

CULTURE

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Bullfighting's noble death?

While fans fete matador Jose Tomas, a looming vote on a ban in Barcelona focuses more on Catalan identity than animal rights

BY JASON BURKE
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

Last month, bullfighting fans in Barcelona enjoyed an historic afternoon corrida. The main draw for a 19,500 sell-out crowd in the Plaza Monumental, the brick-and-tile bullring of the Catalan capital, was Jose Tomas Roman Martin, a 34-year-old described as the "messiah sent to revolutionize Spanish bullfighting" by the bullfighting critic of *El Pais*, Antonio Lorca.

That afternoon, Lorca wrote, saw Jose Tomas (the fighter is known universally by his two first names) reach his "apotheosis." But the report carried an undertone of melancholy.

Praising the bullfighter's grace, emotion and astonishing calm, Lorca lamented the possibility that base "politics" could put an end to such a spectacle once and for all in the Catalan capital.

The headline last week in *El Mundo* said it all, asking: "End of the line for bullfighting in Barcelona?" The answer to this question may be known before Christmas. And it could well be "yes," if an imminent vote in the parliament of Catalonia goes against the "aficionados."

Campaigners have raised 180,000 signatures for a petition calling for a ban. So far one conservative national party has come out against the ban, while major left-wing and green local parties have declared their support. The deciders will be Catalan nationalists and socialists. But some observers say the row is less about animal rights than Catalan identity.

"There is an element of animal rights but it is mainly about Catalans wanting to leave behind the Spain that is mystical, dark, bloody, Catholic," said British writer and broadcaster Robert Elms, a bullfighting fan and avowed Hispanophile, who lived in the city in the 1980s. "Barcelona is becoming a bright, clean, cosmopolitan city, like so many others in Europe. It has lost its mystique."

The city's only other bullring, Las

Arenas, is being turned into a US\$148 million leisure and shopping center by architect Richard Rogers.

There has long been a strong anti-bullfighting movement in Catalonia. Opposition to the sport has become a strong marker of local nationalist identity, pitting fashionable, arty Barcelona against conservative Castilian-speaking bullfighting central and southern Spain. Under the fascist regime of General Franco, bullfights were state-supported and used as a symbol of national pride and cultural unity.

But the charge that the anti-bullfighting camp is motivated by identity politics has infuriated many. A recent *New York Times* article on the row quoted Paco March, bullfighting correspondent of Barcelona's *La Vanguardia* newspaper, saying that his 15-year-old daughter had been called a "fascist" by classmates because she had a picture of a "torero" stuck to a schoolbook. "We want to be different from the rest of Spain by not killing bulls ... but we're just killing off our own culture," March said, prompting one group of supporters of the ban to issue a statement saying that Catalan "nationalism" had nothing to do with their opposition to the

sport. Instead, they argued, many locals simply wanted "to eliminate a shameful practice that is considered repulsive by a large number of Europeans."

In 2004, campaigners declared Barcelona "an anti-bullfighting city." More than 20 Catalan towns followed its example. Animal rights groups claim polls show more than 60 percent of the city's residents want to see bullfighting end.

Elsewhere in Spain, although crowds still fill stadiums, sometimes paying US\$150 or more to touts for seats, bullfighting has undoubtedly lost popularity. Two years ago state TV axed live bullfights, saying coverage clashed with children's viewing times — though the recent proliferation of TV channels means there is probably more of the sport now available than ever before.

No one, however, is talking about a nationwide ban. There have been many previous efforts to end bullfighting, none very successful. In 1567, Pope Pius V decreed that torturing bulls for amusement runs "contrary to Christian duty and piety," and ordered an immediate halt to the practice. A public outcry forced his successor to repeal the decision.

BULLFIGHTING: A HISTORY

- 1133** The first corrida takes place in Logrono at the coronation of King Alfonso VIII.
- 1567** Pope Pius V tries to ban the sport.
- 1700** King Felipe V stops the aristocracy from taking part, but bullfighting, on foot, gains popularity with the peasantry.
- 1726** Spain's first professional bullfighter, Francisco Romero, from Ronda, Andalusia, introduces the *estoque* (sword) and *muleta* (crimson cape).
- 1785** The first purpose-built bullring is inaugurated in Ronda with a display by Romero's grandson Pedro.
- 1932** Ernest Hemingway dedicates *Death in the Afternoon* to the Ordenez family of matadors.

SOURCE: THE GUARDIAN

[MUSIC]

Secret to musical success eludes 'queen of all media'

Perez Hilton's failure to turn his celebrity into a sweet-sounding cash cow proved one thing: you've got to know your fans

BY JOE MUGGS
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

Celebrity is not the same as popularity: that was the lesson Perez Hilton should have learned, but almost certainly didn't, last week. Maybe he thought his name would be enough to make the Perez Hilton Presents US package tour of hip up-and-coming acts — including Ladyhawke and Little Boots — a hit. After all, he's the ubiquitous gossip blogger, friend-to-the-stars and self-proclaimed "queen of all media" who has become an A-lister himself in the past few years. Nevertheless, ticket sales for his tour have been so poor that prices have had to be slashed — in some cases to nothing — for the remaining dates.

