept his vulnerable side under wraps. "Those people from my corporate world had no idea I was sick the whole time. They certainly didn't know that Tom LeNoble wore high heels once upon a time ... I kept all of these things a secret till recently, until just a very few weeks ago."

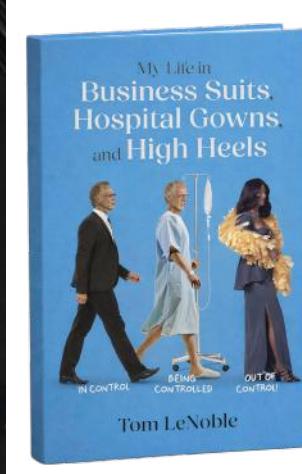
But now, the cat's out of the bag and clawing its way to the top of the bestseller list.

"*My Life in Business Suits, Hospital Gowns, and High Heels* is a memoir that crosses over into self-help," LeNoble says. "The purpose of this book is that who we are today is the sum of all the parts of who we've been. In fact, without some of those parts in your life, whether you're ashamed of them, they were outrageous, they seem private or you just think somebody wouldn't understand, each one of those parts are part of who you are today."

Deconstructing the title, LeNoble elaborates: "In the stages of our life, we wear many outfits. I've had an incredible corporate career. I've spent a lot of time in hospital gowns with that flimsy piece of fabric that never closes in the back very well and yes, I've spent time in the high heels. All of those parts of my life have taught me something. High heels taught me how to stand in the present and stand tall ... the business suits I was able to wear allowed me access to board rooms and making decisions at some of the largest companies in the world ... and hospital gowns in the middle is where you learn a lot about humility and being humble because you are not fully in control of what's going to happen."

This volatile medical chapter of LeNoble's journey presented a compelling crossroads: "I could sit in the waiting room and I could be full of angst and anxiety, but instead what I try and do is look around and I see others who might be in fear and strike up a conversation and invariably what I end up doing with somebody is dismantling the fear."





LeNoble alchemizes helplessness into helpfulness: "I define resilience as not just getting back up but growing from it and learning what gratitude is all about and how service to others in sharing what you've experienced in what you've learned can empower yourself and take you to even greater places."

Destination: heroism.

"Be of service to others to help them get to the other side of their storm," he says. LeNoble clarifies, "My favorite quote by Maya Angelou: 'Every storm runs out of rain.' We have a big storm in the sky with wind and howling, hard rain, but on the other side of that storm, the sun is still shining. Whatever storm you might be going through in life, the sun will shine again."

And for LeNoble, the forecast calls for philanthropy: "Too many people have said to me, 'Tom, one day when I have enough money, I wanna be a philanthropist.' So I created something called the philanthropic mindset and when I communicate with people, I want people to know that your smile — a 'hello' — is a philanthropic gesture."

Kindness is revolutionary ... and the revolution is now.

"There is no more important time for us to come together," he entreats. "We're all part of one community."

LeNoble sharpens his point of view as he takes the long view of his legacy: "I came from very humble beginnings and I did very well. I think that we have a responsibility to give back. We have our time that we can give. We have our talents that we can give. I know somebody who makes some mean deviled eggs; that's her talent. We also have our treasure, whatever size it is, so there's a way for you to give back. And in giving back, I assure you it's not a cliché: You'll get more than you ever gave."

And while you're serving salvation, do it in style.

"Whatever your high heel is," LeNoble advises, "strut into the room and be who you are."

My Life in Business Suits, Hospital Gowns, and High Heels is an anthem for the survivors, a love letter to the outcasts, and a riveting yarn that unspools from the shadows of gay subculture to the spotlight of success.

"Writing this book was one of the most cathartic experiences I've done," LeNoble concludes. "I am so grateful that I have this opportunity to share what happened on my journey. We all have a journey ... No matter what's happened, no matter where we're going, no matter what we think life is, it's meant to be lived right now."

He urges readers to cherish every damn moment: "Live your life to the fullest because each day you have here is something to explore. Some people got up this morning. Some people didn't."

Thank you for the wakeup call, Tom. We're so glad to embrace every sunrise with you.

LGBTQ+ HEROES IN THE HOLOCAUST



In observance of **International Holocaust Remembrance Day** on January 27, we share with you a little-known story of LGBTQ+ bravery and how two gay artists saved countless lives under Nazi occupation.

History often celebrates heroes in familiar forms: soldiers, elected officials, community leaders. But some of the most meaningful acts of defiance during World War II came from people whose power did not lie in weapons or resources, but in their conviction to help others in whatever way they could. **Frieda Belinfante** and **Willem Arondéus** were two such figures during one of history's darkest periods. Dutch artists and openly gay in a time when that alone was daring, the pair resisted Nazi occupation with their greatest assets: wit, ingenuity and determination.

Belinfante was a cellist and conductor — Europe's first female conductor. As the artistic director of a prestigious concert hall in Amsterdam, her dream job came to an abrupt halt when the Nazis invaded the Netherlands. As a Jew, remaining in the public eye would have been a death wish. But sensing her people needed her help, she joined the underground resistance movement.

There, she met Arondéus, a visual artist and storyteller who believed that art carried an ethical responsibility to others. The two began forging documents to help Jews escape the country. But they needed to cover their bases. The authorities would eventually catch on if the forged documents could be checked against public registration lists. To prevent this, they would need to do something extreme. On March 27, 1943, the group made a decision to bomb the Amsterdam public registry.

The public registry was where the records were held that allowed the Nazis to identify which citizens were Jewish. Destroying the records would make deportations much more difficult, in turn saving countless lives. Though she wasn't able to go on the mission herself, Belinfante did her part by helping the other resistance fighters disguise themselves as police officers.

The operation was a success. After investigations, however, the resistance group quickly became the most wanted people in the country. Arondéus was soon captured, as were the others, one by one. When Belinfante realized that she was the only one left in her resistance group, she knew she had to take drastic measures to avoid what was now inevitable detainment by the Gestapo.

Belinfante cut her hair short and began living as a man. Taking extra

precautions, she also moved in the shadows and lived in hiding. Now on trial, Arondéus accepted full responsibility for the bombing. Though he knew that this confession was a death sentence, taking the blame allowed two other resistance members to be spared from execution.

On July 1, 1943, Arondéus and other resistance members were lined up in front of a firing squad. Willem's very last act before his death exemplified the bravery with which he lived his life. Standing before the firing squad along with two other gay men, Arondéus made a proclamation to the world: "Tell people that homosexuals are not cowards."

Arondéus and 11 members of the Dutch resistance were then executed.

Though she had been lying low, the authorities eventually caught on to Belinfante. With no other options, surviving resistance members helped her across the border to Belgium and eventually to France, where the French Underground then helped her get to Switzerland. But to reach complete safety, she would have to cross the Alps on foot in the dead of winter. Astoundingly, she survived the grueling trek. Arriving in Montreux, she was given refugee status and was finally safe from the Nazis.

After the war, Belinfante immigrated to the United States and sought to rebuild the life she once had, now in Laguna Beach, California. Joining the music faculty at UCLA, she would soon become the founding artistic director and conductor of the Orange County Philharmonic Orchestra. Continuing her commitment to others in whatever capacity she could, Belinfante made all orchestra concerts free to the public, funded entirely by donations and memberships.

Just a few years before her death, Belinfante expressed dissatisfaction that despite all her incredible accomplishments, she couldn't do more for others. "I should be born again. I could have done more; that's what saddens me. But I'm not an unhappy person. I look for the next thing to do. There's always something still to do."

The valiant stories of Belinfante and Arondéus are important because they expand our understanding of courage and how we can help those in crisis. Their work in the resistance was specific and rooted in a clear understanding of how ordinary systems can be used to harm those they are meant to protect. The efforts of this incredible duo also highlight the capacity each person has to help those in need, regardless of resources or skillset. Their lives stand as a proud monument of how our community can come to the aid of others in times of disaster.

