

POP STOP

COMPILED BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW

Private information leaked onto the Internet has provided ample material for Taiwan's gossip rags, but the most recent scandal surrounding the posting of transsexual TV host **Li Ching's** (利菁) medical history on a public Web site has hit all kinds of nerves in the entertainment and media industries.

The entertainer, whose real name is Regine Wu Ming-enn (吳明恩), has repeatedly claimed to have been a hermaphrodite who opted to become a woman. She has long insisted that while she did not plan on having children, she was physically capable of becoming pregnant. A medical report from the doctor who is said to have performed the surgery claims that Wu was a man who had a sex-change operation.

Wu has consistently stated that she is a woman, and has rebuffed all suggestions that she is in fact a transsexual. The controversy surrounding her claims has even led local transsexual artist **Hsue-er** (雪兒) and South Korean transsexual star **Harisu** (河莉秀) to attack her for not supporting her own. The new revelations refute Wu's own story of starting life as a hermaphrodite, but she has vehemently denied any acquaintance with the doctor **Chang Chi-Chung** (張啓中), whose article detailing Wu's sex-change procedure was posted online.

The *Liberty Times* (the *Taipei Times*'s sister paper) reported Wednesday that the Department of Health (衛生署) would investigate Chang's behavior, which may be considered illegal. Chang insists that he published the details in a specialist journal for the benefit of medical professionals, and has no idea how the material was disseminated on the Internet.

The leak and the subsequent media frenzy over details of Wu's sex change (which, let's face it, is just a minor twist on what is pretty much old news) follows in the wake of revelations earlier in the week that model and aspiring actress **Alicia Liu** (劉麗愛) was also a man. The revelation was made by a high school classmate. Liu held a press conference on Jan. 15 to reveal that she had undergone a sex change at 18, stating that she was happy with the way she was now. Liu has won overwhelming support from colleagues in the entertainment industry.

Big S (大S), otherwise known as Barbie Hsu (徐熙媛), has taken a step on a new career path. Despite negative reviews for her television soap *Summer of Bubbles* (泡沫之夏), in which she stars together with

TV idol **Peter Ho** (何潤東), Chinese interests have approached Hsu and her leading man as product spokespersons for a range of wedding apparel. According to *Next Magazine*, the deal is worth NT\$10 million each.

Hsu has also hit the headlines for a series of new pro-vegetarian ads for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) Asia. One poster features Hsu striking an assertive pose in unbuttoned cut-off shorts and a rack-enhancing tank top with the words "Powered by Tofu" against a slogan "I Am Barbie Hsu, and I Am a Vegetarian." A second poster has her in cute mode and cuddling up to a little piglet, with the words "Compassion is beautiful. Go vegetarian."

"Animals are like my brothers and sisters, my friends and my family," the TV personality said in a PETA statement. Hsu was voted Asia's Sexiest Vegetarian woman in PETA's 2009 poll, so whether or not her endorsement is going to turn the *otaku* hordes of Taiwan into passionate chickpea-munching animal lovers, is certainly something to watch. The unbuttoned shorts are clearly the key.

On a lighter note, the *Liberty Times* reported that the cute little piglet sht on Hsu's whiter-than-white boob-tube during the shoot. With her usual candor, Hsu immediately announced to the assemble crew, "This ain't my shit." (這不是我的屎!) The piglet, which had initially been called Bacon, was subsequently re-christened Da Da (大大), baby talk for poo.

Janet Hsieh (謝怡芬), host of *Fun Taiwan* (瘋台灣) is marking her arrival as a serious force in Taiwan's entertainment industry with the publication of a volume of autobiography titled *Traveling With 100 Toothbrushes* (帶一百支牙刷去旅行). The big revelation is that — yawn — she still gives her heart to her first boyfriend from her MIT days, and that she fails to gush sycophantically over her agent, former lover and the guy who pretty much made her the celebrity she is today

— **Tim Li** (李景白). As much as Pop Stop disapproves of her efforts to rival Big S and others in foxy appeal, we still say: More power to her.

Big S is Asia's "sexiest vegetarian."

PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES

South Korean superstar rains supreme



A superstar in Asia since 2004, Rain's profile skyrocketed internationally last year when he starred in the American action film *Ninja Assassin*, produced by the Wachowski brothers. The film was tailor-made for Rain after the director duo was mesmerized by his supporting-role performance in 2008's *Speed Racer*, also directed by the Wachowskis. In April 2006, Rain was listed by *Time* as one of the "100 most influential people who shape our world," and in 2007 was included on *People's* "most beautiful people" list. Rain's ascent to stardom wasn't always plain sailing. Rejected several times by JYP

Entertainment (his former agent) because he did not have double eyelids, a traditional standard of beauty in Asia, he refused to resort to plastic surgery as many South Korean entertainers have done, and through sheer will and talent hit the big time, redefining audiences' aesthetic tastes in the process.

MBLAQ, the boy group launched by Rain's own management company J. Tune Entertainment, will appear as guests.

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: Legend of Rainism in Taiwan (Rain 暴雨傳奇高雄演唱會)
WHEN: Tomorrow at 7:30pm
WHERE: Main World Games Stadium, Kaohsiung City (高雄世運主場館), located at the junction of Jhunghai (中海) and Junsiao roads (軍校)
ADMISSION: Tickets are NT\$380 to NT\$6,000, available through ERA ticketing outlets or online at www.ticket.com.tw
ON THE NET: www.rain-jihoon.com/main.html



PHOTOS: TAIPEI TIMES

BY DAVID CHEN

MUSIC

Linkin Park's frontman sees the sunrise

It's not Linkin Park, but fans will hear a familiar voice when the group's lead singer, Chester Bennington, appears in Taipei tomorrow night with his side project, *Dead By Sunrise*, at Huashan 1914 Creative Park (華山1914).

Bennington takes a self-professed confessional tone in *Out of Ashes*, *Dead By Sunrise*'s debut album, which was released in autumn last year. Both the album title and the band's name refer to the singer's past personal problems, which revolved around his divorce with his first wife and addiction to alcohol and drugs.

In a press release from his label Warner Music, Bennington said the album "came out of wondering, literally, whether I was going to make it to tomorrow." Spoken in true rock 'n' roll fashion, but Bennington appears to have emerged from his troubles on top. He continues to enjoy enormous success with Linkin Park, whose blend of hip-hop, alternative rock and metal has earned the group several Grammy awards and led to headline tours



Chester Bennington, the lead singer of Linkin Park, performs in Taipei tomorrow with his band *Dead By Sunrise*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WARNER MUSIC

of stadiums around the world.

In addition to feeding the sex-drugs-and-rock-and-roll mystique, Bennington has settled into another archetypal mold, the modern rock star as entrepreneur. He co-owns a tattoo parlor in Las Vegas and runs a clothing line called *Ve' Cel*.

But die-hard fans at tomorrow's show will likely be focused on Bennington's

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: *Dead By Sunrise*
WHEN: Tomorrow night at 8pm
WHERE: Huashan 1914 Creative Park (華山1914), 1, Bade Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市八德路一段1號)
ON THE NET: myspace.com/deadby sunrise
ADMISSION: NT\$1,000 to NT\$3,000, available at the door or at Rose Records outlets (玫瑰大眾唱片), which are listed online at www.g-music.iticket.com.tw

angst-ridden voice, which takes center stage in this first ever solo venture. *Dead By Sunrise* sees the vocalist getting more melodic and pop-oriented thanks in part to his five-piece backing band, composed of friends from several Los Angeles-based synthrock groups.

In contrast to Linkin Park's nu-metal sound, *Dead By Sunrise*'s brand of rock

is more straightforward and laced with catchy pop hooks. In an interview with the *Taipei Times* last year, Bennington cited grunge, punk and 1980s electronic pop from the "New Romantic movement" as his major influences, which can be heard in *Out of Ashes*. The album shifts between songs like the guitar-drenched *Fire* and the keyboard synthesizer-driven *Too Late*.

Though Bennington's lyrics for *Dead By Sunrise* draw from direct personal experience, they cater to a pop universality and sense of melodrama that resonates with Linkin Park's music. In *Let Down*, a song about his divorce, he sings in the chorus: "I don't want to be let down / I don't want to live my life again / Don't want to be lead down the same old road."

