

BOOK IT, L.A.

For the brainy and the bold

By Drew Tewksbury

This week's book events showcase diverse voices, hidden histories and readings by world-class authors. Learn about New York's punk scene, the Inkwell and Amazon tribes.

Go undercover in West Africa

Like the detectives that populate his novels, author Kwei Quartey lives a double life. Quartey is a Pasadena physician. He's also the author of crime fiction based in Africa. His book "The Missing American" kicks off a new series. In a recent Times story, Paula L. Woods writes Quartey's "unflinching portrayal of Ghanaian criminals, their fetish priest handlers and corruption at the highest levels" marks an "intriguing debut." Quartey will be at Vroman's to discuss "The Missing American." The book unfolds in Ghana, where he grew up.

7 p.m., Tuesday, Vroman's Bookstore, 695 E. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena. Free.

Echoes of New York's punk past

Poet, editor and author Glenn O'Brien made his name writing a column for Interview magazine and running Rolling Stone's New York bureau. O'Brien's New York City public access show "TV Party" chronicled the cultural cauldron of New York's primordial punk, new wave and hip-hop scenes from 1978 to 1982. Debbie Harry, Chris Stein, Jean-Michel Basquiat and David Byrne all made cameo on the show. On Tuesday the Hammer Museum hosts a reading of the late writer's works compiled in the recent book "Intelligence for Dummies: Essays and Other Collected Writings." The event features Jonathan Lethem, Ernest Hardy, Linda Yablonsky and Andy Spade.

7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Hammer Museum, 10899 Wilshire Blvd., Westwood. Free.

Explore deep in the Amazon

The rapid deforestation of Brazil's Amazon isn't only obliterating a precious environment; it's also threatening the many indigenous cultures that call the jungle home. Photojournalist Sue Cunningham and writer Patrick Cunningham spent five months in this fragile ecosystem, traveling

by boat on the Xingu River deep into the Amazon jungle. They spent time in 48 tribal villages, exploring the vibrant cultures embedded in the remote region. Their efforts are documented in "Spirit of the Amazon: The Indigenous Tribes of the Xingu," which they will discuss at Diesel Books.

6:30 p.m., Thursday, Diesel Books, 225 26th St., Santa Monica. Free.

Experience a new kind of noir

Author Tom Lutz's oeuvre covers a lot of territory, from slackerdom to hitchhiking in Uzbekistan to a cultural history of crying. Lutz, the founder and editor in chief of the Los Angeles Review of Books, adds literary thriller to his roster with his first novel, "Born Slippy." The book traces the troubled friendship of anti-hero Frank Baltimore and a charming sociopath who is fascinated by him. Lutz will discuss "Born Slippy" with novelist Stephen Chabon at Skylight Books.

6:30 p.m. Thursday, Skylight Books, 1818 N. Vermont Ave., Los Feliz. Free.

Looking beyond the beach

The beach just south of Santa Monica's Ocean Park, known as the Inkwell, became a welcoming place for African Americans during the racially tense times of the early 20th century. People went there to catch a wave and some rays without fear of discrimination. While much evidence of the area has disappeared, historian Alison Rose Jefferson's book, "Living the California Dream: African American Leisure Sites During the Jim Crow Era," reflects on how black communities spread inclusivity and visibility by having fun in public spaces. At Chevalier's, Jefferson discusses her research on the history of Southern California's African American involvement in business projects and leisure destinations from the 1910s to the '60s.

7 p.m., Thursday, Chevalier's Books, 126 N. Larchmont Blvd., Free.

Tewksbury is a writer, editor and Emmy-winning producer in Los Angeles.



JOSHUA BASSETT and Olivia Rodrigo get emotional in "High School Musical: The Musical: The Series."

Big steps for young love

'High School Musical' stars talk about their Season 1 journey to a romantic finale.

By Christi Carras

Warning: This article contains spoilers from the Season 1 finale of "High School Musical: The Musical: The Series."

In preparation for the most emotional scene of her Disney career, "High School Musical: The Musical: The Series" star Olivia Rodrigo turned to — what else? — a Spotify playlist.

