

■■■ ELECTION 2020 ■■■

Abortion debate jumps into spotlight

Strict new laws have energized women and given them more sway in Democratic race.

BY JANET HOOK

WASHINGTON — After Alabama’s governor signed a near-total ban on abortion into law last week, a surge of women interested in running for office contacted Emily’s List, a women’s political group. The Virginia Democratic Party saw a surge in contributions. VoteRunLead, a group that trains female candidates, saw enrollment for an upcoming weekend course abruptly almost double.

With abortion policy returning to the center of national attention, women are back in the spotlight as a central force in Democratic politics. The party’s 2020 presidential candidates have responded quickly, scrambling to promote abortion rights policies in campaigns that had mostly been giving priority to economic issues.

Women — as candidates,

voters and activists — were a pivotal element of Democrats’ success in the 2018 midterm election. Their energy has been diffused in the enormous field of Democratic presidential candidates. But now many Democratic women are joining together for the abortion fight that has emerged in recent weeks.

“We’re seeing another surge of an already pretty engaged universe of women,” said Stephanie Schriock, president of Emily’s List, which she noted was contacted by 76 women in a single day amid debate over the Alabama law. “It’s changing the positioning of the Democratic Party.”

Her group joined a coalition of activists to stage demonstrations across the country last week to protest a spate of restrictive abortion laws passed by Alabama, Georgia, Missouri and other states.

The intensifying abortion debate also carries political risks for Democrats. Republicans have stepped up their efforts to portray abortion rights advocates as extremists. Reacting to

[See Abortion, A18]



CASA LIBRE, or Freedom House, in Los Angeles has been cited by officials 143 times for failing to meet standards for state-licensed group homes, a Times investigation has found.

SIGNS OF NEGLECT

At the Casa Libre youth shelter operated by a longtime L.A. immigrant-rights champion, health and safety concerns have persisted despite repeated state citations

By Cindy Carcamo and Paloma Esquivel

Los Angeles lawyer Peter Schey has long been a trailblazing courtroom defender of immigrant youth. He helped argue the Supreme Court case that ensured the right of children without legal status to attend public schools. He also helped secure the Flores settlement — a landmark 1997 agreement to safeguard migrant children held by the government, which gave his legal foundation the right to inspect those shelters.

That case also inspired him to run his own shelter for homeless migrant youths.

Schey opened Casa Libre, or Freedom House, in late 2002 in a historic mansion near MacArthur Park, saying it would care for “the most vulnerable” children.

But Casa Libre has been cited by state officials 143 times for failing to meet standards for state-licensed group homes, and 89 of those were for issues that posed “an immediate risk to the health, safety or per-

sonal rights of residents,” a Times investigation found.

Interviews with more than two dozen former employees and residents and a review of hundreds of documents — including 15 years’ worth of state inspection reports — show a pattern of neglect that has persisted despite efforts by workers and residents to inform Schey and the board of directors about problems at the home.

Children have been locked out of the home for hours because there was no staff on-site, forcing some to take shelter outside in a broken-down van. And at times, there has not been enough food, former residents said.

There was violence among the residents and break-ins, according to former residents and workers. The basement frequently flooded. And the roof often leaked, according to former

[See Casa Libre, A8]



Los Angeles Times
PETER SCHEY



MARY ALTAFER Associated Press
ABORTION RIGHTS supporters across the country have been protesting recent state-level restrictions.

Admissions scammer may have faked his resume too

BY MATTHEW ORMSETH AND JOEL RUBIN

William “Rick” Singer was well into orchestrating an elaborate bribery and cheating scheme to slip his clients’ children into elite colleges when he sat down for a deposition in Washington, D.C., in 2016.

Asked why he should be considered an expert in the field of college admissions, Singer outlined his credentials: He had worked on admissions committees for UCLA, UC Davis, the University of Miami and other colleges, helping to decide

which students should be offered spots.

He claimed to know what colleges did and did not want in an applicant. Parents sought him out, Singer said, because they “want to have an edge and have an expert that understands both sides of the equation,” according to a transcript of the proceeding obtained by The Times.

