

## POP STOP

COMPILED BY DAVID CHEN

Sparks continue to fly over a rumored romance between singer **Jay Chou** (周杰倫) and model **Lin Chi-ling** (林志玲), co-stars of the recently released film *The Treasure Hunter* (刺陵). The two were spotted together by *Next Magazine* several weeks ago on a late night outing at a hot pot restaurant on Civil Boulevard (市民大道). Reports have also circulated on the Internet of a Chou-Lin sighting at Shilin night market (士林夜市).

Fueling speculation even further was a birthday ode to Chou (who just turned 31) written by his close friend and fellow pop singer **Devon Song** (彈頭). On his blog, Song posted an eight-line poem in Mandarin which sneaks in a vague reference to Lin: The poem was written to be read from left to right, but the first character of each line also forms a sentence, which reads, "Director Chou is fucking cool, Chi-ling knows it." (周導好屌, 志玲知道.)

But it seems **Jolin Tsai** (蔡依林) can't be left out of the picture when it comes to "The Chairman," at least on the gossip pages. Just last weekend, Chou and his former sweetheart reportedly went on a bowling date — a development that has left observers "in the dark," as our sister paper, *The Liberty Times*, put it.

As for one of Lin's past flames, pop heartthrob **Jerry Yan** (言承旭) has been dodging questions as usual regarding romance. Yan, who was last rumored to be dating actress **Terri Kwan** (關穎) but supposedly still holds a candle for Lin, recently made an appearance on *Variety Big Brother* (綜藝大哥哥) — but not without a fuss.

According to the *Liberty Times*, the taping of the show was delayed by Yan's management, which insisted that host **Chang Fei** (張菲) refrain from asking questions about his love life. Chang relented, but lightly prodded Yan on the show:

"[Jerry], this is the first time that as a host, I've been restricted from asking certain questions."

The reporters on the set, on the other hand, didn't let Yan off the hook. They grilled him on the Chou-Lin rumors. "I've heard about it," he replied with a "rigid" smile. Had he seen the *The Treasure Hunter*? "It's actually a good movie."

A movie that's actually good, James Cameron's hit *Avatar*, is getting trumped in China by *Confucius* (孔子). Chinese authorities have told theaters across the country to pull the sci-fi epic to make way for a biopic on the venerated philosopher

starring **Chow Yun-fat** (周潤發). The *Apple Daily* reports that high-level Chinese officials have been concerned that local films would lose market share to *Avatar*, which opened at the beginning of the month and is already the highest-grossing movie in Chinese film history, having earned US\$76 million thus far. But all is not lost for our friends across the strait, who can still see the 3D IMAX version, which has yet to be pulled from theaters.

Meanwhile, Taiwanese Internet users have been feeding their craze for *Avatar* by drawing comparisons between Neytiri, the film's lead female character, with several pop singers, according to another *Apple Daily* report. **Elva Hsiao** (蕭亞軒) was in the running for the best look-a-like, but **Angela Chang** (張韶涵) took the prize with her "eye-to-nose ratio."

**Ouyang Fei-fei** (歐陽菲菲), the Taiwan-born singer who found stardom in Japan as a disco diva, will be appearing at Taipei Arena (台北小巨蛋) tomorrow night. The 55-year-old, who sports a Tina Turner-esque hairdo and is sometimes called the Taiwanese Cher, shared with the *Liberty Times* the secret to maintaining her svelte figure: everyday she does 30 minutes of "exercise in bed" (床上運動) — that is, leg lifts and waist twists.

And perhaps to prove that she also remains young at heart, Ouyang has been rehearsing Madonna's *Like a Virgin* as part of the Western pop segment of her show. But the song is not really her, she says. "I can't sing something so restrained, I'm too wild."



Taiwanese Internet users think Angela Chang looks like Neytiri from *Avatar*.

PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES

BY DIANE BAKER

POETRY

# Time and stage space

## — and don't forget the wine

Ayesha Mehta grew up in Taipei and went off to Sydney to study music and voice at a conservatory, became a jazz singer and a vocal coach — and fell in love with the spoken word.

