March 6—13, 2012

Living in a university town sometimes feels like being part of the movie “Groundhog Day”. That’s the one where the same scenario repeats and repeats and repeats every day, driving the characters nearly mad in the process. Now the University of California at Berkeley, the distinguished institution which I graduated from some years ago, is doing yet another instant replay of “Let’s Mark People’s Park”.

Or maybe it’s like the old joke about programmers: “Why do programmers take such long showers? Because the label on the shampoo bottle says ‘lather, rinse, repeat.” But you’d probably need to have worked with programmers as much as I have to get that joke. The point is that U.C. seems to have an unshakeable determination to make the same mistakes in their dealings with the Park over and over and over again, following some kind of crazy instruction set that they can’t seem to shake.

I wasn’t in Berkeley when the park was created from the rubble of one of UC’s numerous smash-and-grab incursions into Berkeley’s residential neighborhoods. I have, however, spent a lot of time in the Southside neighborhood where it’s located.

I lived in a rooming house in a brown shingle on Channing when it was still primarily a single family area. Then in the 1980s we created one of those high-tech university spin-off startups on Telegraph, just the kind that the City of Berkeley is currently lusting after. We rented the whole second floor of the building which now houses Rasputin’s for the incredible price of 30 cents a square foot. If rents were still in that range, Berkeley would still be able to attract the entrepreneurs it wants, but the greed of Telegraph area property owners has priced enterprises like ours out of the market and pushed them into Emeryville and Oakland instead.

The university’s current moves on the park seem to have been motivated by the desires of the Telegraph property owners’ business improvement district. It’s traditional for Telegraph landlords to blame the park for their own deficiencies, and they’re following the old script again in this instance. UC is only too glad to collaborate.

Ever since I’ve been associated with UC, going way back to the time they threw the information tables of Slate (the nascent student political party, not the Microsoft online magazine) off campus, the bureaucrats have managed, time and again, to choose the most ham-handed way of pursuing their objectives. The new plans for altering People’s Park are no exception.

A public-spirited park activist did a Public Records Act request and came up with full documentation of what UC’s up to and shared the information with the Planet.

For starters, the quick and dirty operation which an outside contractor carried out on December 28 was just the opening salvo, just Phase 1 in a much bigger game plan which the University has cooked up with absolutely no advice and consent from those who are supposed to be consulted. The tab for the part of Phase 1 which has been executed so far—tearing down a pergola, leveling some raised beds and cutting down a grove of small trees—was “only” about $12,000, but emails reveal that UC’s budget for all of its planned operations is now at least $220,000. A lot of damage could be done for that much money. And that’s not all—another document seems to project spending of $620,000 by the end of Phase 3, which isn’t chump change.

Traditional UCB Orwellian newspeak in the bureaucratic emails calls all this activity “maintenance”. One writer asks the PR people who are gearing up to issue a press release after the clearance starts...
“if there is another word for ‘small trees’ (something other than shrubs).” A tree by any other name, …

Vice Chancellor Ed Denton in a memo authorizing the December action says “… we will press ahead during the holidays. Let’s hope a project that does not bring controversy with the locals [sic].” It might have been prudent to consult “the locals” using excellent protocols already established. [By the way, Ed, “locals” is a rude epithet to use for Berkeley citizens and residents.]

And who was supposed to have been consulted? Well, for starters, there’s the People’s Park Community Advisory Board, set up a few years back on the recommendation of an expensive consultant as a way of avoiding unnecessary conflicts, with members appointed by UC. No one asked them about this project, which created predictable outrage.

Also, the city of Berkeley’s Landmark Preservation Commission should have been consulted. People’s Park is a City of Berkeley designated landmark. There are ongoing jurisdictional disputes between the city and the university over authority on such properties which have never been adequately litigated, but it’s often been the university’s practice to consult the LPC when it plans some change to historic sites.

I know this because I served on the LPC for close to 8 years, during which time many UC projects were brought before us for consideration. I thought of myself as occupying the “Bob Sparks Memorial Seat” on the Commission.

Bob was a longstanding People’s Park activist and defender, appointed to the LPC by Councilmember Maudelle Shirek, who didn’t care much about historic architecture but had a keen appreciation for the history which the park represents. After he died, his seat was vacant until I asked to be appointed because of my concern for a building where the disability rights movement had started which we managed to save.

The LPC has approved and supervised many changes to the park over the years, including, ironically, the construction of the very pergola which the university just tore down without so much as a by-your-leave. But now, once again, with characteristic UC hubris, the bureaucrats seem poised instead to create a major fight which could be avoided by exercising simple civility.

One of the memos I was given characterized the onsite People’s Park Facilities Manager, Devon Woolridge, as worrying about community reaction to the work planned for December. He and an associate, Bobby Newell, seem to have asked for backup from UC police and the UC public affairs office. They were reported to have expressed concern about the consequences of tearing down the pergola in particular.

I called Woolridge this morning to get more information about his opinions. He wouldn’t talk to me, except to say that he’s barred from communicating with anyone about this—that I’d have to ask someone in the community affairs office, which would be a pointless exercise in hot air consumption.

It’s noteworthy, by the way, that this office is now headed by Julie Simaj, formerly Mayor Tom Bates’ head of staff, and the Mayor’s new chief of staff, Judith Iglehart, is a former U.C. bureaucrat. With this kind of revolving door staffing, it’s no wonder that the city of Berkeley is consistently trampled in UC’s insatiable push for domination of the civic landscape.

As things stand now, it’s incumbent on the city of Berkeley’s Landmarks Preservation Commission, which is composed of citizens instead of bureaucrats, to insist that UC Berkeley follows the advise-and-consent protocol which has often avoided messy confrontations in the past. There’s not much time left, since the next two phases—the really pricey ones—seem to be scheduled to start in early Spring, and that season is upon us as I write.

At their meeting last night the commissioners discussed putting People’s Park on their agenda for their next monthly meeting and forming a sub-committee to study the situation, but these actions may be too little and too late to avert trouble. They should figure out a way to communicate with UC immediately.

People’s Park can always be improved, but if the improvements are done in a hostile way instead of collaboratively there will be problems. The December demolition was carried out in bad weather between Christmas and New Year with no warning, so the uproar was limited. That kind of surprise move won’t work a second time—major opposition can be predicted from now on.

If Ed Denton is sincere in his desire not to “bring controversy with the locals”, he should instruct his minions to voluntarily present the rest of their plans in an orderly way to both the Park Advisory Board and the LPC, and perhaps to other City of Berkeley commissions as well. A little civility would go a long way, and a further lack of civility will inevitably cause an uncivil response.

News

Up to 50 in Berkeley Displaced by Morning Apartment Building Fire

By Scott Morris/Dan McMenamin (BCN) Tue Mar 06 08:47:00 -0800 2012

As many as 50 people have been evacuated from a Berkeley apartment building that burned for nearly four hours early this morning and four buildings surrounding it, a deputy fire chief said.

Two walls of the building at 2227 Dwight Way were evaluated as unsafe and at risk of collapse by a structural engineer this afternoon, Berkeley Deputy Fire Chief Gil Dong said.

Residents of four adjacent buildings will remain displaced until crews can come in tomorrow to resolve the structural issues, as officials fear that a collapse could damage the surrounding buildings, Dong said.

The fire at the six-unit building located a few blocks from the University of California at Berkeley campus was reported at 4:13 a.m.

The roof of the building collapsed, which made it difficult for firefighters to access various hot spots that remained from the blaze, Dong said. The fire was under control at 8:05 a.m., he said.

All residents were safely evacuated from the building, according to Dong. No injuries to any civilians or firefighters were reported because of the fire, he said.

Investigators have determined the fire was accidental, but have been unable to determine the exact cause, Dong said.

The fire began in a closet which housed two water heaters, which contained multiple heat sources including a natural gas appliance, electrical outlets and heating vents for the wire heaters themselves, Dong said.

“There’s nothing there to indicate this fire was intentionally set,” he said.

City of Berkeley Issues

Summary of 2227 Dwight Fire

From Mary Kay Clunies-Ross, Public Information Officer for the City of Berkeley Thu Mar 08 11:29:00 -0800 2012

On Thursday, March 8 at about 4:15 a.m., a fire was reported at 2227 Dwight. It was a 2 alarm fire and was ultimately contained at about 8 a.m. Because there was still some smoldering, fire crews monitored the build-

-2-
ing for the rest of the day.

Cause: The Berkeley Fire Department made a preliminary finding that the fire was accidental in nature and started in a water-heater closet. Damage is estimated to be at least $1 million to the 3-story, 6-unit building.

Traffic: Dwight Way has one lane closed, but is otherwise open to traffic.

Building Safety: The fire-damaged building has been red-tagged by the City’s building official, designating it as unsafe to enter. Because of the risk that the fire-damaged building could collapse, several surrounding buildings received yellow tags. The yellow tag designation generally means that the building is unsafe to live in, but residents can enter with a police escort in order to retrieve their belongings. Building access is limited to 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Residents: Residents of 2227 Dwight and the surrounding apartment buildings were evacuated and no injuries have been reported. The American Red Cross was on site to assist residents in their short-term housing needs, and the University of California, Berkeley is providing assistance to Cal students who were in the fire-damaged building.

Residents who were affected by the fire, either because they lived in 2227 Dwight or because they are residents of one of the neighboring buildings, can call (510) 981-5900 for housing information or to be escorted into their building to retrieve their belongings.

Berkeley Fire Now Controlled

By Dan McMenamin (BCN)
Thu Mar 08 08:52:00 -0800 2012

A two-alarm fire at an apartment building in Berkeley was controlled this morning after burning for nearly four hours, a deputy fire chief said.

The fire was reported at 4:13 a.m. at 2227 Dwight Way, a six-unit building located a few blocks from the University of California at Berkeley campus, Berkeley Deputy Fire Chief Gil Dong said.

The roof of the building collapsed, making it difficult for firefighters to access various hot spots that remain from the blaze, Dong said. The fire was under control at 8:05 a.m., he said.

All residents were safely evacuated from the building, according to Dong. He said fire officials were working to count how many residents had been displaced.

No injuries to any civilians or firefighters were reported because of the fire, he said.

Dwight Way is closed between Fulton and Ellsworth streets and will likely remain shut down throughout the day while crews watch for hot spots and investigate the fire, Dong said.

The cause of the blaze had not yet been determined as of this morning, he said.

Berkeley’s Aquatic Park (Photo Essay)

By Louis Cuneo and Marcia Poole
Wed Mar 07 11:18:00 -0800 2012

Covered Pier in fog at Berkeley’s Aquatic Park

Boathouse at Berkeley’s Aquatic Park

Aquatic Park’s lagoon and boathouse with view of Berkeley

Swooning tree at Berkeley’s Aquatic Park

Two Alarm Fire Burning in Berkeley’s South Campus Neighborhood

By Dan McMenamin (BCN)
Thu Mar 08 08:43:00 -0800 2012

A two-alarm fire is burning at an apartment building in Berkeley this morning, a deputy fire chief said.

The fire was reported at 4:13 a.m. at the building at 2227 Dwight Way, a six-unit building located a few blocks from the University of California at Berkeley campus, Berkeley Deputy Fire Chief Gil Dong said.

The roof of the building collapsed, making it difficult for firefighters to access various hot spots that remain from the blaze, Dong said. The fire had not yet been controlled as of 7:45 a.m., he said.

All residents were safely evacuated from the building, according to Dong. He said fire officials were working to count how many residents had been displaced.

No injuries to any civilians or firefighters have been reported because of the fire, he said.

Dwight Way is closed between Fulton and Ellsworth streets and will likely remain shut down throughout the day while crews battle and investigate the fire, Dong said.

The cause of the blaze had not yet been
View of Albany Hill from Berkeley's Aquatic Park

View of the lagoon at Berkeley's Aquatic Park

The birds of Berkeley's Aquatic Park #1

The birds of Berkeley's Aquatic Park #2

The birds of Berkeley's Aquatic Park #3

The birds of Berkeley's Aquatic Park #4

The birds of Berkeley's Aquatic Park #5

The birds of Berkeley's Aquatic Park #6

The birds of Berkeley's Aquatic Park #7

The birds of Berkeley's Aquatic Park #8

The birds of Berkeley's Aquatic Park #9

Children Enjoying Berkeley's Aquatic Park

Sunset at Berkeley's Aquatic Park #1

Sunset at Berkeley's Aquatic Park #2
Editor’s Note: Current proposals for developing the area around Aquatic Park in the draft revision of the West Berkeley Plan threaten views and wildlife. This photo essay by two Berkeley artists highlights what’s at risk.

Berkeley’s Aquatic Park, an unmanicured, still environment filled with wildlife and accessible to all, sits directly to the east side of busy Interstate 80 and yet gives the feeling of being a wildlife sanctuary. The park, built in 1935 as part of a WPA project, serves today as a wetlands preserve as well as a lovely place for individuals and families to refresh themselves on nature’s beauty.

A convergence of species takes place here. The park is home to many resident and migrating birds, a shelter for animals and a preserve for fish (no fishing permitted). Birds, the last of the few truly free species on earth, take shelter to feed and rest here.

Louis Cuneo and Marcia Poole created these digital prints. Cuneo took the photographs and Poole edited them in such a way that one takes a second, deeper look at the images. She printed them on archival watercolor rag paper with archival inks. Their collaborative work captures a series of moments — the intersections of time and space — in the Japanese tradition of Haiga, the visual form of Haiku.

City to Hear Public Comment This Week on Two Development Plans for Berkeley (News Analysis)

By Toni Mester
Mon Mar 05 11:08:00 -0800 2012

The dotted lines show two versions of building heights proposed for the Aquatic Park area under the draft West Berkeley Plan.

Public hearings on the Downtown Plan and West Berkeley Project, two development plans that envision significant increases in building heights and mass as well as housing density, begin Tuesday night at City Council meeting with a public hearing on the Downtown Plan. The meeting starts at 7 PM at City Hall with the public hearing scheduled as the first item on the action calendar. The hearing will be followed by certification of the EIR and adoption of the Downtown Area Plan (DAP 2012) and the first reading of changes to the zoning ordinance and maps.

Downtown Area Plan

The Downtown Area Plan has been in the making since the creation in September 2005 of DAPAC, a large advisory committee that hatched out problems and priorities. By the summer of 2009, two versions of a downtown plan had been presented to the Council, one submitted by the Planning Commission and another from DAPAC.

A compromise plan passed by the Council on July 14, 2009 was answered by a referendum that collected over 9,200 signatures, far in excess of what was required to void the legislation. In response the Council placed Measure R, an advisory resolution stipulating environmental and other mitigations on the November 2010 ballot, which was passed by 64% of 40,760 votes.

This dialogic, often combative process has brought us to the present plan, 154 pages of policies, goals and development standards illustrated by graphs, maps, and pictures, which is sure not to please everybody. Since June of this year, the Planning Commission discussion focused mainly on the zoning for the Green Pathways and the Downtown Mixed Use zones, but many questions remain unanswered.

With the Council considering a bond and tax increase for the November ballot, many citizens worry that developers will not be required to foot their fair share of infrastructure costs as well as provide other benefits. How will affordable and family housing or in-lieu fees be assured? Can the roof of a 180 foot (17 stories) building be considered open space? Will UC take even more buildings off the tax rolls? Is the proposed downtown plan consistent with Measure R?

If any citizen has a concern about any of these outstanding issues or other problem or point related to the Downtown Plan, Tuesday night may be the last opportunity to make your voice heard. The Council hearing will be broadcast as usual on Channel 33, so if you cannot join the crowd at City Hall, please tune in.

West Berkeley Project

Public input on the West Berkeley Project continues on Wednesday before the Planning Commission, which will not be broadcast, starting at 7 PM at the North Berkeley Senior Center. Planning Commission meetings are now mostly held at City Hall, but March 7 is an exception.

The public hearing will be on the draft supplemental EIR (SEIR) of the West Berkeley Project, another development plan with a long, contentious history starting with a tour of industrial properties in February of 2008, when the intent of the Project was to increase zoning flexibility to allow for more office space, R&D, internet based warehousing, and other uses.

However, when the competition for the LBNL (Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory aka The Labs) second campus began in earnest in the autumn of 2010, it became obvious that the City wanted to promote a greater development allowance in select sites to attract the Labs and spin-off R&D companies, even though the Council’s stated intention in developing new standards for Master Use Permits (MUPs) was to “revitalize” West Berkeley.

After the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was certified by the Council on March 22, 2011 a citizens group calling itself the Sustainable West Berkeley Alliance (SWBA) filed a lawsuit challenging its validity, which prompted the City in July to authorize a further study called a draft.
Audubon Society, and CESP (Citizens for Eastshore Parks) which have each taken positions to limit development on parcels on Aquatic Park for fear of disturbance to the birds, over 33 species listed in the SEIR and more in prior studies, and their habitat. Public views of the hills from Aquatic Park would also be obscured.

The SEIR also studied shadows that fall on nearby residences and portions of Aquatic Park, noise, odors and other environmental impacts.

The public comment period is open to March 30th. Stay tuned.

Toni Mester is a resident of West Berkeley.

Berkeley Mayor’s Office Chief of Staff Still Has Her Old Job

By Zelda Bronstein
Tue Mar 06 08:50:00 -0800 2012

Last night I attended Berkeleyside’s latest Start-up Forum at the Freight and Salvage. The event yielded one piece of news: panelist Judith Iglehart, Mayor Bates’ new chief of staff, who’s being paid $90,000 (plus benefits) in that position, revealed that she’s still working at her old job; she’s still Vice President for International Chapter Development and Operations at Keiretsu Forum. The Keiretsu website describes the organization as “the world’s largest angel investor network with…twenty-one chapters on three continents.”

Reminding us that “we’re living in a global economy,” Iglehart reeled off the cities around the world that she’s visited for Keiretsu—Barcelona, Istanbul, and then I lost track—and ended by noting that she was about to return to Istanbul. She responded to several questions by stating that she didn’t know the answer, observing that she’d been in the mayor’s office for only two months. I wondered how much of that time she’d spent jetting off to exotic destinations for Keiretsu. I also wondered why it hasn’t occurred to her or her new boss that paying a public employee $90,000 to do a full-time job part-time is problematic.

Under the previous EIR, 28 out of 33 of “significant and unavoidable impacts” were transportation/traffic. The increased housing allowances mean even more daily vehicle trips, over 20,000 at the max, raising the question whether the West Berkeley Project is in compliance with the Climate Action Plan, which seeks to limit greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Since the EIR was written and certified, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) has adopted new CEQA guidelines to assess the GHGs, and the SEIR claims to apply them.

Others impacts concern the environmental community including the Sierra Club, the mused that locating angel investors is like figuring out “where to find former members of the Communist Party; you know they’re around, but you don’t know how to find them.” Someone should tell her that, gentrification and all, in this town, you do.

[Editor’s Note: Iglehart told the Planet this morning that she “has a share” in Keiretsu International which might eventually lead to profit, but that she’s now only compensated for doing specific assignments for the organization. She said the Istanbul trip was planned before she started the city job.]