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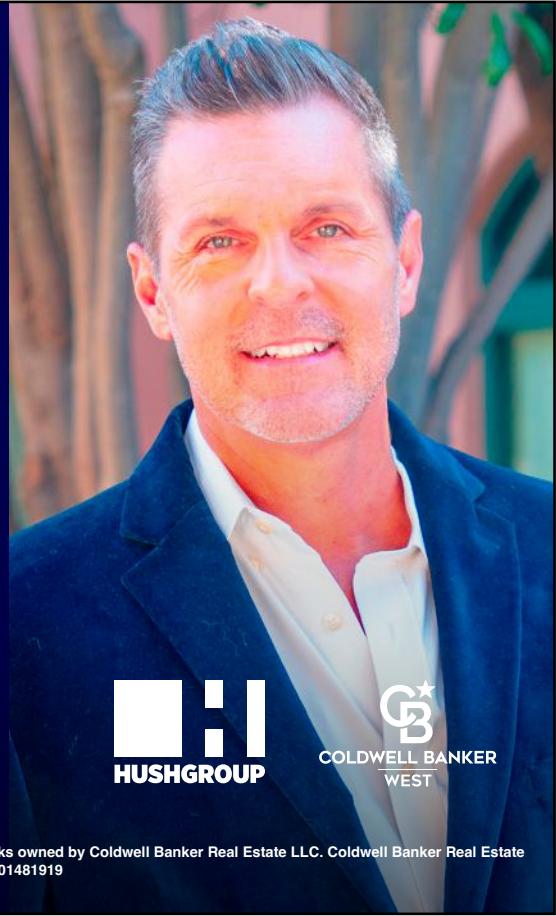
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LOOKING AHEAD:

Queer Entertainment To Keep On Your Radar In 2026...

If the past few years of LGBTQ+ entertainment felt a little intense, 2026 is shaping up to be a welcome shift. Not because queer stories are suddenly avoiding substance, but because they are allowed to be fun again. Romantic. Awkward. Sexy. Occasionally messy. Sometimes all in the same project.

What stands out about what's coming next is how relaxed it feels. These films, shows and albums are not trying to announce themselves as cultural moments. They focus on being entertaining, well-made and confident in the audience they address. For queer audiences, that confidence is easy to recognize and easy to enjoy.

FILM: Romance, Risk and a Little Chaos

The LGBTQ+ films arriving in 2026 cover a surprisingly wide range of moods, which is precisely what makes the lineup interesting. There is room for comfort viewing, curiosity viewing, and the kind of viewing where you text a friend afterward and say, "OK, you need to see this."

Documentaries are doing some of the heavy lifting this year, but in an accessible way. *Barbara Forever* looks at the life and work of Barbara Hammer, a major figure in lesbian experimental cinema whose influence has often lived quietly in the background. The film keeps its focus on the work itself and why it mattered, rather than turning her life into a checklist of milestones.

Joybubbles goes in a completely different direction, telling the story of a queer phone-phreaking pioneer whose life intersected with early tech culture, obsession and outsider brilliance. It is specific, strange and far more entertaining than the description might suggest.

Narrative films are where 2026 really begins to unfold. *Pillion*, produced by A24, has already attracted attention for its direct approach to power, intimacy and desire between men. This is not a tidy romance and it does not try to be. Instead, it focuses on relationship dynamics that feel adult and lived-in, with all the tension that entails. It may not be everyone's favorite movie, but it will absolutely be part of the conversation.

On the opposite end of the emotional spectrum is *Heartstopper: Forever*. As a feature-length conclusion to the series, it delivers what fans have come to expect: warmth, honesty and a sense of emotional payoff that feels earned. The film continues the show's strength of portraying queer teens as thoughtful and supported, without manufacturing unnecessary drama. It is comfort viewing in the best sense of the word.

Also worth watching is *The Chronology of Water*, Kristen Stewart's first feature as a director. Based on Lidia Yuknavitch's memoir, the film focuses on memory, creativity and survival. It leans into mood and interior experience rather than traditional storytelling beats, which makes it feel personal rather than polished for mass appeal. Stewart's move behind the camera is part of a growing trend of queer artists shaping stories from start to finish.

Pillion



TELEVISION: Slow Burns Still Win

Television remains a challenging space for LGBTQ+ storytelling, but the shows that break through tend to do so by committing to their characters rather than chasing constant twists.

Heated Rivalry continues to stand out for precisely that reason. What begins as a competitive sports story develops into a romance that takes its time. The tension builds slowly, the emotional beats feel earned, and the show trusts viewers to stay engaged without needing a shock every episode. That trust has paid off in a devoted fanbase that appreciates letting the relationship unfold rather than racing to the finish line.

A very different but equally character-driven approach shows up in **Overcompensating**, which returns for a second season in 2026. Set against the chaos of college life, the series leans into humor, insecurity and social performance, especially around masculinity and queerness. Season 1 found its footing by being funny first and sincere second, and the upcoming season looks poised to push its characters further without losing that balance.

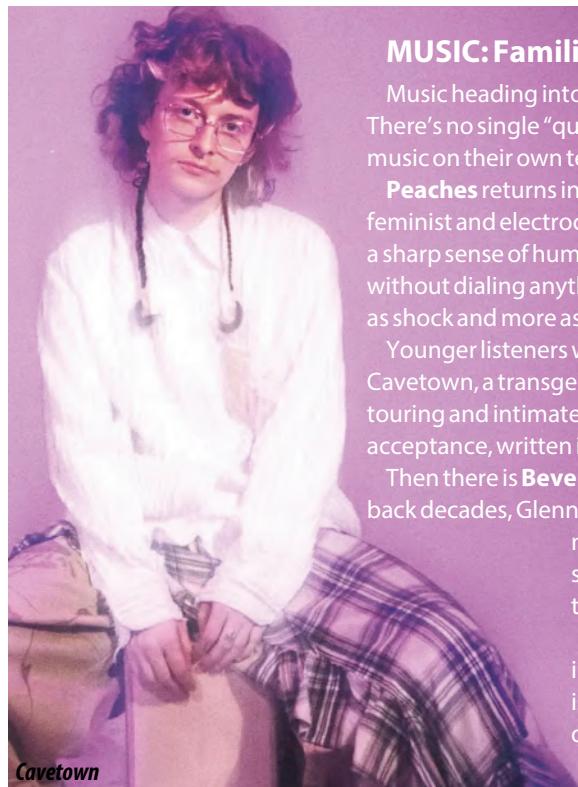
High-profile drama also stays on the queer radar with **Euphoria** returning for its third season. While often discussed for its visual style and intensity, the show's queer storytelling has always been rooted in imperfection. Rue's journey continues to unfold unevenly, allowing space for relapse, growth and backsliding without forcing neat conclusions. It remains one of the few series willing to let queer characters be entirely contradictory.

Genre fans have something new to watch with **Buffy the Vampire Slayer: New Sunnydale**, a reboot that carries the weight of a legacy series with deep queer roots. While details are still emerging, early buzz points to an expanded approach to identity and relationships in this new iteration. Given the original show's enduring impact on queer audiences, expectations are high for a version that more directly reflects today's landscape.

On the lighter, flirty end of the spectrum, **The Boyfriend** returns with its second season. Netflix's same-sex dating series keeps things simple: a group of queer men, shared space and the slow build of attraction. The show's appeal lies in its relaxed pace and emotional openness, offering a welcome contrast to louder, more manufactured reality formats.

More broadly, queer characters are appearing across television genres with less fanfare than before. Sports dramas, college comedies, supernatural reboots and reality series increasingly include LGBTQ+ characters whose lives are not limited to coming-out arcs or singular struggles. They have careers, friendships, bad timing and complicated relationships, just like everyone else on screen.

That does not mean television has solved everything. Cancellations still come too fast, and queer-led shows often feel like they are being judged more harshly. But when a series delivers consistency and respect for its audience, viewers respond. In a crowded streaming landscape, that kind of loyalty still matters.



MUSIC: Familiar Names, Fresh Chapters

Music heading into 2026 is less about chasing trends and more about artists stepping into their next chapter. There's no single "queer sound" dominating the year. Instead, a mix of veterans and newer voices is releasing music on their own terms, and listeners can choose what works for them.

Peaches returns in early 2026 with her first full-length album in more than a decade. A longtime icon of queer, feminist and electroclash music, Peaches built her reputation on provocative lyrics, theatrical performances and a sharp sense of humor. Her new material continues that tradition, blending sex, satire and social commentary without dialing anything back. What feels different now is the context. In 2026, her unapologetic style lands less as shock and more as confidence, backed by an audience that has essentially caught up with her point of view.

Younger listeners will once again find familiar comfort in **Cavetown**, who will release new music in January. Cavetown, a transgender singer-songwriter who first gained traction online, has built a steady career through touring and intimate, emotionally honest releases. Their songs often focus on identity, anxiety and self-acceptance, written in plain language that feels conversational rather than performative.

Then there is **Beverly Glenn-Copeland**, whose next album arrives in February. With a career that stretches back decades, Glenn-Copeland has experienced a rare late-career rediscovery, introducing his work to a whole new generation of listeners. Openly transgender, his recent releases blend folk, ambient and spiritual influences, leaning into warmth and reflection. His upcoming project continues in that vein, offering music that feels thoughtful, calm and deeply human.

Together, these releases highlight just how wide the queer music landscape looks heading into 2026. From playful provocation to quiet introspection to long-earned perspective, there is no single lane to follow. Just artists releasing music when they are ready, and audiences deciding what resonates.





HAPPY NEW YEAR!

As we begin 2026, sending you all good wishes for health, happiness, peace, love, joy, and an abundance of good times and fabulous social happenings to enjoy, support and celebrate.

The 37th **Palm Springs International Film Festival** will be January 2-12, with the prestigious film awards on January 3 at Palm Springs Convention Center. The Hollywood-style evening will feature honorees including Timothee Chalamet, Miley Cyrus, Rose Byrne, Kate Hudson, Amanda Seyfried, Ethan Hawke, Leonardo DiCaprio, Michael B. Jordan, Adam Sandler, *Frankenstein*, *Hamnet* and *Sentimental Value*. During the festival, 169 films (over 500 screenings) from 72 countries and territories will be shown. These include 53 premieres (three world, six international, 10 North America, 12 U.S. and 22 California).

The **US Bank Gayla Party** will be Thursday, January 8 at The Sonoran with a theme of Rainbow Rainforest. Festival venues will be Annenberg Theater, Plaza Theatre, ARCO Theatre (Palm Canyon Theatre), Festival Theaters, Palm Springs Cultural Center (Camelot Theatres), Richards Center for the Arts, Mary Pickford is D'Place in Cathedral City and Cinemark Century LaQuinta. psfilmfest.org



The fabulous, newly reborn **Plaza Theatre** opened in December and has a great lineup this month including: January 5, Shaun Cassidy; January 10, Herman's Hermits starring Peter Noone; January 17, Matteo Lane; January 25, Janeane Garofalo; January 28, Spamilton: An American Parody. palmspringsplazatheatre.com

Rock the Park, a tribute band concert series from Palm Springs Chamber of Commerce, will present Bee Gees Forever on Wednesday, January 7 at the downtown Palm Springs Park. Coming February 4 will be Bruno and the Hooligans. pschamber.org

PS Underground has a month filled with themed, interactive, theatrical, culinary dinner shows. They include: January 9, O Canada, a love song to our neighbors to the north; January 10, A Night at the Movies, in honor of the film festival, celebrating music of the movies; January 14, Cher-Struck; January 16, A Brighter Day, '80s throwback to We Are The World album; January 18, Nonna, Italian traditions; January 21, Music of the Night, songs of Andrew Lloyd

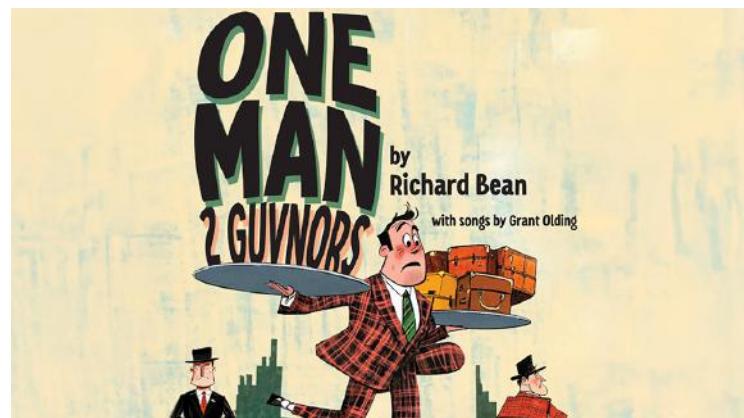
Webber; January 24, Adele, Through the Ages; January 25, Dirty Bingo, raunchy is an understatement; and then redeem yourself February 1 at Gospel Brunch. Book these shows during Modernism Week: February 14, Sitcom; February 15-17, Queens of Soul and Jazz; February 18-21, Palm Springs Holiday; February 22, Bacon, Beehives and Bubbly. psunderground.com

Pride Night at Acrisure Arena will be Saturday, January 10, with the Coachella Valley Firebirds hockey team taking on the Henderson Silver Knights. Cardi B, the Little Miss Drama Tour, will be February 11. acrisurearena.com



Anthony Hernandez Illusions with the magical adventure of Dawn and Anthony will be Saturday, January 10 at Desert Theatricals, City of Rancho Mirage amphitheater. The Rat Pack Hour musical journey will be February 7. desert-theatricals.com

Well in the Desert benefit and concert will be Monday, January 12, at Mission Hills Country Club in Rancho Mirage. This charity fights food insecurity. Dan Gore will be the honoree. Entertainment will include Frank DiSalvo, Kristi King, Lisa Lynn Morgan, Yve Evans, Chris Bennett, Tony Grandberry, Patrice Morris, Brian Scott, Bonnie G., Eve Holmes, Gregg Marx and Kevin Tokarz, with Bella da Ball as emcee. wellinthesedesert.com



Coachella Valley Repertory will present ***One Man, Two Guvnors*** January 14-February 1. cvrep.org

DeZart Performs will present ***Eureka Day*** January 15-25 at its all-new location, the DeZart Playhouse on South Riverside Drive in Palm Springs. dezartperforms.org

Revolution Stage Company will present ***Assassins*** January 16-31. revolutionstagecompany.com

I Do! I Do! will play at Palm Canyon Theatre, January 16-25. palmcanyontheatre.org

The new Prism Theatre's opening show ***Camp Morning Wood*** will run January 16-March 22 in their new location on Indian Canyon Way. prismtheater.org.



