

Editors Column

Buena Vista Social Club Retells a Cuban Story

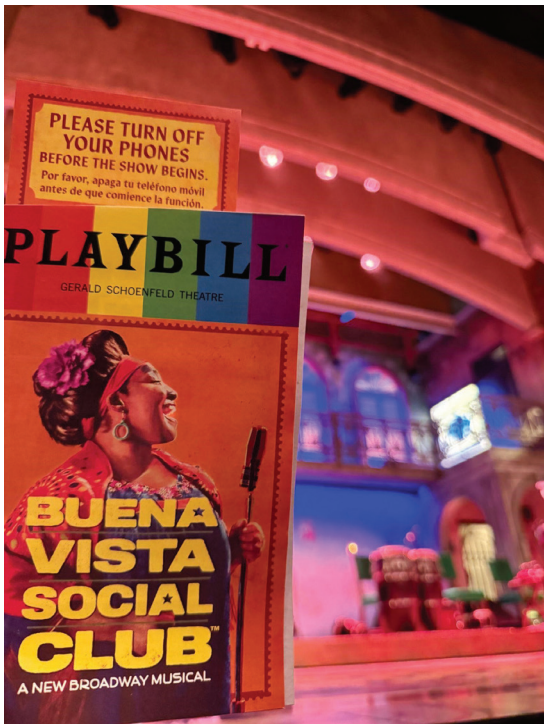


Summer Park
Grade 12
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Buena Vista Social Club is a story of music, memory, and diaspora. The production is inspired by a legendary group of Cuban musicians whose songs reflected everyday life and Cuban culture in the 1940s and 1950s. Although many of these artists faded from international attention after the Cuban Revolution, their music was rediscovered decades later and introduced to a new generation through the 1997 album and subsequent projects. On June 27, the opportunity arose to watch Buena Vista Social Club on Broadway, which brought these themes to life on stage.

The musical used a circular narrative structure, moving between the present and flashbacks. This was interesting because the younger and older casts matched so well that they truly felt like the same people at different stages of life. Energetic choreography and upbeat music brought the story to life, while each scene carried emotional depth to the narrative. Set during the Cuban Revolution, the musical explored themes of love, identity, and the power of music.

The musical resonated because it showed how music can



The Broadway production of Buena Vista Social Club celebrates Cuban cultural heritage by bringing their music, stories, and traditions to a new generation of audiences, while honoring the enduring legacy of the Cuban artists through cultural preservation. [Source: Author, Summer Park]

give people purpose and passion. Familiar Afro-Cuban dance movements woven into the choreography enhanced the experience. It was impressive to watch the danc-

ers transition seamlessly from lifts and flips into salsa and rumba movements, particularly the women, who performed it all in heels.

The performers were all incredibly talented, but the audience's energy was just as memorable. People clapped, smiled, laughed, and even danced in their seats. One audience member shouted, "Bravo!" after every lively musical number. During intermission, he introduced himself as Alejandro, a first-generation Cuban immigrant. He explained why the performance meant so much to him: "Music makes me so happy. It's such an important part of how I grew up. I couldn't imagine my

life without it." Hearing his story gave new meaning to each heartfelt "Bravo"; they became a celebration of the memories and traditions that had shaped his life.

Another aspect of the musical was its use of language. Although the dialogue was in English, every song was performed in Spanish. This artistic decision preserved the authenticity of the music and honored its Cuban cultural roots. Presenting the songs in their original language made the performance feel more genuine, as their emotional depth was not lost in translation.

A highlight of this experience was the opportunity to take a picture with Wesley Wray, who played Young Ibrahim, and receive his autograph. It was heartwarming to see Wray's genuine smile and enthusiasm as he greeted audience members. His passion for Buena Vista Social Club was evident, making the experience even more memorable. Overall, watching the musical was truly an amazing experience that proved that the spirit of Cuban artists is still influential, and it is one that I will always remember and cherish.

Student Reporter

Anime Expo 2026: A Celebration of Anime



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Grade 11
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This July, I was able to go to Anime Expo at the Los Angeles Convention Center, which is easily one of the biggest anime conventions in the world. Running from July 2-5, the whole venue was packed with different events, stalls, and thousands of fans from all over the globe. Whether you were there to buy merch, meet creators, or just check out the cosplays, the energy this year made it an unforgettable experience.

