

# FEATURES

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[ THE WEEKENDER ]



Tracyanne Campbell of Camera Obscura, performing at *The Wall* on Saturday evening. PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

## Camera Obscura captures the moment

BY RON BROWNLOW, CATHERINE SHU AND BRADLEY WINTERTON STAFF AND CONTRIBUTING REPORTERS

Scottish band Camera Obscura kicked off a tour of Asia on Saturday evening by playing to a slightly older, more bookish-looking crowd than The Wall (這牆) usually sees. The six-person lineup, led by lead singer and songwriter Tracyanne Campbell on acoustic guitar, started with *Come Back Margaret* from the group's most recent album, a melodically sensual and somewhat sapphic ballad that had the audience members swaying and nodding their heads to lines like "Come back, Margaret, I want to adore you/ Come back, Margaret, I want to explore you."

The atmosphere during the less than hour-and-a-half-long set was congenial and relaxed, and many in the audience were clearly familiar with the Glaswegians' music, applauding flourishes such as when trumpet-player Nigel Baillie put down his instrument and walked over to accompany percussionist Lee Thomson on the drum kit. Campbell introduced the title song of her band's most recent album by saying, "I hope you guys aren't offended by the title of this next song," before introducing *Let's Get Out of This Country* to rapturous applause. One fan in the front row had brought along a Scottish flag. "Where did you get that?" Campbell asked. "eBay," was the reply. "How much did you pay for it," she asked. "Too much!" shouted a fan in the back.

Camera Obscura is working on a new album and played three new songs from it, much to the crowd's delight. The set ended with the wistful, melancholic *Razzle Dazzle Rose*, one of the most bittersweet songs off the bittersweet *Let's Get Out of This Country*. It was perhaps more of a reflection of the audience's temperament than the quality of the show when, unusually for a foreign band with a following in Taiwan, the curtain closed and the audience did not insist on an encore.

The only downside to what was an otherwise great evening was the unusual and daft move of limiting the free drink included with the concert's NT\$1,100 ticket price to a short list of beverages, including only two beers, Miller and Coors Light, and two cocktails. Hopefully this does not represent the beginning of a trend, as Miller makes Gold Metal Taiwan Beer taste like Chimay Blanche.

The finals of the *German Lieder Competition Taipei 2008* in the Metropolitan Hall on Saturday showed a Taiwanese commitment to German 19th century art-songs that was unexpected to say the least. Six finalists in junior and senior sections sang out in German, with piano accompanists of their choice, and after a pause the winners were duly announced — Tang Fa-kai (湯發凱) in the junior section and Fan Ting-yu (范婷玉) (singing only items by the daunting Arnold Schoenberg) in the senior. Both carried off, among other rewards, cash prizes of NT\$100,000.

Strangely, the senior contestant placed sixth failed to show up for the award ceremony. This can only have meant the six had been told the final placings off-stage, and she had been too upset to appear. If so, it was a testimony to the relentless competitiveness of Taiwanese society, but was unnecessary nonetheless — she had, after all got to the final 12 in a competition that had attracted an amazing 150 eager aspirants nationwide. All things considered, you felt this was an event that, in all Asia, could only have happened here.

Four years ago, Eminem, one of the best-selling rappers in history, released his last album of original material, *Encore*, and then essentially disappeared. The years since have been pockmarked with personal struggles. He entered rehab in 2005 for a dependency on sleep medication. In 2006 he remarried, and then divorced, his ex-wife, Kim Scott, the subject of many of his most vitriolic songs. And that same year his closest friend, the rapper Proof, was killed in a shooting at a Detroit nightclub.

In his new book, *The Way I Am*, Eminem hopes to set the record straight. "I'm really just a normal guy. You can ask my neighbors," he writes in the book. "I ride a bike. I walk the dog. I mow my lawn. I'm out there every Sunday, talking to myself, buck naked, mowing the lawn with a chain saw."

Well, one out of three isn't bad. "I do ride my bike, I don't have a dog, I don't mow my lawn," Eminem, 36, admitted in a phone interview from a Detroit studio on Monday night last week. But otherwise he's been living the life of a suburban father, taking care of three girls: Hailie, his daughter with Kim; Alaina, his niece; and Whitney, Kim's daughter from another relationship.

And now Eminem, born Marshall Mathers, is tentatively re-entering public life with his book, published by Dutton this week. Part autobiography, part photo gallery, part ephemera collection, it's a handsome midcareer (and midlife) roundup for an artist who has been notoriously reluctant to discuss his personal life anyplace but in his music.

"In a way this is the end of the first chapter of his career," said Paul Rosenberg, Eminem's manager. "Em's looking forward now. He's very re-energized and refocused."