"When I first arrived in Sydney from Taipei, I found a poetry night at a pub, hosted by Tug Dumbly [organizer and host of Bardflys, Australia's long-running spoken word night]. He's become an icon ... I came back six years later and there's no place I can go to read books except in the living room," Mehta said in a telephone interview on Wednesday.

Missing Bardflys, she was looking for a way to create a similar experience here. Then she met Ping Chu (朱平), the well-known pharmacist-turned-entrepreneur who brought the Aveda cosmetics franchise to Taiwan and established Nonzero restaurant. It was kismet.

"I went to volunteer for Typhoon Morakot in Taitung. The first night I walked into the [Dulan] Sugar Factory (都蘭新東糖廠藝術村) and Ping was standing there with a big smile on his face. 'I know your mom [businesswoman and artist Roma Mehta];' he said. I met him a couple of times in Taipei and then I told him I had been thinking about doing a 'Red Room' since I came backing in April," Mehta said.

Ping loved the idea and told her that his girlfriend organizes reading nights in Hong Kong and he had been "waiting for something like this to happen in Taipei."

Mehta had been looking for a space like a large living room that would be big enough to hold several dozen people yet could still feel comfortable and intimate. Ping just happened to know of some, since this is what he builds as training spaces for Aveda.

Having found a space and a very willing collaborator, Mehta organized musician friends to perform two sets, put up posters and sent out e-mails inviting people to read, sing, but most importantly, listen.

"Bring something you have written or choose a passage from somewhere else that you are moved to read aloud," she told people, but keep it at five minutes, while musical participants were encouraged to bring their instruments for jam sessions at the beginning and end of the night.

Attendees were also told to bring something to drink, and after the first event, also a washed and peeled vegetable ready for the stewpot.

The first Stage Time and Wine@ Red Room event was held in November last year at a space right next to Nonzero and Aveda's office. The second night, held last month, was just down the road at another Aveda venue, the company's "learning space." The first event drew 60 or 70 people, maybe more, Mehta said, while the second one attracted 40 to 50. She described the first event "as a laugh," while the second was "like a living room, people meeting each other, really wonderful."

Mehta said she wanted to keep the events low budget to make them accessible to everyone.

"If you go out for a drink, you spend at least NT\$400, if you go out for coffee it's at least NT\$100," she said. "Here you spend NT\$200, you can drink as much as you want, eat as much as you want."

Thanks to Ping, Nonzero provides the glasses and kitchen supplies — along with some complimentary cookies.

Though Mehta stressed that Stage Time and Wine@ Red Room III is an event for listening, it is open to whatever people want to do. She noted that at the first event "one person came and shrieked like a banshee," while at the second a woman came and read in Taiwanese, French and English.

Asked about the Red Room name, Mehta laughed and said it was a long story but basically it's "a name for the space."

"Each one is so different, I'm looking forward to seeing it evolve," Mehta said. "People get what they bring."



## PERFORMANCE NOTES:

**WHAT:** Stage Time and Wine@ Red Room III  
**WHEN:** Tomorrow from 6:30pm to 10:30pm  
**WHERE:** 2F, 117, Da-an Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市大安路一段117號2F)  
**ADMISSION:** NT\$200 at door. For more information, send an e-mail to red.room.taipei@gmail.com or pingc@canmeng.com.tw



Above: People listening at a Red Room event last year. Left: A photo of a painting of a lotus by Roma Mehta and a little monk piggy bank that has become the Red Room icon.

Below: Louis Goldfarb plays the clarinet at a Red Room session.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROMA MEHTA



## RESTAURANTS

## Yun Zhi Tai 雲之泰

**Address:** 22, Ln 10, Zhongxiao E Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市忠孝東路三段10巷22號)  
**Telephone:** (02) 2752-6163 **Open:** 11am to 2:30pm and 5pm to 9:30pm  
**Average meal:** NT\$250 to NT\$350 per person **Details:** Credit cards accepted

Tucked away on a quiet tree-lined alley near the corner of Xinheng South (新生南) and Zhongxiao East (忠孝東) roads, Yun Zhi Tai (雲之泰) boasts a welcoming outdoor patio and reasonably priced Thai and Yunnan dishes.

