A topless **Zhang** Ziyi (章子怡) has been warming up winter for the blogosphere, as paparazzi snapped up shots of the Chinese actress and her fiance, Israeli venture capitalist Aviv "Vivi" Nevo, frolicking on the Caribbean island of St Barts.

A collection of 80 photos, taken while the pair were on vacation earlier this month, has been posted on various Web sites, a few of which have received server-crashing traffic, according to the Liberty Times (the Taipei Times' sister newspaper).

The couple's frisky beachside manner had blogging tongues wagging the most. Nevo was photographed giving the 29-year-old starlet's tush a robust squeeze as she lay sunbathing. In another shot, he nuzzles her squarely where the sun don't shine (not even on this tropical island). The Apple Daily noted the shocked reactions on the Internet to this "butt biting."

Others in the Chineselanguage press dutifully regurgitated the posted blog comments, which included remarks to the effect of "get a room," "disgusting foreigner," "oh my, they're not even married," and "what a disgrace to the Chinese people." Apple's assessment combined concern for Zhang's "future happiness," given Nevo's past as a playboy, with bewilderment: "For famous foreigners, sunbathing topless is no big deal at such a locale, but [Zhang] and Aviv's overly brazen display of passion would have even Hollywood celebrities admitting defeat."

The saga of the troubled marriage between actress Annie Yi (伊能靜) and singer Harlem Yu (庾澄慶) has taken yet another twist. While their marriage has reportedly been on the mend, Next magazine has stirred things up again, reporting that Yi had been seeing Chen Chia-chun (陳嘉鈞) before her reported affair with Laurence Huang (黃維德).

According to Next, Chen, the younger brother of a prominent newscaster and former boyfriend of Little Pan-pan (小潘潘), was so distraught after reports of Yi's affair with Huang that he went on a drinking binge. When confronted by reporters, Chen denied that he was drowning his sorrows over the affair, but expressed his "appreciation" for "this caring female friend."

Who's number one? The question has spawned the latest "war of words" in the Mando-pop world, as Little Pig (小豬) claims to have bested

Zhang Ziyi, "a disgrace to the Chinese people"?

Wang Lee-hom (王力宏) for the top spot in G-music's sales charts for the final week of December. Both Little Pig, also known as Alan Luo (羅志祥), and Wang have just released new albums. When asked how he felt about beating Wang, Little Pig said "I can only make comparisons with myself," reported the Liberty Times.

But Wang's label, Sony, doubted the accuracy of the charts. A company representative offered a sore response, implying that Little Pig's label, Gold Typhoon (金牌大風) rigged the charts: "Everyone in record industry knows that whenever major artists from a certain wellknown label come out with a new release, they come up with ways to make sure they are the top sellers." Wang chimed in, saying that "there's not enough credibility to the charts, they don't really matter."



Fans aren't happy with A-hsin's New Year's Eve performance. PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES

Gold Typhoon, shot back with more numbers: number one in mobile phone ring tones and nine other sales charts and an average of 5,000 copies sold at autograph signing events. "We'll continue to work hard - not make excuses," said a company representative. Now, now, there's enough room for both of you, said the Liberty Times report, which commented that the real praise should go to the two stars for their charity work.

Pretty-boy rockers Mayday (五月天) endured a rough start to the New Year. According to the *Liberty Times*, disgruntled fans on Internet boards complained that lead singer Ahsin (阿信) was singing off key throughout the band's New Year's eve concert in Taipei. Other fans aired suspicions that he was lip-synching, which Mayday's manager vehemently denied, saying that the band was in the middle of a grueling tour schedule and A-hsin had been suffering from a cold.

— COMPILED BY DAVID CHEN



Canadian indie-pop band Stars play at The Wall in Taipei on Monday night.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF STARS AND WHITE WABBIT RECORDS

Star turn

D escribed across the Internet as "beautiful, eloquent indie pop," the music of Montreal-based group Stars resonates with underground music fans in Taiwan.

