

## FEATURES

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2008

PAGE 13

[ THE WEEKENDER ]

IN Taiwan's relatively young rock scene, reaching the 12-year mark as a band could be considered a milestone for the indie group 1976. Not that its members are counting the years or fretting about their ages; they continue to attract a loyal following of geek-chic high school and college students, often referred to in Chinese as "the artsy youth" (文藝青年).

The members of 1976 look the part — mod haircuts, skinny jeans, preppy button-down shirts — and sing it, too. Earlier this month the band released its fifth studio album *Asteroid 1976* (1976這個星球), a collection of songs sung in Mandarin on topics ranging from youth and dreams to love and baseball — dressed in Brit-pop and rock sounds inspired by bands like New Order and The Smiths.

Just as these two groups shook up the UK rock scene in the 1980s, 1976 created a stir of its own in Taiwan in the late 1990s. "When they first came out, no bands were playing that kind of music," said Chang Tieh-chih (張鐵志), music critic and author of the local bestseller *Sounds and Fury* (聲音與憤怒), a book about rock music and social change. "They ignited a fire ... They are still the biggest indie rock band in Taiwan, no doubt."

But, some fans are asking whether they will be able to keep the "indie" in their rock. *Asteroid* is issued through Sony BMG, marking the band's first major label release. "This is the biggest 'challenge' we heard from people before we signed [with Sony BMG]: Will this affect the spirit or the concept of the band. Will there be disappointment? But this won't happen when people listen to it [the album]," said the band's vocalist and songwriter Chen Ray-kai (陳瑞凱), who goes by the name Ah-kai (阿凱). He points out that the band was halfway through the recording process before signing with the record label.

Chang agrees. "Even though they signed with a major label, they're not going to become another May Day (五月天)," he said, referring to the popular Mando-pop rock band that started around the same time as 1976. "Their music is more complicated and sophisticated — it's harder to sing along with."

The band's four members were relaxed but enthusiastic as they talked about their past and new directions in an interview with the *Taipei Times* at Kafka by the Seashore (海邊的卡夫卡), a coffee shop near National Taiwan University that is part-owned by Ah-kai.

Of all things, heavy metal music brought Ah-kai and guitarist Zac Chang (張崇偉) together — the two played in the

From left to right: Lin Tzi-chiao, Warren Lin, Ah-kai and Zac Chang. Taiwanese indie rock band 1976, who have been winning underground rock fans' hearts for 12 years, have just released their fifth studio album.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SONY BMG

## Movin' on up

Indie rock band 1976, the darlings of Taiwan's thinking youth, signed with Sony BMG to release 'Asteroid.' But is the deal a pact with the Devil?

BY DAVID CHEN  
STAFF REPORTER

same cover band in high school. "At the time, everyone was playing metal," said Chang, who played guitar in an early incarnation of Taiwan's renowned black metal group, Chthonic (閃爍).

Toward the end of high school, a friend gave Ah-kai a cassette tape copy of The Smiths' album *The Queen is Dead*. He didn't like it at first, being a thrash metal fan at the time. But after a while he "kept listening to it" and decided he didn't want to play metal anymore. He convinced Chang to start a new band playing original music.

They had a rough beginning given that Bon Jovi and Guns N' Roses ruled the hearts and minds of Taiwanese youth then. "When we started writing our own songs, we didn't know if we were doing it correctly," said Chang. "At the time, people felt that writing your own songs was a weird thing to do — that was the scene in Taiwan."

But the scene matured, which encouraged 1976 to come up with songs like *Attitude* (態度). The lyrics speak to a disaffected youth: *If you live too happily you lose your ideals/If you live too freely you won't have any goals/I don't want ideals and goals/I just want happiness and freedom* (活得快樂會失去理想/活得自由會沒有目標/我不要目標和理想/我只要快樂和自由).

This sentiment also seems to resonate with Chang the guitarist, who describes himself as the "one in class whose name nobody remembered." He says 1976's music reaches out to "ordinary" kids, those

who were neither the top student nor the trouble-maker. "Although it's rock 'n' roll, we don't sound so loud — but it's also not quiet. It's not overly sentimental ... I don't need to make a lot of noise to show that I am strong. And I don't have to go out of my way to sing nice-sounding melodies that everyone will like."

For Ah-kai, 1976 and their peers owe a partial debt to the lifting of martial law in Taiwan in the late 1980s, which sparked a zeitgeist of creative freedom and encouraged them to start writing their own music. "I think right at the time when things were changing, we were still children," he said.

