

## FEATURES

MONDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2008

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## Right as rain

Orangegrass's new album is an introspective, atmospheric meditation on life in Taipei



BY **DAVID CHEN**  
STAFF REPORTER

## PERFORMANCE NOTES:

**WHAT:** Orangegrass  
**WHEN:** Thursday at 8pm  
**WHERE:** The Wall (這牆), B1, 200, Roosevelt Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市羅斯福路四段200號B1). Call (02) 2930-0162 or go to [www.thewall.com.tw](http://www.thewall.com.tw) for more information  
**TICKETS:** NT\$400, includes one drink  
**ON THE NET:** [www.orangegrass.tw](http://www.orangegrass.tw)

Storm clouds seem to follow indie-rock trio Orangegrass (橙草) wherever they go. In Kaohsiung, Tainan and Kenting the band has been greeted with rain. At a recent outdoor festival in Tamsui, a sudden downpour hijacked the group's set.

But instead of wallowing in self-pity, the band embraces the gloom of gray skies. They named their first full-length album *Cumulonimbus* (積雨雲), the meteorological term for towering, puffy clouds that cause heavy rainstorms, and the band is throwing a launch party for the CD with a concert on Thursday at The Wall (這牆).

For lead singer, guitarist and songwriter Klark Chung (鍾體學), rain sets the right mood for their music.

"Of course rain can be annoying but I like the feeling that comes with it, where you don't have to leave the house," he says.

Orangegrass sounds like a post-rock band, with electric guitar-centric songs based more on themes and moods than melodies, but there's one difference: vocals figure prominently in their songs.

Chung formed Orangegrass in 2004 with drummer Larsq Tang (湯宗勳). Current bassist JoJo White (白盛方) joined later. They cite the standard influences among Taiwanese youth of their generation, including Nirvana and various heavy metal bands.

But what really opened the doors for Chung was going to Spring Scream, Taiwan's first genuine alternative music festival, where he saw pioneering indie bands like Sugar Plum Ferry (甜梅號) and Tizzy Bac.

Orangegrass is celebrating the release of its new CD, *Cumulonimbus*, with a concert this Thursday at The Wall.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ULUDOL MUSIC

"What they were playing at the time was trip-hop, like Portishead, and there was no guitar," he says of the latter. "When I saw them, I thought this was really cool. What is it? I've never run into this before ... that's when I wanted to sing stuff that was more different."

Many of Chung's lyrics are introspective musings on loneliness, sung either softly or with emo-rock verve.

"It's the feel of living in Taipei," the 27-year-old says of his music. "Taipei has a drifting feeling. Compared to other places [in Taiwan], people's relationships are more distant ... many people pay attention only to themselves."

But the Ilan native prefers Taipei's concrete sprawl to the "big family" atmosphere of his scenic hometown. "I think Taipei can be a cold and detached place, but it's also a place I really like," he says. "Your [personal] space is bigger."

For Orangegrass' show on Thursday, concertgoers can expect to hear all of the songs from the new CD, as well as new tunes already in the works. And even if it doesn't rain that evening, listeners will be treated to atmospheric storms of a different sort: Chung says he tries to evoke the "humid" air of Taipei with his reverb-drenched guitar sound.



American singer Katy Perry hosts the MTV Europe Music Awards ceremony in Liverpool, England, last month.  
PHOTO: REUTERS

Katy Perry:  
music's new  
quirky girl

BY **NEKESA MUMBI MOODY**  
AP, LOS ANGELES

Don't get Katy Perry twisted: She absolutely loves being pop's quirky poster girl, the wild child who doesn't censor herself and causes raised eyebrows with songs like *Ur So Gay* and *I Kissed a Girl*. But for all her success over the last year, Perry is hoping that songs like her most recent No. 1, *Hot n Cold*, show she has more to offer than kitsch and controversy.

"It's my personality, which is up and down and sassy and cheeky," says Perry, who recently became a Grammy nominee. "You're gonna see me with all kinds of different things. Maybe you won't expect it, but that's what I like to do — keep people on their toes." Offering the unexpected was a key factor in Perry becoming one of pop's breakout stars this year. While *Ur So Gay* — a taunting song to an ex-lover more enamored with flatirons and skinny jeans than his ex-girlfriend — became an underground talker, it was her equally ear-catching song *I Kissed a Girl*, about girl-on-girl experimentation, that resonated with mainstream music fans, becoming a No. 1 summer smash.

"She's not scared to rattle some people's cages lyrically, and say some risque stuff," says singer-songwriter Butch Walker, who collaborated with Perry on some of the tracks on her debut album, *One of the Boys*. "She brings a little bit of the underground, a little bit of the hipster and underground culture to the mainstream, and that's what sells her ... as different." And that's what Perry hoped her role in pop music would be. The 24-year-old, who was raised by ministers and dabbled in Christian music before heading to Los Angeles as a 17-year-old aspiring artist, found most of pop's princesses to be manufactured and boring.