Advance tickets are selling well for the band's show at The Wall (這牆) in Taipei on Monday, according to Sky Tai (戴杏芳), a manager at White Wabbit Records (小白兔 唱片). The show wraps up a tour of Australia, Japan and Singapore in support of their latest EP, Sad Robots.

Stars made their breakthrough along with a wave of popular Canadian groups including Arcade Fire and Broken Social Scene. They were nominated for Canada's Juno Awards for their albums Heart in 2004 and Set Yourself on Fire in 2005.

Three of Stars' members are part of Broken Social Scene, which performed in Taipei in March of last year, and the two groups share a liking for ornate pop arrangements and quirky sounds from electric guitars and synthesizers. But Stars' music is less abstract and often has an atmosphere of dark romance and drama, notably played out in male/female vocal duets between Torquil Campbell and Amy Millan, who Tai says is a major attraction for Taiwanese fans.

The band employs catchy, melodic hooks, but their brand of pop shies away from the mainstream. Many of their songs contain narratives with poetic leanings - songs like *Reunion* and *What I'm Trying to Say* from Set Yourself on Fire, have chorus refrains with a lyrical cadence that owes a debt to The Smiths.

Since it formed in 2001, the band's sound has ranged from 1980s synth pop and electronica to guitar rock. Their repertoire of mostly original songs has also

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: Canadian indie-pop band Stars, live at The Wall WHEN: Monday 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 for more

TICKETS: NT\$2,000, available at White Wabbit Records, located inside The Wall's shopping arcade ON THE NET: www.myspace.com/stars; www.arts-crafts.ca/stars

included covers such as Bruce Springsteen's *Hungry* Heart and the Yeah Yeah Yeah's Modern Romance.

But one band member is ambivalent about the "indierock" label. In an interview with the Singaporean music blog Power of Pop, bassist Evan Cranley said, "We've always tried to rise above that title. We're a pop band with a conscience. We make home movies for people's lives."

Pop's potential for melodrama appeals to Campbell, a former stage and television actor. On the band's Web site, he remarks on making the band's full-length 2007 album In Our Bedroom After the War. "What is the darkest possible situation that I could try to turn into a beautiful pop song?" he said. "That was sort of my mission with this record. If you could make horror movies that were like love stories, that would be my ultimate genre."

— DAVID CHEN



A transvestite spy for China attempts to stop a Taiwanese physicist from launching missiles in The Party Theater Group's

Love in the time of bombs

The White Terror era witnessed the **▲** imprisonment, disappearance or execution of tens of thousands of Taiwanese who opposed the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT) and dictator Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石). The deep-seated bitterness that many Taiwanese felt against the regime is the starting point for The Party Theater Group's (同黨劇團) The Sky Crisis (飛天行動), which sees its second run beginning tonight at the Guling Street Avant-Garde Theater.

"The experiences of the main character are rooted in history," said Betsy Lan (藍貝芝) who plays three of the production's six roles. "But we don't just want the pro-independence point of view. We did considerable research on Taiwan's recent history to gain a deeper understanding of the characters.

Be that as it may, the work ends up being less about the country's tumultuous past than it is about the relationship between the two protagonists.

The play's principle character, played by Chui An-chen (邱安忱) — who also wrote The Sky Crisis — is a physicist whose father was a leader in Taiwan's independence movement during the 1970s and 1980s — a role that eventually led to the mysterious murder of him and his family. Only the physicist, then a young man, survived.

Forward to the present day, or some time after a pro-China president has been elected as Taiwan's leader, rage replaces loss and the physicist hatches a demented plan to right historical wrongs by launching a barrage of missiles at China in the hope of ensuring Taiwan's independence.

The foil to this plan is a female-to-male transvestite who works with the physicist but also is a spy for China. "[We were] interested in putting some gender politics ... some queerness ... into the play," Lan said.

