



A still from one of the blogs Lowkey uses to document the production of *Backstage — Say No to Tomatoes*. — Say No to Tomatoes. PHOTO COURTESY OF KYLE HUANG

Lowkey by name, low-key by nature

In most dramas, audiences see nothing more than the action on stage. With *Backstage — Say No to Tomatoes*, Lowkey Drama Group intends to give its audience a glimpse into the insider's world — and show them what happens after the curtains are drawn.

"This show may appear to be an impromptu creation," said Inn Wu (吳小穎), stage director for Lowkey, a group of amateur thespians founded 16 years ago. "You won't know what the next act will be like until it starts. At times you'll wonder if the actors are ready for it."

The aim of *Backstage* is to illustrate how dramas are produced and what happens offstage. Lowkey maintains two official blogs, which document the progress of the production.

Tomatoes feature heavily. The subtitle, *Say No to Tomatoes*, originally referenced the fact that screenwriter Huang Saomin (黃少民) hates the fruit, which later became a major source of inspiration for the production.

"We have certain perceptions and interpretations of drama, which all depend on personal experiences," said producer Chen Joshan (陳奕珊) of the use of tomatoes as a metaphor. "Some people treat the tomato as a veggie, others, as a fruit. Some people like ripe ones, whereas others like them unripe. People can relate to it easily, which makes it a good vehicle for our messages."

Exactly what those messages are — much less what audiences will see during the play — is being kept a secret for now. "Put simply, it is about how love affects arts creation," said director Kyle Huang (黃晟凱), somewhat cryptically, when asked to describe the production.

— DEREK YIU

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: *Backstage — Say No to Tomatoes* (開麥啦之後之「絕不吃蕃茄」) by the Low Key Drama Group (低調劇團之D鈞劇團)
WHERE: Fruit Wine Building, 2nd Floor (果酒禮堂二樓) at Huashan Culture Park (華山創意文化園區), 1, Bade Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市八德路一段1號)
WHEN: Tonight at 7:30pm; tomorrow at 2:30pm and 7:30pm; Sunday at 2:30pm
ADMISSION: Free
ON THE NET: dfishingtools.blogspot.com; kyle1216.pixnet.net/blog



Dry as a bone

The Drought Goddess (大神戲) by the Ethan Chen Production House (野墨坊), which opens tonight at the Experimental Theater, is the second production in the New Idea Theater Festival (新點子劇展). It follows similar production criteria to *Liou Ching-ti's Hell* (劉青提的地獄) by the Taiwan Bangzi Company (台灣梆子劇團), which opened the festival last week, but takes Production House in a very different direction.

Setting out to integrate *nanguan* (南管) and *beiguan* (北管) performance styles into something modern and fun, Li Yi-hsiu (李易修), the show's director, created a hectic collage of diverse media that may, by dint of its sheer devil-may-care inclusiveness, coalesce into a style uniquely its own.

Nanguan is a traditional musical form that is remarkable for its ponderous elegance, and in its unadulterated form is likely to put the uninitiated to sleep. Li and his young production team, as something of a joke for the musically and culturally hyper-aware, incorporated the theme from the Transformer-like Super Robot anime series *Mazinger Z* (無敵鐵金剛) — wildly popular among children in the 1970s — into the score to be performed in the *nanguan* style.

Other humorous elements include the use of tap dancing as part of a traditional *beiguan* percussion ensemble, and made-up language that incorporates words from the Hoklo, Hakka and Cantonese dialects. Subtitles are hand-written on a background projection, mingled with a background reproduced



The drought goddess brings destruction and death wherever she goes. PHOTOS COURTESY OF NTCH

in classical ink wash and modern animation. Costumes seem to be a mixture of cosplay and Halloween, and the story is a meditation on the end of the world based on a 100-word segment in the *Classic of the Mountains and the Seas* (山海經), an ancient text of uncertain date. And the list of incongruous elements doesn't end there.

