

Welcome to American Mosaic from VOA Learning English!

I'm June Simms.

On the show today, we remember the life and music of George Duke.

We also take a look at a new movie by director Woody Allen.

But first, we hit the streets of Los Angeles, California, where one photographer finds art in unlikely places.

Documenting the Street Art of LA

In Los Angeles, artists are uncovering some of the city's hidden culture. Several photographers are taking pictures of Los Angeles street art, which includes decorated cars and graffiti. VOA's Mike O'Sullivan visited Los Angeles to watch one of these photographers at work.

Jim Tedder has more.

Erwin Recinos is a photographer who records the life and urban art of Los Angeles. At a neighborhood auto show, he takes pictures of lowriders. Lowriders are classic cars that are made to sit close to the ground, almost touching the road.

Car clubs in the city's Hispanic communities make changes to American automobiles from the 1960s and 70s. Mr. Recinos captures images of the cars for a project by local photographers. "A lot of these car clubs have been around for about 50 or 60 years. So what you're looking for is cultural influences in the community."

Mr. Recinos walks around an industrial neighborhood looking for things to photograph. Here, many graffiti artists have painted storage buildings with colorful murals. Some of the murals are almost seven meters tall.

Some people consider graffiti as damage to property and want it removed. But some building owners support the colorful additions to the downtown neighborhood.

Erwin Recinos says inner city artists are one of the many cultures of Los Angeles.

“Different neighborhoods of surf culture, skate culture, gang culture, car culture, graffiti culture.”

The online photography project, called Snapshot Galleria, documents these cultures.

Mr. Recinos says he loves to work downtown. The area is full of surprises. Sometimes, the photographer says he even finds waste containers that are decorated with art.

Mr. Recinos says Los Angeles is rich with images. On a photo shoot in a downtown park, he comes across a group of mean-looking pit bull dogs and their owners. The dogs are taking part in behavioral training. He stops to take a picture. He says such unexpected sights can result in a great image.

“You never know what's going to happen. You've just got to go with it.”

He says these photos show a different side of a colorful city.

Woody Allen’s Latest: “Blue Jasmine”

"Blue Jasmine" is a new movie from the famed American filmmaker Woody Allen. The film takes place after the collapse of the American economy in 2008. It tells the story of Jasmine, a wealthy woman who loses everything, and must try to make a new life for herself.

((Ginger)) "Jasmine! Oh my God!"

((Jasmine)) "Look at you! Your place is...homey. The flight was bumpy, the food was awful! You'd think...first class."

((Ginger)) "I thought you were tapped out."

((Jasmine)) "I'm dead broke, really. I mean, the government took everything."

"Blue Jasmine" is about a New York socialite named Jasmine, played by Australian actor Cate Blanchett. Jasmine is married to a Hal, played by Alec Baldwin. When Hal, a Wall Street banker, is put in jail for investment fraud, Jasmine is left with no money and no job. She moves in with her sister and tries to decide what to do with her life.

The film was inspired by real events. The character of Jasmine is loosely based on Ruth Madoff, the wife of former wealthy stockbroker and financial adviser Bernie Madoff. Bernie Madoff was sentenced to 150 years in prison in 2009 for cheating investors out of billions of dollars.

Woody Allen's film shows how wealth and power are not the most important things in life. Jasmine is a self-important and shallow character. She is lost about how to live when wealth and ease go away.

"I can't just do some mindless job. I was forced to take a job selling shoes on Madison Avenue. Ah!"

"Blue Jasmine" shows a more personal side of the 2008 Wall Street disaster. The audiences are left to decide if they feel sorry for Jasmine or if they believe she deserves what she gets.

"With wealth comes responsibility. I wasn't some mindless consumer like so many of my so-called friends, though I won't say I disliked buying pretty clothes. Tip big, boys. Tip big because you get good service."

Remembering George Duke

The world lost a great musician this week. Pianist George Duke died Monday at the age of 67.

Duke started his career in jazz. But he made a name for himself playing all kinds of music. He also worked with many famous artists including Michael Jackson and Frank Zappa.

Madeline Smith has more.

George Duke became interested in piano music at the age of four. He was moved by a performance from jazz pianist Duke Ellington. He recorded his first album of jazz music in 1966, when he was just 20 years old. He released about 40 albums of his own. And he was a part of many more. He worked with some of the most famous names in jazz, like saxophonist Cannonball Adderley and trumpet player Miles Davis.

Duke also was involved with major pop hits. He played keyboards on Michael Jackson's 1979 album "Off the Wall." He also produced "Let's Hear it for the Boy" by Deniece Williams. The song was a number one hit in 1984.

George Duke established himself as a jazz fusion artist, a genre that combines jazz, rock, and funk. But in the middle of his career, he moved towards a softer sound. He released the ballad "Sweet Baby" in 1981. It reached number 19 on the Billboard charts, making it his most successful song ever.

George Duke's latest album, "Dreamweaver," was released just last month. It was the first new music he recorded after his wife died last year. He wrote the song "Missing You" in her memory. Now, the song also has meaning for remembering George Duke's life and the music he left behind.

I'm June Simms. Our program was written and produced by Madeline Smith. Mike O'Sullivan and Penelope Poulou provided additional reporting.

Do you have a question about American life, people or places? Send an e-mail to learningenglish@voanews.com. We might answer your question in a future show. You can also visit our website at learningenglish.voanews.com to find transcripts and audio of our shows.



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