

## POP STOP

COMPILED BY CATHERINE SHU



There's nothing like the whiff of scandal to boost record sales.

PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES

Japanese pop princess **Noriko Sakai** has been enmeshed in a drug scandal involving several members of her family and a brief and mysterious disappearance on her part — but it's only helped the chanteuse's record sales.

Sakai's estranged husband, **Yuichi Takaso**, was arrested on Aug. 4 after reportedly being caught with drugs squirreled away in his underwear. Police raided Sakai's home on a tip from Takaso, a professional surfer, and found a small amount of an illegal drug.

Faced with police requests for questioning, Sakai did what any rational person would do and disappeared with her 10-year-old son, wandering around Japan for several days and causing an intense media frenzy before she finally returned to Tokyo. She tested clean for traces of drugs in her system, but is still under suspicion. If it turns out that Sakai is indeed a user, then it just runs in the family — her younger brother was arrested last month on drug charges.

Despite her weird behavior, Sakai still enjoys a great deal of sympathy from her fans who, the *Liberty Times* (the *Taipei Times*' sister paper) reports have flooded police hotlines with angry phone calls demanding just treatment for their idol.

Without actually admitting culpability, Sakai told reporters that her husband was a pusher who pressured her to take drugs with him last summer. When asked about her alleged flight from justice, Sakai snapped, "I don't want to talk about that!" before backtracking. She'd been so upset by news of her husband's arrest, Sakai said, that she'd traveled all over Japan in a state of frenzy. Seeing herself described as a fugitive on TV news made her decide to return to Tokyo.

The president of Sun Music Production, Sakai's agency, said in a press conference that the company was behind its wayward star 100 percent. **Masahisa Aizawa** said Sakai would not be fired and then added, somewhat plaintively, "I've known her for 23 years. It

makes me sad she didn't tell me about her problems. I hope she does some soul-searching." Either way, it looks like Aizawa will be able to wipe his tears away on the back of lots and lots of yen notes. Sakai's songs have been bestsellers on iTunes and Amazon Japan since the scandal broke.

Also suffering some marital discord last week (albeit without drugs involved) was **Edward Chiang** (蔣友常), the grandson of Chiang Kai-shek (蔣介石), who *Next Magazine* gleefully reported has already left his wife of nine months, Hong Kong jewelry designer **Candice Luk** (陸敬賢), and has been spotted all over Taipei with a new and as-of-yet unidentified lady love in tow.

Chiang, who an online survey once named one of Taiwan's most handsome career men, was hitched last September to Luk in a Montreal ceremony, but did not hold a wedding banquet in Taiwan, which *Next* seems to consider, in retrospect, a sign that the marriage was doomed.

*Next's* spies and photographers caught Chiang and his new paramour holding hands, munching on hamburgers and French fries, laughing at each other's jokes and fetching groceries — before reportedly heading back to Chiang's place to spend the night.

The snaps stand in contrast to photos of Chiang and Luk taken just four months ago. The two looked dour even when giving each other good-bye pecks on the mouth. *Next* speculated that even though Chiang has reportedly already filed for divorce, his extra-marital dalliances started when his relationship with Luk was still supposedly going strong.

Actress **Zhang Ziyi** (章子怡), meanwhile, has been fighting rumors of a split with her fiancé **Vivi Nevo** ever since announcing last month that the duo had postponed their nuptials due to work obligations — and it looks like the stress might be getting to her. Gossip pages this week reported that Zhang is feuding with **Fan Bingbing** (范冰冰), her co-star in *Sophie's Revenge* (非常完美), which Zhang also produced.

Zhang reportedly exercised her producing prerogative to prevent Fan from traveling to South Korea for publicity events and had the Chinese starlet's face excised from *Sophie's Revenge* posters in that country. The cause of the beef is unknown, but it is apparently so rancid that congratulatory messages from some of the world's top directors, including **Ang Lee** (李安), **Zhang Yimou** (張藝謀) and **Wong Kar-wai** (王家衛), where apparently unable to temper Zhang's hissy fit.

