



LIFESTYLE

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Voluptuous Vixen: The 14th Annual 'Xena' Convention starts today at the L.A. Airport Marriott, \$30.



Book bargains: Our round-up of local indie bookstores. **PAGE 6**

ON TAP MONDAY
We review the Franz Ferdinand concert, Friday at Ameoba Music.

Controversial artist performs at Fisher Gallery

Artist, activist and author Guillermo Gómez-Peña challenges U.S. to humble itself.

By DANIELLE CHABONNEAU
Daily Trojan

Entering into an era of what President Obama hopes will be marked by change, millions of Americans wait shuddering in fear, anxious to start seeing the glorious actions of a man they've put their faith in. There is a palpable uneasiness in the air. Will the war end in Iraq? Will the economy slither further into darkness and despair? Will the jobless find work? Will there be a greater tolerance for people of all races and sexual orientations? Will hope in democracy be restored?

These questions plague the souls of so many. It is a time marked by what internationally renowned performance artist, author and activist Guillermo Gómez-Peña calls "cautious optimism."

With thick black eyeliner smeared with sweat, dangling feather earrings and black leather boots, Peña took the stage in the courtyard of the USC Fisher Gallery Wednesday night to explore this cautious optimism.

Known for his outlandish antics — including a performance art piece in which he rode a public elevator wrapped in a floral print batik bound in ropes for 24 hours to represent the isolation and loneliness of a new immigrant in America, and a piece in which he stationed himself



James Watson | Daily Trojan

Passionate performance • Internationally renowned and controversial artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña performed at USC's Fisher Gallery Wednesday night. His act challenged the audience to be critical of American ideals.

on a toilet to read a poem — Peña's Wednesday night performance was, by comparison, somewhat lacking in stunts.

It was not, however, tame in subject matter. His passionate diatribe, delivered in a strange, ritual-like costume and in a commanding voice, explored such subject matters as transcontinental identities, cultural misunderstandings, the artist's

role in democracy and America's arrogant, commodity-driven ways.

Peña, swept up in the national anxiousness like so many, seemed to have felt an urgency to communicate his message less abstractly and more directly. The issues he raised have been explored endlessly by the media, artists and politicians, but somehow, Peña was able to weave the issues together so that they

seemed less unrelated and more interconnected.

With splashes of side-splitting humor and various antics, including gargling with dish soap and spitting it onto the audience, passing a bottle of rum around like it was communion, putting the entire microphone into his mouth and massaging his testicles on stage, the performance

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Academy nods raise the usual skepticism

Christopher Byars
CINERAMA



From all of the films of 2008, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences does its best to recognize the outstanding and noteworthy films that made an impact on both critics and audiences. But each year, many works of art go unnoticed while some gain more attention than they actually deserve.

This year, the Academy elevated many actors and filmmakers that genuinely earned their nominations. But many of the most prestigious categories contain underserving films that steal the place of many rightful, unrecognized contenders.

Clint Eastwood, one of the most easily recognizable Hollywood icons, has also become one of the most underappreciated actors and directors of the past year; his film, "Gran Torino," was left without a single nomination.

One of the most glaring mistakes of the year by the Academy is the absence of Eastwood on the ballot. It is a shame to see Eastwood not even receive consideration for lead actor. His character Walt Kowalski is one of the most original film characters in years, but also one of the most controversial due to his racism, which almost undoubtedly contributed to his disassociation from both the Best Picture and Best Actor categories.

Still, no matter how dismal the tone may be, Eastwood's film would have been a far superior contender for Best Picture, Best Director and Best Actor than "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button," even if it did not have a chance of winning. "Gran Torino" suggests a stronger, more concise narrative than that found in the poorly executed and ultimately irritating film directed by David Fincher.

While "The Dark Knight" garnered a well-deserved nomination for Heath Ledger as the Joker, as well as seven other nominations for production, the film is another which could have justifiably been nominated for Best Picture and even Best Adapted Screenplay.

It is hard to determine exactly what the Academy misconstrued about "The Dark Knight." Many factors may have contributed to the Academy's resentment, most prominently that it was a super-hero movie and possibly also that it set so many box office records, establishing itself as the second-highest-grossing film of all time.

In 1997, "Titanic," the highest grossing film of all time, swept the Oscars with its 11 wins for no credible reason. Though "The Dark Knight" sought to follow in

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Franz Ferdinand's latest mixes in some electronica

MUSIC

Franz Ferdinand

'Tonight: Franz Ferdinand'
12 Tracks
In Stores Now



By RUDY KLAPPER
Daily Trojan

The spark to a revolutionary slew of British and American guitar-based rockers and the blueprint to retro sound that tore up charts in 2004, Scottish foursome Franz Ferdinand always towered above many of its peers with its concise blasts of tuneful guitar hooks, dance rhythms and singer Alex Kapranos' wry, irrepressibly clever lyrics.