Berkeley’s Students Stung by Tough Times, and They Want You to Know

By Ted Friedman
Fri Mar 02 13:16:00 -0800 2012

Last night I attended Berkeleyside’s latest Start-up Forum at the Freight and Salvage. The event yielded one piece of news: panelist Judith Iglehart, Mayor Bates’ new chief of staff, who’s being paid $90,000 (plus benefits) in that position, revealed that she’s still working at her old job; she’s still Vice President for International Chapter Development and Operations at Keiretsu Forum. The Keiretsu website describes the organization as “the world’s largest angel investor network with…twenty-one chapters on three continents.”

Reminding us that “we’re living in a global economy,” Iglehart reeled off the cities around the world that she’s visited for Keiretsu—Barcelona, Istanbul, and then I lost track—and ended by noting that she was about to return to Istanbul. She responded to several questions by stating that she didn’t know the answer, observing that she’d been in the mayor’s office for only two months. I wondered how much of that time she’d spent jetting off to exotic destinations for Keiretsu. I also wondered why it hasn’t occurred to her or her new boss that paying a public employee $90,000 to do a full-time job part-time is problematic.

What was clear is that Iglehart needs to catch up on her City (and city) of Berkeley homework: she informed the crowd that the mayor and council had changed the zoning for Downtown (not yet, they haven’t), and that Hayward was the newest member of the East Bay Green Corridor Partnership (never joined). And in a how-un-Berkeley-can-you-be moment, Iglehart, a Piedmont resident,
Thursday.

Peace man! occupy Oakland protestors trying to deliver 3000 petitions to Morgan Stanley, who they accuse of gouging the Peralta school district $1.65 million yearly. Morgan stanley would not receive the petitions. OO vowed to return.

If cuts could sting, there was lots of pain in Berkeley, Thursday, as Occupy Oakland teamed up with Occupy Cal for a march from Cal to downtown Oakland to protest cuts in services, classes, and increased tuition. Our students want you to know.

Perhaps the teaming is more than a passing fancy (this is at least the second such team effort), as two of the major U.S. occupiers see advantages in pairing.

Student protests calling for reduced tuition and taxes on millionaires were staged Thursday in seven U.S. cities, and students will stage walkouts in Boston and Philadelphia this week, organized by Occupy Education, a coalition of 80 occupy, labor, and community groups, to launch a week of action around the nation.

Maybe there’s something about coeds that tames the beast in the wild men of Oakland. On the last two marches starring the new team, I’ve met nothing but ingratiating young people. As Osha Neumann wrote in the Planet recently, these are our youth, our political legacies, and we can be proud.

I had the same feeling. But both of the OO/OC marches I’ve been on were peaceful.

As one protestor commented, “we’re always peaceful, when we’re not being beaten by Oakland Police.”

Demonstrators insist the police provoke the fights, while even initial supporters of OO, have turned away from the violence, and the movement itself.

As I learned Feb. 19 on the first OO/OC pairing, Oakland police tactics are taking their toll on the movement. As many as 400 have been permanently banned from Frank Ogawa Plaza, and hundreds of others have appeared in mug-shot binders police use to identify “troublemakers.”

The festive mood dimmed briefly when an irate motorist stepped out of his car and allegedly, “just poked a marcher in the mouth,” after words were reportedly exchanged. According to on-lookers, the poker’s car license number was 6H21 814.

As the march slowed traffic to a crawl, some motorists honked and waved their approval, while others nursed cases of road rage.

A pro-Allende socialist rallying song was broadcast from a van, and marchers chanted “when they say fees go up, we say fight that,” and “we are the students, the mighty students, fighting for justice.” What a concept! And there were 150 of the mighty.

The idea of mighty students seemed not too far from the mark, since students have always been America’s future.

Don’t tell these protesters they’re running out of steam. “We shut down four banks for several hours this week,” one boasted.

But things are not going well for our students. They are facing joblessness, massive student debt, loss of the American dream, and worst of all loss of faith in the system they had hoped to join.

Students were joined by four university unions, a handful of faculty and graduate students, and a dozen elders.

The march moved swiftly, arriving at Ogawa Plaza two hours after leaving Cal, where speakers addressed such issues as abortion (threatened by Republicans), minority under-enrollment at Cal, and government disregard for illiteracy while planning to imprison illiterate felons.

Still, the theme for the day was lowering college fees by taxing millionaires.

One speaker recommended making friends on the march, and I can second that. These were people worth knowing.

Soon the march split into two components; marchers headed for Sacramento in four 20 miles a day segments, arriving in Sacramento Sunday. Night one: Richmond; night two, Vallejo; night three, Vacaville; and final night U.C. Davis, then on to Sacramento.

Some of the 75 marchers wondered what
they were getting into, but I assured them 20 miles was no big deal, while admitting I would be missing that march.

I had to cover the OO action at Morgan Stanley, nearby. This Occupy 50 member contingent was to submit 3,000 petitions to Morgan Stanley, seeking debt relief from a bond deal, which was bankrupting (1.65 million yearly) the Peralta Community College District, which includes Merritt and Laney colleges.

According to leaders of this action, Morgan Stanley was soaking the financially beleaguered Peralta school district, and killing our economy, which relies on education. One Laney instructor said four of his students were in shelters, because the student financial aid office was so decimated by budget cuts they could not deliver student’s financial aid checks.

But the petitions went undelivered, when phone calls to Morgan Stanley were not answered. Grim-faced, the leaders huddled together for a quick strategy session. “They won’t respond now, but we’ll be back. And they will respond to us then.”

The leader seemed confident Morgan Stanley would eventually receive the petitions, many of them detailing personal student hardships Morgan Stanley has allegedly spawned. According to the petitions, MS “could restore at least 320 classes and vital student services.”

Caught up in the moment, I told the leader that “I once applied to teach at Laney, and would like to think I would have been on the protest lines with them.” “But you have joined us,” the leader said.

He shook my hand.

I’m such a sap. That hand shake meant a lot to me.

Meanwhile, back in Berkeley, Berkeley High Students teamed up with Occupy Cal with their own occupy event, on the steps of city hall, reportedly 200 students strong, protesting high school budget cuts.

After covering the Oakland action to the end, I was back in time to talk to Berkeley High’s principal about his students’ protest, which he estimated at “several hundred.”

If this is the start of a national trend among highschoolers, Berkeley is cutting edge.

“You must be proud,” I said.

“I’m very proud of our students” the principal enthused.

He explained that the high school protest was developed in conjunction with three different Berkeley High courses. Occupy Cal had advised the students. One OC student attended the high school protest, according to the principal, on a day when Occupy ruled.

Sometimes good things happen when our Off-beat reporter goes off his South side beat.

Six Men Shot in Two West Berkeley Incidents over the Weekend

From Sergeant Mary C. Kusmiss, BPD Public Information Officer
Mon Mar 05 15:53:00 -0800 2012

The Berkeley Police Department on Monday provided information on two shooting incidents over the weekend in West Berkeley with a total of six injuries:

The City of Berkeley Police Department (BPD) received multiple calls reporting possible gunshots in the 2200 block of Bonar Street on Friday, March 2, 2012 at approximately 6:21 p.m. BPD officers responded, located the victims, requested City of Berkeley Fire Department (BFD) personnel to respond and secured the crime scene. Based on the initial investigation, it appears that a group of at least five people were standing in front of an apartment building when a vehicle driving on Bonar Street stopped in the roadway.

Occupants of this vehicle fired multiple rounds at the group before fleeing the area. BPD located three (3) victims of gunshot wounds in the area. Each of the injured were treated on the scene by BFD then transported to Highland Hospital for further care. None of the injuries to the victims are life threatening. One was kept overnight for observation. All three men have now been treated and released. Officers did checks of the area and surrounding neighborhoods but did not locate any suspect(s) or suspect vehicle.

About 12:51 a.m., on Sunday, March 4, 2012, the City of Berkeley Police Department (BPD) received multiple reports from community members regarding gunshots heard in the area of 7th and Addison Streets. BPD patrol officers responded and found the victims at Sixth (6th) and Bancroft Way as they were trying to leave the area. City of Berkeley Fire Department (BFD) responded to medically assess the victims.

A group of approximately five people were hanging out in front of a house in the 2100 block of 7th Street. Two suspects on foot approached the group on 7th Street. The suspect(s) fired at the group. The suspects fled on foot, possibly to a waiting vehicle that fled the area. After being fired at, the group of five were located by responding officers a couple blocks south of the shooting scene. Three of the male victims sustained gunshot wounds, none of which were deemed life threatening. All of the victims were treated and released from the hospital.

BPD Patrol officers immediately began investigating and conducting area checks for the suspect(s) but were not able to locate any.

In the interest of not compromising the active and ongoing investigation, this is the total substance of what we are sharing today. The names of the victims of any violent crimes are protected by confidentiality.

We do not know if the two shootings are related. The BPD detectives will certainly explore that possibility.

Earthquake This Morning Felt in Berkeley Was 4.0

Mon Mar 05 05:46:00 -0800 2012

Yes, that was an earthquake. A 4.0 earthquake in the Richmond-El Cerrito Hills struck about 5:30 this morning.

Magnitude 4.0 Quake This Morning Followed by Second Smaller Quake

By Bay City News
Mon Mar 05 10:54:00 -0800 2012

A 4.0 magnitude earthquake centered in the East Bay shook the Bay Area early this morning, followed by a second magnitude 2.0 quake about 30 minutes later, according to the U.S. Geological Survey.

The first quake was reported at 5:33 a.m. one mile southeast of East Richmond Heights with a depth of about 5.5 miles.

A second quake was reported at 6:03 a.m. in around the same location.

BART stopped trains due to the first tremor, and held trains at stations for 5 to 10 minutes to check the tracks for damage. Trains continue to have short delays this
Berkeley Student Injured in Frat House Fall Still in Critical Condition

By Bay City News
Fri Mar 02 08:20:00 -0800 2012

A University of California at Berkeley freshman who fell two stories from the side of a fraternity building and suffered severe head trauma Saturday night remains hospitalized in critical condition, a Berkeley police spokeswoman said Thursday.

Sgt. Mary Kusmiss said Andrew Crowley is in a medically-induced coma at Highland Hospital in Oakland because he is suffering from severe brain trauma and head trauma and has bleeding in his brain.

She said Crowley is from British Columbia and several family members have traveled to the Bay Area to be with him.

Crowley is on the Cal men’s crew team and his older brother Spencer Crowley also was on the team before he graduated last year.

According to the crew team’s roster, Crowley is 6-foot-3 and weighs 190 pounds and attended Brentwood College, a private boarding school on Vancouver Island in British Columbia.

Kusmiss said Crowley, who is in his 20s, was found unconscious and bleeding after a call at 11:34 p.m. Saturday about someone who had fallen from the Phi Gamma Delta fraternity house at 2395 Piedmont Ave.

Kusmiss said that according to a witness account and on an examination by police officers, it appears that Crowley was trying to scale down the outside of the building by going down a pipe. The drainpipe runs vertically to the roof of the three-story building, she said.

Crowley made it part way down when the pipe separated from the wall, causing him to fall backwards and ultimately fall to the ground, along with broken pieces of the pipe, Kusmiss said.

There’s no evidence that Crowley was a victim of crime or other foul play so police are classifying the incident as an accident, she said.

Alcohol played “a significant role” in the incident, Kusmiss said.

Fire on UC Berkeley Campus Forces Evacuation

By Bay City News
Thu Mar 01 17:35:00 -0800 2012

A small fire at the University of California at Berkeley this morning forced the evacuation of Etcheverry Hall, fire officials said.

Occupants of the fifth and sixth floors of the hall at 2521 Hearst St. reported seeing smoke and flames at 10:06 a.m., Deputy Fire Chief Gil Dong said.

Berkeley firefighters responded, but there was minimal damage and any investigation was turned over to the campus fire marshal, Dong said.

“It wasn’t that big. We were just trying to find it and get an exact location. There were reports on two different floors so there was trouble finding it,” Dong said.

Campus officials said today that equipment being used for remodeling work sent sparks flying to ceiling tiles on the floor below, and one started smoldering.

The building was expected to be cleared for re-occupancy by mid-day today.

Bay Area Campuses, Including U.C. Berkeley, Participate in National Day of Action for Public Education

By Scott Morris (BCN)
Wed Feb 29 15:33:00 -0800 2012

Bay Area students are gathering today to protest rising tuition costs and state budget cuts to public education in a wave of demonstrations at U.C. Berkeley and other campuses up and down California.

The protests are part of a “National Day of Action to Defend the Right to Education” called by student organizations and members of the Occupy movement.

In California, the protests are the latest in a series of demonstrations over the lack of funding for public education in the state, which has resulted in dramatic fee increases for public universities in recent years.

Protesters intend to march on the state Capitol in Sacramento on Monday as well, and students are organizing to send busloads of protesters to the event.

One of today’s most ambitious actions began at 4:30 a.m., when students at the University of California at Santa Cruz gathered intending to shut down the campus for the day.

They have effectively done so, causing class cancellations and scaled-back services as faculty and staff are unable to get to work.

The actions in Santa Cruz are scheduled to go on all day, and will include a rally at noon followed by a “Tent University” in which students and faculty will hold teachings and workshops on topics ranging from
foreclosures to gender issues to Marxism.

There are musical performances scheduled throughout the afternoon and protesters will watch a screening of the movie “Brazil” in the evening.

Protesters at the University of California at Berkeley are holding their own open university this morning, and began gathering outside California Hall at 8 a.m.

A rally was planned in Sproul Plaza at noon, and then protesters were planning to march to Oakland’s Frank Ogawa Plaza to join an evening rally there at the site of the former Occupy Oakland camp.

At California State University Monterey Bay, protesters are holding an “Occupu Education” rally at noon followed by a march at 1:30 p.m. The rally will be held at Library Plaza at the corner of Divarty Street and Fifth Avenue.

The march will head to the Student Center on Inter-Garrison Road, where a teach-in will be held starting at 2 p.m.

At California State University East Bay in Hayward, protesters will hold a “People’s University” starting at noon. There will be faculty and student speakers and educational workshops throughout the afternoon, organizers said.

A “Reclaim SF State U” rally will be held at San Francisco State University starting at noon, followed by a march from Malcolm X Plaza.

Organizers of the SFSU event said the action is being held to improve the quality of education at the school, and reclaim a student voice in education.

Students at San Jose State University are planning a walkout at noon today, followed by a rally and march.

The rally will begin near Clark Hall and students will hold a “speak out” to tell their stories of struggling with the rising costs of tuition.

The protesters are then planning to march silently through the Student Services Center before gathering in front of Tower Hall in the afternoon.

In the North Bay, students at Sonoma State University will hold a “Reclaim the People’s University” event at noon today in Stevenson Quad.

The event will last throughout the day, starting with teach-ins, discussion circles and performances discussing cuts to departments, campus programs and the availability of student jobs.

Organizers said that university administration officials are intending to attend the events and discuss the students’ concerns.

There will also be a night event on the campus, with a concert featuring musical performances and speakers from 9 p.m. until midnight.

Students at Santa Rosa Junior College are planning to rally at 2 p.m. for a march to the Rattigan State Building at 50 D St.

There will be several Bay Area events held in solidarity with the campus events as well that have no direct association with a college or university.

In San Francisco, protesters will hold a teach-in and occupation at the California State Office Building at 455 Golden Gate Ave. before holding a rally in Civic Center Plaza at 4 p.m.

Occupy Oakland protesters are planning a rally in Frank Ogawa Plaza at 5 p.m.

Protesters from throughout the state will hold a larger, unified demonstration on Monday in Sacramento.

The “Occupy Education” rally will begin at 10 a.m. followed by a march to the state Capitol building. The daylong event will also feature nonviolent direct action training and another rally at the Capitol that evening.

UC Berkeley Faculty Join “99 Mile March” to Sacramento

From Eric Hayes, U.C. Faculty Association Staff
Wed Feb 29 12:55:00 -0800 2012

Approximately two dozen UC Berkeley faculty will join the “99 Mile March for Education and Social Justice” on Friday, March 2nd. The march departs Oakland on Thursday, March 1st, and will arrive in Sacramento on Monday March 5th for a rally on behalf of public education at the State Capitol Building.

UC Berkeley faculty will join the march on Friday afternoon to walk the stretch from Richmond to Vallejo. “We are marching to draw attention to the plight of public education in California and to implore Californians to re-invest in it,” said Berkeley Faculty Association Co-Chair and Professor of Political Science Wendy Brown. “For all its resources, innovation and wealth, California has sunk to nearly the bottom of the nation in per student spending, and our public higher education system, once the envy of the world, is in real peril.”

On Monday, March 5th, UC faculty from several northern California campuses will join students, parents, workers, teachers and administrators from all sectors of California public education for a rally at the Capitol Building in Sacramento. According to Richard Walker, Professor of Geography and Co-Chair of the Berkeley Faculty Association, “we are going to the Capitol because re-funding public education is urgent, not only for reasons of equal opportunity and human development but because universal access to high quality education reduces the need for prisons, policing, welfare, and a range of other expensive social services.”

Brown agreed, “first-rate and widely accessible public education was the engine of this state for half a century….cutting that engine now is pure folly.”

The March 1st-5th “Days of Action on Behalf of Public Education” are endorsed by the Council of UC Faculty Associations (CUCFA), the umbrella body for Faculty Associations on individual UC campuses.

For information about UC faculty participation in the 99 Mile March or the Rally at the Capitol, contact:

Eric Hays (staff); 916-502-6804; info@cucfa.org
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Wendy Brown (faculty); 510.703-6513; wlbrown@berkeley.edu

Berkeley School Safety Officer Charged with Identity Theft

By Jeff Shuttleworth (BCN)
Tue Feb 28 12:55:00 -0800 2012

A Berkeley High School safety officer has been charged with one count of felony identity theft for allegedly stealing bank account information from a special education teacher and using it to pay his utility bills.

William “Billy” Keys Jr., 41, was arraigned in Alameda County Superior Court on Friday and is scheduled to return to court Monday to enter a plea. He is free on $10,000 bail.

Keys, who graduated from Berkeley High and has worked for the school for about 20 years, was arrested Thursday after he allegedly admitted to Berkeley police Officer Darren Rafferty that the account numbers that he used to pay his bills were not his own.

Rafferty said in a probable cause statement filed in court that Keys initially claimed that he hadn’t done anything wrong but “eventually admitted that he needed to take responsibility for what had happened” and wanted to repay the special education teacher for the money that had been taken.

Rafferty said that when he searched Keys’
apartment in Oakland, he found marijuana and equipment for the indoor cultivation of marijuana, but that Keys told him that his roommate had a medical marijuana card.

Berkeley Unified School District spokesman Mark Coplan said, “Everyone is in a state of shock because he is a highly respected individual in our community.”

Coplan said, “We care about him and are hoping for the best possible outcome for him in this difficult situation.”

Keys is on administrative leave, Coplan said. He said Keys and other school safety officers counsel and monitor troubled students in addition to providing security.

“They talk to students to help them succeed,” Coplan said.

Berkeley police spokeswoman Sgt. Mary Kusmiss said she could not provide further information on the case.

