

# Everywhere man

Hailed as the 'godfather' of Taiwan's hotel industry, Stanley Yen sees the country's culture and lifestyle as its most valuable asset

BY NOAH BUCHAN  
STAFF REPORTER

Scheduling a time to interview Stanley Yen (嚴長壽) was no simple task. The Landis Hotels and Resorts Group president had a packed schedule promoting Taiwan at conferences overseas and showing off the country's eastern region to groups of diplomats, among other things.

Hailed as the "godfather of Taiwan's hotel industry" (飯店教父), Yen, 62, has one of the most recognizable and respected faces in the country's tourism sector. He began his career as an errand boy for American Express in 1971 and quickly moved up the ranks to become its general manager in Taiwan at the age of 28. Four years later he left that position to work in Taiwan's flourishing hospitality industry. He is now Group President of Landis Hotels and Resorts and President of the Landis Hotel, Taipei. But he is not just a hotel manager. By his own account, Yen is a member of roughly 20 foundations — including the Taiwan Visitors Association (台灣觀光協會), where he is honorary chairman, and Taiwan's International Travel Fair — and is on the board of directors for two hospitals.

He has published four books including *From Messenger to Manager* (總裁獅子心), a rags-to-riches tale peppered with managerial tips that has sold more than 500,000 copies. His most recent work, *Be an Angel to Oneself and Others* (做自己與別人生命中的天使), calls for Taiwan's younger generations to have faith in themselves.

It's only to be expected that the stacks of books and knickknacks in his spacious office have been culled from all over Taiwan. *Taipei Times* reporter Noah Buchan sat down with Yen to discuss the innumerable trips around Taiwan that resulted in this impressive collection of souvenirs, his rise through the ranks of the hospitality industry, the state of tourism in Taiwan, and the country's youth.

**Taipei Times: The last time we spoke [December 2008] you were on the way to Ilan — or you were promoting the east coast of the island. A few weeks ago you were down in Pingtung.**

**Stanley Yen:** I'm virtually everywhere, almost every county, talking to every mayor — all my weekends are used. The weekend before this I was in Singapore and Malaysia and the weekend before that I was in Hualien.

**TT: You seem to place a lot of emphasis on Taiwan's east coast.**

**SY:** I'm fighting against time. I've seen some very greedy developers trying to force the government to build a highway to go across the tunnel bridge. Out of 87km they are going to destroy a lot of the environment and sensitive areas. I'd rather we have enough traffic, but what we also need is for people not to go there for just one day. They should go there and stay longer.

[President] Ma [Ying-jeou (馬英九)] joined part of the program. It was very positive and all the diplomats were very touched because they saw things that they ordinarily wouldn't see

— not just the scenery but also the people: the artists, the outstanding singers, carvers, dancers. The lifestyle ... But our travel agents and our government still separate tourism and culture without understanding the true value.

**TT: What do you mean by true value?**

**SY:** First of all, before you know your customer, you have to know yourself. What is Taiwan's strength? I think that culture is the most important value in this country.

**TT: How would you characterize Taiwan's tourism scene?**

**SY:** I divide tourism into three phases. The first is what I call, "riding the horse and admiring flowers" (走馬看花). You are riding on a horse and you take the quickest

time to see the flowers. So people will go to Sun Moon Lake (日月潭), Alishan (阿里山) — you know, a quick trip. This happened 30 years ago when people from Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia came to Taiwan. At that time they would go on a seven-, eight- or nine-day tour and cover every major city and then disappear. And now China does the same thing. They will go to any destination they've heard about.

And this is what Taiwanese did when we went to Europe. We would cover as many cities as possible and once we've done it we don't go back. That's one thing I've experienced. A lot of money, a lot of time. Today, nobody wants to do that anymore.

**TT: What do Taiwanese do now?**

**SY:** Everybody goes for 10 days or two weeks and only ... to one or two cities. Prague and Vienna for eight days. Or southern France for eight days.

**TT: So the style of tourism for Taiwanese has changed quite significantly.**

**SY:** Taiwanese have become more sophisticated. We now go to see the culture and this is the second phase called "in-depth traveling" (深度旅遊). And that's more related to culture and lifestyle.

The third level relates to all modern people. You have so much stress at work and you want to go somewhere to relax and do nothing. People go to Bali. They go to the mountains and bring a couple of books for one week, they have a little massage and spa and meditation. After one week they are happy and they come back. And I try to introduce that to our government and our people and our industry.

Of these three categories the most unsuitable for Taiwan to develop is first-generation tourism. Especially with China.

