

POP STOP

COMPILED BY NOAH BUCHAN



Ming Jin-cheng: The force is strong in this one.

The 44th Golden Bell Awards (金鐘獎) have come and gone and as is typical for an awards show in Taiwan, it was mired in controversy.

More on that in a moment. First up is this week's edition of *Next Magazine*, which outdid itself with a three-page expose about actor and director Ming Jin-cheng (明金城) and his self-proclaimed girlfriend Hsiao-ting (小婷), which included a headline that roughly translates as "14 shags in 3 days" (3天14砲).

Pop Stop speculates that Hsiao-ting's real name was left out to, er, protect her privacy, which is odd, considering the details she revealed.

She told *Next* that what was initially a fairy-tale relationship began three years ago with a brief encounter at Room 18, a popular Taipei nightclub. Two years later Ming, 41, found Hsiao-ting, 25, on the Internet and in April they began dating.

So far, so good. Hsiao-ting told the gossip rag that Ming was at first the picture of gentlemanly behavior. He would send her sweet messages telling her that she was "a gift from the gods" and that he wanted to take care of her.

But after hooking up, things took a turn to the dark side. Hsiao-ting told *Next* that Ming's sexual practices increasingly tended towards the deviant. She alleges that he would place his lightsaber pretty much anywhere it could go without wearing a safety jacket and that he often videotaped their sexual encounters.

She then went on to describe in graphic detail how Ming brought said encounters to a climax. Pop Stop will spare readers the juicy details.

Next, always to be counted on when it comes to putting a person's peccadilloes into context, offered a useful sidebar of celebrities who have been caught with their pants down, including disgraced Hong Kong actor Edison Chen (陳冠希) and Taiwanese pop idol Ethan Ruan (阮經天).

But it seems Ming's exploits weren't the worst of it.

When the couple first started dating, Ming told Hsiao-ting that he would be there for her if she became pregnant. Without the use of a condom, she predictably became pregnant last month, a topic that Ming largely managed to avoid, along with Hsiao-ting, for the next few weeks.

Hsiao-ting decided to take matters into her own hands and went to the wayward Ming's apartment. But instead of Ming answering the front door, a young woman surnamed Cheng (鄭) appeared.

When Hsiao-ting told her why she was there, Cheng told Hsiao-ting that she had just had an abortion two weeks previously. The father was allegedly Ming.

Meanwhile, Hsiao-ting said that Ming's friends have tried to convince her to have an abortion, with one going so far as to offer her NT\$150,000 for the procedure.

And where was Ming through all of this? Reportedly he's been in the hospital for the past two weeks suffering from a bout of depression. The saga will inevitably continue to play out over the next few weeks.

Moving right along, funnyman Hu Gua (胡瓜) finally won the award for best variety show host at this year's Golden Bell Awards, Taiwan's version of the Emmys.

The television celebrity has worked in the entertainment industry for almost 30 years and has been nominated 13 times.

Hu Gua's ecstatic reaction to his award was in marked contrast to that of Mark Chao (趙又廷), who starting bawling after accepting the Best Actor award.

The newbie took the gong for his role in the popular police drama *Black & White* (痞子英雄), beating out audience favorite and former F4 member Vic Chou (周渝民), who also stars in the same show and goes by the name Tsai Tsai (仔仔).

Chao's win had audience members and the media in an uproar. They claimed that the reason why he took top honors was because of backroom dealings by his influential father, Allen Chao (趙樹海), reported *Apple*, the *United Daily News* and the *Liberty Times* (the *Taipei Times*' sister newspaper).

The elder Chao didn't lessen suspicions when he awkwardly tried to coax Tsai Tsai to share the limelight with his son. Tsai Tsai just looked uncomfortable.

The *China Times* also reported that the names of the Best Actor and Best Actress winners were leaked to the media before the ceremony, further evidence for many that much of the event is a charade.

BY DIANE BAKER

Dancers perform Yang Ming-lung's *Eastern Wind, Too*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DANCE FORUM TAIPEI

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: Dance Forum Taipei, *Flashing Lucidity*
WHEN: Tonight and tomorrow at 7:30pm
WHERE: Novel Hall (新舞臺), 3-1 Songshou Rd, Taipei City (台北市松壽路3-1號)
ADMISSION: NT\$450 to NT\$1,500, available through the NTCH box office, online at www.arts.tickets.com and at the door. NT\$450 seats for tonight are sold out

The Dance Forum Taipei (舞蹈空間) is celebrating its 20th birthday this year and for its anniversary program at Taipei's Novel Hall, founder and artistic director Ping Heng (平衍) wanted to do something special. She wanted a program that would both reflect the troupe's history and the changes it has gone through, as well as mark its current direction.