The story tells of the battle between the Yellow Emperor (黃帝) and the monster Chi You (蚩尤). Chi You's forces included the spirits of the wind and rain, so the Yellow Emperor summons his daughter, the drought goddess, to defeat them. After she aided him in victory, she is exiled and wanders the face of the earth, bringing destruction wherever she goes.

Although the story is about death, destruction and the end of the world, there is a jolly, witty eclecticism about the whole project that is in tune with the subversive, discursive nature of *The Classic of the Mountains and the Seas*.

Though based on an ancient text and employing traditional performance techniques, *The Drought Goddess* is clearly a fully-fledged contemporary work that tries to have fun with the classics and comment on the nature of power, alienation and the destruction of the environment.

Performances are at 7:30pm today and tomorrow and at 2:30pm on Sunday. Tickets are NT\$500 and are available through NTCH ticket outlets.

— IAN BARTHOLOMEW



One of the pioneers of the rave/club scene in Taipei during the late 1990s alongside contemporaries **Allen** and **Victor Cheng**, **Jimmy Chen** (陳怡成) is a true veteran and leading activist of dance music. Longtime partygoers will tell you that this is a man you can trust when he steps up to the turntables.

Having been the promoter/resident at @live, TeXound and AXD, Chen is credited with bringing international DJs like **Frankie Knuckles**, **BT**, **John Digweed**, **Adam Beyer**, **Victor Calderone**, **Satoshi Tomiie**, **Murk**, **Richie Hawtin** and **Superchumbo** to Taiwan.

His mix CD *Mint Taipei 101* (2004) featured on Tom Stephan's Kiss 100 Radio Show in the UK and was played at

the renowned San Francisco dance club The Endup.

Well-known for his tribal house sets, Chen is adding new elements including minimal techno, tech house and electro to his mixes these days.

"I still have a soft spot for soulful house," he told the Vinyl Word. "It's just too bad that there seems to be nowhere to play that kind of music now."

Earlier this year, Jimmy held a joint anniversary party to celebrate "two decades of deejaying" with Victor Cheng. So what's next? "I guess I'll keep deejaying until no one wants me to play anymore!" he says.

Jimmy Chen's upcoming gigs:

- * Every first and fourth Saturday of each month at Jump, B1, 8, Keelung Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市基隆路一段八號B1)
- * Tomorrow at Black & White (Taichung). Tickets: NT\$500. Send a



Jimmy Chen, from back in the day. PHOTO: COURTESY OF JIMMY CHEN

text, including your name, to 0936-212-066 to get party location

* Dec. 26 at Winter White G5 at Luxy, 5F, 201, Zhongxiao E Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市忠孝東路四段201號5樓). Tickets: NT\$900

My head hurts when someone asks me to recommend a "good" hip-hop club in Taipei. After all, don't they all play the same tunes? Fortunately,

every once in a while there's an event like tomorrow's Hip Hop Winter Clash at VU Livehouse.

This gig features some of the country's top expert hip-hop artists. Lineup: **Marcus Aurelius**, **Sofa Kings**, **Mixer-T**, **Shaman** and **Black Reign International Sound**. Tickets: NT\$350. VU Livehouse (地下絲絨), B1, 77, Wuchang St Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市武昌街二段77號B1).

Meanwhile, over at Copa (B1, 2, Ln 137, Yanji St, Taipei City, 台北市大安區延吉街137巷2號) from Tuesday to Saturday, well-known and up-and-coming Taipei-based DJs will be in the mix playing everything from funky club music to sexy chilled-out grooves. No cover charge. On the Net: www.copataipei.com.

Upcoming events at Copa: Tonight **Jimmy Quinn**; tomorrow, **AL and Fion**; and **Taka** on Wednesday.

— QUEEN BEE

[EVENTS & ENTERTAINMENT]

Tonight **Underworld** (地下社會) hosts **Black Summer Days** (黑色夏日), whose music is based on hard, rhythmic rock 'n' roll mixed with blues and punk. Also appearing is punk band **Random** (隨性). Tomorrow night grunge band **koOk** (庫克) visits from Kaohsiung, sharing the bill with post-rock group **Sorry Youth**. Then on Wednesday, the bar hosts a Christmas Eve party, starting with punk band **Feed Me** (餵我樂團) and **Freeloader** and followed by a 1980s dance party.