Opinion

Letters to the Editor

Re: Berkeley School Safety Officer Charged with Identity Theft; Gun Violence and Its Impact; The Republicans Are at It Again

Re: Berkeley School Safety Officer Charged with Identity Theft

Let’s us not forget the historically low wages paid to public school district, “classified” employees, i.e. office workers, bus drivers, teacher aides, custodians, et (versus certificated and administrative). While all receive generous paid holidays, sick, vacation pay (medical, dental), etc (if a regular employee; not a “sub” or hourly paid)... given today’s high payroll taxes...the actual ‘net income (paid only monthly)...makes living and working very, very difficult. This alleged theft might actually be indicative of an employee having to go to extremes to survive and keep working while so many others working around him get three of five times more pay simply by title.

R. Valentine Oakland, CA

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Gun Violence and Its Impact

How much more news of shocking deaths will it take before we place a ban on gun possession?

A couple of days ago I heard that five people were shot to death in the East Bay over a period of 3 hours. I am unable to understand the view that toting guns for pleasure is a good thing. Have we forgotten our interdependence on one another? Can’t we curb our violent impulses in the interests of the common good?

Our social structure is falling apart. One out of every twelve people seeking jobs is unemployed. The patience of poor people has frayed. Is there no way of improving the well being of the most adversely affected people? As social stress mounts we must make special effort to reduce the availability of guns to every Tom, Dick and Harry.

Romila Khanna, Albany

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The Republicans Are at It Again

Republican presidential contestants are singing the same old song. Four conservative white guys pandering to, playing to, an unrepresentative base of anti-abortion, anti-gay, anti-immigration, anti-tax, anti-government, anti-everything zealots.

Romney, Gingrich, Santorum, Paul, are old news in a fast changing world. They are a picture of negativity spewing out vindictive rhetoric on everyone and everything that doesn’t fit in their worldview.

Four conservative guys trumpeting Bush era failed economic policies, tossing around pie-in-the-sky promises, on how they’ll move the country forward. This pack no longer represents anything. They only represent themselves.

Ron Lowe, Nevada City, CA

Re: The Berkeley Hills Murder Could Have Been Predicted

By Christian Stauduhar

Thu Mar 01 15:04:00 -0800 2012

Other than the title of the editorial, which I don’t think expresses what you meant to say, this is certainly the most thoughtfully and well composed piece that I have seen written in the BDP. I think you meant to say that ‘this sort of thing is predictable’, not that it ‘could have been predicted’; the title you chose is inaccurate and has an inflammatory feeling. It is clearly predictable that there will be fatalities when cars are driven, but a particular fatality is not predictable based on that knowledge alone.

I would also like to point out that you give the impression that violent crimes are committed are more frequently by the mentally ill than the general population, which I believe is wholly unsupported by the evidence, and buys into a common myth. The fact that a person has an untreated mental illness is not a ‘predictor’ of a tendency towards violent crime.

There is one thing that you did not touch upon, which I think is important to point out, and that is the complication which arises due to the age of onset of this particular disease. Schizophrenia tends to show itself just as the afflicted enters adulthood. That fact makes treatment difficult, since they can no longer be legally compelled to follow the practices which are most likely to help them manage the disease.

The only solution that I have been able to devise is one that is not without problems of its own, but may be better than the current system. I believe that we — all of us, sufferers and the public — may be better off if the law would allow for the hospitalization and treatment of people, who are diagnosed schizophrenics, for a period of time (as short as possible, while long enough to allow for the possibility that effective treatment may be given a chance to work) when they are of an age that falls within the window of typical onset. Without such a scheme, we simply allow these sufferers to fall through the cracks because of the peculiar nature of the development of the disease and the age we have chosen to grant adult rights. The age of onset, the paranoia that is often part of the disease, as well as the stress that most all people feel at that stage of life, conspire against the sufferer and society at large, to make a solution difficult.

As a society, we make exceptions to the adulthood rule. Drinking is not legal (in California) until the age of 21. We don’t encounter much resistance to this law, so I offer that as proof that adulthood is not sacrosanct. I take least lightly of all, those laws which would seek to allow the state or other persons in positions of power, the opportunity to abuse the free right of individuals to live their lives as they choose, without specific regard for the approval of others, or a need for them to understand in the slightest, the choices that an individual makes.

So I don’t suggest this lightly. On the other hand, the age of adulthood is arbitrarily chosen and applied as if humans were all cut from the same mold. There are good reasons for this model, in terms of civil rights, but we may wish to modify this model to create a window for the transition to adulthood that recognizes the particular difficulties encountered by those afflicted with certain illnesses. This exception should be focused and limited. Focused on providing the best help possible, as early as possible, and limited a reasonable-effort treatment period, with a concrete cutoff, both in terms of a maximum involuntary treatment period and
in terms of absolute age. For example, two years maximum and age limited to thirty years old. That guarantees a limit to the time that the right to full adulthood is suspended, and allows for a full good faith effort to be made.

By all accounts, the afflicted person in this saga comes from a good and caring home, had a fine education, and was regarded by those who came in contact with him as a kind, sweet individual until he began to be symptomatic. Do we abandon such a person? No, I believe we can do better.

Al Jazeera, Naomi Wolf, and American Islamic Blind Spot

By John A. McMullen II
Tue Mar 06 10:35:00 -0800 2012

I think this is a letter to the editor. I have been reviewing theatre for this paper for two years next month.

It has been a long time since I have written on anything other than that for anyone.

The other night I was watching MI-5, an exciting, well-acted, and tightly-written spy series from BBC, where main characters get killed off regularly in the line of duty which always surprises me.

Their portrayal of the CIA and of Americans is less than flattering: lawless cowboy bully-boys with a penchant for torture and a pathological sense of entitlement. But I can tell the difference between good dramatic TV conflict and reality, particularly from a country that has a video camera on every lamppost.

But today, I surfed Al Jazeera. I tuned in a year ago thinking that I would get an earful of Islamic Fundamentalist Propaganda.

Surprise! Seems lot of writers are American. And Jewish. Like Naomi Wolf who I’ve always liked for her renegade candor (she has a new book out “Give Me Liberty: A Handbook for American Revolutionaries” which is on my list). In Al Jazeera, she takes on the wimpy reporting of the Qur’an burnings in Kabul in an article entitled “America’s Islamic Blind Spots.”

More than that, she talks about Bagram where 3,000 are being held without rights and tortured; she says that the terrorists concede that next to Bagram, Guantanamo is a resort hotel.

Crap! I thought this crapola stopped when W got replaced by a guy that promised change. Check out Ms. Wolf’s POV.

Is Progressive Zionism Possible?: a Response to Wendy Kenin

By Joanna Graham
Tue Feb 28 13:02:00 -0800 2012

In her article, “People with Potential” (Daily Planet and ACCESS blog of the American Jewish Committee, Friday, Feb 17), Wendy Kenin provides brief reports on the activities of four people, two Palestinians and two Israeli Jews, who, she avers, “speak sanely about how to move forward” with respect to what she describes as “Palestine-Israel peace.” I have been trying to think deeply and respectfully about Kenin’s piece, since I believe her underlying assumptions to be far more serious in their implications than her cheerful, bouncy tone suggests.

Kenin is not careful with language. The “meaning” range of many of her words tends to be broad and blurry and thus open to multiple interpretations. Therefore, I will start by deconstructing the title of her piece, which, in full, on both websites (and, therefore, I will assume, provided by her) is “People with Potential: Providing Sanity to the US Struggle for Israel’s Peace” (note the parallel with “speak sanely,” above).

Just in passing, “sanity” is a word that rings bells for me; we all, I’m sure, remember John Gertz in the pages of the Daily Planet promising to restore “sanity” to the Berkeley Peace and Justice Commission (a commission on which by what I am sure is total coincidence Kenin now serves.) “Sanity,” one comes to realize, is reserved to those who support Israel. Critics are medicalized as “insane” or sociopathologized as “anti-Semites” or, as the case may be, “self-hating Jews.” In either case, obviously, no considered response is required from any sane or nonsociopathic person.

Anyway, what exactly does Kenin mean by “the US’ [sic] struggle” or, for that matter, “Israel’s peace”? She is not addressing potential actions by the U.S. government or even by any organized nongovernmental bodies nor, with one partial exception to which I will return, is she addressing possibilities for peace in Israel—not, I might mention, that Israel really needs any help on the issue, let alone “struggle,” since the country is at peace and has been so (with the multiple exceptions of its many wars of choice) since 1973, the one and only time in its existence Israel has ever been attacked. As for internal terrorist attacks, for what are probably multiple reasons they stopped years ago; recent Israeli polls show security concerns to rank far below other issues, such as housing or the ultraorthodox, which are far more pressing for ordinary Israelis.

Kenin’s real agenda is spelled out in her first sentence, although obliquely. She announces, “For Americans who are burnt out by the negative and aggressive public dynamic between opposing political factions on Palestine-Israel peace, hope lives!” Of course most “Americans,” far from being burnt out on the “dynamic,” are probably surprised to learn it exists. What Kenin is referencing is the ongoing war for the hearts and minds of American Jews, the war Peter Beinart described in his much-discussed article in the New York Review of Books thus: Jews can be liberals or Zionists but not both. Therefore, Beinart argued, if the Jewish establishment does not rethink its unquestioning support for Israel, young Jews, overwhelmingly liberal/progressive in their politics, will, as they are already doing, simply walk away, both from Israel and from the American-Jewish “community.”

Enter Wendy Kenin, orthodox mother of four, überliberal (Green Party! Oakland Occupy!), and proud Zionist, to demonstrate that merging leftiness and Zionism is not only possible but actually easy and pleasant. Here are four lovely people to show us the way.

But what exactly are we being shown? I will start with the second and third of Kenin’s models—two midwives, one Israeli Jew and one Palestinian, who work together on a project to promote more skin-to-skin contact between mothers and their newborns. The project is admirable although the impact on the difficult lives of Palestinians probably infinitesimal. I would never argue, however, that any worthwhile project should not be undertaken because “too small” nor make guesses as to what will prove to be important in the longer term. I wish here only to point out an assumption that I will address more fully later: that co-operation between Jews and Palestinians will bring “peace,” whatever “peace” is. But this, in turn, implies a still deeper assumption that the obstacle to “peace” is lack of mutual understanding and therefore co-operation. This belief is very deeply rooted in liberal Zionism. It underlies all the dialogue groups, peace camps, cooperative projects, etc. I will return to this belief when I argue that the actual problem is lack of justice.

Kenin’s fourth “person with potential” is Israeli environmentalist Alon Tal. Kenin, an activist in Green Party politics, hopes that Tal, currently on tour in the United States, will convince the National Green Party to
drop their “one-state” position and end their near-decade-long boycott of Israel. Kenin refers in particular to Tal’s “constructive” response to Amnesty International’s “biased” report on water access for Palestinians. In his article, available online, Tal objects to Amnesty’s lack of hard data and their “anti-Israel” language, he points out that the whole region must adjust to global climate change, and he suggests that the Palestinian Authority should bear some blame for bad water management (with which I have no reason to disagree)—but he does not deny the main charge: that Israelis have plenty of water while Palestinians have little, and that this situation is directly controlled by Israel. In fact, although he comes up with excuses and explanations, he specifically confirms it.

Tal’s institute, Arava, which Kenin references, is connected, by the way, with Ben Gurion University of the Negev, a university founded in 1969, according to Wikipedia, “with the aim to bring development to the Negev.” This actually means to bring Jewish development to the Negev, to “Judaize” this large desert southern section of Israel. In a process that should be not unfamiliar to U.S. citizens, the Negev’s non-Jewish inhabitants, the Bedouin, tent-dwelling nomadic herd- ers, have been and are still being subjected to massive ethnic cleansing to make way for the Jewish settlers. (Some activists in Israel are attempting to address this disgraceful process.) Since my husband, for some reason, is now on the mailing list of the Jewish National Fund, month after month we receive their thick, big format, full-color newsletter extolling the building of housing, hospitals, businesses, etc. in the Negev, helping brave Jewish “pioneers” move into Israel’s last frontier. This makes clear that keeping American Jews on board is not just a matter of spiritual feel-good together- ness; it’s a cold hard matter of money—the American-Jewish money which since the beginning of the Zionist project has provided the primary funding for expansion and settlement.

I wish to make clear that I have no reason to doubt that Alon Tal does important and admirable work in a region where sustain- ability has always been difficult and will become more so in the coming decades. My intention in pointing out that the very paper Kenin cites in support of her thesis actually contradicts it and that the institute she admires is, and is intended to be, part of a process of conquest and displacement is to state what may be thought of as a corollary of Beinart’s axiom: in a situation of over-arching injustice everything, even the best, gets contaminated.

And so I arrive at Kenin’s hardest case, her first “person with potential.” Since I know something of his history, and have already done some thinking about who he is, what he’s done, and what it means, I will focus my discussion on the “Gaza doctor,” Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish.

There are some strong commonalities between Kenin and Abuelaish. Both work in women’s health, with a focus on birthing. Kenin is a doula (birth helper) in the Bay Area and Abuelaish is an ob/gyn. Kenin de- scribes herself as a feminist, and Abuelaish, who remembers his own mother as a “hero,” has established a foundation to support education for girls and women in the Middle East. He believes that “it’s time for women to take the lead and to practice their full potential and their role.” Kenin interprets orthodox Judaism, which she adopted after her marriage, as an ecological/feminist/spiritual faith and practice, while Abuelaish, a Muslim, believes that spiritual and emotional health are as important as physical. Clearly, these two well-meaning people, who want to make the world a better, more supportive, more peaceful place, especially for women, have many shared interests, concerns, and beliefs.

For those who do not remember who Dr. Abuelaish is, his fifteen minutes of world fame came to him suddenly on the afternoon of January 16, 2009, in the most dreadful way imaginable. He is a Gazan who, very unusually, worked in Israel. Thus he speaks Hebrew and has Israeli colleagues and friends. During Operation Cast Lead, the invasion of Gaza carried out by Israel with extraordinary ferocity during that most lame-dull of times, the last three weeks of George W. Bush’s second term, two Israeli shells fired in quick succession from a tank penetrated a room in Dr. Abuelaish’s home, blasting to pieces three of his teenage daughters and a niece. A fourth daughter’s eye “was on her cheek.” Hoping to save his wounded child, Dr. Abuelaish called an Israeli friend, a television reporter who happened to be in a TV studio at the time. Thus, the Israeli audience and ultimately the entire world got to hear the live voice of a man who was getting his first look at the gruesome remains of his children, body parts and pieces of splattered flesh which only a moment before had been living young women, “building,” as Dr. Abuelaish says, “their dreams and their hopes.”

Despite this tragedy, Dr. Abuelaish stated his refusal to “hate,” and so he was brought almost immediately on a whirlwind tour through the United States, as a kind of hos-
goals.”

Kenin should note that there is nothing about “peace” or, for that matter, forgiveness, in Dr. Abuelaish’s words. Rather, this is the statement of someone girding himself for a certain kind of warfare or struggle—one who prepares himself to “achieve the noble goal” of “bringing justice.”

What would that justice consist of? At the end of the “Democracy Now” interview, Amy Goodman asked, “What needs to happen now?” Dr. Abuelaish replied, “To admit the rights of the Palestinians and to take active steps, and that there will never be a just and good peace just for one. Must be good and just for all, for Palestinians and Israelis. And I think it’s time for the Israeli government and the Israeli people to stand up. We need to translate the resolutions into actions. There is a Palestinian nation and an Israeli nation, and they have to live sharing the land with respect, and that the dignity of the Palestinians equals the dignity of the Israelis. And the freedom of the Palestinians is linked to the freedom of the Israelis from their fears. The security of the Israelis and safety is linked to the safety and the security of the Palestinians, not dependent on the suffering of the Palestinians.”

People who have been damaged, wounded, and traumatized by the actions of others are compelled to deal with what has happened to them in one way or another. Dr. Abuelaish, whose life began in a crowded refugee camp in Gaza after his parents were forced from their family home by the victorious Jews in 1948, after a long struggle out of poverty through education, made the unusual choice to work in Israel, based, I am only guessing, on a conviction that his oppressors were rational persons who could be convinced by his competence, his friendliness, and his compassion—by, in other words, his simple being as himself—that he, a Palestinian, and with him all other Palestinians are human beings entitled to freedom and dignity. This is a man who bent over backwards to understand the concerns of his oppressors. And the oppression was ordinary and constant: hours every day getting to work in Tel Aviv from Gaza through the twenty gates of the Eretz checkpoint; fourteen hours to cross the Allenby Bridge from Jordan to get to his dying wife. And Dr. Abuelaish endured it and forgave it, I believe, in the hopes that eventually Jews would understand how much he had given up for them and would, in turn, be willing to give up something of what they had for him. The upshot of his efforts? His children were brutally and carelessly murdered in a massacre perpetrated by the very people with whom he had tried so hard to find—literally—common ground.

I still don’t know what caused Dr. Abuelaish to lend himself to the tour of 2009, especially at a time when he must have been still deeply in shock. I have learned that he spent two years trying to convince the government of Israel to admit responsibility for its action and to pay reparations into the foundation he’s created in his daughters’ memory. In vain. No admission, no apology, no compensation. Finally, just before the statute of limitations ran out in January 2011, he brought suit in the Israeli courts. I have been unable to find online what the current status of his lawsuit is, but I do know that at present Dr. Abuelaish and the remaining members of his family live in Canada where he teaches public health at the University of Toronto.

How does anyone extract “hope lives!” from this horrifying story? Where is the hope? What is the hope?

I said I would return to all those liberal Zionist exercises in “reaching out,” to building “cooperation” and “understanding.” In her excellent and revelatory book, The Other Side of Israel, Susan Nathan argues that the purpose of Jewish-Palestinian dialogue groups is to give Jews an opportunity to explain themselves and the Palestinians to understand them—and to forgive. The Zionist right does not bother with this exercise; from their point of view, God gave the Land of Israel to the Jews and since Arabs are cockroaches, how they feel about their loss is immaterial. But the Zionist left, even the best of the left, wants not only conquest but a clear conscience with respect to it. From their point of view, to provide this clear conscience was the function that Dr. Abuelaish served, both before the murder, when he was worked in a Tel Aviv hospital as a “model” Palestinian, and after it, when he went on his tour. As Kenin writes (rather insanely in my view), “In Greenwich, Connecticut last year, two Zionist Jews wrote heartfelt appreciation and praises for Dr. Abuelaish.” What does this mean? I wonder if those Zionist Jews would consider, if even for a moment, Dr. Abuelaish’s demand to “share the land.”

One more comment in this very long essay. Without knowing Kenin at all, I know a great deal about her, including activities, memberships, day job, religious and spiritual beliefs, marital status, number of children, e-mail and twitter addresses. I even found a picture of her, watching three of her beautiful children splashing in the Dead Sea. This did not take a great deal of search—

A Step on the Road to Protect Civil Rights

By George Lippman, Coalition for a Safe Berkeley and Chair, Berkeley Peace and Justice Commission (for purposes of identification only)

Tue Feb 28 13:47:00 -0800 2012

Last week, Berkeley moved forward a small step forward towards new civil rights and civil liberties protections. In this note I will share some of my personal reflections on this accomplishment. This is not a statement of the Coalition for a Safe Berkeley or the Peace and Justice Commission.

I’ll begin with the current update, and explain the background events of 2011 below.