To achieve this Ping turned to two men who have worked with the company before and asked them to create new works. As so often happens with Dance Forum productions, the two choreographers, whose styles and backgrounds are very different, started off at opposite ends of the spectrum yet found themselves creating pieces that were a big departure from their usual repertoire.

Tonight's program begins with the world premiere of *Grace* by Toru Shimazaki, a Japanese choreographer who staged *Ran* for the company two years ago.

He chose a score by Ryuichi Sakamoto, the Japanese composer who won an Academy Award for his score for *The Last Emperor*, and German composer Alva Noto, who added a digital framework for the piece.

At a press conference on Wednesday, Shimazaki

A mighty wind



described *Grace* as a turning point.

"Maybe it's something to do with my life. Usually my work is very quick and to the point, but this music is not countable. It's really beautiful music, piano and some technological sounds," he said. "My work is usually concerned with designs of the human body. This piece has no story. How to react to this particular music, how the body moves was the challenge."

Shimazaki said he was influenced by two very Japanese aesthetics, origami and bonsai, the idea of artificially created nature.

"I asked the costume designer [Atelier Yoshino] to think of origami and the human body. I wanted masks so it wouldn't look like a human body."

Judging by the short excerpt shown at the press conference, Shimazaki got his wish. The dancers wear silvery white costumes, with what looked like fabric triangles decorating the legs, and silver mesh masks that covered their faces and heads.

Shimazaki praised the troupe's dancers and their willingness to work hard in the three weeks they had together to learn the piece.

The second choreographer on the program, the

company's former artistic director Yang Ming-lung (楊銘隆), also spoke highly of the dancers' willingness to tackle new challenges, in his case the improvisational techniques he used to create *Eastern Wind, Too* (東風乍現).

Yang said the piece built on the foundation of his *Eastern Current* (再見東風), which has long been an audience favorite. Like that piece, the new work was influenced by the traditions of Chinese puppetry.

"I tried to make the dancers' moves like those of puppets, but without a puppeteer so the movement comes from within the puppets themselves," he said.

"It took two weeks to work out the improvisation part. We recorded the process and then I told the dancers I wanted them to learn what they had improvised. They were shocked but they tried very hard," he said.

The company leaves on Monday for a European tour that will take them to Antwerp, Amsterdam and Palermo, where they will be performing these two works. It's very unusual for festivals and promoters to take a chance on an unreviewed program, and a testament to Ping and her dancers that Dance Forum's reputation for innovative work was strong enough to outweigh any concerns about untested pieces.

DRAMA

BY NOAH BUCHAN

Fiction is sometimes fairer than truth

Chang Kue-nian (張桂暉) gave up on documentaries because making them was too much of a hassle. The theater director and founding member of Le Voeur Theater (窺視者劇團) said that although she enjoyed working behind the camera, her subjects were often afraid of revealing their identity.

"I've made a few documentaries about gay women," Chang said. "But the [subjects] often had issues with being filmed because people might say 'oh, you are gay.'"

"I kept encountering people who told me that I couldn't show it here or couldn't show it there," she said with evident frustration. "I couldn't show [the documentaries] on public television or in the movie theaters because family or friends might see them."

Chang's solution was to take the real-life stories told to her and present them on the stage. *Herpoems* (窺視尋她), an experimental performance at Crown Art Center Theater (皇冠小劇場), does just that — but with an added flourish.

Rather than tell the stories directly to audiences in a dramatic form, *Herpoems* narrates the stories of

women through 30 poems written by Chang and some of Taiwan's most gifted contemporary poets, including Yen Ai-lin (顏艾琳), Hsia Yu (夏宇) and Chiang Wen-yu (江文瑜).

Performed by eight actors, the poems' themes range from gay rights and the difficulties women continue to experience in Taiwan's patriarchal society to the experiences of foreign brides.

Chang said that while the poetry may difficult to follow — especially for those not fluent in Mandarin or Hoklo (commonly known as Taiwanese) — much of the dialogue is illustrated and interpreted through dance and music to appeal to a wider audience.

