

CULTURE

MONDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2009

13

Roll over Beethoven ... and swing

Jazz pianist and teacher Chang Kai-ya has released a new album that shows classical music can swing and jazz is more than just "playing whatever you want"

BY DAVID CHEN
STAFF REPORTER



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHANG KAI-YA

Classical music can be "too serious" for Chang Kai-ya (張凱雅), who started studying piano at the age of four. This is one reason the 39-year-old pianist became interested in pop and eventually turned to jazz as a full-time profession.

Chang revisits her musical roots in a newly released album, *Jazz Promenade*, for which she adapted well-known pieces from classical composers such as Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Debussy for a jazz ensemble.

Chang, who teaches at Shih Chien University, says the album was inspired in part by her students. She noticed some of them were switching from classical music to jazz "because they think jazz is easy." But this isn't necessarily true, she said.

One common misperception among students of classical music and music teachers unfamiliar with jazz, says Chang, is that improvisation is merely "playing what you want to" and that there is little technique required in the genre. She points to Bill Evans, Chick Corea and Herbie Hancock as examples of accomplished jazz musicians who received extensive classical training.

"I want to tell everybody [with this album] that classical [music] is important and also, with classical, you don't have to always be serious, like you're at a concert hall," she said. As the title suggests, the album has a playful, relaxing feel, full of breezy Latin and bebop grooves. A closer listen reveals familiar melodies, which many will have likely heard before, even if the names aren't recognizable: *Sunset in Bonn* is Chang's rearrangement of Beethoven's *Sonata Pathétique*; *German Garden* lightens up Mendelssohn's somber

and brooding *Violin Concerto* with a snappy beat; *Orbit* brings a swing feel to *Jupiter* from Holst's *The Planets* suite.

The work was co-produced by Chang and her husband and collaborator, violinist Hsieh Chi-pin (謝啟彬). The pair founded the annual Taipei International Jazz Festival in 2004, an event that takes place every summer, as well as a summer jazz camp for aspiring young musicians.

Chang and Hsieh devote much of their time to music education, and *Jazz Promenade* was designed in part to serve as a teaching tool with an accompanying book of musical scores. In addition to private lessons and their classes at Shih Chien University, the two are frequent guests at high schools across the nation, where they teach not only jazz, but also pop music appreciation.

Recently, they have also been sharing their ideas and teaching techniques with high school music teachers at a training center run by the Ministry of Education.

It is easy to imagine Chang and Hsieh engaging a classroom. Their faces light up when they talk about music of any style, be it jazz, rock or hip-hop. At a moment's notice, they fluently scat, hum and beat-box a wide range of rhythms and melodies, often smiling and laughing as they do so.

More importantly, they have a knack for distilling abstract musical concepts into down-to-earth explanations. In talking about Chang's new album, Hsieh mentioned how jazz chords can add particular "colors" to classical music pieces. I asked how they explained this to non-musicians without getting too technical.

Without hesitation, Chang described what

typical chords sound like: a major seventh chord feels "light." A ninth chord is like "a little wind" blowing. A thirteenth chord sounds like a "truck" crashing through the music.

Hsieh offered another metaphor: jazz chords serve the function of adding "spiciness" to a song. A musician chooses a chord according to how much "heat" is desired, whether it's slightly spicy (*xiaola*, 小辣) or numb-inducing spicy (*mala*, 麻辣).

With the new album, Chang and Hsieh also hope to show that classical music and jazz both draw on the same set of skills.

"We tell our students that composing is slower improvisation on paper, and improvisation is instant composing that comes out of the mind directly," said Hsieh. "But they're both the same thing — constructing and composing ideas."

Mashing genres together is nothing new for Chang and Hsieh, who also hold an occasional concert series at Riverside Cafe (河岸留聲) called JACK, or "jazz plus rock," in which they add jazz elements to well-known classic rock and pop songs. Their repertoire includes Led Zeppelin's *Immigrant Song*, The Jackson Five's *Going Places* and Ozzy Osbourne's *Iron Man*.

"You can see a lot of imagination in her song arrangements," said Riverside owner and veteran session guitarist Geddy Lin (林正如), who has played with Chang and Hsieh in the JACK series.

He praises Chang as a "passionate" and "unique" pianist and composer. "She can take traditional source material and turn it into a jazz vocabulary, which makes things very interesting."



CD NOTES:

JAZZ PROMENADE (記憶漫遊)
CHANG KAI-YA (張凱雅)
E-WISE RECORDS (慧智唱片)
ON THE NET: www.chipin-kaiya.com/kaiyachang-jazzpromenade/Music/Music.html



TOP FIVE MANDARIN ALBUMS

DEC. 4 TO DEC. 10



1 Mayday (五月天) and *A-Mit — Realize Your Dream; Re-live Your Life* (小巨蛋DNA LIVE!! 演唱會劃紀錄音) with **26.57** percent of sales

2 Cyndi Wang (王心凌) and *Heart to Heart* (心電心2H) with **20.16** %

3 Anson Hu (胡彥斌) and *Music Life* (失業情歌) with **6.15** %

4 Shin (信) and *Take Advantage of Me* (趁我) with **5.05** %

5 Wonfu (旺福) and *Wonfu Loves You* (旺福愛你) with **3.8** %

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

PLANET POP

Pop icon **Michael Jackson** and Canadian singer **Leonard Cohen** will headline a group of talent receiving lifetime achievement awards at the Grammys next month, organizers announced on Thursday.

