

FEATURES

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Right now things couldn't be better for Diana Krall.

The Canadian-born chanteuse took her 21-month-old twins on tour this summer (they're currently on tour with their dad, Krall's husband Elvis Costello) and just several weeks ago she was putting the final touches on her upcoming album.

"I'm so busy being a mom and I just made probably the best record of my career ... I'm so proud of it, and I'm so happy with it, it's the best experience I've had making a record," said Krall in a telephone interview last week.

The friendly and talkative Krall was nursing a slight cold as she spoke from Hong Kong, one stop on a three-week tour of Asia that concludes tomorrow night at the Taipei International Convention Center (台北國際會議中心大會堂).

But it hasn't all been smooth sailing for the 44-year-old Grammy-winning pianist and singer, despite her steady rise to stardom in the jazz and pop world over the past decade. Krall suffered a personal setback with the death of her mother in 2002, an experience she described as "devastating."

But now she's back with a new album, due out next year, which she describes as a "love letter" to her husband, one with a "very Brazilian romantic, super late-night" mood. The album includes songs recorded with a 50-piece orchestra, conducted by her long-time collaborator, Claus Ogerman, who is renowned for his work with Brazilian composer Antonios Carlos Jobim.

The album will also showcase Krall's sultry contralto, which has won her legions of fans, both in the jazz and pop worlds. "You think I was smoke and scotch-infused then, wait 'til you hear me now," she joked about her voice.

And tomorrow night, that signature voice will no doubt charm Taipei audiences, with Krall doing what she does best: singing standards from the Great American Songbook, as well as the occasional obscure tune, all rendered in the spirit of legends such as Peggy Lee, Frank Sinatra and Nat King Cole.

"I'm playing repertoire, stuff that hasn't been recorded. [I'm] just having a ball playing with my musicians, playing with really swingin' happy standards, and just enjoying myself," she said.

Krall tried her hand at songwriting with Costello on her 2004 release *Girl in the Other Room*, but said that while she valued the experience, right now, it's not for her.

"If I want to be a songwriter, I want to be on the level of Joni Mitchell or Elvis Costello ... and that's just never going to happen," she said laughing. "I'm just going to stick to my knitting ... to what I'm comfortable with, and what I enjoy, and what I feel my strengths are."

Many of those strengths lie in Krall's distinctive renditions of songs by everyone from Irving Berlin to Tom Waits. As a jazz vocalist, however, it irks her to be described as someone that sings "covers." "I know it's not meant in a [bad way], but it's just more of a misunderstanding," she sighs.

"The easiest way for me to describe it is that I'm an actor ... I find it the most satisfying creative challenge for me to take something that's well-known, take the lyrics, to find out my own story in them, whether I can relate to it as a character or as something very personal."

In striving to put the "personal" into a song, Krall has been inspired by Louis Armstrong, Nat King Cole, and Frank Sinatra. "They were all great artists — but they were also great entertainers," she said.

"Every male crooner, female crooner, you know, quote unquote, wants to be Frank Sinatra. The missing link is that they try to emulate all the snappy, 'hey, I'm the hip rat pack' qualities, but nobody can floor them like [he can]. Nobody can just destroy you with a rendition of *Only the Lonely* or *In the Wee Small Hours of the Morning*," she said.

Once Krall finds a song she likes, she says it may take years before the right inspiration comes to perform or record it.

And some tunes seem to never leave her repertoire. "I've been singing *Case of You* [by Joni Mitchell] every night for the last six years, and I'm never tired of it ... I still find it interesting to interpret and challenging all at the same time."

"So I think I look for the things that are interesting harmonically and lyrically and also that are fun to play on, like *Frim Fram Sauce* [by Nat King Cole] or something like that, that sort of satisfies the swingin' jazz side."

In offering advice to aspiring musicians, Krall acknowledges that it can be tough. "I think it's really difficult for young artists now, whatever kind of music they choose, because there's such a wealth of history now ... There's so much to check out now ... you could spend your whole life listening to Bob Dylan ... With jazz, it has to be a combination of: you have to do your homework, and then you have to be able to feel it."

Then she pauses. "I don't know ... just go into it with honesty, and you'll be ok," she said.

Krall says she's looking forward to returning to Taipei, given that she and Costello "had a ball" on their last visit, despite the rain.

After her Taipei show, she heads back home for a brief rest, and then to South America, where she will record a live DVD in Rio de Janeiro.

