

CULTURE

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[THE WEEKENDER]

Chopin's homeland a magnet for Asian musical talent

More and more Asian students are traveling to Poland to hone their craft because of the country's rich classical music traditions

BY **URSULA HYZY**
AFP, WARSAW



Above: South Korean students Kim Ae Ran, left, and Hwang Eui Jin attend a lesson at Warsaw's Frederic Chopin University of Music on Nov. 27. Left: Ewa Izykowska, right, teaches South Korean student Sohnye Young at Warsaw's Frederic Chopin University of Music on Nov. 27. PHOTOS: AFP

Young Asian musicians are increasingly choosing to perfect their skills in Poland, the native land of renowned 19th century romantic composer Frederic Chopin.

"I love Chopin's music. I feel it is so beautiful and so nostalgic — it's very pure and passionate and so I like to live in Warsaw, in Poland," says Aya Gokita, 27, a Japanese piano student.

She is one of some 40 Japanese and Koreans studying at Warsaw's Fryderyk Chopin University of Music.

South Korean music student Jeong Soojin, 22, agrees.

"In Korea, most important is technique. I think technique is important, but more important is my emotion," says Jeong, who was also drawn to Poland by Chopin's music.

Other Polish music schools are also developing contacts with Asia. Music academies in the Baltic Sea port of Gdansk and central industrial city of Lodz are preparing programs for students from China, where classical music is booming.

The music academy in the southern city of Krakow already hosts around 25 Chinese students, while some 16 are studying in the western city of Poznan.

"Many of them, pianists for example, want to come to Poland to feel, to breathe the atmosphere of the country where Chopin lived," says Izykowska. "They feel they're able to play his Mazurkas well here. And it really is quite the case!"

"It's like going to New Orleans if you want to learn to play the blues or jazz," she adds.

The fact that Poland is at a cultural crossroads between East and West also draws students from Asia, Izykowska says. "We've suffered invasions, our country was partitioned, so we've always been

pocketed their diploma.

While there is no such bilateral program with Japan, young Japanese musicians, primarily pianists, are keen to study at Chopin University.

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The fact that Poland is at a cultural crossroads between East and West also draws students from Asia, Izykowska says. "We've suffered invasions, our country was partitioned, so we've always been

subject to external influences. All of a sudden in the modern day this tradition has become a great asset," Izykowska notes.

She says the musical traditions of great composers and pianists such as Rachmaninoff, Tchaikovsky and Mozart are also alive and well in Poland.

Held every five years, the prestigious International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition, revered among Chopin fans and pianists, also attracts young Asian musical talent like a magnet, says Chopin University official Monika Kolenda.

But forging a musical career in Europe for Asian students is far from simple, and opportunities are scarce in Poland.

"For work, Poland isn't open. It's difficult for us to find work," says South Korean singer Kim Ae-Ran, 26, who is studying opera and preparing to become a teaching assistant in the Polish-Korean program.

But Izykowska is convinced the numbers of classical musicians from Asia can only grow.

"There will be more and more Asian classical musicians, due to their exceptional determination and their willingness to struggle — qualities that are indispensable for any artist," she says.

"I think the future of classical music lies in Asia. It needs classical music... the love for classical music there is incredible, perhaps even greater than in Europe," she says.

Cross-strait rockin' and mountainside magic

BY **DAVID CHEN AND DIANE BAKER**
STAFF REPORTERS

Cui Jian (崔健) rocked Taipei on Friday night with a blistering two-hour concert in his second appearance in Taiwan since headlining the Ho-Hai-Yan Rock Festival in 2007. Donning his signature tattered white cap with a red star emblazoned on front, China's "godfather of rock" provided a fitting inauguration for the city's newest concert venue, Legacy Taipei (博音樂展演空間), which holds around 1,000 persons and was nearly at full capacity.

It's easy to see why Cui often draws comparisons to Western rock icons like Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen and Kurt Cobain. His music is clearly inspired by an indignant spirit, sense of urgency and subversive energy. But he and his six-piece band have also crafted a unique sound with an impressive rock vocabulary that covers everything from hip-hop and electronic pop to reggae and ska.

Cui put on a solid concert that was engaging from start to finish. The band began with *Balls Under the Red Flag* (紅旗下的蛋), the title track from Cui's 1994 album, which had an alluring, funky junkyard groove. A ska-infused song followed, setting the tone for the evening with anthemic choruses and driving grooves.