Working with themes of gender politics is nothing new for Lan, who helped organize last year's Vagina Monologues and has collaborated on a number of productions that deal specifically with gender issues. With The Sky Crisis, however, the overt themes of sexuality, not to mention cross-strait politics, gradually take a back seat to the developing relationship between the spy and scientist.

But the missiles remain, as does the scientists' hatred for anything that will stand in the way of Taiwanese independence. Media reports about his plans cause chaos in the government, leading to a denouement that is both comical and refreshing in its take on issues of personal and national identity and how these conflict with reality.

The Sky Crisis will be performed today and tomorrow at 7:30pm and Sunday at 2:30pm at Guling Street Avant-Garde Theater (牯嶺街小劇 場), 2, Ln 5, Guling St, Taipei City (台北市牯嶺街5巷 2號). NT\$400 tickets are available through NTCH ticketing (Today and tomorrow's performances are sold out.) — NOAH BUCHAN



Alan Luo (羅志祥) and Trendy Man (潮男正傳) with 37.8%

Mayday (五月天) and Poetry of the Day After (後青春期的詩) with 34.62%

- Wang Lee-hom (王力宏) and Heart Beat (心·跳) with 14.99%
- Rainie Yang (楊丞琳) and Proclamation Not Yet a Woman (半熟宣言)
 - Khalil Fang (方大同) with Orange Moon (橙月) with 0.7% ALBUM CHART COMPILED FROM G-MUSIC (WWW.G-MUSIC.COM.TW), BASED ON RETAIL SAL

Minor, Op. 4.

▶ Sunday at 2:30pm

[EVENTS & ENTERTAINMENT]

Theater

Human Condition (人間條件), Green Ray Theater's (緑光劇團) newest

play, centers on the life of a 17year-old girl who rebels against her dysfunctional family's listless existence. One day, the grandmother's spirit returns and possesses her teenage granddaughter.

- ▶ Taichung Chungshan Hall (台中市中 山堂), 98 Hsuehshi Rd, Taichung City (台中市學士路98號)
- ▶ Today and tomorrow at 7:30pm ► Tickets are NT\$500 to NT\$2,000, available through ERA ticketing or

online at www.ticket.com.tw

Tickets for Godot Theater Company's (果陀劇場) much-anticipated Chineselanguage production of Shakespeare's Othello (針鋒對決) are running out fast. The production features accomplished Taiwanese stage actors Lee Li-chun (李立群) and Chieh Shih-

- iie (金士傑) ▶ Metropolitan Hall (城市舞台), 25 Bade Rd, Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市八德 路三段25號)
- ▶ Today and tomorrow at 7:30pm and tomorrow and Sunday at 2:30pm
- ► Tickets are NT\$1,000 to NT\$4,000, available through NTCH ticketing (Note: NT\$1,000 and NT\$1,500 tickets are sold-out)

The Fifth Chinese Character Festival (第五屆漢字文化節), which aims to promote the use of Chinese characters and is organized by the Council for Cultural Affairs (文化建設委員會), ends on Sunday at Huashan Culture Park in Taipei City. This weekend's performance, Welcoming the Spring of the Year of the Ox (迎

- 春牛逼), looks at the significance of the coming Chinese zodiac
- ▶ Plum Wine Factory (烏梅酒廠), Huashan Culture Park (華山創意文化 園), 1, Bade Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北 市八德路一段1號)
- ▶ Tomorrow at 7:30pm and Sunday at 2:30pm
- ▶ Tickets are NT\$200, available through tickets.books.com.tw or by calling (02) 2782-1100

The Village (寶島一村) takes a

nostalgic look at Taiwan's veteran villages through the lives of three families, from 1949 to the present day. Television producer Wang Wei-chung (王偉忠) teams up with respected director Stan Lai (賴聲川) to produce a dramatic and humorous work about the communities that did much to shape modern Taiwan. ▶ Chiayi Performing Arts Center (嘉義

