

Whose canine is that anyway?

Lu Po-shen (呂柏伸) auditioned more than just actors for his forthcoming theatrical production, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, an updated version of Shakespeare's play of the same name that begins its run tonight at Taipei's National Experimental Theater. This time around auditions called for a dog, of which 11 showed up.

"Many beautiful dogs auditioned," the artistic director of Tainaner Ensemble (台南人劇團) said after a preview of the play on Wednesday. "But we chose the ugly one because ... it was more in keeping with the original script."

When asked if he was concerned about the canine relieving itself on stage, Lu took it in his stride.

"That's what we expect. We have already told the actress that she has to improvise," he said. "Our concern is that on the premiere night there will be 200 people here and we don't know how it will react [to the audience]."

Judging by the canine's performance during the preview, which saw it rolling over, offering a paw and responding to a variety of gestures (some of them violent), there shouldn't be a problem.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona is the fourth

play in Tainaner's "Unplugged" series of Shakespeare revivals. The other three were *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.

Having done three tragedies in the series, why is Tainaner staging a comedy this time around?

"Why not?" Tu said.

Wang Hong-yuan (王宏元), who acts in and directs the play, was slightly less succinct.

"I noticed a lot of similarities between the love rivalries in the script and what I see with my school-mates," Wang said.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona is a coming of age tale that finds two friends going off to the big city to earn life experiences. The play deals with themes of friendship, love and infidelity.

To appeal to a younger generation of theatergoers, Lu, a National Taiwan University Drama department graduate, added contemporary flourishes such as exchanging 17th-century Italian clothing for "Eton-style" school uniforms — the kind of dress common in Taiwan.

Tainaner Ensemble's "unplugged" series of plays seeks to return theater to a more traditional form of staging because it focuses the audience's attention on the actors.

"We turn the stage over to the actors. We don't use too many complicated sets or lighting effects to distract the audience," Lu said.

— NOAH BUCHAN



Rock 'n' roll dombra

The sound of galloping horses, Middle Eastern melodies and reggae — keen listeners will hear all of these influences in the music of Yerboli Ahmethan (葉爾波利), a Kazakh musician born and raised in China's Xinjiang Uigur Autonomous Region.

Ahmethan, who is currently based in Shenzhen, is traveling outside China for the first time ever to play at the Bitan Music Festival (碧潭音樂節) in Taipei County tomorrow and Sunday.

Although he started learning the *dombra*, a traditional stringed instrument common in Central Asia, at the age of 5, Ahmethan says he also spent his youth listening to the likes of Frank

Zappa, AC/DC and "all kinds of rock 'n' roll." He finds it hard to communicate at length in Mandarin, so during a phone interview earlier this week his manager and close friend, Tu Fei (塗飛), helped answer questions.

Ahmethan, 28, now plays Kazakh folk music — which reflects a combination of "Islamic and Mongolian culture" in Tu's words



Kazakh musician Yerboli Ahmethan of Xinjiang performs tomorrow and Sunday at the Bitan Music Festival in Taipei County.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TREES MUSIC AND ART

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: Kazakh musician Yerboli Ahmethan of Xinjiang
WHERE: Bitan Music Festival (碧潭音樂節) at the Bitan (碧潭) riverside area outside Xindian MRT Station (新店捷運站)
WHEN: Tomorrow from 4pm to 5pm and Sunday from 3pm to 5pm
DETAILS: Free entrance
ON THE NET: www.2009bmf.com.tw

— but with his own twist.

He rearranges traditional songs, adding elements of improvisation and displays of virtuosity on the *dombra*. He says half of his material consists of original songs, which mix Kazakh lyrics and music with contemporary forms like reggae, folk and rock.

The *dombra* features prominently in Ahmethan's debut CD, *Kazakh Spirit*, which Ahmethan released on his own last year. The instrument, which has two nylon strings, a pear-shaped body and slender neck, was traditionally used as accompaniment for Kazakh folk songs and poems.

When strummed rhythmically, the *dombra* has been compared to the sound of galloping horses, which play a major role in the lives of the nomadic Kazakhs. When plucked, it sounds somewhat similar to the oud, an Arabic lute, and echoes the hints of Middle Eastern melodies found in Kazakh music.

