

RESTAURANTS

Wanda (丸大食堂)

Address: 32, Ln 40, Taishun St, Taipei City (台北市泰順街40巷32號)
Telephone: (02) 2369-5003
Open: Daily from 11am to 2:30pm and 5pm to 10pm
Average meal: NT\$160 to NT\$400
Details: Chinese menu; credit cards not accepted

The old Wanda (丸大食堂) was a no-frills hole-in-the-wall that was one of few options for low-priced sushi near Shida night market. The new Wanda is sleekly remodeled and twice the size of the old restaurant, but the menu and prices remain the same.

While Wanda's old interior was cramped, the new Wanda is spacious and swank, with deep brown leather chairs and dark wood tables set off by birch partitions. The new sushi bar, which is lit up like a small stage at the back of the restaurant, is a distinct improvement over the old model, which was little more than a glorified freezer with a bar wrapped around it. The best items on Wanda's sushi and sashimi menu are its hand rolls. The tastiest is the shrimp and asparagus hand roll (蘆筍蝦手捲, NT\$70), which nestles the two main ingredients with crisp shredded lettuce and mayonnaise in a cone of seaweed. The salmon roe roll (鮭魚卵手捲, NT\$80) is a richer option, with a large scoopful of the gleaming roe perched on soft sushi rice. Wanda's salads are also good, even if the portions are disappointingly small for the price. The best of the bunch is the shrimp and apple salad (鮮蝦水果沙拉, NT\$180), which is served on a bed of peppery watercress and lettuce.

Wanda's chirashi (生魚片蓋飯, NT\$170), with sashimi layered on top of a bowl of rice sprinkled with flakes of salty-sweet furikake, offers good value for sushi lovers. Its sushi and sashimi combos, however, are hit and miss. The combination sashimi platter (綜合生魚片, NT\$280) is composed of tuna, amberjack and salmon sashimi and a fresh prawn prettily arranged on a bed of crushed ice and garnished with a paper umbrella. Unfortunately, the dish did not live up to its presentation. The tuna pieces were limp and separating into segments, but otherwise appeared and tasted fine. The floppy and somewhat lifeless slices of salmon were more tedious to get through. The amberjack slices were also mediocre, though the prawn was delicious.

While the sashimi platter did not pass muster, the sushi combo (綜合壽司, NT\$160) was downright disappointing. Though its decor is more upscale, Wanda still serves sushi rolls with a layer of saran wrap around them, which has the effect of compacting and hardening the rice and giving diners with the impression that the sushi is not freshly made. The combination's California roll would have been fine if it weren't for a large dollop of overwhelmingly sweet mayonnaise sauce, while the roll with shredded dried pork, cucumber, egg and pickled radish was also lackluster. The sweet inari, or tofu skin, nigiri was okay, probably because it had mercifully escaped the cling wrap.

Wanda's menu also includes hot dishes including a large selection of grilled fish, as well as Japanese favorites such as pork cutlets on sweet, coconut milk curry (咖哩豬排飯, NT\$130).

— CATHERINE SHU



Wanda's sashimi combo platter fails to live up to its presentation.

PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

Don't worry, be happy

Officials discover that people are vanishing in Taipei's MRT stations and want the mystery solved before the media finds out. This is the central conceit of Theatre de la Sardine's (沙丁魚客團) fifth production, *Underground* (地底的天空), currently playing at the National Experimental Theater.

It stars the troupe's founder, Ma Zhao-qi (馬照琪), as an arrogant and thuggish male detective who is hired to find the missing persons. She also directs the work, which was translated from a script written by her husband, French expatriate Vincent Leconte.

Theatre de la Sardine has gained a reputation in Taipei's theater scene for creating works that use masks, puppetry and multimedia.

The use of masks in this production is particularly effective because they personify the characters. Ma's face, for example, is concealed behind the mask of a bulldog, which reinforces her character's gruff exterior.

The detective is a world-weary hack. Bored by his assignment, he falls asleep in an MRT station and wakes up in a dreamlike world where he discovers the missing people. The playwright uses this parallel world to explore *Underground's* central theme: How do we attain happiness?

"In the play, like in life, we all have to make choices. Should I find a job and raise a family? Or should I pursue my passions. And I think at one point or another we all have to face this basic issue of should we pursue our dreams or conform to what society wants us to do," Ma said.

Audiences familiar with Theatre de la Sardine's work will notice the social commentary. But the play doesn't get bogged down by its message because the characters' humorous banter and exaggerated gestures keep things moving at a frenetic pace.