BY MARCUS AURELIUS



## FESTIVAL NOTES:

**WHAT:** Jump Festival (跳起來音樂節)  
**WHERE:** Huashan Culture Park (華山文化園區), 1, Bade Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市八德路一段1號), near the intersection of Jinshan North (金山北) and Zhongxiao East (忠孝東) roads  
**WHEN:** Tomorrow from 2:30pm to 4am and Sunday from 2:30pm to 10:30pm  
**ON THE NET:** www.wretch.cc/blog/JumpFestival  
**ADMISSION:** Tickets are NT\$500 for one day and NT\$800 for two days, available through tickets.books.com.tw or by calling (02) 2782-1100 X531, X532, X534, X535, X566

## TOMORROW

## PAIN STAGE (跳痛舞台)

2:30pm to 3pm Rachel Kar (賈立怡)  
 3:15pm to 3:45pm FiFiTwo (緋緋兔)  
 4pm to 4:30pm Jar'n Jam (扎一針)  
 4:45pm to 5:15pm BB Bomb (BB彈)  
 5:30pm to 6pm Kenny From Casino (賭場肯尼)  
 6:15pm to 6:45pm Red Flower (紅花樂團)  
 7pm to 7:30pm Mister Mouth (瞞哥樂團)  
 7:45pm to 8:15pm Connie Sin (呂莘)  
 8:30pm to 9pm Lazy Lady  
 9:15pm to 9:45pm Funky Brother

## SEXUAL SCAM STAGE (仙人跳舞台)

2:30pm to 3pm Epitaph  
 3:15pm to 3:45pm Face Yesterday  
 4pm to 4:30pm Obsess  
 4:45pm to 5:15pm Zenkwun (神棍樂團)  
 5:30pm to 6pm Human Brutality  
 6:15pm to 6:45pm Down in Air (瀟在空中)  
 7pm to 7:30pm Mary See the Future  
 7:45pm to 8:15pm Hot Pink  
 8:30pm to 9pm Pa Pang (怕胖)  
 9:15pm to 9:45pm Ban Ban (斑斑)

## BLACKOUT STAGE (跳電舞台)

2:30pm to 3pm Indie Famous  
 3:15pm to 3:45pm Havens (黑凡斯)  
 4pm to 4:30pm Hsiao Nan (小南) and Iron Monkey (鐵猴子)  
 4:45pm to 5:15pm Soundboss (驢包)  
 5:30pm to 6pm Alien Avenue (異族亡魂)  
 6:15pm to 6:45pm AP  
 7pm to 7:30pm Tri-Poets (參劈)  
 7:45pm to 8:15pm Shebang-a (死蚊子)  
 8:30pm to 9pm New Yorker (紐約客)

9:15pm to 9:45pm Skaraoke

## HEARTBEAT STAGE (心兒怦怦跳舞台)

2:30pm to 3pm Every Planet (美味星球)  
 3:15pm to 3:45pm Feng Lai Fang (風賴坊)  
 4pm to 4:30pm Slow Motion  
 4:45pm to 5:15pm Elesha (伊蕾莎)  
 5:30pm to 6pm Misike (柯派萊)  
 6:15pm to 6:45pm Anniedora (安妮朵拉)  
 7pm to 7:30pm Engine 9 (九號引擎)  
 7:45pm to 8:15pm Queen Suitcase (皇后皮箱)  
 8:30pm to 9pm The Peppermints (薄荷葉)  
 9:15pm to 9:45pm The Fen-Fens (紛紛—趙之璧)  
 10pm to 10:30pm Sunny4

## CRAZY DANCING STAGE (跳很大舞台)

2:30pm to 3pm Van Fan (范逸臣) and The Handsome Band (就是帥樂團)  
 3:15pm to 3:45pm (自由發揮) Free Expression  
 4pm to 4:30pm Children Sucker (表兒)  
 4:45pm to 4:15pm Coach (教練樂團)  
 5:30pm to 6pm Dog G (大支)  
 6:15pm to 6:45pm Punkhoo (胖虎)  
 7pm to 7:30pm DaXiMen (大囍門)  
 7:45pm to 8:15pm Cherry Boom (櫻桃幫) and Wu Bai (伍佰)  
 8:30pm to 9pm Jam Hsiao (蕭敬騰) and Great! (真是棒)  
 9:15pm to 9:45pm 88 Balaz (88顆芭樂籽)

## DANCE STAGE (跳起來派對)

10pm to midnight DJ Triple 1  
 Midnight to 2am DJ Lucy  
 2am to 4am DJ Kwest aka Shotcaller

## Jump to it

How do you get more than 100 bands and DJs, including top-drawer performers such as Wu Bai (伍佰) and China Blue and Van Fan (范逸臣), to play at a two-day festival in central Taipei — for free?