Franz Ferdinand's third album, "Tonight: Franz Ferdinand," has been three years in the making, and longtime fans expecting a return to the angular post-punk guitar ricochets of "You Could Have It So Much Better" and their self-titled debut will be more than a little disappointed with this latest outing. Kapranos himself has stated that "Tonight" was to be "quite new ... quite different sounding from everything we've ever done before." This is undoubtedly true, but for all the benefits of evolving, not everything on "Tonight" is up to the standard of the band's earlier work.

Still there, but far less important in the mix, is Nick McCarthy's guitar, replaced by bombastic '80s keyboards and slinky bass lines. The

first single, "Ulysses" is the perfect example of Franz's new direction, a love-it-or-hate-it opener that starts with a simple beat and Kapranos' whisper of a voice before expanding with a twirling synth and distorted guitar as he belts out "I've found a new way." Indeed, this is a new Franz, but the song's lackluster bridge and standard chorus cause "Ulysses" to pale in comparison to previous singles.

Everything is forgiven, however, with the excellent one-two punch of "Turn It On" and "No You Girls," songs that recall the dance-punk of their debut but with a noticeably funkier sound. "No You Girls," in particular, jives along a twisted guitar riff and Kapranos' deliciously naughty lyrics before exploding into one of the best choruses on the record.

Throughout, Franz does a fair job of switching between the familiar guitar-based rock of their earlier work, such as the thumping, unrelenting rhythm of "Bite Hard," and their newfound fascination with synth-tastic, "Hot Fuss"-era Killers new-wave punk, like the keyboard-heavy "Live Alone." Tunes like the dub-influenced "Send Him Away" and the buzzing techno and impressive bass playing on "Can't Stop Feeling" show serious promise for Franz's future if they continue in this direction.

The album follows a loose theme of a night out on the town, so maybe lines like "I typed your number into my calculator / where it spelled a dirty word when I turned it upside down" can be attributed to one too many pints at the bar. Too many



Photo courtesy of Franz Ferdinand

Shadows and fog • The popular band Franz Ferdinand released a new album titled "Tonight: Franz Ferdinand" nationwide this week.

times Kapranos resorts to bad puns or nonsensical rhymes to get through a song. Luckily, his pipes are so pleasant to listen to, it's easy to overlook many of his verbal gaffes.

"Tonight: Franz Ferdinand" is easily a step down from their debut and the oft-underrated "You Could Have It So Much Better" but, at its best, the band's merging of electronica and '80s synth rock with their own inimitable post-punk guitar tricks shows

that Franz is not content to re-make their debut over and over again. Sure, I never thought I'd hear Kapranos and company bloat a song like the otherwise enjoyable "Lucid Dreams" out to nearly eight minutes with unnecessary electronic wankery, but, hey, musicians sometimes have weird desires. "Tonight" is a grower, and for a band branching out of their comfort zone, it's an uneven, entertaining experiment.

Indie bookstores offer warmth and charm

While Borders and Barnes & Noble are able to fulfill many people's book-buying needs, large bookstores lack the personal feel that makes trips to many of the smaller, independent bookstores such a unique experience.

The authentic smell of bound pages and the friendly faces that readily greet you at a small neighborhood bookstore simply cannot be faked and luckily, they don't need to be. Los Angeles is full of independent bookstores with open doors and employees ready and willing to help you find whatever book you might need.

"These bookstores have an independent voice," said Justin Jasper, a manager at Skylight Books in Los Angeles. "We are able to take care of you better than a large corporation can."

While reading is an individual activity, it is a shared experience, one that is revered at these independent bookstores. With book recommendations posted all over the shelves by bookstore employees, it is easy to leave these small bookstores with not only exactly what you were looking for, but also a number of other quality reads that you might never have discovered otherwise.

