

BY NOAH BUCHAN

MUSIC

POP STOP

COMPILED BY DAVID CHEN

Allen Chao's (趙樹海) recent return to the entertainment world continues to be bumpy. His new Saturday night variety show on CTS (華視) didn't pass the muster of station executives, who have put the program on hold and requested major "structural changes," according to the *United Daily News*.

The executives also reportedly were unimpressed with Chao's "old school" style of hosting, which they feared wouldn't live up to competition from variety show kings **Hu Guo** (胡瓜) and **Chang Fei** (張菲). Chao's temper hasn't helped, either. The atmosphere at the studio has been "tense," as he has reportedly bawled out many crew members on the set.

The 59-year-old singer-turned-TV celebrity, who has been out of the limelight for most of the past decade, has recently attracted some unwelcome publicity over the past few months, with entertainment media portraying him as an ambitious and overbearing father and womanizer.

In October, there was intense speculation that he had pulled strings to help his son **Mark Chao** (趙又廷) win a Golden Bell Award. Then several weeks ago, the *Apple Daily* spotted Chao having dinner with model **Sonia Sui** (隋棠), prompting rumors that he was stepping in between Sui and her boyfriend **Yao Yuan-hao** (姚元浩).

Earlier this week *The Liberty Times* (the *Taipei Times*' sister newspaper) reported seeing Chao at yet another dinner, holding court with three *shoumu*

(熟女), which roughly translates as attractive women over 30.

At least he received some kind words from would-be competitor and old friend Chang Fei, who complimented him on his "outspokenness" and "steadfastness." Chang recalled how Chao threw a tantrum when he tried to back out of a golf outing because it was raining. They wound up playing 18 holes in the rain, leaving Chang with a nasty cold that lasted a week.

Actor and singer **Eddie Peng** (彭于晏) has a new flame, according to the *Apple Daily*, whose paparazzi snapped a few photographs of the two on a movie date at the Core Pacific Mall (京華城). *Apple's* report portrayed the date with the mystery "square-faced girl" as something of a comeback for Peng, who supposedly once dated Mando-pop diva **Jolin Tsai** (蔡依林). *Apple* asked for a response from Tsai's manager, **Wang Yung-liang** (王永良), who replied, "Best wishes to him."

Peng is probably the last thing on Tsai's mind, as she is just fresh from a three-week vacation in Montreal, where she took French classes. This stirred the imagination of the press, which asked if her studies had led to any romantic encounters. "I mostly just asked for directions from elderly men and women on the street," the pop star said. "But some people whistled at me from a casino ... does that count?"

Tsai admitted that while in Montreal she got recognized on the street a few times, but never let on about her identity. According to the *Liberty Times*, she told her would-be admirers, "A lot of people say I look a lot like her, but really, I'm not Jolin."

And faithful Jolin-watchers just can't seem to let go of the possibility of a rekindled romance with fellow Mando-pop star **Jay Chou** (周杰倫). Both the *Liberty Times* and *Apple Daily* mentioned how the two "rumored former lovers" are both scheduled to appear at an awards ceremony in Beijing this weekend.

Jolin's been brushing up on her French. PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES



A surreal feast for the eyes

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: Child of God (上帝之子)
WHEN: Tonight, tomorrow and Sunday at 7:30pm and tomorrow and Sunday at 2:30pm
WHERE: Guling Street Avant-Garde Theatre (牯嶺街小劇場), 2, Ln 5, Guling St, Taipei City (台北市牯嶺街5巷2號)
ADMISSION: NT\$400, available through NTCH ticket outlets or online at www.artsticket.com.tw



The Party Theater Group's (同黨劇團) *Child of God* (上帝之子) is so effective in creating an eerie dystopian atmosphere, it may cause nightmares. The production begins tonight at Guling Street Avant-Garde Theatre (牯嶺街小劇場).

It should be noted that this reviewer only saw a few scenes at a tech rehearsal on Wednesday night, so I cannot comment on the play's overall narrative quality. However, the parts that I did see demonstrated a potent use of staging — particularly masks and movement — that offers a deliciously surreal interpretation of the novel on which it is based.

Chui An-chen (邱安忱) and Mark Zidzik adapted the script from Ursula K. Le Guin's 1971 science fiction novel *The Lathe of Heaven*, which tells the story of a young man with the power to alter reality through his dreams. Thinking he is losing his mind, the young man goes to see a psychiatrist who, at first, uses the young man's dreams as a means to change the world for the better.

But the doctor's initial benevolent desire to help soon gives way to a malevolent thirst for power. A woman soon appears to help the young man regain control over his dreams, his sanity and the future.

The novel uses the dreamer's powers to examine social issues — environmental degradation, racism and overpopulation — and how good intentions often lead to unforeseen consequences.

