



BRINGING SOUTHEAST ASIA TO TAIPEI

A dancer performs at a Southeast Asian dance competition held in the square in front of Zhongshan Hall in Taipei on Sunday. Participants hailed from Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam and Indonesia.

PHOTO: CHIA

Street artists trickle into Taipei

COMING TO A STREET NEAR YOU: Since the city's Cultural Affairs Department began granting permits in 2005, only five foreign artists have managed to sign up

BY MO YAN-CHIH
STAFF REPORTER

Every Saturday and Sunday morning, Canadian pan flute artist Bernier Sylvain drives to Tamsui MRT Station and waits for the draw with other street artists to secure a performance spot at the rear of the station.

If he is lucky enough to get a spot, Sylvain starts setting up speakers, tuning devices, a small table displaying his printed CDs and a donation box, and begins his four to five-hour pan flute performance in the afternoon.

Sylvain's soft and unique pan flute music always attracts the crowd's attention. Some commuters have even become fans and come to listen to his music regularly.

"People enjoy my music... And I like performing here [in Tamsui, 淡水] because everyone is happy to hear me play," he said.

Sylvain, whose career as a full-time street artist began at a subway station in Montreal when he was 15 years old, traveled to Taiwan four years ago with his Taiwanese wife and became one of five certified foreign street artists in Taipei City since the Cultural Affairs Department began pushing for street arts in 2005.

The department implemented the Taipei City Street Artists Performance Permit in 2005, and a total of 677 street artists received certificates, said Chen Kuan-fu (陳冠甫), chief secretary of the

department.

The permit system was inspired by the cities of Cambridge, San Francisco and Tokyo, where governments have set up special districts for street artists.

The Taipei City Government followed suit, allowing street artists to perform at more than 100 public spaces across Taipei, he said.

Sylvain chose Tamsui as his regular performing spot because it was less crowded than other public spaces.

Forty-year-old singer and songwriter Kent John from the US, on the other hand, performs mostly in Ximending (西門町).

Coming to Taiwan in 1997 to do missionary work, John started singing on the streets in Taipei about one and a half years ago, and was surprised to find that more and more people have learned to appreciate street art.

"People like good music and good performances. I have always been a musician, I give my best performances, and the audience expects us street artists to be professional," he told the *Taipei Times* after performing in a corner of Ximending on a Sunday afternoon.

John played guitar and sang songs ranging from country music to rock 'n' roll.

His lively music and constant interactions with the crowd made his performances quite popular.

However, John's wife, Jasmine Chou, who accompanies him to



Left: Kent John, one of five certified foreign street artists in Taipei City, plays guitar and sings songs in front of a crowd at Ximending on a Sunday afternoon. Right: Street performer Bernier Sylvain plays the pan flute outside Tamsui MRT Station on a Sunday afternoon. As a full-time street artist for over 20 years, Sylvain still has a passion for street performance and expects street art in Taipei to become more organized and mature.

PHOTO: MO YAN-CHIH, TAIPEI TIMES

performance sites, said street art was too immature in Taiwan to make a living out of it.

"Sometimes we only get NT\$200 to NT\$300 after performing all afternoon... I guess people are too shy or not used to giving street artists cash rewards," she said.

Another street artist, Patricia Santoro, an Uruguayan who came to Taiwan more than 20 years ago, can only do street art as a part time job, too, despite over 20 years of experience as a clay artist.

"Street artists can be excellent and professional artists, but not every artist is lucky enough to be able to do full-time street art," she said.

Santoro, who acquired a street artist's permit last year, offers clay craftwork classes at her workshop, and showcases her artwork on Xiangti Boulevard (香堤大道) at Xinyi New Life Square during weekends.

Her ceramic art, mainly light colored elves, fairies and animals, are especially popular among

female customers, who stop at her table to watch her make the dolls.

Santoro says she chooses light or bright colors for her works because she wants her art to make people feel happy.

She appreciates the city government's efforts to promote street art in Taipei, but says it should provide more public space for street artists.

A permanent location to hold a regular "fair" every weekend where people can bring their kids and enjoy great art and performances would be better, she said.

Sylvain, John and another street artist, Daniel Greenberg, echoed Santoro's comments and suggested that the city government open up more venues for street artists and place less restrictions on where they can perform.

