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'APOCALYPSE'
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Monica
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Remorse**

**Carl
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**TAKING
ORDERS
FROM THE
SUSHI CHEF**

**ANOTHER
15
MINUTES
WITH
JOSIE
COTTON**

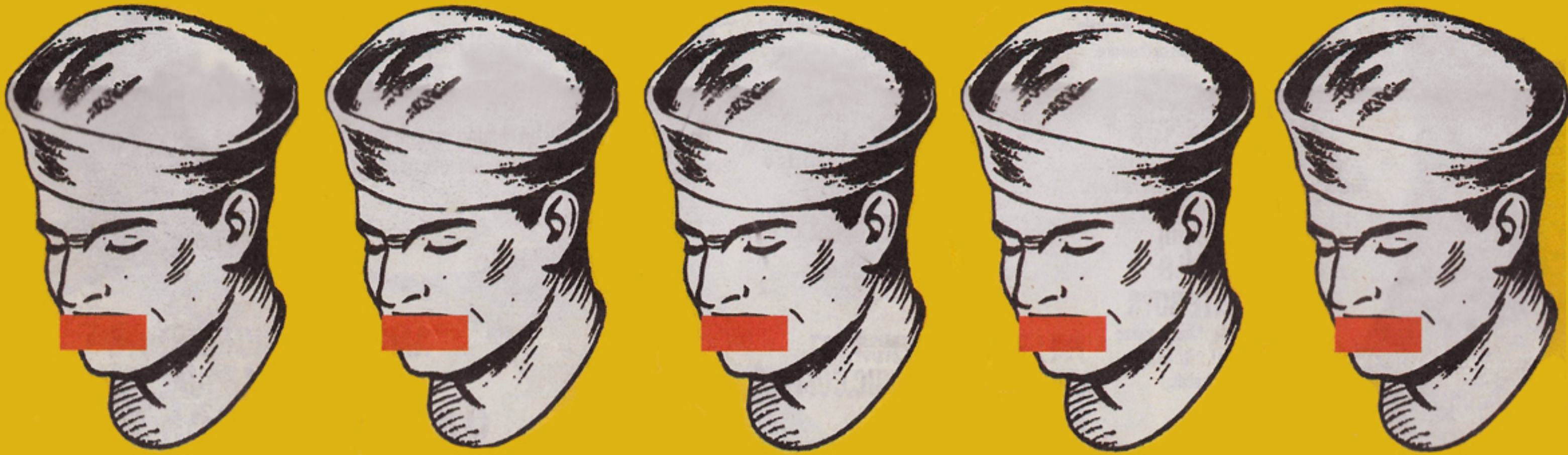
**BURYING
IMMIGRANTS
IN THE
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'LEFT COAST'
GARY LEONARD
TAKES A PICTURE**

AUGUST 17-23, 2006 ★ VOL. 4, NO. 34

LOS ANGELES CITY BEAT

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THE LEGACY OF A FLAWED POLICY AND WHY
MANY GAY AND LESBIAN SERVICEMEMBERS
WANT IT REPEALED ★ BY PETER HOLSLIN

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HOW TO REACH US
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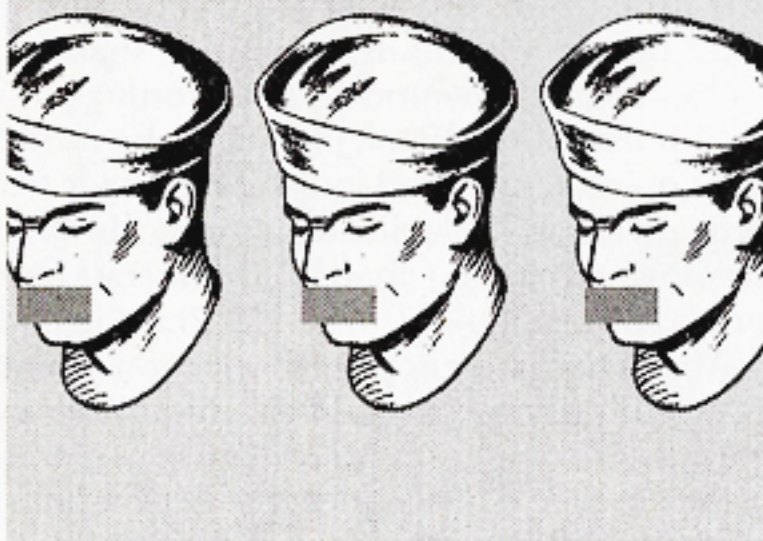
SUBSCRIPTIONS
One year: \$149 (Mailed 1st Class)