Liberace and Liza: A Tribute will be Friday and Saturday, January 16-17, at Purple Room Supper Club. ***Chadwick Johnson*** will entertain January 23-24. Dragapella! featuring the ***Kinsey Sicks*** will be February 6-7. purpleroompalmsprings.com

The **28th annual concert series at The Gardens on El Paseo** will kick off January 17 with Jimmy's Buffet (Jimmy Buffett Tribute), benefiting Parade Charities; January 24, Harmony of Rock ('70s Tribute), benefiting UCPiE; January 31, Abba LA (Abba Tribute), benefiting Shay's Warriors, Life After Cancer. thegardensonelpaseo.com

Michael Childers will present ***My Husband Makes Movies II***, a John Schlesinger Film Festival, celebrating John's centennial birthday from January 19-March 30 at Palm Springs Cultural Center. The films will include: January 19, *Billy Liar*; January 26, *Far From The Madding Crowd*; February 2, *Madame Sousatzka*; February 9, *Honky Tonk Freeway*. psculturalcenter.org

Palm Springs Women in Film and Television's speaker series will present actress/director/mental health advocate ***Madchen Amick*** on Monday, January 19, at Shadow Mountain Golf Club, Palm Desert. pswift.org

The **American Express golf tournament** will be January 22-25 at PGA West in La Quinta. Special shows will include: Friday, January 23, Old Dominion, and Saturday, January 24, One Republic. theamexgolf.com

Desert TheatreWorks Corp will present ***Laughter on the 23rd Floor*** January 23-February 15. dtworks.org

Palm Springs Health Run and Wellness Festival, the largest health and wellness event in Southern California, will be Saturday, January 24, at Ruth Hardy Park. Activities will include health expert seminars, USATF certified 5K and 10K runs, 1K fun run, bike ride, and over 80 booths showcasing the latest in nutrition, exercise, health testing and a rock-climbing wall. palmspringshealthrun.com



Palm Springs Art Museum's ***Art Party 2026*** gala will be Saturday, January 24, honoring fashion legend Bob Mackie with a presentation from Carol Burnett. psmuseum.org

Singing The Birds, Bird Song and Dance Festival, will be Saturday, January 24, at Palm Springs High School gymnasium, presented by the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians. aguacaliente.org.

Revolution Stage Company will present Siobhan Velarde, Bonnie G. and Kim Schroeder Long in ***They Had It Coming*** on Sunday, January 25. revolutionstagecompany.com

Mineria Symphony Orchestra of Mexico music festival will be Sunday, January 25, at Cathedral City Community Amphitheater. This free program will include Marisa Corvo, Cathedral City High School Ballet Folklorico dancers, Cathedral City High School Royal Jazz band and Mariachi Arco-Iris de Los Angeles. mineria.eventbrite.com

A night of music, martinis and gl'amour, ***Va Va Voom! with Billy L'Amour***, will be Thursday, January 29 at V Wine Lounge and Martini Bar. vwinelounge.com

COMING NEXT MONTH
Intersect Palm Springs, Art and Design Fair, will be February 12-16 at Palm Springs Convention Center. intersectpalmsprings.com

The 11-day ***Modernism Week*** festivities will be February 12-22, celebrating midcentury modern architecture, art, vintage culture and more. modernismweek.com

Desert Woman's Show will be Sunday, February 15 at Agua Caliente Casino in Rancho Mirage. marloproductions.com

Best wishes for a fabulous 2026. Shine! Sparkle!



MOVIE MEMORIES OF 2025

Politics, Horror, Political Horror ... and Jonathan Bailey

Last year's movies were a mixed bag at the box office. There were blockbusters, notably the latest *Jurassic World* adventure, a revamped *Superman* and several Disney sequels/reboots. But there were also some big-budget flops: *Mickey 17*, *Springsteen: Deliver Me from Nowhere* and Disney's less successful *Snow White* and *Tron: Ares*. In hindsight, such unpredictability seems reflective of our national political and economic uncertainty these past 12 months. Here's hoping and praying for a more stable 2026!

Despite an increase in anti-DEI and anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment in the USA, we can take some comfort in the fact that two out entertainers went down in history by the end of 2025. That both are alums of the hit *Wicked* movies seems purely coincidental.

Jonathan Bailey, who played heroic Fiyero in the two-part musical adaptation, was named 2025's highest-grossing actor thanks to his roles in *Wicked: For Good* and *Jurassic World: Rebirth*. He is the first openly gay actor ever to top the box office charts in a given year. Bailey was also the first openly gay contender to be named "Sexiest Man Alive" by *People* magazine in 2025.

Meanwhile, queer actor-comedian **Bowen Yang** not only reprised his supporting role as Pfannee in *Wicked: For Good* but played one of the lead roles in last year's excellent reimagining of 1993's *The Wedding Banquet*. Yang made Emmy Award history in 2025 by becoming the awards' most-nominated Asian male performer to date, thanks to his work on *Saturday Night Live*. He surprised everyone when he resigned from *SNL* after six years shortly before Christmas. I'm sure—to paraphrase Yang's hero, Cher—we haven't seen the last of him.

There has been more consensus than usual among critics and critic groups on the best films of 2025. Several of them deal with timely political themes, and an unusually high number of selections sit squarely in the horror genre.

Here are my personal choices. As is my custom, I have joined together movies of equal quality that also share themes, genres and/or talent. And, as usual, there were a few end-of-the-year releases I wasn't able to watch before my deadline. Chief among these are the acclaimed *Marty Supreme* and James Cameron's latest, *Avatar: Fire and Ash*.

TOP 10+



1. *One Battle After Another*

(Warner Bros). Uber timely and bracingly topical, Paul Thomas Anderson's dramedy follows a group of revolutionaries, led by a terrific Leonardo DiCaprio, over two decades as they confront corruption in the upper echelons of our good ol' US of A. Watch out for the evil Christmas Adventurers Club! This political yet personal epic is deservedly sweeping critic groups' awards.



2. *Eddington*

(A24). Dark auteur Ari Aster's latest garnered as many detractors as admirers, and possibly more detractors. Similar in some ways to *One Battle After Another*, this is an even more satirical depiction of COVID-era divisions in our country. I greatly appreciated how Aster succeeds in making both far right and far left extremists look equally insane.

3. *Hamnet*

(Focus Features). I've never seen a movie reduce an audience to sobs, myself included, as this lovely exploration of loss and grief did. Inspired by an incident in the lives of William Shakespeare and his wife, it is ultimately a cathartic take on how we all strive to find meaning in the wake of death. Jessie Buckley is exquisite in what I consider the year's best female performance as Agnes, with queer-friendly Paul Mescal playing opposite her as Will.

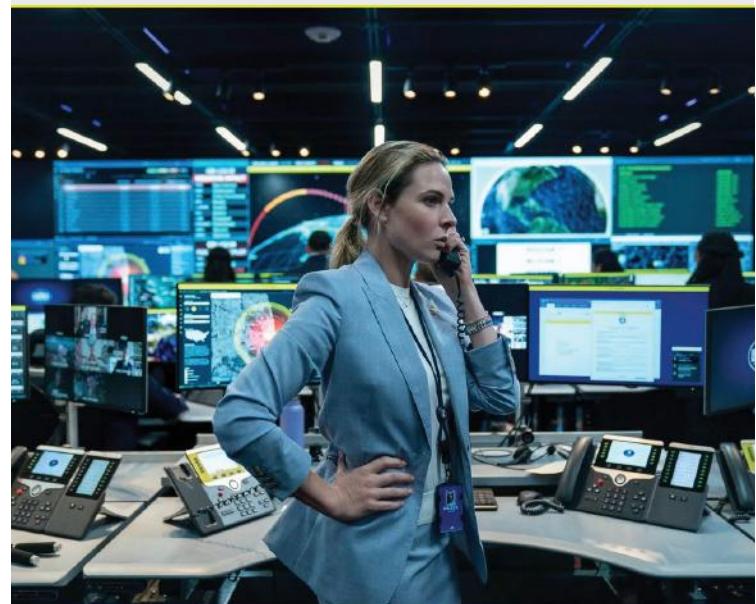


4. *Sinners*

(Warner Bros). While this is best or most simply defined as a vampire-filled horror movie, there is a lot more going on beneath its surface. Written and directed by Ryan Coogler and starring Michael B. Jordan in dual roles, it also deals with racism, enculturation, sibling love and the enduring power of music.

5. *A House of Dynamite*

(Netflix). Arguably the most intense 112 cinematic minutes of last year. Oscar-winning director Kathryn Bigelow and an impressive all-star cast count down to an anticipated nuclear attack on Chicago from different perspectives. Something of a pre-disaster disaster movie, one can't help but think "What would I do?" in such a frightening scenario.





6. *The History of Sound* (MUBI) and *On Swift Horses* (Sony Pictures Classics).

