

CULTURE

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13

[THE WEEKENDER]

All that jazz,
and girl
power tooBY DAVID CHEN AND DIANE BAKER
STAFF REPORTERS

The National Concert Hall's Summer Jazz Party started with some classic sounds on Friday night with the Preservation Hall Jazz Band from New Orleans. This six-person ensemble of veteran musicians and young talents delighted a nearly full house with a 90-minute showcase of traditional jazz numbers.

The set began with a rollicking version of *Short Dress Gal* and a charming rendition of *My Sweet Substitute*, sung by 77-year-old clarinetist and New Orleans legend Charlie Gabriel. The standard *St James Infirmary* was given a folksy vocal treatment by 36-year-old trumpeter Mark Braud, a nephew of two former Preservation Hall bandleaders.

Holding the band's sound together were long-time Preservation Hall pianist Rickie Monie, whose playing has a large gospel footprint, and veteran drummer Ernie Elly, who egged on the band's joyful syncopation.

But if anyone stole the show, it was Lucien Barbarin, who spent the beginning of the performance quietly driving the band's two-beat swing on the tuba. He lit up the room when he switched to trombone and vocals on *Girl of My Dreams*. His animated solos and gravely, cheerful vocals elicited a boisterous response from the audience.

While Preservation Hall is about carrying on tradition, there are also refreshing signs of new blood. The band performed *I Don't Want to Set the World on Fire*, a torch song made famous by the doo-wop group the Ink Spots, which featured singer Clint Maedgen, whose singing leaned toward a more contemporary jazz vocal style.

The band dedicated the evening's concert to areas in Taiwan hit by Typhoon Morakot, noting that it was four years ago to the day that Hurricane Katrina struck their hometown.

At times, the Preservation Hall experience couldn't cut through the austere setting of the National Concert Hall. But the band ended the show on a perfect note: its members marched off the stage while playing their final song, leading the audience in a mini-parade to the lobby, where they posed for photographs and signed autographs for a hundred or so fans, both young and old.

Heroine (迷幻英雄), which ran on Friday and yesterday as part of the Taipei Arts Festival, is testament to the superb conditioning of Taiwanese dancer Su Wen-chi (蘇文琪). Created especially for — and with — her by Belgian choreographer Arco Renz five years ago, it's a long performance for a single dancer, 60 minutes, and its lighting and sound proved a test for the audience as well on Saturday night at the Wenshan Branch of the Taipei Cultural Center.

The piece begins in total darkness, both on stage and in the theater. Pulsing electronic noise — you couldn't call it music at this point — filled the air and the audience members' heads. It was hard to tell how long the first section of total darkness lasted; it seemed at least 10 minutes but was probably much less. Then a flickering image appeared on stage, so fuzzy that you couldn't quite make out the shape and you didn't know if your eyes were playing tricks on you.

Slowly the body of a woman, facing the back of a bare stage, became visible, her arms upraised as if held by chains or ropes that she is struggling against. As the light grew, Su finally turned to confront the audience — and confront is the right word, for you felt that this collection of viewers was part of what she is struggling against.

From the initial trembling and tentative moves — the repetitive fingering of an outflung hand, the windmilling of arms, the slow half-bending spirals of the body — her movements gained strength and assertiveness. Su was clad only in a bra and a short, pleated micro-mini, her musculature on full display. Since she barely moved away from the dead center of an eight-mat square, the dance was the movement of her muscles in this confined space rather than the display of her body across spatial lines.

By the end of *Heroine*, Su is no longer a woman trapped by the confines of light, sound and space, but a woman, exhausted as she may be, exulting her command of her body and her strength in a repetitive series of motions.

The lights go down as Su windmills her arms so fast they become a blur. The audience sat in stunned silence until the lights came back up and Su came out to take her well-deserved bows.

In a question-and-answer session afterwards, Renz described the piece as representing the struggle for freedom, and it certainly is that. Since he created it especially for Su, he said he couldn't imagine any other dancer performing it, especially not a man. He also said the model for the heroine — like the murmured words used in the sound track — came from the world of video games.

Heroine is a challenging piece, often disturbing, that raises many questions about the confinement of women and why society is comfortable with the idea of a strong woman only within certain frameworks.