When Bennington was here last summer, he was singing with Linkin Park to a stadium crowd of 40,000 people. Tomorrow's show will be a much more intimate affair. The concert takes place in a former warehouse at Huashan 1914 Creative Park, which seats around 2,000.

RESTAURANTS

BY NOAH BUCHAN

BY DAVID CHEN

Alleycat's

Address: 1, Bade Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市八德路一段1號) **Telephone:** (02) 2395-6006
Open: 11am to midnight; closes at 2am on Fridays and Saturdays
Average meal: NT\$400 **Details:** Credit cards accepted; English and Chinese menu; 10 percent service charge **On the Net:** www.alleycatspizza.com



Alleycat's new location at Huashan 1914 Park sets the bar, both in terms of food and service, for upscale pizza joints in Taipei.

NOAH BUCHAN, TAIPEI TIMES

I must confess that I broke a vow made a few years back never to step foot again into Alleycat's. My last experience in the claustrophobic and crypt-like atmosphere of its branch located a stone's throw from Yongkang Street (永康街) saw an angry chef repeatedly berating a server over some indiscretion — one that was perhaps deserved because the service was terrible (though the food was excellent).

Fast forward a few years and I happened past the chain's recently opened location in Huashan 1914 Creative Park (華山1914), where large calzone-shaped casement windows exuded soft light. Tempted by the ambiance and the deliciously pungent smell of baking, I broke my covenant.

The expansive interior, with its vaulted ceilings and open-spaced concept, consists of two rooms separated by a long bar. The walls are painted mustard yellow with patches of exposed brick, and the windows are ideal for watching the hustle and bustle of the open market (on weekends) outside.

Behind the bar, patrons can watch cooks roll, dress and bake pizzas and calzones. Two arches to the right of the long bar act as the gateway to the second dining

room above, which sports a partial replica of Michelangelo's fresco *The Creation of Adam*, rounding out the Mediterranean vibe that the restaurant does well to cultivate.

As I was losing myself in the architectural largesse, the caprese salad (NT\$180) arrived. Sliced tomatoes and fresh mozzarella were alternately stacked on a small plate, and it was seasoned with lemon juice, olive oil and cracked pepper and sprinkled with slivers of fresh basil.

Like the Tower of Pisa it replicates in miniature form, however, it was slightly awry. More to the point, the salad was not so much doused but drenched in olive oil, effectively drowning out the delicate flavors of the tomato, cheese and basil. Perhaps a little less oil and a sprinkling of balsamic vinegar would lighten up this heavy starter.

But everything fell into place with the vegetarian pizza (NT\$330 for 10-inch; NT\$360 for 12-inch). Alleycat's takes its dough seriously. Made from scratch, it is assembled as ordered and cooked in a stone oven.

The mural of black olives, green peppers, tomatoes, shiitake mushrooms and artichoke hearts was evenly arranged on a thin

crust with just the right amount of mozzarella cheese and marinara sauce. The crust was expertly cooked to a golden brown on the edges and remained soft and chewy toward the center.

The calzone (NT\$350) was also a triumph. Served with a Caesar salad and marinara sauce on the side, the pastry's innards were a gooey mixture of spinach and ricotta cheese infused with aromatic spices.

And the service? No angry chefs here, and my water glass was kept full even though the place was packed.

The restaurant also has a large outside patio that is perfect for sipping back a few ciders or glasses of Hoegaarden draught (both NT\$120 for a half pint or NT\$220 for a pint).

Dust off that old Hawaiian shirt: Tiki carvings and the "original" Mai Tai are just some of Trader Vic's kitschy charms.

This Polynesian-theme restaurant might look like a Hawaiian tourist trap at first glance, but it quickly grows on you. The food, a fusion of pan-Asian cuisine and American steakhouse fare presented with unusually good service, is as comforting as the teak paneled walls and bamboo rattan furniture.

A way to sample Trader Vic's extensive selection is the Sunday brunch buffet, which is well worth the price at NT\$780 per person. The spread includes beef prime rib, rack of lamb, pork ribs and salmon — all of which are slow-roasted in the restaurant's "Chinese smoke oven," an impressive large barrel-shaped kiln.