To its credit, The Party Theater Group keeps things simple and focuses on the relationship between the doctor and patient and the tyranny that can result when one individual has too much power over others — one that is compellingly portrayed in a scene where the doctor acts as the puppeteer to the helpless young man who reacts as if he were a marionette.

But it is the masks — custom-made to fit each of the actors — that resonate most with the authoritarian and bizarre atmosphere director Beck Lim (林耀華) is trying to create. The large and bulging eyes on these otherworldly objects possess a frighteningly surreal appearance that underscores the evil intentions of the doctor and the fear gripping the young man.

The Party Theater Group creates an eerie dystopian atmosphere in its production *Child of God*. PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PARTY THEATER GROUP

DANCE

BY CATHERINE SHU

Undulating delights

This weekend, the sensual stylings of Miss Cabaretta will descend upon Taiwan in a cloud of crystals and tulle. One of the few burlesque performers in Japan, Miss Cabaretta — real name Deka Tamagi — will perform tonight in Taichung and tomorrow in Taipei as part of Rock N' Roll Circus. [See story on Page 13.]

The voluptuous beauty's act takes cues from burlesque performers of the 1950s and 1960s. Swaying and swirling gracefully across the stage, she caresses herself and her wavy black hair before slowly taking off pieces of her tasseled and bejeweled costumes.

Miss Cabaretta's stage image is modeled in part after American pinup legends Bettie Page and Blaze Starr, but says she also draws on an eclectic bouquet of inspirations, including Italian actresses Monica Bellucci and Sophia Loren and the classic films of Japanese director Hideo Gosha. She has collaborated with avant-garde filmmaker and poet Sono Shion, and appeared in music videos for groundbreaking Japanese musicians D'erlanger, Micro and Rock 'A' Trench.

The performer's musical tastes are diverse — she cites 1960s Cuban jazz and music from the West African nation of Guinea as influences. "I love drums and strong rhythms. Blues, jazz, rock, funk, classic, I listen to any sort of music. Any kind of music can be my energy!" wrote Miss Cabaretta in an e-mail. Japanese mod rock band Minnesota Voodoo Men will accompany Miss Cabaretta's shows.

She first discovered burlesque while working as a backup dancer in 2001. Captivated by the sex appeal of pole dancers, Miss Cabaretta asked Erotica Bamboo, another Japanese burlesque performer, if there was anything "more gorgeous" than pole dancing. Erotica Bamboo responded, "definitely burlesque!" Miss Cabaretta's own stage name was created as something she felt was suitable for "a princess dancing in a cabaret."

According to Miss Cabaretta, what distinguishes burlesque from stripping is the former's focus on strategically concealing the naked body and preserving its "mystery and allurements." "Burlesque is not stripping but teasing," she says. Any criticism of it as merely



Tokyo-based burlesque performer Miss Cabaretta will shimmy her way into Rock N' Roll Circus tonight and tomorrow. PHOTO COURTESY OF MISS CABARETTA

prurient is due to negative attitudes about the human body, she adds. But Miss Cabaretta also downplays the idea that burlesque is a serious art form: "Burlesque

is not an art but entertainment, isn't it? Don't think. Enjoy it like a cocktail." **On the Net:** pksp.jp/cabaretta; www.myspace.com/miss_cabaretta

RESTAURANTS

BY CATHERINE SHU

BY NOAH BUCHAN

TIDBITS

BY RON BROWNLOW

Yaki 雅燒

Address: B2, EsLite Xinyi (誠品信義), 11 Songgao Rd, Taipei City (台北市松高路11號B2)
Telephone: (02) 28789-3388 X1915 **Average meal:** Set meals are NT\$278 to NT\$788
Open: Sundays to Thursdays from noon to 2pm and 5pm to 9pm. Open until 9:30pm on Fridays and Saturdays **Details:** Chinese menu; credit cards accepted

From the outside, Yaki (雅燒), located in the food court of EsLite Xinyi, resembles a run-of-the-mill teppanyaki restaurant. The standard U-shaped counter is present, with an iron griddle in the center. Meals are served in sets, with courses of fish, salad and a choice of meats. But Yaki's food is several rungs above ordinary teppanyaki restaurants, where dishes are often held together by grease and salt — and Yaki's prices are higher, too.

Yaki's menu is divided into four set meals that range in price from NT\$278 to NT\$788, all of which come with coffee, green tea, black tea or milk tea. "Economy" set A (經濟套餐, NT\$278) is served with soup, garlic bread, salad and a choice of marinated grilled fresh fish (醬燒鐵板鮮魚) or Japanese-style steamed porgy with bell peppers (和風彩椒煎鰻魚). For NT\$50 extra, "economy" set B turns the marinated grilled fresh fish into an appetizer and gives you a choice of New Orleans-style tender roasted chicken (紐奧良嫩雞排), a 4-ounce rib-eye steak (燒烤肋眼牛排), or Venetian-style grilled prawns (威尼斯鐵板班節蝦) for your entree.