That's the feat that Brown Chen (布朗) pulled off for this weekend's Jump Festival (跳起來音樂節) at Huashan Culture Park (華山文化園區).

Armed with a compelling concept but hampered by a meager budget, Chen turned to blogs and social networking sites such as Plurk, Twitter and Facebook to spread the word.

"We didn't buy a Web domain so our main page is on Wretch. Two months ago we were getting 50 hits per day," Chen said.

He traveled around the country, met and interviewed bands, many of which he had never heard of, and photographed them jumping in the air. After this content was uploaded to the Web site, interest in the festival erupted.

"A few of the famous bloggers in Taiwan started talking about it," Chen said. "Now we've gotten a total of 200,000 hits so far."

The buzz reached the big guns, but an inadequate budget remained a problem. Both Chen's friends' bands and the bands he didn't know were playing free of charge. After Wu Bai and China Blue, Jam Hsiao (蕭敬騰) and Van Fan spoke with him, they all agreed to waive their fees, energized by the idea behind Jump Festival.

"It's amazing because all three of them have had their own huge concerts in

arenas," Chen said. "But here, every band is equal. Everyone is open-minded."

"Wu Bai has been great," Chen said. "He's the only one that did his own video because our schedules didn't match. We've asked him to tell people to come and he has. All for free."

Chen is enamored with the hip-hop lifestyle. He used to frequent the now-defunct Da Project record store on Guangfu South Road (光復南路) and organize freestyle battles in parks through online message boards. In 2005, he grew a full-blown Afro measuring more than 1m in circumference, and released an album with his group DaXiMen (大囍門), their combined efforts leading to the hit *Office Lady*: "Office lady make me crazy. Office lady u are so sexy. Office lady u are a beauty. Office lady u are my baby."

At this year's Spring Scream, Chen once again reinvented himself: long hair, a full back-up band and a boisterous primetime performance featuring a sound reminiscent of Linkin Park. After returning from Kenting and realizing that he was just one performer on a long list of others, Chen decided to gather his friends together and organize a smaller-scale music festival in Taipei.

"First of all, I wanted to perform. Then I had five groups of people who wanted to help. Soon, five more told us not to forget about them. Ten turned into 20 which turned into 50 ... 100 and even 200," Chen said. "But the problem is that we only have 100 time slots for people to play."

4:45pm to 5:15pm Lucky Q  
 5:30pm to 6pm Almost Human  
 6:15pm to 6:45pm Davi (奈米)  
 7pm to 7:30pm Inhuman Species (非人物種)  
 7:45pm to 8:15pm Soft Lipa (蜜堡)  
 8:30pm to 9pm Overdose  
 9:15pm to 9:45pm Taimaica Soundsystem (台貴加環繞音效)

## HEARTBEAT STAGE (心兒怦怦跳舞台)

2:30pm to 3pm Be Right  
 3:15pm to 3:45pm Xiaoyu Watermelon (小玉西瓜)  
 4pm to 4:30pm Clockworkers (發條人樂團)  
 4:45pm to 5:15pm Koumis  
 5:30pm to 6pm Louisixteen (老爹與路易十六條柴)  
 6:15pm to 6:45pm Enno Cheng (鄭宜農)  
 7pm to 7:30pm (粉紅吉它與拖比兔) Pink Guitar  
 7:45pm to 8:15pm Jet (易樂齊)  
 8:30pm to 9pm Fran (法藍)  
 9:15pm to 9:45pm Elisa (林依霖)  
 10pm to 10:30pm 831 (八三天)

