

ENTERTAINMENT



The cast of *The Real Housewives of Toluca Lake*

From Real Housewives to Valley Girls

Molly Bell has taken our country's reality TV obsession and turned it into prime viewing set for the stage **By Les Spindle**

'CRAZY' GETS IT RIGHT

HEY, TV FANS, DID YOU KNOW there's a super funny post-feminist musical dramedy called *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend*? Did you know the show features one of the most heartwarming and unique same-sex relationships on TV? Sure, it's primarily about Rebecca (**Rachel Bloom**) and her quest to land childhood boyfriend Josh (**Vincent Rodriguez III**), but the real couple of the show is Rebecca's boss, recently divorced single dad Darryl Whitefeather (**Pete Gardner**), and his new boyfriend, White Josh. Darryl's late-in-life realization that he's bisexual was treated with warmth and understanding (how refreshing!), and Darryl's coming out even came with a wonderful **Huey Lewis**-esque musical number called "Getting Bi." *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* has been quietly revolutionary in so many ways this season. Do yourself a favor and check it out, so we can all enjoy another season. —**Dominik Rothbard**

Bravo's ultra-popular *Real Housewives* franchise, launched in 2006, melds reality TV and high camp into a seemingly unstoppable franchise. Beginning with *Real Housewives of Orange County*, the craze escalated with subsequent spinoffs set in New York City, Atlanta, New Jersey, D.C., Beverly Hills, Miami, Potomac and Dallas.

Northern California-based writer-composer-performer **Molly Bell** is now parlaying widespread *Housewives* mania into a series of spoof musicals for the stage. Next up is Bell's San Fernando Valley edition, *The Real Housewives of Toluca Lake: The Musical*, appropriately housed at **Garry Marshall's** ever-popular Toluca Lake venue, the Falcon Theatre. It begins previews March 23, running April 1-24.

"The show is written for the title to be changed in each location it appears," says Bell. "Specific jokes and locales have been written in to make it Toluca Lake-centric. The show was originally written in Northern California, but once I knew it would be making its Toluca Lake debut, we got to work adding local references."

Bell is working with a formidable collaborator in prolific writer-director-producer **Roger Bean**, a proven ace at jukebox musicals (including *The Winter Wonderettes*,



Molly Bell

the L.A. Drama Critics Circle-winning *Life Could Be a Dream*, *The Andrews Brothers* and many more). A SoCal resident who has staged his hit shows in various cities, as well as Off-Broadway, Bean is helming the Toluca Lake production.

"Roger heard about my show, playing up North, and flew in to see it," Bell says. "Lucky for me, he loved it and wanted to be a part of its growth. His success with *The Marvelous Wonderettes* and other shows has allowed him to develop artists' work, and it's been a great collaboration. We have a lot of fun."

Will fans of *Real Housewives* editions find elements that send-up the hit series? "I've drawn inspiration from all of the *Real Housewives* shows. You could say I watch way too much, but I call it research," she says.

According to Bell, her first *Housewives* show was originally developed for the town of Walnut Creek, near San Francisco. "The show is similar in plot and twists, but it's grown a lot since the production two years ago," she says. "This one will in many ways be different, but mainly because we've learned a lot from the last production. Every installment will have a natural growth to it."

Bell has herself been a performer for 16 years, writing plays for seven. As a performer, she helped create roles in *Memphis*, *Vanities* and Andrew Lippa's *A Little Princess*. "Writing and composing still feel new to me," she says, "and I consider myself a newbie. The reward of watching a show that I wrote being fully produced is huge to me. In many ways, writing feels like a bigger risk, and it can be nerve-wracking wondering, Is it funny? Does it sound good? Will they laugh?"

Summing up her experiences with her *Housewives* franchise, Bell adds, "The world is full of stress and worry. My goal in writing this show is to have a packed audience enjoying a night at the theater filled with laughter, joy and smiles. *Real Housewives of Toluca Lake* is pure fun and silliness, and I'm so excited that it's taking Los Angeles by storm."