* B1, 45 Shida Rd, Taipei City (台北市師大路45號B1). Call (02) 2369-0103 or visit www.upsaid.com/underworld for more information
 * Music shows tonight and tomorrow are from 9:30pm to 11:30pm. Bar open from 8pm daily; on Wednesday, bands play from 9:30pm to 11:30pm, followed by a dance party, which runs until 5am.

* Entrance for the music shows is NT\$300 tonight and tomorrow and includes one drink; drinks are buy one, get one free on Tuesdays and Thursdays before midnight; for the Christmas party on Wednesday, entrance for the band is NT\$300, which includes a drink and admission to the dance party. Entrance for the dance party is NT\$100

Tonight at **Bliss** it's **The Rattlebrains**, who describe their songs as a mixture of 1970s psy-ambient rock, post rock and experimental music. Tomorrow DJ collective **Idiotique** spins alt-rock tunes.

* 148, Xinyi Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市信義路四段148號), one block east of Dunhua South Road (敦化南路). Call Bliss at (02) 2702-1855 or visit www.bliss-taipei.com. For more information on live performances at Bliss, visit www.myspace.com/blisslivehouse

* Tonight at 10pm and tomorrow at 8pm. Bar/kitchen open from 7pm daily. Ladies night Fridays; women get one free cocktail of their choice
 * NT\$200 for music shows tonight and NT\$100 tomorrow

Both established and aspiring Taiwanese pop musicians perform regularly at the **EZ5 Live House**. This homey pub and restaurant on

Anhe Road, whose clientele ranges from taxi drivers to prominent politicians, is one of the few places where people actually turn off their cell phones and listen attentively to the performers. EZ5 hosts three different singers every night. Recommended performers include beloved female crooner **Tiger Huang** (黃小琥), who performs two sets every Monday, and **Julia Peng** (彭佳慧), who appears on Tuesdays.

* 211, Anhe Rd Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市安和路二段211號). Call (02) 2738-3995 or visit www.ez5.com.tw for more information

* Music shows run from 9:45pm to 12:30am
 * Cover and two drinks is NT\$600 to NT\$850, depending on the performer. Call the venue for exact amount

Every Wednesday night at the **Cosmopolitan Grill** there's a blues open mic, held by the **Blues Society on Taiwan**. All are welcome to bring their instruments and sit in on guitar, bass or drums.

* 1F, 218 Changchun Rd, Taipei City (台北市長春路218號1樓). Call (02) 2508-0304 or visit www.cosmo.com.tw for more information
 * 8pm to 11pm every Wednesday
 * No admission fee

Exhibitions

Legends of the Silk Road — Treasures From Xinjiang (絲路傳奇—新疆文物大展). This exhibit of ancient artifacts from the Silk Road reflects the history of the ancient trade route connecting Asia and Europe and features 150 archaeological treasures unearthed in Xinjiang. Highlights include the 3,800-year-old "Loulan Beauty" mummy and artifacts from the Tang Dynasty unearthed in Turfan.

* National Museum of History (國立歷史博物館), 49 Nanhai Rd, Taipei City (台北市南海路49號). Open Tuesdays to Sundays from 10am to 6pm. Tel: (02) 2361-0270
 * Until March 15, 2009

Acrylic Skin/Existence — Hiroukyi

Highlight

World music label Trees Music and Art hosts its annual winter party tomorrow night at Riverside Live House, located at the historic Red House Theater (西門紅樓).