- 縣表演藝術中心), 265, Jianguo Rd Sec 2, Minsyong Township, Chiayi County (嘉 義縣民雄鄉建國路二段265號)
- ▶ Tomorrow at 7:30pm and Sunday at 2:30pm
- ▶ Tickets are NT\$400 to NT\$2,800. available through NTCH ticketing (Note: NT\$400 to NT\$1,800 tickets are sold-out)

The Little Matches Girl (賣番仔火 的小女孩) by Taiyuan Puppet Theater Company (台原偶戲團), tells the story of a greedy grandmother who forces her granddaughter to work in a factory that makes matches. The girl befriends a little boy and together they discover that the matches are alive. One night, a disaster threatens the lives of both

▶ Nadou Theater (納豆劇場), 79 Xining N Rd, Taipei City (台北市西寧北路79號)

children and their match friends

▶ Tomorrow at 3pm

▶ Tickets are NT\$200, available through NTCH ticketing

Classical music

Piano Music From Formusica — New Piano Compositions by Taiwanese Composers (大音希 聲 — 2009新台灣音樂鋼琴作品發

- 表會) showcases recent works by 10
- Taiwanese composers. ▶ Today at 7:30pm
- National Recital Hall, Taipei City ▶ Tickets are NT\$200, available through NTCH ticketing or online at www.artsticket.com.tw

Taipei National University of the Arts Autumn/Winter Concert Series (國立臺北藝術大學 2008秋冬系列音樂會) concludes its

traditional Chinese music component

- with three concerts this weekend. ▶ Tomorrow at 2:30pm and 7:30pm
- and Sunday at 2:30pm ► Taipei National University of the Arts Concert Hall (國立臺北藝術大學展演藝術 中心音樂廳), 1 Xueyuan Rd, Beitou Dist,
- Taipei City (台北市北投區學園路1號) ► Tickets are NT\$100, available through NTCH ticketing or online at www.artsticket.com.tw

Discovering Chien Nan-chang — TCO Special Project 2 (TCO 特

別企劃2 — 發現錢南章) features work by Golden Melody Award (金曲獎) and National Culture and Arts Foundation Awards (國家文藝獎) winner Chien Nan-chang (錢南章). The program includes his work for Chinese drums. arrangements of Aboriginal melodies and Taiwanese folk songs and the world premiere of a newly commissioned work for eight gehu (革胡) — a kind of Chinese cello — and orchestra titled

Highlight

The world-renowned **Cirque du Soleil** is coming to town with its production Alegria, which starts next Wednesday and runs until Feb. 22. The show marks the award-winning circus' first-ever performance in Taiwan. Each of the 56 shows are already sold out as the relatively expensive ticket prices, which ranged from NT\$1,900 to NT\$7,000, did not deter Taiwanese fans, according to a Central News Agency report. Alegria, the Spanish word for joy, features a world where fantasy and magic are a part of daily life. The two-and-a-half hour show has a cast of 50 performers from 17 countries who engage in acrobatics, aerial acts, contortion and clowning. Alegria's music, which will be performed by a live band and singers, has also earned wide critical acclaim. The production is setting up camp at vacant space in Shilin (士林), and the performance will take place under its Grand Chapiteau ("Big Top"), a large tent that holds an audience of 2,500 people and requires eight days of set-up time. Those who missed out on the chance for tickets can keep their hopes up for next year — organizers say they hope to bring Cirque du

The Eight Generals (八家將). The

work will be performed by the Taipei

Chinese Orchestra (台北市立國樂團),

conducted by Lee Ying (李英) and

feature soprano Mewas Lin (林惠珍).

