

# FEATURES

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In the age of MP3s, the album isn't dead — at least not as an art form. This idea partly inspires a new book that aims to canonize the finest in Taiwanese pop and rock with a list of the 200 best albums released since 1975.

*Taiwan Popular Music — 200 Best Albums* (台灣流行音樂 200最佳專輯) is one of the first attempts to cull together a definitive list of classic Taiwanese pop and rock albums, complete with background information on each album and artist.

The book, a project conceived by a group of National Taiwan University (NTU) students, is divided into two parts: the first half is a revised edition of a book first printed in 1994 that ranks albums released from 1975 to 1992, and the second half ranks albums released from 1993 to 2005.

At the top of the lists are Lo Ta-yu's (羅大佑) *Pedantry* (之乎者也) for 1975 to 1992 and Puyuma musician Pau-dull's (陳建年) *Ocean* (海洋) for 1993 to 2005.

## TIMES A' CHANGIN'

For each time period, many of the top contenders mirrored the changes in society and popular music in Taiwan.

It was no surprise that Lo took the top spot for his 1982 debut album, according to Ma Shih-fang (馬世芳), a radio DJ at News 98 (98.1 FM) and one of the founding editors of the book.

"He was such a key figure in the evolution of Taiwanese pop music history," Ma said in an interview with the *Taipei Times*.

Indeed, Lo was Taiwan's first rock rebel. He stepped into the scene at a time when Taiwanese pop was dominated by, as the book puts it, a mindless "gaiety" that remained from the 1970s folk singer movement. "Even his love songs were different — they [always had] a certain degree of bitterness," said Ma.

On *Pedantry*, Lo veiled social commentary behind his rock 'n' roll, much to the consternation of the Government Information Office (新聞局), which put his songs on a radio airplay blacklist.

Then there was his "coarse" voice. "Before Lo Ta-yu, everyone thought you could only [make] an album if you had a beautiful voice," said Ma. "But [his voice] was perfect for rock singers."

Other albums topping the list from 1975 to 1993 were released during pivotal and politically turbulent times.

Chinese rocker Cui Jian's *Nothing to My Name* (一無所有), which is ranked eighth, came out just two months before the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989 (Cui was included as all albums sung in a Mandarin or Aboriginal language from Taiwan were considered).

Albums like Blacklist Studio's (黑名單工作室) *Songs of Madness* (抓狂歌) and Lim Giong's (林強) *Marching Forward* (向前走) — both notable as albums sung entirely in Hoklo (commonly known as Taiwanese) and which proudly celebrate a "native Taiwanese" identity — came out in 1989 and 1990, respectively.

"These albums also reflected a certain time ... the so-called 'post-martial law era,'" said Ma, referring to the lifting of martial law in Taiwan in 1987. "During those few years a lot of things were happening, politically, culturally, economically. It's all reflected in this music and those albums."

## ABORIGINAL MUSIC: THE NEW TAIWANESE POP

The 1993 to 2005 list shows how major labels began to lag creatively while independent artists, Aboriginal musicians in particular, started to thrive, said Ma.

He noted that Pau-dull's *Ocean* was an important album not only for its novel fusion of early Taiwanese folk pop and traditional Aboriginal music, but also for its sudden popularity.

Virtually unknown at the time, Pau-dull won the Golden Melody Award's Best Album accolade in 2000 for *Ocean*, which "gained a lot of attention in the mainstream media and opened the gates for a lot of musicians with similar backgrounds," said Ma.

Those musicians include Samingad (紀曉君), Pau-dull's niece, whose album *The Sounds of the Sun, Wind and Grass* (太陽風/草原的聲音), ranked fourth, and Puyuma folk legend Kimbo Hu (胡德夫), who took the number two spot with *In a Flash* (匆匆).

Also rounding out the top is the most famous

A new book offers the first list of Taiwan's best pop and rock albums from the past 34 years