AAAP VERIFIED
#4830102

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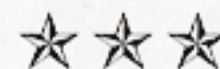
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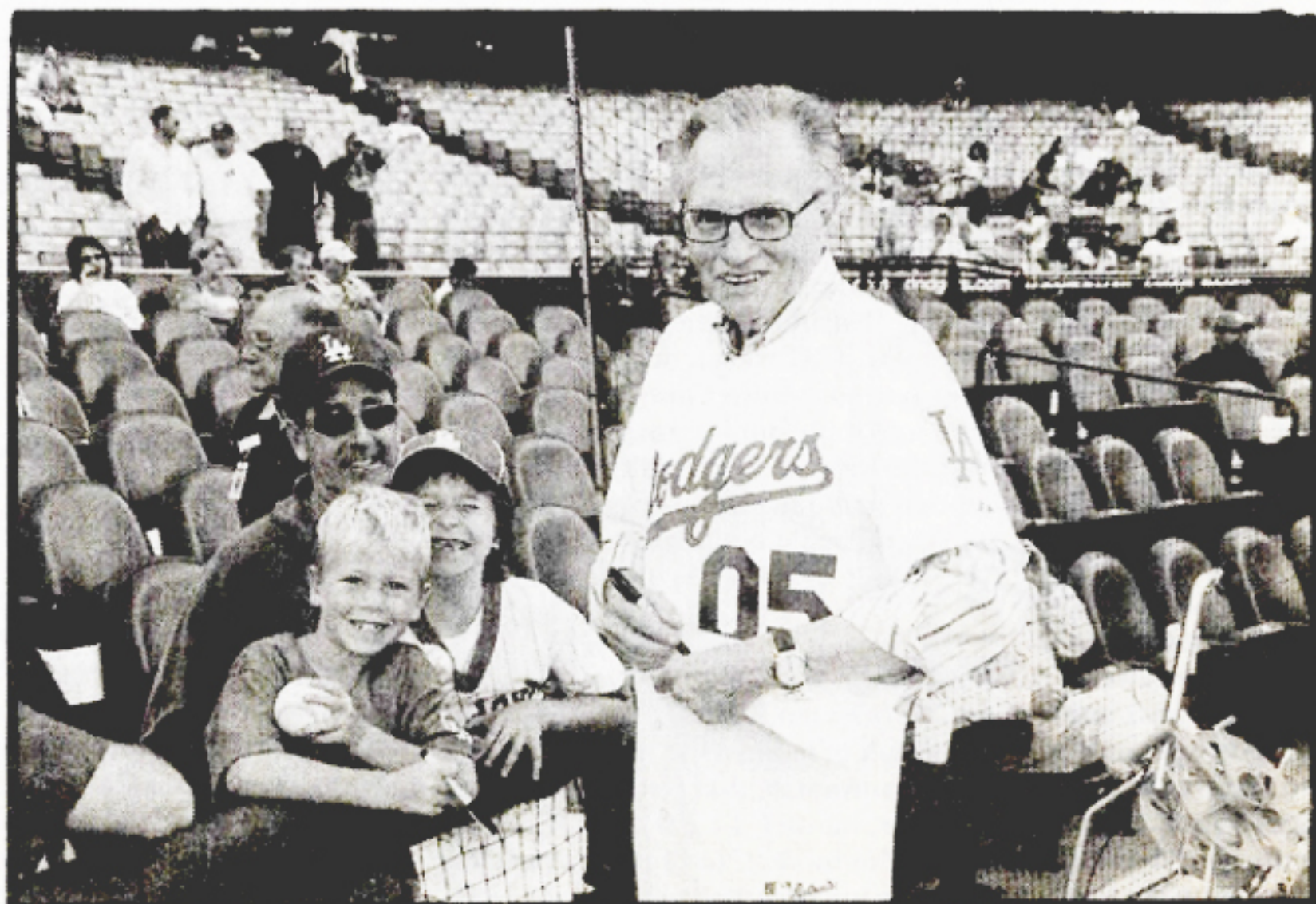
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PHOTOGRAPH BY MAX S. GERBER