▶ Zhongshan Hall (台北市中山堂). 98

Yenping S Rd, Taipei City (台北市延平

▶ Tomorrow at 7:30pm



The "Tamir Duo" are part of Alegria, a production by Cirque du Soleil, which is making its first appearance in Taiwan in a month-long run of shows.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CIRQUE DU SOLEIL

Soleil back, although details have

- yet to be confirmed. Cirque du Soleil's *Alegria*, at the corner of Chengde (承德) and Jihe (基河) roads, next to the National Taiwan Science Education Center (國 立台灣科學教育館), at 189 Shishang Rd, Taipei City (台北市士商路189號) ▶ For more information visit their Web site at www.cirquedusoleil.com (English) or www.cirquedusoleil.tw (Chinese)
- ▶ Show runs from Jan. 14 to Feb. 22. Tickets are sold out

南路98號)

- ► Tickets are NT\$200 to NT\$1,000, available through NTCH ticketing or
- The Red Cello (紅色大提琴) sees cellist Alexander Baillie perform with the Taipei Symphony Orchestra under

online at www.artsticket.com.tw

Contemporary Tonight at **VU Live House** it's an

evening of minimal techno with Ear Worm German Sound (耳朶蟲 德國之聲)。 ▶ B1, 77, Wuchang St Sec 2, Taipei City

the baton of Martin Fischer-Dieskau.

The program includes Prokofiev's

Sinfonia Concertante, Op. 125 and

Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5 in D

National Concert Hall, Taipei City

available through NTCH ticketing or

► Tickets are NT\$200 to NT\$800,

online at www.artsticket.com.tw

2314-1868 for more information ▶ 11pm tonight ▶ NT\$400 admission, includes one drink

(台北市武昌街二段77號B1). Call (02)

Tonight **The Wall (這牆)** hosts a party for the release of You Can Play That Again Vol. 2, a compilation album featuring indie bands The Chairman (董事長樂團), The Shine and Shine and Shine and Shine (閃閃閃閃), Jacuzzi, Rabbit Is Rich (兔子很有 錢) and Bitter. Tomorrow Pen Sauce (筆醬) plays its first concert of the year. Canadian indie-pop band Stars, which shares several members with indie super-group **Broken Social** Scene, performs on Monday night. [See story above].

- ▶ 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 visit www.thewall. com.tw for more information
- ▶ 8:30pm tonight, 8pm tomorrow and Monday
- Cover is NT\$450 tonight, NT\$400 tomorrow and NT\$2,000 on Monday. Tickets for the Stars show are available

Tonight at Witch House (女巫 店), Come on! Bay Bay! (來吧!焙 焙!), which has an indie-pop sound similar to Belle and Sebastian, takes to the stage. Playing tomorrow are indie-rockers **Neon**, who enjoy a loyal following, particularly for they're charismatic lead singer and songwriter

in advance at the venue

- Jun Lee (李昀熹.) On Thursday it's acoustic solo act Koumis. ▶ 7, Ln 56, Xinsheng S Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市新生南路三段56巷7號). For more information call (02) 2362-5494 or visit www.witchhouse.org
- Performances start at 9:30pm. Restaurant/bar with queer/feminist bookstore and large collection of board games open 11am to midnight Sundays through Wednesdays, 11am to 1am Thursdays through Saturdays
- ▶ Entrance fee for music shows is NT\$300, includes one drink

Veteran jazz combo JEG (這個爵士樂 (B) plays standards, Latin, funk, rock and fusion tonight at **Riverside Cafe (河** 岸留言). Indie-rockers Love Manana (愛的大未來) appear tomorrow night along with pop-rock pretty boys Rock Oriental Express (搖滾東方). On Sunday it's **Kou Chou Ching** (拷秋 勤), the thinking music lover's hip-hop crew, sharing the bill with Japanese group Start of the Day.

- ▶ B1, 2, Ln 244, Roosevelt Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市羅斯福路三段244巷 2號B1), next to Taipower Building (台電 大樓). Call (02) 2368-7310 or go to www.riverside.com.tw for more information
- ▶ 9:30pm tonight, 9pm tomorrow and Sunday
- Admission is NT\$400 tonight and tomorrow and NT\$350 Sunday, includes one drink