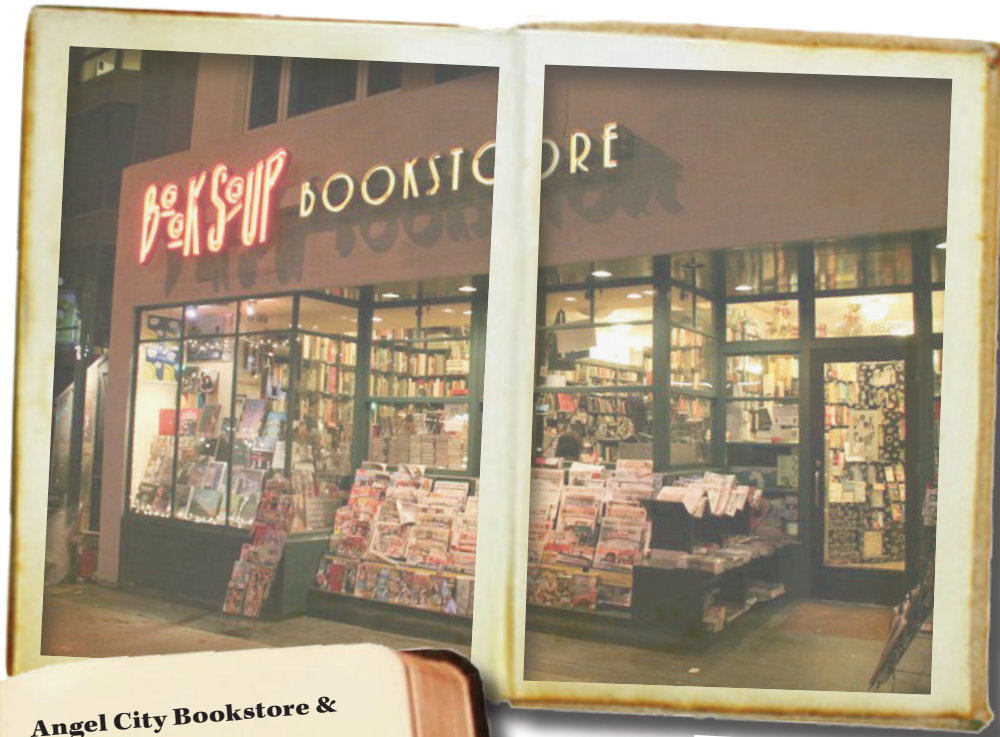


Photo courtesy of Book Soup

Stories L.A.

With high ceilings, sculptures and paintings atop the shelves and a multitude of both new and used books, this new neighborhood bookstore and café provides L.A. book-lovers with the perfect gathering-place. The bookstore, which opened just three months ago in Echo Park, hosts multiple readings each week by up-and-coming authors and story times for children, as well as appearances by bands. Wooden benches topped with pillows line the front of the small store, where people can sit comfortably to read or simply observe the passers-by. Readers can enjoy a sandwich or a cup of coffee with friends while they browse through the store's neatly organized array of books.

Angel City Bookstore & Gallery

The Angel City Bookstore is one of the last general used bookstores in the Los Angeles area and good literature is its specialty. According to Rocco Ingala, Jr., the bookstore's owner, "good literature" does not just mean fiction, but it means quality, well-written books, which he guarantees his store has plenty of. The quaint store in Santa Monica, filled with previously read books and their glorious scent, also specializes in books on philosophy, poetry, art and architecture and doubles as a gallery for the owner's artwork, which fills the walls above the well-stocked shelves. After running the store for 10 years, Angel City's owner is familiar with his customers — primarily locals or people visiting the beach — and what they will support, and he makes sure he always fulfills their literary needs.

Skylight Books

It's an indoor bookstore with an outdoor feel. With a round bench surrounding a real tree in the middle of the store, shoppers are provided with a relaxing place to sit down and explore the books they are considering purchasing. The calm music that emanates throughout the store suits the welcoming, neighborhood vibe perfectly. Located in Los Feliz for the past 12 years, the store specializes in the literary tastes of the neighborhood — which include a lot of small publication works — but has a wide selection nonetheless. Its easy-to-navigate sections include everything from fiction to science and nature, and the store will special order any book that they do not already carry for its customers. With notable authors and writers speaking and signing their books at the store multiple times each week, Skylight is a true book-lover's haven.

Book Soup

Whether looking for an imaginative work of fiction, an informative piece of non-fiction or a book filled with solely photographs, Book Soup has it all within its ceiling-high bookshelves. Books are not all the store has to offer, for while roaming the aisles between the expansive bookshelves, shoppers are almost always guaranteed an interesting conversation with a fellow book-lover. Located on Sunset Boulevard in West Hollywood for more than 30 years, the store attracts an eclectic crowd, including the occasional celebrity. As its late founder Glenn Goldman liked to say, Book Soup is a "bookseller to the great and infamous." The store also holds events nearly every week featuring authors who present and sign their books, as well as musicians, journalists and other notable people. While the store has especially strong art, photography, film and music sections, one can find books of all sorts here, a number of them signed by their authors.

The Novel Café

While disorganization usually serves as a hindrance in bookstores, it is part of this used bookstore and café's charm. With absolutely no order or logic, used books are placed and piled on the shelves which surround two levels of small, round café tables. Every book on the Santa Monica café's shelves can be taken home for between \$1 and \$4 — less than what a writer or reader occupying one of the tables pay for his or her sandwich. Although it may take some time to sift through all of the beautifully beat-up books contained in the café, it is well worth it, for there are undoubtedly some classic literary treasures hidden amid the chaos.