The two best gay-themed movies of 2025. These sexy, achingly beautiful tales of gay longing are set in different time periods but share several dramatic similarities. They also boast gorgeous leading men Jacob Elordi, Will Poulter, Diego Calva, Josh O'Connor and Paul Mescal (again), all of whom are beautifully photographed.



7. *Companion* (Warner Bros), *Good Boy Weapons* (Warner Bros).

After *Sinners*, these are the next best out of a very strong year for horror films. Each has a unique premise and is told from an unusual perspective, with a dog playing the lead in *Good Boy!* While they have necessary unsettling moments, these movies are cleverly written and completely engrossing. And all hail the big screen return of Amy Madigan as instant camp icon Aunt Gladys!



8. *I Was Born This Way*

(Jungefilm&W/Love Productions). The best documentary I saw last year celebrates the life, music and ministry of Bishop Carl Bean. He journeyed from disco-era singer of the title song to founder of both the Minority AIDS Project in LA and the Unity Fellowship Church. Revealing and inspiring.

9. *The Life of Chuck*

(NEON). 2025 was a big year for Stephen King stories on the big screen. We got *The Last Walk*, *The Monkey* and a new version of *The Running Man*, as well as TV's *It*-inspired series *Welcome to Derry*. The best of them all — and one of the best Stephen King adaptations ever — was this metaphysical, mathematical and genuinely moving tale illustrating how each of our lives "contain multitudes," to quote the movie's potent citation of queer poet Walt Whitman.



10. *Blue Moon* (Sony Pictures Classics) and *Nouvelle Vague* (Netflix).

Has director Richard Linklater made a bad movie yet? He turned out not just one but two great period pieces/character studies last year alone. Linklater's longtime muse Ethan Hawke is astonishing and currently my pick for best male performance of 2025 as the real-life, sexually conflicted composer Lorenz Hart in *Blue Moon*. In his *Nouvelle Vague*, Linklater playfully recreates the filmmaking architects of the French "new wave" of the 1950s-1960s, and appropriately does so in both French and black and white.

Honorable mentions, in alphabetical order: *Aichaku*, *Chainsaws Were Singing*, *Dust Bunny*, *Frankenstein*, *Griffin in Summer*, *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, *Roofman*, *Train Dreams*, *28 Years Later*, *The Wedding Banquet* and *Wicked: For Good*.

At the bottom of my list are these 2025 movies that, even if they aren't absolutely awful, nonetheless fell short of expectations:

1. *The Conjuring: Last Rites* (Warner Bros). This spooky franchise hit its artistic bottom here, but inexplicably became its most financially successful entry. I doubt it will be the last in the series as intended, which is truly scary.

2. *Night Always Comes* (Netflix). I love actress Vanessa Kirby, and she made a fine Sue Storm in last year's *The Fantastic Four: First Steps*. While she's typically good in this, the plot is a dreary exercise in self-perpetuating dysfunction with Kirby's character making one frustratingly bad decision after another.

3. *Wolf Man* (Universal Pictures). The title character has long been my favorite old-school movie monster so I was really looking forward to a modern-day take on him/it. Needless to say I was disappointed. Not only does the creature bear little resemblance to the original, the movie is just plain boring.

4. *Mission: Impossible-The Final Reckoning* (Paramount Pictures). I was also looking forward to this closing chapter of the Tom Cruise-led series since the last film, 2023's *Mission: Impossible-Dead Reckoning*, was thrilling. While not without some exciting set pieces, this was essentially a three-hour vanity project for Cruise. I won't complain about the two extended sequences in which the admittedly in-shape star is clad only in boxer briefs, but it all seemed narcissistic.

5. *Captain America: Brave New World* (Disney/Marvel Studios). Marvel did well artistically with the aforementioned *Fantastic Four: First Steps* as well as *Thunderbolts**. However, this was a strange entry in the *Captain America* canon because it served more as an overdue sequel to 2008's largely forgotten *The Incredible Hulk*. And not to sound ageist, but Harrison Ford came across as too old and feeble to play the Commander in Chief. Yes, even older and more feeble — but at least saner — than his real-life counterpart.

LIGHTS. VOICES. ACTION.

Theater this month isn't just entertainment, it's conversation. These standout picks will bring music, poetry, perspective and love to the stage, offering experiences that linger long after the curtain call.

JUST ME

Some performances arrive with spectacle. Others arrive with purpose. *Just Me*, presented by the Grammy-winning vocal ensemble **Tonality**, falls squarely in the latter. And that's exactly why it earns our January Theatre Pick.

Taking place for one night only at **Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts** in Beverly Hills, *Just Me* is a choral concert centered on the lived experiences of transgender and nonbinary people. It's not designed as a traditional performance with neat arcs or easy resolutions. Instead, it offers something quieter and more intentional: a shared space built on listening, reflection and presence.



Under the direction of Artistic Director **Dr. Alexander Lloyd Blake**, *Tonality* transforms the concert stage into a place for conversation, as Blake describes it: "Tonality's work is about conversations. When I begin to think about what could be in a program, it is very important that I am asking questions from the people that are directly the subject. Our circle expands as we listen more."

The program weaves together original works, spirituals and culturally resonant selections, including "True Colors" and "Reflection," alongside contemporary choral pieces that address identity, injustice, grief and resilience. The emotional range is wide. Stories of pain sit next to moments of affirmation and joy. But the through line is honesty rather than sentimentality.

Blake notes that while the challenges facing trans and nonbinary communities are not new, the urgency has intensified. "What felt like ignorance before is now much louder," he explains, "and that makes this program more necessary than ever." Rather than responding with outrage or spectacle, *Just Me* responds with care. "Each song becomes a story, each harmony a step toward healing," Blake says.

What makes the evening stand out is its sincerity. Rather than telling audiences what to think, it invites them to listen, reflect and share space together. In a cultural moment where trans and nonbinary voices are too often spoken *about* rather than heard, *Just Me* insists on attention. And trusts the music to do the rest.

Saturday, January 10

The Wallis

thewallis.org | 310.746.4000



THE NOTEBOOK

One of the most beloved modern love stories gets a live-theatre twist this season. *The Notebook*, the Broadway-bound musical adaptation of Nicholas Sparks' best-selling novel, arrives in Southern California with two chances to fall under its spell. Based on the timeless tale of Allie and Noah — whose connection survives time, distance and every obstacle in between — the production pairs an original folk-pop score by **Ingrid Michaelson** with a book by **Bekah Brunstetter**, guided by four-time Tony nominee **Michael Greif** (*Dear Evan Hansen*, *Rent*).

Critics have described the show as "full of butterfly-inducing highs and beautiful songs" and "a love story for the ages," and with its soaring melodies and heartfelt storytelling, it's easy to see why audiences are swooning.

Whether you're a hopeless romantic or a musical-theatre fan drawn to emotional depth, *The Notebook* offers a lush, live-stage experience that celebrates enduring love and keeps the heart in the spotlight.

January 6 – 26

Hollywood Pantages Theatre
broadwayinhollywood.com

January 27 – February 8

Segerstrom Center for the Arts
scfta.org | 714.556.2787

Fall in love again with the shadowy, surreal universe of Tim Burton through the unmistakable sound of Danny Elfman with this visually enhanced concert highlighting the composer's most iconic scores.

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THE WIZ

For the first time ever, *The Wiz* will land in Costa Mesa, and if you think you already know this show, think again.

Yes, it's the seven-time Tony Award-winning musical that flipped *The Wizard of Oz* on its head back in 1975. Yes, it gave us "Ease on Down the Road" and the forever-feels anthem "Home." But this current national tour isn't about nostalgia, it's about momentum. The story still hits, the music still grooves, and the creative team is very clearly not interested in doing this the safe or expected way.