Ten years ago, Ahmethan wouldn't have imagined that he would still be playing the *dombra*. After leaving Xinjiang at the age of 16, he a guitarist in AC/DC cover bands and made a living by playing piano, mandolin and accordion for live bands and studio sessions.

Ahmethan's situation is typical, says Tu, who works as a radio DJ and runs a live music venue in Shenzhen. "In the interior [of China], a lot of traditional things are almost all gone. A lot of young people, in order to survive, can't do [traditional music]. So they have to do Western music in order to make a living."

Ahmethan started to rediscover his musical and cultural roots when he moved to Beijing in 2000. There he played in IZ, the locally renowned band led by fellow Kazakh musician Mamuer Rayeskan (馬爾爾). Ahmethan met Tu on a visit to Shenzhen, where he gigs regularly with his current three-piece band, which will also be in Taipei this weekend.

Tu encouraged Ahmethan to go back to his "roots" while exploring "world fusion" music. Tu says Ahmethan's current interests include working with avant-garde and free-jazz musicians.

But Ahmethan doesn't intend to put the *dombra* down again. "His biggest goal," says Tu, "is to let more people around the world know about Kazakh culture."

— DAVID CHEN

RESTAURANTS

Pan's Garden (夏姿林)

Address: Kangning Rd Sec 3, Neihu Dist, Taipei City (台北市內湖區康寧路三段75巷272號)

Telephone: (02) 2634-9079; 0936-117-022

Open: Tuesdays through Fridays from 5:30pm to midnight; Saturdays from noon to midnight; Sundays from 11am to midnight. Brunch will be available Sundays from 9am starting in April

Average meal: NT\$900 for two people

Details: English and Chinese menu; credit cards accepted

Pan's Garden (夏姿林), a hidden gem nestled in a forested hillside in Neihu, is named after its owners — Peter Pan, and his wife, Wendy. Originally from Germany, Peter took his Taiwanese wife's surname upon marriage. Wendy Pan (潘綾蓮) looks like an Asian version of a good German *fräulein*, with a thick braid, a headscarf and an apron tied firmly around her ample waist.

Their restaurant is warm and welcoming, with creamy pink walls, soft lighting, a wrap-around bar and two expansive outdoor patios. The cushioned sofas, high ceilings, arched entrance ways and canopy frames around the tables led my dining companion to comment that it felt like "a ski lodge out of a '70s James Bond movie."

We ordered two mains to share, and opted on the set for an additional NT\$120, which included soup, salad, and dessert. The former came in a large porcelain tureen brimming with ham and potato cream soup, a rich and satisfying concoction. The romaine lettuce and mixed vegetables were crisp, fresh and served with two dressings on the side: a sweet basil vinaigrette and a tangy, creamy blend.

The main dishes, chicken with mustard sauce (NT\$280), and the mixed sausage platter (NT\$360), while simple fare, were savory enough to make any diet plan fly out the window as surely as the Darling children on their way to Never-Never Land. A boneless split-chicken thigh was smothered in a rich, creamy, grainy-mustard sauce that spilled onto the plate, perfect for dipping the accompanying crisp potato wedges.

The sausage platter had four kinds of sausage: a chunky, meaty cheese sausage; a light, almost foamy pate-textured veal sausage; half of a flavorful bratwurst; and a small, juicy breakfast sausage. Potato salad with egg, onion and homemade mayonnaise was served alongside, with two kinds of mustard, and sauerkraut, which was served warm — a nice touch.

Both dishes came with a side of steamed broccoli, carrot and tomato, and a basket of hearty black bread, with a crispy outside and soft, fresh middle. The dinner ends with a small bowl of fruit and yogurt. To protests of "Oh no, we're too full!" Wendy Pan insisted "but it's only fruit. It's healthy."

The only small disappointment was the artificial creamer available with the self-serve coffee, which is fresh enough to be enjoyed black.

The white wine and garlic fish (NT\$300), which is tender and flaky, topped with grilled red and yellow bell peppers, and served with a bed of chewy, flavorful rice, comes recommended.

While Pan's Garden is intimate enough for a romantic dinner for two, friendly enough to dine alone at, and easy-going enough for dinner with friends, it also lends itself well to larger events, with seating between the outdoor garden areas and indoors able to fit 50 for sit-down dining, and up to 80 for buffet and cocktails.