At their last meeting the Berkeley City Council returned to the five Berkeley Police Department (BPD) documents it had tabled last fall: three external agreements (the Northern California Regional Intelligence Center, or NCRIC; Urban Areas Security Initiative, or UASI; and operational agreements with the UCB PD), and two internal policies (criminal intelligence and jails).

A major concern with NCRIC and UASI is their reliance on Suspicious Activity Reporting (SAR). The concern is that suspicious activity is such a subjective concept that it encourages non-criminal behavior, and has led to racial, political, and religious profiling.

Some 25-30 speakers shared their stories with the Council. They made personal their reasons for opposing government spying and profiling, the co-optation of local cops
into Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s (ICE) mass deportation scheme, and mutual aid being used to crack down on free expression. With the support of the Coalition for a Safe Berkeley, Councilmember Jesse Arreguin proposed moderate changes to the agreements and policies.

I was disappointed that the Council majority (6-3) extended the relationship with NCRIC, UASI, and UCPD unconditionally through the end of the current mandate in April. Only one of Mr. Arreguin’s provisions was passed: a request that the police chief ask UC to adopt the City’s practice of allowing drivers stopped without documents to contact a relative to have the automobile picked up.

But my interpretation is that the community gained more than we lost. While the Council essentially returned to status quo, we fielded dozens of strong and very diverse speakers, without exception supporting changes to a wide range of police practices. The Council and the City Manager promised to engage the Police Review Commission (PRC) immediately in a full review of community concerns and Arreguin’s proposals. The PRC and the BPD are to report back to Council by May 15, with their recommendations for changes to the 2012 round of agreements.

On the Council there were three strong proponents for Arreguin’s package of changes, out of five votes needed to pass them. It’s also clear that we got our message through to the entire Council that change is needed. Here’s a summary of supportive comments made by members of Council members who wanted more time to consider the changes:

Mr. Capitelli: I support the towing policy change; support protecting people from ICE, we are a Sanctuary City, do not cooperate with ICE.

Mr. Wozniak: Let’s make as many of these changes as we can. Council is united that we want to allow people to engage in peaceful political protest. We should negotiate with other departments on improving their rules in this regard.

Ms. Maio: In Berkeley, “we are who we are,” that’s why we are a Sanctuary City, respect people, have a PRC, etc. We want the best possible provisions in our MOU’s to safeguard civil liberties, not cooperate with ICE, ensure that police force is not militarized through training—we have always stood for that. Do it thoughtfully, carefully. Thanks to Jesse Arreguin, we will make it better than it’s ever been.

For a good press report on the Council action, refer to the ABC Channel 7 news piece, at:
http://abclocal.go.com/kgo/video?id=8544449

We should have no illusions that this campaign is over. Pressure from national security, surrounding communities’ police forces, and vested interests in the City will fight back against these reforms. We can’t take supportive words from the authorities for granted. We need to organize widely, give input into the PRC’s review process, and come back to Council in May with a strong showing for human rights.

If you live, study, or work in Berkeley, let the Coalition know if you want to get involved with the next phase of the campaign. Otherwise, talk to us if you are interested in starting a similar campaign in your community.

If we can pass the full platform of changes especially with regard to the fusion center agreement, we will take a stand that no other community in the country has ever taken.

BACKGROUND

The Coalition for a Safe Berkeley formed last spring to draft and lobby for a new municipal ordinance. The Berkeley Civil Rights Ordinance would restrain Berkeley from collaborating with federal law enforcement agencies in their pursuit of unconstitutional, repressive activities. Specifically, it would ban local involvement in political, ethnic, and religious-based surveillance and intelligence-sharing as practiced by agencies like the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) and the regional fusion centers, such as the Northern California Regional Intelligence Center (NCRIC). The Ordinance would also ban collaboration with ICE’s infamous S-Comm program (misleadingly named “Secure Communities”), responsible for deportations of hundreds of thousands of undocumented workers and their families. Finally, it would attempt to restrain the stubborn practice of racial profiling, by mandating collection of demographic data on police interactions with civilians and the publication of the aggregated data.

Through the Coalition’s work on the Ordinance, we became aware of an opportunity to address the same issues using concrete, immediate examples. Here’s what happened:

1) The annual Council review of all BPD external agreements came due. This packet of 1,100 pages of agreements and internal policies provided great insight into the department’s collaboration with other law enforcement agencies. It includes agreements with NCRIC, ICE, and JTTF, local policies on jail procedures including the handling of detainee requests (such as those from ICE), and the management of criminal intelligence, which includes non-violent civil disobedience as a criminal predicate.

Law Enforcement Mutual Aid, not addressed by the Ordinance draft, is another major subject of these agreements.

2) In October and November, Occupy Oakland, Berkeley, Cal, and Davis, along with almost every other encampment nationally, became targets of militarized and coordinated police attacks. BPD officers participated through mutual aid in the eviction of Occupy Oakland, which was characterized by inexcusable violence including the disabling of Marine vet Scott Olsen, his skull fractured by a police tear gas canister. These events raised many questions for the thoughtful:

Why were Berkeley police there? Even if they only played supportive roles like traffic duty, weren’t they abetting a human rights violation? What is the duty of Berkeley police when other police break the law by violently suppressing demonstrations, failing to wear identification, and other crimes against the Constitution? Should not the BPD try to stop the official law-breaking? In a democratic society, who makes the decisions about where our police are dispatched? How can the civilian leadership of the city assert our city’s values, and control over its “military” forces? 3) One protester’s story brought together many of the threads of concern, including suppression of freedom of expression, mutual aid, and collaboration with ICE. Pancho Ramos, an immigrant of a spiritual bent whose student visa had lapsed, was arrested at Occupy Oakland while quietly praying. When all the arrestees were released, Pancho was turned over by Alameda County Sheriff Greg Ahern to ICE due to a detainee request. Sheriff Ahern is known to be a supporter of S-Comm and a leader of the militaristic “Urban Shield” police training program. Testimony by Pancho’s supporters helped persuade Berkeley’s City Council to ask the County not to comply with civil immigration detainers, which even ICE admits are voluntary requests.

On November 8, in light of all this tumult, Berkeley City Council member Jesse Arreguin persuaded a unanimous Council to defer approval of three agreements (NCRIC, Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI), and operational agreements with the UCB PD) and two internal policies (criminal intelligence and jails). These five were re-scheduled to February 14 for further discussion.

I’ll leave off with a quote from the always-eloquent Council member Max Anderson:
“There is a sense in this country that we should be willing to sacrifice civil liberties for safety. That hasn’t worked out so well for any country that I know, when these trade-offs are made. And when state and local governments are starving for resources, and the federal government comes along and says, ‘Hey, I’ll buy you a SWAT team, I’ll buy you an armored vehicle, I’ll buy you assault rifles and I’ll give you body armor’ – it’s very hard to resist the temptation. But those kinds of offers and those kinds of acceptances come with strong political strings. They require of us that we sacrifice, if we are willing to, our local values, for something called the greater good, that’s defined by someone else. We end up in a society where there are conflicts that play themselves out on the stage of maximum armament on the side of the police.

“When we have issues that arise as a result of political conflicts in the country, such as decisions to go to war, or not to go to war, or the imbalance in resources, and life chances and prospects for success in this country break down into 99% vs. 1%...then the police are asked to play a decisive role in trying to mediate these disputes on the streets. And the police departments by and large are ill-equipped to do that. They have weaponry, they have resources, and they have mutual aid agreements, but at the end of the day nobody wants to see a country firing on its own citizens.

“My voice remains strong about the necessity for having civilian control over military, quasi-military, and paramilitary forces in the country... Jesse and a number of groups in the Coalition see the danger of mutual aid agreements that are blind and reflexive in their nature.”

See: http://berkeley.granicus.com/Media-Player.php?publish_id=856

Max begins speaking in this video at around 2:21:45.

My Thoughts on the Berkeley Hills Murder

By Jack Bragen

Tue Feb 28 12:57:00 -0800 2012

When someone with mental illness is presumed guilty of a crime, it’s all over the news, and this promotes the misconception that mentally ill people are automatically criminals and that criminals are automatically mentally ill. Persons with mental illness are far more likely to be victims of crimes than perpetrators of them.

Doing away with rights of persons with mental illness, to me doesn’t appear to be a solution. A large part of the problem is the perception of the public that persons with mental illness are across the board dangerous. Most persons who have a mental illness pose no threat to society. Forced treatment may not prevent these occasional violent incidents from happening. You could create more anger among people with mental illness when you try to suppress the basic rights of that population, and thus, the restrictive laws could backfire.

Noncompliance is a real problem for persons with mental illness. Family members are upset that they can’t get their loved one into treatment when they are ill and are not accepting treatment. While I might agree with some type of change to the laws, I don’t believe the current proposals are quite right. You should not increase the legal restrictions on persons with mental illness without also making conditions better for us. I’m seeing the whip, or the shackles, but I’m not seeing the carrot. If the problems that persons with mental illness face are addressed, it might do a lot more to increase voluntary compliance with treatment. As it is, you have a population which has little hope of having a “good” or pleasurable existence. Most people with mental illness don’t have much to look forward to except maybe their next cigarette or a piece of chocolate cake with their meal. Getting persons with mental illness into employment in work situations that we can handle would do a lot toward increasing hope. When you force treatment on people without providing anything to look forward to, you are killing hope. This could create a great number of suicides, or even homicides among those with mental illness. Don’t kill our hope.

Other than that, the public perception is warped because we don’t see the same public outcry when someone is murdered in Oakland, say, in an armed robbery, compared to the much more rare incidents of mentally ill persons perpetrating violence.

I have heard of about three suicides among persons with mental illness (who attend a support group that I go to) in the past two years. Where is the public outcry over that?

Columnists

EATS, SHOOTS ‘N’ LEAVES: Layoffs at Amyris?

Huge losses for the year

By Richard Brenneman

Wed Mar 07 23:15:00 -0800 2012

Amyris, the cheap anti-malarial drug maker agrofuel refiner cosmetic company supplier using genetically altered microbes as microscopic refineries, has just laid off a fifth of its workforce, a reader tells esnl. None of the corporate executives had to bite the bullet.

While we’ve not found confirmation on the Internet, the reported move comes as the company unveiled in losses for last year, a total of $177.9 million.

Based just south of Berkeley in Emeryville, Amyris was created by UC Berkeley bioengineer Jay Keasling with cash from Bill Gates to create a cheap anti-malarial drug, but the product they produced costs as much as the same drug derived from plants, a crop that keeps thousands of small farmers employed in Africa and Asia. Amyris developed the technology, then gave it to Swiss pharmaceutical giant Sanofi-Aventis to sell at a break-even price.

Repurposing itself as a for-profit agrofuel refiner, using the same microbe with new genetic tweaks, the company later abandoned that trade, with its technology in other corporate hands, including French oil giant Total.

In its third incarnation, Amyris uses its microbes to churn out a costly cosmetic chemical.

Corporate founder Jay Keasling, as noted before, has moved on to another startup, Lygos, and is back in the agrofuel game.

The company’s stock was down again for the day, closing at $4.69, six cents lower than Tuesday’s closing and fifteen cents above its all-time low, set during yesterday’s trading.

Amyris had been hailed as a rising star by both UC Berkeley and city officials, and cited by the city as one reason to effect major zoning changes in the city’s western industrial section that could lead to the loss of existing manufacturing and craft jobs to make way for university-spawned startups.

We hope city officials will think again, given that the overwhelming majority of high tech startups fail, while the existing West Berkeley firms and businesses offer
the only decent good-paying blue collar jobs in the city that don’t required advanced degrees.

DISPATCHES FROM THE EDGE: Syria: A Way Out?

By Conn Hallinan
Sat Mar 03 19:42:00 -0800 2012

There are two tales about the crisis in Syria. In one, the vast majority of Syrians have risen up against the brutality of a criminal dictatorship. The government of Bashar al-Assad is on the ropes, isolated regionally and internationally, and only holding on because Russia and China vetoed United Nations intervention. U.S. Secretary to State Hillary Clinton describes Assad as “a war criminal,” and President Barak Obama called him a “dead man walking.”

In the other, a sinister alliance of feudal Arab monarchies, the U.S. and its European allies, and al-Qaeda mujahedeen are cynically using the issue of democracy to overthrow a government most Syrians support, turn secular Syria into an Islamic stronghold, and transform Damascus into a loyal ally of Washington and Saudi Arabia against Iran and Lebanon’s Hezbollah.

Like most stories, there is truth and fiction in both versions, but separating myth from reality is desperately important, because Syria sits at the strategic heart of the Middle East. Getting it wrong could topple dominoes from Cairo to Ankara, from Beirut to Teheran.

There is no question but that last March’s demonstrations were a spontaneous reaction to the Syrian government’s arrest and torture of some school children in Deraa. What is more, that the corruption of the Assad family — they dominate the army, the security forces, and much of the telecommunications, banking and construction industry, coupled with the suffocating and brutal security forces, underlies the anger that fuels the uprising.

But is also true that outside players — specifically the monarchies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the U.S., as well as Sunni extremist organizations — all have irons in the fire. Indeed, there is the profound irony that, while the GCC condemns Syria for oppressing its citizens, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are crushing homegrown democratic movements in their own countries. Or that Washington should be on the same page as Ayman al-Zawahiri, the current leader of al-Qaeda.

And while there is no denying the brutality of the Assad regime, or that some 7,500 to 8,000 Syrians have died over the past year, Israel’s 2008-09 invasion of Gaza — Operation Cast Lead — killed a greater percentage of Palestinians per capita. When countries in the region tried to stop the Gaza War, it was the U.S. who blocked any UN action. In the Middle East, double standards and hypocrisy are par for the course.

The Syrian crisis is not a simple “good guys vs. bad guys,” democrats vs. a dictator, with the overwhelming majority confronting an entrenched, thuggish elite.

First, while the current uprising represents a substantial number of Syrians, the Assad regime has domestic support. As Jonathan Steele of the Guardian (UK) points out, a recent You Gov Siraj poll on Syria commissioned by The Doha Debates and funded by Qatar found that, while a majority of non-Syrian Arabs wanted Assad to resign, 55 percent of Syrians wanted him to remain.

The poll was hardly a ringing endorsement of Assad — half of that 55 percent wanted free elections — but it reflects the fact that most Syrians fear a civil war. That is hardly a surprise. The U.S. invasion and subsequent civil war in Iraq flooded Syria with millions of refugees and terrible tales of murder, torture, and sectarian bloodshed. And Syrians had a front row seat for Lebanon’s 15-year civil war.

A Syrian dissident, Salim Kheirbek, told the New Yorker “No more than thirty percent of the people are involved in the resistance. The other 70 percent, if not actually with the regime, are silent, because it is not convincing to them, and especially after what happened in Iraq and Libya. These people want reforms, but not at any price.”

While the recent referendum on reforming the Syrian constitution was widely dismissed by the U.S., Europe and the GCC, it appears that close to 60 percent of the voters turned out to overwhelmingly endorse the proposals.

Part of the Assad regime’s support comes from minority communities, in particular Christians and Alawites, who, make up 10 percent and 12 percent respectively, of Syria’s 24 million people. Alawites are a variety of Shiite, and the sect dominates the government. Sunnis make up the majority. Syria also has Kurdish, Druze, Armenian, Bedouin, and Turkomen communities. It is estimated that the country has 47 different religious and ethnic groups.

Alawites and Christians have reason for concern. As a recent New York Times story reported, demonstrators in Hom, one of the centers of the uprising, chanting “Christians to Beirut, Alawites to the grave.” Al-Qaeda routinely describes Shiites as “a bone in Islam’s throat” and targets Shiite communities in Iraq and Pakistan.

Nor is Syria isolated regionally or internationally. While the Arab League has condemned the Assad government, not everyone in the organization is on board. Damascus has support in Lebanon and Iraq, and neutrality from Jordan (Amman also remembers the chaos of the Iraq war). Algeria — North Africa’s big dog on the block — has been sharply critical of the League.

“The Arab League is no longer a league and it’s far from Arab,” Algerian State Minister Abdelaziz Belkhadam told Agence France Presse, “since it asks the Security Council to intervene against one of the [the League’s] founding members, and calls upon NATO to destroy the resources of Arab countries.”

On Feb. 15, the UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly for Assad to step down, but countries like Brazil and India, while deploring the violence, have made it clear they oppose anything involving military intervention or arming the opposition force, the Free Syrian Army (FSA). Even Turkey, while calling for Assad’s resignation, has begun hedging its bets, and dropped any talk of creating “safe zones” along its border with Syria.

Most countries fear that a Syrian civil war would spread to Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and maybe into the Gulf states.

While the situation on the ground in Syria is hardly clear, the Syrian Army and security services appear to be sticking with Assad for now. If that continues, the rebels may keep the pot boiling, but, without outside intervention by NATO, it is unlikely they can overthrow the regime. On the other hand, after a year of fighting, Damascus has not succeeded in ending the rebellion.

It short, it looks like a stalemate, in which case the current campaign to aid the rebels and force Syria’s president out is exactly the wrong strategy and one guaranteed to prolong the bloodshed.

Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and several U.S. senators have called for arming the FSA, a particularly bad idea because it is not at all clear who they are. There are persistent reports that the organization includes a goodly number of jihadists from Iraq, Libya, and Saudi Arabia. In any case, handing out weapons to people you don’t know, to fight people you don’t like is a formula for repeating the Afghanistan disaster.

Second, the demand for regime change—
and threats to charge Assad and those around him with war crimes — makes this a war to the death. Why would the Damascus government compromise if the end game is exile and prison?

The only solution to a stalemate is negotiations. The Russians have offered to host such talks, but so far the fractious Syrian National Council says it won’t talk until Assad resigns. The U.S. and the GCC have similar positions. However, talks will only work if both sides have an incentive to enter them, which means dropping the regime change demand, ending the sanctions, and shelving any talk of aiding the FSA.

Maybe events have gone too far, but at this point that doesn’t appear to be the case. Instead of condemning them, the Russians and the Chinese should be encouraged to negotiate a ceasefire and the opposition should take up the Russian’s offer to host talks with the Assad government. The recent referendum can serve as a jumping off point for re-writing the constitution.

For this to happen, however, the regional players, the U.S., and the European Union will have to stop using Syria as a proxy battleground. As Dan Meridor, Israel’s intelligence Minister, told the New York Times, supporting the Syrian uprising was important because, “If the unholy alliance of Iran, Syria and Hezbollah can be broken, that is very positive.”

For whom? Is this about freedom and democracy, or a calculated move on a regional chessboard?

Read Conn Hallinan at dispatches-fromtheedgeblog.wordpress.com and middleempireseries.wordpress.com

THE PUBLIC EYE: Let’s Drop the Big One

By Bob Burnett
Fri Mar 02 14:53:00 -0800 2012

Rather than move forward, Republicans want America to return to the fifties. They’ve resurrected Cold War themes: plutocracy, patriarchy, and militarism. Plutocracy: Today’s GOP wants America to be run by the 1 percent. Patriarchy: Republicans regard American women as second-class citizens, who should have no access to birth control. Militarism: GOP presidential candidates want a gargantuan military and believe the United States should prepare to “drop the big one” on Iran.