Supporting Krall tomorrow night are Anthony Wilson on guitar, Robert Hurst on bass and Karriem Riggins on drums.

Loving life, living love

Canadian jazz diva Diana Krall
plays Taipei tomorrow night

BY DAVID CHEN
STAFF REPORTER



PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: Diana Krall in Concert

WHERE: Taipei International Convention Center (台北國際會議中心大會堂), 1, Xinyi Rd Sec 5, Taipei City (台北市信義路五段1號)

WHEN: Tomorrow night at 8pm

TICKETS: NT\$1,200 to NT\$4,800; available through ERA ticketing outlets, online at www.ticket.com.tw or at the door

Canadian jazz diva Diana Krall makes her third appearance in Taiwan tomorrow for a show at the Taipei International Convention Center.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF BROOKERS BROTHERS HERALD AND DIANA KRALL

[THE WEEKENDER]



Petals, mirrors, hair — a voyage to hell and back

BY DIANE BAKER AND BRADLEY WINTERTON
STAFF AND CONTRIBUTING REPORTERS

Whisper of Flowers, Cloud Gate Dance Theater (雲門舞集) artistic director Lin Hwai-min's (林懷民) latest work, is perhaps his darkest yet (although *Wind Shadows* two years ago was moving in that direction). I say that perhaps because I have now seen the production three-and-a-half times (the half was a press call in August) and Lin has been continuously tweaking it, and in the process lightening the mood considerably.

Act One is deceptively beautiful. It is light, airy and very colorful thanks to the brightly hued costumes and the thousands of pink petals strewn about the stage and blown on as the act progresses. The dancers spend almost more time in the air than on the ground, quite unlike Lin's usual style.

The act opens with a wonderful solo by Huang Pei-hua (黃珮華), followed by a duet for Tsai Ming-yuan (蔡銘元) and Shen Yi-wen (沈怡文). Huang, clad in an apple-green dress, is as crisp and clean as a bright fall day as she twirls across the stage. Tsai has really grown as a dancer in recent years. He and Shen shine in their duet and Tsai achieves terrific height in his leaps. The rest of Act One is a mix of duets, quartets, quintets and ensemble work that ends in a swirl of color as the white backdrop rises to reveal a mirror and the dancers cavort through a wash of petals.

The flowers are gone as Act Two opens. The stage is darker, with mirrored panels stretching across the back of the stage. Huang repeats her opening solo to the same piece of music, but the mood is completely different. Now there is poignancy, a sense of loss. The feeling of despair grows with each successive movement. Clad in torn white briefs (and camisoles for the women), the dancers are trapped in an apocalyptic landscape, the squeaking of their bodies as they drag themselves across the stage almost drowning out Yo-yo Ma's (馬友友) cello.

The first full-length run-through I saw, in Chiayi on Sept. 11, was very dark in this part, with Lin Keh-hua's (林克華) mirrored set and Chang Tsan-tao's (張贊桃) lighting creating visions evocative of Hieronymus Bosch's tortured bodies or the old Taoist hell of Hong Kong's Tiger Balm Gardens. It was hard to pick out an individual body, much less recognize a dancer.

Last Friday at the National Theater, however, the stage was no longer quite so dark; you could almost see which limb belonged to which body. Lin had also created a new solo for Chou Chang-ning (周章候) at the end of Act II. Spotlight behind one of the mirrors, Chou was a reminder of the paradise lost in her red dress, as the rest of the cast dragged themselves offstage. *Whispers* was stronger with Chou's additional solo, but I have to admit I preferred the more tortured lighting that I saw in Chiayi.

Last Monday in the National Concert Hall you quickly learnt that sitting in the second row is not advisable when the production on stage has the orchestra, albeit a small one, placed directly above you, with the soloists behind them, but not raised that much higher. It's impossible, therefore, to say anything about the singing of the long extract from *Madama Butterfly* that began the Un Bel Di — Puccini Festival evening. What was clear, though, was that the Hsin Tien Youth Orchestra (國立新店高中音樂班管絃樂團), composed entirely of high-school teenagers, was outstanding, even under the auspices of a school specializing in music, and possibly also taking in students with special musical talents.