Audience members started singing along early in the evening as the band played *Nothing to My Name* (一無所有), one of Cui's concert staples and a breakthrough hit that became an anthem during the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989.

During a press conference earlier in the day, Cui mentioned the Beastie Boys and Public Enemy when pressed to name other bands he admired. Those influences were heard in the evening's set. The band played newer songs like *Get Over That Day* (超越那一天) and *Blue Bone* (藍色骨頭), which featured some smooth rapping by one of the band's two drummers, Bei Bei (貝貝).

For the final song, a funky jazz number, Cui invited his "Taiwanese sisters" to come on stage and dance. It went over well with the crowd, but looked slightly awkward when Cui's stage crew shooed the 14 or so women off the stage just before the song ended, as if to say the party was over.

The band was thoroughly professional and displayed first-class musicianship. The distinctive sound of Cui's recordings translates well live, thanks to veteran members Liu Yuan (劉元), who played the baritone saxophone and Chinese flutes, and guitarist Eddie Luc Lalasoa, a Madagascar native that has played with Cui since the beginning of his career.

Throughout the night, Cui kept his stage banter to a minimum, sometimes briefly introducing songs in his thick Beijing accent and gruff, raspy voice.

The concert went without a break and the band returned for two encores. Audience members sang along and swayed to the final song, the sweet rock ballad *Girl in the Greenhouse* (花房姑娘). Between encores, Cui told the audience, "I will definitely be back."

The boys of the Horse Dance Company (舞獅劇場) have grown up. The six men delivered a finely nuanced and polished performance of *Growing Up* (正在長高) at Taipei National University of the Arts' Experimental Theater in Guandu on Saturday afternoon.

Taking over a space twice as large as they usually use, they more than amply filled the room, both in stage utilization and with the audience. Removing a couple of rows of seats, they created a long stage that extended from the back of the theater right up to the railings of the second tiers. The walls were left exposed so you could see all the rigging and the large metal door that leads to the set-building room behind the theater.



Red star rocker: Cui Jian performs at a press conference/sound check at Legacy Taipei on Friday afternoon. PHOTO: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES

The floor was covered with white mylar flooring and the only "set" was an archipelago of small crescent-shaped islands of dirt.

Although the space was expansive, Horse retained a sense of intimacy by keeping most of the dancing front and center, with the choreography consisting largely of duets and solos. While there were bursts of exuberance, the emphasis was on small, tightly focused movements, such as Hung Huai-te's (黃懷德) solo that expanded into a "shaking duet" with Su Wei-chia (蘇威嘉). The soundscape by Yannick Dauby meshed perfectly, providing a backdrop that ranged from some industrial sounds to lapping waves, rain and percussive elements.

Hung and fellow newcomer Chang Chien-chih (張堅志) more than held their own with the company's founders Chen Wu-kang (陳武康), Su and Yang Yu-ming (楊育鳴), as well as Chang Tzu-ling (張子凌). Chen, Su and Yang may have complained about the younger men making them feel their age during rehearsals, but they didn't look ready to give up the stage anytime soon, thankfully.

The chilly weather on Friday night up on Laoquanshan (老泉山) in Muzha (木柵) may have had audience members huddling into their jackets, scarves and blankets, but it didn't seem to deter the members of U-Theatre (優劇場) and their youth troupe, who were clad in their usual linen/cotton mix of wide-legged pants and sleeveless V-neck tops. You have to be a dedicated fan to make the trek up the mountain to see the show, and audience members were well rewarded for braving the cold with a charming show.

Company leaders Liu Ruo-yu (劉若瑀) and Huang Chih-chun (黃誌群) turned a hillside into their stage, utilizing the paths up and around the trees and a new small platform and open-sided tent, while the audience sat in the clearing below. It was a fitting environment since the story running through *The Message* (嚮向前進) was set in a forest.

The focus on the show was on U-Theatre's youth troupe, who drummed, sang, acted, danced and performed martial arts. There are more than 50 junior high and high school youngsters in the training program the company began a few years ago, although only those that have been in the program for at least two years — about two dozen — were used in the show. Their polished performances, however, belied their ages and it wasn't until a couple of them came down for a post-show discussion that you realized just how young they were.