The main hub for most people was the Exhibit Hall, spanning across parts of the South, West, and Kentia Halls. This was where the massive industry booths set up shop, including streaming giants like Crunchyroll and production studios like Aniplex (the team behind huge hits like Demon Slayer: Kimetsu no Yaiba and Spy x Family). The official company stands were constantly handing out free items such as stickers, bags, and snacks. Other stands also sold items like anime collector cards, figures, t-shirts, pants, and blind boxes. It was also the prime spot to ask cosplayers for pictures.

Right next door in Kentia and West Hall was Artist Valley, which was easily a crowd favorite. The



A large Chainsaw Man display featuring character artwork and original animation sketches was one of the featured attractions on the Anime Expo show floor. [Source: Author, Caden Ahn]

room was set up like a massive grid where hundreds of creators had a single six-foot table to showcase their work, resulting in an endless wall of colorful banners, prints, and lights. Creators were selling both fan art (existing characters featured on an artist's work from an anime, manga series, video games, or movies in the artist's unique style), as well as their own

original characters and concepts. People lined up to support independent art and meet famous creators like Airily Arts, Tunaa Draws, and Wanderella Co. Since a lot of prints and handmade items were limited runs just for the AX weekend, things sold out fast. With a mix of creativity and connection, it's a celebration of artistry.

Over in West Hall, the Entertainment Hall catered to the gaming and cosplay sides of the event. This year, part of it moved to the brand-new Entertainment Arena at the L.A. Live Event Deck, featuring the massive PC gaming section with 75 high-end MSI Crosshair 18 gaming laptops that were completely free to play. Companies like Capcom and Paramount set up lounges for people to try out new game demos, while the Retro Arcade Arena ran classic cabinet games and dance rhythm

machines on free play all day over the first three days of the convention. For cosplayers, the hall offered detailed photo backdrops and even a Cosplay Repair Center stocked with hot glue, sewing kits, and safety pins to save people from costume emergencies. With its wide variety of activities and welcoming atmosphere, the Entertainment Hall became a central hub where attendees could play, create, and connect.

With how big the convention is, taking breaks is a necessity. The outdoor plaza, AX Crossing, was great for grabbing food and drinks, while the indoor VIZ Media "Manga Lounge" let people kick back and read from a collection of over 8,000 manga volumes. There were also places like the Beer Garden, Lounge 21 (for those 21 years and older), and the Quiet Lounge if you just needed to escape the noise for a bit.

Overall, Anime Expo was an awesome experience. It brought together gaming, cosplay, and Japanese pop culture in a way that felt welcoming to everyone, and most people left with a lighter wallet, tons of cool merchandise, and great memories.

Student Reporter

How San Diego's Jazz Stays Alive



Christopher Kim
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Just before 7 p.m. at the Young Lions Jazz Conservatory rehearsal in Liberty Station, instrument cases line the edge of the room as students unpack saxophones, trumpets, and basses. As the bandleader counts off the first tune, conversations quickly fade while a jazz swing rhythm fills the air. Every musician is going through their own unique experience; some students are meeting for the first time, while others have jammed together for years. And yet, despite coming from different schools and backgrounds, they all share one thing in common: a passion for jazz. Sooner or later, these students will all perform at a public venue, where they get to express themselves through music. Scenes like this may sound like something from a movie, but they take place every week in San Diego.

Through school jazz bands, organizations, and local jam sessions, San Diego has fostered an interconnected jazz community. With these opportunities at hand, students are able to meet through



A youth jazz band performs at a restaurant in San Diego, California, where anyone can come listen to them perform. [Source: Katie Kim]

one program or another. These students, including myself, can learn from and perform with new teachers, building lasting connections in the process.

While schools throughout the country introduce students to the genre, San Diego is exceptional at

maintaining community organizations that provide additional opportunities to rehearse, perform, and collaborate with musicians from all different sorts of backgrounds. Students often plan jam sessions themselves, as mentors and teachers constantly provide them the opportunities to do so. These authentic experiences encourage teamwork and creativity for young musicians.