In his sardonic 1972 classic “Political Science,” musician and composer Randy Newman predicted the current bellicose Republican mentality:

No one likes us-I don’t know why We may not be perfect, but heaven knows we try
But all around, even our old friends put us down
Let’s drop the big one and see what happens.
We give them money-but are they grateful?
No, they’re spiteful and they’re hateful
They don’t respect us-so let’s surprise them
We’ll drop the big one and pulverize them.

Republican presidential candidates’ extreme comments about economics – let’s give the rich more tax breaks – and culture – women shouldn’t have access to contraception or health services – have dominated headlines, but lurking in the shadows is a hawkish Cold War mentality. Gingrich, Romney, and Santorum want to beef up the military, take a much more aggressive stance in foreign policy, and put nuclear weapons back on the table.

For the past three plus years, President Obama has been working to reduce the number of nuclear weapons. Obama has searched for ways to minimize conventional nuclear weapons in the arsenals of the United States and Russia, and other nuclear powers, and the “loose nukes” created by the dissolution of the USSR. (On February 29th, North Korea announced they were prepared to roll back their nuclear weapons program in exchange for food. This was another positive product of Obama’s efforts to diminish the nuclear threat.)

Newt Gingrich opposes these efforts and has historically opposed programs to reduce stockpiles of nuclear weapons. In December of 2010 he argued that the extension of the Strategic Arms Reduction Retreat, START, should not be signed. A few days ago, Gingrich argued that the US needs a robust nuclear arsenal in order to stand up to a madman in Iran.

Mitt Romney is cut from the same cloth. He also opposed the extension of START. Romney wants to expand the US Navy and deploy additional nuclear missiles on submarines. His presidential campaign “White Paper” on Foreign Policy says “declarations of utopian aspirations (e.g., the abolition of nuclear weapons)… undermined America’s position in the world.”

And then there’s Rick Santorum. In every presidential election there’s one Republican who stakes out the “warrior” ground – who delights in taking the most macho position imaginable. In 2007, that was John McCain, who sang bomb, bomb, bomb Iran. This year, the extreme warrior title goes to Santorum. On February 9th Santorum accused President Obama of helping Iran obtain nuclear weapons:

“We’re throwing Israel under the bus because we know we’re going to be dependent upon OPEC. We’re going to say, ‘Oh, Iran, we don’t want you to get a nuclear weapon — wink, wink, nod, nod — go ahead, just give us your oil.’ Folks, the president of the United States is selling the economic security of the United States down the river right now.” (Among the Republican presidential contenders, the most rational stance is that of Ron Paul. Congressman Paul is the favorite of the Libertarian wing of the GOP and commands about 12 percent of the Republican faithful. Ron Paul wants to reduce the overall military budget: “It doesn’t make any sense unless you consider increasing the profits of the military-industrial complex to be in the “national interest”, no matter what the cost to the rest of us may be.”)

But, at this moment, the Republican presidential nominee will likely be Gingrich, Romney, or Santorum. They all “heart” nukes and are itching to start a war with Iran. Perhaps one of them will use Randy Newman’s classic song as their campaign theme.

Boom goes London and boom Paris
More room for you and more room for me
And every city the whole world round
Will just be another American town
Oh, how peaceful it will be
We’ll set everybody free
You’ll wear a Japanese kimono babe
And there’ll be Italian shoes for me.
They all hate us anyhow
So let’s drop the big one now
Let’s drop the big one now.

Bob Burnett is a Berkeley writer. He can be reached at bburnett@sonic.net

ECLECTIC RANT: The Dragon Tattoo Girl Still Going Strong

By Ralph E. Stone
Fri Mar 02 13:16:00 -0800 2012

If you haven’t read The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo, The Girl Who Played with Fire, and The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets’ Nest -- The Millennium Trilogy -- by the late Swedish mystery writer Stieg Larsson, you are among the very few who haven’t. All three books spent much time on best seller lists. The Hornets’ Nest is still on the National Best-Seller list and has been for 78 weeks. The Dragon Tattoo and Played With Fire are on the National Paperback Best-Seller list. By December 2010, over 65 million copies of The Trilogy had been sold worldwide.

In addition to the three Trilogy books, I also enjoyed the movie versions of each of these mysteries. The Swedish versions starred Michael Nyqvist as Mikael Blomkvist and Noomi Rapace as Lisbeth Salander. The American version of The Dragon Tattoo starred Daniel Craig as Blomkvist and Rooney Mara as Salander. For this role, Rooney Mara received an Oscar nomination for best actress. Sony plans movie versions of the other two books with the Played With Fire due for release late next year. Both the Swedish versions of the three books and the American version of The Dragon Tattoo are excellent. Although, Noomi Rapace more closely captured my imagined Lisbeth Salander. This is not to slight Mara’s excellent portrayal.

Larsson fans from around the world travel to Stockholm to follow the footsteps of Blomkvist and Salander. I understand The Stockholm City Museum even offers walking tours of Sodermalm, where much of The Trilogy takes place. Starting last month, the Museum includes stories from the shooting
of the film The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo. My wife and I visited Stockholm in 2010 and wandered SoFo, but didn’t take the Museum tour.

The books introduce Lisbeth Salander, a unique figure in fiction. She is Goth-like in appearance, autistic and bisexual with a distrust of authority, an amazing ability with a computer, a photographic memory, and astonishing physical courage, and while not physically attractive, is sexually appealing to both men and women. And yes, she has a large tattoo of a dragon on her back. She is a rare example of a feminist heroine who doesn’t hate men, just men who hate women. Throughout The Trilogy, Larsson weaves in her background of childhood abuse and violence.

What is compelling about The Trilogy are the complex characters, the fast-paced story telling with interesting plots and sub-plots. The books are long and very political. With a background as an investigative reporter, Larsson brings a knowledge of the inner workings of the Swedish police, its intelligence service, and private security companies. Larsson has been called a revolutionary socialist.

Larsson delivered the three books to his publisher, envisioning a series of books. Supposedly, he had started on a fourth book and wrote outlines for six more. Will someone finish the fourth book? Unfortunately, just as they were editing and translating the books, he died of an apparent heart attack in November 2004. He never knew that his Trilogy would become a worldwide publishing phenomenon.

Unfortunately, Eva Gabrielsson, his partner of 32 years, is not benefiting from the success. Because they were not married and he died without a will, Larsson’s estate was divided between Erland and Joakim Larsson, his father and brother. Ms. Gabrielsson receives no income from the sales of Larsson’s books. She refused an offer of $3.3 million and a seat on a board in the company that manages The Millennium Trilogy books to settle her claim. Instead, she wants to determine which agents are used and approve how the works are used and any changes made in them. In her memoir published last year, There Are Things I Want You to Know About Stieg Larsson and Me, Gabrielsson chronicles their life together and puts Larsson’s often chaotic life into context.

If you are a mystery buff and even if you are not, I highly recommend reading The MillenniumTrilogy. They are terrific reads. Scandinavian crime fiction has become enormously successful the last several years. They are characterized by plain, direct writing, devoid of metaphor. They expose the underside of the cradle-to-grave Scandinavian welfare system. Besides Larsson, I have enjoyed Henning Mankell (Sweden), Helene Tursten (Sweden), Hakan Nesser (Sweden), Åke Edwardson (Sweden), k.o. dahl (Norway), Jo Nesbø (Norway), Karin Fossum (Norway), Christian Jungeren (Denmark) and, of course, Per Wahllo and Maj Sjowall, a Swedish couple, whose ten-volume Martin Beck series (1965-1975) were a great influence on rising Scandinavian mystery writers.

And many of the Nordic mysteries have been made into movies and television series. I’ve watched dramatizations of Varg Veum based on the series of crime novels by Norwegian mystery writer Gunnar Staalesen, and Mankell’s books. In 2008, BBC adapted a few of Mankell’s books starring Kenneth Branagh as Kurt Wallander; a second series was shown in 2010.

See the movies, read The Millennium Trilogy and other Scandinavian mystery writers. You won’t be disappointed.

This is an update of my April 15, 2010 article, Nordic Mysteries: The Millennium Trilogy.

WILD NEIGHBORS: Owl Versus Owl, or Playing God in the Old-Growth Forest

By Joe Eaton
Thu Mar 01 15:04:00 -0800 2012

Barred owl in Everglades National Park.

Ilya Katsnelson
Spototted owl in Humboldt Redwoods State Park.

Chris Harshaw
Barred owl in Everglades National Park.

Word has been out for a while about federal plans for lethal control of barred owls in the range of the endangered spotted owl, but the first media coverage I’ve seen was a short Associated Press article on page A12 of Wednesday’s Chronicle. The story covered Interior Secretary Ken Salazar’s announcement of a new critical habitat designation for the northern spotted owl, oddly described (by the AP writer, not by Salazar) as a “passive, one-pound bird”, and a concurrent plan to remove “selected barred owls.”

This is not going to go over well with a lot of people, including some in the conservation community.

If you look at the actual Interior press release, the barred owl control program is supposed to be detailed in a separate Environmental Impact Statement to be released in March. The accompanying fact sheet presents it as an experimental approach rather than a wholesale slaughter. The EIS, the agency says, will “outline options for removing barred owls by lethal or non-lethal methods, such as capturing and relocating or placing in permanent captivity,” to be followed by evaluation of the effects, if any, on spotted owl populations at the experimental sites. That analysis might lead to barred owl removal on a broader scale.

This kind of experiment is exactly what some spotted owl researchers have been calling for. In a 2007 article in the journal Biological Invasions, R. J. Gutierrez of the University of Minnesota and co-authors wrote: “...it seems evident to us that carefully designed removal experiments are our
best hope for rapidly determining whether declines in some spotted owl populations are being caused by barred owls...As scientists concerned with endangered species or invasive species, we feel that the only way to inform the public of their full range of options is to understand the effect of barred owls on spotted owls by experimentally removing barred owls from areas where spotted owls are declining to determine whether they are the root cause of the declines.”

A cynic might wonder if the barred owl is being presented as a scapegoat for the timber management policies that have eliminated much of the spotted owl’s old-growth forest habitat. However, it seems clear from field surveys in Oregon and elsewhere that spotted owl populations have contracted as barred owl populations have expanded.

The barred owl is a common Eastern bird. I believe the first non-captive owl I ever saw was a barred, in some Georgia or Florida swamp, and I heard them long before I saw one. Southerners hear the owl’s call as “Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you-all?” (This is not the place to get into the semantics of “you-all,” on which Roy Blount Jr. and others have written extensively, or whether the owl has it right.)

About 80 years ago, barred owls began expanding westward. They crossed the Rockies, reached the Pacific Northwest — home of the northern subspecies of the spotted owl — and moved south, crossing the Oregon/California border in 1981. Barred owls have been present at Muir Woods since 2002. They’ve also occupied the Sierra range of the California spotted owl, although at lower densities than in the Northwest. The third spotted subspecies, the Mexican spotted owl, is unaffected as yet.

How exactly would one owl species displace another? While I would not buy the characterization of the spotted owl as passive — it is, after all, a predator — the larger, stronger barred owl is indeed a more formidable bird. Direct predation is one likely pathway of interaction. E.H. Forbush once found the remains of a long-eared owl in the stomach of a barred owl; the long-eared in turn had eaten an eastern screech-owl.

Barred owls can lay more eggs per clutch than spotted owls, although it’s not clear that they consistently fledge more offspring.

Spotted owls are specialist predators, with a limited menu of flying squirrels and woodrats; barred owls will eat anything that moves (see above.) While spotted owls are tied to old growth, barred owls do fine in cutover forests and second growth. Short of predation, there are anecdotal accounts of barred owls bullying spotted owls. The two species also hybridize, with at least 50 documented instances between 1974 and 1999 — a trend that may accelerate as spotted owls become rarer. Looks like a classic case of competitive exclusion, which is an old story. Ask any Neanderthal.

Gutiérrez and colleagues do acknowledge some Rumsfeldian known unknowns: “…we do not know in detail, or with any degree of precision, the rate of barred owl range expansion, the magnitude of the increase in population density, the rate of colonization of different forest types or the nature of interspecific interactions. More importantly, we do not know if declines in spotted owl populations are being caused or simply exacerbated by barred owls.” Hence the suggestion of removal experiments.

This isn’t going to be cheap. In a 2010 article in Northwestern Naturalist, Kent Livezey of the US Fish and Wildlife Service estimates the cost of the projected removal study as a million dollars annually over a 3 to 10 year period, or $700 per barred owl during the first year and $2800 for each subsequent year. Livezey assumes a take of 2150 to 4650 barred owls, numbers conspicuously absent from the Interior press release. (I’ve only seen an abstract of the article so can’t say how close this is to what the Interior Department is about to propose.)

So much for cost. Other considerations will be explored next week.

SENIOR POWER: Women’s History
By Helen Rippier Wheeler
Thu Mar 01 15:04:00 -0800 2012

Shortly before her death in 1998, Bella Abzug declared “They used to give us a day— it was called International Women’s Day. In 1975 they gave us a year, the Year of the Woman. Then from 1975 to 1985 they gave us a decade, the Decade of the Woman. I said at the time, who knows, if we behave they may let us into the whole thing. Well, we didn’t behave and here we are.”

March 8 is International Women’s Day. March 2012 is National Women’s History Month. The theme this year is Women’s Education — Women’s Empowerment.

Why celebrate history of women in particular? Because it is recognition that recorded history still omits females, and that when something is noted about them, it is often distorted or played down, contributing to the misogyny that sustains global sexism.

Why bring this up in a Senior Power context? Because most senior citizens are women, many of whom are alone and low-income.

What may be accomplished in the present and for the future by a glance at the past?

Women have gained some equality (an oxymoron, like partial virginity) in the workplace, but a wage gap based on gender remains. Although enactment of the Equal Pay Act nearly 50 years ago abolished wage differences based on sex/gender, in 2009, the median weekly earnings for female full-time wage and salary workers was 80% what men make.

The fact that women earn less than men has serious repercussions throughout their lives. Reduced salaries mean smaller Social Security payouts and slimmer pension benefits. Many women take time off full-time work to raise a family or care for an aging relative, resulting in fewer years that they can pay into a retirement plan. Women are also more likely to work for smaller firms or part-time in jobs that have no tax-deferred retirement plan.

A recent study shows that, on average, California “working women” make $8,300.00 less per year than men, costing these women about $37 billion annually. The data also suggest that, as women work more hours, the gap between the genders increases. The good news is that the wage gap in California is slowly narrowing and is smaller than the national average. Although women are 50.3% of the state’s population, women are only 28% of California legislators and 16.8% of the U.S. Congress. From the start of the Recovery through May 2011, women lost 218,000 jobs, while men gained 768,000 jobs.

Women now outnumber men in American colleges. However, in comparing then-and-now post-high school enrollments, one should also factor in: the number who actually graduate, how their major concentrations differ, and relative numbers in graduate schools and achieving graduate-level degrees. Researchers and reporters often fail to recognize the significance of whether an institution provides undergraduate and or graduate level matriculation, has full professional and regional accreditations, offers full and or part time study, provides onsite (or any!) class attendance, etc.

The California budget ax has come down on public colleges and universities, resulting in reduced access to higher education, which creates an additional barrier to higher earnings and economic security for women. Since 2007, enrollment in community colleges has declined by 129,612 students, with
women accounting for 81.6% of this decline.

The share of women with jobs dropped over the past year, while the share of men with jobs was flat. Older women remained in the workforce, but were more likely to live in poverty. The poverty rate for older women increased between 2006 and 2012.

The Governor’s 2012/2013 Budget Proposal eliminates the California Commission on the Status of Women, the only official voice for women and girls within state governance.

This Commission will be forced to close its doors in April after 47 years of advocating for California women and their families.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, is often described as an international bill of rights for women. The U.S. has not yet ratified this treaty. In 2008, CEDAW was transferred to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in Geneva.

The Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing mobilized the global women’s movement into strategic alliances and collective power that resulted in participating nations’ commitment to the advancement of women outlined in its Platform for Action. The decennial Fifth World Conference on Women that would have been held in 2005 was not. Will it ever be held?

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How many of these heroes from California’s herstory can you identify?

California’s first woman lawyer, she was active in women’s rights, social welfare and politics. The owner and editor of the West Coast’s oldest black newspaper, The California Eagle, in 1912, seeing no black workers on a visit to the County Hospital, appealed to the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors, who agreed to hire if she sent qualified women; she continued to pressure, and 10 years later the first black secretary and nurses were hired. During her time in UC, B office, she increased the enrollment of women from 1,200 to 6,400 by raising money for scholarships, expanding curriculum and housing opportunities. She encouraged women to participate in student government. During her tenure, the schools of Nursing and Social Welfare and the departments of Home Economics and Decorative Arts were established. She was also involved in the founding of the Women’s Faculty Club, one of the earliest female faculty organizations to exist at a co-ed university. She grew up in Whittier, lived in France and northern California, where her book on aging, Sister Age, was written when she was 75, well known as a gourmet-author. As California’s first female architect, she was one of the first women to attend UC Berkeley as a civil engineering student. The first woman to attend the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. She designed 700+ buildings, was known to climb around the construction sites – in dresses – to supervise the building of her designs. This economist lectured on labor and social policy and wrote stories until she met Jane Addams at the California Women’s Congress in 1895 and was inspired to write the classic Women and Economics, since published in 7 languages. When it was rumored that women were being mistreated at the City Hospital, this San Francisco Examiner journalist threw herself in front of a truck; taken to the hospital by horse cart, her resulting expose caused reforms. She won several civil rights court battles. She was a 19th Century female entrepreneur. Of partial African descent, she was widely known as Mammy Pleasant. She used her fortune to further the abolitionist movement, worked on the Underground Railroad across many states and then helped bring it to California during the Gold Rush Era. She was a friend and financial supporter of John Brown and well known in abolitionist circles. After the Civil War, she took her battles to the courts in the 1860s, and won several civil rights victories, one of which was cited and upheld in the 1980s. She was the first woman to carry the U.S. mail as a stagecoach driver. Her father was the Wells Fargo stage line agent, and when one of his regular drivers became ill, she was given the chance to take over. She became a regular backup driver. Born into slavery, provided no formal education, she learned about midwifery and herbal remedies from other slave women. The family she worked for eventually made her free. Inspired by Candacy Taylor¹s result on the underground railroad, she was known to climb around the construction sites. As a mid-wife and later with a Los Angeles doctor. Living frugally, she was able to save enough money to purchase a home – one of the first African American women to own land in Los Angeles. ANSWERS in next week’s column

MARK YOUR CALENDAR. Readers are welcome to share by email news of future events and deadlines that may interest boomers, seniors and elders. Daytime, free, and Bay Area events preferred. pen136@dslextreme.com.


Friday, March 2, 12:15-1 P.M. UC,B Dept. of Music students perform chamber music. Free. Hertz Concert Hall. 510-642-4864.


Tuesday, March 6, 7 – 8 P.M. San Ramon Library Foundation Book Club. San Ramon Library. 100 Montgomery St. This month we’re reading Death Comes for the Archbishop, by Willa Cather. Newcomers are welcome to drop in at any time! 925-973-2850.