Meanwhile, Bell has her sights set on yet another TV franchise. "I'm currently working on a new script—a musical fairy tale about the television show *The Bachelor*. It's in the early stages," she says. "The first draft of the book is written, and I'm about to start in on the music." Set in West Hollywood, perchance? ■



Sex with Strangers (left), Summer and Smoke

On the Stage

SEX WITH STRANGERS

Geffen Playhouse // Through April 10 // ★★★★★

Premiering at Chicago's Steppenwolf company in 2011 and having its New York bow in 2014, **Laura Eason's** two-character play offers a seriocomic glimpse at fervent career ambitions and provocative romance in the internet age. The play's L.A. debut, directed by **Kimberly Senior**, stars **Stephen Louis Grush**, superb as a womanizing late-20s guy who proudly flaunts his conquests in his blog, and **Rebecca Pidgeon**, in a finely nuanced portrayal as a middle-aged novelist, chasing success in that career while toiling as a teacher. Their paths cross at a Michigan bed-and-breakfast retreat on a frigid winter night. The battle-of-the-sexes contest ensues there, then heads to her Chicago apartment after the act break. Halfway between a sophisticated 21st century rom-com and thoughtful pondering on the dehumanizing cyberspace world versus the more bracing sphere of unbridled passion, the play is quite enjoyable but could use a stronger sense of narrative cohesiveness and thematic coherency.

SUMMER AND SMOKE

David Schall Theatre // Through April 17 // ★★★★★

Tennessee Williams' sultry and thought-provoking 1947 drama, strongly associated with **Geraldine Page's** unforgettable lead performances on stage and screen, is also known as *Eccentricities of a Nightingale*, the author's 1964 revision. Actors Co-op stages the original version, in a solid realization of the play's provocative themes, captivating ambience and lyrical grace, enhanced by splendid production design. Director **Thom Babbes** helms this intelligent and emotionally stirring rendition, evoking a timeless relevance. Set in 1915 Mississippi, the story explores the conflicts between physical reality and spiritual essence, reflecting on faith, passion, guilt and redemption. The key relationship is between strongly repressed spinster Alma (**Tara Battani**, superb) and John (**Gregory James**, excellent), a womanizing local physician with an unusual bedside manner. These actors deliver richly nuanced portrayals, evoking a fine chemistry. —**Les Spindle**



Crazy in 70mm

The widest 70mm theatrical release in 20 years was also one of the year's most polarizing films. Some people were enamored while others espoused hatred of **Quentin Tarantino's** eighth outing, *The Hateful Eight*, but wherever you fall on that film critic spectrum, the **Jennifer Jason Leigh, Samuel L. Jackson** and **Kurt Russell**-starring film is available to own on DVD and Blu-ray come March 29, packed with two featurettes—*Beyond the Eight: A Behind-the-Scenes Look* and *Sam Jackson's Guide to Glorious 70mm*. —**Tom Paul Jones**



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LGBT couples have the chance to prove themselves against their straight counterparts in a new game show where paired-up partners prove how well they know each other. *Modd Couples* is the latest show on LGBT network Here TV. Hosts **David Millbern** and **Olivia Harwood** welcome two couples to each episode—one straight, one LGBT. Over three rounds, they must prove their knowledge of one another through games, like guessing how their partner would answer certain intimate questions. (You know the drill.) It's all at the cheesy end of the game show spectrum, but intentionally so, and the show doesn't take itself too seriously. "*Modd Couples* is really a comedy dressed up like a retro '70s game show but with a fresh twist," says Millbern, also one of the show's producers. All six episodes are currently available on Here TV, as well as the network's Hulu and YouTube Premium channels. —**Dominic Preston**



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In theaters this month, writer and director Matt Sobel's new film *Take Me to the River* is no picnic **By Gary M. Kramer**

