

FEATURES

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Lost in space at the Taipei Arena

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The opening performance of *The Lion King* at the Taipei Arena (台北小巨蛋) on Saturday was impressive for the size of the audience, if not for its response, which was polite rather than rapturous. This is not to say there wasn't plenty that was spectacular about the show, but the cavernous performance space prevented any intimacy, and poor pacing made the show's three hours (with intermission) seem much longer.

The opening scene managed to create enormous anticipation, as singers dressed as animals, ranging from antelope to elephants, emerged from the aisles singing the famous opening African chant that then segues into the show's theme song *The Circle of Life*. For a moment, the big space came into its own, and the bold designs for giraffes, cheetah and zebra elicited gasps of admiration. It was hard not to be impressed even by this scaled down touring production, and the stage design and effects were some of the most sophisticated I've seen in Taiwan for a musical.

The Lion King is primarily a story about a young boy's coming of age, taking its protagonist Simba through the usual dramatic stages of unbounded ambitions of youth, sin, guilt, insight, facing down his own demons and finally taking his rightful place in society. All of this is brought out in a string of wonderful songs, but the stage at the Taipei Arena, for all its technical marvels, is too small and too distant for people in all but the best seats to really appreciate the intimate tenderness of *Can You Feel the Love Tonight* or catch the humor of *Be Prepared*. The story is told in big emotional brushstrokes, but even for something as unsubtle as a cartoon musical, some level of sympathy is necessary with the main characters, and this was never really achieved — or was utterly outshone by the brilliant spectacle.

Even elaborate set pieces such as the bison stampede that leads to the death of Mustafa, Simba's father, lacked emotional impact. The point of interest is on the clever way the effects of an animated film are recreated on stage with the sophisticated use of traditional performance techniques such as shadows and masks. When Mustafa is thrown from the cliff by his brother in a seamless piece of wire-work, you gasp at the technical proficiency, not at the dramatic import.

This imbalance between spectacle and drama contributed to the slow pacing of the show, but it is difficult to pinpoint why all this wonderful material didn't make more of an impact. The blame should probably lie with the nature of the venue, which was simply too big, too impersonal and ultimately too uncomfortable for the audience to fully settle down to enjoy the show.

The Lion King is at the Taipei Arena (台北小巨蛋) at 2 Nanjing E Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市南京東路四段2號) until Aug. 24. Tickets are NT\$800 to NT\$6,600 and are available at www.kham.com.tw or at the venue.



Bigger isn't always better when it comes to musicals. PHOTO COURTESY OF RYAM

Independent, metalcore, emo: it's all punk to them



Vans Warped Tour, now in its 14th year, long ago accepted that punk music and punk values were not an exclusive match

BY JON CARAMANICA
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"You guys are supporting a very independent band," Ben Liebsch of the emergent emo band You, Me, and Everyone We Know told a crowd of 100 or so from a small stage on a remote slice of asphalt in the parking lot of Nassau Coliseum here on last month. "There are lots of dependant bands playing elsewhere."

It was a quaint complaint to voice on the Vans Warped Tour, now in its 14th year, which long ago accepted that punk music and punk values were not an exclusive match. And had Liebsch's band not been so charming and skilled, it might have been harder to ignore the logo for Kia Motors waving on a banner just above them.

Over the years the Warped Tour has become a staging ground for discussions about punk inclusion. But given the range — or, perhaps, the lack of focus — of its current incarnation, what's evident is that punk may well encompass whoever's willing to show up and be counted.

On this stop of the summer-long tour, about 100 bands on 10 stages made for several forms of success: impressive, punishing sets by the Christian metalcore band The Devil Wears Prada and the detail-oriented,



Top: The emo veterans Say Anything were among about 100 punkish bands that performed at the Vans Warped Tour at Nassau Coliseum in Uniondale, New York, on July 26.

Above: Cobra Starship plays its electro-tinged sound at the Vans Warped Tour.

PHOTOS: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

melodic metal outfit Protest the Hero, a stage-overwhelming turn by the promising young emo band Forever the Sickest Kids, and masterly performances by the emo veterans Say Anything and the politically minded punks Against Me!

As in recent years, hip-hop was a recurrent theme, even if there were few actual rap acts. The rapper Shwayze, whose musical partner is the rocker Cisco Adler, of Whitestarr, was benign; Adler also appeared onstage with 3OH!3, which suggested a less literate Beastie Boys. Gym Class Heroes drew one of the day's largest and most fervent crowds

with a mix of emo-rap and power-pop. They toyed with a range of influences like 1980s soul and metal — the group covered a song by Lamb of God, while its frontman, Travis McCoy, fiddled with a controller from the video game *Guitar Hero* — that had barely any discernible traces of punk. Later, in a separate acoustic set, the band covered the Zombies' *Time of the Season*, and McCoy exuberantly riffed on J. Holiday's *Bed*, one of last year's best R 'n' B songs.

In a new twist for this tour, electro reared its head in the music of Family Force 5, whose members dressed as if they were

extras in *Starlight Express*; the Finnish shouters Disco Ensemble; and Cobra Starship, whose lead singer Gabe Saporta averred, in between smart-alecky numbers, "We're not the conventional notion of what a Warped Tour band is." As if that center were somehow holding elsewhere.

