

DON'T CALL ME ECCENTRIC

She has been an icon of British style for four decades, but Vivienne Westwood breaks off from work on her new gold bodysuit to reveal she never wanted to make clothes

BY EMINE SANER
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON



PHOTOS: AP

“Please don't write that I'm eccentric,” says Vivienne Westwood, who is dressed in a holey black dress with what looks like bits of flesh-colored tights woven in and out of it, a pair of scruffy old trainers and a knitted hat pulled over her hair, which is the color of clementines. She has drawn her eyebrows on in red pencil. “It's always, ‘aah, this eccentric woman.’ I've heard that story so many times.” She pauses and looks out of the window of her office. “I suppose I don't mind, I have to take it as a compliment in an age of conformity.”

Westwood's office, in a building in Battersea, south London, which seems to have hundreds of young people busying themselves in corners, is crammed with papers, ideas and sketches pinned on walls, and rails crammed with clothes. She shows me a gold bodysuit she is working on for a ballet performance next week by dancers from the Royal Ballet, alongside a fashion show of her fall/winter collection, in aid of the NSPCC (the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children). “It will have

a dragon snaking its way around it,” she says. It looks worryingly unfinished, given that it needs to be ready in four days, but Westwood doesn't look concerned.

The idea for the dance, she says, came from a book about alchemy, and what follows is a 10-minute monologue about the subject, delivered in an accent so soft and Alan Bennett-esque that it makes you think of tea and crumpets. “I won't go into any more details,” she says, finally, then: “Yes I will actually, because it's really great. I won't be a minute. So, the dance. I took one of these metaphors from an alchemical book. The male is horrible — he is absolutely beautiful, a sensation, but he's totally cold and he doesn't care about anything. The female is incredibly ugly but she's attracted to him. Eventually, they lock together and they can't separate and it's a sort of strange love affair. They become one substance. Anyway, that's the end of it. It's incredible how it works, I love the choreography.”

Another speech follows — and I'm not sure how we got on to this — about how she doesn't think science is the answer to everything because it doesn't take account of

human nature and what makes you happy. She says: “Sorry if I take rather a long time to explain things,” then: “Hang on a minute,” when I interrupt. She steamrollers over me, talking slightly faster and louder, sometimes putting her head in her hands, as if nothing will stop her getting her point out. She has a lot to say. On the destruction of the planet: “We have to save the rainforest or else we've got no chance. Can you imagine the warlords, and the rape and pillage, and the mass migrations and the hunger? The human race has looked never before on the apocalypse and I do believe that is what we're facing.”

On politics: “I'm [UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown's] worst enemy. I hate that man. I hate his cowardice, the fact that he just acquiesced in everything the horrible, disgusting [former UK prime minister Tony] Blair wanted to do. [Conservative Party leader] Cameron doesn't seem to have much to say, and the Liberal Democrats are following the government ideas. They are all old-fashioned thinkers.”

You could probably choose any subject and Westwood, a voracious reader, would have something to say on it. But

because we have a strict time limit, it's a bit of a battle because Westwood wants to talk about art and ideas and, boringly for her, I'd rather talk about the punk years and why she didn't wear knickers when she went to collect her Order of the British Empire medal (if she's wearing a dress, she never does, apparently).

“I'm not interested in talking about little anecdotes about things that have happened to me,” she says, not unkindly. I suppose her past has been gone over so much that it is threadbare. Westwood grew up in the Pennine village of Tintwistle, where her father worked in the Wall's sausage factory and her mother was an assistant at the local greengrocers. After art college, Vivienne Swire married Derek Westwood, a factory apprentice, and their son Ben was born. The marriage didn't last, and when Westwood met Malcolm McLaren, she fell pregnant with her second son, Joe, almost immediately.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15

[CD REVIEWS: TAIWAN]



VARIOUS ARTISTS
Ultimate Metal Vol. 1
Ultimate Music (奧特登音樂事業)



KATNCANDI X2 (棉花糖)
2375
Self-Released
blog.pixnet.net/katncandix2



EUROPA HUANG (黃建為)
Come to Me
Wind Music (風潮音樂)
www.windmusic.com.tw



PANAI (巴奈)
A Piece of Blue (那片藍)
Ring of Fire Music
(www.soundsoftaiwan.com/)
panai-pah.com

Thanks to groups like Chthonic (閃靈), who have started to cultivate a global following, heavy metal has taken root in Taiwan. Chthonic's success has inspired a small but thriving metal scene, a slice of which is showcased on *Ultimate Metal Vol. 1*.

This compilation features up-and-coming bands from northern Taiwan, representing various “extreme” metal styles. Untrained listeners will hear, if not feel bombarded by, strident electric guitars that provide both rhythmic texture and the main melody; drums that belt out beats at machine-gun speeds; and vocalists who croak, screech and scream.

As one might expect, occult imagery and fantasy themes abound in the lyrics and stage costumes. These basic elements are shared by the bands appearing on the album; the stylistic differences are left to connoisseurs to identify and argue over.

But this album is not about presenting different styles, but rather bringing young bands together, says Bull Tsai (蔡文甫), the bassist for Desecration, which contributed two tracks. The scene is still small, he says, but Taiwanese bands are unique in that they “can mix different metal styles.” Tsai likens this

“freedom” to what he calls Taiwan's “hybrid society” (混合社會).