**TT: Why is that?**

**SY:** Because if you try to compare, for example, West Lake (西湖) in mainland China, Sun Moon Lake means nothing. If you go to Ali Mountain [China], has so many mountains — Nanshan (南山), Huashan (華山), Huangshan (黃山) — they have all these beautiful mountains with clouds. They have all these minority tribes and indigenous people. If you try to impress them with that, it's probably not going to work.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15

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— Stanley Yen, hotelier



Stanley Yen rose from the lowly position of errand boy to become one of the hotel industry's leading lights.

PHOTO COURTESY OF STANLEY YEN

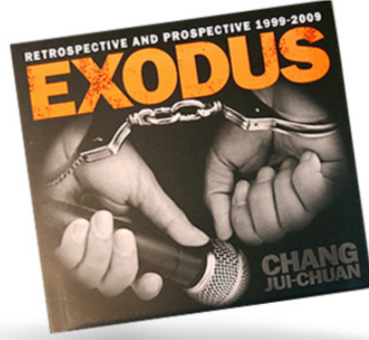
## [ CD REVIEWS: TAIWAN ]



**Lala's First Original Songs**  
(首張創作專輯)  
Hsu Chia-ying (徐佳瑩, aka Lala)  
AsiaMuse Entertainment



**City (城市)**  
Deserts Chang (張懸)  
Sony BMG



**Chang Jui-chuan (張睿鈺)**  
*Exodus: Retrospective and Prospective 1999-2009*  
Uloud Music



**Various Artists**  
*Out-of-Print Taiwanese Popular Songs From the 1930s (1930年代絕版台語流行歌)*  
Taipei City Government Department of Cultural Affairs (台北市政府文化局)  
and Taiwan New Cultural Movement Hall Planning Office (台灣新文化運動紀念館籌備處)

Hsu Chia-ying (徐佳瑩) was one of the boldest and most creative of the alumni from the third season of CTV's *One Million Star* (超級星光大道) pop music talent show. The release of her debut album suggests that she might be around for some time. Her song *I Ride a White Horse* (身騎白馬), which combines teen pop and *gezai* opera (歌仔戲), has already proved a huge hit securing massive airtime, and has the distinction of achieving a smooth musical and lyrical integration between two very different forms, a feat that has confounded many more experienced artists.

The chorus of *I Ride a White Horse*, sung in Taiwanese, references not just a classical heritage, but also, whether intentionally or not, its glitzy, kitschy manifestation of televised golden light puppets. It is romantic, heroic, just a tad tongue-in-cheek, and totally self-assured.

At just 24, Hsu has emerged as a talented musician in the Mando-pop mainstream, and one who is no stranger to the commercial possibilities of a catchy tune. The final track on the album *My Door's Not Locked* (沒鎖門) was commissioned for the 10th anniversary of the MSN chat service, and for all its marketing functionality, is a remarkably appealing bit of bubblegum pop, down to MSN sound effects and online slang.

Most of the songs are playful and reference everything from well-known classical poems to the preference

settings of online chatting software. The result is an attractive lack of pretense in the way these references are used. Hsu is very much at home in the world of MSN, Japanese-inflected slang, Internet jargon and Taiwanese catchphrases, and has, for the most part, incorporated them effectively into her songs. It is not groundbreaking stuff, but Hsu has produced an album of well-crafted pop music that has the occasional spark of real invention. What more can you ask? Since her appearance in *One Million Star*, Hsu has lost something of her Betty Boop chubbiness; let's hope that the entertainment industry has not sweated away her creativity in the process.

— IAN BARTHOLOMEW

With her third album, *City* (城市), singer-songwriter Deserts Chang (張懸) has taken her music into the mainstream, picking up backing band *Algae*, a Brit-pop sound, and a hint of rock princess attitude. For the soft-spoken singer who came to fame on the campus circuit with her disarmingly simple first album *My Life Will ...* with vulnerable songs like *Baby* (寶貝), this is quite a shift. This new album might be described as electronic-tinged urban folk rock.

Chang is a talented lyricist, but with *City* she has moved from an intimate world of personal experience to take on the broader canvas of modern life in the big city. She has put on some

big city attitude, but this is not enough to cover up her lack of assurance in this new milieu. The album is full of clichés, but is saved from itself by Chang's ever-evocative voice and occasional melodic brio. Behind the tired rock 'n' roll poses, there are still flashes of vulnerability and a fearless curiosity about herself and the world around her.