At the center is **Dana Cimone** as Dorothy, making her national tour debut, surrounded by a cast stacked with Broadway veterans and breakout talent. **Alan Mingo Jr.** returns as The Wiz, joined by **Sheherazade** as Glinda and **Kyla Jade** pulling double duty as Aunt Em and the deliciously wicked Evillene. The performances feel grounded, confident and contemporary; less fairy tale, more finding-your-place-in-the-world energy.

What makes *The Wiz* our pick isn't just its legacy (though winning seven Tonys helps). It's that nearly 50 years later, it still feels bold, joyful and unapologetically Black — precisely the kind of theater that reminds us why live performance still matters.

January 13 – 25

Segerstrom Center for the Arts

scfta.org | 714.556.2787

POETRY FOR THE PEOPLE: THE JUNE JORDAN EXPERIENCE

What does resistance sound like? At the **Fountain Theatre**, it sounds like poetry — urgent, musical, joyful and unapologetically truthful. The West Coast premiere of *Poetry for the People: The June Jordan Experience* arrives in Los Angeles this winter, offering a theatrical evening that feels less like a biography and more like a living conversation.

Devised by Fountain Theatre artistic director **Raymond O. Caldwell** and composer **Adrienne Torf**, the production celebrates the life and legacy of **June Jordan**: a writer who believed, fiercely, that poetry belongs to the people and that language itself can be an act of resistance. Part performance, part concert and part call to action, the show weaves Jordan's poetry with live music and movement to illuminate her voice in all its complexity.

Six performers bring Jordan's words to life, joined by Torf on piano, creating a rhythm that feels immediate and alive. The production also draws from Jordan's collaborations with composer John Adams and features musical interpretations by **Sweet Honey in the Rock**, expanding the evening beyond spoken word into something communal and resonant.

"In today's fractured political climate, her voice is more urgent than ever," Caldwell says. "We're not just staging her work — we're channeling her joy, her rage, and her uncompromising vision."

Born in Harlem in 1936, Jordan was a poet, essayist, teacher and activist whose work centered on civil rights, women's rights, LGBTQ+ visibility and liberation in all its forms. She authored 27 books across genres and insisted that poetry should speak plainly, passionately and directly to lived experience. For those looking for theater that challenges as much as it inspires, this is a conversation worth joining.

January 27 – March 29

Fountain Theatre

fountaintheatre.com | 323.663.1525



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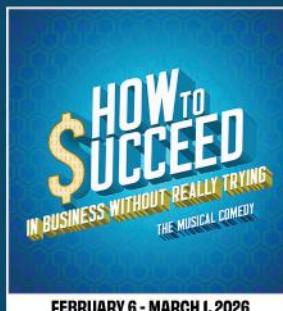
Book by **ABE BURROWS, JACK WEINSTOCK & WILLIE GILBERT**

FEBRUARY 6 - MARCH 1, 2026

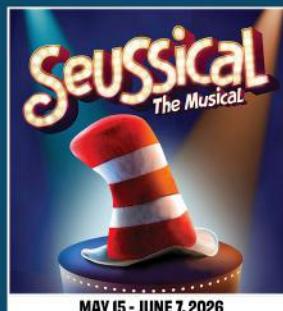
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FEBRUARY 6 - MARCH 1, 2026



MAY 15 - JUNE 7, 2026



AUGUST 21 - SEPTEMBER 13, 2026

PLUG IN, POWER DOWN: FINDING STILLNESS IN LORETO



The moonrise over the Sea of Cortez looked like the sun. It hovered low and orange on the horizon, casting a glowing path across the water as if someone had flipped a switch in the sky. I stood barefoot at the edge of the beach in Loreto, Baja California Sur, watching the reflection stretch toward me in the shallows, feeling unusually still for someone who teaches yoga and strength training for a living. This was my first wellness retreat. It was also Loreto's.

The **Loreto Live Well Experience** marked the town's first-ever hosted wellness retreat, a milestone for this quiet coastal *Pueblo Mágico* tucked between desert, mountains and the sea — also known as the Gulf of California. Loreto has long been known for its natural beauty, its colonial history, and its slower pace compared to more crowded Baja destinations like Cabo. Now, it is beginning to position itself as a place to come not just to vacation, but to reset.

The retreat unfolded primarily at Hotel Oasis Loreto, whose location directly on the Sea of Cortez makes it feel removed from the outside world without ever being isolated. The water out front stays shallow for a surprising distance, making it easy to wander in without committing to a full swim. Between sessions, people wandered the malecón, shared meals, or simply sat and watched the light change over the water.

Movement was present in many forms, but it was framed as wellness in a broader, more accessible sense. The programming made room for strength, breath, mindfulness and longevity practices in a way that felt intentional rather than trendy.

The standout moment for me came during a Longevity Qigong session led by **Matt Pesendian**. Qigong was not entirely new to me, but Matt's approach made it land differently. At one point, he talked about "plugging in," likening the body to a phone on a charger. When you plug your phone in, you don't keep unplugging it every few minutes. You let it charge.

The imagery was simple, but it resonated deeply. Through slow, grounded movements and breathwork that emphasized drawing energy up from the feet, the practice encouraged staying connected rather than constantly reaching outward. It felt less like performing wellness and more like allowing it.

That sense of grounding carried through to other sessions. Classes led by **Lety Roman** and **Ana Jimena Ramírez**

introduced participants to the Sersana Method, a holistic fitness approach that blends Pilates, strength training, CrossFit-inspired movement and mindful conditioning. The emphasis was not on pushing harder, but on creating a sustainable relationship with movement that supports long-term health.

As someone who works in fitness, I appreciated how these sessions honored both strength and recovery. They were challenging without being overwhelming, and they reinforced the idea that wellness is not one-size-fits-all. It is functional, personal and deeply tied to how we live beyond the mat or studio.

Loreto plays a crucial role in why this experience works. The town's natural rhythm encourages slowing down without requiring effort. There is no pressure to fill every moment.

This kind of retreat also reflects a broader trend. Mexico's health and wellness market is projected to grow significantly over the next decade, driven by increasing interest in preventive care, stress reduction and mindful living. Loreto's entry into this space feels thoughtful rather than rushed, rooted in its environment instead of built on spectacle.

By hosting a retreat that emphasized connection over performance, Loreto offered a version of wellness tourism that feels both modern and grounded. It is not about escaping life, but about learning how to return to it more fully.

For a first-time retreat attendee and for a town hosting its first-ever wellness experience, Loreto Live Well felt less like a debut and more like the beginning of a natural evolution: One that invites travelers not to do more, but to finally power down and plug in.

Keep an eye out for next year's retreat at yoga.com.mx/en/loreto-live-well-experience. Head to loretobcstourism.com to stay updated on all forthcoming events.

10 REASONS SAN DIEGO RESTAURANT WEEK



IS THE BEST WAY TO DINE

From comfort-food cravings to community-minded dining, San Diego Restaurant Week (SDRW) taking place January 25 to February 1 will deliver more than just a great deal. Here's why this winter edition deserves a spot on your calendar ... and your reservation list.

1. Prix-Fixe Menus That Actually Feel Like a Treat.

With two-course lunches and three-course dinners starting at \$30, Restaurant Week makes it easier to enjoy thoughtfully curated menus without second-guessing the bill.

2. A Citywide Food Tour — No Passport Required.

More than 100 restaurants across 30+ neighborhoods are participating, turning every meal into a chance to explore a new part of San Diego, from coastal favorites to neighborhood gems.

3. Winter Menus Bring the Comfort.

January menus lean into cozy, seasonal dishes. Get ready for warming flavors, fresh seafood, and creative spins on classics that feel just right for cooler nights.

4. You're Supporting the People Behind the Plates.

New for 2026, SDRW partners with **Restaurants Care**, with a portion of participation fees benefiting restaurant workers in need. Dining out becomes a direct way to give back.

5. Peak-Season Ingredients Take Center Stage.

Thanks to the event's ongoing partnership with **Specialty Produce**, menus highlight seasonal fruits and vegetables at their best. Fresh, flavorful and thoughtfully sourced.

