

POP STOP

Victor Wong counts himself lucky to be alive.

PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES

Hong Kong media was in a tasteless tizzy on Tuesday as it reported that pop icon **Faye Wong** (王菲) had miscarried what would have been her second child with husband **Li Yapeng** (李亞鵬). Her manager's strange denial that Wong had even been pregnant only added to the hullabaloo.

Some newspapers speculated that the 39-year-old Wong's "advanced age" might have had something to do with the miscarriage, or that it might have actually been an induced abortion after Wong's doctor noticed that the fetus had an "abnormality." Wong has reportedly been anxious about her ability to conceive a healthy child after her younger daughter was born with a harelip.

After news broke that Wong had lost her baby, manager Chen Jia-ying (陳家瑛) hurriedly insisted that the star had in fact never been pregnant. In an announcement no doubt designed to save her notoriously private client from further public mortification, Chen proclaimed that Wong's period had just been a little late and, apparently, things are now back to their normal flow. This is in spite of the fact that just over one month ago, Chen herself had announced the pregnancy by telling a reporter that congratulations were due to Wong and her husband, who also confirmed the rumors.

It's been one heck of a cruddy week for Wong. Just a few days before news of her miscarriage broke, she was caught by *Oriental Sunday* leaving actress **Carina Lau's** (劉嘉玲) home with puffy eyes and a red face. The gossip rag speculated that Wong's apparently tear-filled pow-wow with her bestie might have centered around Li's alleged obsession with hanging out at nightclubs and bars while Wong is stuck at home with her two young daughters. Sometimes Li is so wrapped up in whatever it is that he does at those nightclubs that he won't even answer his wife's phone calls, the article says.

Lau may also have something to commiserate about with Wong: the Hong Kong media's increasingly fervent interest in her fecundity since her July nuptials to **Tony Leung** (梁朝偉). The *Oriental Daily News* reported that when Lau and her mom took a trip to Hangzhou to celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival, they didn't just pass their time sightseeing and feasting on local delicacies. The women also went to a Buddhist temple and prayed that Leung's

magical seed would plant itself in Lau's womb forthwith. Despite unceasing speculation over when the Leung-Lau superfetus will finally come into being, Lau has taken a much more pragmatic attitude toward childbearing, telling reporters: "getting pregnant and having a baby is a matter of fate. You can't force the timing."

Speaking of fate, Taiwanese singer **Victor Wong** (品冠) recently let slip to the *United Daily News* that he narrowly missed being a passenger on the flight that crashed at Madrid's Barajas airport last month, killing 153 people. Wong said he and a group of his buddies had been tossing around the idea of a sightseeing tour to the Canary Islands, where the plane was headed, before deciding Barcelona had more sights to see.

Victor Wong's near miss, coupled with the recent death of a good friend in a car accident, plunged him into a period of introspection about his own mortality. "Life is truly unpredictable," he mused philosophically. "We should all make merry while we can."

And make merry he did. The newspaper wrapped up its item on Wong by noting that the pop star had gained 5kg of pure fat by indulging a bit too gleefully in Barcelona's delicious seafood and red wine. In order to regain his formerly lithe figure, Wong now has to embark on a strenuous regime of crash dieting. So much for enjoying life while you can.

On a lighter note, **Fish Leong** (梁靜茹), the wide-eyed Malaysian singer whose album *Today Is Valentine's Day* (今天情人節) is a current chart-topper, is heads over heels in love. Her new squeeze is Mr T — no, no, no, not the mohawked, fool-pitying 1980s wrestling superstar. "Mr T" and "Tony" are nicknames the Taiwanese media has given the media-shy fellow who reportedly wooed Leong with sweet compliments and a bottle of her favorite pink champagne at a dinner in Shanghai last December.