Personally, the jazz scene in San Diego has opened me up to several new relationships and opportunities. After only playing classical music, I first began my jazz journey by taking a jazz band class in the 9th grade, to which my more experienced and older classmates recommended that I join an out-of-school jazz ensemble. In the 10th grade, my jazz instructor recommended me to the Young Lions Jazz Conservatory, as they were in

need of more double bass players. By the following year, I was in one of the most advanced jazz bands at the conservatory. With a classical music background, adjusting to a completely new music genre was undoubtedly difficult, but the supportive community allowed me to pick up the style quickly. Before I knew it, I was performing at local restaurants and jazz venues. At performances, I met jazz professionals; some became mentors, some became people I would jam with, and some became people who introduced me to new opportunities to perform elsewhere.

Although jazz is sometimes viewed as a niche genre, San Diego's youth jazz scene refuses to die off; it continues to grow through the dedication of students, educators, and the overall community. Every rehearsal and performance contributes to a network that not only preserves the tradition of jazz but also gives young musicians a space to learn, connect, and express themselves through music.

Editors Column

Exploring San Francisco’s Exploratorium



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In July, I went to visit San Francisco’s Exploratorium as part of COSMOS, also known as California State Summer School for Math & Science. Unlike a traditional museum where visitors simply walk around observing exhibits behind glass, the Exploratorium was one of the most interactive places I’ve ever been to. Almost every exhibition was interactive in some way— from double pendulums to a device that played music only when two rods were connected by a chain of people, every exhibit transformed a simple concept from physics and math into something more visual and engaging.

My favorite exhibit at COSMOS was one that allowed me to see a live zebrafish embryo using a microscope. Although the microscope itself was placed behind a glass, I was able to control its focus and position using a separate screen that I was able to interact with. On the display, I saw the beating heart of the fish as well as the blood cells that circulated throughout the body. Occasionally, it squirmed around, letting me know that it was something real and alive that I was observing in real time, not just a recording or a computer-generated video.



One of my favorite exhibits at the Exploratorium allows me to control a microscope that observes a zebrafish embryo in real-time. [Source: Author, Robin Ryul Kang] One of my favorite exhibits at the Exploratorium allows me to control a microscope that observes a zebrafish embryo in real-time. [Source: Author, Robin Ryul Kang]

Other exhibits included a device that let a tiny current of electricity to flow through your body, as long as both of your fingers were touching a metal plate. The harder you pressed your fingers, the more numb they became, and it was somehow a familiar sensation that I felt occasionally during my daily life. Additionally, there was an exhibit where I could observe a glass of water on top of a

scale. Surprisingly, the fourth decimal place of the scale decreased by 1 every second, letting me observe the evaporation of water in real-time.

Science can feel intimidating when presented solely through equations, definitions, and diagrams. However, the Exploratorium had the ability to make complex scientific topics feel ap-

proachable—a visitor does not need to be an expert in physics, biology, or chemistry to understand the questions behind exhibits. Each had a clear written explanation that illustrated why the exhibit does what it does. This approach reflects the Exploratorium’s goal of combining scientific education with a hands-on experience. Many of the exhibits demonstrate scientific topics that are difficult to visualize in a traditional classroom setting, such as the zebrafish embryo exhibit, which connects microscopic observation with early biological development. Experiences like these, rarely available for civilians, are the reason why this museum should be appreciated.

Ultimately, the Exploratorium gave me a chance to bridge the gap between my previous science knowledge and a real-world application—it was just like seeing scenery that you had only ever seen through screens. It is definitely a once-in-a-lifetime experience that I believe every science enthusiast should visit. Even if you aren’t—who knows, the Exploratorium could be the very place that creates the scientific you.

Student Reporter

The Cultural Wonders of Jeju



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After a busy school year, I finally had the chance to visit and relax at one of my dream travel destinations: Jeju Island. Located off the southern coast of South Korea, Jeju is famous for its sweet hallabong mandarins, volcanic landscapes, and crystal-clear coastlines. Before my trip, I imagined spending my vacation admiring the beautiful scenery while eating delicious food. However, while the island’s breathtaking scenery lived up to my expectations, it was the island’s rich culture that made the trip unforgettable.