But the claim appears to be dubious. All but one of the schools Singer named in the deposition denied that he ever played a role in advising whom to admit and whom to turn away.

The episode offers a win-

dow into how Singer sold himself as an authority, a self-described “master coach” who could steer his clients’ children through the narrows of the application process.

Sitting in a law office that October morning, Singer was still two years from being nabbed as the mastermind of what authorities have called the largest college admissions scam ever uncovered by U.S. law enforcement.

Instead he was flying high among the rich and influential in Silicon Valley, Hollywood and other circles,

[See Singer, A12]



NABIH BULOS Los Angeles Times
FIGHTERS LOYAL to Libya’s interim government load heavy guns in Tripoli, where many weary residents have become inured to the sounds of combat.

Kebabs, gelato and bombs

In Tripoli, many ignore war and get on with life

BY NABIH BULOS

TRIPOLI, Libya — It’s Ramadan in Tripoli, and come midnight the streets around the Kabir public garden are a melee of bumper-to-bumper traffic. In the park, families hold post-fasting picnics, as teenagers roam in energetic clumps amid a panoply of kebab stands, gelato trucks and inflatable bounce houses.

Occasionally, a loud thud overpowers the dance-beat thumping from speakers (“That’s a Grad rocket,” says one passerby, cocking a discerning ear to the sky); it’s one of the few signs in downtown Tripoli that the enemy is at the gates.

That enemy, in the eyes of many here, is renegade Gen. Khalifa Haftar, who seeks to rule Libya via his self-declared Libyan National Army.

For years, the aspiring strongman (not to mention naturalized U.S. citizen and former CIA asset) has vowed to conquer Tripoli, a city of more than 1 million people and the seat of the United Nations-recognized — though largely powerless — Government of National Accord, or GNA.

A deal reached in February with the GNA’s head, Prime Minister Fayez Serraj, would have installed Haftar as chief of staff of a reconstituted Libyan army after the selection of a new government later this year.

Instead, with Libya’s east and south already in his hands, Haftar, who once worked for longtime dictator Col. Moammar Kadafi and currently is allied to a rival government in eastern Libya, sought to claim the capital and consolidate power over the oil-rich North African country.

[See Libya, A4]

Losing a rat race

Rodents plague downtown, and blame is easily shared, Steve Lopez writes. CALIFORNIA, B1

A dead end for some Lyft drivers

The costs and terms of the firm’s car rentals are leaving workers in dire straits. BUSINESS, C1