Though the wooden deck is a relaxing spot for a beer, on colder days, the interior is equally relaxing. The plain but warmly lit decor is refreshingly down-to-earth in contrast to the dark, ultramodern lounge-bar look that seems to define every other Thai place these days.

Reservations are recommended at the weekend. On a recent Sunday lunchtime visit, our group of 11 was relegated to a small dining room.

But we soon forgot how crowded the backroom felt upon digging into jiaomaji (椒麻雞, NT\$220), crispy fried chicken served with cilantro and chili on a bed of coleslaw. This popular tangy, spicy and savory Yunnan dish was polished off pronto. In hindsight, it would have been better to order the larger portion (NT\$350).

One good sign early on in the meal was how well Yun Zhi Tai fared with a simple vegetable stir-fry. We ordered two versions of kongxincai (空心菜, NT\$160, NT\$250 for a larger portion), one with shrimp paste, the other a vegetarian version, as some

in our group don't eat shellfish. Both dishes disappeared quickly, and the vegetarian version actually seemed to be the more popular of the two.

Other joys were found in concoctions like the "hot saute" eggplant (辣炒茄子, NT\$180), which is similar to the eggplant and basil stir-fry (炒茄子) found in Hakka cuisine.

This version did not have basil, but just about everything else, including mushrooms, green, red and yellow bell peppers and minced pork (we went without the chili peppers). What made this a winner, though, were the tender eggplant slices and a flavorsome garlic sauce.

Despite the slow service, the meal only got better. Each time we reminded the busy wait staff not to forget us, they would return with a soul-satisfying plate that made up for the lost time.

The green curry chicken (綠咖哩雞, NT\$220) is another instance where we should have ordered the larger version (NT\$350). The steamed fish with lemon (清蒸檸檬魚, NT\$400), a house recommendation, was sweet and sour perfection, with citrus and garlic as the dominant flavors. At the end of the meal, there was hardly anything left of sea bass except the tailbone.

A few other Thai restaurant standards also did not disappoint. The fried shrimp

BY DAVID CHEN



It's worth the wait. PHOTOS: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES

cakes (NT\$280, NT\$450 for a larger portion) arrived crispy and hot. The spicy and sour calamari salad (涼拌花枝, NT\$220, NT\$320 for a larger portion) was a refreshing interlude for the meal.

The only dish that fell short was a rather bland pad Thai (泰式辣炒河粉, NT\$160), although several at our table liked it enough to clear the plate.

Another visit, however, will probably be made during a less busy time.

For dessert, Yun Zhi Tai has the standard tapioca and sweet bean desserts for NT\$50. For something different, try one of the steamed buns (破酥包, NT\$30 each) with sweet red bean or black sesame filling.

Yun Zhi Tai is a five-minute walk from Zhongxiao Xinheng MRT Station (忠孝新生捷運站), exit No. 3.

The recent uproar over Taiwan's relaxed regulations on US beef imports inspired an increased interest in meat from locally raised cattle. Niu Gonggong (牛公公), which happened to open just as the controversy was brewing two months ago, specializes in the latter. But even for diners who thought the kerfuffle surrounding the safety of US beef was a load of tripe, Niu Gonggong is a good pick for a quick bowl of noodles or rice-topped tender slices of homegrown meat.

All the beef served in the restaurant on the corner of Jinshan South (金山南) and Xinyi (信義) roads comes from steers raised on pastures in Liuying (柳營鄉), a village in Tainan County. Without explicitly referencing the recent changes in legislation, Niu Gonggong's modest but clean and carefully decorated storefront is plastered with posters from industry groups extolling the virtues of Taiwan-raised beef. Benefits are supposed to include better texture and taste and no risk of mad cow disease (a focal point of arguments against beef imports from the US).