Originally intended to be "a scrapbook for my fans," Eminem said, the book grew to include large chunks of first-person narratives culled from interviews with the journalist Sacha Jenkins, and presented in a conversational style. "Rap is one big Fantasy Island," Eminem writes. "It's the place I always retreat to when things get too hectic in real time."

In a section about his family and upbringing, he's discomfitingly frank: "If you go back and look at the abuse that I took, it's no surprise I became who I am."

Someone I don't really want to be."

Jenkins said: "I think Em has an appeal that's very everyman. That's his natural voice in the book." He added: "The guy has been out of the mix and not interacting with a lot of people, let alone a writer. But this was an opportunity for him to get a lot of stuff off his chest, especially in the wake of the death of his best friend."

In fact Eminem's memories of how Proof toughened him up as a young man are among the most vivid passages in *The Way I Am*. "As difficult as it was to talk about, I had to," Eminem said. He also writes of how much his retreat from public life had to do with Proof's death: "After he passed, it was a year before I could really do anything normally again. It was tough for me to even get out of bed, and I had days when I couldn't walk, let alone write a rhyme. When I tried to put my thoughts together — well, I wasn't making sense when I spoke, so everyone was trying to keep me off TV and away from the press."

But while Eminem discusses some personal topics in the book — fatherhood gets especially lengthy treatment ("Being a dad makes me feel powerful in a way that I hadn't known before, and it's the kind of power I don't want to abuse") — he almost completely avoids other, more familiar subjects, like his exceedingly public battles with his ex-wife and his mother, Debbie. (Next month Eminem's mother will release a memoir, *My Son Marshall, My Son Eminem*.)

"Everyone already knows how I feel about those situations," Eminem said. "I don't want to keep putting Kim and the kids in everything that I do, stuff where it's not necessary." The book, he said, is "more about Eminem and less about Marshall."

### MARSHALL MATHERS' MEMENTOS

And so it's the career artifacts, especially the handwritten lyrics, that receive a place of privilege.

For years Eminem would scribble down snatches of lyrics on whatever piece of paper was available — spiral notebooks, hotel memo pads — and carry them around in a backpack. When he wanted to put together a song, he'd rifle through the sheets, pick out some lines that might go together and head into the studio.

"I collect words and then I stack them up," Eminem said of his songwriting process. Often he'd write lyrics in a sort of code, leaving key words out. His reasoning: "If you leave your rhyme pad laying around, no one can make sense of it but you."

More than two dozen of the sheets are reproduced in the book, and they're impressive in both content and appearance — lyrics scrawled at odd angles, in different ink colors, at lengths varying from a few words to complete

verses. A few of them — ones that include lyrics from hits like *My Name Is*, *Stan* and *Lose Yourself* — are on perforated pages so that they can be easily removed.

"It reminds me of the sort of crazy scribbling and writing like Russell Crowe's character in *A Beautiful Mind*," said Rosenberg, referring to the Nobel Prize-winning economist John Nash. "It's an organized chaos of thoughts."

(As for any aspiring rappers thinking of appropriating the unused material, Eminem jokingly offered: "Whoever wants to use it, I guess, go ahead and use it. Take my scraps.")

In an era when stars like Jay-Z famously do not write down their rhymes, instead constructing them in their head and committing them to memory, *The Way I Am* is a celebration of a sort of artisanal approach to rhyme.

"In the older hip-hop he has a connection to, lyric sheets have always played an important role," Jenkins said. "He's a traditionalist."

In 2002 Eminem released the book *Angry Blonde*, largely a collection of lyrics — reprinted, not the original handwritten sheets — that sold about 77,000 copies, according to Nielsen BookScan. But that was near the height of his fame; this is a much less certain time for him. Still, "we never worried there wasn't a market," Rosenberg said. "He's certainly done enough over his career to sustain interest, even with having stepped away for a couple of years."

### PROFANE AND PREPOSTEROUS

And now Eminem appears ready to return to the world of music. He has been recording with Dr. Dre, with whom he has made his biggest hits, working on songs for his next album, to be called *Relapse*. (There are rumors that the album will be released by Interscope before year's end, but there has been no official word yet.) Last week he released a teaser freestyle, *I'm Having a Relapse*, on which he sounds vibrant and engaged, stacking characteristically profane and preposterous rhymes atop one another:

*It seems like every day I get a little flakier  
The medication is making my hands a little shakier  
Hand me that 18-month-old baby to shake him up  
It'll only take me a  
Second to choke his trachea*

In one of the book's most revealing sections, Eminem talks about how he happened upon his signature bottle-blond look, high on Ecstasy, around the time he was recording his first songs with Dr. Dre. It reads like a comic-book origin story, his new identity presaging a path of bad behavior to follow.