"I was a bit let down by maybe their personality or their delivery or their consistency," says Perry during an interview at her Capitol Records label offices. "They were so like careful with everything." "Well, what's the point of being in pop or rock 'n' roll music if you're going to be a windup doll?" Perry says. "Use your own wheels and bolts, even if they break, do it yourself." But Perry found that a colorful personality, strong voice and well-crafted songs didn't guarantee her pop stardom, or even an album. Though she worked with top producers such as Glen Ballard and The Matrix, she bounced from label to label. (*Blender* magazine profiled her as one to watch in 2004.)

"She was signed and dropped like twice before the record came out," says Walker. "I was afraid that her career and those songs were never gonna see the light of day." Even Perry wondered whether she should just give up. But her competition gave her hope.

"Every time I thought maybe there was a girl that would take my place, I would watch her and I would kind of sit back and say, 'Almost! No no no, there's still a void!'" she recalls.

Now that she's come along to fill it, Perry looks back on her struggles as a badge of honor. "It's like training," she says.

And she has this advice for those hoping to be the next Katy Perry: Find your own identity.

"When I first started at 17 in Los Angeles, the hit song was *Complicated*, and everyone wanted me to write a *Complicated*," she says of Avril Lavigne's early hit. "I'm like, 'Look that's her, this is me. Everybody loves that song — hopefully everyone will love my song.'"

ON THE NET: [www.katyperry.com](http://www.katyperry.com)

## PLANET POP

'Tis the season to gather, be grateful for what we have and share what we can. But for cinephiles, it's awards season, and that means dreary fare — particularly with a World War II or Holocaust focus. No fewer than six are set for release this holiday season.

In theaters now are *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, which tells the story of a forbidden friendship between the son of a Nazi officer and a Jewish boy imprisoned in a concentration camp; *The Reader*, which stars **Kate Winslet** as a former concentration-camp guard on trial years after the

Nazi movies are in.  
PHOTO: AP

war; and *Adam Resurrected*, which follows a Holocaust survivor (**Jeff Goldblum**) living in a mental institution.

*Valkyrie*, which opened on Christmas day in the US, stars **Tom Cruise** as a German officer who heads up a plan to kill Hitler. And two more Nazi-oriented films open on New Year's Eve: *Defiance* stars **Daniel Craig** and **Liev Schreiber** as brothers who battle the Nazis from a secret hideout in the woods, and *Good* features **Viggo Mortensen** as an academic and novelist reluctantly enticed into the SS fold after he's approached to write some mild propaganda for the Nazi party.

In a recent interview, Cruise joked: "Go kill Hitler on Christmas!" But some critics aren't amused. Influential US critic Roger Friedman on Friday blasted *Valkyrie* as a "Nazi apologia."

The movie features Cruise as Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg, an aristocratic German who lead a group of top officers who hatched a plot to kill Hitler late in the war.

Friedman, film critic for Fox News, said the movie appeared to intentionally minimize the

impact of Nazism.

"I'm concerned that *Valkyrie* could represent a new trend in filmmaking: Nazi apologia. Not once in *Valkyrie* do any of the 'heroes' mention what's happening around them. Hitler has systematically killed millions," said Friedman. "*Valkyrie* opens the door to a dangerous new thought: that the Holocaust and all the other atrocities could be of secondary importance to the cause of German patriotism."

Friedman criticized the set designers for minimizing or hiding the swastikas that have become symbols of the evils of Nazism, and blasted the portrayal of Hitler as a "doddering fool with a British accent and a nice suit."

Friedman's political criticism of the movie may have been the sharpest of US reviews, but it was far from the only negative assessment.

Writing in the *Washington Post*, Phillip Kennicott blasted the film's puzzling failure to portray von Stauffenberg's life before his unsuccessful assassination attempt — when he was untroubled by Nazism and served



Icelandic singer Björk is seeking investors to help boost her country's economy.  
PHOTO: AFP

as Hitler's loyal soldier.

Kennicott also criticized the movie for failing to point out that the plot was hatched not out of moral objections to Nazism but only when Germany was facing imminent collapse.

Cruise himself came close to distorting the extent of German support for Hitler and his policies.

"It's important to know that it wasn't everybody — not everybody felt the way [Hitler did] or fell into the Nazi ideology," Cruise said during the film's US press tour.

Icelandic singer **Björk** is seeking investors in a venture-capital fund she helped start to finance new businesses and boost the economy in her home country, according to the fund's Web site.

Audur Capital, a Reykjavik-

based investment fund founded and managed by women, will run the fund, which is named after the 43-year-old singer. It was started with an initial investment of 100 million Icelandic krona (US\$790,000) and will close to new investors by March of next year.

The new venture aims to boost Iceland's economy after a five-year economic boom ended this year with the collapse of the US subprime mortgage market and the resulting failure of the local banking system.

Police say the actor who portrayed the gay lover of a closeted mobster on *The Sopranos* has died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound in New York.

A police spokesman said **John Costelloe** was found dead in an apparent suicide at his Brooklyn home on Dec. 18.

The 47-year-old former New York City firefighter gained fame in 2006 when he was cast as short-order cook Jim "Johnny Cakes" Witowski opposite **Joseph Gannascoli**, who played gay mobster Vito Spatafore on the hit HBO show.

— AGENCIES