## CRAZY DANCING STAGE (跳很大舞台)

2:30pm to 3pm Boys & Girl  
 3:15pm to 3:45pm Joker  
 4pm to 4:30pm Kou Chou Ching (拷秋勤)  
 4:45pm to 5:15pm Iron Banana (鐵香蕉)  
 5:30pm to 6pm Julie Peng (彭佳慧)  
 6:15pm to 6:45pm A Chord (謝和弦)  
 7pm to 7:30pm E-turn, Hsing Han (星瀚), Waa Wei (魏如薈) and Queen (魏如昀)  
 7:45pm to 8:15pm Matzka (馬斯卡)  
 8:30pm to 9pm Aphasia (阿飛西雅)  
 9:15pm to 9:45pm Dong Yun-chang (董運昌)

COMPILED BY MARCUS AURELIUS

## RESTAURANTS

## Meikuanyuan (美觀園)

**Address:** 36 Emei St, Taipei City (台北市峨嵋街36號) **Telephone:** (02) 2331-7000  
**Open:** 11am to 9pm; closed on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month  
**Average meal:** NT\$400 per person

Founded in 1946, Meikuanyuan (美觀園) restaurant on Emei Street (峨嵋街) in Ximending hearkens back to the days when the area was a thriving theater district. The four floors of the restaurant's original storefront (which stands diagonally across the street from a newer second location) look like they have barely been touched over the past 60 years, with bright fluorescent lighting, dingy tiles and tables with crumpled up pieces of newspaper shoved under their legs to keep them from wobbling. Dishes are also barebones — Taiwanese twists on Japanese home-cooking favorites like curry over rice, and seafood basics including sashimi and plenty of stir-fries.

Meikuanyuan may not score high in the ambience department and its prices aren't cheap, but it is a welcome counterweight to the trendy eateries and fast food restaurants that fill Ximending and it reels in a wide variety of people. The restaurant is filled with retirees chatting over bottles of Taiwan Beer on weekday afternoons, while evenings and weekends attract a range of age groups.

The restaurant's largest sashimi platter (上飛綜合生魚片) costs NT\$460 and includes a couple pieces each of amberjack,

tuna, salmon, swordfish and squid sashimi, and a raw prawn. The slices of fish were fine, but nothing to crow about. The thickness of each slice was overwhelming and detracted from the flavor of the fish, but subtlety doesn't seem to be one of Meikuanyuan's selling points. In fact, the huge slabs of fish would probably go very well with a gigantic double-handled mug of draught beer (生啤酒天王杯, NT\$180), one of the restaurant's signature drink offerings. Another dish that would pair just as well with the beer is the vinegar-flavored raw oyster (醋物生蠔, NT\$180), a huge specimen topped with grated daikon soaked with vinegar and sprinkled with chopped green onions. The size of the oyster, which is served with a fork and knife, was intimidating, but its flavor was pleasantly mellow and creamy underneath all the toppings.

Meikuanyuan's sushi hand rolls are fine, but somewhat overpriced — a shrimp and asparagus roll (蝦蘆筍手卷) that was light on the shrimp but heavy on the asparagus and mayonnaise was NT\$75. The restaurant's other cold dishes are also very simple. The bamboo salad, for instance, is just a plate of cold bamboo shoots (竹筴沙拉, NT\$170) served with a gigantic heap of



One of Meikuanyuan's big bivalves.

PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

mayonnaise. The shoots were wonderfully tender, however, and went very well with the sweet mayo. The dish isn't exciting, but serves as a welcome palate cleanser, especially after one of Meikuanyuan's very flavorful hot dishes, like the salmon and egg fried rice (鮭魚蛋炒飯, NT\$120) or the sauce-heavy, oily shrimp stir-fry (熱炒蝦仁, NT\$200). A more interesting alternative to the bamboo salad is the fish roe salad (魚卵沙拉, NT\$160), which resembles pieces of tofu but upon closer inspection turns out to be sacs of pollack roe cooked and then sliced and served with mayonnaise (which seems to be Meikuanyuan's dressing of choice). The roe was somewhat dry and the mayonnaise didn't complement it very well. Its sweetness and richness cancelled out whatever briny flavor was left in the roe after the cooking process.