— ALITA RICKARDS



Pan's Garden has ways of making you eat.

PHOTO: ALITA RICKARDS



Still recovering from last weekend's partying? Bukem and Sonrad were something else. A full house of junglists and other music-lovers experienced another great event delivered by the golden duo from the UK — a reminder that great music and a kick-ass sound-system are the most important ingredients of a rocking party.

Fresh parties are starting to bloom with the arrival of spring. Dance Department in Tainan city next Saturday has been the talk of the scene lately. The event takes place in a 3,300m², two-level venue that used to house a department store. Four "music departments" covering



minimal, techno, electro, indie dance, breaks, house and progressive will be manned by some 20 up-and-coming local DJs. There will be an art exhibition too.

"It's a theme party. The idea is to make it feel like a grand opening of a department store, so there will be lots of free giveaways and novelties such as elevator attendants that night. And, obviously, the four 'departments' of music will be our products," says Ace (鄭光世), organizer of the event. "With the convenience of High Speed Rail, we expect to attract lots of out-of-town party people."

The party-scene veteran, who once worked at MoS Taipei as a program manager, is confident that the bash will go well, despite the fact that it is his first attempt at planning such a big do without the clout of big-name international headliners. This will also be a good test to see if local music fans are ready for a party that puts together so many music genres under one roof.

There will be parties in Taipei, Tainan, Kaohsiung and Taichung this weekend, which presale ticket holders enjoy free entry to.

For a complete list of the DJ lineup and information on presale tickets, which are available until Tuesday at NT\$700 each, visit dance-department.org.

Tonight's preparties:

• Soho, 149, Dunhua S Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市敦化南路一段149號). From 10pm to 3am. Entry is NT\$300.

DJ Lupen and M Ross hit The Wall tomorrow.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DOS

• Underbridge 20, Dongmen Rd Sec 1, Tainan City (台南市東門路一段20號). From 10pm to 3am. Entry is free.

• PP, B1, 10, Siwei 4th Rd, Kaohsiung City (高雄市四維四路10號B1). From 10pm to 3am. Entry is NT\$300.

Tomorrow's preparty:

Ocean, 15 Rensi St, Taichung City (台中市仁愛街15號). From 10pm to 5am. Entry is NT\$500.

March 14:

Dance Department, 120, Simen Rd Sec 2, Tainan City (台南市中西區西門路二段120號). From 9:30am to 5am. Entry is \$1,000 at the door or \$700 presale.

Another interesting event is the team-up between Dance Rock Taipei, Back 2 the Future (B2TF, 回到未來) and Science of Sounds (SOS), a party production/talent management company that's currently based in Beijing. Though it was founded by a collective of Spanish electronic artists (DJs and VJs) about two years ago, SOS has been growing steadily by organizing parties in Manila and major cities in China as well as creating original music. Two killer electro/minimal techno jocks Lupen and M Ross from Barcelona will be their first missionaries here. Supporting acts will be Spykee Fat and Databass. If you are into music that's cutting-edge, this party will not let you down.

Tomorrow from 11:30pm to 4:30am at The Wall (這牆), B1, 200, Roosevelt Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市羅斯福路四段200號B1). Entry is NT\$500 for men and NT\$350 for women.

— QUEEN BEE

EVENTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Joining post-rock band Mosquito-phant (蚊子大象) tonight at Underworld (地下社) are newcomers Hi Jack. Tomorrow one-man electro-rock band Sonic Deadhorse opens for post-rock group Aphasia (阿飛西雅). On Wednesday, it's psychedelic folk rockers No.7 Cyan (七號青), with Tough Black Tea (硬式紅茶).

► 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

► Shows are from 9:30pm to 11:30pm and 9pm to 11pm on Wednesdays

► Entrance for music shows is NT\$300 tonight and tomorrow and includes one drink, Wednesday's show is NT\$100. Bar opens daily from 9pm, closed Mondays. Drinks are buy-one-get-one-free before midnight on Tuesdays and Thursdays

Loaded plays everything from "rock classics to today's hits" tonight at Tone 56 Live Bar. Blues and surf rock trio Blues Vibrations take the stage tomorrow. There's an open acoustic jam on Sunday hosted by The Diamond Backs.