Formed in 2004, Le Voeur Theater aims to expose the public to theater that deals with gay themes and gender issues.

THEATER NOTES:

WHAT: Herpoems (窺視尋她)
WHEN: Today and tomorrow at 7:30pm and tomorrow and Sunday at 2:30pm
WHERE: Crown Art Center Theater (皇冠小劇場), B1, 50, Ln 120, Dunhua N Rd, Taipei City (台北市敦化北路120巷50號B1)
ADMISSION: NT\$400, available through NTCH ticketing or online at www.arts.tickets.com



Herpoems examines gay and gender issues through poetry, dance and music.

PHOTO COURTESY OF LE VOEUR THEATER

RESTAURANTS

BY CATHERINE SHU

Pancake Day

Address: 43, Ln 26, Taishun St, Taipei City (台北市泰順街26巷43號)
Telephone: (02) 2366-1551
Average meal: NT\$180
Details: Chinese and English menu; credit cards not accepted



It's pancake day every day at Pancake Day.

PHOTOS: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

Pancake Day takes its namesake dish very seriously.

It is possible to get old-fashioned pancake stacks topped with butter and syrup at the three-month-old restaurant near Shida night market, but it specializes in covering its signature confection with a rainbow of syrup, fruit, and vanilla or chocolate ice cream.

Bite-sized dollar pancakes (NT\$150), for example, are heaped with raspberry and caramel syrup, diced honeydew, peach and banana, dried blueberries and a scoop of vanilla ice cream, and dusted with a liberal coating of powdered sugar. Surprisingly enough, the combination of ingredients was not overwhelmingly sweet, and the warm, fluffy pancakes tasted especially good when used to soak up the syrup and melting ice cream. Other flavor combinations include fruit caramel (NT\$130), fruit chocolate (NT\$130), banana caramel (NT\$130) and cinnamon apple (NT\$140). The restaurant has already attracted a clientele of devoted sweet tooth. On each of my trips there, I witnessed diners pulling out their cameras or cell phones and taking multiple snapshots of their pancakes.

Pancake Day offers a less exciting but decidedly more wholesome savory menu. On

a recent visit, my companion ordered a chili con carne burrito (NT\$180), but discovered on his first bite that the staff had mistakenly given him the roast chicken version instead (a lapse in what was otherwise a competent and friendly service). The burrito was unexpectedly light, especially compared to the extravagance of Pancake Day's breakfast options. The thin, toasted white flour wrap was stuffed with cilantro and cucumber in addition to the meat and served with delicious fresh oven-roasted steak fries.

Pancake Day's menu lists a couple of salads under its "savory pancakes" heading. Not, fortunately, salad-topped pancakes, but salads served with savory buttermilk pancakes on the side, as if they were taking the place of dinner rolls. The roast chicken salad with Japanese dressing was plain old iceberg lettuce, but a heap of watercress on top and the extremely piquant mustard-based dressing added an unexpectedly nostril-searing, tear-inducing kick to the dish. A heartier alternative to the burritos and salads is the beef cheeseburger (NT\$200).

On weekends before 6pm, Pancake Day serves a brunch that consists of two fat buttermilk

pancakes, eggs, fries, a button mushroom salad in a light vinaigrette sauce and a choice of bacon, ham or "American-style" sausage. I ordered the latter and was presented with three giant links that more closely resembled hot dogs than the smaller sausage usually served with American breakfasts. They tasted better than hot dogs, though — the skin was taut and the meat inside was very salty and juicy. The mushrooms seemed a bit out of place, but served as a welcome counterpoint to all the carbohydrates and eggs.

The restaurant's decor is sparse but cheerful, with birds painted in glossy white paint on bright yellow walls. The interior is outshone, however, by Pancake Day's outdoor dining area, which is large enough for three tables, surrounded by potted plants and sheltered from the elements by a roof. The outdoor seating is unusual in the neighborhood and a great place to take advantage of natural light for photographers who want to indulge in some pancake portraiture.

Disclaimer: Easily offended readers, those of an environmentally aware disposition, or animal rights champions, are advised to exercise caution as this review contains mention of a controversial though fine-tasting duck product, a drink with a bad ecological rap and a reference to food porn.