The professors, students and scientists — to name a few of the play's characters who have disappeared into the parallel universe — pursue their dreams free from the pressures of family or work. Witnessing these self-fulfilled individuals go through their daily routines inspires the investigator, and his search for the missing people turns into a search for his own happiness.

"The journey gradually changes him because these people constantly ask him why: Why don't you want to stay? Why do you want to return the real world?" Ma said.



A detective searches for missing people and his own happiness in Theatre de la Sardine's *Underground*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THEATRE DE LA SARDINE

As the detective struggles with these questions, he faces another conundrum. Before he entered the MRT system, officials said they were planning to destroy the station the next morning.

Unsure if he wants to stay but increasingly certain that he doesn't want the utopian world he has discovered to be destroyed by mindless bureaucrats, the investigator has to make a choice between his professional obligations and the enchanted world he has found.

— NOAH BUCHAN

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: *Underground* (地底的天空)

WHERE: National Experimental Theater, Taipei City

WHEN: Today and tomorrow at 7:30pm and tomorrow and Sunday at 2:30pm

ADMISSION: NT\$450 tickets are available through NTCH ticketing or online at www.artsticket.com.tw



Aside from the bands, Spring Scream threw up a little electronic treat this year.

"I loved how my acid electronic sounds echoed through the green fields at Spring Scream," said Mei Wong, otherwise known as The Analog Girl. "Performing from sunset straight into moonlit skies was also such a surreal experience."

At 6pm last Saturday, the 50 or so people in the audience witnessed a stunning Singaporean singing over her MacBook Pro-produced tracks and using a Yamaha Tenori-On, a futuristic-looking LCD handheld screen.

"It is a music sequencer which allows you to create beats and melodies on the spot using a 16-by-16 button matrix," said Wong.

"What's so exciting about this piece of music technology is that the LED buttons light up and animate as you press them to form your song. And the light can be seen from both the front and back of the machine, so the audience [is] able to partake in the visual feast as well, which takes live electronic music performances to a whole new different level of experience."

Characterized by *Time* as a cross between Tricky and Bjork, Wong described her music as, "technicolored candy floss running through a sun-kissed horizon. Electro music for those lazy outdoor afternoon naps on the soft green grass."

Catch her tonight at After the Scream at Bliss, B1, 77, Wuchang St Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市武昌街二段77號B1). From 10pm.

On the Net: www.analog-girl.net



The Analog Girl: digitally dreamy.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JULIUS LANGAU

Moving on to the darker side of electronica, it looks like Spring Scream was usurped this year by 48RENU, a huge outdoor party held at Hengchun Airport that showcased a wide range of international artists leaning towards indie electro-rock, breaks and tech-house.

"Credit given where credit is due to **Boogie, Freaky Squeaker, DJ Mykal, and Spykee Fat** [formerly of dance rock duo **Tomodachi**] for kick-starting and making this scene what it is today and making it possible for an event like this to coexist in a scene that has been previously dominated by trance, house and hip-hop," said 48RENU attendee and Taipei-based DJ **Shawn Kidd**.

Friday nights at Spring Scream can be a little quiet while the revelers arrive, "but this wasn't the case at 48RENU as local Taichung Swank DJs geared up the crowd just in time for Brazilian DJ **Anderson Noise** to

step it up a notch with his deep crunchy tech beats," said Kidd. "This was followed by **Rogue Element** who stole the show."

Saturday was the big one however, "rolling out the same hard-hitting punch with **Aquasky, Spykee Fat, DJ Mykal, Atomic Hooligan, Felix Cartal, LA Riots and EvilNine** spinning their legendary *They Live* track mashed up with old skool rock," Kidd said.

Taiwanese DJ of the moment, Spykee Fat and his Dance Rock promotion team will be rolling out another installment of their well-attended electro clash nights at The Wall (這牆) tonight.

Tonight: Drunk Rocker 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) from 11:30pm until 4am. Entry is NT\$400 with a drink.