The department should take advantage of the permit system to separate professional street artists from those who perform mostly for charity, so that street art can be

appreciated as a genuine art form, Sylvain said.

Greenberg, who returned to the US after finishing his studies in Taiwan in September, agreed that the city government should put more effort into encouraging street artists, especially foreign ones.

"Overall, being a street performer was an immensely rewarding experience... I really loved playing on the streets of Taipei and was always amazed at the generosity of Taiwanese people," he told the *Taipei Times* in an e-mail.

Lee Shun-lin (李順霖), a staff member at the city's culture department, said it was more difficult for foreigners to obtain permits because they were required to first receive work certificates in their field of art from the Council of Labor Affairs.

The permit, however, is effective indefinitely once it is issued and the city government is opening up more public spaces, including parks, plazas and sidewalks, for street performance, he said.

FEATURE

Standard Chartered helps blind students grow with charity

RELAY OF HOPE: The bank held a charity drive in which residents of Taipei, Hsinchu, Taichung and Kaohsiung could run to obtain donations of NT\$1,500 per kilometer

BY JERRY LIN
STAFF REPORTER

During the weekend of Oct. 17 to Oct. 19, Standard Chartered Bank (渣打國際商業銀行) initiated the charity drive, "Relay of Hope — Standard Chartered GROE 42," in Taipei to purchase Braille books and computers for blind students in Taiwan.

The bank donated NT\$1,500 for every kilometer participants ran on treadmills that bank staff set up for the event.

Sunil Kaushal (高恕年), president

and CEO at Standard Chartered Bank (Taiwan), told the *Taipei Times* by e-mail why his company wanted to sponsor this event and help the visually impaired community.

"Seeing is believing" is Standard Chartered's global initiative, which aims to raise awareness of the visually impaired community and to care for and help restore sight for the blind in developing countries," Kaushal said in his reply.

Last year, Standard Chartered Group raised more than US\$10 million to help tackle avoidable

blindness among 10 million people across 20 countries, Kaushal said, adding that the staff in Taiwan have raised more than NT\$9 million (US\$270,000) since 2004.

In an effort to help change blind people's lives, Standard Chartered Taiwan sponsors visually impaired runners to take part in the Greatest Race on Earth (GROE) marathon series, held in four different cities — Nairobi, Singapore, Mumbai and Hong Kong — every year.

The bank also sponsors the Taiwan Ah-gan Visually Impaired

Running Team, led by Chang Wen-yen (張文彥), Taiwan's first visually impaired marathon runner, in the hope of encouraging more blind people to exercise.

This year, Standard Chartered Taiwan said it succeeded in taking its commitment to the next level with the charity drive, "Relay of Hope — Standard Chartered GROE42," in Taipei, Hsinchu, Taichung and Kaohsiung. The number 42 in the charity's name refers to 42km, which is the distance of a full marathon course.

Standard Chartered donated roughly NT\$1,500 for every kilometer participants ran on the treadmills in the charities. The money is to be

shared between the Taipei School for the Visually Impaired (TSVI) and National Taichung School for the Visually Impaired to purchase Braille books and computers to help improve students' learning.

Kaushal said a Braille computer along with a monitor usually costs about NT\$200,000 in Taiwan. The cost is so high that several students have to share one computer while in class.

The 42-hour non-stop treadmill activity held at the Vieshow (formerly Warner Village) plaza in Taipei's Xinyi District (信義) from Oct. 17 to Oct. 19 was a success, Kaushal said, as it attracted more than 1,085 individuals, including more than 250

staff, who ran 1,283km in total, accumulating a donation of NT\$1,924,500, which the bank rounded up to NT\$2 million.

Standard Chartered also donated NT\$1,500 for every kilometer ran by participants in the three relay events in Hsinchu (Nov. 1), Taichung (Nov. 9) and Kaohsiung (Nov. 15), which entailed a 42km relay on treadmills.

Kaushal said the bank wished to accumulate NT\$3 million in donations after these four treadmill relays.

"Taiwan is a very important market to Standard Chartered," Kaushal said. "In this global financial turmoil, we will stay focused

on being the right partner to our stakeholders and to the communities in which we operate. This is why we brought, "Relay of Hope — Standard Chartered GROE 42" to Taiwan this year."

