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in this week's issue

features

Recall-ifornia

Arnold and Arianna, Davis and Bustamante, Bush's Hollywood hypocrisy, and why this weird, insane, embarrassing election is a good thing. BILL BRADLEY reviews the [Terminator's big week](#) and has a surprise or two of his own; he also remembers the last great months of [California's Democratic Party](#). HAROLD MEYERSON warns that another one of California's [middle-class riots](#) is upon us. HOWARD BLUME grades [Gray's record](#). NIKKI FINKE asserts that [Arnold's candidacy](#) pumps up the political game for Hollywood. MARC COOPER [debunks five myths](#) providing safety and comfort to recall opponents. D.J. WALDIE scans California and finds it to be [ungovernable](#). STEVEN MIKULAN [bares the humor](#) in the ballot lineup. ROBERT GREENE explores a ballot initiative that could spare California [another recall mess](#). ERIN AUBRY KAPLAN warns of the real danger on the ballot — [the Ward Connerly initiative](#).

Our Mothers Were a Communist
American Splendor, the life-size heroics of [Harvey Pekar](#), and me. BY DAVE SHULMAN

news

[Cirque du Kobe](#): How race and riches are shaping the Kobe Bryant case in Eagle County. BY DAVID O. WILLIAMS

[Web of Deceit](#): A state appellate court has overturned the murder conviction of Jose Salazar for killing an infant girl in 1996, ruling that the L.A. County District Attorney's Office deliberately concealed information from the defense. BY JIM CROGAN

Plus, ROBERT GREENE on mediation talks over the future of [Rancho Los Amigos](#), and other city/county issues; HOWARD BLUME remembers [Gregory Hines](#); and CHRISTINE PELISEK's [Ambushed](#) takes on Bush's nuclear policies.

columns

The Buck Starts Here

Why two private investors are gambling on the theater
by Steven Leigh Morris

It's official: Now that the state budget has been approved, the California Arts Council's funding has been slashed 90 percent from \$18 million in 2002-2003 to \$1 million this coming year. (The National Endowment for the Arts is expected to provide a matching \$1 million, plus another anticipated \$1 million in revenues from designer license plates, bringing the expected state arts budget to \$3 million.) This represents a contribution of less than 3 cents per Californian per annum, placing the Golden State dead last in the nation's state arts-budget sweepstakes. Even laissez-faire Nevada — even Arkansas! — now gives more public money to the arts than we do.

If it's to survive, our theater must now bank, almost literally, on the likes of philanthropist Z. Clark Branson and developer Tom Gilmore. The two men could not be more dissimilar in temperament, yet they each claim to have left-leaning sympathies (Branson is a supporter of the Liberty Hill Foundation, while Gilmore speaks with contempt about the Banana Republican gentrification of Santa Monica and Old Town Pasadena), and they both share a common desire to have a lasting impact on the culture of their beloved cities — Pasadena for Branson, and Los Angeles for Gilmore.

The eccentric Branson comes off as a dreamer who, for reasons of personal conviction, has sunk \$5 million of his own money into the construction of a state-of-the-art performance complex named Boston Court, located on Mentor Avenue just north of Colorado Boulevard. Boston Court is comprised of a 99-seat theater (the Boston Court Theater) and a 60-seat music recital hall (the Marjorie Branson Hall,



Branson (left) and Gilmore
(Photo by Ted Soqui)

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LETTERS

We write, you write...

A CONSIDERABLE TOWN

Continuing education: DAN KAPELOVITZ, like a lot of us, was hungry for knowledge, thirsty for celebrity and wondering how he'd improve his marriage if, indeed, he were married. That's why he signed up for Shirley Jones and Marty Ingels' class on "The Value of Separation and Therapy in a Marriage," offered by, of course, the Learning Annex.

Missing panties: JAY BABCOCK sniffs around for clues in the case of the mysterious panty raid at, well, Panty Raid.

Drinking games: To quote philosopher kings Lynryd Skynryd: "Whiskey bottles, brand-new cars, oak tree you're in my way." PAUL CULLUM doesn't actually adhere to that philosophy, but he does take you deep into the world of the Tennessee Squires, the single-barrel-sippin' ninjas of the Jack Daniel's diaspora.

CONSIDERABLE PEOPLE

Interpreter: Artist Alix Lambert decodes Russian prison tattoos. BY RON ATHEY

Date mate: Evan Marc Katz helps cyberdaters spice up their personal profiles. BY HEIDI HARDT

POWERLINES

HAROLD MEYERSON warns that another one of California's middle-class riots is upon us.