6. A Perfect Excuse to Try "That Place."

You know the one: The restaurant you've bookmarked but haven't visited yet. Restaurant Week lowers the barrier and gives you a reason to finally book that table.

7. Beloved Classics and Newcomers Share the Spotlight.

Longtime favorites and rising culinary stars appear side by side, making this one of the easiest ways to sample what's new and noteworthy in San Diego dining.

8. Great for Dates, Friends and Group Dinners.

Prix-fixe menus make planning easier. No awkward bill math, no menu overload, just good food and good company.

9. It Kicks Off the Year on a Delicious Note.

There's something grounding about starting the year gathered around a table. Reconnecting after the holidays and setting the tone for more shared experiences ahead.

10. It's Feel-Good Dining, Plain and Simple.

Every reservation supports local restaurants, local workers, and a dining culture that thrives on community. Eating well has never felt so aligned with doing good.

PRO TIP: Reservations aren't required, but they're strongly recommended — especially for popular spots. Menus and participating restaurants are updated daily at sandiegorestaurantweek.com.

SIP SMART IN SOCAL

Drink Trends We're Keeping in 2026

In 2026, the way we drink has officially caught up with the way we live. Across Southern California, beverages are getting lighter, smarter and more intentional — without losing flavor, fun or social energy. These are the drink trends showing real staying power this year:

Zero-Proof Drinks With Personality: Mocktails have moved far beyond juice in a fancy glass. Today's alcohol-free drinks lean bitter, botanical and citrus-driven, built with the same care as a cocktail.

Why they're sticking: They feel grown-up, social and satisfying. No explanation required.

Try it here: Kindred (San Diego) features inventive, bold, zero-proof drinks that never feel like an afterthought.

Hydration That Tastes Like a Choice: Hydration isn't an afterthought anymore. Citrus spritzes, mineral-forward refreshers and fresh juices are designed to be ordered *because you want them*, not because you should.

Why they're sticking: Perfect for warm days, long lunches and real life in SoCal.

Try it here: Big Juice Bar Café (Cathedral City) includes cold-pressed blends and citrus-forward juices that feel purposeful, not preachy.

Calm Energy Over Caffeine Chaos: Adaptogenic teas and low-caffeine blends are quietly replacing the third cup of coffee. The goal is steadier energy, not a spike.

Why they're sticking: Focus without the edge or the crash.

Try it here: Dialog Cafe (West Hollywood) featuring tea lattes and wellness tonics designed for calm, productive days.

Gut-Friendly, Not Gimmicky: Fermented and probiotic drinks are showing up in cleaner, more approachable forms — lightly effervescent, balanced and food-friendly.

Why they're sticking: They feel good without feeling like homework.

Try it here: TapShack Kombucha (San Diego) is a kombucha brewery known for bold, fruit-forward flavors, naturally effervescent blends and a lineup that feels crafted for enjoyment, not just function.

Drinks That Respect the Meal: Lower sugar, brighter acidity and more restraint across the board. The best drinks now enhance the food rather than compete with it.

Why they're sticking: Because the plate still comes first.

Try it here: The Blind Rabbit (Anaheim) is a speakeasy-style spot where cocktails and zero-proof cocktails are treated with the same care, featuring bitters, citrus oils and layered flavors that feel intentional and dinner-appropriate.

RAGE TAKEAWAY: In 2026, smarter sipping isn't about cutting back; it's about choosing better. These drinks are part of the experience, not an afterthought.



THE JANUARY RESET THAT ACTUALLY LASTS

Simple Food Habits You'll Still Enjoy in February and Beyond

Forget strict rules and short-lived cleanses. The January reset that sticks is the one built around ease, intention and enjoyment. In 2026, eating well looks less like starting over and more like making small choices that feel good all year long.

Add One Veggie-Forward Meal a Day: Not every meal needs to be plant-based — just purposeful. Seasonal winter produce like citrus, leafy greens, squash and root vegetables brings brightness and balance without sacrificing comfort.

Order With Curiosity, Not Habit: January is the perfect time to break autopilot ordering. Try the dish you usually skip, ask how something is prepared or choose a vegetable-forward entrée you wouldn't typically consider.

Eat Slower, Taste More: Slowing down changes everything. Fewer distractions at the table mean greater satisfaction, better digestion and meals that feel like experiences rather than checklists.

Share When You Can: Sharing plates — whether with friends or a partner — naturally encourages moderation and connection. You get more variety, less excess and a better sense of when you're truly satisfied.

Choose Quality Over Quantity: One excellent appetizer. One memorable dessert. One dish done really well. Intentional indulgence feels better and lasts longer than overdoing it.

RAGE TAKEAWAY: A January reset works best when awareness leads the way. These habits don't expire at the end of the month; they simply make eating more enjoyable, more human and easier to sustain.

MORE THAN A BARTENDER: CREATING CONNECTION

Michael Chiever Helps Make Everyone Feel Right at Home at the Tool Shed

Walk into the **Tool Shed** in Palm Springs on any given night and chances are you'll spot **Michael Chiever** behind the bar — smiling, moving fast and making sure that everyone feels welcome. He hasn't been there forever, but you'd never know it by the way he fits right in.

Michael joined the Tool Shed team in January 2025, starting as a barback before moving behind the bar a few months later. Before that, his career looked very different. He came from a marketing and technology background. After being laid off in early 2024, he took some time to reset and

realized that he wanted a change that felt more human and more social. When he saw a post that the Tool Shed was hiring, he figured he'd try something new. "What a huge difference my career change has made in my life," Michael says. "I've never enjoyed a job as much as I enjoy working here."

A big part of that enjoyment comes from the crowd. The Tool Shed's deep roots in leather and bear culture create a space that's relaxed, friendly and refreshingly low on pretense.

"I love that this community is so friendly and accepting," Michael says. "The 'come as you are' vibe makes it especially comfortable and inviting." It's the kind of place where people show up as themselves. And expect to be welcomed exactly that way.

Ask Michael about event nights and he doesn't hesitate. Underwear Night is his favorite. "Aside from all the half-naked sexy men," he laughs, "the variety and types of underwear I see are so interesting and fun." From bold designs to handmade creations, it's the creativity and confidence that really stand out. Those nights tend to bring out big personalities, loud laughter and the kind of energy that fills the bar wall to wall.

For regulars who may only know him by their drink order, Michael hopes one thing comes across clearly: Connection matters. "I'm all about the smiles and positive vibes," he says. "But also, a genuine human connection. Everyone comes to the bar for a different reason, but if I can put a smile on your face, then I've done my job." That mindset shows in the way he works — approachable, present and never rushed, even when the bar is packed.

Michael also believes spaces like this still play an essential role in queer nightlife. They are places to feel safe, to belong and to be fully yourself. The added layer of body positivity, kink acceptance and inclusivity only strengthens that sense of community. Michael takes pride in being part of it.

When he's off the clock, Michael's vibe shifts, but his appreciation for quality stays the same. For a polished night out, he recommends the rooftop bar at the Rowan Hotel, where craft cocktails come with sweeping valley views. When food is the priority, Kaiser Grille is his go-to, thanks to consistently great service and high-quality dishes.

Away from nightlife altogether, Michael has a passion that surprises some people: rescue dogs. He has been volunteering with animal rescue organizations for nearly two decades and is deeply committed to giving animals a better life. It's a quieter side of him, but one that speaks volumes about who he is.

Asked to sum up a perfect night at Tool Shed, Michael keeps it simple: "Lots of smiling faces, loud laughter, and a genuine cool vibe that leaves fond memories and the desire to come back again." If you've ever spent a night there, you know exactly what he means.

pstoolshed.com



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WHAT DO YOU WANT?