Weather B10

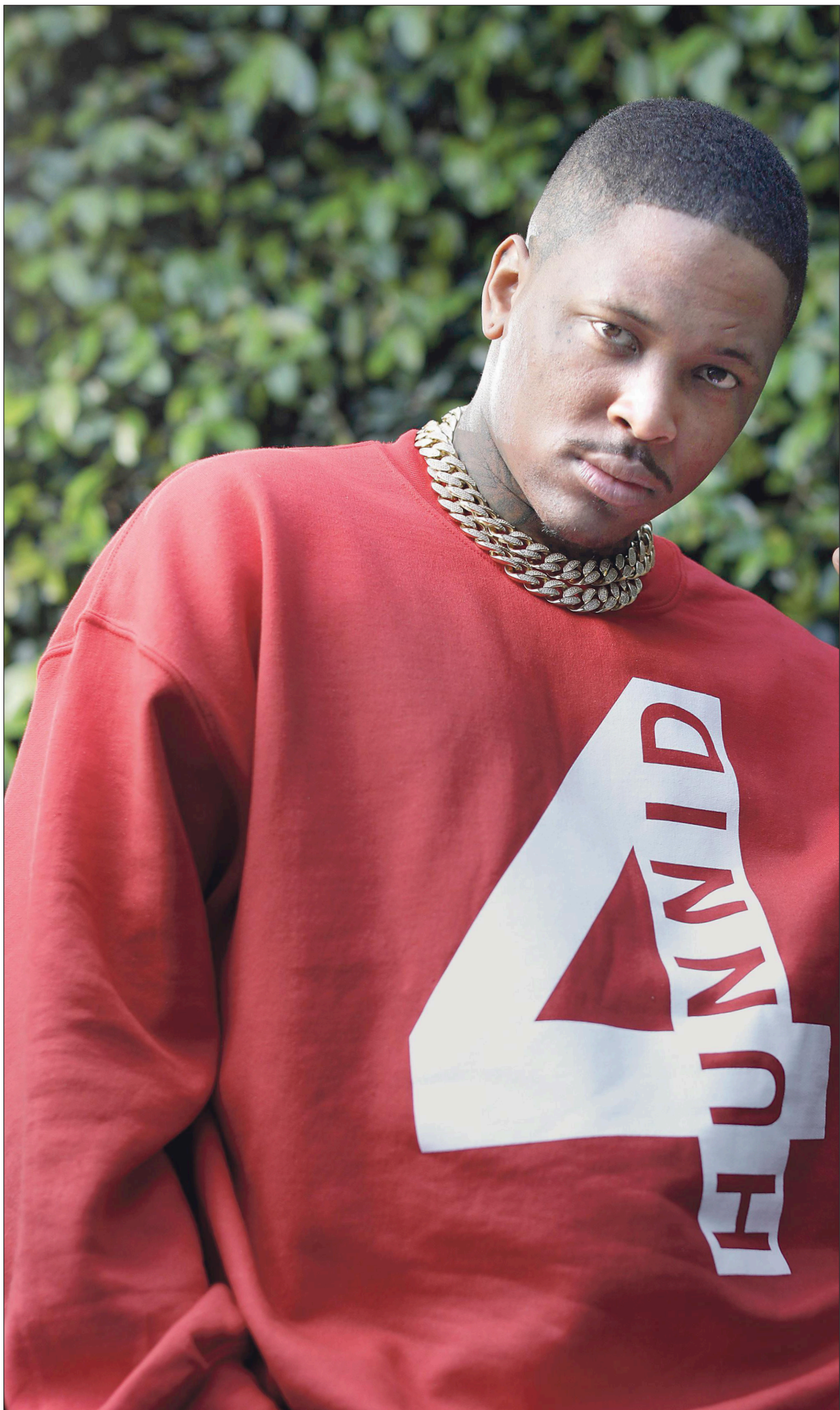
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VALERY HACHE AFP/Getty Images
South Korean film wins Cannes
“Parasite,” by director Bong Joon-ho, right, wins top prize, and Mati Diop’s “Atlantics” is runner-up. A6

ARTS&BOOKS

SUNDAY, MAY 26, 2019 :: LATIMES.COM/CALENDAR



MYUNG J. CHUN Los Angeles Times

“I FELT LIKE that was my time to really show them that I’ve got this West Coast on lock,” YG says of a slot at Coachella.

POWERFUL L.A. VOICE

YG honors a fallen friend while advancing West Coast rap

By RANDALL ROBERTS >>> During the last week of March, Compton-born rapper YG was nodding along to a new track called “In the Dark” in front of a mixing board at Encore Studios in Burbank. ¶ The 29-year-old listened as part of a split TV screen on the wall above him displayed security camera footage from the building’s perimeter. ¶ “Think twice before attacking me,” he raps on the track, the most menacing on YG’s new album, “4Real 4Real.” “I’m-a pull a gun out, I ain’t gonna run, I ain’t no athlete.” ¶ Over the last decade, YG, born Keenon Jackson, has been shot on two occasions — once while leaving a recording studio. “We gotta be behind gates now, private locations,” he said at the studio. ¶ Little did he know. Three days later, Nipsey Hussle, one of YG’s best friends and self-described brother from another color, would be ambushed and killed outside his own shop. ¶ Despite YG identifying as a red-wearing Blood and Hussle as a Crip outfitted in blue, the two had been through a lot together, most famously via a letter to his label from the Secret Service after the release of “F.D.T.,” their expletive-driven 2016 collaborative indictment of then-candidate Donald Trump. When Hussle earned a rap album Grammy nomination in 2018, YG said he couldn’t have been more [See **YG**, F4]

A Walk of Fame star still in limbo

The late lyricist behind Bob Hope’s theme song was a victim of bad timing, but ‘Memory’ still irks kin.