BY DAVID CHEN  
STAFF REPORTER



# Top of the pops

## Top 20 Taiwan popular music albums, from 1975 to 1992

- [Title, Artist, Year]
- Pedantry*, Lo Ta-yu, 1982 (之乎者也 / 羅大佑 / 1982)
  - Su Rui*, Julie Su, 1983 (蘇芮專輯 / 蘇芮 / 1983)
  - Olive Tree*, Qi Yu, Xinge, 1979 (橄欖樹 / 齊豫 / 1979)
  - Blue Skies Every Day*, Michelle Pan, 1982 (天天天藍 / 潘越雲 / 1982)
  - Spirit of Life*, Jonathan Lee, 1986 (生命之精靈 / 李宗盛 / 1986)
  - Marching Forward*, Lim Giong, 1990 (向前走 / 林強 / 1990)
  - Descendants of the Dragon*, Li Jian-fu, 1980 (龍的傳人 / 李建復 / 1980)
  - Nothing to My Name*, Cui Jian, 1989, (一無所有 / 崔健 / 1989)
  - Masters of the Future*, Lo Ta-yu, 1983 (未來的主人翁 / 羅大佑 / 1983)
  - Songs of Madness*, Blacklist Studio, 1989 (抓狂歌 / 黑名單工作室 / 1989)
  - Echoes*, Qi Yu and Michelle Pan, 1985 (回聲 / 齊豫潘越雲 / 1985)
  - Christine Hsu*, Christine Hsu, 1987 (許景淳專輯 / 許景淳 / 1987)
  - The Chiu Chiu Singers*, The Chiu Chiu Singers, 1982 (丘丘合唱團 / 1982)
  - Golden Rhythm Awards, Vol. 1*, Compilation, 1977 (金韻獎第一輯 / 合輯 / 1977)
  - Modern Chinese Folk Songs*, Yang Hsien, 1975 (中國現代民歌集 / 楊弦 / 1975)
  - Da Jiao Jie Zi*, Chen Hsiao-hsia, 1991 (大腳姐仔 / 陳小霞 / 1991)
  - These Feelings Can Wait*, Tsai Chin, 1984 (此情可待 / 蔡琴 / 1984)
  - The Red Ants I*, The Red Ants, 1985 (紅螞蟥1 / 紅螞蟥 / 1985)
  - Busy and Blind*, Sylvia Chang, 1985 (忙與盲 / 張艾嘉 / 1985)
  - Childhood*, Sylvia Chang, 1981 (童年 / 張艾嘉 / 1981)



## Top 20 Taiwan popular music albums, from 1993 to 2005

- [Title, Artist, Year]
- Ocean*, Pau-dull, 1999 (海洋 / 陳建年 / 1999)
  - In a Flash*, Kimbo, 2005 (匆匆 / 胡德夫 / 2005)
  - Wanderer's Love Song*, Wu Bai, 1994 (浪人情歌 / 伍佰 / 1994)
  - The Sounds of the Sun, Wind and Grass*, Samingad, 2000 (太陽風 / 草原的聲音 / 紀曉君 / 2000)
  - Lonely Bird on a Tree Branch*, Wu Bai and China Blue, 1998 (樹枝孤鳥 / 伍佰 and China Blue / 1998)
  - Walking to Danshui*, King of Kinmen and Lee Bin-hui, 1997 (流浪到淡水 / 金門王與李炳輝 / 1997)
  - Tao Zhe*, David Tao, 1997 (陶喆 / 陶喆 / 1997)
  - Come Home*, Shunza, 1997 (回家 / 順子 / 1997)
  - A Fabulous Adventure*, Cheer Chen, 2005 (華麗的冒險 / 陳綺貞 / 2005)
  - Sisters*, A-Mei, 1996 (姊妹 / 張惠妹 / 1996)
  - Let Me Think*, Cheer Chen, 1998 (讓我想一想 / 陳綺貞 / 1998)
  - First Album*, Mayday, 1999 (第一張創作專輯 / 五月天 / 1999)
  - Sister Drum*, Chu Che-chin, 1995 (阿姐鼓 / 朱哲琴 / 1995)
  - Fantasy*, Jay Chou, 2001 (范特西 / 周杰倫 / 2001)
  - One*, Faith Yang, 1998 (ONE / 楊乃文 / 1998)
  - Sky*, Faye Wong, 1994 (天空 / 王靖雯 / 1994)
  - Lullabies*, Blacklist Studio, 1996 (搖籃曲 / 黑名單 / 1996)
  - Yan Zi*, Stefanie Sun, 2000 (孫燕姿 / 孫燕姿 / 2000)
  - Goodbye Kiss*, Jacky Cheung, 1993 (吻別 / 張學友 / 1993)
  - Ni Wa Wa*, Panai, 2000 (泥娃娃 / 巴奈 / 2000)



Puyuma musician of all, A-mei (阿妹), whose 1996 debut album *Sisters* (姊妹) ranked 10th.

## SELECTION CRITERIA

For the 1975 to 1992 list, the top albums were chosen, submitted, then voted upon by over 100 voters consisting of Taiwanese music critics, writers, industry representatives and musicians.

For the 1993 to 2005 list, the voting panel was whittled down to 26 people chosen by the Association of Music Workers In Taiwan (中華音樂人交流協會), a music industry advocacy group, which organized and produced the book.

