

FEATURES

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PAGE 13

Taiwan has some “hidden treasures” waiting to be discovered, says musician Matthew Lien, who is on a mission to bring them into the spotlight. But this time, Lien, who is widely known in Taiwan as the “eco-musician” and environmental activist from Canada, is not talking about wilderness, but something even closer to home for him: music.

Among these “treasures” is the Hakka music that Lien explores on his latest album, *Adventures in the Hakka Heartland* (旅客), which was released earlier this month. The album is associated with the television series *Ha-Fun Taiwan*, which Lien conceived and co-hosted with Hakka singer-songwriter Hsieh Yu-wei (謝宇威).



In each episode of the series, Lien and Hsieh travel to predominantly Hakka areas around Taiwan, from the foothills of Ilan County in the north to Meinung (美濃) in the south. They meet local folk musicians who talk about their lives and perform in their daily surroundings. The musicians featured in the show, and who contribute to the album, performed a variety of Hakka music forms, including mountain songs (山歌), an improvisational singing style, and bayin (八音), a ceremonial instrumental music often played at social events.

It is these “musical heroes who perform for the love of culture” that inspired the project, Lien writes in the liner notes to the album. Lien and his co-producers deliberately chose to spotlight lesser-known musicians.

“I thought it would be interesting and beneficial to Hakka culture at large to show that there are a ton of super cool musicians out there; but they’re not interested in being famous or trying to get on stage or into the limelight – they’re just on their chicken farm or wherever playing their music,” he said in a recent interview with the *Taipei Times*.

Lien took the field recordings, all made during 2007, and added his own music at his Taipei studio. He drew from a range of instruments including synthesizers, drums,



Chen Yong-tao, above, Hsu Mu-jeng, left, Lin He-jhen, right, are just some of the many Hakka singers featured on Matthew Lien’s new album, *Adventures in the Hakka Heartland*.

Below: Hakka folk singer Hsieh Yu-wei, right, is co-host with Matthew Lien on the TV show *Ha-Fun Taiwan*, which is currently airing on Hakka TV

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WIND MUSIC

flutes, and guitars to create the backing tracks. The results were featured at the end of each episode as a music video, with footage recapping Lien and Hsieh’s time with the featured musician.

In *Ba-yin Blues*, Lien takes Lin Zuo-chang’s (林作長) rendition of a traditional Hakka tune on the *suona* (嗩吶), a trumpet-like instrument, and gives it a modern electric blues sound: think BB King’s backing band with a *suona* as the main voice.

Lien’s instrumentation changes the mood

of the tune in a way that traditional music purists might call blasphemous. And Lin, a chicken farmer from Meinung, was not initially convinced of Lien’s idea of adding a blues-sounding backing track to his performance.

“I think he was doubtful and kind of ‘humored’ by the idea,” said Lien. “But nevertheless he gave me a bottle of kaoliang and signed his name on it with the date and gave it to me and said if I succeed, (I should) bring it back and we would drink it together.”

And drink they did. Lien and the TV crew returned to finish taping Lin’s segment of the show, and played the new recording with Lien’s backing instrumentation. Lin’s face “just lit up with this big smile,” Lien said.

While Lien’s distinct musical footprint may come across as a bit heavy for some, he says his purpose is to show that Hakka music can hold its own, even in a pop context. “I felt I could capture the essence of [their music] and lift it up to a new level to make people pay attention,” he said.

Even with the elaborate production, the core performances remain “genuine,” says Lien, who says he made a conscious effort to record the musicians in “their area of comfort,” often at their homes, in the fields, or at local temples.

Lien is proud of the result, and hopes the album will encourage Taiwanese listeners to explore music beyond corporate pop. “What I hope is that the CD will attract different people’s attention ... in a way that will lead them back to appreciating and rediscovering Taiwan’s traditional music for what it is, without new clothes ... go find the stuff because it’s out there,” he said.

Lien’s album is available through Wind Music (www.windmusic.com.tw). *Ha-Fun Taiwan* currently airs on Hakka TV at 10pm on Thursdays and 12am Sunday. Clips from the show can be viewed on YouTube. Lien’s next performance is this Friday at Da-an Forest Park (大安森林公園) in Taipei at 7pm; admission is free.