The late King of Pop, a 13-time Grammy winner, and singer-songwriter **Bobby Darin** will be receiving the prestigious prize posthumously during a Los Angeles gala on Jan. 30, on the eve of the 52nd Annual Grammy Awards.

Other awardees include classical pianist **Andre Previn**, country legend **Loretta Lynn**, jazz trumpeter **Clark Terry** and blues musician **David "Honeyboy" Edwards**.

"This year's honorees are a prestigious group of diverse and prominent creators who have contributed some of the most distinguished and influential recordings," Recording Academy president and chief executive Neil Portnow said in a statement.

"Their outstanding accomplishments and passion for their craft have created a timeless legacy that has positively affected multiple generations, and will continue to influence generations to come."

Montreal-born Cohen, 75, will receive the Grammy nod in honor of a career spanning four decades during which he recorded 18 albums, including

collaborations with **Elton John**, **Neil Diamond**, **Iggy Pop** and **Willie Nelson**. He was inducted in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame last year.

Previn, also a conductor and composer, has won 10 Grammys for his work with some of the world's most recognized orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic and the Vienna Philharmonic. He also composed the operas *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Brief Encounter*.

Irish singer **Sinead O'Connor** called on Friday for **Pope Benedict** to step down over a government report that said Church leaders covered up widespread sexual abuse of children for 30 years.

The Vatican issued a statement on Friday saying the pope felt "outrage, betrayal and shame" over the scandal and would write to the Irish people about sexual abuse.

But O'Connor, who once inflamed Catholic sensibilities by ripping up a picture of Benedict's predecessor Pope John Paul II on live television, said in a letter published in a British newspaper earlier on Friday that the pope had remained silent on child abuse for too long.

"I demand the Pope stand down for his contemptible silence on the matter and his acts of non-co-operation with the inquiry," O'Connor wrote in a letter to



the *Independent* newspaper.

"Popes have had no problem voicing their opinions when we wanted contraception or divorce," O'Connor said. "No problem criticizing *The Da Vinci Code*. No problem criticizing **Naomi Campbell** for wearing a bejeweled cross."

"Yet when it comes to the evils done by pedophiles dressed as priests they are silent. It is grotesque, unbelievable, bizarre and unprecedented. They stand for nothing now but evil."

Pop legend **Elton John** is selling off thousands of articles of his clothing, including outrageous outfits from his concerts, in a London shop as part of a charity fund-raiser.

John, and his partner **David Furnish**, officially inaugurated the shop at Covent Garden in the heart of the capital at a ceremony Friday evening, in an event



Far left: Next month's Grammys will honor Leonard Cohen. Left: Elton John is clearing out his wardrobe for charity. PHOTOS: REUTERS AND AFP

they are calling "Out of the Closet." Proceeds of the sale, the fifth he has organized, will go towards the singer's AIDS charity.

"We always get a fantastic response from the public," said John. "I think the idea that the items we all buy and enjoy can help someone in dire need, particularly at this time of year, really strikes a chord."

Shoppers will be able to buy some of the costumes he has used in the course of his musical career, such as pairs of the singer's sky-high platform shoes and the out-sized spectacles.

Prices range from US\$16 to US\$3,252 and the items were made by designers such as Versace and Prada.

A court on Friday threw out a bid to suspend the medical licenses of two doctors accused of illegally supplying late Playboy model **Anna Nicole Smith** with powerful drugs.

Los Angeles judge David Wesley denied a motion from the California Attorney General's office to curtail the work of doctors **Christine Eroshevich**, 62, and **Sandeep Kapoor**, 41.

The two doctors are charged along

with Smith's longtime companion and attorney, **Howard Stern**, with conspiracy and other counts stemming from her death from an accidental drug overdose in February 2007.

The judge noted that there had been "years of investigation" and said it had been eight months since the doctors were charged.

"I don't see the ... urgency," Wesley added, saying it would be a "very drastic step."

Stern, Eroshevich and Kapoor are accused of conspiring to prescribe, administer and dispense controlled substances to Smith from 2004 until her death at the age of 39 in a Florida hotel room.

Eroshevich and Kapoor each face six felony counts, including unlawfully prescribing a controlled substance, prescribing, administering or dispensing a controlled substance to an addict.

Stern is charged with 11 felony counts, including prescribing, administering or dispensing a controlled substance to an addict, obtaining a prescription for opiates by deceit, fraud or misrepresentation and conspiracy to commit a crime.

All three accused have strenuously denied the allegations.

They will next appear in court on Feb. 5.

— AGENCIES