When Salt and Bread opened a couple of years ago in Taipei, the excitement raised by the introduction of a new kind of cuisine quickly dimmed with the realization that the place is about as Russian as Sarah Palin.

Now there's a real Russian restaurant in Taipei, and it's so new that it doesn't even have an official English name.

The tiny restaurant on Jihe Road (基河路) near the Shilin night market is for the time being known as "Russian Kvass" because its cook, Oleg Feklinov, sold kvass, a beverage brewed from rye with a mild beer flavor but little to no alcohol content, before opening his first restaurant two months ago. Kvass is on the menu and diners can get a glass for NT\$55 or a pitcher to take away for NT\$250.

Russian Kvass is true to the peasant traditions of Russian cuisine, offering borsch, mashed potatoes and meat gravy, salmon-filled pancakes and other staples. It aims to introduce authentic Russian food to Taiwan while providing a comfortable retreat near a popular nightspot, and it does so at affordable prices.

Savory pancakes are one of Kvass' signature dishes.

The restaurant serves chicken, mushroom and rice-filled pancakes (NT\$50) with a side of dill pickle- and-sour cream relish. The salmon pancake (NT\$90) is another treat, and for the more extravagant a caviar pancake (NT\$160) can be washed down with a swig of kvass. There are also sweet pancakes with banana and chocolate (NT\$50) or fruit (NT\$45).

On a visit last weekend, a bowl of borsch (NT\$65) containing beef, beetroot and a dollop of sour cream was ready in minutes. However, with sometimes only one person (Feklinov) acting as cook, waiter and cashier, the service, especially if you order a pancake, can be slow. Fortunately this provides an opportunity to imbibe a couple of Taiwan (NT\$45) or Belgian beers

(NT\$150) while enjoying the Russian music on the radio.

And it's worth the wait. Most of the food is made fresh — the beetroot salad with walnuts (NT\$45) was particularly good — with only the mashed potatoes with beef (NT\$50) and borsch prepared ahead of time. The service is friendly, and Feklinov is willing to explain the background of the dishes on the menu in Chinese to customers.

Russian Kvass is a small operation. A half-dozen people nearly fill up the main dining room and overwhelm the skeleton staff. The lighting is dim, the music on low volume, and a wide-open door gives diners a view of an alleyway. Feklinov says that next month he will start opening from 11am to 2pm for lunch.



Russian peasant food made perfect.

PHOTOS: THOMAS WALK, TAIPEI TIMES

## Russian Kvass

**Address:** 1F, 28-1, Room B, Xiaoxi St, Shilin Dist, Taipei City (台北市士林區小西街28-1 B室)  
**Telephone:** (02) 2881-6608 **Open:** 5pm to 11pm **Average meal:** NT\$100 to NT\$200  
**Details:** Chinese and English menu; credit cards not accepted

BY THOMAS WALK

## TIDBITS

Before tucking in comes the not insignificant problem of locating decent grub.

When the staffers here at Features Section HQ were asked to name their favorite foodie Web site or blog, hungryintaipei.blogspot.com streaked ahead. Since 2005, the anonymous blogger, who revels in the pleasures of the palate, has amassed a catalogue of more than 350 highly accessible reviews, posted with accompanying photos. Who is this insatiable Netizen? She deserves a Tidbits medal.

Second comes enjoygourmet.com.tw, a Chinese-language site that has reviewed hundreds of restaurants and graded them according to food quality, service and atmosphere with a total mark out of 100. Tantalizing photos are posted alongside each entry.

JB's wrote in with its current offerings, which include Happy Hour from 6pm to 8pm every day except Saturday, which will be from 2pm to 5pm; full English breakfast brunch every Saturday and Sunday; and traditional roast dinner on Sundays from 5:30pm. JB's is located at 148 Shida Rd, Taipei City (台北市師大路148號). Tel: (02) 2364-8222.

If you have any comments, queries or tasty morsels to share, either send an e-mail to features[at]taipeitimes.com with "Tidbits" in the subject line or find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/taipeitimes and leave a message.