One of the restaurant's signature dishes is the Taiwan *caiyou* beef rice (台灣財有牛肉飯, NT\$130). The two main ingredients are accompanied by an ample serving of pickled vegetables sauteed in butter, crunchy bok choy, half a tea egg and a few stewed veg-

etables (including single slices of carrot and daikon root), added to give texture as well as color to the dish. The beef was tender and well marbled and the texture of the rice, which soaked up all the different flavors, was just right. The *caiyou* beef rice is served with a bowl of clear broth, just in case you want to mix it with the rice. The dish is also available as a bowl of noodles.

On a separate visit, we ordered gonggong yushan qibao rice (公公御膳七寶飯, NT\$130), topped with vegetables, a very lightly cooked, nearly raw egg, chopped green onions, pickled vegetables, thin slices of marinated beef and pieces of small intestines, stomach lining, tripe and four other organ meats (or the "seven treasures" of the dish's name). The combination of different textures was pleasing, but the flavor of each individual ingredient was lost in the meleé. I was left looking in envy at my dining companion's bowl of dongfang bubai beef noodles (東方不敗牛肉麵, NT\$150). Along with the slices of tender meat I enjoyed with my bowl of Taiwan *caiyou* rice, it featured plenty of crunchy bok choy and tender carrot. My companion thought the soup was a bit bland, however, and added some vinegar and hot sauce to spice it up.

As a side dish, we ordered a small luwei pingpan (滷味拼盤), or

a mixed dish of marinated beef and organ meats served with a side of dipping sauce. The dish certainly needed the dipping sauce and the slender portion was not worth the NT\$100 it cost.

Niu Gonggong is neighbors with Dongmen Market (東門市場), a popular destination for cooks filled with seafood, live poultry and vegetables. The restaurant takes advantage of its location by selling different cuts of beef at the store's front. Prices are reasonable; for example, sirloin steaks range from about NT\$110 to NT\$150 per 100g.



Niu Gonggong's locally raised beef ups the flavor of its noodle and rice dishes.

PHOTOS: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

## Niu Gonggong 牛公公

**Address:** 148, Jinshan S Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市金山南路一段148號)  
**Telephone:** (02) 2341-7766 **Open:** 10:30am to 11:30pm; the meat counter opens at 9am  
**Average meal:** Most bowls of rice or noodles are NT\$120 to NT\$150  
**Details:** Chinese menu, credit cards not accepted

## TIDBITS

BY STEVE PRICE

Burns Night or Robert Burns Day in Taiwan is as Scottish as Mel Gibson in *Braveheart*.

But that shouldn't stop anyone from celebrating the anniversary of the poet's birth says Mark Goding of Mr Sausage's Kitchen: "It's not so much about being Scottish, but about having fun and enjoying fellowship and being proud of who you are."

His version comprises a haggis dinner, including clapsnot, or potato and turnip mash (NT\$280), on Monday night.

Goding procured the necessary sheep bits: lungs, heart, liver, kidneys, the "pluck," as it's known. He ground the offal up with oatmeal, added spices and whisky, stuffed the mixture in a sheep's stomach, and then boiled and roasted it.

Specials include Belhaven stout (NT\$200 for a 500cc bottle) and Belhaven lager (NT\$160 for a 500cc bottle). Though the bar stocks The Famous Grouse, patrons are encouraged to bring their own water of life, "as long as they don't mind sharing," said Goding.

Mr Sausage's Kitchen is located at 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).

Down in Kaohsiung, Foster Hewitt's pub and grill is holding its third annual Robbie Burns night on Jan. 30.

Advance tickets are NT\$500, available from the venue. At the door, entry is NT\$600.

Admission gets patrons one drink, a plate of haggis, or meatloaf, and roast vegetables, followed by homemade trifle and scotch whisky samplings of five brews, said proprietor Luke Weir. Timothy Higgs is on

Address to a Haggis duty for the evening. Foster Hewitt's is located at 30 Wenjiahong Rd, Kusan Dist, Kaohsiung City (高雄市鼓山區文德里30號).

Tel: (07) 555-0888

On the Net: www.fosterhewitts.com