

CALENDAR

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THE BIG PICTURE

Paper chase still thrills

PATRICK GOLDSTEIN

As you may have heard, these are hard times for the journalism business. Newspapers are biting the dust left and right. My own paper's ownership has filed for bankruptcy. Ditto for the Minneapolis Star Tribune, the Chicago Sun-Times and other media groups. Even the New York Times is battering down the hatches.



When I visited the Dodger Stadium press box the other day, a lofty perch once full to the brim with sportswriters, the joint looked like a bar on the day after St. Patrick's Day.

So why does Hollywood keep making movies about newspapermen? The short answer is that Hollywood loves a good yarn. For much of its 100-plus-year history, whenever Hollywood has portrayed journalists, it seems to have taken the advice of the frontier newspaper editor in John Ford's "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance," who said: "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend."

The maxim is certainly alive today, as is evidenced by two new films that revolve around journalists. This past weekend saw the arrival of "State of Play," which stars Russell Crowe as a freewheeling investigative reporter ensnared in a nasty web of Washington intrigue and conflict of interest. Due this Friday is "The Soloist," which features Robert Downey Jr. playing The Times' own Steve Lopez, a newspaper columnist who finds himself intertwined in an equally complicated relationship with a homeless musician, a relationship inspired by a series of columns Lopez wrote for our paper in 2005.

Neither movie is expected [See Goldstein, Page D4]



WORKING HIS BEAT: Russell Crowe, left, and Ben Affleck in "State of Play."



JAY L. CLENDENIN Los Angeles Times

THE BAMBOO STARSCRAPER: Gerard Minakawa's structure at the Coachella festival topped 90 feet.

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

A desert beacon

Coachella's ephemeral structures anticipate future design.

CHRISTOPHER HAWTHORNE ARCHITECTURE CRITIC >>> The Coachella Valley Music & Arts Festival has drawn some fire in recent years, mostly from indie-rock purists, for booking world-famous baby boomer headliners, including an opening night set this time around from Paul McCartney. ¶ But in other ways its organizers continue to make room for experimental culture's sometimes ragged fringe. The curator of Coachella's art programs, Philip Blaine, commissioned a number of pavilions this year that straddled the line between architecture and installation art. They also took advantage of the growing prominence of temporary structures in a world suddenly drained of capital. ¶ The short-term future of American cities, after all, involves lots of provisional and low-budget projects — and a whole lot fewer iconic [See Coachella, Page D9]

Drama Pulitzer goes to 'Ruined'

Playwright Lynn Nottage has links to SCR. Steve Reich wins for music; W.S. Merwin for poetry.

DIANE HAITHMAN

Brooklyn playwright Lynn Nottage, 44, who boasts a long association with the Southland through her work with Costa Mesa's South Coast Repertory theater, won the Pulitzer Prize for drama Monday for "Ruined," set in conflict-torn Africa.

The prize marks only the second time an African American woman has netted the Pulitzer for drama. The first was Suzan-Lori Parks, who won in 2002 for "Top Dog/Underdog."

Other winners in arts and literature include minimalist composer Steve Reich in music for "Double Sextet"; Elizabeth Strout in fiction for her short story collection, "Olive Kitteridge," set in small-town Maine; Annette Gordon-Reed for history for "The Hemingways of Monticello: An American Family"; Jon Meacham for biography for "American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House"; poet W.S. Merwin for his collection "The Shadow of Sirius"; and Douglas A. Blackmon in general nonfiction for his book "Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans From the Civil War to World War II."

The prizes were announced at Columbia University in New York. Each comes with an award of \$10,000.

Nottage's "Ruined" is a hard-hitting tale of survival set in a Congolese bar and bordello. Based on interviews Nottage conducted in Africa, it revolves around young women who have been raped and brutalized — or "ruined" — in the decades-long war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. [See Prizes, Page D7]

L.A. city, county cut into culture

Budget troubles mean funding reductions for arts institutions. Libraries will be especially hard hit. D2

This is what's new, pussycat

"Back to Bacharach and David" at the Music Box @ Fonda surveys the pair's songwriting gems. D3

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Designed for the moment

[Coachella, from Page D1] towers. In that sense, Coachella — at least in its nooks and crannies, far from its main stages or any former Beatle — seemed to be sketching a loose blueprint for young architects to follow. Leading the way in that regard were the talented L.A. architects Benjamin Ball and Gaston Nogues, who worked with a group of students from the Southern California Institute of Architecture to create an imperfect but hugely charismatic Coachella installation called Elastic Plastic Sponge.

In its combination of digital savvy and seat-of-the-pants pragmatism, it seemed custom-made for a culture in which temporary architecture may be the only kind any of us can afford. It hardly seemed coincidental, for example, that on the same day last week that I was firming up my plans to visit Coachella and reading about a temporary summer pavilion at London's Serpentine Gallery proposed by the Tokyo architects SANAA, I opened up my mail to discover a new book called "Camps: A Guide to 21st Century Space."

Written by Charlie Hailey, who teaches at the University of Florida, "Camps" argues that provisional architecture of all sorts — whether high-design pavilions or emergency housing — deserves serious attention. Stitching together analysis of refugee camps, Burning Man, terrorist hideaways and the Glastonbury music festival outside London, Hailey makes a surprisingly persuasive case that "defining the camp is the central problem of our contemporary moment."

To be sure, thanks to the economy and to the shifting priorities of architects and patrons, the distinction between permanent and temporary buildings is collapsing. The economy is forcing unemployed thirtysomethings to "camp out" at their parents' houses, while new Hoovervilles for unemployed migrant and blue-collar workers are popping up in parts of California. And Coachella, Burning Man and other temporary festivals increasingly resemble cities.