DEADLINE HOLLYWOOD

NIKKI FINKE asserts that Arnold's candidacy pumps up the political game for Hollywood.

DISSONANCE

MARC COOPER debunks five myths providing safety and comfort to recall opponents.

CAKEWALK

ERIN AUBRY KAPLAN warns of the real danger on the ballot — the Ward Connerly initiative.

ROCKIE HOROSCOPE**arts****FILM**

American splendors: Kevin Costner and Harvey Pekar deliver the goods. Plus, revisiting [George Clooney, Chuck Barris, et al.](#) BY SCOTT FOUNDAS

Better than alright: The good news about the kids in OT: Our Town. BY ERNEST HARDY

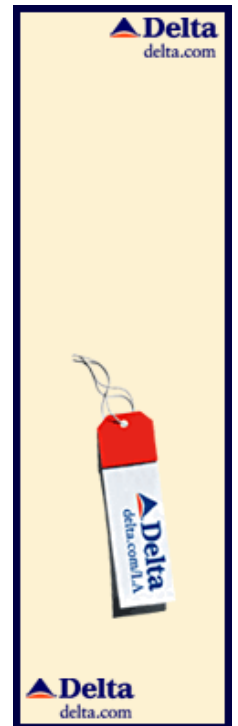
named after Clark's late mother). Storytelling, jazz and cabaret programming has already started in the recital hall; Michael Michetti's staging of *Romeo and Juliet* will inaugurate the theater this fall. (Michetti and director Jessica Kubzansky have been appointed co-artistic directors of the theater.) In the lobby of the squeaky-clean facility, designed by John Fisher (who also designed Burbank's Falcon Theater), Branson gazes distractedly around the space as he speaks softly, frequently mumbling. He keeps tugging his jacket tautly around his frame, as though it were a blanket and he were sitting alfresco on an Arctic plain.

Branson's already hinting that his financial commitment may extend beyond the contracted two years, during which time the complex must attach itself to other donors and foundations in order to keep the doors open. This is partly because the economic climate has clouded over since the project was started three years ago: 9/11 all but froze local economic expansion while three established small theaters have fled Pasadena in favor of more supportive environs. (The Furious Theater Company's space at the Armory is being reclaimed by the city for office space, Knightsbridge Theater has relocated to Silver Lake, and the Pasadena Shakespeare Company recently announced it will shutter its offices until it can find some financial stability.)

But Branson is undeterred: "Yes, it's a tough business," he says, playing with a coat button. "I don't know what the future holds, but we're going to give it a darn good try."

A Los Angeles native and confirmed bachelor who has returned to Pasadena after living there from the second grade through high school, Branson is an accomplished storyteller and folksinger who also plays the Appalachian dulcimer. He has recently been performing semiprofessionally. "I'm a late bloomer," he explains. "I probably should have gotten into performance earlier."

Branson grew up under modest

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BOOKS

[About Smith](#): Alexander McCall Smith on writing the "why-dunnit." BY MICHELLE HUNEVEN

THEATER

[The buck starts here](#): Why two private investors are gambling on the theater. BY STEVEN LEIGH MORRIS

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[Packaging the rock](#): Jane's Addiction's Strays. BY JOHN PAYNE

[NYC hip-hoppers](#) FannyPack and Northern State deserve the mainstream. BY MIKAEL WOOD

Dreamtime for [the Dagoes](#). BY FALLING JAMES

LIVE IN L.A.

[Performance reviews](#): Evanescence; Björk; Metallica, Limp Bizkit, Linkin Park, Deftones, Puddle of Mudd; Supergrass, Paloalto; the Lucksmiths.

A LOT OF NIGHT MUSIC

[Passionate and persnickety](#): R.I.P. Harold Schonberg. BY ALAN RICH

STYLE

[Bust a move](#): PLEASANT GEHMAN keeps abreast of the bra scene with Felina Lingerie's Willie Mrasek.

COMICS

["BEK,"](#) BY BRUCE ERIC KAPLAN

RESTAURANTS

[Uncooking](#): Juliano, in the raw. BY MICHELLE HUNEVEN

[Where to Eat Now](#): A list of favorite restaurants compiled by JONATHAN GOLD and MICHELLE HUNEVEN.

circumstances. His mother was a receptionist and escrow officer; his father, a telephone engineer. They divorced when Branson was 8 months old, but he says he saw a lot of his dad, and named his personal corporation, Zebulon Projects, Inc., after him. While competing on the UCLA track-and-field team as a shot-putter, Branson pursued graduate work in international folklore. He worked odd jobs through much of his life — as a bookseller in San Francisco ("an assistant to an assistant"), and as a copy boy and book reviewer for the *Los Angeles Times*.