TAKE MY PICTURE, GARY LEONARD



Larry King. Restore the Game. Dodger Stadium



Kitten with a Quip

Josie Cotton's new album is music for a very queer world indeed

~ BY RON GARMON ~

A WOOLLY F. SCOTT FITZgerald wrote "There are no second acts in American lives," but that only counts when you drink yourself to death. Once the settings on American existence switch from auto-destruct to autodidact, a life led here takes on as many acts as *King Lear*, even *Huckleberry Finn*. George Foreman at 45 again battled to a world heavyweight title; John Travolta vies with Donald Rumsfeld for number of career reprieves; Richard Nixon's many crises gladden our historians; and middle-aged D.B. Cooper was clearly in transit from one American dream to another when he dived out the back of a Boeing 727 with \$200,000 of airline money. As one back from the dead more times than Snake Plissken, I prefer Captain Beefheart's sturdy injunction against new dinosaurs in old dinosaur shoes.

Josie Cotton is a case in point. With her new album, *Movie Disaster Music*, the 1980s L.A. new-wave diva returns as a sardonic art-rockster in the mold of Kate Bush or Warren Zevon. To the casual pop fan, this is a little like hearing Dee Snider wrote the I Ching, but this transformation is just another twist in a career notable for effrontery. The *one* part of Cotton's scandalous 1982 hit "Johnny Are You Queer?" that seemed to irritate critics the most was its verisimilitude; her lipstick-smearing prom queen who just *knows* her boyfriend's limp dick isn't *her* fault was a too-perfect parody. Her two 1980s LPs (*Convertible Music* and *From the Hip*) were breezy, spacious L.A. chickpop inhabited by the star's honey-mouthed sass and whimsy. The singer-songwriter was dropped by Elektra in 1984 but refused to take her assigned place in the irony-slag of popular culture.

Cotton (née Kathleen Josey) continued to write and record, often with quasi-mythic producer and long time pal Geza X (helmsman of such landmark Calipunk as the Germs' "Lexicon Devil" and the Dead Kennedys' "Holiday in Cambodia"), but released only one album, 1993's *Frightened by Nightingales*, before this summer's acid-filigreed *Movie Disaster Music*. Put this disc in and punch up any of the 11 songs at ran-

dom to get jabberings from a "cryptonomic" TV screen ("Creeps"), America finding its inner hillbilly ("Looking for Elvis"), and Pac-Man reconsidered as Death, Destroyer of Worlds ("Happy Face"). In another Geza X collaboration, the pair flings lashings of lush cynicism and razorblade clatter around the singer's baby-Buddha detachment. She's the hardboiled new-wave sheila still, her voice durably lubricious and shorn of precisely the same degree of affect that made her the 12-inch Lolita of the early Reagan Age. One poisoned candy-apple follows another to "You're the Boss," with the plea "Can you dare to be un-hip/ Yeah, the cheesiest act on the Strip," finally giving us emotional payoff as spare and dignified and sexy as Bessie Smith, moaning low for all our phony asses.