Wednesdays, March 7 and 14, 9 A.M. – 1 P.M. Mastick Senior Center, 1155 Santa Clara Ave. , Alameda. AARP Driver Safety Program. Designed for individuals 50+, this 8 hour course is taught in 2, 4-hour sessions over a 2-day period. Preregistration required; cost is $12 per person for AARP members, $14 non-AARP members. Registration payable by check ONLY, made payable to AARP. Sign up in the Mastick Office. 510-747-7506.

Thursday, March 8, 4:30 P.M. Kensington Library, 61 Arlington Av. eReader Workshop. Please bring your own device and library card to the workshop.

Free. No reservations needed. 510-524-3043. See also March 15.
Thursday, March 8, 6:30 P.M. El Cerrito Library, 6510 Stockton Avenue. Join board certified psychologist Dr. Marshall Zaslove for an evening meditation workshop and interaction. He will base his presentation on the book, Inner and Outer Peace through Meditation, by Rajinder Singh. 510-526-7512.

Sunday, March 11, 1:30 – 4:30 P.M. Book Into Film. Central Berkeley Public Library, 2090 Kittredge St. Discussion group participants will read the book Between A Rock And A Hard Place at home and then to view the film adaptation. Following the film, participants will discuss the book, the film and the adaptation process.

Sponsored by the Friends of the Library, this free Book Into Film program offers adult and teen patrons the opportunity to discuss. 510-981-6100.

Sunday, March 11, 2:30-3:30 P.M. Concord Library, 3900 Savio St. The Concord Library Mystery Book Club meets on the second Sunday of each month. The book for March will be The Cold Dish (A Walt Longmire Mystery) by Craig Johnson. Free. 925-646-5455


Monday, March 12. 7 P.M. Kensington Library, 61 Arlington Avenue.

Berkeley Repertory Theatre discussion. A docent from the Berkeley Repertory Theatre will discuss the current production, Moliere’s A Doctor in Spite of Himself, the traditional story of a girl, who feigns illness to avoid an unwanted wedding. Free. 510- 524-3043

Tuesday, March 13. 1:30 P.M. . Mastick Senior Center, 1155 Santa Clara Ave., Alameda. Douglas Borchert, J.D., SBC, underwriting counsel, columnist, will present “The America’s Cup: Racing the Wind.” Sign up in the Mastick Office or call 510-747-7506. This program is sponsored by the Mastick Senior Center Advisory Board.

Tuesday, March 13, 6:30-7:30 P.M. Pleasant Hill Library, 1750 Oak Park Blvd. Book Pleasant Hill Library Book Club. Meet other readers for fun engaged discussions. We will be reading The Lost City of Z: A Tale of Deadly Obsession in the Amazon by David Grann. 925-646-6434.


Thursday, March 15, 4:30 P.M. Kensington Library, 61 Arlington Av. eReader Workshop. Please bring your own device and library card to the workshop. Free. No reservations needed. 510-524-3043.

Sunday, March 18. 2 – 3:15 P.M. San Francisco Shakespeare presents Macbeth. Central Berkeley Public Library, 2090 Kittredge St. The touring company presents a 55 minute production of the “Scottish play” with costumes, props, sets and recorded music. Stay for a Q&A session with the actors. 510-981-6100.


Wednesday, March 21, 7:00- 8:00 P.M. Albany branch library, 1247 Marin Av. Adult Evening Book Group: Pat Barker’s Regeneration. When poet and soldier Siegfried Sassoon writes a letter critical of England’s efforts in World War I, he is sent to a mental hospital where Dr. W. H. R. Rivers tries to help patients express their war memories as a means of healing their “nerves.” Rosalie Gonzales facilitates the discussion. Come to one meeting, or all meetings. Books are available at the Library. 510- 526-3720.

Friday, March 23, 12:15-1 P.M. Bustan Debsy Quartet. Free Noon Concert Series. Lecture/demonstration: Co-sponsored event: Highlights: Hertz Concert Hall. Visiting Israeli group demonstrates their work in crafting new means of musical expression from diverse resources. Tickets not required. 510-642-4864.

Saturday, March 24. Berkeley Public Library North Branch final open day for BranchVan Service at Live Oak Park will be Saturday, March 24, 2012.

Monday, April 9. 11:30 – 1:30 A.M. Older Adult Passover Seder. Jewish Community Center of the East Bay, Berkeley Branch 1414 Walnut Street. Kosher meal will include chicken and matzo ball soup, gefilte fish with horseradish sauce, fresh green salad w/ hard boiled eggs, roasted chicken, matzoh kugel, and wine. The Seder will be led by Ron Feldman. $10 JCC East Bay Member. $13 Non-Member. RSVP by March 29. Contact: Front DeskPhone: 510-848-0237. Email: samy@jcceastbay.org

Saturday, April 14. Berkeley Public Library Claremont Branch’s final open day for BranchVan Service at St. John’s Presbyterian Church.

ON MENTAL ILLNESS: Addressing the Problem of Noncompliance Among People with Schizophrenia

By Jack Bragen
Sat Mar 03 18:59:00 -0800 2012

Noncompliance of people with schizophrenia with treatment including not taking medication has been a problem for a very long time that adversely affects
many people’s quality of life. The dilemma between protecting someone’s civil rights (which we fought for in order to improve the conditions of our lives and which was intended to prevent inhumane treatment in mental health facilities) versus protecting a person essentially from their own folly (because of the willingness of many people with schizophrenia to let a mind-altering disease go untreated) has been a major issue of contention for decades.

When someone is given a 5150, and subsequently a 5250, that person is under a court order that they will be given treatment, by force if needed, for up to two weeks. The court has traditionally been liberal about deeming a person not a danger to one’s self or others and not gravely disabled such that many who should be forcibly treated are not.

The first change I would suggest is to somewhat extend the criteria for a 51 or 5250. An additional criterion that can be added would be to “50” a person if unable to provide for his or her basic needs [such as going to the store and buying a loaf of bread] due to a mental illness. Such a criterion would be less offensive than the one Laura’s Law provides which says they are subject to forced treatment if refusing medication due to the lack of judgment caused by their illness [not in those exact words]. The problem I have with theLaura’s Law criteria is that the patient is presumed incompetent based on making the choice to refuse treatment. The fact that I take medication to an extent by choice and not because a law is mandating it makes a huge difference to me, to my quality of life, and to my attitude toward treatment practitioners.

The second change that I would introduce is to create a 5350, which would mandate treatment for two or three months, a long enough time period, if someone is still unable to provide for his or her basic needs, to consider mental health treatment facilities provide humane treatment and quality of care. If we are to be forced into treatment by a governmental mandate, it becomes the responsibility of that government to make that treatment humane, free of malpractice, and respectful of basic human dignity.

MY COMMONPLACE BOOK (a diary of excerpts copied from printed books, with comments added by the reader.)

By Dorothy Bryant
Fri Mar 02 13:33:00 -0800 2012

You have every right to be happy no matter what. If other people are unhappy, you do the best you can for them . . . but you do not deny yourself happiness on their account. It does them no real good if you do. On the contrary . . . so be happy for other people’s sake as well as for your own sake. And if you believe in God, be happy for God’s sake too because that is what God created you to be.—Frederick Buechner (clergyman, author), from The Clown in the Belfry (a book for young people)

Advice to young people? Buechner’s advice is invaluable at any age, and whatever your religious beliefs!

I remember the time in Berkeley (1965—1980ish?) when we protested errors and atrocities of American foreign policy, the plight of the poor, racism, etc. I marched with friends in most of the protests, attended meetings, did countless readings of my work at benefits for good causes, and against bad ones. But that didn’t seem to be enough for some friends. If I mentioned how much I’d enjoyed a local performance of a concert, a comic movie, or a classic play, they looked at me disapprovingly, as if I could do more against war, poverty, racism, etc. by denying myself pleasure in the good things they and I were lucky to have, the pleasures we were trying to win for everyone with our protests.

Today, I would say what I should have said (so politically incorrectly!) thirty-odd years ago: if there’s something I can give or say or write that will help, I’ll do it. But don’t ask me to stop feeling happy whenever I can: grateful for live music, inspired by a good poetry reading, reveling in good bookstores (fewer today—alas), an excellent public library, and the spillover of cultural riches from a great university.

Maybe becoming un-guilt-trip-able is one benefit of age.

(Send the Berkeley Daily Planet a page from your own Commonplace Book)

EATS, SHOOTS ‘N” Leaves: Occupy Education Rally at UC Berkeley on Thursday

By Richard Brenneman
Wed Feb 29 12:55:00 -0800 2012

Forwarded by a friend:

Thursday, March 1 begins a series of nationwide actions around public education coordinated by Occupy Education. At UC Berkeley, March 1 will include a daylong student strike, an Open University, a noon rally on Sproul Plaza, and a march to Oakland where we will converge with other East Bay schools at Oscar Grant Plaza. While the massive cuts to public education in California have clear roots in the systemic failures of our state government and financial system, we cannot ignore the active role upper administrators at the UC continue to play in the privatization of our university. Nor can we afford to forget that administrators like Chancellor Robert Birgeneau and Provost George Breslauer have repeatedly ordered the brutal criminalization of Cal students, faculty, workers, and community members. We will kick off March 1 at UC Berkeley with a protest against the UC administration for its mishandling of university resources and repression of campus activism. Please join us at 7:30am to begin this protest outside of California Hall where much of the upper administration works (including Chancellor Birgeneau).

To make visible the thievery and brutality regularly administered from inside California Hall, we will be encircling the entire building with crime scene tape.

Please join us, and feel free to bring
your own signs, banners, etc. Also, please forward this friends, departments, and other interested parties.

We really like that crime scene tape.

Arts & Entertainment

Lou Harrison: A World of Music: Premiere Screening on Tuesday, March 6

Reviewed by Gar Smith
Mon Mar 05 16:58:00-0800 2012

Eva Soltes’ long-awaited film, Lou Harrison: A World of Music, is just as charming, playful and soulful as its titular subject. It is only now that Harrison (who died in 2003) is becoming recognized as one of the greatest composers of the 20th century. A World of Music will certainly help bring Harrison’s genius to a larger audience.

In a nice break from documentary tradition, Soltes begins by reshuffling the familiar “family photo album” routine to show us images of Lou “growing down” — becoming younger and more innocent with each new snapshot. One striking realization: how much Lou, in his twenties, resembled another American prodigy — Orson Wells.

Like Wells, Harrison was his own man and was not at all interested in following convention. His insistence on pursuing marvel over mimicry meant that much of his work vanished beneath the din of prevailing musical trends. During a time when dissonance ruled the orchestral world, Harrison continued to pursue “delight over duty,” finding inspiration in “junkyard percussion,” in the brass gamelans of Indonesia, in Korean dance, ballet, opera and in the cadences of Esperanto.

Over his 60-plus years of composing, Harrison worked with fellow legends like choreographers Merce Cunningham and Mark Morris (both interviewed in the film) and avant-garde composers like John Cage. It was Harrison, in the early decades of the previous century, who worked with Charles Ives to hone the music that would eventually win a Pulitzer Prize. (And there is stunning archival footage of Harrison, as a young man, leading a major performance of Ives’ work.)

Harrison has a varied and eclectic career. He worked in the dance department at Mills College. He wrote music reviews for the New York Herald Tribune. He traveled to San Quentin for “lessons through bars” with his mentor, the composer Henry Cowell (imprisoned in the 1930s for “homosexual activity”). And, finally, he returned to the woods of northern California to devote himself, full-time, to the music that seemed to flow from his mind like unbridled rivulets feeding a greater river.

One of Harrison’s greatest accomplishments was pulling off a production of what may be the world’s first, flat-out gay opera. “Young Caesar” celebrated the early loves of Rome’s greatest emperor. At the end of the first show, one of the wealthy dowagers in the crowd remarked about how much she enjoyed the “colorful little birds” that could be seen flying about the stage on nearly invisible strings. It came as a shock when someone explained to her: “Those were not birds, madam. Those were tiny flying penises.”

Soltes spent 20 years filming her friend Lou — traveling to gigs, composing at home, building new instruments with his partner Bill. And, given the massive amount of footage she must have acquired, Soltes imposed admirable artistic restraint by avoiding extended interviews and offering, instead, many small moments that stand out like gems.

Soltes has not only managed to capture Harrison’s impish personality and fierce professionalism, she also has created a visual composition that is wonderfully rich, colorful and layered. Photos ebb and flow behind the lines of handwritten letters enhanced by Lou’s distinctive calligraphy. Soltes’ camera moves over landscapes of manuscripts and books viewed at incredible proximity where the background is blurred and each new document relaxes into perfect focus as the camera drifts past. And there are sly visual puns embedded in the film (watch for the image on the screen as the film speaks of Lou “pushing the circle”).

Soltes’ cinema concerto beautifully compliments Harrison’s music as small, telling details are caught by her lens to be sewn into a visual sonata of shapes and light. The image may be a small as a close-up of the curl of a resting hand or as grand as the powerful cloud of steam pouring from a locomotive, seen from above, as it rockets down the rails over an unending landscape. Other images that move and linger: The quiet happiness that radiates from Bill’s face as Lou praises him for his ability and artistry. Lou hovering over Bill, dying in his hospital bed, and leaning down for one last kiss.

Lou’s music swells and prances throughout the film, seeping beneath the skin and leaving this viewer so sensitized that, by the end of the film, the mere image of a shadow falling across a painted door moved me to tears.

SF Orchestra Conductor Michael Tilson Thomas (who has done much to spotlight and celebrate Harrison’s music) offers this perfect assessment of the gentleman and his music: “The greatest artists have the ability to make us really understand what it’s like to be in their skin. And what makes [Lou] such a treasure is that, when you do realize what it’s like to be in his skin, you say: ‘Gosh! What a great place to be!’”

Special Premiere Screening at San Francisco’s Castro Theater on March 6

To benefit the Harrison House of Music & Arts

(With a special performance by Terry Riley on the mighty Wurlitzer)

7:30 PM, $25

Just Do It: A Tale of Modern Day Outlaws

By Gar Smith
Tue Mar 06 11:14:00-0800 2012

Screening at the Green Film Festival in San Francisco, March 7, 7:30 PM

Closing night premiere and party at the SF Film Society Cinema, 1748 Post St.

Just Do It, Emily James’ bright and engaging eco-doc, takes a cheeky reality-show look at environmental activism. A big hit in the UK, where much of the action is set, Just Do It has finally “crossed the pond.” (In addition to the Green Film Fest screening, Just Do It will be showing at college campuses and Occupy encampments across the country. For info on scheduling a “community screening” see the contact info at the end of this review.)

With dry British wit and droll commentary, the film documents the lifestyle of a fun-loving clutch of creative and good-natured British activists. Filmmaker James was given rare permission to tag along for more than a year as this eclectic group of “professional domestic extremists” busied themselves by “hiding, running around” and generally proving a good-humored annoyance to the 1%. This is the world of Climate Camp, an ad hoc collective of environmental activists who take their agit-prop cue from Greenpeace.

The action starts up in 2009 (well before the US Occupy Movement sprang to life) with the studied comments of a proper British lady who insists on bringing tea to her demos — for protesters and police alike. (She
believes in protesting sober … and saving the booze for the after-parties.) “I don’t mind being arrested,” she opines primly. “It doesn’t matter if it’s small or if it’s dodgy. Just do it!”

The action begins with an April Fool’s Day protest of the G-20 summit in London. Our cheery band of outlaws (complete with brass band) joins a protest that turns London’s financial district into a street party. Tragically, as the demos are winding down, the police accidentally killed an innocent Londoner walking home near the protests. Because the death was filmed, it became a scandal too large to ignore, prompting a call to reform police procedures and usher in an era of “kindly coppers and tea.” (As it turns out, the détente would be tested in the months ahead.)

**An Alliance on the Isle**

A protest erupts at the Isle of Wight after a wind turbine factory is closed and 400 workers are laid off. The workers opt to occupy the factory and the London activists show up to declare their support.

The plant’s multinational owners intend to starve the workers out but this strategy fails when the protesters start filling tennis balls with grub and hurling the green balls over the barricades to the hungry workers. At one point, a crowd of women carrying shopping bags loaded with fresh-baked fish-and-chips breach the factory fence, race across the lawn, and begin hurling the food to workers on the rooftops—as rattled police run back and forth trying (and failing) to deal with the unexpected anarchic situation.

“We took direct action,” one woman chuckles as she recalls that day. “We did it with manners and we did it with courage and we did it with humor.” Acutely embarrassed by the publicity, the multinational announced it would start feeding its striking former employees.

We meet a young Cambridge University student who moonlights as an activist and chains herself to the private home of a government official to protest lack of financial support for clean, renewable energy. No sooner is she out of jail than she’s swept up in protests targeting the banks that finance global warming.

Although the film shows some disturbing clips of police violence, the real focus of *Just Do It* is trained on the humor and energy of the activists. The message of the movie is crystal clear: Activism! What fun!

“Climate Camp is all about making things happen,” one happy Climate Camper explains. The collective is self-sustaining and consensus-governed and its goal is clear: “Here we are, in London. Taking on the Capitalists. Which is quite scary. For the Capitalists….”

Listening to properly accented English ladies reveling in recollections of their rebel behavior, you can’t help feeling like you’re on the ramparts with crew from Monty Python. As one of the more senior rascals warns: “We’re prepared to do all sorts of naughty things….”

**Just Do It** offers a close look into the intimate group process of debating tactics and finding consensus. Things are a bit different in Britain, though. Instead of holding up a hand to get recognized, our UK colleagues pop up their hands and wiggle their fingers to gain attention.

**Occupying Over a Bank**

In preparation for a raid on the World Bank of Scotland (targeted for bankrolling fossil fuel projects), we get to look in on a rehearsal where the young activists practice the quick application of metal arm-tubes and neck bolts. Rehearsed and ready, the camera tags along for the action. It looks like a normal day in London. People stroll about innocently until, suddenly, individuals begin to coalesce from the crown and approach the bank entrance. Some carry banners and some carry ladders. Dressed as construction workers, they shut off the entrance and declare it to be under an “Ethical Renovation.”

Inside the bank, the SuperGlue Crew takes its stand — by sitting on the floor, held in place by superglue. To cement their determination, they all spurt superglue into their palms and join hands. It’s a well-coordinated agit-mob action.

A banking rep steps forth to inform the protestors that they will be arrested if they don’t leave. And here’s where it gets surreal. Since this is London, and not Oakland, the supervising officer called to the scene actually asks the activists: “Is there anything we can do to convince you not to be arrested?”

The seated protestors reply conversationally: “Well, could you convince the bank to stop investing in fossil fuel industries and change over to serious investment in renewables?”

But there are other battles to be waged. A third runway is proposed for Britain’s sprawling Heathrow International. The new stretch of tarmac would take out rows of stately middleclass homes (and a local cemetery) to make room for more kerosene-fueled aircraft.

Quicker than you can say, “Just do it!” banners are being dropped from the roof of the House of Parliament and “runway occupations” are underway to shut down take-offs and landings. These outlaws, who have dubbed their movement “Plane Stupid,” have chosen to dedicate a year of their lives to defend an imperiled community from Heathrow Tarmacking.

