

People & Places

Entertainment

Entertainment, glamour & style

In LA, rock n roll fight to save 'Sunset Strip'

By Tim Chan

On a recent Saturday evening on Sunset Boulevard, just beyond the nightly caravan of European sports cars and open-air tour buses that have seen better days, the famous Tower Records building was once again bathed in the familiar red and yellow paint job of the iconic music store that once occupied its stone-brick walls.

Though the store had shuttered in 2006, it had been revived for the weekend, at least on the outside. Only this time, the doors of the building weren't welcoming shoppers, but rather holding up billboards for the movie, "Yesterday", the new Beatles-inspired flick whose promotional campaign was inspired by the color of the Fab Four's "Yellow Submarine".

Just down the block, a group of city advocates were throwing an event to kick off the "Summer on Sunset", a new initiative that seeks to bring back some of the lustre to the Sunset Strip. If the Tower Records store, a former jewel in the city and must-visit shopping destination, was now reduced to a pricey placard, what fate awaited the rest of the Boulevard's residents?



Navarro

Dubbed the "Summer on Sunset" concert, the private, invite-only event was a joint effort between the West Hollywood Travel and Tourism Board and the Sunset Strip Business Improvement District, who used the concert to kick off a series of new initiatives to bring business and attention back to the once-thriving neighborhood.

As guests like Kendra Wilkinson and Victoria's Secret model, Taylor Hill, munched on spicy crispy tuna rolls and mini sliders from Sunset Strip staples like Katanata and BOA Steakhouse, musicians **Dave Navarro**, Juliette Lewis and the Sex Pistols' Steve Jones took to the stage to perform for the crowd, trading off on a mix of their own songs and popular rock covers. Toward the end of the night, Courtney Love made a surprise appearance, and took the mic to perform a duet of "Celebrity Skin" with Navarro, followed by a rousing rendition of "Anarchy in the UK", with Jones on backing guitar. With amps blaring, spotlights on high and hundreds of party-goers posing for photos, it was, at least for a couple hours, a throwback to the glory days of the Strip.

Documentary

In Hans Fjellestad's 2012 documentary, "Sunset Strip", the late producer and The Runaways manager Kim Fowley, calls Sunset Boulevard, "a civilization for the broken-hearted, the mistreated, the overlooked, the under-loved, the under-paid and the doomed."

But for a time, Sunset Boulevard was also a place of intense glamour and style. As the well-to-do settled Beverly Hills, the Sunset Strip — which actually begins at the edge of Beverly Hills — became a place where everything from the outfits, to the people, to the music, was bigger, bolder and louder.

According to the West Hollywood Travel and Tourism Board, the Strip's origins really got its start in 1930s mob culture and Hollywood's golden age, as a place where darlings and delinquents would mingle. But it really became a hotbed for the music scene during the rock and roll movement of the late 1960s, later becoming an illicit playground for the big "hair metal" scene of the late 80s. Flanked by venues like The Viper Room, Whiskey a Go Go and The Roxy, Sunset Boulevard became a place where musicians could play and party, without the pretense. Artists who inhabited the Strip included Led Zeppelin, The Doors, Elton John, Janis Joplin, Guns 'N Roses, Bob Dylan, and Jimi Hendrix, who would all play a show one night, and then come back to drink the next.

Indeed, music may have brought the masses to Sunset, but partying kept them coming back. "Did you know that's where this idea of 'Go Go Girls' started?" a TMZ tour guide told me one summer when I was visiting the Strip. "Before girls were dancing on tables at clubs, they were dancing on the bar at The Whisky."

But like everything in Hollywood, the headlines of one day turn into postscripts the next. The Viper Room never quite recovered after the actor River Phoenix overdosed on the sidewalk outside the club in 1993, while local dive bars and paraphernalia shops soon gave way to snazzy lounges and guestlist-only clubs. When the Tower Records store finally shut its doors in 2006 (the parent company had filed for bankruptcy two years earlier), it was seemingly the last vestige of a bygone era. Still, not everyone is convinced that the sun has set on the Strip just yet.

"The neighborhood did have a moment years ago where it was the place to be for people out of the area to cruise, but that's gone now," says Lee Maen, vice-chairman of the Sunset Strip BID (Business Improvement District) and co-founder of Innovative Dining Group, who opened his popular restaurant BOA Steakhouse on the street in 2009, followed by three more restaurants over the past ten years. "Still," he adds, "I don't believe that Sunset has lost its luster."