Leong told the press that she's not quite ready to call the bookish-looking Mr T her boyfriend yet, but that he pampers her and they have a knack for saying the same thing at the same time. Mr T, reportedly a manager at a liquor company, prefers to stay out of the spotlight, keeping a low profile and wearing casual, non-flashy duds when he's out in public with his lady love, reports the *United Daily News*.

— CATHERINE SHU

Othello redux: the new comedy of errors

Celebrating its 20th anniversary, the Godot Theater Company (果陀劇場) has taken on the huge task of staging a Chinese-language version of *Othello*. The production premiered at the end of last month in Kaohsiung, and yesterday opened at the Metropolitan Hall in Taipei. Godot has had plenty of experience adapting Western works for the Chinese stage, but a work by Shakespeare was an especial challenge, for which they brought in the talents of two of Taiwan's greatest stage actors, Li Li-qun (李立群) and Chin Shih-jie (金士傑).

The show has been enormously anticipated, and a final dress rehearsal on Thursday played before an almost full house of friends of the company, theatrical insiders and media. The celebratory atmosphere was very much in evidence, but, sad to say, the show itself was less than riveting.

I had gone into the performance with some degree of trepidation, having seen Li in the early rehearsals of the production done up in boot polish makeup and Chin sporting a prosthetic nose that gave him a sly look. This would have been bad enough, but this literalism seems to have been carried through into many other aspects of the production as well, to the considerable detriment of any real dramatic interest.

One of the great challenges of the production had been to produce a script that would be accessible to the masses. Contemporary Chinese vernacular is used throughout, but the writers seemed uncertain of how close they should keep to the letter of the original. It was in the occasional departures, all too few, that the language gained some natural vigor, but otherwise actors where left floundering with lines that were at best plodding, and sometimes so unnatural as to approach parody.

The desire to bring stars to the stage clearly outweighed other considerations. Li and Chin showed flashes of their prodigious talents, but neither could sustain roles for which they were unsuited. Neither was convincing as veteran soldiers of bloody campaigns, for both are bookish and articulate rather than physical actors. Li's Othello never had a sufficiently commanding physical presence, and Chin worked so hard at being sly, seemingly unconvinced that his words could achieve this effect, that he created a parody

that might have been funny had it been intentional.

One of the greatest difficulties that the play failed to overcome is the inherent absurdity of the story. Take away the intricately layered language of Shakespeare, and what is left is the story of a rather stupid and jealous man who kills his wife. As Othello works through his own tortuous logic to convince himself of his wife's infidelity, there is more laughter than tears among the audience. Without the heroic and the tragic, what's left? To make the dialogue accessible, the producers have pretty much gutted the play, and the best efforts of the actors could not save it.

All this is not helped by the bombastic score that simply couldn't leave any emotional point alone, constantly building tension with deep bass notes and underlining tender emotion with caressing violins. Once again, it's as if the producers can't trust the script to get the point across. So intrusive was the music, and so crass (one section sounded as if it was lifted from *Phantom of the Opera*) that it would hardly have been surprising if the characters had suddenly burst into song. It would at least have been diverting, and Godot has a reputation for producing musicals.

Perhaps I shouldn't have gone into the theater looking for Shakespeare, for he had clearly left the building. What I found was a brave effort to what may have been an inherently impossible task — a serious and accessible production of a Shakespearean tragedy. The most tragic thing about Godot's Othello was watching two talented actors floundering and eventually being overcome by forces they could no longer control. They were victims of a play that didn't know where it wanted to go.