Looking back at the articles I produced throughout 2025, I realized that I had quite a bit of fun this past year. I wrote about losing my underwear — and why it's always best to go commando to d!ck appointments. I questioned c@ck size and whether it actually matters. I shared my experience as the guest star in a ménage à trois with a married couple. And finally, I detailed the importance of not catching feelings — or the clap — at sex parties.

Imagine my surprise: All that cock-a-doodle-doo, and I still found time to accomplish a few personal goals over the last 12 months. Don't get it twisted; I'm not bragging. There's plenty of work for me to do on myself, which is why I won't be tooting my own horn anytime soon. Not that I need to toot my own *anything* if you've been keeping up with this column.

Yet, between all the ups and downs, and other positions I somehow managed to get my body into, I seem to be fixated on the one thing in my life that's still missing: a relationship. I guess it's fair to say I was pre-cockupied in 2025. In my defense, I did try to date before ultimately choosing another path. Unfortunately, that resulted in a big fat D. Yep, disappointment. Turns out bisexual men in Nashville, Tennessee lie just as much as gay men on the West Coast. How fun is that? Then again, he was a professional liar — I mean, he was a lawyer — so shame on me for not knowing better. When in doubt, remember to chase dreams, not men.

Regardless of the circumstances, the whos and the whys, the bis and the lies, I can't help but wonder: If my endgame is to be in a healthy, monogamous relationship, then shouldn't I start acting like it?

You see, in true male fashion, I've consistently thought I could have my cake and eat it, too. That I could turn it *off and on*. No, not my gay side — my ho side. After all, aren't those the two stages of being attracted to men: Wanting them just for sex and wanting them for companionship? Although if we're talking about being attracted to and dating men, it's more likely the five stages of grief that come to mind.

Until recently, I never considered how putting my thang down, flipping it, and reversing it so frequently could hinder my chances of finding a long-term partner. This possibility occurred to me after a friend told me about this woman (perhaps the lady who wrote *The Secret*, or something similar — honestly, I was only half listening at the time) who longed for a relationship so badly that she would set the dinner table for two each night: one for her, one for the man she desired.

Now, I obviously can't do that, and for two reasons. First, I don't really set a table so much as I eat on the couch, in bed or at my desk. And second, I would end up eating two meals. However, the idea behind this action is obvious; it's manifestation.

Another way to look at it is like this: If someone is trying to lose weight, would they hang out in a bakery? No. If my endgame is to be in a healthy, monogamous relationship, should I be trying to bring all the boys to the yard with my milkshake? Also no.

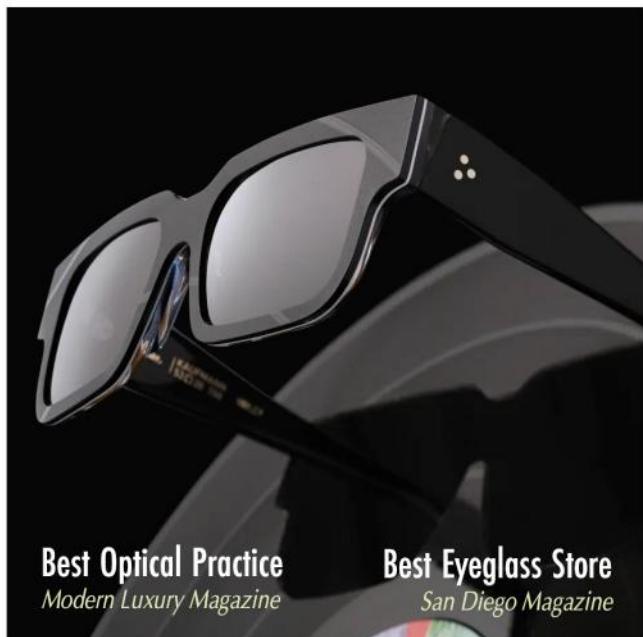
Despite being able to fluctuate between the two very different lifestyles, there is an argument here for presenting myself in a way that aligns with what I want my life to eventually look like — i.e. manifestation. When it comes to getting what you want in life, how important is manifestation? Could I be unknowingly telling the universe that I'm not ready for a relationship? Or that I don't even want one?

If that's the case, then let me be crystal clear: "Hey, Universe. I'm ready to be a multi-millionaire!"

As we enter 2026, don't start that "New Year, New Me" bullshit. You don't need to be a new version of yourself, you just need to know what you want and go after it with everything you've got. Same you, but focused, determined and unapologetically willing to put yourself and your dreams first — no matter what.



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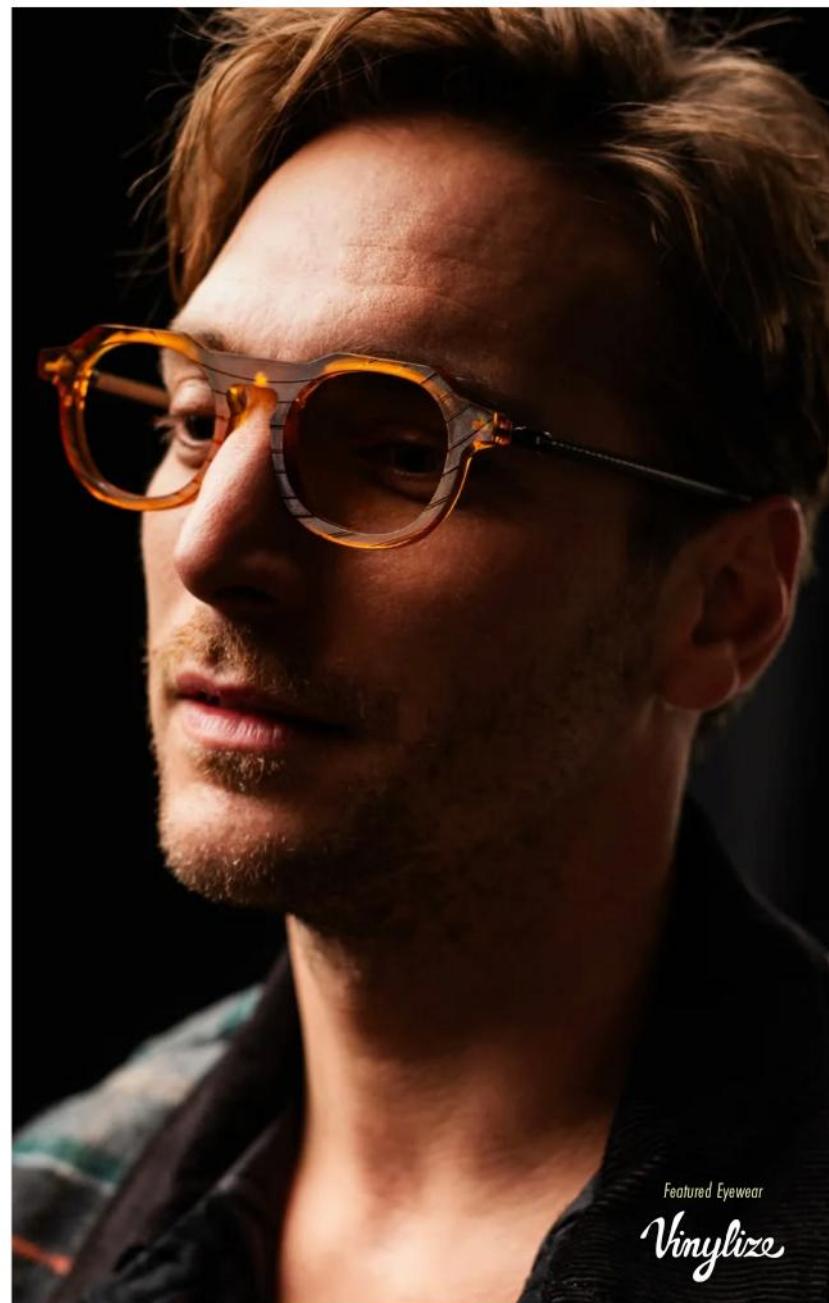
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