One of the sites I visited during my trip was Seongsan Ilchulbong, a volcano on the eastern part of Jeju Island. Being a UNESCO Natural World Heritage Site and one of Jeju’s most iconic landmarks, the area surrounding the volcano was packed with visitors eager to snap pictures and admire the peak overlooking the ocean below. But underneath the cliffs was one of the island’s most unique cultural experiences: the haenyeo. Haenyeo are local female divers, often elderly, who dive to depths of up to 10 meters



Seongsan Ilchulbong, a volcano and the site of the haenyeo diving into the ocean, was one of the places I experienced both geological beauty and culture on the Island of Jeju. [Source: Author, Yale Lee]

without oxygen tanks, harvesting seafood like abalone and sea urchins. Watching the haenyeo disappear into the sea and resurface with their daily catch was an interesting perspective into the local traditions and unique way of life.

Another place I visited was Aewol’s coastline towards the western side of the island. As a popular tourist destination,

what makes this area of the island’s coast unique is the large wind turbines that surround it. These wind turbines use Jeju’s strong winds and convert them into electricity for the island’s residents. With the island being geographically isolated from the mainland, those who live there aren’t able to receive sufficient electricity from the mainland. Therefore, the people of Jeju Island have developed their own

special ways of independently producing and managing energy through these wind turbines.

One of the last cultural experiences I had in Jeju was through the various foods they offer solely in Jeju. A meal that has stuck with me since the trip was Jeju’s black pork barbecue, a native delicacy made from the Jeju Black Pig. At first, I was startled by the fact that the meat originated from a black pig, which is not a common source of pork for normal Korean BBQs, and didn’t understand the buzz behind it. But after trying it for myself, I understood why it was such a beloved delicacy and saw a new side of Korean cuisine.

After my trip to Jeju Island and witnessing all the different cultural sides of it, I realized that Jeju’s beauty doesn’t only come from its natural landscapes but also from the local traditions and lifestyles of the people. Seeing the haenyeo, wind turbines, and trying Jeju’s local delicacies, my visit to Jeju became an unforgettable journey diving into the island’s unique culture and history.

Student Reporter

A Day at the Water Park: Fun with Family



Ava Je
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Summer break is the time of the year when many students visit new places and do fun activities outside of schoolwork. And given the hot weather, some of the top things to do are water activities, such as swimming and visiting the water park or beach. So, when my cousins came over to visit, we went on a trip to the local water park to cool off and create exciting memories.

We started the day off by packing our swimsuits and pool essentials, including towels and sunscreen, before heading out. In the car, we talked about all of the different rides we might get to go on and how excited we were to go swimming. Additionally, the view on the way there was one of my favorite parts, as countless trees, large clouds, and the huge nearby lake surrounded the park.

Once I got there, my cousins and I were greeted by numerous slides and attractions, varying in height, color, and shape. After we rested on the chairs as we set our belongings to the side, we walked around the water park to pick out the first slide we would ride. To start, we chose a simple slide that



The variety of slides at the local water park helped me and my cousins to cool down in the summer heat and create a fun family activity. [Source: Author, Ava Je]

went down a small hill, saving the most thrilling rides for the end of the day.

However, the day passed quickly, and soon we were eagerly climbing the steps to the biggest and most popular ride in the park. Though the slide’s huge drops and spirals looked intimidating, as soon as the ride started, we were all screaming and laughing with excitement, which only got louder with every turn and plunge.

Lastly, after going on all the rides at the water park multiple

times, we headed over to the wave pool for one last swim. Cooling off from the blazing sun, we splashed around in the water while trying to jump over the waves for a while, making the most out of our trip. Overall, the carefree joy I experienced there with my family and the reminder of how much fun summer can be made it my favorite part of the day.

Once we headed back home, we shared the photos and videos we took and laughed about them together. This experience was even more special as I usually don’t visit the water park too

often, especially with my cousins. It has been one of the main highlights of my summer so far, making it a special event that I can look back on. Getting to see my family and go on rides while forgetting about the stress of school is definitely something I will never forget and will share with my friends once school starts again. And most importantly, the day at the water park reminded me that summertime is for letting go of stress, creating memories, and having fun so that I can go back to school feeling refreshed and ready for the upcoming school year.