► 1F, 56, Minquan E Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市民權東路三段56號1樓), near the corner of Fuxing North (復興北) and Minquan East (民權東) roads. Tel: (02) 2517-3869

► The music starts at 9:30pm tonight and tomorrow. Open jam goes from

7pm to 10pm on Sunday.

► No admission fee

Exhibitions

Li An-cheng Solo Exhibition (展幕中的行星 — 李安成當代水墨跨年國展) showcases 50 works by one of Taiwan's foremost ink painters.

► Soaring Cloud Art Center (上雲藝術中心), 7F, 11 Dayung Rd, Kaohsiung City (高雄市大勇路11號7樓). Open Tuesday to Friday from 11am to 6pm and Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 8pm. Tel: (07) 533-1755. On the Net: www.sc-art.org.tw

► Until March 29

Explore is a group exhibition of works by Hubert Cance, Iskren Semkov and Luiz Cavalli. The artists, hailing from France, Bulgaria and Brazil, use abstraction, expressionism and realism to "explore" landscape and still life.

► X-Power Gallery, 98, Xinyi Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市信義路四段98號). Open Monday to Thursday 11am to 6pm and Friday and Saturday 11am to 8pm. Tel: (02) 2708-0929. On the Net: www.xpgallery.com.tw

► Until March 31

The Yingge Ceramics Museum investigates the human form in **Passionate Beings: Contemporary Ceramics of**

Museum Collection (多情·人—當代陶藝典藏展), an exhibit of 35 sculptures from its permanent collection.

► Yingge Ceramics Museum (鶯歌陶瓷博物館), 200 Wenhua Rd, Yingge Township, Taipei County (北縣鶯歌鎮文化路200號). Open Tuesday to Friday from 9:30am to 5pm and Saturday and Sunday from 9:30am to 6pm. Tel: (02) 8677-2727. On the Net: www.ceramics.tpc.gov.tw

► Until April 19

Easy Plastics is a group exhibition by 11 up-and-coming Taiwanese artists who use sculpture, installation and design to investigate plastic and its metaphorical applications to our society.

► Taipei National University of Arts — Guandu Museum of Arts (台北藝術大學關渡美術館), 1 Xueyuan Rd, Beitou Dist, Taipei City (台北市北投區學園路1號). Open Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 5pm. Tel: (02) 2896-1000 x2432. On the Net: kdmofa.tnu.edu.tw

► Until March 29

Those wanting to gain a deeper understanding of one of Asia's oldest trade routes can check out **Legends of the Silk Road — Treasures From Linjiang (絲路傳奇—新疆文物大展)**.

The exhibit provides viewers with a glimpse of life in the ancient world by displaying 150 items unearthed along the Silk Road, including a 4,000-year-old mummified

body of a woman in sandals known as the Loulan Beauty (樓蘭美女) and artifacts from the Tang Dynasty.

► 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 daily from 10am to 6pm, closed on Mondays. Tel: (02) 2361-0270. On the Net: www.nmh.gov.tw

► Until March 15

Ancient Pottery of the Paiwan Tribe in Taiwan (祖靈的居所—台灣排灣族古陶壺特展) shows how ceramics are closely associated with the legends of the Paiwan tribe's origins, and how pottery helps to perpetuate the tribe's social hierarchy.

► National Museum of Natural Science (國立自然科學博物館), 1, Kuanchien Rd, Taichung City (台中市館前路1號). Open daily from 9am to 5pm, closed on Mondays. Tel: (04) 2322-6940. On the Net: www.nmns.edu.tw

► Until May 17

The God of Earth in Taiwan (台灣土地公特展) explains the origins of the Earth God (土地公) and why it continues to play an important role in folk worship throughout the country.

► National Museum of Natural Science (國立自然科學博物館), 1, Kuanchien Rd, Taichung City (台中市館前路1號). Open daily from 9am to 5pm, closed on Mondays. Tel: (04) 2322-6940. On the Net: www.nmns.edu.tw

► Until May 31

The National Palace Museum does a superb job of explaining the history and importance of Chinese ink painting with its exhibit **The Art and Aesthetics of Form: Selections From the History of Chinese Painting (造型與美感—中國繪畫的發展)**. Beginning with the Six Dynasties period and moving up to the Qing Dynasty, the show represents a selection of individual works from the museum's collection arranged chronologically to provide an overview of some major traditions and movements in Chinese painting.