The show features collaborative performances between musicians of different genres and cultures from Taiwan and abroad. Performers include Hakka singer-songwriter Lin Sheng-xiang (林生祥); Japanese guitarist Ken Ohtake (大竹研); Atayal singer Inka Mbing (雲力思); Chinese classical musician Chung Yufeng (鍾玉鳳); female Hakka singer Lo Sirong (羅思蓉); American blues and roots musician David Chen; and Amis blues and folk group The Betel Nuts Brothers (檳榔兄弟).
 * Riverside Live House (河岸留言西門紅樓展

Classical Chinese orchestra musician Chung Yufeng is among a host of folk and roots musicians collaborating onstage for a show at the Riverside Live House tomorrow night. PHOTO: COURTESY OF TREES MUSIC AND ART

演廳), 177 Xining S Rd, Taipei City (台北市西寧南路177號). For more information call (02) 2370-8805 or go to www.riversidelive.com.tw
 * Tomorrow night at 8pm
 * Tickets are NT\$500; available at the door or through tickets.books.com.tw. For more information contact Trees Music and Art at (02) 2341-3491 or visit blog.roadoo.com/treesmusicart for more details

Myth Inside Monitor — Lee Lee Nam (有影無影—李二男影像神話). Having quickly become a star in contemporary art circles in South Korea, Lee Lee Nam stirs fascination with popular video art works that are commonly described as animated paintings, or as Eastern and Western classical paintings brought to life.
 * Metaphysical Art Gallery (形而上畫廊), 7F, 219, Dunhua S Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市敦化南路一段219號7樓). Open Tuesdays through Sundays from 11am to 6:30pm. Tel: (02) 2771-3236
 * Until Jan. 4, 2009

Yang Hsing-sheng Solo Exhibition (台灣風情畫—楊興生個展) is an exhibition of more than 40 oil paintings by the acclaimed veteran painter, who has taken artistic nourishment from abstractionism and Taiwan's native literary movement.
 * Capital Art Center (首都藝術中心), 2F, 343, Renai Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市仁愛路四段343號2樓). Open Tuesdays to Sundays from 10am to 7pm. Tel: (02) 2775-5268
 * Until Dec. 28

RESTAURANTS

Kamado (火間土)

Address: 7F, 98, Zhongxiao E Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市忠孝東路四段98號)

Telephone: (02) 2752-7822
Open: Monday through Thursday from noon to 2pm and 5:30pm to 11:30pm; Friday through Sunday from 11:30am to 2:30pm and 5pm to midnight

Average meal: NT\$700 to NT\$1,000

Details: Chinese, Japanese and English menu; credit cards accepted



Kamado doesn't skimp on the salmon roe. PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

Located in the Bistro 98 building across from the Zhongxiao Sogo, Kamado offers a large selection of fresh sashimi and other Japanese dishes, set meals that will leave you bursting at the gills, and two maze-like floors of atmospherically lit nooks and crannies. For NT\$600 you can rent your own private little room for two with a large window overlooking the bustling shops nearby.

My dining companion and I turned down that option and were seated in a booth that was still cozy and secluded, with partitions made from dark wooden slats that separated us from other diners.

Kamado looks posh, but most of the meals and individual dishes on the menu are reasonably priced. There are several set meals, ranging from NT\$1,240 to NT\$2,380 for two (sets are also available in four person servings).

Like most of the other sets, the xue (雪, or snow) option costs NT\$1,580 and includes a salad, at least one sushi or sashimi plate, yakiniku-style barbecued meat on skewers, a small hot pot, a dessert and two half-priced selections from the beer and cocktail menu.

The Kamado salad (特製火間土沙拉, a la carte price NT\$180), which was topped with diced sashimi, ginger dressing and a drizzling of mayonnaise, was a pleasant opener, but not spectacular and a bit heavy on the dressing.

The salmon perilla roll (紫蘇鮭魚卷, NT\$180), which is made from salmon sashimi, sushi rice and thin, fragrant perilla (Japanese basil) leaves wrapped around crisp asparagus and complemented with a briny dollop of salmon roe, was more enjoyable than the small platter of sashimi slices (tuna, salmon and yellowtail).

The sushi was followed by three skewers of beef, pork and chicken, a generous portion of miso-flavored grilled cod, and a plate of vegetable tempura. The meat and fish were all tender and juicy, and the tempura light, with a delicate coating.