Small World Books

Located on the Venice Boardwalk, this bookstore is the perfect place to visit when looking for a good book to read while soaking up the sun on the beach. Because it is tucked behind Venice's famous Sidewalk Café, it is easy to miss, but it is not a bookstore to be overlooked. Looking through its vast selection is especially enjoyable when the live music being played outside on the boardwalk floats through the bookstore's doors and windows, as is often the case. Small World Books has a distinctive, genuine personality that is reflected in its book selection — which includes an entire section devoted to vampire literature — and suits the eclectic Venice population perfectly.

— Juliana Appenrodt

BYARS

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Titanic's footsteps, the novelty of being a comic-book film overshadowed its power and intensity.

The script alone is so brilliantly written, encompassing so many bleak and mature characteristics of human behavior, that it is a surprise that "WALL-E" (itself a great film) earned a nomination for Best Original Screenplay while Christopher and Jonathan Nolan did not receive the Adapted Screenplay nomination.

On the category of Best Original Screenplay, two other great scripts are also missing. Much as with the Nolan brothers' screenplay, both "Rachel Getting Married" and "Synecdoche, New York" clearly articulated human element flawlessly.

Along with "In Bruges," these two films conveyed exactly what an original screenplay is rightfully named for — the most originality. Charlie Kaufman, the writer of "Synecdoche, New York," is a novelty when it comes to writing screenplays. All of his work has a uniqueness in itself. Kaufman's latest film, which he also directed, is unlike any other film of the year.

"Rachel Getting Married" showcases Anne Hathaway at her very best; her character, heartbroken over what she has become, delivers some of the best dialogue of the year, written by Jenny Lumet, daughter of director Sydney Lumet. This otherwise-common story of a discomfiting homecoming is completely turned around by both viciousness and an eventual resolution that is as bleak as it is appropriate.

One of the most puzzling actions by the Academy is recent Golden Globe-winner Bruce Springsteen's snub for his title song from 'The Wrestler.'

As well as a nomination for director Lumet, Jonathan Demme (Oscar-winner for "The Silence of the Lambs") would have been a suitable consideration for Best Director — more so than the flashy "Curious Case of Benjamin Button" director David Fincher.

One of the most puzzling actions by the Academy is recent Golden Globe-winner Bruce Springsteen's snub for his title song from "The Wrestler." The academy was favorable to Darren Aronofsky's film considering the presence of both Mickey Rourke and Marisa Tomei, but they somehow forgot all about the Boss.

In a time when title songs are almost extinct, excepting most animated musicals, it is absurd to disregard a song written for a film that is able to evoke the same emotion and suffering felt by the film's protagonist. This is especially true when only three original songs are nominated in the first place, two of them from "Slumdog Millionaire."

The Academy often makes irritating mistakes with its nominations, but its purpose is completely necessary for maintenance of film as an art form. The best films of the year deserve Oscars, but even if they don't win, the legitimacy of being nominated should never be played down. It is ultimately up to the moviegoers to decide for themselves where the Oscars go wrong and where they go right.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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ARTIST | Gómez-Peña challenges audiences' ideologies

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was wholly entertaining. But that wasn't the point. It was meant to get the audience thinking critically about the issues America is facing. There were several recurrent themes. The notion that America puts itself on a pedestal was one of them.

"God bless America," belted out Peña. But what about God bless Fiji, Pakistan, Yugoslavia, the Czech Republic and every other nation in the world? Shouting out obscure places, taking suggestions from the audience and concluding "God bless America — the continent I mean," Peña's point was well received.

What will America do if it's

pedestal is yanked out from underneath it?

"The U.S. might not know how to live within its means," said Peña. "We're a nation that's obsessed with what we lack."

When people who have never known a life without excess or wrongly perceived necessities are suddenly thrust into a world without them, Peña fears that anger and greed will arise.

"I feel for the flight of the frailest," he said, alluding to his prediction that if the economy dwindles too far, anger and violence will be aimed at immigrants, homosexuals and so-called undesirables.

Artists, Peña fears, will also

suffer in a world where they're often seen as dispensable. But "democracy cannot exist without the critical bones of the artist," Peña argued. "Art is embodied fury. Art is responsibility."

"Should artists be advisers to bankers and politicians?" he asked. Imagine. Maybe, just maybe, the banks wouldn't be receiving a bailout.

"What about bailing out the homeless, art spaces, schools, families whose homes have been foreclosed?" Peña asked. "What about bailing out our souls?"

Peña forced the audience to think about these things and to imagine an alternative. It was this ability

that made his often humorous, boisterous performance so powerful.

Peña has an "ability to create that imagined space where change unfolds," said Tara McPherson in a panel after Peña's performance.

But under a clear plastic tent in the Fisher Gallery courtyard, that space didn't seem so imaginary. And Peña agreed. Change can happen.

"A black family is now living in the white house," Peña said pointing out the irony. A house, he added, "That was designed by an architect who owned slaves."

While Peña's, and much of America's optimism, may be cautious, at least it's optimism.