By ASHLEY LEE

Scott Ora was 8 years old when he first visited the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 1965. After watching a matinee with his grandfather at Grauman’s Chinese Theatre, he and his brother ran outside onto the Hollywood Boulevard sidewalk and began to read off each name.

“Do you know who this is?” he repeatedly asked his grandfather, who couldn’t be stumped. It helped that he was asking the legendary Broadway and Hollywood lyricist Leo Robin, known for the 1938 song “Thanks for the Memory.” At every coral terrazzo star they found, Robin shared an anecdote about the person, punctuating each story with the same compliment: “She is great.” ... “He is great.” Ora grew up knowing that his grandfather was also one of the greats. What he didn’t know is that years later he’d be tangled in a still-unresolved back-and-forth with the Walk of Fame to get it set in stone.

The song “Thanks for the Memory,” written for “The Big Broadcast of 1938,” the last in a series of Paramount Pictures variety-show movies, is a nuanced number, encompassing an estranged couple’s enduring love. Six writers had tried and failed at the assignment before director Mitchell Leisen gave it to in-house lyricist Robin and composer Ralph Rainger.

“I said, ‘It’ll never be a hit. It’s not a song,” [See **Star**, F5]



GREG GORMAN

JOHN WATERS’ latest book is titled “Mr. Know-It-All.”

BOOK REVIEW

Life, as reflected by Waters

By HENRY ROLLINS

John Waters’ new collection of essays, “Mr. Know-It-All: The Tarnished Wisdom of A Filth Elder,” explores the edgy filmmaker’s many decades of experience in the business, brushes with mainstream acceptance, and life as an aging counterculture celebrity. As Waters writes: “Aging gracefully is the toughest thing for a rebel.”

“Mr. Know-It-All” is like life itself: at times fascinating, hilarious and outrageous as well as tedious, gross and obnoxious — exactly all the reasons why you show up for anything Mr. Waters has done in the first place.

I’ve been a fan of Waters for many years. I’ve visited with him, interviewed him and have always been impressed with his friendliness, quick wit, curiosity and honesty. I’ve kept every Christmas card he sent me as well as the tree ornament, a clear bulb with a plastic roach in it: “Happy holidays from John Waters.”

Waters spends a lot of time on airplanes. He insists on first class now after so many years of circling the globe on promotion duty in coach. Waters has earned it; he also keeps a [See **Waters**, F6]

Star issue irks lyricist's kin

[**Star**, from F1]
it's a piece of material,' " Robin told writer Max Wilk in 1971. But the Bob Hope-Shirley Ross duet went on to win the Academy Award for original song, and it became Hope's signature tune. Now more than 80 years old, "Thanks for the Memory" has been covered by Frank Sinatra, Ella Fitzgerald, Bing Crosby, Sarah Vaughan, Anita O'Day, Rosemary Clooney, Harry Nilsson, Rod Stewart and more.

Throughout his 30-year Hollywood career — with hits like "For Every Man There's a Woman," "In Love in Vain," "June in January," "Zing a Little Zong" and "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend" — Robin earned 10 Oscar nominations and was inducted into the Songwriters Hall of Fame. The notoriously modest wordsmith often downplayed his accomplishments, attributing his success to have to his collaborators. But others continue to sing praises for his work.

Take "Easy Living," the jazz standard made famous by Billie Holiday. Audra McDonald performed the ballad in the 2014 Broadway play "Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill," and noticed a new layer in the lyrics.

"It's deceptive. It's simple but very deep at the same time," she told The Times recently. "The audience knows that song as being about someone in the glory of love and that there's no other reason to live except for that love. But on the other hand, if you don't have that love, you have nothing to live for."

Megan Hilty ("Wicked," "Smash") called Robin's lyrics "so powerfully witty and clever." She got to know his songs well when she starred in City Center Encores! 2012 production of "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," the 1949 Broadway show for which Robin wrote the lyrics to Jule Styne's music.

"People assume 'Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend' is about a money-hungry woman, because that's how it is in the film with Marilyn Monroe," she said. "But the original stage version makes it this power anthem for women of that time: Who you think is this stereotypical dumb blond is telling the audience about how she's working a system and taking control.