TOP FIVE MANDARIN ALBUMS

NOV. 27 TO DEC. 3



1 Shin (信) and *Take Advantage of Me* (趁我) with **11.99** percent of sales

2 Shinlung (辛龍) and *Fine Singing and Creation* (創作俱佳) with **7.47**%

3 Landy Wen (溫嵐) and *Dancing Queen* with **7.12**%

4 Jam Hsiao (蕭敬騰) and *Love Moments* (愛的時刻自選輯) with **4.91**%

5 Elva Hsiao (蕭亞軒) and *Diamond Candy* (鑽石糖) with **4.68**%



Destiny beckons Beyoncé. PHOTO: AFP

PLANET POP

Beyoncé topped the list of nominees for the 52nd Grammy Awards on Wednesday, leading the way with 10 nods ahead of teenage country star Taylor Swift with eight.

R'n'B superstar Beyoncé scooped nominations in the coveted record of the year and album of the year categories, for her single *Halo* and her chart-topping double-album *I Am... Sasha Fierce*. The former Destiny's Child singer also picked up a nod in the song of the year category.

But Beyoncé is likely to face fierce competition in the major categories from Swift, eccentric songstress Lady Gaga and Black Eyed Peas, who all earned nominations in best album, record and song categories.

Trailing Beyoncé and Swift in overall nominations were the Black Eyed Peas, Maxwell and Kanye West with six nods each.

This year's nominations were announced at a star-studded concert performance in Los Angeles where Beatles legend Ringo Starr and Katy Perry were among the presenters.

Swift, 19, who has already enjoyed success this year at the American Music Awards and Country Music Awards, earned a nod for her

album *Fearless*.

Other nominees were the Black Eyed Peas for *The E.N.D.*, Lady Gaga (*The Fame*) and Dave Matthews Band for *Big Whiskey and the Groogrux King*.

Grammy chief Neil Portnow praised Swift as a "phenomenon in entertainment." "She crosses so many genres and generations. She's really struck a chord with people because her music is so honest," Portnow said.

The best rock album nominees meanwhile comprise AC/DC's *Black Ice*, Live From Madison Square Garden by Eric Clapton and Steve Winwood, 21st Century Breakdown by Green Day, Big Whiskey and the Groogrux King by the Dave Matthews Band and *No Line on the Horizon* by U2.

The best new artist category saw nods for the Zac Brown Band, Keri Hilson, MGMT, Silversun Pickups and The Ting Tings.

Next year's Grammy Awards will be presented on Jan. 31 at the Staples Center for Los Angeles.

Michael Jackson's death put a sudden end to long-rumored plans for a Jackson 5 reunion, but brother Jermaine Jackson on Friday kept fans guessing about whether there might be a Jackson 4 concert next year.

"Those plans are in the works but you have to wait and see where it goes," Jermaine Jackson told reporters, referring to an upcoming reality TV show about the famous singing family.

Meanwhile, Sony Pictures on Thursday said global ticket sales for its movies have neared US\$3.4 billion, beating a studio record with a range of films such as Michael Jackson's *This Is It*, which raked in more than US\$250 million worldwide. The Jackson film, which was put together from video footage of the late pop star rehearsing for a series of concerts that would have taken place had he not died in June, debuted in theaters in late October and ended its run outside the US this week with US\$180 million internationally, Sony said.

Film star Nicolas Cage has won a UN award night for his humanitarian work and has been appointed a goodwill ambassador for the UN Office on Drugs and Crime.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon presented the actor and filmmaker with the UN Correspondents Association's Global Citizen of the Year award for humanitarian endeavors.

Cage said his role will be "to shine a spotlight on the need for global

justice." The Amnesty International advocate has donated US\$2 million to establish a fund to help former child soldiers and led a campaign around his film, *Lord of War*, to raise awareness about international arms control.

The secretary-general also presented a Global Citizen of the Year award to William Roedy, chairman of MTV Networks International, for his work to combat HIV and AIDS.

The UN tapped genre-defying music icon Stevie Wonder to become a "messenger for peace," focusing on the battle for disabled rights.

Wonder vowed to "make the world more accessible." "I'll sing songs. Speak on it and sing about it. I plan to do that," he said.

Hollywood has finally realized that Tobey Maguire has grown up. The actor who gained fame as a teenager in the *Spider-Man* movies has embraced fatherhood and a new role as a soldier whose family is torn apart by war. The 34-year-old actor is now a married father of two and appearing in his first film in two years since *Spider-Man 3*, the adult drama *Brothers*, which debuts in major US cities on Friday and looks at soldiers returning from Afghanistan.

— AGENCIES

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