The set is large, such that midway through the tempura, it is easy to doubt your ability to finish the next course, the sumo wrestler's hot pot with pork (日式相撲鍋, NT\$490). It was filled with vegetables and mushrooms in addition to meat, but was not as robust or flavorful as could be expected from a dish originally designed to help wrestlers gain weight. On the other hand, it left room for dessert, a white sesame dou hua (豆花) topped with a thick layer of honey.

If your appetite is not up to conquering one of Kamado's set meals, there is an extensive a la carte menu of small dishes in the spirit of an izakaya, or Japanese tapas bar. Many of the individual rolls on the sushi menu, including the California roll (加州捲), are priced at about NT\$180, and there is also a selection of NT\$90 nigiri sushi. Combination plates of grilled meat are available for NT\$290 to NT\$490 each, or individually for NT\$90 per skewer for most meats. Other promising-looking dishes include the sea urchin and salmon roe on sushi rice bowl (特選海膽鮭魚卵蓋飯, NT\$450).

— CATHERINE SHU



The brew, not the food, is what matters at Taiwan Beer 346 Warehouse Restaurant. PHOTO: HO YU, TAIPEI TIMES

Taiwan Beer 346 Warehouse Restaurant (台啤346倉庫餐廳)

Address: 85, Bade Rd Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市八德路二段85號)

Telephone: (02) 2509-8346

Open: Daily from 5:30pm to 12am

Average meal: NT\$600, including drinks

Details: Chinese menu; credit cards accepted

On the Net: www.nv.com.tw/346beer

Chienkuo Beer Brewery (建國啤酒廠) was built in 1919 as the country's first producer of the amber nectar and designated a city heritage landmark in 2000. Located at the junction of Bade Road (八德路) and Jianguo North Road (建國北路), the factory has now become a bustling historical site, visited by evening diners and drinkers who come for freshly brewed Taiwan beer and Taiwanese fare at its warehouse-turned-restaurant.

Beer cases stacked up on the roadside greet patrons as they walk in. Signs reading "346" point the way to the Taiwanese-style bistro at the end of the plant.

Outside, there are several seats. Inside, the interior's spaciousness is accentuated by a high ceiling and sparse decoration, which lend the place an unpolished, casual charm. The neon-lit stage comes to life on weekends when live bands perform starting from 8pm.

On a recent Sunday night, the restaurant was relatively quiet, though a few tables of intoxicated diners defined the atmosphere with their echoing laughter and horseplay.

The menu offers a wide range of grilled, deep-fried and appetizing items commonly served at roadside seafood eateries. We ordered several of the bistro's specialties that feature the country's most celebrated brew: Taiwan beer shrimps (台啤醉仙蝦, NT\$180); roast chicken with miso and red yeast rice (烤紅麴味啤酒雞腿, NT\$250); and sausages with Taiwan beer and red yeast rice (台啤紅麴香腸, NT\$150). All failed to live up to expectations. The chicken and sausages were passable, but the shrimp did not pair well with the beer's bitter taste.

The only dish that won unanimous approval was the black-boned chicken and clam hot pot with beer (啤酒烏骨雞蛤蜊鍋, NT\$850); its complement of fresh-tasting broth and abundant use of vegetables makes it a healthy choice.

However, the food was hardly the center of attention since, like others, we came for the freshly brewed Taiwan beer.

As the brewery resumed production in May after a year's hiatus, bottles of beer that have been brewed on site are available the very same day they are made.

Bottles and half-liter glasses of beer cost between NT\$70 and NT\$90. For larger parties, the popular choice is to share a 3.8-liter barrel. The price is a friendly NT\$600 each, but unlike the beer that comes in bottles and glasses, the barrels are not freshly brewed.

A couple of barrels into the evening, it was easy to forget about the mediocre food and join in the merriment of the surrounding tables.

Taiwan Beer 346 Warehouse Restaurant's weekend band lineup can be found at www.nv.com.tw/346beer. For diners and drinkers who are keen to learn more about the brewery's history, a guided tour can be arranged by calling (02) 2771-9131 X431.

— HO YU