“Rediscovering” Taiwan’s musical treasures

BY DAVID CHEN
STAFF REPORTER



Matthew Lien, who gained fame in Taiwan as an eco-musician, is back with *‘Adventures in the Hakka Heartland,’* an album of field recordings of Hakka folk musicians with a contemporary twist

PIANNO POP

With perfect timing and dramatic moves, an American performer with the stage name of **Hot Lixx Hulahan** has captured an international rock guitar award — without ever having to strum the instrument.

Wearing tight black pants, satin shirt and elaborate armbands, Hulahan — real name Craig Billmeier —



Craig Billmeier “Hot Lixx Hulahan” of the US performs during the Air Guitar World Championships final in Oulu, Finland, on Aug. 22.

PHOTO: EPA

crushed his competition on Friday night to capture the world air guitar championships in Finland’s western city of Oulu.

“The two-year reigning Air Guitar champion, Japan’s **Ochi ‘Dainoji’ Yosuke** had to give in to the overwhelming new champion,” organizers said in a statement that saluted Hot Lixx’s “impeccable timing and overall solid performance.”

For his prize Hott Lixx was presented with the real thing — a Finnish handmade Flying Finn electric guitar.

The event, which involves performers strutting and strumming on nonexistent instruments, has taken place in Oulu for the past dozen years.

Hott Lixx’s winning performance can be viewed on the video-sharing Internet site YouTube.

Canadian pop-rock star **Avril Lavigne** will be able to perform

in Malaysia after authorities reversed their decision to cancel her concert, saying Saturday that she can perform next week despite complaints her act is “too sexy.”

The Arts, Culture and Heritage Ministry sparked an outcry among music fans when it decided earlier this week not to permit Lavigne’s show. The ministry said then that the show was unsuitable for Malaysian culture and could not be held on Aug. 29, two days ahead of Independence Day, because it might disrupt patriotic celebrations.

Muzahet declined to give a specific reason for the decision, but he said organizers told the government that they had already sold thousands of tickets and that the cancellation could hurt tourism.

The flap over Lavigne’s concert is the latest in a string of troubles confronting foreign artists seeking to perform in Malaysia. Last year, R&B singer Beyonce moved her show from Malaysia to Indonesia, and Christina Aguilera skipped the country on an Asian tour after a controversy erupted over a dress code for foreign artists.

Malaysia requires all performers to wear clothes without obscene or drug-related images and to be covered from the chest to the knees. They must also refrain from jumping, shouting, hugging and kissing on stage.

Spanish crooner **Julio Iglesias** has vowed never to slow down as he marks the 40th anniversary of a polyglot career that has made him one of the biggest selling Latino singers in history.

His romantic ballads, along with the signature dark mane, perpetual tan and flashing smile, propelled this Madrid native from a reluctant contender in a seaside song contest to an international heartthrob with more than 250 million albums sold worldwide.

“I love my profession and I owe everything to it. As long as I have strength, I will be here,” Iglesias, who turns 65 next month, said in an interview published Tuesday ahead of his latest concert in a summer tour.

Old pop memorabilia is getting fashionable with investors, with Madonna souvenirs and vintage

guitars the latest alternative assets to attract interest from structured investment funds.

Marquee Capital Ltd and Anchorage Capital Partners Ltd. are London-based companies planning to start the first investment funds devoted to rock and pop mementos.

“Some people have huge memorabilia collections,” said Ted Owen, managing director of the specialist auction house, The Fame Bureau. “These have quadrupled in price in the last 10 years. Now funds could make people aware that the rock and pop market has a financial base, rather than just a fan base.”

“**Madonna** is a good investment because she’s the most successful female pop artist of all time,” said Marquee Capital’s founder, Chetan Trivedi, a 36-year-old former management consultant at A.T. Kearney Inc. “Many of the people who admire her now will be reaching the peak of their wealth in the next 10 years.”

— AGENCIES



Ochi ‘Dainoji’ Yosuke of Japan, the defending world champion in the Air Guitar World Championships. He was defeated by Billmeier in this year’s event.

PHOTO: EPA