"Lyricists are unsung heroes because for those of us who make a living by singing those lyrics, they're everything. If you don't connect to what the song is saying, it's nothing, it's hollow."

In 1989, nearly five years after his death, Robin was named as a recipient of a posthumous star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Thirty years later, the star has yet to be installed. To quote Robin's Oscar-winning song, "And how are all those little dreams that never did come true?"

For many years, few in Robin's family knew that a star was supposed to be placed for the lyricist. That includes Ora, who became Robin's trustee in 2013 and inherited a few of his grandfather's possessions. His gold dress watch and weathered leather band. His dark mahogany credenzas. The coffee table where his burning pipe rested. And the Academy Award.

"Oscar and I are living the bachelor life," Ora joked of the statuette to The Times. Afflicted with cauda equina syndrome, which affects the lower-back region, the 61-year-old public accountant keeps a reclusive routine in his Sherman Oaks apartment. Among his regular tasks is maintaining the official Leo Robin website, requiring him to stay up to date on the genres his grandfather influenced.

One day in 2017, Ora googled Tito Puente, who had been newly inducted into the Ertegun Jazz Hall of Fame, an entity he knew little about. After a few clicks, he not only learned that the Ertegun Jazz Hall of Fame was launched in 2004 by Wynton Marsalis and Jazz at Lincoln Center, he discovered Puente had been awarded a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in the same year as Woody Woodpecker, Vivian Vance, Sam Cooke, Arsenio Hall, Robin Williams, B.B. King ... and Leo Robin.

"I was in disbelief," Ora recalled. "I had to reread it a number of times, because I thought I knew everything major that there was to know about my grandfather."

To double-check this — "because with the web, you can never trust things," he said — Ora called the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, which first proposed the idea for the Walk of Fame in 1953. The effort has since transformed the city's sidewalks into a coral-and-charcoal checkerboard, applauding achievements in five areas of the entertainment industry: film, television, music, theater and radio.

"It's the only award that a celebrity can truly share with their fans," Ana Martinez, the chamber's long-time vice president of media relations and Walk of Fame producer, told The Times. "The Oscar, the Tony, the Emmy, the Grammy, they're all on someone's mantle or wherever. But the star is for the public — they can touch it, sit next to it, even lay next to it. And if they can go to the ceremony, they've hit the jackpot."

Martinez confirmed to Ora that, yes, Robin had indeed been awarded a posthumous star in the



From Scott Ora

LEO ROBIN, top, with Rita Hayworth and his songwriting partner Ralph Rainger work on "My Gal Sal" at Paramount in 1942.



Paramount Pictures



From Scott Ora

BOB HOPE and Shirley Ross, top left, sang "Thanks for the Memory" in the film "The Big Broadcast of 1938," with lyrics from Robin, above circa 1934. The song would go on to be Hope's theme. Above, Robin's grandson Scott Ora with lyricist's Oscar for the song.



MYUNG J. CHUN Los Angeles Times

motion pictures category, as a lyricist of songs in more than 50 films. It was never installed because no one responded to the award notification letter, which requests that an honoree set an induction ceremony date and pay a sponsorship fee. That crucial piece of correspondence is sent to nearly two dozen recipients each year in June, after the committee makes its final selections.

Robin's wife, Cherie Redmond, who applied for her late husband's star, never saw the letter that arrived on June 18, 1990; she had died on May 28. The envelope was returned to its sender and has since remained in the Chamber of Commerce's records.

"I do think it was meant to be," said Ora of discovering the star. "It's important to me because it was important to my grandmother to pay tribute to Leo's career in this way. And she took the time, she followed all the rules. My grandmother did everything right except live long enough."

It's been decades since Robin was named to the Walk of Fame. Was it too late to get his name in a star? And if not, what would it take to get the star installed? Martinez explained that Robin would need to be reinstated by the current committee at the next annual meeting. She didn't anticipate problems with that part of the process. But there were two final steps that would need to be done by someone representing the estate: set an induction ceremony date and pay the sponsorship fee.

That fee? In 2017, when Ora made his inquiries, was \$40,000 — 10 times what it was in 1989 when Robin was approved for inclusion.