SOUNDS

I meet Cotton at the WeHo Shoreham Tower in a white room splotted over cheerfully with expressionist art and Philip K. Dick paperbacks. The reclusive ex-pop idol is diminutive, animated, and thrilled to be having her CD-release party at the Knitting Factory (next Thursday, August 24) shortly before her second trip to the alkali wastes of the northern Nevada desert and the Burning Man festival.

"It's afterlife, heaven without the boredom," she says. "Art, sensuality, free expression, no money. The feeling of flying on a bicycle in a dust storm headed for a neon city is the most thrilling thing I've ever done," Cotton breathes serenely, her giant blue eyes glittering like radioactive cobalt, "in terms of just touching something so *huge!*" We chat amiably while settling into an oversized white futon, until she spies my list of questions. She points at my notes in horror, squealing, "I might give *wrong answers!*"

Unmoved (though giggling), I persist. "Aren't you tired of the phrase '15 minutes of fame'?" She shoots back, "I'd be more tired of the words *Never heard of her.*" Amid our fits of spastic laughter, she addresses some of her legend's more significant hiccups: "I'm from Dallas, not Houston, as reported. I was *not* married to Geza X, by the



~ SHE COULD BE THE ONE: COTTON ~

way. Someone made that up." Nor is she the granddaughter of *Citizen Kane*'s Joseph Cotten. "At one time I thought that somebody was intentionally putting out misinformation. One night at Madame Wong's, they billed me as 'Joseph Cotten is performing tonight!'"

Nor was the fabled cooz-o-liciousness of "Johnny Are You Queer?" originally slated for the Go-Go's, as widely reported. Cotton traced the tune's provenance from authors Larson and Bobby Paine to Foghat-punks Fear (one imagines album titles: *We're So Queer with Fear*) to its status as show-closer for the fabled femme quartet. When the Go-Go's walked out on a contract with the Paine brothers, Cotton inherited song and controversy. Being the cosmic brat she is, she found the experience of being banned and reviled by both Right and Left "Fun as shit! That was *my* motive, and to a large degree it backfired on me horribly," she says. "To me, it was a funny song, and a lot of people took it the wrong way. It was *very* innocent and humor-based. It's something a girl *would* say! I had a huge amount of guys tell me they realized they were gay to that song, and a lot of girls had that experience with guys, and many of them wrote me. It was just something in their lives. The guy who wrote it says it's like a blues song for girls."

In addition to pop smarts and fearlessness, Cotton approaches songwriting with an acrid, unsentimental intuitiveness. The songs on *MDM* run this sensibility headlong into contemporary life and culture, resulting in bursts of pouty denunciation like "Creeps" (her take "on the *absolute*

creepiness to which we're losing our privacy coupled with this completely generic horror movie cum political spoofery. Is spoofery even a word?"), along with the B-movie satire of "Kung Fu Girl" (originally written for Shonen Knife, who "were supposed to come to the studio Geza and I have up in the Hollywood Hills, and I was so excited, and by the time I was finished, which was five minutes, Geza said, 'They're not coming.' It had to go *somewhere!*"). Not to mention the observed gooniness of "Fabulous." ("I don't know if you've been in Beverly Hills, but there's this skater who has this ghetto box *with no music* coming out of it, and he wears a veil, and all he does is dance in front of windows. He's a *star* in my mind!")

With Cotton's new album being less a career extension than a radical expropriation of what worked in new wave (tunefulness, detachment, barbed humor) and its reapplication to another, worse era, I ask if such was her intent. "If I am, as Tammy Wynette said in her wonderful, redundant way, it's an 'accidental mistake.'" She pauses, serious for a moment. "It really is nothing so clever on my part. I didn't foresee any of that. I just tried to make music I like and the best record I could." *

Josie Cotton performs Thur., Aug. 24, with Geza X and Double Naught Spy Car, at the Knitting Factory Front Bar, 7021 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood, at 8:30 p.m. \$7. Info: (323) 463-0204 or Knittingfactory.com.