Then one day, his grandparents' mining stocks came through. "There was no wizardry on anybody's part," he says. "It was just one of those things."

With that inherited fortune, Branson has built a magnificent 99-seat theater, which he believes is the only economically viable model for the stage in these times. "I think small theater is the best way to view theater, not only for the intimacy but to be able to see works in development. I like the idea of experimentation combined with community service, getting the community and the schools engaged here."

Still, when asked about a business plan, Branson says he's "not a money guy," and defers to his business partner, Eileen T'Kaye, who fields a question about the ethics of using \$5 million to build a theater so small when the Actors Equity union requires performer stipends of only \$15 per performance at such venues.

The whole idea of actors making a living in the theater is already a myth, T'Kaye feels. "Half the people on Broadway are working other jobs," she says. Her commitment is to provide actors with sparkling dressing rooms and facilities that send a message of respect. Also, Boston Court will pay actors a \$25 stipend per performance — \$10 higher than the Equity minimum. Besides, you're not going to see the 686-seat Pasadena Playhouse staging *Romeo and Juliet* with 23 actors, as Michetti will be doing shortly at Boston Court.



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“For better or for worse, 99-seat theater is what works in Los Angeles,” T’Kaye insists. “When it doesn’t work, it’s because people are taken advantage of or treated poorly.”

On July 31, a panel of the Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department voted to endorse developer Tom Gilmore’s bid to privately operate the four-theater Los Angeles Theater Center on Spring Street, starting January 1, 2004. The decision must now be reviewed by the department’s head, Margie Reese, who will offer her own recommendation to city Councilwoman Jan Perry for a council vote and submission to the mayor. Yet for all the process yet to come, City Hall insiders predict that Gilmore and Associates will land the deal.

Like many fine Angelenos, Gilmore hails from New York. (He settled here in 1992 after first visiting four years prior.) Like many fine New Yorkers, he talks a fast, convincing game. Whether or not one believes his conviction about the Second Coming of Downtown as part of some inevitable historical process and/or the remedy for “5,000 bad decisions by urban planners,” Gilmore’s knowledge of local history is as prodigious as his love for the city is infectious.

Educated in architecture, though not licensed to practice, Gilmore came to work here as a consultant for his partner, Jerri Perrone. Since then, Gilmore and Associates has been purchasing abandoned, historic downtown buildings (including St. Vibiana’s Cathedral, which Gilmore is turning into an arts center in partnership with Cal State L.A.). The buildings are located in what he calls “the best and the worst of Los Angeles in 10 square blocks.” Gilmore has been converting them into loft rentals and condos — thanks in part to accommodating zoning legislation and tax breaks.

He says his projects have an affordable-housing component built in, in order to keep artists in the area and prevent the kind of gentrification that has overly sanitized the Santa Monica Mall and Old Town Pasadena. “I’m a liberal Democrat,” Gilmore says, “but I’m not a lemming.”

Gilmore attributes the failure of the Music Center, Staples Center or the Convention Center to rekindle downtown to L.A.'s short-sighted affection for "silver bullet" projects that receive gobs of attention, like an exclamation point at the end of the sentence. He says it's now time to pay attention to the sentence itself, to the diverse populations required to build lasting neighborhoods in a pattern of urbanization that holds the future for America's cities — that is, affordable housing, attractive restaurants and a diversity of cultural venues.

"This is the last, great unbuilt city in America," Gilmore proclaims. Downtown thrived until the post-WWII G.I. Bill, combined with the decline of mass transit, bolstered suburbanization and left L.A. with a hole in the middle. Now, Gilmore believes, the time is right to fill the hole.

He says he's put in \$2.5 million on a \$37 million downtown-redevelopment plan. The money, he says, he "borrowed from a really rich guy." So far, Gilmore's not made a dime in profit but foresees many happy returns in a few years, and though the press has reported payment disputes between Gilmore and his contractors, including a threat of foreclosure, no such disaster has come to pass.

Should the city confirm Gilmore's bid to run LATC, he says he has little interest in choosing what goes on inside. He plans on turning those decisions over to Garson Entertainment, among other partners still unspecified. Gilmore's passion lies in the legacy of his work. "We've already changed the city," he says.

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