Family reunions are always full of drama, but the one in writer/director **Matt Sobel's** wonderfully discomfiting *Take Me to the River* is worth attending. **Ryder (Logan Miller)** is a California teenager who heads out with his mother **Cindy (Robin Weigert)** and father **Don (Richard Schiff)** to her family's Nebraska homestead. He wants to tell his conservative relatives he's gay; his parents don't think that's such a good idea. Besides, family tensions escalate plenty when **Ryder** is accused of doing something inappropriate with his pre-teen cousin **Molly (an outstanding Ursula Parker)**. The anxiety **Ryder** feels extends to viewers. As Sobel explains, "**Ryder** realizes he does not know nearly as much as he thought about himself and the world." *Take Me to the River* goes in a completely opposite direction than the setup suggests, which is one of its strengths. Sobel creates what he calls an "uncanny" experience: "It is something familiar but strange; it starts out naturalistic, but soon becomes insidious and darker." The writer/director, who is straight, masterfully ratchets up the tension by creating awkward silences—as when **Ryder** performs a song for his uncle and cousins—or during an powerful scene when **Molly** and **Ryder** visit the titular river.

The Q&A: MICHAEL CARBONARO



The Carbonaro Effect returns Wednesday, March 23, and here the handsome young illusionist gives us the scoop on the latest season

Q: What's one of your favorite tricks from the upcoming season?

A: We hired out an Elks Lodge where they do wakes, and I orchestrated a whole event where there are caterers in the other room, and one by one I'd send them to another room and there was a casket in the room. When you put someone in a room with a casket, oh boy, anything goes!

Q: You worked with Shaq on the premiere?

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Q: Who are some of your favorite magicians?

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Q: What's in Michael Carbonaro's future?

A: I'm going on tour starting in April (check MichaelCarbonaro.com), and I'll meet fans, and perform in front of an audience.

Q: You've done some acting in the past. Want to do more of that?

A: Yeah, sure! I've done a bunch of TV, and I love the idea of being on a sitcom someday or working in the movies. I'm going to be in *Rush Hour*; I'm in the second episode. But *The Carbonaro Effect* keeps me really busy. It really is all-consuming. Hopefully it'll be a long, exciting career. It's been awesome so far. —**D.R.**

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BY IOANNIS PAPPOS



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5 New Tracks We're Currently Living For

1. "Cold Call" by Boulevards

Jamil Rashad, aka Boulevards, drops his much-anticipated debut, *Groove!*, on April 1. Until then, luxuriate in his slinky mix of **Tom Tom Club**, **Prince** and **Sade** on this funky earworm of a single.

2. "Where the Light Gets In" by Primal Scream (feat. Sky Ferreira)

These acid-damaged Scots haven't sounded this fun since their early Madchester days circa-*Screamadelica*. **Sky Ferreira**, no stranger to drugs herself, guests on this electropop teaser from the band's forthcoming *Chaosmosis*.

3. "3 Wheel-Ups" by Kano (feat. Giggs)

This UK Grime MC's recently released *Made in the Manor* makes a strong case for this decidedly English hybrid of rap and EDM to make a play Stateside. It's skittish, beats-wise, and manic enough

to get you on the dance floor. Just don't throw out your neck while keeping time with your bobbing head.

4. "Tidal Wave" by Midi Matilda

Most electro indie isn't nearly as engaging as it pretends to be. But this San Francisco duo, quiet since their 2013 EP *Red Light District*, comes back swinging with this open-hearted hookfest. Can a formal debut be long behind? Let's hope not.