Kaushal said Standard Chartered would continue to invest in Taiwan and care for the visually impaired community as part of the company's global initiative "Seeing is Believing," to bring new vision to the world with the marathon spirit in the Greatest Race on Earth.

The GROE marathon series and Seeing is Believing are two of the bank's major community programs. GROE has been running in four cities since 2003.

SPECIAL COLUMN

Taking care of ourselves

Many of us are natural caretakers in our roles as loyal friends, parents, teachers, counselors or community volunteers. In this fast-paced world it is not uncommon for us to over-commit and overwork. Unfortunately, in an effort to avoid selfishness, we too often ignore our own needs. As a result, we risk losing sight of the things that are most important — our peace of mind, our physical health and enjoying time with those we love. If we don't take the time to take care of ourselves, we are in danger of not only burning out at work or school, but also of fracturing important friendships and romantic relationships.

Setting boundaries is a key component to protecting ourselves and ultimately ensuring we are able to give back to others. There is no need to be apologetic for setting limits with your time and energy. It is "OK to say no." Give it a try — you may even find people envious of your ability to prioritize yourself.

Taking the time to conduct a personal inventory helps us better prepare ourselves to cope with stress. What physical, emotional or behavioral signs let us know that we are under pressure? Knowing our own response to stress is critical to being able to know when to take a "time out." As we juggle multiple responsibilities in our daily lives, we can help ourselves by scheduling and prioritizing time just for us. This can be as simple as taking a bath, meeting a friend for tea, or finally getting to that yoga class.

A key component of self care and a concept that is part of many Eastern and Western traditions is mindfulness. Research has shown that mindfulness-based interventions have been effective in treating chronic pain, anxiety, depression and substance abuse problems, among others. Mindfulness instructs us to pay attention to each moment and to refrain from judging things as they "should be" and focus on how they really are. If we are not mindful then we miss out on the "here and now" and we risk spending our time worrying about the future or ruminating about the past.

The only "goal" of practicing mindfulness is mindfulness itself. The Zen Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, may have put it best in his book *The Miracle of Mindfulness*: "There are two ways to wash the dishes. The first is to wash the dishes in order to have clean dishes and the second is to wash the dishes to wash the dishes."

When we are mindful we are observing, describing and participating in the moment without judging the experience. If we approach each task mindfully, we can stop operating on "automatic pilot" and be present in our daily lives.

A benefit of practicing mindfulness is the ability to more skillfully manage and regulate our emotions. Psychologist Marsha Linehan devised an easy mnemonic to remind us how to care for ourselves and reduce our emotional vulnerability to stressful situations. The PLEASE skills are as follows: (P) — treat physical illness, go to the doctor when you are sick; (E) — eat a balanced diet; (A) — avoid mood altering drugs; (S) sleep — maintain a consistent sleep schedule; (E) — exercise.

The PLEASE skills are a helpful guideline for self-reflection to remind us to take care of ourselves during times of stress. Through mindfulness, the PLEASE skills and setting limits, we can skillfully cope with modern day demands. Approaching self care mindfully is essential to promote an overall sense of well being and to manage inevitable life stressors. The bonus is that if we are able to truly take care of ourselves and we are better equipped to reach out and care for those we love.

Suggested reading on self care and mindfulness — all available on amazon.com or the Community Services Center library:

- ▶ *Crazy Busy: Overstretched, Overbooked and About to Snap — Strategies for Handling Your Fast-Paced Life* by Edward M. Hallowell
- ▶ *Wherever You Go There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life* by Jon Kabat-Zinn
- ▶ *The Miracle of Mindfulness* by Thich Nhat Hanh
- ▶ *The Mindful Brain: Reflection and Attunement in the Cultivation of Well-Being* by Daniel Siegel

Cynthia Teeters is a counselor at the Community Services Center and works with adults, teens and couples. She continues to work on self-care strategies and her personal mindfulness practice.



IF YOU HAVE SUGGESTIONS FOR EVENTS, INTERVIEWS OR TOPICS YOU WOULD LIKE TO SEE COVERED ON THIS PAGE PLEASE SEND YOUR IDEAS TO:

community@taipeitimes.com