Now that he's preparing to re-enter the music world, though, will the peroxide, and all that comes with it, return? "My hair is back to its natural color," Eminem said. "I don't think I'm going back to the dye."

## Eminem resurfaces in new role: memoirist



*The Way I Am*, a memoir by rapper Eminem, also known as Marshall Mathers. PHOTO: AP

*Eminem has been mostly silent and invisible for nearly four years after canceling a European tour to enter rehab and the murder of his best friend, the rapper Proof from D12. Now he has a new, visually driven memoir out*

BY JON CARAMANICA  
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK

## PLANET POP

British music company BEMI reported a loss of US\$1.2 billion in its first year as part of the private equity group Terra Firma, news reports said Saturday.

Revenues dropped by 19 percent to US\$2.3 billion in the business year

ending on March 31, according to earnings data released the previous day in an annual review by Maltby Capital, through which investor Guy Hands' Terra Firma owns EMI Music. The loss, which ballooned

Axl Rose singing at the MTV Music Awards. *Chinese Democracy*, Guns N' Roses' newest album, is to be released on Nov. 23. PHOTO BY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

from US\$457 million the previous year, is largely due to financing costs, asset writedowns and restructuring costs, the *Financial Times* reported.

Jury selection was completed Thursday for the murder retrial of legendary music producer Phil Spector, and main arguments in the case will be heard beginning next Wednesday, court sources said.

Spector, the eccentric musical genius who created the famous *Wall of Sound* recording technique, was accused of shooting dead an actress in his Los Angeles mansion five years ago. He avoided conviction after a marathon, six-month trial last year that ended with a jury deadlocked 10 to 2 in favor of finding him guilty, and prosecutors decided to launch a new case against him.

The new jury consists of seven men and five women. Six replacement jurors must be chosen before Wednesday, when the court hears opening statements by the defense and the public prosecutor.

The trial at Los Angeles Superior Court is expected to last between three and four months, and the fabled producer faces a minimum 15 years to life in prison if he is found guilty of second degree murder.

Prosecutors are seeking to convict Spector, 68, of murdering actress Lana Clarkson, who was found dead in the foyer of the fabled producer's home in the early hours of Feb. 3, 2003.

At his first trial, prosecutors alleged that Spector shot Clarkson as she attempted to leave his home after meeting him for the first time only hours earlier at the Hollywood nightclub where she worked. Defense lawyers said Clarkson, 40, best-known for her role in Roger Corman's 1985 cult classic *The Barbarian Queen* but whose career had stalled at the time of her death, killed herself.

Spector is regarded as one of the most influential figures in pop music history. In the early 1960s he was responsible for hits including *Da Doo Ron Ron*, *Be*



Jerry Lewis has put his foot in it, again. PHOTO BY TIMES NEWS SERVICE



*My Baby and You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'*.

US supergroup Guns N'Roses will unveil their first original album in 17 years next month with the release of long-awaited work *Chinese Democracy*, a statement said Thursday.

The long-delayed album will go on sale in the US on Nov. 23 while the title track *Chinese Democracy* has already been released to radio, the band's managers said.

The album is Guns N' Roses'

first since the 1991 release of *Use of Illusion I* and *Use Your Illusion II*.

"The release of Chinese Democracy marks a historic moment in rock 'n' roll," co-managers Irving Azoff and Andy Gould said. "Guns N' Roses fans have every reason to celebrate, for this is only the beginning."

Guns N' Roses frontman Axl Rose is the only member of the band's 1991 line-up to feature on the new album, which will include 14 tracks.

The band has sold 90 million albums worldwide, with 42 million in the US alone, with the group's seminal *Appetite for Destruction* — featuring hits *Welcome to the Jungle* and *Sweet Child o'Mine* — its most famous.

Veteran comedian Jerry Lewis is under fire again for making an anti-gay slur on Australian television similar to one he apologized for using on his annual

US telethon a year ago. The 82-year-old King of Comedy dropped the slur when he was asked by a Network Ten national TV reporter following a press conference in Sydney on Friday for his opinion on the Australian nation sport of cricket. "Oh, cricket? It's a fag game. What are you, nuts?" Lewis replied.

The network broadcast the comment in full on its Friday evening news bulletin along with footage of Lewis handling an imaginary cricket bat with an effeminate gesture.

Lewis apologized in September last year for using the term "illiterate faggot" in Las Vegas during his annual Labor Day telethon that raises money for the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

In a statement released a day later, he described the slur as a "bad choice of words." New York-based media discrimination watchdog Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, or GLAAD, called for Lewis to again apologize.

—AGENCES