"1976, this happened to be when both Mao Zedong (毛澤東) and Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石) died ... Our growth is directly related to the [changing situation] in Taiwan," said Chang. But he is quick to dismiss the idea that history was the inspiration behind the band's moniker, which is tied to their birthdays. He, Ah-kai, and drummer Warren Lin (林雨霖) were born in 1976; bassist Lin Tzi-chiao (林子喬), who joined the band later, was born in 1982.

And fans probably aren't dwelling on the band's past as much as reveling in the sounds of its present: jangling guitars, 1980s rock beats, and Ah-kai's syrupy, angst-tinged voice, which at times evokes The Cure's Robert Smith.

Even with the band's move to a major label, Ah-kai is not interested in the kind of fame that gets one recognized on the street. "I still am very happy to be a 'nobody.' I think it's very helpful for songwriting and helpful for performing ..."

Yet he says he enjoys the band's already strong underground following. "I think it's really cool having all these people line up for our shows."

The band members hope the new album will keep them lining up. With *Asteroid*, they worked in a new way, spending months rehearsing and arranging the new songs, instead of going directly into the studio. "This time we had rough sketch recordings beforehand ... so when we went in, we knew clearly what we wanted to do," said Lin, the band's drummer.

This growing sense of craftsmanship and devotion to their music is a source of pride for Chang. "I play guitar. If I put everything into doing this — even if others don't really know why I'm doing this — then I don't care." He rejects the shallow values associated with celebrity and says 1976 has "a tool to oppose these kind of values. We can suggest a new set of values — this is the best part [of what we do]."

1976 plays at the Urban Simple Life Festival (簡單生活節) in Taipei on Saturday. For more information, visit the band's Web site at [www.mod1976.com](http://www.mod1976.com).

## Crash, bang, wallop: the art of noise

BY BRADLEY WINTERTON  
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

YOU can find almost anything in Taiwan — which is another way of saying that the Taiwanese will put their hands (and invariably their minds and hearts as well) to just about anything. This is certainly true in the musical sphere.

Forum Music specializes in abstract percussion, one of the most austere, not to say abstruse, musical genres. But there's a way that Taiwanese amiability and good-natured confidence can tame even this. Toneless, tuneless and even clueless it may be to some, but the atmosphere at the Music Forum 2008 Annual Concert (十方樂集2008年度公演 — 時空交響) held at Taipei's Zhongshan Hall on Saturday evening was so congenial that the idea that this music might actually be fun appeared to be, if anything, actually taken for granted.

On stage were gongs, tubular bells, xylophones, sheets of metal, and more kinds of drums than I could count. Six items were performed, two of them announced as world premieres, and the number of players ranged from 13 to one. Most surprising of all, the average age of the instrumentalists looked to be mid-20s at most.

Historically, this kind of music began as an aspect of early 20th-century modernism, an equivalent of cubism and abstraction in art and every sort of non-realism in literature. It was as far from lush romanticism as it was possible to go, aspired to be all head and no heart, and attracted a determined few who wanted to have no truck whatsoever with the past.

Yet a century later, in modern Taipei, several hundred followers showed up and applauded wildly. Three of the composers gave brief speeches, all of which provoked appreciative laughter and more applause, and the items themselves were in the event very varied.

One premiere, Li Yuan-chen's (李元貞) *Ring* (鐘), was played solo on a gigantic xylophone, with ambient sounds drifting from two large speakers. Another, Chang Chao-jan's (張超然) *Beyond the Boundary* (極限之外), required four players, each with a mass of equipment, and made a strong impact.

The lasting impression was that you can do whatever you want and call it music if that's what it is to you. This, I'd have thought, is as democratic and liberating a message as anyone could wish to come away with from any performance.

Meanwhile, at the 9th Taipei Poetry Festival, a simply-staged show was on offer at the Guling Street Avante-Garde Theater. Called *Midaregami* — *Tangled Hair: A Poem of Light and Shadows*, it featured a worried, alienated youth and a kimono-clad female shamisen player. Simple cutouts and silhouettes were projected onto a white sheet, along with fragments of poetry by, I was told, two poets. Almost the entire audience of perhaps 60 consisted of women, and all the featured poets this year are female as well.