— TOM LEEMING

TOP FIVE MANDARIN ALBUMS MARCH 27 TO APRIL 2

1 Jolin Tsai (蔡依林) and *Butterfly* (花蝴蝶) with 68.11 percent of sales

2 Power Station (動力火車) and *Moving On* (繼續轉動) with 3.33%

3 Fish Leong (梁靜茹) and *Fall in Love & Songs — Don't Cry for Him Anymore* (靜茹&情歌 — 別再為他流淚) with 3.02%

4 Wang Ruo-lin (王若琳) and *Joanna and Wang Ruo-lin* (Joanna and 王若琳) with 1.37%

5 Ji Jia-song (紀佳松) and *Blue J* with 0.94%

ALBUM CHART COMPILED FROM G-MUSIC (WWW.G-MUSIC.COM.TW), BASED ON RETAIL SALES

[EVENTS & ENTERTAINMENT]

Acoustic folk group **Country Boys** (農村武裝青年) and post-rock band **The Peppermints** (薄荷葉) play tonight at **Underworld** (地下社). Tomorrow evening it's metal bands **Revilement**, a Cannibal Corpse-inspired grind-metal band, and **The Freeleaders**. Appearing Wednesday are hip-hop rockers **Living Force** (存活勢力) and indie-electronica group **The Shine and Shine and Shine** (閃閃閃閃).
 ▶ 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 run from 9:30pm to 11:30pm on Fridays and Saturdays and 9pm to 11pm on Wednesdays
 ▶ Entrance is NT\$300 tonight and tomorrow and includes one drink, NT\$100 on Wednesday

Larsen藝坊, 30, Ln 45 Liaoning St, Taipei City (台北市遼寧街45巷30號). Open Tuesdays through Sundays from 11am to 8pm. Tel: (02) 8772-5005. On the Net: www.pethanlarsen.com
 ▶ Until May 17

Kamatani Tetsutaro employs mixed media materials, such as Barbie dolls and plastic toy soldiers, as well as acrylic on canvas to explore the constantly shifting line between the real and unreal in his solo exhibition **Ultra Superficial**.
 ▶ Gallery J Chen, 3F, 40, Ln 161, Dunhua S Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市敦化南路一段161巷40號3F). Open Tuesdays through Sundays from 12pm to 9pm. Tel: (02) 2781-0959. On the Net: www.galleryjchen.com
 ▶ Until April 30

Y.E.S., Taiwan — Young Emerging Stars, Taiwan (台灣當代藝術潛力新秀聯展) is a group exhibit that explores different aspects of contemporary Taiwan through sculptures and paintings by 12 of the country's hottest emerging artists.
 ▶ AKI Gallery (也趣畫廊), 141 Mintsu W Rd, Taipei City (台北市民族西路141號). Open Tuesdays through Sundays from 12pm to 6:30pm. Tel: (02) 2599-1171. On the Net:

www.akigallery.com.tw
 ▶ Until April 26

A Jiacha Experience (間 — 交叉體驗) is a joint exhibit by French artist BlueScreen and Taiwan's The Puppet and its Double Theater (無獨有偶劇團). The interactive installation ponders the meeting points between performance art, new media and contemporary art. It encourages visitors to interact with the exhibit's environment and play with objects found within the space to gain a deeper understanding of the process of artistic creation.
 ▶ Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei (MOCA, Taipei), 39 Chang'an W Rd, Taipei City (台北市長安西路39號). Open Tuesdays through Sundays from 10am to 6pm. Tel: (02) 2552-3721. On the Net: www.mocatapei.org.tw
 ▶ Until April 26

Collision Between Taboo and Desire: Hou Chun-ming Works of Print, 1992-2008 (六腳侯氏—衝撞在慾望與禁忌之間的版畫創作 1992-2008) displays 13 sets of the artist's printmaking. Bearing titles such as *Erotic Paradise* and *Paradise Lost for the Heterosexuals*, the pieces unflinchingly explore religion, sexual desire and the artist's

own life experiences.

▶ National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts in Taichung (國立台灣美術館), 2, Wucyuan W Rd Sec 1, Taichung City (台中市五權西路一段2號). Open Tuesdays through Sundays from 9am to 5pm. Tel: (04) 2372-3552
 ▶ Until May 24

Lee Tsai-chien's Solo Exhibition (李再鈞雕塑個展) features 18 metal objects by Taiwan's preeminent master of geometrical sculpture. Ancient Greek ideal forms and Buddhist and Taoist philosophy inspire Lee's monumental creations.
 ▶ Main Trend Gallery (大趨勢畫廊), 209-1, Chengde Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市承德路三段209-1號). Open Tuesdays through Saturdays from 11am to 7pm. Tel: (02) 2587-3412. On the Net: [www.maintrendgallery.com.tw](http://www maintrendgallery.com.tw)
 ▶ Until April 25