— IAN BARTHOLOMEW

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: Godot Theater Company's *Othello*

WHEN: Today until Sept. 27, daily at 7:30pm; tomorrow, Sunday and Sept. 28 at 2:30pm

WHERE: Metropolitan Hall (城市舞台), 25, Bade Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市八德路3段25號)

TICKETS: NT\$1,000 to NT\$4,000 available through NTCH ticketing



Godot Theater Company enlisted the talents of two of Taiwan's greatest stage actors, Li Li-qun, second from right, and Chin Shih-jie, third from right, for its production of *Othello*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GODOT THEATER COMPANY

[EVENTS & ENTERTAINMENT]

TOP FIVE MANDARIN ALBUMS

SEPT. 5 TO SEPT. 11

- 1 Ronald Cheng (鄭中基) and *The Best of Ronald* (怪胎) with 15.07 percent of sales
- 2 Fish Leong (梁靜茹) and *Today Is Valentine's Day* (今天情人節) with 13.46%
- 3 Aska Yang (楊宗緯) and *Start! Start! Live Concert* (星空傳奇) with 5.75%
- 4 Kan Kan (康康) and *Grey, the Sequel* (灰色·續曲) with 5.05%
- 5 Black Girl (黑Girl) and *Black Girl* (黑Girl) with 3.89%

ALBUM CHART COMPILED FROM G-MUSIC (WWW.G-MUSIC.COM.TW), BASED ON RETAIL SALES



Upcoming

Cuban singer **Omara Portuondo** returns to Taipei for a performance at the Taipei International Convention Center next Saturday, Sept. 27. Portuondo's career spans more than 60 years, but it wasn't until 1999 that she gained worldwide recognition for her part on the album and documentary *Buena Vista Social Club*. Born and raised in Havana, Portuondo started out in the chorus line at the famous cabaret Tropicana, and then later pioneered a unique musical style that combined Cuban music, bossa nova and American jazz influences that came to be known as "Feeling." Her singing also draws comparisons to French singer Edith Piaf. Portuondo last played in Taipei in 2005, and her current tour coincides



Omara Portuondo, diva of the Buena Vista Social Club, plays in Taipei on Sept. 27.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DA DA ARTS

with a new, soon-to-be-released solo album.

- Cuban singer Omara Portuondo at the Taipei International Convention Center (台北國際會議中心大禮堂), 1, Xinyi Rd Sec 5, Taipei City (台北市信義路五段1號)
- Sept. 27 at 7:45pm
- Tickets are NT\$800 to NT\$3,200
- On the Net: www.ticket.com.tw

Theater

Avenue Q (喜樂社區) by Glorious Theater Company (耀演劇團) is based on the Tony Award-winning musical of the same name. The set and puppets are inspired by the children's television show **Sesame Street**, but the themes are adult-oriented and address serious topics such as racism, pornography and homosexuality. The show, geared toward adults, includes full-puppet nudity.

- Cultural Affairs Bureau of Hsinchu County (新竹縣文化局), 146, Xianzheng 9th Rd, Chubai City, Hsinchu County (新竹縣竹北市政九路146號)
- Today at 7:30pm and tomorrow at 2:30pm
- Tickets are NT\$350 to NT\$800, available through NTCH ticketing

Tellus Theater continues its tradition of adapting classical Western theater to the stage with its version of Euripides' **Medea**, the story of a woman who takes revenge on the husband who betrays her. The production is in English.

- Lien Te Vegetarian Restaurant (蓮德品素天地), B1, 82 Ningpo W St, Taipei City (台北市寧波西街82號B1)
- Tomorrow at 3pm and 7pm and Sunday at 3pm
- Tickets are NT\$350, available through NTCH ticketing

Heart of Ocean (海洋之心) is a diabolo dance performance by Diabolo Dance Theater (舞鈴劇場) that portrays life underwater.

- Sinhuang Cultural Arts Center (新莊

文化藝術中心), 133 Jhongping Rd, Sinhuang City, Taipei County (台北縣新莊市中華路133號)

- Tomorrow at 7:30pm
- Tickets are NT\$200 to NT\$900, available through NTCH ticketing

Open Sesame! Merrily Go Around the World (巫頂環遊世界) is a puppet theater production by the Paper Windmill Theater Troupe (紙風車劇團) that features a wizard who travels around the world.