The tiny, attractive auditorium was sold-out, and all I could gather of the show's import was that the progressive women of Taiwan are gathering in remote locations on every hand. Lacking identifying insignia, they are engaging in occult rituals, exchanging cabalistic signs and preparing to assault the heights. I was all the more grateful, in these circumstances, for being silently handed a free ticket.

The male of the species often prefers to avoid shadow plays. Not this specimen though.

PHOTO COURTESY OF TAIPEI POETRY FESTIVAL



## PLANET POP

The Vatican's daily newspaper marked the 40th anniversary of the *White Album* on Friday by dismissing as a "quip" John Lennon's notorious claim that the Beatles were bigger than Jesus Christ.

The legendary double album — which came out on Nov. 22, 1968 at the height of the Fab Four's influence and popularity — was "a magical musical anthology" from a band "full of talent," *L'Osservatore Romano* said.

Rather inevitably, its lengthy article kicked off with Lennon's remark to a London newspaper in

March 1966 that "Christianity will go. It will vanish and shrink ... We're more popular than Jesus now."

"It is a phrase that provoked deep indignation at the time, but which sounds today like a quip from a young man from the English working class overtaken by unexpected success," the newspaper wrote.

The real talent of the Beatles, it said, "rested in their unequalled capacity to write popular songs with a sort of euphoric lightness." Pop superstar Madonna and her British husband Guy Ritchie were granted a "quickie" divorce on the grounds of his unreasonable behavior Friday, a month after announcing their eight-year marriage was over.

District Judge Caroline Reid pronounced the *decree nisi* at the High Court's Family Division in London during a hearing which lasted barely a minute and was not attended by the couple or their lawyers.

Madonna, left, and Guy Ritchie have been granted a 'quickie' divorce.

PHOTO: AFP

The case — Ciccone ML vs Ritchie GS — was dealt with as a British newspaper reported film director Ritchie would receive no money under an agreed settlement.

Ritchie has expressed relief at the speed of the divorce and stressed that access to the couple's children and not money was the biggest issue for him, the *Daily Mirror* said Friday.

"Thank God," the paper quoted him as saying. "It was never about money — never about her bloody art collection. I just wanted to settle it and move on ... I didn't raise any objections at any stage until she insisted the children lived permanently in New York."

He is worth an estimated US\$45 million dollars compared to Madonna's US\$446 million fortune. The couple's two sons, eight-year-old Rocco and David Banda, three — whom they adopted in Malawi — will split their time between Britain and the US, the *Mirror* and other papers said.

Madonna's 12-year-old daughter Lourdes, from a previous relationship with fitness trainer Carlos Leon, is set to stay with her

mother in the US.

The court released a document in which Madonna stated that Ritchie's unreasonable behavior was continuing and that they had not lived together at the same address for six months.

The US government has asked the Supreme Court to reimpose a US\$500,000 fine slapped on CBS television for a 2004 broadcast of live images of pop star Janet Jackson's breast, court documents show.

It is up to the Supreme Court to decide whether it will consider the request.

Prosecutors are asking the high court justices to weigh in on a case that raised eyebrows and stirred passions in the US, where nudity on non-pay

television is a no-no in advertising, while rare and limited to late-night hours in television series.

Jackson was performing live at the Superbowl when the attention-getting move took place, in a routine featuring her and fellow performer Justin Timberlake.

The popular press has dubbed the incident "Nipplegate."

The Federal Communications Commission imposed a US\$550,000 fine on CBS for breaking indecency rules.

But after a three-year court fight, a federal court in Philadelphia in July ruled that the network could not be held responsible for Jackson's actions.

Japan's once-ionic pop music producer Tetsuya Komuro was released on bail Friday after he was indicted on

charges of swindling an investor over copyrights for music that had already been sold.

"I have caused trouble and disturbed you all," the 49-year-old said, bowing deeply before a horde of photographers and reporters as he stepped out of the Osaka Detention Center where he had been kept since his arrest on Nov. 4.

He paid the bail of US\$315,000 following the indictment by the Osaka district public prosecutor.

"I wish to do my best, if possible, in music again," he said. Komuro allegedly told the investor in mid-2006 that he would sell for US\$10 million the copyrights of 806 tunes he had composed and written words for Jiji Press and other media said.

But the rights had been already sold to music publishers, the reports said.

The 48-year-old investor paid Komuro US\$5 million as part of the fake contract. Komuro needed the money to repay huge debt he owed after a number of failed ventures, the reports said.

— AGENCIES