The difference between "premium" meals (精選套餐) C and D and their cheaper counterparts include a dessert of mango

pudding and bigger portions all around; for example, the rib-eye option for both is 8 ounces instead of 4 ounces. In meals C (NT\$588) and D (NT\$788) you can pick between the rib-eye and chicken, filet mignon (also 8 ounces) or "exotic" roasted lamb (異國香料烤羊排). Paying NT\$200 extra for meal D allows you a choice between the porgy, roasted prawns or scallops for your appetizer.

Every dinner comes with onion or pumpkin cream soup. Stick with the latter unless you enjoy drinking warm onion-flavored water with limp onion bits floating about. The pumpkin soup is extremely mild, but it does have body and texture. Yaki does very well with all its fish dishes, which have a melt-in-your-mouth texture. The juicy New Orleans-style tender roasted chicken doesn't seem particularly New Orleans-ish, but is still excellent, with just the right amount of crispness to its skin. My dining companion on several visits preferred the rib-eye to the filet mignon; the latter was "stringy" and a bit tough, he said, but the rib-eye was rich and buttery when cooked medium rare (六分熟). The grilled prawns served as an entree with meal B weren't bad, but the dish



Yaki's food is a step above most teppanyaki restaurants, with prices to match. PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

included only two crustaceans.

Considering the number of courses per meal, Yaki's service is efficient. On two occasions for dinner during busy weekends, our dishes arrived quickly and were swept away just as fast. Unfortunately, the briskness translated into abruptness when we returned on a Monday evening. Our main courses were plopped in front of us before we had finished our salads, leaving the impression that the waiter, while friendly, wanted us to skedaddle soon, even though an hour and a half remained before closing time.

Good Day serves up fast food in a casual atmosphere. Nestled amongst the hair salons and clothing stores in the alleys behind California Fitness on Zhongxiao East Road (忠孝東路), the restaurant's interior benefits from two large picture windows in front which let in natural light and offer diners a glimpse of the young hipsters passing by.

Despite the crowds out on the street, there wasn't a single customer sitting on the comfortable gray felt chairs or lime-colored couches when we arrived at noon. Although this was worrying, we went ahead and perused the menu of dishes from "New York and Mexico," located above the ordering counter at the back of the restaurant.

Good Day's menu is extensive. Offerings range from pizzas

(NT\$225 to NT\$375) and burgers (NT\$155 to NT\$255) to "Cuban" and "Uruguayan" sandwiches (NT\$190 to NT\$360).

We decided to go "Mexican" and ordered the single beef burrito (NT\$130 for single/NT\$230 for combo) and the combo chicken enchiladas (NT\$170 for single/NT\$270 for combo). Like all combo platters in the Mexican food section, the enchiladas were served with tortilla chips and salsa (for burgers and sandwiches, substitute fries) and a bottomless drink.

At first, we thought the burrito was somewhat pricy. But then it arrived. "This burrito has weight!" my dining companion exclaimed as she balanced it in her hands.

A generous layer each of rice, ground beef, onions, jalapenos, fresh cut salsa and melted

cheddar cheese came wrapped in a warm flour tortilla. Though somewhat put off by the cheese (it was neon orange) and the ground beef (decidedly gristly), the generous portions of salsa, jalapenos and onions gave this burrito a satisfying kick.

But where was the enchilada? A five-minute wait soon turned into 10, and I was beginning to think that they had forgotten the order. Nope. Good Day just doesn't seem to care if customers eat alone.

Two enchiladas did eventually arrive in a dish covered with a slightly spicy tomato sauce and topped with melted mozzarella. Strips of spice and lime-infused chicken shared space inside the soft tortillas with chopped jalapenos and onions. The salsa, though fresh and homemade, tasted more like ketchup than the spicy variety found in the burrito. Still, it went well with the steaming hot enchiladas and tangy and aromatic chicken inside.

Less impressive were the tortilla chips. Served warm on a plate, they looked more like something that should be offered for free.

If you go to Good Day expecting authentic Mexican fare, you will be disappointed. But if you're looking for a decent and substantial meal, the restaurant certainly fits the bill. Good Day also features a daily lunchtime special for NT\$100, which includes one side but no drink.

Good Day also has a branch at Shin Kong Mitsukoshi, A8 (新光三越A8館), B2, 12, Songgao Rd, Taipei City (台北市松高路12號B2). Tel: (02) 2723-5520.



At Good Day, you'll probably eat alone. PHOTO: NOAH BUCHAN, TAIPEI TIMES

Good Day

Address: 18, Ln 177, Dunhua 5 Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市敦化南路一段177巷18號)
Telephone: (02) 8771-9620 **Open:** 11am to midnight **Average meal:** NT\$300
Details: Chinese and English menu; credit cards not accepted **On the Net:** www.gooddaytw.com