- Tainan Municipal Cultural Center Performance Hall (台南市立文化中心演藝廳), 332, Chunghua E Rd Sec 3, Tainan City (台南市中華東路三段332)
- Tomorrow at 7:30pm
- Tickets are NT\$200 to NT\$750, available through NTCH ticketing

The Zen drumming group U-Theater (優人神鼓) commemorates its 20th anniversary walk around Taiwan with **The Walk**, which tells the story of the sights and sounds of their journey and the people they met.

- Tonight and tomorrow at 7:30pm and tomorrow and Sunday at 2:30pm at the National Theater (國家戲劇院), 21-1, Zhongshan S Rd, Taipei City (台北市中山南路21-1號)
- Tickets are NT\$1,000 to NT\$2,500, available through NTCH ticketing

Classical music

12th International Taipei Chopin Piano Competition — Final Round (2008年第十二屆國際台北蕭邦鋼琴大賽 — 決賽) takes place this weekend and

includes the semifinals and finals of the junior and youth divisions. The competition began this year with 364 contestants, with performers from Poland, Germany, France, Russia, the US, Singapore, Hong Kong, China, Japan and South Korea. The award ceremony will be held at 7:30pm on Sunday.

- Today and tomorrow at 2:30pm and 7pm
- National Concert Hall, Taipei City
- Tickets are NT\$200 to NT\$500 per session

2008 Liu Hui-shan Piano Recital (劉惠珊2008鋼琴音樂會)

sees Liu Hui-shan (劉惠珊), a graduate of Mannes College of Music in New York, return to her homeland to perform a program that will include Chopin's *4 Ballades*, Beethoven's *Sonata Op.27, Nr.2*, Ravel's *Jeux d'eau* and Rachmaninoff's *Liebessfreud*.

- Monday at 7:30pm
 - National Recital Hall, Taipei City
 - Tickets are NT\$300 to NT\$500, available through ERA ticketing
- Liebe und Tod — Current Chapter (愛與死—時代篇)** brings together dancers and musicians to create expressionist work that looks at the themes of love and death. The performance will be presented by the Yinqi Symphony Orchestra and Chorus (音契合唱管絃樂團) under Chin Hsi-wen (金希文), with guests Hsu Chien-tai (羅明芳), soprano, and Weng Ruo-pei (翁若珮), mezzo soprano. Dance choreography is by Chen Chiu-ying (陳秋吟).

- Wednesday at 7:30pm
- National Concert Hall, Taipei City



Black Lung Inner City Choir performs at TaiwanFest in Toronto.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HEATHER NORTGRAVE

The importance of being earnest

When Taichung-based acoustic trio Black Lung Inner City Choir heard about a Taiwanese festival in Toronto that was to take place while they were back in Canada on tour, the band jumped at the chance to participate.

"We felt that a band of Canadians that has been playing in Taiwan for five years, returning to their native soil to perform at a Taiwanese festival was just an amazingly interesting cultural and musical exchange," says vocalist and guitarist Nick Fothergill.

Apparently the organizers of TaiwanFest agreed, and Black Lung's application was accepted. The festival, which runs through Sept. 21 at Harbourfront Center, has turned into a large cultural event in Toronto. Fothergill says they were "absolutely thrilled to be chosen" and that it was an "amazing opportunity for us both as a band and as residents of Taiwan." Bandmate Pat Reid agreed, saying that it was, "a beautiful place to play, a great show and a great response from the audience."

This down-to-earth gratitude and sincere appreciation for their audience and the opportunity to spread their sound is refreshing. While many bands give lip service to their fans, one senses that the Black Lung boys really mean it. Perhaps this has something to do with the simple acoustic music they play, and the delightful harmonies they engage in.

It's also rare to find a band that doesn't have an obvious frontman. All three sing. Both Fothergill and Reid play guitar, while drummer Brad Whitmore provides percussion and is "the glue that holds the band together," says Fothergill. One will bring in a song and sing the main part, while the other two develop harmonies to go along with it. It's not always easy to have such an egalitarian system, but, says Fothergill, "humans do things in teams; [we] end up better for the contributions of the other band members."