After moving back 10 rows following the interval, the vocal elements of the second half of the evening, the one-act opera *Gianni Schicchi*, were clearly audible. Now I could both see and hear the soloists, neither of which had been possible before. And it was enormously gratifying to discover that Dennis Chung-kuang Lin (林中光) was every bit as convincing in the title role as his predecessor in the Taipei Symphony Orchestra's production a month earlier had been. Conducted by Yang Chih-Chin (楊智欽), this was, even with virtually no scenery, a very enjoyable experience, and the near-hysterical applause of the large audience, many of them clearly student friends of the young instrumentalists, was well deserved.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LIU CHEN-HSIANG

PIANET POP

The golden gun used by villain Scaramanga in the James Bond movie *The Man With the Golden Gun* has been stolen from its film studio home, British police said Saturday, according to the BBC.

The prop, one of the most iconic weapons in cinema history, was noticed missing from Elstree Studios, north of London, on Friday, Hertfordshire Constabulary said.

Made for the 1974 film about fictional British spy Bond starring **Roger Moore** in the title role and **Christopher Lee** as Francisco Scaramanga, the gun is worth an estimated US\$136,000 dollars.

"We were called to Elstree Studios in Borehamwood at 1:25pm after a report of a theft of a prop, which was the golden gun," a Hertfordshire Constabulary spokeswoman said.

In the movie, Scaramanga uses the gun for numerous assassinations. The legendary weapon is assembled from a

cigarette case, lighter, cuff link and pen.

The latest Bond film, *Quantum of Solace* starring Daniel Craig in his second outing as agent 007, is due for release on Oct. 31.

Lisa Marie Presley, Elvis Presley's only child, gave birth to twin baby girls on Oct. 7, celebrity news TV show *Entertainment Tonight* said on its Web site on Saturday. The girls, whose names were not given, were delivered by cesarean section and weighed 2.7kg and 2.3kg.

A magazine cover photo of **Angelina Jolie** breast-feeding one of her newborn twins may have turned the superstar actress into a role model for new mothers. The photo, taken by Jolie's partner **Brad Pitt**, will adorn month's issue of *W*. Other family pictures taken by Pitt in the weeks after the birth in July of twins **Vivienne Marcheline** and **Leon Knox** will appear inside.

Jolie, an advocate for adoption, was determined never to get pregnant until Pitt came along and changed her mind, the actress said in a magazine interview. The screen idols, dubbed Brangelina, welcomed the birth of their first biological child, daughter Shiloh, in 2006.



Samantha Who? star **Christina Applegate** avoided hugs for weeks and hid her cancer diagnosis from nearly everyone working on her hit television program, the actress said in an interview aired on Friday. Applegate, 36, publicly revealed her diagnosis for breast cancer in August and had a double-mastectomy performed.

Pop star **Britney Spears** plans to set the record straight about her personal and professional woes in a documentary to be aired shortly before the release of her new album *Circus* in December. In the 90-minute film, *Britney: For the Record*, Spears talks about her high-profile meltdown, which included stints in rehab and psychiatric hospital units, an ugly divorce, losing custody of her two sons and shaving her head.

Lars Ulrich, the drummer for

the heavy-metal band Metallica, is selling a nearly 2.4m wide **Jean-Michel Basquiat** portrait of a boxer at Christie's International in New York on Nov. 12.

Christie's said the 1982 painting is estimated to sell at about US\$12 million.

Untitled (Boxer) was among the highlights of a 2005 to 2006 Basquiat retrospective that toured several museums, including the Brooklyn Museum.

Basquiat's fighter, with a black skeletal face topped with a white crown, raises his gloves in victory.

"It's a proxy self-portrait," said Brett Gorvy, Christie's international co-head of postwar and contemporary art. "The black artist as defiant hero."

Basquiat's US\$14.6 million auction record was set last year at Sotheby's in New York with the 1981 *Untitled*, a ferocious full-length self-portrait. A 1982 portrait of boxer **Sugar Ray Robinson** fetched US\$7.3 million at Christie's in New York last year.

The artist painted a series of black athletes, including boxers and baseball players. He died in 1988 of a drug overdose.

Experts say Basquiat was at the height of his talent in 1982. "He had a breakthrough," said New York collector Larry Warsh, who owns Basquiat's work. "His energy popped in those years."

— AGENCIES

Top: The golden gun used by villain Scaramanga in the James Bond movie *The Man With the Golden Gun* has been stolen from its film studio home, British police said.

Left: If anyone can make Angelina Jolie change her mind, it's Brad Pitt.

PHOTOS: AFP AND AP