Factors

According to Tom Kiely, resident and CEO of the West Hollywood Travel and Tourism Board, a number of different factors led to the Strip's decline in popularity over the last few years. "Digital entertainment consumption, an evolving music genre and the growth in younger audiences has accelerated the need to expand beyond the rock era of the Sunset Strip and put more of a focus on all sectors," he says. "As with anything new, it takes a period of test and adjustments to restore the vibe and energy that once permeated throughout the Strip."

The plan to revitalize Sunset starts with the "Summer on Sunset" event series, which Kiely says will promote new businesses in the neighborhood, welcome new shows at the venues, showcase "cutting edge culinary trends," pop-up lifestyle experiences, and new events. "The Sunset Strip has always been a hub of creativity — free-flowing with music, dining, dancing and shopping," he says. "As the Strip continues to blaze its own path as a world-famous cultural landmark, setting trends in music, hospitality, and dining, we invite locals (and visitors) from near and far, and fans of all genres to fall in love with the Strip's rebellious, forward-thinking spirit."

Maen says he wants to bring back a neighborhood feel to Sunset, which in recent years has been overtaken by pricey hotels and velvet rope-lined clubs that seem reserved for the super elite.

"We want Sunset to be a place for our beloved locals, and be a place where you say, 'I'm going to Sunset', versus just going to one restaurant or bar," Maen says. "We truly believe that when you make it a local spot, others will want to be there, whether it's from other parts of Southern California or tourists from around the world."

Kiely says it's also time to look beyond music, to make the Sunset Strip, "a haven for foodies, fitness junkies, revelers, activists, the LGBTQ community and creatives of all kinds." (RTRS)



This image released by Netflix shows Beyoncé in a scene from her documentary 'Homecoming: A Film by Beyoncé'. Beyoncé, earned four Emmy nominations Tuesday, including bids for producing, writing, co-directing and musical direction. (AP)

Comic-Con

Fans descend on San Diego for the 50th Comic-Con

'It' cast brings joy, chill to convention

SAN DIEGO, July 18, (AP) — Dust off your Captain Marvel cosplay, San Diego Comic-Con is here.

The four-and-a-half day convention kicked off Wednesday with the show room floor opening to thousands vying for exclusive merchandise, from art to toys. Later, Warner Bros is hosting a ScareDiego event promising some hair-raising new footage from "It: Chapter Two".

"We have some exciting footage but I can't go into details," said "It" director Andy Muschietti. "But I think it's going to be worth it for the fans to go and watch."

"It: Chapter Two" is not taking it easy on the grown losers' club if the new trailer is any indication, and the shoot itself doesn't sound much calmer than battling a demonic clown either.

A theater of fans got a sneak peek at the latest promo for the horror sequel at a Comic-Con event Wednesday night in San Diego before it's released to the world Thursday morning.

Cast including James McAvoy, Bill Hader and Jessica Chastain were also on hand to tease three chilling extended scenes that had the audience gasping, laughing and cheering. They described the intensity of the shoot with director Andy Muschietti, who wouldn't quit until he got the perfect shot.

Chastain recalled doing a scene with blood. She wasn't supposed to get any on her face, but she protested and said, "No, let's make it 'Carrie' on steroids." Later, "freezing and very uncomfortable" in a kiddie pool covered with the

fake blood, she may have regretted her choice.

They laughed that throughout filming they used a "record" amount of fake blood — 4,500 gallons (17,035 liters), according to Chastain.

McAvoy also talked about filming a particularly hair-raising scene in a hall of mirrors that he said was "like a nightmare ... absolutely horrific. There was no fun in it."

And all marveled at Bill Skarsgard's ability to transform into Pennywise the clown.

"He's super imposing in the costume," Bill Hader said. "He's a super nice guy but then when they say 'Action', it's like a whole other being."

Worried

McAvoy worried occasionally that Skarsgard was actually going to hurt himself in character. According to the cast, the "eye trick" Pennywise does where one eye is looking straight and the other goes off to the side is not computer-generated; it's just something Skarsgard is able to do.

"It's like he was born to play Pennywise," Hader said.

The film opens nationwide Sept. 6. Workers were putting the final touches on all the branded exhibitions Wednesday evening, like the Walking Dead-themed AMC "Deadquarters" installation, while enthusiastic fans lined up outside of the convention center. A few were already in full costume, including a man in a "Stranger Things" Hawkins Police uniform and an Austral-

ian couple dressed as Marty McFly and Doc Brown, although most opted for the nerd-approved t-shirt (there were more than a few AT-AT, Jurassic Park and Laura Palmer shirts) for badge pickup.