Opened in April by owner and head chef William "Abu" Bu (布秋築), formerly of Tutto Bello, Abu Authentic Cuisine from the outside looks much like any nondescript lounge bar with its shiny black facade, mesh curtains obscuring the interior, and blue neon sign.

Inside, the self-assured patter and delicate laughter of wealthy patrons competes with piped chamber music, as the wait staff, some wearing white gloves, glide from table to table. There is a fine line between prison guard service, with beady eyes following every move, and unobtrusive attention to detail, which Abu stays the right side of, though a half-finished cup of delicate pu'er tea (普洱茶) was whisked away by an over-keen busser.

The decor is a symphony of browns, from the fawn satin napkins to the beige, bronze and amber wood flooring.

A word of warning: the AC seems only to have two settings,

subtropical or Arctic. The banquet along the sidewall offers the most temperate seating. Upstairs accommodates about 30, while a salon prive downstairs seats 10.

Before ordering, guests are offered Monteforte sparkling or Fiji mineral water — the latter has been heavily criticized for environmentally unfriendly production methods, though its maker says the company is going green.

An assortment of breads, including a baked mochi sesame bun, a mini white torpedo roll that almost required lobster crackers to eat, and crunchy cheese flat bread came to the table accompanied with peppery olive oil, a pat of butter wrapped in gold foil and a pot of eggplant sauce that tickled the umami receptors.

Abu's menu consists of a five-course lunch and an eight-course dinner set. For the former, the arugula salad with duck confit and foie gras pate (spicy king prawn and apple salad is the alternative appetizer choice) was a lesson in self-restraint with its dainty slice of velvety vice sandwiched between paper-thin crackers and drizzled with a smidgen of truffle oil. The king Hokkaido scallop coconut and lemon grass soup (the other soup option is chicken broth

and quail leg) impressed with its expertly seared plump mollusk and frothy consistency.

For the main, the oven-roasted lamb loin in pistachio crust, served with jus (NT\$1,600), was surprisingly delicate — while many restaurants make their jus to the strength of industrial glue, Abu's erred towards the subdued.

Substitute mains include pan-roasted rib eye steak (NT\$1,800), pan-roasted Dover sole with porcini and crab meat sauce (NT\$1,500), slow-braised veal shank (NT\$1,200), or linguine with crab and garlic white wine sauce (NT\$1,000) for the cheapskates.

The two desserts that followed, a fragrant organic rose sorbet and slick parfait, while both above par, ignited a yearning for hot pudding.

Since it began operations, Abu has earned a reputation for quality. A quick trawl of the Net throws up an abundance of sensual shots of artfully presented dishes and satiated diners, and plenty of praise.

After all, some guilty pleasures are worth the remorse.



Sin city. PHOTO: STEVE PRICE, TAIPEI TIMES

Abu Authentic Cuisine

Address: 28 Siwei Rd, Taipei City (台北市四維路28號)
Telephone: (02) 2707-0699
Average meal: NT\$2,000 for lunch, and NT\$2,600 for dinner, without drinks but including service charge
Details: Chinese and English menu, reservations are a "must," credit cards accepted except Diners Club International

TIDBITS

Taiwan's self-proclaimed Aussie sausage king, Mark Golding has opened a new venture on Bade Road. Mr Sausage's Kitchen, a bar-cum-restaurant affair, serves eight varieties of ... sausage: chorizo (includes tequila on its ingredient list), boerewors, a Guinness version first concocted for St Patrick's Day, Lincolnshire, Thai (made with pork, fish sauce, coconut and lemon grass), cheese and wine, Frankfurter and bratwurst.

Bangers and mash is NT\$200, for which diners can choose two types of sausage. Other menu items include mince pies (NT\$120 each), sausage rolls (NT\$50 each), spinach and feta rolls (NT\$50 each) and vegetarian platters such as baba ghanoush with homemade bread and vegetables (NT\$150).

Frozen sausages are available for takeout, which cost NT\$450 per kilo.

On the beverage menu, San Miguel draft is NT\$150 for a 500ml stein, and Hunter's Gold cider is NT\$150 a glass.

Golding encourages weird and wonderful requests, which he says he will try his best to make.

Address: 5-1, Alley 4, Ln 12, Bade Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市八德路三段12巷4弄5-1號)

Open: Wednesdays through Saturdays, from 5:30pm to 11pm
Tel: (02) 2579-0396