Something about the acoustic sound and melding of three voices does make this group refreshingly human and accessible.

"My lyrics are like a page out of my diary," says Fothergill. "Although the names and places are different from yours, I think all the thoughts and themes in people's personal lives are always going to be similar." He says he sings to relate that we all share the same "fears, joys, sorrows and triumphs." A line from his song *Heather* illustrates this: "If you find you're second-guessing and wondering what's right/Remember we've all felt that way sometime in our lives."

Something that definitely did seem "right" was their participation in TaiwanFest. "After years of learning to speak Chinese in Taiwan, it was a cool thing to be able to address a crowd in our home country in Mandarin," says Fothergill.

The response from the crowd was great, and the band felt welcomed by other performers, including an Aboriginal choir.

Fothergill says Taiwan's small size makes it easier for potential bandmates to meet each and connect here than in Canada, and he thinks musicians should take advantage of the rapidly expanding scene in Taiwan and the "nurturing environment" it provides. "A much-needed coming together of expat and local Taiwanese artists is beginning to take place," says Fothergill. "Once we come together as artists, some very interesting new things can happen. Perhaps even a new world music."

— ALITA RICKARDS

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: Black Lung Inner City Choir

WHERE AND WHEN: Tonight at Bliss, 148, Xinyi Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市信義路四段148號); Oct. 4 at 89K, 25 Daguan Rd, Taichung City (台中市大觀路25號). Both shows start at 10pm

TICKETS: NT\$200 at Bliss; NT\$300 at 89K

ON THE NET: www.blacklungchoir.com

Alternative folk-rockers **Deserts Chang** (張懸) plays at the **The Wall (遺牆)** tonight, while Aboriginal pop-rock band **Totem (圖騰)** appears tomorrow night. Playing on Sunday is Japanese acoustic-electronica duo **Mondialito** (夢的采撷), whose vocalist Junko Nashimura sings exclusively in French with a whispery timbre.

- B1, 200, Roosevelt Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市羅斯福路四段200號B1). Call (02) 2930-0162 or visit www.the-wall.com.tw for more information
- 8pm tonight and tomorrow; 7pm on Sunday (doors open at 6:30pm)
- NT\$450 tonight and tomorrow; tickets for Sunday's show are NT\$750 in advance, or NT\$900 at the door

At **Underworld (地下社會)** tonight **Shishukong** (屍術控) and industrial band **2"43** take to the stage. Tomorrow night **Nuin 8** and **Capelin** (柳葉魚樂團) fill the venue with a post-rock atmosphere. Wednesday night is a punk and deathcore party with **Ashen, Angry Young Man** (生氣的年輕人), **Use Pen to Sing** (用筆來唱歌) and **Total Disruption**.

- B1, 45 Shida Rd, Taipei City (台北市師大路45號B1). Call (02) 2369-0103 or visit www.upsaid.com/underworld for more information
- Live shows go from 9:30pm to 11:30pm on Fridays and Saturdays and from 9pm to 11pm on Wednesdays. The bar is open from 8pm daily, closed Mondays
- Entrance tonight and tomorrow is NT\$300 and includes one drink; entrance on Wednesday is NT\$100 and does not include a drink

Contemporary

Jazz Your Mind takes to the stage tonight at **Sappho de Base**,

- a favored late-night venue for impromptu jazz sessions. Tomorrow night is surf-rock and blues from the **Blues Vibrations**. On Tuesday night the **Grace Jazz Trio** plays a set, with an open jam afterwards. Wednesday features the **Chris Stiles Jazz Trio**. **Double J Band** performs on Thursday.
- B1, 1, Ln 102, Anhe Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市安和路一段102巷1號B1). Call (02) 2700-5411 (after 9pm) or visit www.sappho102.biz for more information
- Performances begin at 10:30pm on weekends and 10pm on weekdays
- No entrance fee