Those in full cosplay were grateful for the cooler-than-usual temperatures.

"I would be melting," said Ana Nibbla of San Diego, who was dressed as a female Pennywise, or "Princess Pennywise" as she likes to call it.

She likes to hit the convention floor early to check out exclusives from artists who don't go to conventions often. "This is the one time a year I get to see them in person," she said.

And although Wednesday is typically quiet, lines and big groups could be found offsite as well, including the dozens of people who'd gathered outside a Conan O'Brien taping hoping to catch the cast of "It: Chapter Two".

"This is my favorite, I'm a huge Stephen King fan," said Cheryl Dolbel from Jersey in the Channel Islands, who was wearing a t-shirt with artist drawings of both Tim Curry and Bill Skarsgard as Pennywise. "We tried to go for the taping, but we couldn't get in. We've been waiting a few hours."

She's hoping to see Skarsgard and James McAvoy and later in the week is going to visit the "Brooklyn Nine-Nine" installation.

As the week goes on, movie fans will also get a look at Paramount's "Terminator: Dark Fate" at a Hall H presentation Thursday, and on Saturday be treated to a Marvel Studios presentation with its president,

He had legions of readers overseas, too, thanks to the enduring popularity of his character, police chief Salvo Montalbano. (AP)

BOSTON: Massachusetts prosecutors on Wednesday dropped a criminal case accusing former "House of Cards" star **Kevin Spacey** of sexually assaulting an 18-year-old man at a Nantucket bar in 2016 after

the alleged victim refused to testify. Prosecutors said they made the decision to drop the felony indecent assault and battery charge against the Oscar winner after the alleged victim invoked his right under the US Constitution against giving self-incriminating testimony.

Spacey's lawyers had previously accused the man of deleting text messages that would support his defense.

The man invoked his Fifth Amendment rights during a hearing earlier this month concerning the whereabouts of his cell phone, which was missing. (RTRS)

CHICAGO: R&B singer **R. Kelly** pleaded not guilty on Tuesday to a raft of federal charges accusing him of running a scheme to force women and girls to provide sex for himself and others, and a judge ordered that he remain in jail without bail.

A federal judge said the main reason he was denying bail was obstruction of justice charges, part of a multi-count indictment unveiled on Friday in Chicago and New York.

Wearing an orange prison jumpsuit and handcuffed at a hearing in federal court, the 52-year-old singer entered his plea of not guilty and answered "Yes, sir," to all of US District Judge **Harry Levinewer**'s questions. He made no eye contact with supporters in the Chicago courtroom. (RTRS)



Robyn performs in concert during her 'Honey Tour' at TD Pavilion at the Mann on July 17 in Philadelphia. (AP)



Spacey



Camilleri

Variety

LOS ANGELES: Indie director, **Nobuhiko Obayashi** will be feted as the director in focus at the Japan Now section of this year's Tokyo International Film Festival. The festival will give a world premiere to his "Labyrinth of Cinema".

Supporting his art by shooting commercials, Obayashi is an indie whose dreamy works have influenced numerous other directors in Japan. His oeuvre includes "I Are You, You Am Me", "The Little Girl Who Conquered Time" and "Lonely Heart", which were completed in 1985 and are together known as the Onomichi Trilogy.

Other titles include "Casting Blossoms to the Sky", "Seven Weeks" and "Hanagatami", which have been called the War Trilogy. These were completed even the director had been diagnosed with lung cancer. His first commercial film, "House", made for Toho in 1977, was said to have surprised audiences with unique touches not found in the work of studio directors. (RTRS)

ROME: Author **Andrea Camilleri**, creator of the best-selling Commissario Montalbano series about a likable, though off-brooding small-town Sicilian police chief who mixes humanity with pragmatism to solve crimes, died in a Rome hospital Wednesday. He was 93.

Italy's RAI state TV, which produced wildly popular TV versions of his detective stories, interrupted its programming to announce his death and comment on his works.

Rome's hospital system also announced the death, a month after the long-ailing Camilleri was hospitalized with heart problems and complications from a broken thigh bone.

Camilleri's books — most set in his native Sicily — sold some 25 million copies in Italy, where literary best-sellers are usually measured by the tens of thousands.



A woman poses for a photo in front of the statue of British singer Ed Sheeran, in front of the main Soviet style entrance of Gorky park in Moscow, Russia on July 16. Ed Sheeran's live in concert will be at Otkritie Arena (Spartak) in Moscow on July 19. (AP)