The tour reached its nadir in Boston, when the Norwegian indie rocker Ida Maria, playing to 250 people in a 2,400-capacity venue, suffered a meltdown on stage and pulled out of subsequent dates. The tour had been intended as an overture to the launch of the excruciatingly named Perezcious Music, through Warner Bros Records. So, will its failure give the music industry pause for thought about the absolute promotional value of celebrity?

Hilton has been uncharacteristically quiet on the matter, but — perhaps unsurprisingly — his rival US pop commentators are more than ready to suggest that the Perez brand itself is toxic. "People go to Perez's site only because they want to read gossip," says Michael Knudsen, aka "MK" of popbytes.com, "not because they actually like Mr Hilton. Why would anybody want to go to a concert presented by him?"

Maura Johnston of the hugely popular *Idolator* blog goes further: "His blend of self-aggrandizement, barely concealed agendas, misogyny and poor grammar is quite a noxious cocktail. It 'works,' but I suspect it works largely because he was one of the earliest online gossipmongers and definitely the first to build an outsized persona for himself. He trumpets things like click-throughs to artists he mentions on his site, but the moment the users have to make any commitment or lay out any money, any 'influence' he has evaporates."

Eamonn Forde, who writes about the music industry, suggests Perez's understanding of the business may also be limited. "I suspect he was probably advised [to put on the tour based on financial] figures going back three years or so, when live music was still a gold mine," Forde says. "But the recession has changed that totally, particularly the middle-sized shows he's trying to break into: it's an incredibly complex science to even make 5 percent or 10 percent profit on a tour, even with corporate backing. I just don't think people buy him as an entrepreneur, as a tour promoter, or even as someone who understands music that well — he's a media entity, someone who likes to hang out with the cool kids, and that's it."

But use of celebrity-as-brand need not be so crass and off-putting: for every Perez, who appears to think that merely stamping a name on something will transfer popularity to it, there are those genuinely trying to use the power of celebrity to create new business models for artists who can't survive on record sales any more.

Hip-hop, of course, has forged the way here, and Forde suggests Jay-Z as "the absolute perfect example of someone who maintains the respect of his peers and fans as an artist, but learns from the best — or at least puts the best on his payroll — in each new sphere he moves into, and takes each venture very,



Perez Hilton, blogger and television personality.

PHOTO: AP

very seriously." Maura Johnston, meanwhile, cites Pete Wentz of Fall Out Boy, now also a video director whose name adorns a clothing line, comic book and chain of bars, as someone who has managed to use his fame without losing touch with his emo-punk grassroots support.

My own experience writing for dance music monthly *Mixmag* has shown me that the underground dance and urban music scenes in Britain are bursting with youthful capitalists who also understand that the strength of their connection with fans is at least as important as the size of their following. Earlier this year, I chaired a panel of young British dubstep musicians, promoters and shop managers at a UK national music

industry conference; they and the discussion audience were fired up about the localized infrastructure they were building, and it was remarked that this was one of very few optimistic panels in a conference infused with doom and gloom. In fact, dance music is full of optimists who see opportunities where the big labels see only decline.

The current champion of this attitude in dubstep is 21-year-old Ollie Jones — better known as Skream, the south London DJ-producer who broke the sound into the mainstream when his startlingly sparse and haunting remix of La Roux's *In for the Kill* became last year's undisputed club anthem. Hearing Jones talk about how he positions his brand, it's easy to see he puts almost as much artistry into his strategies as into his music.

"I know I'm reaching a more commercial audience now," he says, "and losing some of my old fans. But if I wanted maximum sales right now I'd do the Noisettes and Katy Perry remixes I get offered, but just being flavor of the month ain't what I'm about, and I'd lose out long-term. This dubstep thing won't last forever, and I want to be known as versatile, and have a career as a proper record producer, so I've got to make the right connections. I don't want the Skream name on something that isn't me."

These descendants of rave and hip-hop know that, whatever messages *The X Factor* might convey, you can't just play your music, get discovered and become a star — an altogether more complex raft of skills and a sharp eye for opportunity are needed to survive in the modern music industry. But can the rise of these young artists provide major labels with an alternative model to the blaring, hectoring saturation branding that Perez Hilton represents? Forde hopes so. "It comes down to the 'dinner model,'" he says. "Would you want to sit down for two hours over a meal with that person? You get the feeling that with, say, Jay-Z or even Tinchy Stryder, there would be a conversation: you might learn something from him, and he would listen to you. But would you want to listen to Perez Hilton name-dropping and screeching about himself for two hours? Of course not. That should tell you what you need to know about them as brand figureheads."