I saw evidence of those shifts in seemingly every direc-



JAY L. CLENDENIN Los Angeles Times

TEMPORARY STRUCTURE: L.A.'s Do LaB designed this Coachella installation, which included water misting.

tion when I finally reached Coachella at dusk on Friday. The festival, with its \$269 tickets and \$7 Heinekens, is hardly the province of the down and out. And if its thronged spaces suggest those of a metropolis, this is a homogeneous and decidedly commercial kind of urbanism.

Still, it seems foolish to think about its collection of temporary structures and what they mean in a vacuum, entirely apart from the economic crisis. This year Coachella offered a layaway ticket-buying plan for the first time, and tens of thousands of attendees took advantage of it.

After inching through very city-like traffic for more than two hours to find a parking space on one of the grass fields surrounding the Coachella grounds, I made a beeline to meet Ball and Nogues at the site of the Elastic Plastic Sponge. On the way I passed a series of other temporary installations commissioned by Blaine, including a 90-foot-tall bamboo tower by Gerard Minakawa, an elaborate, city-like piece by L.A.'s Do LaB and a flaming, dragon-shaped extravaganza created by a group of artists called the Flaming

Lotus Girls.

Some of these projects are big enough to require not only structural engineers but building permits. The local fire marshal reportedly paid a visit to check out the piece by the Flaming Lotus Girls, called Serpent Mother.

If the Sponge was hardly the most physically impressive structure commissioned for Coachella, it was easily the most conceptually ambitious. It was made of long strands of flexible PVC tubing coiled into a series of loops. Those loops were arranged to make an arch on one end and, on the other, to curl protectively around a stage-like interior space.

Designed to spray water on festival-goers during the day, the structure provided a protection from the elements and the Coachella crowds that was more psychological than physical. It had no roof, in other words, but in the dark, with its purple lighting, it glowed as an obvious refuge.

In the way it was planned and executed — rather than the community it was designed to serve — Sponge qualifies a digital-age version of the projects Samuel Mockbee oversaw at Auburn University's Ru-

ral Studio in the 1990s. If the structure shares the sensibility of earlier projects from Ball-Nogues Studio, the task of designing and building it fell ultimately to the students. As a result, the final product was missing the tight integration of concept, computation and craft that marks most of the firm's installations, in which precision and repetition ultimately blur into a kind of beauty.

In the end, it was something Ball told me as we were wandering through the festival's crowds that stuck with me more than the forms of the Elastic Plastic Sponge. "Now that there's just no money for new construction," he said, "what we have to figure out is, how does architecture do the things architecture has always done? How does architecture achieve the effects it's always achieved?"

It is, as they say, the question of the hour. One answer is that architects will increasingly design projects that are more about spatial effects than structure. Lighting, landscape installations, shade structures and reconfigured spaces between buildings may, at least for a few years, replace buildings as commissions.

Some of these new quasi-architectural designs will rely on digital screens and immersive computer-aided effects. But many others will get by with cheap, workaday materials. Sponge was created largely with off-the-shelf parts that cost a grand total of \$15,000, according to Ball.

The architects who thrive in this difficult period will be those able to reinvent themselves, at least to a degree, as sleight-of-hand artists, bringing to inexpensive or immaterial designs a sense of heft or spectacle. And in the coming years, fans of experimental architecture and design will increasingly travel to get our aesthetic fix not to some brand-new museum or iconic skyscraper but to gatherings like Coachella, where the Bilbao Effect is now being re-created on the cheap in temporary, stripped-down and occasionally thrilling form.

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THE COACHELLA FESTIVAL

McCartney gives the event a charge

The Beatle helps attendance, but his set lasts into the hour when penalties kick in.

TODD MARTENS

Paul McCartney's opening-night set at the 10th edition of Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival won rave reviews, and the artist helped promoter Goldenvoice score recession-busting attendance figures. Undeterred by \$269 three-day festival passes, the Friday-to-Sunday festival averaged more than 50,000 people per day, adding up to 160,000, Coachella founder Paul Tollett reported.

The tally is the third highest in Coachella history. The 2007 edition, at which Rage Against the Machine, Björk and the Red Hot Chili Peppers were headliners, drew the most.

"We had no idea what to expect," Tollett said. "Then in the last couple of weeks the tickets skyrocketed. We feel really fortunate."

This year saw headline performances from the Killers, the Cure and My Bloody Valentine. McCartney dominated the talk, thanks to a set that went beyond 2½ hours, and came

with an additional cost.

The career-spanning performance continued well past the midnight end time designated by the city of Indio, home to Coachella. Once the clock strikes 12:01 a.m., the charge is \$1,000 per minute, said Indio police spokesman Ben Guitron. He estimated that McCartney went "50-plus" minutes past the music curfew.

Was there ever a thought of cutting the Beatle off? "Believe me, some people wanted us to," Guitron said. "We weren't going to, but we are talking to the people responsible... If we end up having artists go a little over, there are consequences."

Guitron said it was up to Goldenvoice to pull the plug.

Sunday night, the Cure didn't get the same extended treatment. Sound was eventually cut off, even as the act continued to play. Ultimately, the Cure went 33 minutes past curfew, Guitron said.

One number was down for the three-day musical party in the desert: arrests. Sixty-nine concertgoers were picked up, according to police. Last year, 91 arrests were made. The majority were alcohol and drug-related, said Guitron.

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Chris Lee contributed to this report.

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