Snipping a wire fence, Plane Stupid activists occupy some of the threatened land — an abandoned tract with an old greenhouse on it. They begin what becomes known as the Grow Heathrow Project. A community garden springs up to feed the neighbors.

“These young people started something in our hearts,” an elderly resident says. “We’ll be in there doing something, too,” she adds with a laugh. “And it won’t be legal. You can bet on that!”

It’s a uniquely British occupation where the day’s protests begin with the call: “Crumpets everybody!” As an outlaw encampment sets down roots, hot toasted buns are trotted out for one and all—including the police. As an encampment lingers some protesters and police grow so close they bond. When the order finally comes to dismantle the camp, two ladies embrace. One is a protester, the other wears a police uniform. As the demolition commences, a women is heard screaming: “I’m not going to leave without my kettle! I need my kettle!”

Looking back on her arrest that day, one of the women reflects: “The only way we can win is if more and more people agree that the law is an ass. Rosa Parks sat down on a bus and the law changed—because a lot of people agreed with her.”

**The Goal: Not Coal**

The action next shifts to the second-largest coal-fired power station in the UK. In the past, the outlaws have taken great pains to hide their plans (even going to the point of removing batteries from their cell phones, speaking in code, and passing critical information around on scraps of paper, to be read, not said). This time, the strategy is different. The plan to shut down the power plant is announced in advance. No secrecy. No surprise. The police take up positions first, behind barricades of razor wire, with helicopters hovering above.

“Coal industry emissions are directly destroying our planet,” the outlaws explain. “It’s not enough to protest. We actually need to take direct action.”

James’ camera follows one Affinity Group as it cuts its way through woodland fences and travels cross-country to the plant.

The advance notice not only brought out the police, it also brought in hundreds of volunteers from around the country. So, when the protestors behind to emerge from the forests, it’s like a scene from the movie *Bravehart*! The protesters begin moving
across a great panorama of grass toward a line of neon-jacketed police with the stacks of the coal plant towering behind them outlined against the sky. But as they cross the meadow toward the police line, the marchers are singing! Lead by a young girl’s voice, a chorus rises over the grasslands. My lord, it is a gladly stirring moment.

Hundreds of young men and women from all over the UK who have spontaneously answered the call to close the coal plant, swarm the high-tech fences and begin to clip away at the steel wall until there is room to climb between the gaps. Fingers reach into the wire mesh and begin to wrestle the barrier to the ground.

As one of the women observes: “You can do frightfully nice picnics but sometimes you have to get messy.”

This being England, the police are remarkably restrained. Unlike their US counterparts who like to attend these First Amendment events dressed in military camo and battle gear—complete with chemical weapons, tasers and assault rifles—the British troops are armed only with shields and small sticks.

The outlaws argue for the efficacy of a new strategy called De-arrest. If someone is being detained, he or she yells: “De-Arrest!” This signals other activists to flock to the scene and nonviolently overpower the arresting officer, thereby freeing the individual. As one protestor notes, De-Arresting makes the job of the police “exponentially much harder.”

Although they fail to shut the plant down that day, there is a deep pleasure in knowing that “the spectacle of thousands of ordinary people deciding to become outlaws sent a very powerful message.”

The COP-2 Cop Out

Back in London, the outlaws prepare for the largest climate change protest in UK history. This time, the activists come to the event dressed in their best capitalist business suits and dresses. In full-satire mode, they march and call for Carbon Trading and “Power to the Privileged.” “We’re bankers! Give us your money.”

And then the Copenhagen Climate Change conference looms on the horizon.

Despite having their bus stopped at the border by Danish police who insist on checking passports, our Affinity Group makes it to Copenhagen’s Bella Center. They set up shop at an abandoned candy factory that has been turned into a people’s workshop that builds, and rebuilds, bicycles.

The goal of the demonstrations will be to oppose the primacy of “free-market capital-sist solutions” to the climate crisis. The host government is determined to discourage protests and gives the police new powers to detain anyone for 40 days for “obstruction.”

More than 200,000 showed up to challenge the delegates’ “One Solution, Trade Pollution” approach. The protests are peaceful during the day but toward the evening, the Danish police use their new powers to detain 968 protestors. Denmark’s Politi show up with batons and snarling, snapping dogs. Soon, the Politi will begin openly sporting guns. “We have our orders,” one policeman apologizes, “We don’t know the reasons, but we have our orders.”

Lauren Simpson, the film’s producer, is arrested on charges of violating anti-terrorism laws and hauled off to a Danish jail. Marital law prevails as the Politi viciously club arrested on charges of violating anti-terrorism laws and hauled off to a Danish jail. Marital law prevails as the Politi viciously club armed unarmy activists. Bikes are seized, arms are twisted, faces are bashed. Activists are forced to sit on road in a blizzard for an hour while waiting to be removed to the “chicken coop,” where hundreds of arrestees from all over the world share the solidarity that comes from common confinement.

The world’s second Conference of Parties (COP-2) was declared a “cop-out.” Having failed to mandate firm reductions in greenhouse gases, the delegates simply postponed dealing with the planet’s escalating climate problems to a future date. The failure of COP-2 was blamed on the US specifically and on capitalism in general.

Many of the outlaws returned from Copenhagen with a new focus. The violence of the police proved a radicalizing force. Instead of simply focusing on climate change, many were now looking at the bigger problem — “capitalism and social control.”

Ending capitalism “is the only viable solution to climate change,” one of the outlaws now believes. “Every time it comes back to money and power and I see capitalism as the epitome of money and power.” It is easy to be discouraged when so much effort is expended and so little is changed, he says, “but even if you know something is futile, you still have to try. And, who knows, you might even surprise yourself.”

The film ends on an upbeat note with not one, but three, happy endings: In 2010, a crew of 20 Climate Campers on bikes pedaled through security in the middle of the night to occupy a British coal plant. After climbing the cooling towers and chaining themselves to a conveyor belt, they succeed in closing the plant (and ending its pollution) for three days. After years of protests, the coal company decided to cancel its plans to build a new coal-fueled station. In May 2010, plans for the third Heathrow runway were abandoned. In December 2010, Danish courts ruled that the preventative detention arrests at COP-2 were illegal.

That’s more than enough evidence to justify the documentary’s closing comment: “Anyone out there who’s thinking of doing something more…just do it!”

To organize your own community screening, go to: http://justdoitfilm.com/community


To find out how to get engaged in your own direct action, go to: http://justdoitfilm.com/action

EYE FROM THE AISLE: “ISHI, the last of the Yahi” reprise at UCB Zellerbach Playhouse

by John A. McMullen II
Tue Mar 06 11:17:00 -0800 2012

Intae Kim, Chris Herold

At Zellerbach Playhouse on the UC Berkeley Campus, the opening scene of John Fisher’s ISHI, the last of the Yahi, appropriately enough, is a lecture by a young anthropology professor who relates the shocking incident—enacted for us—of a starving gold prospector who kills and eats a Native American. In the first of many action scenes, the prospector chases him around the spacious Playhouse underscored by banjo breakdown music (think “Smoky and the Bandit”). Finally, the weakened prospector shoots the Indian and eats him (offstage).

I scratched my head. Was this a comic scene? Why didn’t the prospector just shoot him to begin with instead of chasing him? And how could a starving man keep up the chase like that?

That was my question at the start of the play. My question at the end of the play—
THREE HOURS LATER—was why didn’t award-winning playwright John Fisher take this opportunity to rewrite this play that premiered four years ago at Theatre Rhino with an eye to shortening and tightening this intriguing script.

“ISHI, the last of the Yahi” is epic in its breadth. It is about the genocide of the Native American tribes as financed by the legislature of California by way of a $5 bounty per head. It is about a man whose culture was destroyed and was starving in the wilderness before giving up and coming into the white man’s town of Oroville in 1911, fully expecting to be killed. It is about the anthropologist who befriends him to study him. It is about ambition, using others, and then turning on them. It is about man’s criminally ambitious culture, under the motto, “Homo homini lupus” (trans., man is a wolf to man). It has a little O’Neill, a little Albee, and a lot of history that UCB TDPS department lecturer Fisher liberally tweaks with poetic license.

Telling this tale educates us about the horrors and blood-money on which our society is founded.

Emotionally, its intention must be to break our hearts for this abandoned man and how his story affects those who first hear it.

Regrettably, by the end of the evening, the result is numbness from the length and repetition of horrors.

Lately, I watched “Angels in America,” and at the end of Part Two, “Perestroika,” it goes on and on lecturing, till finally it undoes much of the great writing and acting that came before, like a guest or lover who won’t go away after the final goodbyes are said: ISHI is much like that.

Nevertheless, it’s a play about Berkeley and California and White Guilt that should be seen, but prepare yourself with a double espresso first.

With a cast of 18, ISHI is a tale told in the aftermath: after the massacres, after the ambition has subsided, after the affairs have been played out. The tale is told through flashbacks and the telling of secrets — secrets that bond one another by their sharing while breeding familiar contempt.

The plays’ historical characters like Phoebe Hearst and Alfred Kroeber after whom the Anthropology Museum and building are named (situated opposite Pacific Film Archives on Bancroft) should be immediately recognizable to the student and faculty audience.

Intae Kim, who is a virile young UCB student of Korean heritage, plays Ishi. The real Ishi was 49 and emaciated when he came out of the wilderness. Mr. Kim was stolidly effective in the role when not putting on a falsely lowered growling voice in a contrived idea of the speech of Native Americans. Admittedly, the casting puzzled me when I’ve seen so many Hispanic students walking across campus who much more closely resemble Ishi than this Asian actor; but by the second act, one relaxed into the cross-cultural casting.

Chris Herold, an Equity actor and a department lecturer, is well-cast in the lead as Andrew Kroeber who is building a world class anthropology department at UCB and finds this living treasure trove named Ishi. Herold even looks like photos of the real Kroeber. Students often learn by acting with their teachers; playing with your betters is always instructive and betters one’s game.

At first, the rest of the student cast vastly overacted, but later settled into a semblance of naturalism.

This was due perhaps to a misguided attempt at “big” acting to fill up the large theatre.

The vocal production of the student actors set my teeth on edge. In their attempt to be heard in the Playhouse, they pushed till I could feel their vocal chords rasp against each other. It is an indictment of the department that the students have not been tutored in this important skill. There is far too much shouting in the play which also has a tendency to numb us emotionally.

Exceptions are: supporting player Emma Nichols as Kroeber’s suffragette “man-hating,” sister-in-law Charlotte who brings a clear and cutting character fashioned on the Oscar Wilde/Ambrose Bierce model of biting and witty humor, and Fisher’s dialogue shines in their clashes; and Matthew Capbarat as Kroeber’s protégé young professor Thomas Waterman, who is convincing and natural in his role, though his acting is in broad strokes and could be enhanced with nuance and subtext. As Ishi’s sister, Nancy Martinez Soto’s physical expressiveness of emotional extremes brings us closer to pathos than any other moment.

Fisher’s poetic license transforms the Texas-born, outdoorsman very male doctor Saxton Pope who attends Ishi into a bisexual British woman played by Kirsten Luise Peacock, who employs an overdone Received dialect. A linchpin of the story is Kroeber’s relationship with his dying, tubercular wife Henrietta, played by lovely Gwen Kingston, who ostensibly infects Ishi which eventually kills him.

Another nagging question was why Kroeber and the others were not infected from such close contact since a vaccine didn’t arrive till ten years later. Would Henrietta not have been in a sanatorium? Though tuberculosis is the world’s leading cause of death in humans from a single infectious agent, modern audiences don’t know much about it. Questions like these tend to pull one out of the story to ponder the congruity, and could well be addressed in the play.

The counterpoint direction of John Fisher on the very large stage — where action is happening at one end while a conversation ensues in another — is always in harmony. The ultimate expressionistic story-telling device — pre-recorded, voiced-over thoughts — of both Ishi and Kroeber work seamlessly and are sometimes comic, often poignant. But of all the story-telling methods Mr. Fisher uses, a notably ingenious one is the format of translating Ishi’s conversation: the translator makes the first translation, after which the two for whom he is translating merely talk as if it is being translated; it is a sure and easy convention that solves what could have been a clunky problem.

The set design by Annie Smart and costumes by Wendy Sparks are sumptuous in design. A wonderfully grand period staircase and an Edwardian/Californian bedroom would account for the entire yearly budget of many departments. Women’s fashions in this period were based on Early Art Deco and were works of art, and Ms. Sparks does justice to that tradition: the fabrics and beading bring one immediately into the wealth and style of the period. Drop-down transparent silk 70’s silk screen with sometimes violent, sometimes lovely pictures and paintings add stunning and instructive visuals. The lighting design of David K.H. Elliot is masterful in its change of place and mood and isolation of scenes.

The middle of the stage is taken up with a 60’ plus tiered sunken recess nearly six feet deep. (I remember it being filled with water for Mary Zimmerman’s “Metamorphosis” a few years ago.) It is well-used by Fisher’s direction as a river, and many other imaginative sites. In many of the wild chase scenes of massacre all around the auditorium, even up to the catwalks, the athletic cast repeatedly leaps into this pool and lands with bone-crunching percussion which shocks us and serves as a resonant metaphor for the hardness and violence of the times.

The tickets are inexpensive, it’s worth your time, and it’s important to support the department and the students, so I recommend it. I also recommend that you check out this link for a quick little background be-
fore you go: http://hearstmuseum.berkeley.edu/outreach/pdfs/ishi_teaching_kit.pdf

**ISHI, the last of the Yahi**

Written and directed by John Fisher
UCB Zellerbach Playhouse through March 15
510.642.8827 http://tdps.berkeley.edu/productions-events/tickets-subscriptions/

Scenic design Annie Smart, costume design Wendy Sparks, lighting design David K. H. Elliot, sound design Scott Koue, original music composition Don Seaver. Stage management by Valerie Tu.

**WITH:** Audrey Baker, Evan Bartz, Shireen Beygui, Matthew Capbarat, Daryl Green, Christopher Herold*, Khizer Iqbal, Sanford Jackson, Kayal Khanna, Intae Kim, Gwen Kingston, Michael J. Kunze, Nancy Martinez Soto, Emma Nichols, Kirsten Luisa Peacock, Devon Roe, Michael Rosen, Joaquin Ticonderoga

*member, Actors Equity Association

**John A. McMullen II is a member of the SF Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle, American Theatre Critics Association, and Stage Directors and Choreographers Society. E J Dunne edits.**

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**EYE FROM THE AISLE:**

Henne’s MESMERIC REVELATION at Central Works at Berkeley City Club—exquisite and challenging!

By John A. McMullen II
Thu Mar 01 15:21:00 -0800 2012

MESMERIC REVELATION, written and directed by Aaron Henne, is a special play of intellectual depth and exquisite performance now at Central Works at the Berkeley City Club. It is appropriate that Aaron Henne should present this profound and concentrated 80-minute argument in this special community. It might not play in Peoria, but for those theatre-goers who have a sense of intellectual history and are concerned about the current cultural battles, this is a must-see.

It is a decade before the French Revolution. Anton Mesmer has been summoned before the French royally sanctioned scientific accrediting committee, and is being interrogated by Antoine Lavoisier. Mesmer’s theory and practice emphasize the movement of life energy through distinct channels in the body. It would fit in naturally with many homeopathic and Eastern medical philosophies current in the Bay Area. Lavoisier argues for empirical, repeatable, demonstrable results, akin to what we now deem the scientific method, albeit in its incipient phase. When the basis of one’s world is a belief in God and that the King has been chosen by God, and the committee is sanctioned by the King, scientific inquiry is easily sullied and questionable. Sullied science is not that hard to imagine: remember when “W” was in office?

Mesmer wants to put on a demonstration of his method, but is stifled by Lavoisier, who only wishes to cross-examine and to limit the proceedings to a Socratic dialectic.

Mesmer is Austrian, which is where the unpopular Queen Marie Antoinette is from. His treatment is becoming influential, but the royal family fears and distrusts his practices.

Henne’s fascinating prose takes on an almost poetic resonance when delivered by these two accomplished Shakespearean actors Joe Jordan (Mesmer) and Theo Black (Lavoisier). Exceedingly tall, elegantly thin, costumed impeccably by Tammy Berlin in jabots, frockcoats, lace-trimmings and breeches, they are subtle and graceful in their movements, and both their physiognomies and comportment transport you to Enlightenment Paris.

The set is perfectly symbolic and emblematic: one ornate chair. Who is “in the chair” is essential to any courtroom drama, and serves the reversals well. This is an exemplary display of the wonderment of simple theatre of the imagination where the words of the playwright, a perfectly attended costume, and the abilities of the players can transport you. There are accoutrements that set the stage: above the ornate hearth in the 50 x 20 room that is the theatre in the “Little Castle” of the City Club hangs a portrait of Marie Antoinette with a set of Encyclopedia on the mantle with fleur de lys bookends which are in turn bookended by gold candlesticks with lit candles. In the three niches atop the wall we find a miniature human skeleton with a magnifying glass positioned upon it for inspection, a miniature telescope, and some colored aqueous solutions in decanters and beakers. The preshow Baroque opera assists in setting it in a world where form and rules held sway.

The third player is the lighting. Designed by Gary Graves and operated with symphonic timing by Gregory Scharpen, the lighting enhances the drama as if dancing with the players and is almost hypnotic in its effect. The two actors often nearly dance the parts, sometimes in a fluid pas de deux, next in a nearly jarring apache. The sound design and operation by Scharpen expressionistically mirror actions from psychic collisions to Mesmer’s impassioned playing of his mellifluous glass harmonica.

Mesmer’s method was part hypnotism; his thesis is the need for release from blockages. This is a century before Freud, who likewise used hypnotism to unblock his patients. In the major reversal, Lavoisier accedes to undergoing a treatment by Mesmer there and then, and secrets are unlocked which takes the play from the Apollonian world of thought to the dark recesses of the Dionysiac subconscious and repressed childhood sexual memories.

The mind reels at the implications this short drama invokes. Their dialogue, set in the days before that Revolution, resonates today with the division between workers who have little time for deep thought and those in power, in the politics from Santorum to Sharia, and what future culture clashes might bode.

I vituperatively panned Henne’s last play at Central Works, “A Man’s Home,” about Kafka. My opinion and esteem of his abilities have reversed; in this effort, he writes with the acumen and talent of Stoppard. If you liked Tolstoy’s “The Grand Inquisitor,” or Central Work’s Gary Graves’ “The Prince,” or Stoppard’s “Every Good Boy Deserves Favor,” or “Copenhagen,” then this is for you.

Henne’s inspiration for the play was a three-thousand word short story by Edgar A. Poe which you can get through Google or from the Central Works site. It provides a little background, but is perhaps better read after seeing the play.

I seldom wait at the stage door to speak to the players in shows that I will review, but their performances were so outstanding, I was possessed to so wait. I asked them about rehearsals, and when they told
me that changes were being made through tech rehearsal (a few days before), it further raised my estimation of their abilities. In 80-minutes, speaking at 180 wpm, consider that each speaks the number of words ordinarily spoken in an entire act of most modern plays.

I do caution you that it is not fare for postprandial entertainment: you might want to have your steak and martini after you attend, for the pace at which the banter and ideas ensue demands your active attention and intellectual participation.