Maura Johnston is circumspect. "It may be that Perez is the tartly dressed canary in the coal mine," she says, "and this warning will be heeded — but I suspect there is worse to come yet. I think Warners are going to go ahead with 'his' label, which actually basically to me seems to be a way to soft-pitch Warner artists who are 'too Euro' to an American audience. It won't work, though — I feel very comfortable saying that."

TOP FIVE MANDARIN ALBUMS

OCT. 2 TO OCT. 8



1 Kuo Shu-yao (郭書瑤), aka Yaoyao (瑤瑤), and *Hug of Love: Farewell to 18* (愛的抱抱:告別18歲) with 28.18 percent of sales

2 Delia, aka Ring (丁噐), and *Night Cat* (夜貓) with 12.89%

3 Peter Pan (潘裕文) and *Dreamer* (夢·想·家) with 11.88%

4 Bibi Chow (周筆暢) and *Time* (時間) with 9.13%

5 Joseph Cheng (鄭元暢) and *Chang a Song* (暢一首歌) with 3.58%

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

PLANET POP

Boyzone singer **Stephen Gately**, 33, died on Saturday while on holiday in Majorca off the coast of Spain, the Irish band said on its Web site.

"Stephen tragically died yesterday whilst on holiday with his partner," the site said yesterday.

Boyzone members, including lead singer **Ronan Keating**, were heading to Majorca following news of the death. The circumstances surrounding Gately's death remained unclear but Britain's *News of the World* reported he died after a night out.

Boyzone manager Louis Walsh told the newspaper: "We're all absolutely devastated."

He said: "I'm in complete shock. I was only with him [last] Monday at an awards ceremony. We don't know much about what's happened yet ... He was a great man."

Speaking to the newspaper late Saturday, band member **Shane Lynch** said: "Me and the boys are flying out in the morning."

"We just need to get over to where he's passed and work out what we need to do."

Gately, who married his partner **Andrew Cowles** in a civil union in 2006, sent ripples through the pop music world 10 years ago when he

announced that he was gay.

He joined Boyzone in 1993 after answering an advert in Dublin to audition for Ireland's first boy band.

The band went on to enjoy huge success with six number one singles in Britain, but split up in 2000.

They reunited seven years later, but their recent 19-date Better tour failed to fill stadiums, despite offers of free tickets.

Gately also starred in West End musicals in London, including *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*.

He last posted a message on his Twitter page on Tuesday, writing: "Still busy, lots going on. Focusing on finishing my book next so may be quiet here."

British actor and comedian **Stephen Fry** said on Twitter that he was shocked at the news.

"Just heard the very sad news about dear Stephen Gately. What a dreadful shock. He was lovable and sweet natured and will be hugely missed."

Music producer **Shelby Singleton**, whose biggest hit was *Harper Valley PTA* in a career that spanned country and rhythm and blues, has died of brain cancer, friend Jerry Kennedy said on Thursday. Singleton, who

passed away in a Nashville hospital on Wednesday at age 77, released the crossover hit written by **Tom T. Hall** and sung by **Jeannie C. Riley** in 1968 on his own small independent record label, Plantation Records. It sold millions of copies.

Indian movie mogul **Yash Chopra** was honored on Friday as filmmaker of the year by one of Asia's top film festivals.

Pusan International Film Festival director **Kim Dong-ho** presented the award to the 77-year-old veteran director and producer at a banquet in the South Korean beach resort city.

Chopra, who founded one of India's foremost studios, Yash Raj Films, said awards are a great motivator because they force you to justify your laurels.

"You have to prove that you're good once again. You're only as good as your last film," he said in a brief acceptance speech.

Asian cinema's elite were on hand to pay tribute to the Indian filmmaker, including the Korean-American star of the US hit TV series *Lost*, **Kim Yun-jin**, 1989 Venice Film Festival winner **Hou Hsiao-hsien** (侯孝賢) of Taiwan, Hong Kong director **Johnnie To** (杜琪峰) and South Korean actor **Ahn Sung-ki**. Chopra made his debut with the 1959



Left: Boyzone's Stephen Gately was found dead while on holiday in Majorca, Spain.



Right: Bollywood veteran director Yash Chopra is Pusan International Film Festival's filmmaker of the year.

PHOTOS: REUTERS AND AP

film *Blossom of Dust* and in 1970 set up Yash Raj Films, which became one of the industry's top production houses and distributes Indian movies abroad. Last year, Yash Raj Films teamed up with The Walt Disney Co to release the animated film *Roadside Romeo*. A pioneer in shooting Indian films abroad, Chopra and his company have worked with the industry's biggest stars, including **Amitabh Bachchan** and **Shah Rukh Khan**.

Past winners of the Asian filmmaker of the year prize include Hou, the late Taiwanese director **Edward Yang** (楊德昌) and veteran Hong Kong actor-singer **Andy Lau** (劉德華).

The Pusan festival is also screening four films directed by Chopra or made by Yash Raj Films — *Lamhe*, *Dhoom 2*, *New York* and *Rab Ne Bana Di Jodi*, a romantic comedy starring Khan and directed by Chopra's son, Aditya.

—AGENCIES