The Taipei Arts Festival, of which *Heroine* is part, has presented a wonderful array of arts and performances. The one disappointment with the festival, which runs through next weekend, is that after rushing from Jingmei to Ximending on Saturday night to catch the video installation *Slow Dancing* at the Zhongshan Hall plaza, it was not running as advertised until midnight. Since most of the festival's shows are at sites far from Zhongshan Hall, having a video installation that runs just from 7pm to 9:30pm doesn't make a lot of sense, since the people most interested in seeing *Slow Dancing* would be those going to the other shows as well.

Su Wen-chi takes the 60-minute dance performance *Heroine* in her stride.

PHOTO COURTESY OF
TAIPEI CULTURE FOUNDATION

DIVA FEVER

Big names and wannabes
to battle for
princess of pop accolade

BY RICARDO BACA
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, DENVER

PHOTOS: AGENCIES



While pop divas have been scarce the past five years, they're readying for their close-up. Again.

Multiple veteran divas are releasing big records in the next month — anticipated full-length discs from Mariah Carey and Barbra Streisand, a comeback project from Whitney Houston and a hyped, multiformat best-of compilation from Madonna.

And the torch will be passed. This season, a new batch of divas is likely to be christened.

Miley Cyrus will be one of the five marquee performers on *VH1 Divas*, the landmark, and popular, special series that returns to the small screen Sept. 17 after a five-year hiatus.

Does that make the 16-year-old millionaire a diva? Many would laugh at the idea. But others will take it and run with it, inducting Cyrus into an elite, ladies-only club of performers who define our times.

We're well past the days of defining diva in a Maria Callas

sense. Pop culture has adopted the word from the opera world to represent its standout leading ladies — the brash and the brassy, the silky and the sassy.

Divas are still larger than life, but the word is less pejorative and more majority-rules these days.

And these are diva days. This year could be the comeback of the diva. Not since Mariah Carey sold 6-million-plus copies of *The Emancipation of Mimi* (a pop-R 'n' B record) in 2005 have the ladies had such a presence in mainstream music culture.

It helps that there's a new generation of divas upping the profile.

"There's an amazing crop of hardworking young women out there," said Rick Krim, executive vice president of music and talent relations at VH1. "They are the reason why we're able to bring [*VH1 Divas*] back, because we're focusing on the new, emerging artists. And we're thrilled with the lineup that we have."

"*VH1 Divas*" went away for five years "because it needed to," according to Krim, who said the franchise needed a break to allow

the talent to replenish itself. As it turns out, "emerging" is the perfect word to describe the lineup for this year's show.

Kelly Clarkson is the most legitimate of the entire group — a pop star who has four big records under her belt. Miley Cyrus is the head-scratcher of the class, given her age, demographic appeal and relative inexperience.

Adele and Leona Lewis each have only one full-length to their names, but their zingy, unfiltered voices are fitting of the title. And Jordin Sparks has the marketing machine that positions her opening for the Jonas Brothers and Britney Spears. It makes sense that they found her a spot at this table.

Compare this list with past *Divas* performers — Diana Ross, Tina Turner, Mariah Carey, Celine Dion, Aretha Franklin, Mary J. Blige, Whitney Houston, Beyoncé Knowles and others — and you'll notice the industry shifting and settling.

Four of the five new divas are products of television shows: two Idols, one Disney star and a winner (Lewis) of British talent

reality series *The X Factor*.

"It sort of points to the new world we live in," said Krim. "They all certainly worked hard to get there. They just got there in a different way."

It's a far cry from Whitney Houston's rise to fame, which came immediately upon the release of her eponymous 1985 debut. Houston's new *I Look to You*, out tomorrow on Arista, is one of the year's most anticipated comeback albums. It's Houston's first full-length since 2002's *Just Whitney*, and it will likely be her best-received record since 1998's *My Love Is Your Love*.

The new disc's *Million Dollar Bill* is a neo-disco natural made specifically for the dance floor, and Houston sounds top-notch in the heavily produced track. The titular ballad is overwrought, but Houston has always had a way of taking the overwrought and making a hit out of it. Her all-too-familiar alto guides the record through each explosion of vocal fireworks, and while it sometimes sounds anachronistic, it also sounds distinctly Whitney — and fans have missed her.