The song *Jiu Zai* (就在) has plenty of lyrical sophistication and a driving rhythm that creates one of the most appealing numbers on the album. The more heavily orchestrated and electronic title track is a well-crafted pop song but thick with echoes of Faith Yang's (楊乃文) early work. The acoustic *Beautiful Woman* is full of the sunshine of young love set against a cheery melody; it's a nice take on a familiar theme, but its appeal is in its superficial throwaway pop quality. When Chang tries to get deep, with songs like *Selling*, which is about consumer culture, she has little to say and the tough attitude comes off as a little girl playing at tigers. By trying to be more than she is, Chang has produced an album that shortchanges her talent.

— IAN BARTHOLOMEW

This compilation from socially conscious rapper Chang Jui-chuan (張睿鈺) offers some relief from the R 'n' B and hip-hop wannabes that litter the Mando-pop landscape in Taiwan.

Even if the title seems a little grandiose — much of the album contains

remixes from Chang's 2006 debut, *Genesis* (創世記) — the songs remain fresh and worth a listen.

Chang's anti-globalization diatribe, *My Language* (我的語言), gets two treatments: The "Universal Grammar Mix" is a straight-up version full of feel-good R 'n' B riffs and Chinese pop hooks; the second version is an artful mash-up done in collaboration with popstar-turned-electronica artist Lim Giong (林強). Chang, who raps in both English and Hokkien [commonly known as Taiwanese], sometimes trips over his own eloquence at the expense of the groove. But his delivery impresses on rhymes like "I speak your language don't mean I'm your slave/I speak your language cause I'm about to invade/ Your music, your culture, your beliefs and your fate/With kung fu, Confucius, Tao, and my name."

He can carry a tune, too. On the "Dub Mix" version of *Hope is Here* (希望的所在), recorded with Red-I and the Riddim Outlawz, he croons about his wish for all Taiwanese to "unite." The song's reggae instrumentation works well with Chang's Hokkien lyrics and best of all, it sounds natural and authentic.

And for those worried about Taiwanese youth losing sight of their history, Chang comes to the rescue. *Hey Kid*, a catchy retelling of the 228 incident and bits of the White Terror period, is a nice example of folk music storytelling incorporated into hip-hop. Other notable collaborators include

South African MoShang, who leaves his signature mix of Asian music grooves on the "Disquiet Mix" of *Hey Kid* and the "Freedom Mix" of *Hope Is Here*. Hakka hip-hop crew Kou Chou Ching (袴秋動) appears on *Civil Revolt Chapter 1*.

Chang's poster-boy image — as a PhD student, lecturer in English composition and devout Christian — adds to his novelty as a rapper. But this doesn't make for a reason to take note of *Exodus*; rather, it's Chang's conviction and talent that make him one to watch.

— DAVID CHEN

Some oldies are waiting to be rediscovered in this collection of Taiwanese popular songs from the 1930s. This 23-song CD and accompanying 100-page booklet will interest history buffs, record collectors and anyone interested in the roots of Asian pop.

The songs were digitized from 78 RPM records loaned by collectors. As such, expect to hear a few pops and scratches, but consider it part of the experience of listening to these rare recordings.

The recordings were part of an effort among musicians and composers to preserve Taiwan's culture by creating its own pop music during the Japanese occupation.

Taiwanese lyricist Lee Lin-chiu (李臨秋) features prominently, having penned nearly half of the tracks in this collection. Other artists include well-known composer Teng Yu-hsien (鄧雨賢)

and lyricists Chen Chun-yu (陳君玉) and Chen Ta-ju (陳達儒).

Listeners will recognize classic folk melodies sung in Hokkien. Many songs were recorded with brass and string orchestras, standard for that time, which lend the tunes a quaint charm.

Traditional Chinese instruments like the *pipa* (琵琶) and bamboo flute also appear, and the final two tracks are the A and B sides of a Taiwanese opera record.

But just as notable are the outside influences heard in the music. The melody to *Dadaocheng Late at Night* (夜半的大稻埕) writhes slowly and sorrowfully much like a Japanese *nakasi* tune. *To the Flowers* (對花) almost bounces with jazz syncopation.

There's another hint of American pop culture in *Hope in the Spring Winds* (望春風): The vibrato notes from a steel guitar are most likely a nod to the worldwide popularity of Hawaiian music at the time.

Taipei City's Department of Cultural Affairs and the Taiwan New Cultural Movement Hall deserve credit for pouring resources into an interesting and worthy project. But recognition is also due to project planner and collector Chuang Yung-ming (莊永明), who wrote an extensive history and background on the composers, singers and songs for the accompanying booklet. Unfortunately it's only in Mandarin.

The CD is currently available at EsLite Music Store (誠品音樂館).

— DAVID CHEN