

## AROUND TOWN

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[ MUSIC ]

## The circus is back in town

*Japanese artists dominate The Deadly Vibes' throwback tribute to the dirty days of rock 'n' roll*

BY **DAVID CHEN**  
STAFF REPORTER

**T**he Rock N' Roll Circus is back. Started several years ago by Yilan expat band The Deadly Vibes, the event has settled on a formula for good old-fashioned, risqué fun: a revue of 1950s and 1960s retro rock and burlesque dancing.

This weekend's "circus," now in its third run, takes place tonight at 89K in Taichung and tomorrow at VU Livehouse (地下絲絨) in Taipei.

With the exception of the Vibes, all of the performers hail from Japan, and one of the featured acts is "Miss Cabaretta," a Tokyo burlesque dancer.

Also appearing is Ed Woods, a band playing psychobilly, a combination of punk and rockabilly. The trio draws inspiration from 1950s sci-fi and B-movie horror flicks and performs songs with titles like *Monster Trash* and *Mutant-Z*. The band members also dress for what they call "Trash Rock 'n' Roll," donning bandanas and flannel shirts and sometimes covering their bodies in green or blue body paint. Expect to get covered in gold and silver glitter as the lead singer wields a wind-blower at one point in the show.

The Minnesota Voodoomen of Tokyo are fans of 1960s British Invasion rock and adeptly look the part, sporting mod haircuts, matching suits with black ties and vintage-looking guitars. Their sound is a slick mash-up of 1950s American surf rock, the Kinks, early Beatles and punk. The Voodoomen's drummer, who gave his name only as "Pete," said in an e-mail that the band hopes the audience will "dance and sing along with us."

Keeping the party moving throughout the evening will be DJ Harry the Hampstead Heath, who spins 1950s and 1960s rock and Motown but wants to prove that British Invasion is "still alive in the 21st century."

The Deadly Vibes will also perform, and between sets there will be games for the audience with give-away prizes to match the rock 'n' risqué theme. In the past, audience members have won panties and bras emblazoned with the words "The Deadly Vibes," free shots of whiskey, flying V pinatas and dildos. There will be several new prizes and surprises for this weekend's shows, say the Vibes, who are expecting to match the attendance of their last shows, which saw up to 200 people a night.

"We have a trademark name, I think people know what to expect ... come out, act silly, have a good time," said singer Jason Copps.

The crowd at a Rock N' Roll Circus event isn't the typical rock club audience, he said. "It tends to attract a lot of people that don't really go to shows that much."

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## PERFORMANCE NOTES:

**WHAT:** The Rock N' Roll Circus, featuring the Deadly Vibes, Minnesota Voodoo Men, Ed Woods, DJ Harry the Hampstead Heath and Miss Cabaretta

**WHEN AND WHERE:** Tonight in Taichung at 89K, 21 Taiguan Rd, Nantun Dist, Taichung City (台中市南屯區大觀路21號). From 9:30pm until late. Tomorrow at VU Live House (地下絲絨), B1, 77, Wuchang St Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市武昌街二段77號B1). From 9:30pm until late

**ADMISSION:** NT\$400, which includes one drink. The first 50 people at the door receive a surprise gift

**ON THE NET:** [www.myspace.com/thedeadlyvibes](http://www.myspace.com/thedeadlyvibes);  
[www.myspace.com/theminnesotavoodoomen](http://www.myspace.com/theminnesotavoodoomen);  
[www.myspace.com/edwoodstrash](http://www.myspace.com/edwoodstrash)



Ed Woods is not a dude but a Japanese band that plays psychobilly and loves 1950s sci-fi and horror films.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ED WOODS

## Behind the mask

*Using its experience in puppet theater, Taiyuan explores the many faces of love, lust and obsession in 'Mark of Desire'*

BY **IAN BARTHOLOMEW**  
STAFF REPORTER

**O**n Wednesday night, *Mark of Desire* (淚痣圖), the latest production of the Taiyuan Puppet Theater Company (台原偶戲團), premiered at its newly renovated and expanded Nafou Theater (納豆劇場) venue in the heart of Taipei's old West District. The new project continues to extend the company's horizons outward, and while Taiyuan still remains true to its roots in Taiwan glove puppet theater, it has increasingly embraced all aspects of contemporary drama in a number of high-profile new productions.

*Mark of Desire* takes its story from the classic Chinese tale of Wang Zhao-jun (王昭君), a princess of the Han dynasty who was one of many young women who lost everything they knew and loved when they were married off to the chieftains of various semi-nomadic peoples as pawns in a high-stakes diplomatic game. The current production brings the story into the 21st century, and uses it as a springboard for a exploration of sexual desire, obsession and repression.

The production employs giant puppets, masks and traditional Taiwanese glove puppets. Shadow puppetry of a sort also makes a brief appearance. This overlaps with the extensive use of lighting and multimedia projection. The central character, Wand Zhao-chun, is played by Chen Hsueh-chen (陳雪甄) without any prosthetic devices.

Wang Zhao-jun is renowned for her skill on the *pipa*, a kind of Chinese lute, and much of the music is based on a score performed by *pipa*, at times as it is conventionally played, and at others mediated through an electric guitar effects peddle, creating some amazing sounds. This also allows the *pipa* score to be integrated into the electronic music that makes up the powerful soundscape that is central to the expressive ambitions of the work. While the dialogue is spoken in Mandarin, director Robin Ruizendaal emphasized that there are enough visual and musical cues to make the play comprehensible to all audiences.

As with a number of previous productions, Ruizendaal makes use of the troupe's core discipline of puppetry to set up some powerful physical contrasts, with menacing giant characters seeking to impose their domination over merely human-sized actors, and treating extras, in the form of glove puppets, as figures, both metaphorically and literally, to be manipulated.

In *Mark of Desire*, a further layer is imposed over the story in the form of two narrators, who at the very opening of the play state that when two people fall in love, everything descends into chaos.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TAIYUAN PUPPET THEATER COMPANY

The play then proceeds to explore the chaos created when the modern day Wang Zhao-jun seeks out photographer Mao Yan-shou (毛延壽) for a series of glamour shots to bring her to the attention of a character called the Chairman. Mao falls in love with his subject, and in trying to keep her to himself brings calamity to all.

This is not the first time that Taiyuan has drawn on Chinese classics for a mixed production of puppetry and theater, the last occasion being in *Autumn Rain* (秋夜梧桐雨), which took its material from *The Palace of Eternal Youth* (長生殿), and the troupe has regularly mixed various styles of Western and Chinese puppetry.

The seams between the various performance styles that Taiyuan seeks to embrace in *The Mark of Desire* have been remarkably and effectively incorporated into the design of the whole. This sort of artistic fusion is notoriously full of pitfalls, which have brought calamity to a number of recent big-budget productions, and it is encouraging to see a small theater company managing to perform so dexterously, finding its way by means of a commitment to core disciplines and expressive goals.

## PERFORMANCE NOTES:

**WHAT:** The Mark of Desire (淚痣圖) by the Taiyuan Puppet Theater Company (台原偶戲團)

**WHEN:** Today (sold out), tomorrow and Sunday at 7:30pm

**WHERE:** Nadou Theater (納豆劇場), 79 Xining N Rd, Taipei City (台北市西寧北路79號)

**TICKETS:** NT\$500, available through NTCH ticketing or online at [www.artsticket.com](http://www.artsticket.com)