The criteria for selecting albums were: the album had to be full length (EPs and singles were not considered); the songs had to have lyrics; the language had to be one of the major languages spoken in Taiwan, which include Mandarin, Hoklo, Hakka or an Aboriginal language.

Voters included musical luminaries such as Jonathan Lee (李宗盛), Tsai Chin (蔡琴) and Ma Nien-hsien (馬念先).

## A LABOR OF LOVE

For Ma Shih-fang, *Taiwan Popular Music — 200 Best Albums* is a labor of love that started during his university days at NTU. He points to a particular issue of *Rolling Stone* from 1987 as his major inspiration. The issue listed the top 100 rock albums of the preceding 20 years for the magazine's 20th anniversary.

"I thought it was so cool and so good that you could put a whole 20 years of history into a list of 100 albums," said Ma. "You have these descriptions of every album, [their] cultural impact, the stories behind this music, the character of the musicians — you could get a lot from the list."

It also pointed to something sorely missing in Taiwan. "While we had all these great artists, great albums, great songs, and they sold very well ... we didn't discuss — seriously discuss — this music, these works," he said.

Starting in his senior year at NTU, in 1993, Ma and a dozen schoolmates spent several years between classes and military service compiling data from the first vote and researching and writing essays on each album.

Ma also received help from his mother, renowned radio DJ Cora Tao (陶曉清), who served as a co-editor of the book and helped him with industry contacts. They chose to start their list from 1975, under the belief that Taiwanese pop music was born out of the folk movement, which took off in the mid-1970s.

Their time and toil paid off. The original edition of the 1975 to 1992 list, which had a print run of 2,000 copies, sold out within months after its release in 1994, and bootleg copies have found their way to China. The new edition, which hit bookstores at the beginning of the year, has already sold out of its first run of 6,000 copies, according to Ma.

## WHITHER THE ALBUM?

Ma concedes that in the age of iTunes, the album, as purchased in the physical form, is becoming a thing of the past. "Which is not necessarily a bad thing ... but the album as an art form — if that [disappears], I'll still feel sad," he said.

True to the rock 'n' roll spirit, Ma is looking to younger generations as a target audience. "I hope this book makes them interested in some good music they've never heard before ... I hope this can be a kind of a road map for them," he said.

And Ma is the first to admit the rankings can only mean so much. "Even I don't agree with a lot of choices on this chart. But it's just natural. With all these thousands of albums ... a lot of brilliant works will be left off."

He says the book's greatest value lies in the essays and background information for each album, written in Mandarin by figures in the music industry, radio DJs and prominent writers.

"A pop music artist is like any artist. They deserve to be seriously discussed," said Ma.

## BOOK NOTES:

*Taiwan Popular Music — 200 Best Albums* (台灣流行音樂 200最佳專輯/in Chinese only)  
Edited by Cora Tao (陶曉清), Ma Shih-fang (馬世芳) and Yeh Yun-ping (葉雲平)  
266 pages  
China Times Publishing Co.  
On the Net: www.200albums.com

## [ THE WEEKENDER ]



Chai Found Music Workshop went overboard on the multimedia effects.

## 'Monkey King' loses the plot

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW  
STAFF REPORTER

*The Journey of the Monkey King* (西遊記), an instrumental presentation of elements taken from the classic Chinese vernacular novel *Journey to the West* (西遊記) by the Chai Found Music Workshop (采風樂坊) premiered Saturday night to an excited house at the National Theater.

The first half of the program more than fulfilled those expectations, but the second half proved profoundly disappointing as the performance lost its direction and the presentation got bogged down in unnecessary multimedia effects.

But first things first: Sections of the production, including almost all the first half, and brief moments of the second, were utterly riveting for their innovative use of Chinese traditional instruments to create a contemporary musical score that was still clearly rooted in an East Asian tradition. The use of musicians as dramatic performers was also largely successful, providing a visual highlighting of the narrative elements within the music. This was particularly true of dancer and acrobat Chen Hsin-ho (陳星合), whose guest performance with the ensemble was unforgettable.

In the first movement, in which the monkey king begins to gradually develop his magical powers, Chen used his juggling skills to make a glass ball float in his hands, which under carefully placed lights, had a magical effect and was the perfect metaphor for the mysterious process of developing an inner magical power. This was integrated particularly well with a layered and insistent minimalist background created by *pipa* (琵琶) and *guzheng* (古箏).

Huang Cheng-ming's (黃正銘) score shifted gears effortlessly from fairly conventional Chinese orchestral music to unusual and evocative sounds that picked up ideas for Central Asia and gypsy music, as well as Western contemporary music.

In the first half of the program, which takes the monkey king from the discovery of his magical powers to the chaos that he creates as a result, there is a relatively cohesive narrative structure, grounding the abstractions rendered by the music and limned out through the movements of the performers.

Though professional musicians rather than dancers, these movements had been well honed, though a sequence in which bamboo poles were used as props as well as musical instruments might have been better served with professional opera performers whose movements would have had greater self-assurance.

With the second half, Huang abandons the narrative and embarks on an exploration of purely abstract elements of the monkey king's personality. Movements such as the sixth, titled *Joking*, and the eighth, titled *Human Feeling*, left me uncertain where the story had got to. It had in fact more or less disappeared into thin air.

Musically, the second half was less interesting than the first, and the multimedia projections which had been a distraction in the first half, became seriously annoying in the second. The stage set, costumes and make up were simple but effective, yet it seemed that the director was unsure that these would be enough. He incorporated photographs, video of the performers in rehearsal and cartoon images that muddled the overall visual effect. The lack of cohesion of the multimedia element, and its conspicuous lack of real creativity, detracted from the generally high level of professionalism on display.

There was plenty that was good in *The Journey of the Monkey King*, and much of what was bad could have easily not been. The weak second half was a huge disappointment, for what started out looking like one of the most innovative musical productions by a local troupe this year petered out, becoming lost and aimless, uncertain where it was going and unsure whether it had arrived.

# DIAMANT POP

Thousands of people turned out to bid farewell to reality TV star **Jade Goody** on Saturday, a fittingly public end for a woman whose life and death were pored over by the celebrity-obsessed media. The one-time dental assistant, who died last month of cervical cancer aged 27, found fame and fortune as a contestant on the popular reality television show *Big Brother*.

Rapper **Coolio** has pleaded not guilty to drug possession and battery charges.

The 45-year-old rapper, whose real name is Artis Leon Ivey, entered his plea during an arraignment on Friday.

He was arrested last month at Los Angeles International Airport, and later charged with felony cocaine possession and battery and possession of drug paraphernalia, both misdemeanors. Coolio allegedly grabbed a screener's arm to prevent a search of his luggage. *The Gangsta's Paradise*

rapper remains free on bail and has been ordered to return to court on April 20.

An online chain of posts involving **Demi Moore** apparently prompted police to go to the aid of a California woman who was having suicidal thoughts.

San Jose Sergeant Ronnie Lopez says the department received a phone call early Friday morning from a person in Dallas who was tipped off to a supposed suicide attempt through the social networking site Twitter.

Moore, a popular celebrity Twitterer, was involved in a discussion on the site that began when a user sent the actress what appeared to be suicidal notes.

Lopez says officers made immediate contact with a 48-year-old female resident of San Jose, California, and transferred her to a local hospital for "psychiatric evaluation." He says there were no injuries.

Indian police have registered a case accusing Bollywood actor

**Akshay Kumar** and his wife of obscenity after she unbuttoned his jeans during a fashion show.

Mumbai police said they acted after a complaint was lodged against Kumar and **Twinkle Khanna** by a social campaigner who called the performance "vulgar and indecent."

Kumar, a brand ambassador for a popular brand of jeans, was strutting down the catwalk last week when he stopped in front of his wife, who was seated in the audience, and asked her to undo his trousers.

"We have registered a case against Akshay, Twinkle and the organizers of Lakme Fashion Week," an unnamed police officer told the Press Trust of India news agency late Saturday.

India's obscenity laws are punishable by a maximum of two years' imprisonment and a fine of US\$39.

The actor has apologized for the incident. Celebrities have previously

landed in hot water over behavior deemed to be offensive in culturally conservative India.

In 2007 a court issued arrest warrants for actress **Shilpa Shetty** and Hollywood star **Richard Gere** after he hugged and kissed her at an AIDS awareness event, but the case was eventually thrown out.

Expectations of a second wedding between supermodel **Gisele Bündchen** and US football star **Tom Brady** has sent Costa Rica into a tizzy, with paparazzi scrambling to this exclusive resort where the knot will be tied.

The Brazilian bombshell Bündchen, 28, and Brady, 31, have already married on Feb. 26 in Santa Monica, California in a church near the beach. *People* magazine has reported with no confirmation so far from

**Demi Moore to the rescue.**

the couple. While no independent confirmation of the wedding was forthcoming in Costa Rica, a friend of Bündchen's family said her parents and five sisters had arrived at Santa Teresa and booked into the Flor Blanca hotel.

Carlos Aviles said that Brady's family too had arrived at the resort and were put up at the same hotel. — AGENCIES



PHOTO: EPA