Anthelion (幻日), who organized the compilation, offers the album's most mature-sounding tracks. *Rapid Disillusionment* (急速幻滅) plays like an epic, from the melancholy piano introduction to the nightmarish turns between chorus and verse. The band arrangements are meticulous and, one could even say, elegant, with lead vocalist Code's well-timed guttural screeching.

Even though the album's makers hesitate to play up their sub-genre niche, their compilation will likely appeal most to death-metal and black-metal fans. In keeping with the spirit of fringe genres, this compilation does not seek to attract new listeners — it's simply waiting for its fans to arrive.

The album includes songs by Beyond Cure, Vulcan, Demise (滅) and Sin of Aeon, and is on sale at the bands' shows.

Katncandi x2 (棉花糖) is an acoustic singer-songwriter duo that entered Taiwan's indie scene last year. The pair's debut EP, *2375*, is a set of vignettes about a daydreamer-type who gazes at her world in wonder and hope.

The album cover art, rendered in pastel pinks and blues, offers visual images of the dreamer: a wide-eyed,

infantile-looking girl wrapped in hair that looks like cotton candy and floating in a sea of clouds.

The title track tells of a desire to find “one's own home,” which in the intro lead singer Ball (小球) says can be “real or imagined.” Thankfully, the song is more sentimental and wistful than overly cutesy. Ball sings in a whispery soprano, backed by the crystalline tones of acoustic guitars.

The mood shifts quickly with the upbeat ballad *x2*, which comes across as heavy-handed with its air of innocence; the song's saving grace is the carefree and funky electronic drum and keyboard arrangement. On *Your Strength* (你的力量), Ball's voice sounds more natural and mature. The piano grounds the song with a sense of intimacy, while the sampled string arrangements summon romantic grandeur. Her honest delivery makes it work, and credit should also go to Ball's musical partner and guitarist Shen Sheng-er (沈聖哲) for his composing.

A newcomer to Taiwan's folk scene, Europa Huang (黃建為) raised eyebrows with his debut *Over the Way*, which he made during college. The album earned him the Best Newcomer accolade at the last year's Golden Melody Awards. Soon after he finished

school and received his occupational therapist certification, Huang completed his newest album, *Come to Me*, a set of thoughtful folk-pop tunes about relationships and growing up.

Huang sticks with familiar song forms — baroque pop, 1970s folk, a hint of Mando-pop — but does so with aplomb and sincerity while managing to be original. He has a keen sense of harmony and a tenor voice that jumps smoothly to high falsettos, which he displays on the nostalgic opening track *The Birds of Youth* (青鳥).

On the title track Huang wears his heart on a sleeve. He sings this song in English, and with lines like “Oh Baby you and I we both live in pain/You know I will stand by your side,” one can't help but brace for a sappy resolution. But a pleasing, quirky refrain and George Harrison-inspired guitar riffs reduce the urge to press the skip button.

Part of Huang's charm is his directness and a yearning to connect. His lyrics, mostly sung in Mandarin — there are two English tracks — take on a colloquial feel, staying away from flowery poetics. *Tomorrow's Affairs* (明天的事), a song inspired by working with clinically depressed patients, offers solace instead of definitive answers to

overcoming personal hardships.

The universality of emotions seems to interest Huang the most, which sometimes makes this album seem like a musical version of “chicken soup for the soul.” But his earnestness and sharp songwriting sensibilities means listeners are able to read between the lines.

Eight years have been worth the wait for singer-songwriter Panai's (巴奈) second studio album, *A Piece of Blue* (那片藍). The 37-year-old chanteuse appears to have used her time well, crafting new songs around lyrics written by friends at a songwriter's workshop in Taitung County's (台東縣) Dulan Village (都蘭).

Panai, who is of Puyuma and Amis heritage, teamed up with area musicians to create an album with a relaxed, dreamy feel that conjures up scenic beach and mountain scenes around Taitung. The sound of acoustic guitars, saxophones, keyboards and hand drums sets a carefree atmosphere, which balances nicely with her rich, melancholy-tinged voice.

Through much of the album, Panai's vocal delivery is understated, which works to nice effect on the slow and hypnotic *Me* (我), in which she sounds serene. *Sea Return* (海歸) draws

listeners in with its lilting acoustic guitar sounds and quiet, warm electric guitar riffs that hint at Hawaiian music. Panai sings this tune in Mandarin with a speech-like cadence and sounds detached yet soothing. Brief chirps from a gecko partway through the song add a sublime touch.

The album draws from a variety of musical styles, and it sounds like Panai makes the band arrangements work for her, rather than the other way around. She sounds right at home in the Brazilian folk-tinged *Talabuki* and navigates smoothly through the reggae number *Me and Myself* (我和自己), which features excellent backup from Paiwan musician Red-I and his band, the Riddim Outlawz.

The production values also deserve praise. The recording's well-balanced mix conveys warmth and intimacy. The backing band is subtly mixed around Panai's vocals, with each instrument coming through clearly. The ambient sounds of nature sprinkled throughout the album, such as sounds of the ocean and crickets chirping, enhance instead of detract from the music.

Panai has outdone herself with *Piece of Blue*. Each song sounds thoroughly inspired and driven — a likely sign that she managed to remain true to her artistic instincts.

— DAVID CHEN