**MESSERIC REVELATION** written and directed by Aaron Henne

**A Central Works Method World Premiere**

at Berkeley City Club, 2315 Durant Avenue, Berkeley

Through March 18.

Costumes by Tammy Berlin, lights by Gary Graves, sound design by Gregory Scharpen, and stage management by Reg Clay.

WITH: Theo Black and Joe Jordan

**John A. McMullen II is a member of the SF Bay Area Theatre Critics Circle, American Theatre Critics Association, and Stage Directors and Choreographers Society. EJ Dunne edits.**

**EYE FROM THE AISLE: Titus Andronicus at Impact Theatre—Bloody Butchery**

*By John A. McMullen II

Thu Mar 01 17:15:00 -0800 2012*

Tamora, Queen of the Goths (Anna Ishida, front) with her lover, Aaron (Reggie White, rear) and her sons Chiron, Demetrius, and Alarbus (1 to r, Mark McDonald, Michael Garrett McDonald, and Joe Loper in Titus Andronicus at Impact Theatre

One sometimes takes a shine to a particular theatre company, perhaps out of a combination of the sustained quality of their work, their effort at keeping it affordable, and their aim to reach an audience that is not just made up of folks my gray age. For me, IMPACT THEATRE is one of those few.

Thus, it pains me to report that their TITUS ANDRONICUS is bloody awful and does butchery to the Bard.

There are just too many words in Shakespeare, and if you don’t pick the right ones and marry them to the right feeling and movement, then no one can understand what you are saying.

Their last outing in verse, “Romeo and Juliet,” soared, with two leads who both had a feel for the verse and an instinct of integrating it into their acting. In this latest revenge tale of gang rape, dismemberment, human sacrifice, and cannibalism, only the four Goths and one Roman in a large cast get anywhere near what can be called Shakespearean acting.

Anna Ishida is a standout and her abilities overshadow the others. This Critics Circle nominee, who is regularly seen at Shotgun, plays the role of the wicked Tamora, captured Queen of the Goths. Ms. Ishida speaks the verse with proper scansion in a range from dulcet, sultry tones to rasping rage. When she speaks you understand both text and subtext. And if you don’t get it from that, you understand it from her body language and inflection. When her son is sacrificed in front of her, you feel the pity and the terror. When she directs her sons to rape Titus’ daughter Lavinia, you recoil, but her manner and her physicality keep you entranced, like the beauty of the tiger before she eats you or the hypnotic undulation of a cobra before it strikes.

Reggie White plays her lover Aaron the Moor, and while he speaks quickly and naturally, he hits the right words that the Bard indicates should be emphasized; though the lust between him and his Queen-lover is more played-at than played. Tamora’s rapist sons, played by twin brothers in real life Mark McDonald and Michael Garrett McDonald, also employ versification. Michael played Romeo in Impact’s R&J, and when I asked him then where he learned how to speak verse, he told me he read a book on it. He should have passed the book around to the rest of the cast. Of all the others, only Lucius, played in a gender bender role by Caitlyn Tella, acknowledges this integral component of acting Shakespeare. Even so, their intention and emotional import does not always match the text.

Mike Delaney, as the narcissistic, lecherous young power-grabber of an Emperor Saturninus, gets some laughs in his over-casual naturalism which calls attention to itself, but the range displayed is limited to loud to snide to enraged.

Stacz Sadowski as the title character is not old enough to play the part (“And for these bitter tears, which now you see / Filling the aged wrinkles in my cheeks; / Be pitiful to my condemned sons”), and the role requires an actor of great nuance and experience to carry it. Mr. Sadowski imparts honest tearful emotion to the role, but it is often difficult to understand what Mr. Sadowski is saying. A much more mature and seasoned actor is required to enact the complicated psychology of a soldier who puts his allegiance to the State above Family, who will then cut off his right hand to save his sons, and whose revenge tops all: (“O villains, Chiron and Demetrius. I will grind your bones to dust! And with your blood and it I’ll make a paste! / And make two pasties of your shameful heads! / And bid that strumpet, your unhallow’d dam [to] the feast! / And this the banquet she shall surfeit on”).

Director Melissa Hillman is the artistic visionary of the theatre company. While her “Romeo and Juliet” agilely moved a multitude across the mini-stage, the staging in TITUS is awkward and similar to an initial improvisation in an acting class. The pictures painted with the bodies in space do not consistently reflect the moment or the relationship. Working in miniature on such a small stage with the actors—who are often closer to the audience than the six feet of empathetic distance needed to maintain the illusion—is an art in itself, and here it seemed to be abandoned. From my last interview during R&J, Ms. Hillman revealed that she does not attend to scansion or the use of verse but leaves it to the actors; here, this laissez-faire approach made for vast differences in the acting. Quite often the speeches devolved into either bellowing every word or into that breathless, tremulous imitation of Shakespeare.

The violence, an integral part of the action, ranged from perfunctory to impressive with memorable moments in the stabbing of Bassianus and the murder of Tamora by Titus, the latter due to the convincing acting of Ms. Ishida. The staging of falling into the pit
might have been, but, except for the twisted
occasionally gives us a glimpse of what
end, all lie dead on the stage. This TITUS
ping-pong of wreaking vengeance till, in the
and have them emotionally absorb the cruel
tragedy is to awaken pathos in the audience
closets.
Except for the camouflage, the costuming
soldiers, form-fitting dresses for Tamora,
cautions against working in a vacuum.
key method of learning, and Stanislavsky
activity and result in imitation. In every other
their influences for fear it will taint their cre
it. Too often theatre artists attempt to limit
the Emperor, but that segment is not set up
derived from Titus' graffiti campaign against
it only serves to confuse. Some laughs are
brought us into the modern setting. Here
it effectively introduced the situation and
effect in this confined space requires a great
deal of ingenuity; but then a big part of the
reason to produce this masterpiece in such a
bandbox would presumably be to show that
kind of inventiveness. Once Grand Guignol
(the art of blood and cruelty in theatre) are
engaged, the technical magic must prevail,
otherwise our expectations go unfulfilled, as
they do here.

Video has become a staple in modern
productions of Shakespeare since used ef-
effectively in Baz Luhrmann’s film “Romeo
& Juliet” with Leonardo DiCaprio. There
it effectively introduced the situation and
brought us into the modern setting. Here
it only serves to confuse. Some laughs are
derived from Titus’ graffiti campaign against
the Emperor, but that segment is not set up
well, and, unless you know the play, there is
a lot of filling in of the blanks required.
The film of “Titus” by Julie Taymor (fa-
nous for “The Lion King” and “Spiderman”
on Broadway) with Anthony Hopkins and
Jessica Lange was a stylish and well-acted
version that fused Shakespeare with mod-
ernity, and everyone in IMPACT’s production
could have profited by multiple viewings of
it. Too often theatre artists attempt to limit
their influences for fear it will taint their cre
ativity and result in imitation. In every other
art, imitation and study of the masters is a
method of learning, and Stanislavsky caution
against working in a vacuum.
The costuming is camouflage, submachine
guns, and Marine fighting knives for the
soldiers, form-fitting dresses for Tamora,
and suits for the Senators and the Emperor.
Except for the camouflage, the costuming
could have been done from the actors’ own
closets.

There is little attempt to change mood or
place by lighting design.
The assumed purpose in producing such a
tragedy is to awaken pathos in the audience
and have them emotionally absorb the cruel
ping-pong of wreaking vengeance till, in the
end, all lie dead on the stage. This TITUS
occasionally gives us a glimpse of what
might have been, but, except for the twisted
thrill of cringing at the gore, it is a struggle
to understand and relate to.

Titus Andronicus by William Shake-
speare
Directed by Melissa Hillman
Runs through Mar 31 · Thu–Sat 8pm
La Val’s Subterranean, 1834 Euclid Ave,
Berkeley
www.impacttheatre.com
Lighting by Jax Steager, Costumes by
Miyuki Bierlein, Sound by Colin Trevor,
Fight Director Dave Maier, Blood Technici-
Anne Kendall, Graphics Designer Cheshire Isaacs,
Films by Martin Estevez.
WITH : Sarah Coykendall, Mike Delaney,
Maro Guevara, Matt Gunnison, Anna Ishida,
Joe Loper, Joseph Mason, Carlos Martinez,
Mark McDonald, Michael McDonald, Jon
Nagel, Vince Rodriguez, Cassie Rosenbrock,
Stacz Sadowski, Caitlyn Tella, and Reggie
White.

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Directors and Choreographers Society. E J
Dunne edits.

FILM REVIEW: The Lorax Goes Hollywood
By Gar Smith
Mon Mar 05 10:56:00 -0800 2012

My name is the Lorax and I speak for the
trees.
So how’d I get sucked up in Hollywood
sleeze?
My message was lost in the Stremulous
Stream!
Even Swomee-swans told me to “Get with
the Team!”
The Grinch (who stole Christmas) got all
the attention

Why TV? Why Movies? Why all this Big
Mention?
Because he’s defeated, so Whos can start
shopping?
But me? I’m ignored because I’d stop
shopping.
So, how come the hokum? Why tell kids
to drive
Their parents to buy a Mazda CX-5?
 ‘Cause I am the Lorax! I push SUVs!
(And also IHOP’s Mac n’ Cheese & Truf-
ula Trees!)
I once scorned the Once-ler and all his
pollution.
But now I’ve been shown there’s another
solution:
Grabulous Greed from a thneed is a hoot!
And now I am rolling in Bar-ba-look loot.
The Humming-fish now know that Rodeo
Drive
Is my new habitat and it’s here that I’ll
thrive.
My new movie’s loud and it’s filmed in
3-D
(Dumb, Dumb and Dumber, between you
and me.)
Instead of just talking, let’s shout, scream
and hoot.
Let’s make so much noise we could
defean a Snoot,
Snatch pratfalls and stunts from the Done-
before Basket
And pluck our clichés from the Done-to-
Death Casket.
I’m a celebrity now meant to prowl upper
classes.
My moustache is waxed and I’ve put on
dark glasses,
I party at Hard Rock and dress incognito
(I can scrunch down and hide behind
Danny DeVito.)
So pour me some vodka with Trufula juice
And please never mention that guy, Dr.
Seuss…. Excuse me! That’s Spielberg on line
number one.
Love ya, babe! Call me! So long! Gotta
run!

AROUND & ABOUT FILM: Raul Ruiz Retrospective at the Pacific Film Archive
By Ken Bullock
Fri Mar 02 15:15:00 -0800 2012

“My films are not fiction, but about fic-
tion.” Raul Ruiz, the Chilean filmmaker,
who over a 50 year-plus career was playwright, novelist, ghostwriter for Mexican soap operas (“telenovelas”), film advisor to Salvador Allende — and maker of something like 120 films and videos — died last summer at 70. This weekend, the Pacific Film Archive will launch “The Library Lover,” curated by Kathy Geritz, March 2-4 April 15, a retrospective of some of his films adapted from literature — including his acclaimed version of Proust’s ‘Time Regained’ and ‘Mysteries of Lisbon,’ the last film of his to be distributed here, widely pronounced a masterpiece, from the 19th century Portuguese novelist Camilo Castelo Branco (whose works have also been adapted to the screen by Manoel De Oliveira).

As the above quote indicates — or intimates — Ruiz’s relationship to literature wasn’t the same as, say, Masterpiece Theatre. His two adaptations of novelist-philosopher Pierre Klossowski’s books, among others, often invent whole new storylines and have a critical undertow. Within a film, one story adapted from one author will suddenly intrude and collide with the title story, as in his version of ‘Treasure Island,’ ‘L’Ile au Tresor’ (not in this retrospective), where Melville’s “Benito Cereno” hijacks Steven son’s tale for awhile — though the Ruizian “Treasure Island” is both a fond tribute to the existence of whales because they’d only been seen on TV or in a film, Ruiz concludes that each shot constituted a new and unique expressionistic black-&-white, the other a panoramic melodrama of revelations-within-revelations, just as ‘Dog’s Dialogue’ makes the format of a “graphic novel” cinematic, with stills, sound effects and narration, as well as a Protean, absurd tale of shifting identities amid catastrophic yet everyday troubles ...

Like Borges — an early influence, along with Poe and Rabelais, Chilean poet Nicanor Parra (of ‘Anti-Poems’ fame) — and Walter Benjamin — Ruiz’s films have the wild diversity of a limitless library — or a stream of conjectures that flows to the end of the old, flat world and over the edge. They are unique, like nobody else’s, unrepeatable expressions of a bemused but constantly probing mind.

This Friday at 7: ‘Mysteries of Lisbon’ (2010); Saturday at 8:30: ‘Three Lives and Only One Death’ (1996), Marcello Mastroianni’s next-to-last film, with stories from Hawthorne (“Wakefield”) and others, and references to Carlos Castaneda and Berkeley’s own Jaime De Angulo; Sunday March 18 at 6: ‘Time Regained’ (1999), with Catherine Deneuve, John Malkovich, Emmanuelle Beart; Friday, March 23 at 6:45: ‘Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting’ (1979) from Klossowski’s ‘The Baphomet’ with cinematography by Sasha Vierny, with short, ‘Dog’s Dialogue’ (1977); Wednesday, April 4 at 7: ‘The Penal Colony’ (1971), Kafka reset in Latin America, with short, ‘A TV Dante’ (1989), Ruiz’s episodes from a BBC series of filmmakers’ versions of “The Inferno.” Ruiz’s contribution (Cantos 9-14) set in Chile during the Coup, with John Gielgud and Bob Peck as the voices of Virgil and Dante; Saturday, April 14 at 6: ‘Tres Tristes Tigres’ (1968); Sunday, April 15 at 4: ‘The Suspended Vocation’ (1977), from Klossowski’s novel of the same name.

Pacific Film Archive, 2575 Bancroft Way, just east of Telegraph, up stairway on UC campus. $5.50-$9.50. 642-1412; bampfa.berkeley.edu

(Sometime during the run of The Library Lover, some of us in the Bay Area who were associated with Ruiz hope to hold a few video screenings in Berkeley of unusual films of his, along with casual conversation and reminiscences. Details will appear here — or contact me: bullock83@gmail. com; 415-433-6988.)
‘In Search of My Father ... Walkin’ Talkin’ Bill Hawkins’--W. Allen Taylor at the East Bay Center for the Performing Arts

By Ken Bullock
Fri Mar 02 15:25:00 -0800 2012

“Hey, Daddy-oo!” Allen Taylor’s brought back his one-man show about the search for his father, the first Black disc jockey in Cleveland, Walkin’ Talkin’ Bill Hawkins. He says it’s for the last time onstage—at the East Bay Center for the Performing Arts, a fine venue off Macdonald near Richmond BART, which originally commissioned it and where it premiered in 1999. (I reviewed it for the Planet, January 10, 2006, when it was at the Marsh, Berkeley.)

If I urge you to go see it on its three final weekends it’s not only to mark the end of a long journey on a worthy project. I mentioned in the review six years ago that Taylor had vowed to hone down the play. And—with the ongoing collaboration of director Ellen Sebastian Chang—he’s not only done that, but come up with a very special thing: a show that’s gone from very engaging to being a work of art. There’s something of perfection about it now, which accents Taylor’s considerable abilities as a performer—and Chang’s as a director—and takes its riveting material—the important questions it asks about paternity, maturity, family and culture—beyond just laying it out there for passive consideration, into the realm of constantly active apprehensions and ideas about the world, energizing the audience’s imagination ... and even further than that: to a performance that doesn’t rely, as most autobiographical solo shows usually do, on its own material and the persona of the performer, but one which wraps all those potential riches up into a seamless whole that can’t be paraphrased, something unique unto itself, illuminating the source of its own inspiration and its own making.

Taylor’s career of over 30 years includes Broadway (August Wilson’s ‘Seven Guitars’) and Off-Broadway credits, as well as film and TV roles. He’s the head of the drama department at College of Marin and has mentored young people at the East Bay Center and elsewhere. He’s taken his show to venues around the Bay, as well as to Cleveland and to the New Federal Theatre in New York City. Taylor’s story was featured on National Public Radio. The show enabled his father’s posthumous induction into the Ohio Radio/Television Hall of Fame.

(Postwar Black DJs not only influenced their white contemporaries—Taylor’s father undoubtedly influenced Cleveland, then New York DJ “Moondog,” Allan Freed, often credited with launching the craze for Rock ’n Roll—but also influential comedians like Lord Buckley and Lenny Bruce, and certainly helped keep hip-talk alive for future generations, down to hip-hop and beyond.)

His seemingly effortless gliding in and out of the characters of his search is remarkable, from his mother and his uncles to a piano teacher, a club owner who was a pallbearer for his father, his father’s widow ... himself as a college DJ, not yet knowing his father was one ... and The Kid, an imaginary hipster alter ego who channels the awkwardness of Taylor’s pain, pent-up anger and confusion into the slanginess of his own generation’s strivings for hipness, yakking and dancing the moves and the grooves of being with it, of not caring. The Kid jangles up the show, an unreal character shoving it into reality— theatrical and human reality ...

Taylor’s been united or reunited, often unexpectedly, with family friends, unknown relatives and memorabilia of his father. (A recording of his father on the air and photos of him, including live broadcasts from his record storefront window, are included in the show.) He says there may be a film forthcoming—but this is, above all, a live performance. Catch it while you can.

‘In Search of My Father ... Walkin’ Talkin’ Bill Hawkins’ Held Over

Saturday, March 3rd at 8; Sunday the 4th at 3, East Bay Center for the Performing Arts, and at 8 p.m on both Saturday March 10 and Saturday March 17, 338-11th Street (just off Macdonald), Richmond. $10-$15. 221-6353, eastbaycenter.org, walkintalik.com
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   Up to 50 in Berkeley Displaced by Morning Apartment Building Fire
From Mary Kay Clunies-Ross, Public Information Officer:
   City of Berkeley Issues Summary of 2227 Dwight Fire
Dan McMenamin (BCN): Berkeley Fire Now Controlled
Dan McMenamin (BCN):
   Two Alarm Fire Burning in Berkeley’s South Campus Neighborhood
Louis Cuneo and Marcia Poole: Berkeley’s Aquatic Park (Photo Essay)
Toni Mester: City to Hear Public Comment This Week
   on Two Development Plans for Berkeley (News Analysis)
Zelda Bronstein: Berkeley Mayor’s Office Chief of Staff Still Has Her Old Job
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   Six Men Shot in Two West Berkeley Incidents over the Weekend
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Bay City News:
   Berkeley Student Injured in Frat House Fall Still in Critical Condition
Bay City News: Fire on UC Berkeley Campus Forces Evacuation
Scott Morris (BCN): Bay Area Campuses, Including U.C. Berkeley,
   Participate in National Day of Action for Public Education
From Eric Hayes, U.C. Faculty Association Staff:
   UC Berkeley Faculty Join “99 Mile March” to Sacramento
Jeff Shuttleworth (BCN):
   Berkeley School Safety Officer Charged with Identity Theft
Letters to the Editor
Christian Stauduhar: Re: The Berkeley Hills Murder Could Have Been Predicted
Grace Underpressure: March Pepper Spray Times
John A. McMullen II: Al Jazeera, Naomi Wolf, and American Islamic Blind Spot