5. "Water" by Ra Ra Riot

Album four is where these Syracuse indie poppers start showing off, nowhere more eloquently than on this infinitely repeatable slice of pop heaven featuring a co-writing credit from **Rostam Batmanglij** (formerly of **Vampire Weekend**) and the soulful upper register of vocalist **Wes Miles**. —*Dan Loughry*



Commando Shares Its Not-So-Limp Bizkit

Who would've thought the missing link between **Limp Bizkit** and **Sigue Sigue Sputnik** would be so ... gay? **COMMANDO** is a hardcore gay nü-metal rap collective comprised of **Christeene**, **Krylon Superstar**, **Big Dipper**, **Van Jackson-Weaver** and **The Living Earth Show**. (Isn't anyone named John anymore?) Their debut three-song EP recently exploded all over the faces of the music industry, and things look never to be the same. "Open Wide" is a eulogy for genitalia lost too soon, with equally disturbing shades of **B-52s** and **Marilyn Manson**. The group describes the EP's closer "Land Mine" as "the sound of **Grace Jones** pegging **Ross Robinson** in the bathroom of Mr. Bungle's tour bus." While that description is a bit ambitious, they do come close. This is not a band to ignore. —*Dominik Rothbard*

4 NEW MUST-WATCH MUSIC VIDEOS



"BLUE MONDAY"

If you ever imagined **New Order**'s iconic dance single with 1930s instruments, check out **Orkestra Obsolete**'s cheeky cover featuring a zither, singing wine glasses, a wood saw and a very excitable theremin player.



"A LOVE SONG"

Enjoy this neon Anime lyric video while awaiting **Ladyhawke**'s official version, because our favorite Aussie lez has delivered one of the best sing-along electropop ditties you're gonna hear all year.



"AUGUST IN PARIS"

We never see French singer **Sage**'s face in this surreal but fun video, but we do see hundreds of topless women, dancing thighs and legs and a militia of mannequins marching in lockstep to his indie dance beats.



"MARBLE MACHINE"

What kind of OCD musician would take the time to create a glorious contraption featuring 3,000 moving parts and 2,000 marbles? **Martin Molin**, aka **Wintergatan**, and the gimmick fades once you hear how beautiful the song is. —*Paul V.*

SET YOUR DVR



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1. THE REAL WORLD

The show's 31st season (!) comes with a twist. Set in Las Vegas for the third time in the show's run, this round is subtitled "Go Big or Go Home," and challenges will test the cast's "grit" and could lead to them being booted. Remember when the biggest thing you had to worry about was peanut butter etiquette? (*Thursday, March 17, MTV*)

2. MARVEL'S DAREDEVIL

Netflix launches the show's second season with 13 new episodes. This season, Matt Murdock (aka Daredevil) will see the return of his ex-girlfriend Elektra Natchios (aka Electric Nachos) and will meet Frank "The Punisher" Castle, so expect comic book sparks to fly. (*Friday, March 18, Netflix*)

3. PEE WEE'S BIG HOLIDAY

There's virtually nothing that could deter us from watching this **Judd Apatow**-produced Pee-wee Herman movie co-starring **Joe Manganiello**. Not even that *Love*'s icky **Paul Rust** co-wrote this thing. Here's hoping Floory is in this. (*Friday, March 18, Netflix*)

4. HEARTBEAT

Melissa George stars as a brilliant and stunning world-renowned heart surgeon who just can't get her life together. Where is Hollywood coming up with these crazy innovative ideas? (*Tuesday, March 22, NBC*)

5. THE PATH

Aaron Paul stars in this mysterious drama centered around the cult-like Meyerist Movement. The series takes an in-depth look at the gravitational pull of belief and what it means to choose between the life we live and the life we want. Whatever. As long as Paul takes his shirt off, we'll be watching. (*Wednesday, March 29, Hulu*)

6. LOPEZ

The comeback no one was asking for on the network no one will watch it on. **George Lopez** returns with a single-camera autobiographical sitcom. Expect **Carlos Mencia** to follow suit in 3...2... (*Wednesday, March 29, TV Land*) —**D.R.**

TELEVISION LONG DIVISION



Bad Life Decisions



Spray Tans



Dad Bods



Occasional Nudity



Gigolos 6th Season, March 17, Showtime



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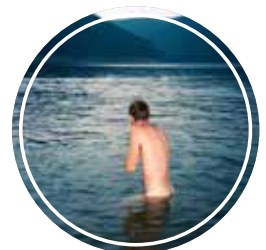
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