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 (鶯歌陶藝博物館), 200 Wenhua Rd, Yingge Township, Taipei County (台北縣鶯歌鎮文化路200號). Open Tuesdays to Fridays from 9:30am to 5pm and Saturdays and Sundays from 9:30am to 6pm. Tel: (02) 8677-2727. On the Net: www.ceramics.tpc.gov.tw
 ▶ Until April 19

Ancient Pottery of the Paiwan Tribe in Taiwan (祖靈的居所—台灣排灣族古陶藝特展) 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, Guancian Rd, Taichung City (台中市館前路1號). Open Tuesdays through Sundays from 9am to 5pm. 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, Guancian Rd, Taichung City (台中市館前路1號). Open Tuesdays through Sundays from 9am to 5pm. On the Net: www.nmns.edu.tw
 ▶ Until May 31

Exhibitions

Cuba: The Island Garden is a photography exhibit by US photographer Keith Brown that sympathetically documents the people and architecture of the last bastion of communism in Latin America.
 ▶ Pethany Larsen Gallery (Pethany



Not quite amore, but pretty close.

PHOTO: STEVE PRICE, TAIPEI TIMES

Blanco

Address: 19, Ln 112, Renai Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市仁愛路四段112巷19號)
Telephone: (02) 2325-3655
Average meal: NT\$350 for lunch; NT\$600 for dinner
Open: 11:30am to 9:30pm; last orders at 8:30pm
Details: English and Chinese menu; credit cards accepted
On the Net: www.wretch.com/mypage/blancotw1

Blanco's staff members are perceptive — they know how to spot a restaurant reviewer. They show initiative and are shrewd operators. But resorting to bribery with a discounted bill should be verboten, especially as there's no need in this instance.

The restaurant may not go in for the esoteric culinary pleasures of Italy's regional cuisines, but its menu, which is reassuringly limited, features a decent selection of Italianesque dishes: risotto, pasta and pizza. Made from rice grown in Taitung, which has a smaller carbon footprint than arborio rice imported from Italy, the lunch menu's organic risotto with mushroom in cream (NT\$270) can be ordered with the addition of black truffle sauce for an extra NT\$40. And who wouldn't? The fungus' pungent, earthy, meaty flavor and musky aroma can rescue the most mundane fare and turn it into something verging on exquisite.

The organic risotto with shrimp and tomato (NT\$290) brightened the table with its yellow/red glow, the result of adding saffron, and tasted sun-kissed.

Three sets are available. The lunch version (NT\$220 to NT\$320) is served from 11:30am to 2:30pm and includes a choice of soup or salad, a main course and, for the addition of NT\$80, a drink or gelato.

The tea set (NT\$160 to NT\$260), available from 2:30pm to 5:30pm, features a choice of sandwiches, pizza, cake, waffles or, the most tantalizing option, egg with truffle and tomato with basil toast platter (NT\$220), and a drink.

For dinner, options include lamb (NT\$680), salmon fillet (NT\$580) or chicken (NT\$480), all with seven-year balsamic vinegar, a choice of salad or soup, gelato or cake, and a drink.

The soup on a recent visit was boring, but the salad, made with lollo rosso, cherry tomato, yellow pepper, olives, fraise, cucumber and romaine lettuce accompanied with a slightly sour cream dressing, while not quite a revelation, put many of Blanco's peers to shame with their limp iceberg and thousand island dressing.

The gelato further sets the restaurant apart. Of particular note are the lemon, chocolate and blueberry flavors, the latter made with tomato, which deepens what can sometimes be a sickly sweet dessert.

Split into a main dining room — walls painted white and green with a dark charcoal ceiling, furnished with white wooden tables, cabinets filled with pottery and X-back wooden chairs upholstered in beige fabric — and the area adjoining the open-plan kitchen, which is completely done out in white, Blanco exudes a cool air of sophistication. A private room at the back of the restaurant seats 10 around a heavy undressed wooden table. At the front, imported Italian produce is displayed in brightly lit cabinets, including wine (Torre A Cenaia, sangiovese 2006, NT\$880; Tosco Torre Del Vajo 2005, NT\$1,190), vinegar (Il Grande Vecchio 100 years balsamic vinegar, NT\$18,500 for 68g), sauces (Villa Reale Sicilian pesto sauce, NT\$290 for 180g), Giuliano Tartuffi whole summer truffles (NT\$455) and olive (Lorenzo No1 D.O.P. Valli Trapanesi Organic extra virgin olive oil, NT\$1,380).

Blanco is located on the alley adjacent to Taishin International Bank Tower (台新金控大樓) on Renai Circle (仁愛圓環).

— STEVE PRICE