"I am the Spotify playlist queen," the 16-year-old said, laughing. "I have a Spotify playlist for everything, so I was listening to my 'Cry' Spotify playlist. I listen to, like, really sad old Tom Waits songs or Adele. Adele just gets you crying every time." The "Bizaardvark" alum's modern approach was on-brand for a teen comedy that bills itself as "High School Musical" for a new generation — and relies heavily on the creativity of its Gen Z talent to succeed. The scene in question happened to be the climax of Friday's Season 1 finale, in which Nini (Rodrigo) and her ex, Ricky (Joshua Bassett), rekindle their love after a season-long show-nance.

"The relationship between Ricky and Nini has been such a slow burn, and to finally get a resolution was so gratifying," Rodrigo said. Their will-they-won't-they journey began in the season premiere, when a heartbroken Nini called things off because Ricky couldn't return the words "I love you." Since then, nearly every move Ricky has made — including joining the school musical as the Troy to her Gabriella — has been in an effort to get closer to Nini. And Nini has been largely

unimpressed — until Ricky finally finds the courage to repeat the three words she's wanted to hear all along.

In the original script, it was actually five words: "I don't not love you" — a callback to Nini's anniversary song for Ricky from the first episode. But what was intended as a sweet and clever payoff ultimately felt phony and fell flat on set, according to showrunner Tim Federle.

So he surrendered the wheel to Bassett, who was 18 at the time, to save the most anticipated scene of the season.

"I pulled Joshua aside, and I was like, 'Just talk to her. Just tell her you love her,'" Federle said. "And if it means you improvise something that isn't on the page, I just need to see Ricky put it all on the line."

Bassett, who is the first to admit that raw emotion is not his strong suit, had originally planned to fall back on his meticulous script memorization to tap into Ricky's vulnerability. Suddenly, there was no script, and he was completely on his own.

"It's an actor's dream and an actor's nightmare at the same time," Bassett said. "It's funny, because Joshua was nervous about what he's going to say, and the character, Ricky, happens to be nervous about what he's going to say, too, so I think it played well.... It is the most powerful feeling in the world when you don't even have to think, and it just comes through you. It was really a magical moment."

"I love you," Ricky blurts out in the episode, shocking Nini and, apparently, Rodrigo, who was not informed of the last-minute script change and "had no idea it was coming," according to Bassett. Emboldened by his new creative freedom, Bassett dropped the Ricky act entirely when it was his co-star's turn to be on camera, filling the climactic confessional with memories from the actors' real-life relation-

'High School Musical: The Musical: The Series'

Where: Disney+  
When: Anytime  
Rated: TV-PG (may be unsuitable for young children)

ship instead.

"Every single time, I would change it to something else that was specific to her and I, and getting her reaction out of it was the best thing in the world," Bassett said.

It turns out Rodrigo didn't end up needing her "Cry" playlist after all.

"He said, 'Remember that one time that we wrote a song, and we didn't know if anybody would like it?'" Rodrigo recalled. "That one made me cry because I just remembered sharing those memories with him, and I love him so much. He's my best friend, so that really made the acting authentic and really truthful. It was like I wasn't acting." The song Bassett was referring to was "Just for a Moment," a duet in the penultimate episode that the teens co-wrote for their characters, exposing the anxieties Ricky and Nini share about their feelings for each other.

Knowing they both dabbled in songwriting, Federle approached Rodrigo and Bassett early on in production and alerted them of an opportunity to submit an original ballad for the show.

"I said, 'Guys, I don't want to promise you anything. I don't want you to get your hopes up. But I think you've got a real shot at this if you try your hand at collaborating,'" Federle said. "And I remember walking away from that conversation, turning around and seeing that they were in the

back of the theater of East High, with Josh on his guitar, already working on the song. I mean literally 45 seconds later."

The track was a hit, besting several professionally written candidates in a blind selection process.

"I don't think that anybody could have written the song like Josh and I could have written the song, because we have such a unique perspective on our characters," Rodrigo said. "We were there for their creation, and we know all of the back story and everything that happened because we actually lived that and filmed that." Their behind-the-scenes contribution is part of a growing trend in an industry in which Gen Z talent are beginning to take on more creative roles in their own projects. Another Disney-bred phenom, Zendaya, 23, doubled as a producer on her teen spy series "K.C. Undercover," while "black-ish's" Marsai Martin, 15, recently and famously became the youngest person ever to sign a first-look production deal with Universal.

Federle attributed the shift to a new "bedroom content creator world," where young artists don't need or seek permission to release their ideas and homemade creations on social media — something Bassett and Rodrigo both do when testing out their own music.

"Gen Z-ers have no tolerance for anything that's fake or anything that's saccharine," said Rodrigo, who also wrote one of the show's most popular originals, "All I Want." "We have a particular insight on the world that sometimes adults don't have.... If you have a bunch of old white guys in a room trying to write a song for a teenage girl, their experience is never going to be the same as a teenage girl living in 2020."

Federle did draw the line at certain realities of Gen Z life.

"How do I tell a story with modern teenagers where nobody is going to be juuling on screen, right? Because it's like, we're still Disney," he said. "But we are trying to tell stories ... that still resonate as a real thing. And a kiss between two people who love each other is maybe one step further in the evolution of the types of stories that I'm getting to tell on Disney+. And I will say, to my boss' credit, I didn't get a single note on the kiss, maybe because it just felt so real." As for the post-kiss cliffhanger that leaves Nini with a choice between pursuing her dreams at an arts conservatory or staying with Ricky and her friends at East High? Federle couldn't reveal much, but he did hint that the series' sophomore season could be the start of something new.

"We're definitely going to see Ricky and Nini work on their relationship and be in love," he said. "In terms of the big decision she has to make — I don't want to give too much away — but part of expanding a show into a second season is bringing in new characters and taking us to places that we haven't always been in Season 1. And that's as much as I'll say about that."

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•• (R) LES MISERABLES

(10:00) 12:25, 2:50, 5:15, 7:45, 8:45, 10:10

•• (R) PAIN AND GLORY

(11:40) 2:20, 5:00, 7:40, 10:15

•• 1917 (R)

(10:50) 11:45, 1:35, 2:30, 3:15, 4:20, 5:15, 6:00, 7:05, 8:00, 9:45, 10:40

•• (PG) LITTLE WOMEN

(10:10) 12:15, 1:10, 4:10, 7:10, 10:05

PARASITE (R)

(10:45) 1:40, 4:35, 7:30, 10:20

•• KNIVES OUT (PG-13)

(10:35) 1:30, 4:25, 7:20, 10:10

•• (PG-13) STAR WARS: THE RISE OF SKYWALKER

(10:00) 1:00, 4:05, 7:15, 10:15

•• JOJO RABBIT (PG-13)

(11:35) 2:15, 4:50, 7:25, 9:55

•• (PG) A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

(11:20) 1:55, 4:30, 7:05, 9:35

• CLEMENCY (R)

(11:00) 1:40, 4:20, 7:00, 9:35

NUART THEATRE

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•• THE TWO POPES (PG-13)

(1:00)

•• THE IRISHMAN (R)

3:45

•• MARRIAGE STORY (R)

8:00

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ROYAL

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THE SONG OF NAMES (PG-13)

1:30 PM 4:20 PM 7:10 PM 10:00 PM

ADVOCATE 4:20 PM

INVISIBLE LIFE (R) 1:10 PM 7:20 PM

A HIDDEN LIFE (PG-13) 1:00 PM 4:30 PM 8:00 PM

PLAYHOUSE

672 E. Colorado Blvd. • Pasadena

THE METROPOLITAN OPERA: WOZZECK 9:55 AM

1917 (R) 10:30 AM 1:20 PM 4:10 PM 7:00 PM 9:50 PM

CLEMENCY (R) 4:20 PM 9:55 PM

LITTLE WOMEN (R) 1:20 PM 4:30 PM 7:40 PM

THE SONG OF NAMES (PG-13) 4:30 PM

UNCUT GEMS (R) 1:00 PM 4:00 PM 7:00 PM 10:00 PM

BOMBSHELL (R) 1:10 PM 4:00 PM 7:10 PM 10:00 PM

INVISIBLE LIFE (R) 1:10 PM 7:20 PM

A HIDDEN LIFE (PG-13) 1:00 PM 7:30 PM

A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD (R) 1:40 PM 7:10 PM

PAIN AND GLORY (R) 4:50 PM

AMERICAN FACTORY 10:30 AM

ONE CHILD NATION (R) 11:00 AM

KNOCK DOWN THE HOUSE (R) 11:00 AM

APOLLO 11 (R) 11:00 AM

THE CAVE (PG-13) 10:30 AM

MONICA

1332 Second Street • Santa Monica

1917 (R) 10:30 AM 1:20 PM 4:10 PM 7:10 PM 10:00 PM

THE SONATA 9:55 PM

THREE CHRISTMAS 1:00 PM 4:10 PM 7:00 PM

LITTLE WOMEN (R) 1:30 PM 4:40 PM 7:50 PM

UNCUT GEMS (R) 1:00 PM 4:00 PM 7:00 PM 10:00 PM

THE TWO POPES (PG-13) 1:10 PM

THE IRISHMAN (R) 4:00 PM

MARRIAGE STORY (R) 8:10 PM

JOJO RABBIT (PG-13) 4:20 PM 10:00 PM

PAIN AND GLORY (R) 1:20 PM 7:10 PM

AMERICAN FACTORY 10:30 AM

ONE CHILD NATION (R) 11:00 AM

KNOCK DOWN THE HOUSE (R) 11:00 AM

APOLLO 11 (R) 11:00 AM

THE CAVE (PG-13) 10:30 AM

GLENDALE

207 N. Maryland Ave • Glendale

1917 (R) 1:30 PM 4:20 PM 7:10 PM 10:00 PM

LITTLE WOMEN (R) 1:10 PM 7:45 PM

UNCUT GEMS (R) 1:00 PM 4:00 PM 7:00 PM 10:00 PM

AMERICAN FACTORY 10:30 AM

A HIDDEN LIFE (PG-13) 1:00 PM 4:40 PM 8:20 PM

PARASITE (R) 4:00 PM 9:55 PM

PAIN AND GLORY (R) 1:10 PM 7:10 PM

NoHo 7

3240 Lankershim Blvd. • No. Hollywood

1917 (R) 1:20 PM 4:10 PM 7:00 PM 9:50 PM

JUST MERCY (PG-13) 1:00 PM 4:20 PM 7:30 PM

LITTLE WOMEN (R) 1:30 PM 4:40 PM 7:40 PM

UNCUT GEMS (R) 1:00 PM 4:00 PM 7:00 PM 10:00 PM

BOMBSHELL (R) 12:50 PM 7:15 PM

CATS (R) 9:55 PM

STAR WARS: THE RISE OF SKYWALKER (PG-13) 1:10 PM 4:30 PM 7:50 PM

A HIDDEN LIFE (PG-13) 3:40 PM

KNIVES OUT (PG-13) 1:10 PM 4:15 PM 7:10 PM 10:10 PM

CLAREMONT

450 W. 2nd Street • Claremont

THE METROPOLITAN OPERA: WOZZECK 9:55 AM

1917 (R) 10:30 AM 1:40 PM 4:30 PM 7:20 PM 10:10 PM

LITTLE WOMEN (R) 10:10 AM 1:10 PM 4:10 PM 7:10 PM 10:10 PM

UNCUT GEMS (R) 1:00 PM 4:00 PM 7:00 PM 10:00 PM

STAR WARS: THE RISE OF SKYWALKER (PG-13) 1:10 PM 4:20 PM 7:30 PM

A HIDDEN LIFE (PG-13) 4:00 PM

PAIN AND GLORY (R) 10:20 AM 1:20 PM 7:40 PM

TOWN CENTER

17200 Ventura Blvd. • Encino

THE METROPOLITAN OPERA: WOZZECK 9:55 AM

1917 (R) 10:40 AM 1:20 PM 4:10 PM 7:00 PM 9:50 PM

TANHAJI: THE UNSUNG

WARRIOR (R) 6:15 PM 9:30 PM

LITTLE WOMEN (R) 10:40 AM

1:10 PM 4:20 PM 7:30 PM

THE SONG OF NAMES (PG-13) 1:20 PM 7:00 PM

UNCUT GEMS (R) 9:55 PM

INVISIBLE LIFE (R) 1:40 PM

4:00 PM

PARASITE (R) 10:30 AM 1:00 PM

7:10 PM 10:10 PM

PAIN AND GLORY (R) 10:30 AM 4:10 PM

BARGAIN IN ( )

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