PLANET POP

TOP FIVE
MANDARIN ALBUMS

AUG. 21 TO AUG. 27



1 A-mei (張惠妹) and *A-Mit* — Concept Album (A-MIT 意識專輯) with **23.83** percent of sales

2 Compilation album *Faith Map* with **20.88%**

3 David Tao and 69 (六九樂章) with **11.14%**

4 Shaun (永邦) and *Devil's Tears* (魔鬼的眼淚) with **5.89%**

5 Khalil Fang (方大同) and *Timeless* (可啦思刻) with **4.92%**

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

Hong Kong actor-singer **Andy Lau** (劉德華) says he quietly got married but did not announce it because he wanted to protect his wife while they tried to have a baby.

Lau said in a brief message on his official Web site late Saturday that he and his wife married in the US because they want to have a child by artificial insemination — a procedure authorized only for wedded couples in Hong Kong.

"I was afraid that if I announced the marriage, she would be stalked by reporters, so I made a selfish decision. I thought if things go well, I would tell everyone when the baby is stable, but instead I made things more complicated," he said.

He did not give more details on their efforts to have a child.

Lau did not identify his wife, but public marriage records made available online by the Clark County Recorder's Office in Nevada show that Lau and **Carol Chu** (朱麗倩) wed on June 24, 2008. The records were first reported on Saturday by Hong Kong's *Apple Daily* newspaper.

Speculation about Lau's personal life has dominated the entertainment pages in Chinese-language newspapers after he was spotted in Hong Kong's international airport on Tuesday with Chu, a former beauty pageant contestant from Malaysia. Entertainment reporters had

staked out the funeral of Chu's father in Kuala Lumpur and mobbed Lau and Chu when they returned to Hong Kong.

The 47-year-old star of films like *Infernal Affairs* (無間道) and *House of Flying Daggers* (十面埋伏) has appeared in more than 100 movies since his debut in 1982 and is one of Asia's biggest celebrities.

One of the biggest Hong Kong female stars sidelined by her management company and opened to a near-capacity audience at a 1,200-seat theater at the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts.

The 28-year-old actress-singer said she valued the experience of playing an aspiring actress who reconnects with her estranged screenwriter father. "I've really learned a lot since I started rehearsing," she said after the first of five performances late Thursday.

Chung and seven other female Hong Kong stars were seen performing sex acts with Chinese-Canadian actor-singer Chen in photos that were leaked onto the Internet early last year, causing a huge uproar in the socially conservative



Following recent speculation about his marital status, veteran Hong Kong actor-singer Andy Lau has announced his marriage.

PHOTO: AP

community. A Hong Kong computer technician was sentenced to 8 1/2 months in jail in May for copying the photos from Chen's laptop.

Chung launched her comeback in March by endorsing a line of jeans.

Also jumping on the comeback wagon is independent Chinese director **Zhang Yuan** (張元), who said on Wednesday that he is releasing his first movie in China since he was detained in a drugs bust more than a year ago.

Zhang, known for taking on sensitive social issues including homosexuality and mental illness, was detained for allegedly using illegal drugs after police officers raided his home in Beijing in January of last year. The scandal grew when footage of the police raid — showing an irritated Zhang talking back to police officers — circulated on the Internet. It was unclear how long he was held.

The 45-year-old director said that Chinese film regulators — known for their aversion to sex,

crime and political controversy — have not punished him for the drug scandal and that he plans to release his new film, *Dada's Dance* (達達), nationally on Sept. 11.

The drama is about a young woman who takes to the road after she is falsely told that her mother is not her birth mother. Zhang said the film's distributor, Beijing Polybona Film Distribution Co, still has not decided how many screens to release the movie on.

However, *Dada's Dance* is getting a late release in China. It premiered nearly a year ago at the Pusan International Film Festival in October 2008. Asked about the long delay, Zhang said he was "working on other things," but did not elaborate on why his plans had delayed the release.

Zhang was also vague when asked about the drug bust, hanging up after answering several questions. It is not clear if he was charged with any crime. Zhang denied using drugs in the footage of the police raid.

Zhang's credits include *Mum* (媽媽), *Beijing Bastards* (北京雜種), *The Square* (廣場) and *East Palace West Palace* (東宮西宮), whose bold exploration of the power play between a police officer and a gay man set off alarms among Chinese censors. Chinese officials confiscated his passport to prevent him from promoting the film overseas, and the movie was never shown in China. — AGENCIES