"I almost feel like we're talking

about real estate," said Ora. "If that's how this is done — and they're just going to, in my opinion, arbitrarily charge 40 [thousand dollars] — what do they have if the award is just based on money? If it's not based on merit, I think it loses some of its meaning."

That \$40,000 actually covers a lot of ground, explained Martinez, who has spearheaded the Walk of Fame proceedings for more than 30 years. The making and installation of the star, the indefinite maintenance of all the stars through the Hollywood Historic Trust, a replica plaque for the honoree. Then there's the ceremony's production costs, including city permits, security staff, barricades, rain tents, live-streaming capabilities and other equipment.

Throughout the Walk of Fame's history, this bill hasn't necessarily always been paid by individual recipients or their families but film studios, television networks, record labels, foundations or other business entities. The induction ceremony has remained a notable publicity opportunity, and ceremonies are often timed to coincide with the release of a star's latest film or TV show.

At one point, it was suggested that Robin's star be installed without the expensive fanfare, which would bring the cost closer to \$10,000. But Ora says he feels Robin deserves the usual ceremony — celebrating a star on the Walk of Fame is as much a part of the honor as the star itself. Since none of the lyricist's living relatives were ever informed of the star when it was awarded 30 years ago, Ora believes the family should be required to pay only the 1989 fee of \$4,000.

"[The Hollywood Chamber of

Commerce] are the ones that made this 30-year-old mistake, and I feel strongly that whoever makes a mistake should take responsibility," argued Ora, pounding his fist on his desk to punctuate his point. "Why should we pay for a mistake that they made? I want them to acknowledge their mistake. They screwed up."

A mistake it was not, noted Martinez to The Times. Back in 1989, before the ease of email and cellphones, honorees were not as repeatedly and actively pursued to secure their star as they are today. That means no follow-up letters and no calls to co-signers, even if Robin's application was co-signed by Hope, who has four stars on the Walk.

In fact, a number of Walk of Fame stars awarded posthumously (Whitney Houston, Neil Simon, Tupac Shakur) or otherwise (George Clooney, Clint Eastwood, Al Pacino) have also not been installed. If any of these previously announced accolades were to be installed today, they would be executed at the current cost.

For honorees inducted in 2020 (applications for which are due on May 31), the sponsorship fee has risen to \$50,000. Even so, Martinez told The Times, "We would keep it at the \$40,000 for [Ora], because we've had that discussion. We're not gonna raise it, we would never do that to him."

Still, Ora has made up his mind about how much Robin's star should cost. Last year, he brazenly sent a \$4,000 check to the Chamber of Commerce to move things along. Martinez immediately returned it; the Walk of Fame has never self-funded or subsidized the cost of a star.

"I feel bad, I do," lamented Martinez of Robin's uninstalled star. "The man deserves it. It should've happened in 1990, but of course, sad circumstances happened. The fact that [Ora] wants us to place the star and do the ceremony, we just can't do it. We want to work with him, but he's gotta work with us."

What began for Ora as a serendipitous discovery has evolved into an impassioned mission, one that's stuck at a \$36,000 impasse — and one that, Martinez offered, can be moved if Ora were to pursue corporate sponsors or crowdfunding.

"I don't like it," said Ora, strongly shaking his head at these suggestions, especially the idea of launching a GoFundMe campaign. "I can already hear people in my family saying, 'Scott, are you crazy?' but if I had that money, I'd say, 'Let's give it to children. Let's give it to a worthy cause.' If I'm not willing to pay for the star, why would I ask other people to pay for it? It just seems very inappropriate."

Yet if his grandfather's star is ever to see the light of day, Ora hopes it might somehow snag a spot in front of the Roosevelt Hotel, where Robin first stayed when he arrived in 1928 as an up-and-coming lyricist. It was there where he and composer Dick Whiting wrote "Louise," the tune sung by Maurice Chevalier in 1929's "Innocents of Paris" with the famous line "Every little breeze seems to whisper 'Louise.'"

How lovely that would've been. "That's prime real estate," said Martinez. "It's a major landmark, and we already doubled up the rows on those sidewalks. There are no spots left."