► National Palace Museum (國立故宮博物院), 221, Zhishan Rd Sec 2, Shilin Dist, Taipei City (台北市士林區至善路二段221號). Open Tuesday to Sunday from 9am to 5pm; Saturday open until 8:30pm. Tel: (02) 2881-2021. On the Net: www.npm.gov.tw

► Until March 25

Madden Reality: Post-Taipei Art Group (弄離異象·後台北畫派) features 72 works by eight of Taiwan's most well-respected contemporary artists ranging from sculpture to painting.

► Taipei Fine Arts Museum (TFAM), 181, Zhongshan N Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市中山北路三段181號). Open Tuesday to Sunday from 9:30am to 5:30pm; Saturday open until 8:30pm. Tel: (02) 2595-7656. On the Net: www.tfam.museum

► Until April 5

Mcafe (門卡迪)

Address: 14 Chengdu Rd, Taipei City (台北市成都路14號)

Telephone: (02) 2314-8955

Open: 11am-11pm

Average meal: NT\$280-NT\$700, not including 10 percent service charge

Details: Chinese and English menu; credit cards accepted

Among the dizzying billboards and crowds at Ximending, one finds relative quiet and a reasonably priced Italian-style meal at Mcafe (門卡迪), a cafe and restaurant just outside the Red House Theater (紅樓劇場).

Mcafe's homey vibe offered a welcome contrast to the youthful buzz of the neighborhood, even though the overall dining experience felt slightly out of place and surreal.

The decor comes across vaguely as rustic Americana: the floors in this three-story restaurant are either covered in wood or earthy, reddish-colored tiles. Ceramic statues of old mads in Victorian garb and prairie animals sit on wooden shelves hanging on the walls. These knick-knacks shared space with old cloth-bound books, messily arranged for a "lived-in" look.

Why the country home styling? Was it to match the easy-listening country music (Carpenters) piped through on the house stereo? This reviewer resorted to wondering if the interior weren't inspired by a Cospaly fantasy.

Thankfully the food and the service were more straightforward. Mcafe labels itself a "trattoria." While the menu choices aren't authentic Italian, the food is unpretentious and full of fresh ingredients. Full set meals, which run between NT\$450 to NT\$700, include an appetizer, soup, main course, drink and dessert. Economy set meals, which range between NT\$280 to NT\$520, include a salad, main course and drink. Every course, from appetizer to dessert, comes in ample portions and has a homemade touch.

My meal got off to an impressive start with the minestrone (NT\$120), which could make for a light meal on its own. Mcafe's hearty version was marked with signature local vegetables, including fresh cabbage and white radish, which blended in nicely with the standard ingredients one might expect: plum tomatoes, potato and pasta. The soup was accompanied by a forgettable bread roll and breadstick.

For an appetizer, the waiter recommended the tempura-fried seafood (酥炸海鮮綜合海鮮配醬香檸檬蝦醬, NT\$220), which included a medium-sized prawn, a smaller piece of cod fish, and several rings of melt-in-your-mouth calamari. A slice of lemon on the side instead of kumquat would have been better, but the mayonnaise tasted homemade and had a tangy zest.

The angel hair pasta with parma ham and shrimp (帕瑪火腿鮮蝦烏龍魚子髮絲麵), at NT\$280 for the economy set or NT\$450 for the full set, is a popular main course choice. The shrimp tasted fresh, and was nicely punctuated by the garlic and the saltiness of the ham. Three small slices of mullet roe topped the dish off.

By the end of the meal, the odd knick-knacks on the wall were no longer distracting. The waiter brought over a display tray of 10 or so different desserts; all of them looked enticing. The "Adam" (梨子蘋果蛋糕, NT\$90) was an unusual but delightful coda. It has a spongy layer at the bottom soaked in liqueur that tasted a little like Cointreau, a creamy layer similar to cheesecake, and caramelized slices of pear and apple on top.

— DAVID CHEN



Fresh ingredients make all the difference with Mcafe's angel hair pasta with shrimp, parma ham and mullet roe.

PHOTO: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES