

CALENDAR

MONDAY, JANUARY 19, 2015 :: LATIMES.COM/CALENDAR

A call to put diversity center stage

Initiative wants SoCal theaters to increase minority hires. Sounds like quotas, some say.

By DAVID NG

A group of Los Angeles theater leaders will announce this week an aggressive plan to diversify Southern California theater companies, the productions they present and the audiences they draw.

Tim Dang, producing artistic director of East West Players, has written an initiative that calls for at least 51% of those employed by Southern California theater companies by 2019 to be people of color, women or those younger than 35.

Some prominent local companies have already voiced support, but some observers question the plan's legality, saying that implementation would institute quotas and violate state and federal employment laws.

Backers of the plan want

to compel theaters to confront the rapidly changing demographic makeup of the country. The U.S. Census Bureau has estimated that minorities will constitute half of all Americans by 2042.

California already was declared a predominantly minority population in the 2000 census. Yet 75% of theatergoers in the L.A. region are Caucasian, and 80% are of the baby boomer generation or older, according to a study by the nonprofit L.A. Stage Alliance in 2011, the most recent year for which statistics are available.

Dang and his supporters said that if theater companies were more diverse — by age, sex and skin color — the change would have a ripple effect on what plays or musicals were staged, and what audiences they brought.

"The more voices you have at the table, the more robust the conversation is," said Dang, who is the driving force behind the plan with other leaders at East West, located in downtown L.A. "We have to start somewhere."

[See Diversity, E2]



COUNTDOWN TO THE GRAMMYS





GARY FRIEDMAN Los Angeles Times

SHELDON EPPS is artistic director at Pasadena Playhouse, which has voiced support for the plan.

TCA WINTER PRESS TOUR

Fox to focus on broader, bolder

New CEOs' strategy includes 'Empire,' 'Wayward,' possibly Simon Cowell.

BY MEG JAMES

Fox's new television team stepped into the spotlight over the weekend to articulate its mission: broaden the appeal of the languishing network while still creating bold and risky programming.

Last spring, Fox's battle-scarred entertainment

chief, Kevin Reilly, stepped down after seven years — leaving a management gap. Longtime Fox TV studio captains Gary Newman and Dana Walden persuaded their bosses to let them run both the Fox production studio and the TV network.

And there is plenty of work to do.

"We are well aware that we are the fourth-place network and our ratings are challenged," said Newman, now chairman and chief executive of the Fox Television Group, on Saturday at the Television Critics Assn.

[See Fox, E6]

LEE ANN WOMACK is in the Grammy mix with "The Way I'm Livin'," her first record since 2008.

RICARDO DEARATANHA Los Angeles Times

Her frank 'Way'

Singer's introspective path leads to nomination

By MIKAEL WOOD >>> Lee Ann Womack, the Grammy-winning country singer, says her latest album grew out of a question: What kind of music would she make if she weren't concerned with marketing or radio play or what her peers are doing?

On "The Way I'm Livin'," her first record since 2008, the answer is frank, small-scale songs about people in tough spots: the lonely drinker killing a quart by herself in "Send It on Down," or the woman in "Chances Are" who "took the wrong turn every time I had a turn to take."

The sound is darker and more introspective than the high-powered party tunes Nashville pumps out these days. And it's less polished than "I Hope You Dance," the glossy pop-crossover ballad Womack drove to the top of the charts in 2000.

"I'm at a point now where I've accomplished everything I wanted to accomplish," the singer said recently. "What I wanted to do this time was just make real music and not think about anything else."

Yet if Womack was taking a step away from the establishment, the establishment hasn't exactly let Womack go. At this year's Grammy ceremony, scheduled for Feb. 8, the singer could take home her second award with a win for best country album. "The Way I'm Livin'" is nominated against higher-profile mainstream hits by Eric Church, Miranda Lambert and Dierks Bentley.

What's more, listening to the record illustrates the quiet influence Womack, 48, has had on a younger generation of singers — women like Ashley Monroe and Brandy [See Womack, E7]



FRANCINE ORR Los Angeles Times

DANISH VIOLINIST Nikolaj Znaider, middle, performs with the L.A. Phil at Disney Hall. His playing was luscious on Sibelius' Violin Concerto on the program.

MUSIC REVIEW

Astonishing grand finale

The late Górecki's Fourth Symphony makes its powerful U.S. debut at Disney.

MARK SWED
MUSIC CRITIC

Henryk Górecki's Fourth Symphony, co-commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and given its U.S. premiere Friday night in Walt Disney Concert Hall, is powerful and peculiar. Just like the late Polish composer.

It is a symphony that was not expected to exist let alone sound the astonishing way it does. But that too happens to be in keeping with Górecki, who came to implausible fame with a 1992 Nonesuch recording of his 1977 Third Symphony. Somehow, the somber CD of what Górecki titled "Symphony of Sorrowful Songs" went platinum, its profound beauty reaching even the pop charts.

The one person an unprecedented symphonic success did not suit was the uncompromisingly spiritual [See L.A. Phil, E3]



ACME

Ambiguity along with clarity

"Expanded Flower" is a work by Amir Zaki at ACME gallery. E3

A brief look at movies

Reviewed: "Pretty Rosebud," "Spare Parts" and others. E4

Comics E8-9
TV grid E10



Regen Projects

AN IMAGE from a video by Gillian Wearing, a Turner Prize recipient who in a local exhibition provides a haunting and powerful piece of documentary theater.

AROUND THE GALLERIES

Harnessing clay's power

BY LEAH OLLMAN

"Coupling" is the eye of the storm that is Meghan Smythe's remarkable first solo show, at Mark Moore Gallery.

The two slightly oversized right hands, sculpted in clay and sheathed in milky white glaze, rest on a pedestal, their gently cupped palms facing up. The thumb of one hand makes the barest contact with one of the fingers of the other. This is coupling of a spiritual as much as a physical sort.

Another kind of convergence happens here too. These hands, with their poignantly irregular texture, are quite overtly works of the hand, the clay pressed and pinched into shape by fingers replicating themselves. The means of creation merges with the image created; the act of making couples with the made.

The tenderness and quietness of "Coupling" are nourishing in themselves, but also a reprieve from the demanding intensity of the surrounding work. "Coupling" whispers; the other pieces grunt and pant.

Smythe, from Kingston, Canada, and now living in Long Beach after a two-year residency at the Cal State campus there, harnesses to its fullest clay's metaphoric power to invoke the very stuff of life.

The raw force of being

and becoming, making as well as unmaking courses through these sculptures, which also incorporate glass, resin, epoxy and plasticine. Their energy oscillates wildly between desperate and spent.

"Young Unbecoming" is the most complex of the group, a breathless orgy of bodies grasping, bending, licking, twisting. There are three, or more precisely 3½, female figures in the mix, plus an assortment of stray phalli and a plethora of clutching hands.

Limbs are entwined, tongues extended. Clay is rarely, if ever, this carnal. Some of the skin is mannequin-smooth but veined with cracks. Some seeps a pink foam or a pale fecal flood. Erotic pleasure plays a part here, but is only one of many competing charges.

Throughout this, and Smythe's other works, there is a violent fragmentation that zigzags between sexual fantasy and deathly dismemberment. With its human shipwreck of compromised flesh, "Young Unbecoming" brings to mind Géricault's "Raft of the Medusa," and exudes comparable, palpable urgency.

Smythe is a sculptor of struggle. Primal forces contend in the work, as do various aesthetic and formal dispositions. The sobriety of the relic is countered by the whimsy of glass and resin follies. Figures pallid and ca-



Mark Moore Gallery

MEGHAN SMYTHE'S show includes the nourishing "Coupling," left, and "Young Unbecoming," the most complex of the exhibition's works.

davorous lie upon a surface oozing with puddles in the happy hues of Easter eggs.

The friction between generation and decay, elegance and entropy, is what makes Smythe's work so alive and also so tough to digest. It doesn't go down easy, or at all. Stubborn, sensual, visceral — it sticks.

Mark Moore Gallery, 5790 Washington Blvd., Culver City, (310) 453-3031, through Feb. 14. Closed Sunday and Monday. www.markmooregallery.com

Images of beauty and mystery

The title of Amir Zaki's absorbing show at ACME, "Seeking Clarity," ought to come with an asterisk and the aside, "But Also Intentionally Subverting It."

The L.A.-based photog-

rapher presents two bodies of work here, and one of them gives the show's title an ironic twist.

The "Sliver" series features images of the ocean, closing in on turbulent wave activity. By leaving out the horizon line and digitally compacting the pictures, Zaki amplifies the unfamiliar within the familiar. Scale and texture become ambiguous. One of the large, immersive prints (75 by 60 inches) reads like a micro-photograph of wriggling cilia. Another conjures a pitted scholar's rock that itself evokes a mountain range. In others, the water mimics slick obsidian or lush fur. The conceit is not terribly complex, but it yields images of irresistible mystery.

In the second group of work here, Zaki does opt for clarity, shooting palm tree seed pods as isolated sculptural forms hanging by a rope against a bare wall. The taxonomic cataloguing of

variants on a single theme harks back to his previous series centering on trees and lifeguard towers, and further, to the influence of Karl Blossfeldt and the Bechers.

Zaki focuses again on the familiar, and tightening his gaze, lets outrageous beauty speak for itself.

ACME, 6150 Wilshire Blvd., (323) 857-5942, through Feb. 7. Closed Sunday and Monday. www.acmelosangeles.com

Summoning confessions

Gillian Wearing mines a vein that generations before her — many of them also women working in photographic media — have mined, having to do with identity as constructed, multiple, fluid.

Think Cindy Sherman,

Eleanor Antin, Yasumasa Morimura and Claude Cahun. It's not just a fertile vein, but an inexhaustible one. How can we ever know ourselves well enough?

Wearing, based in London and 1997 recipient of the Turner Prize, favors the use of masks and variants on the act of masquerade to summon private confessions.

In both of the recent videos now at Regen Projects (accompanied by some less remarkable sculpture), Wearing enlists ordinary people to speak their stories while occupying alternate versions of themselves.

In one case, men and women from L.A. don expression-muting masks while disclosing their fears and loathings. In the other, more wrenching work, citizens of Britain's West Midlands give voice to their future, deceased selves, reflecting back on their lives' regrets, losses, betrayals and disappointments.

"We Are Here," titled after and inspired by the posthumous, poetic self-portraits in Edgar Lee Masters' "Spoon River Anthology," is a haunting and powerful piece of documentary theater.

Men and women, young and old, deliver their preemptive, inverted eulogies mostly facing away from us, as if their vulnerability needed cushioning. The oblique angle, the confessor's mask, the gloss of fiction — in Wearing's work all of these are routes to revelation, effective tools for extracting the aspirations and fears, tender spots and dark holes that comprise the self.

Regen Projects, 6750 Santa Monica Blvd., (310) 276-5424, through Jan. 24. Closed Sunday and Monday. www.regenprojects.com

calendar@latimes.com