For the classicists in attendance, Reel Big Fish played ska-punk that hasn't aged a bit since the band formed in the mid-1990s, when it was already an anachronism. And Street Dogs, a Celtic-influenced punk band, brought out C.J. Ramone, a late-period member of the Ramones, for a cover of Motorhead's *R.A.M.O.N.E.S.* While these bands played to reasonable-size crowds, they were basically punk signifiers, credibility stamps that allowed for experimentation elsewhere.

Not that the crowd of several thousand minded. For most of the festival's nine hours there were as many, or more, fans doing things other than watching bands: checking out books by Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn, taking a stab at the video game *Rock Band*, buying studded belts and pastel-colored sunglasses.

The final set of the day belonged to Katy Perry, an anomaly on this tour for several reasons: She is a woman; she is a pop singer; and she has a song, *I Kissed a Girl*, which has spent the last month atop the Billboard singles chart. But in spite of a teal top and matching shorts, and perfect hair, she played to the scene, rolling around the stage like a rock star, and leading her band in heavier, more guitar-driven arrangements of her songs. By the time she closed with her big hit, boys were singing along, and dozens of girls were crowd-surfing. On this day it was not the least punk thing to have happened.

PLANET POP

Actress **Christina Applegate** is undergoing treatment for breast cancer, her publicist said. Ame van Iden, who represents the 36-year-old actress, released a statement late Saturday saying: "Christina Applegate was diagnosed with an early form of breast cancer. Benefiting from early detection through a doctor-ordered MRI, the cancer is not life



Andy Luo represented Taiwan at MTV's Asia Awards.

threatening. Christina is following the recommended treatment of her doctors and will have a full recovery." Applegate has earned Emmy and Golden Globe nominations for her starring role in ABC's comedy *Samantha Who?* Applegate plays the title character, a young career woman who awakens from an eight-day coma remembering nothing about her past.

The series debuted in October and marked the return to television of Applegate, who helped establish the upstart Fox network in 1987 as ditty teenager Kelly Bundy on *Married... with Children*. The raunchy comedy ran 11 seasons and has been airing in syndication ever since.

The Pussycat Dolls and British pop sensation **Leona Lewis** added a bit of glamour and sex appeal to MTV's Asia Awards show on Saturday, which showcased the best in global and regional music.

The Grammy-nominated Dolls, who shot to fame in 2005 with their worldwide hit *Don't Cha*, strutted their stuff at Malaysia's

hilltop Genting Highlands casino resort, packed with 3,000 fans and industry A-listers.

They were just one act in a star-studded line-up that included Lewis, OneRepublic, Panic at the Disco, South Korean boy band Super Junior, The Click Five and US dance crew Jabbawockeez.

Singing their latest hit *When I Grow Up*, the Pussycat Dolls elicited screams from the hundreds of young fans in the mosh pit with their suggestive dance moves, but the girl group said they were not trying to be provocative.

"We are better prepared this time to perform in Malaysia and we have deep respect for the culture. It is about the music, not about sexy. We are going to respect the people of this country and the culture," said **Jessica Sutta**.

The group came under fire last year from Muslim authorities here for their raunchy performances and sexy attire, which earned concert promoters a US\$2,700-fine.

In the Asian categories, Super Junior won the honors for favorite Korean artist, while the Knockout



People magazine has scored the US rights to exclusive photos of Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie's newborn twins.

PHOTO: AP

Award for the artist with the most influence among Asian youth went to The Click Five.

Thailand's favorite artist was **TorSaksit**, while **Leo Ku Kui Kei** (古巨基) won for top Hong Kong artist, besting Canto-pop idol **Andy Lau** (劉德華).

US rockers Linkin Park were named Asia's favorite international artist, while Chicosci was named the best Philippines artist. **Nicholas Teo** won for Malaysia and Yovie & Nuno were tops in Indonesia.

Singapore's top act was the petite **Stefanie Sun** (孫燕姿), a five-time winner of the same award and Taiwan's top pick was **Alan Luo** (羅志祥).

Hong Kong actress-singer **Karen Mok** (莫文蔚) was given a special Inspiration Award for her work as a social activist.

Brad Pitt and **Angelina Jolie** have struck a deal for the first photos of their newborn twins in an exclusive expected to raise several million US dollars, it was confirmed Friday.

US celebrity magazine *People* announced its "world exclusive" deal on its Web site, saying photos of the babies would be released at 11pm yesterday.

A spokeswoman for *People* confirmed the magazine had secured US rights for the photos and that British glossy *Hello!* had won international rights. Both

magazines would hit newstands today, *People* said.

"We're thrilled to be able to feature these pictures in *People*," *People* managing editor Larry Hackett said in a statement. "They will delight our readers who have followed the growth of the Jolie-Pitt family."

No further information was available.

British pop singer **Gary Glitter** will be freed from a Vietnam prison on Aug. 19 after serving a three-year term for child molestation, an official said Friday.

Glitter, whose real name is Paul Francis Gadd, was arrested in Vietnam on Nov. 19, 2005 for charges of committing obscene acts with two girls aged 11 and 12 in the southern Vietnamese resort town of Vung Tau.

"According to Vietnamese law, Glitter will be freed on Aug. 19," said Chu Xuan Mau, an official from the department in charge of prisoners' file at Z30D Thu Duc jail in Binh Thuan province, where he is being held.

— AGENCIES