Everything at the buffet was of high quality, from the barbeque chicken and Thai curry to the creamy tortellini and salads. The restaurant cut no corners on ingredients, using fresh jumbo shrimp for a stir-fry with cashew nuts and Haas avocado for a salad.

An American chain that began as a tropical-themed restaurant near San Francisco in the 1930s, Trader Vic's drew inspiration in part from the area's Chinese cuisine. The restaurant is even

credited for popularizing crab Rangoon, deep-fried wonton dumplings filled with cream cheese and crabmeat (available at the buffet and for NT\$230 as an appetizer).

The Mai Tai is a must at Trader Vic's, which claims its founder, Victor "The Trader" Bergeron, invented this rum and citrus cocktail and introduced it to Hawaii in the 1950s. The drink, which enjoyed some exposure in *Blue Hawaii* starring Elvis Presley, will cultivate a tropical mood even if the grass hanging at the restaurant's "boathouse bar" doesn't.

A small serving (full size NT\$290), topped with pineapple and a Maraschino cherry skewered on a plastic tiki man toothpick, comes with the buffet (a non-alcoholic version is also available).

Even if the South Pacific is out of reach, Trader Vic's offers libations worthy of a luau. A "rum keg" (NT\$750) is a mix of light and dark rums and tropical fruit served in a wooden vessel for four people. Imported aged Caribbean rums, which are not on the drinks menu, are also served.

The four-page illustrated drinks menu makes for an entertaining read with concoctions like the Rangoon Ruby ("vodka with a tang of fresh

cranberries," NT\$260), Kamaikaze ("a bit suicidal but delicious," NT\$290) and Suffering Bastard ("a forthright blend of rums, lime and liqueurs with an affinity for cucumbers," NT\$360).

The well-trained and competent wait staff, who don either floral print shirts or white chef's coats, could offer lessons to any fine dining establishment in town. I kept missing out on the prime rib, which was gone every time I went to the buffet table. This prompted a waiter to bring over a serving later on — without my asking. And the manager remembered the name of one of my dining companions, who visits several times a year.

The dining room sports several huge tanks full of tropical fish, and the huge "Chinese oven" is placed in a room with a large window so diners can watch the kiln fires.

On the a la carte menu, US prime steaks range from NT\$950 to NT\$1,190, while seafood main courses, which include salmon, sea bass and prawns, run from NT\$790 to NT\$890.



A tender prime rib is part of Trader Vic's excellent Sunday buffet.

PHOTO BY DAVID CHEN

Trader Vic's

Address: 7F, 135, Minsheng E Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市民生東路135號7樓) **Telephone:** (02) 2545-9999
Open: 11am to 11pm, the bar closes at 1am; Sunday brunch is from 11am to 2pm
Average meal: NT\$800 to NT\$1,000 per person; Sunday brunch is NT\$780 per person, plus 10 percent service charge **Details:** Credit cards accepted **On the Net:** www.tradervics.com/rest-taipei.html

TIDBITS

BY CATHERINE SHU

Are macarons the new cupcake? It seems that way. Stores selling the airy, delicate sweets are proliferating in New York City, where shops like Magnolia Bakery launched the cupcake craze. Macarons, which are meringue shells stuffed with ganache and other fillings (and not to be confused with the coconut-based macaroon), are also increasingly easy to find in Taipei.

The French confections are notoriously difficult to make and command higher prices than most other pastries, but Sadaharu Aoki (Tel: (02) 8729-2759) in the food court of Xinyi District's newly-opened Bellavita shopping mall may be the last word in decadence. Tiny macarons (just two bites each) are NT\$85 each. Eye-boggling prices aside, the French-Japanese patisserie's macarons are wonderful, with perfectly crispy shells and a wide range of unusual flavors, including *peche cannelle* (peach with a hint of cinnamon) and *yuzu* (grapefruit).

The adorable Patisserie La Douceur (Tel: (02) 3322-2833, www.ladouceur.com.tw) near Yongkang Street (永康街) is a more affordable but worthy alternative to Sadaharu Aoki. Brightly colored macarons are sold by weight for NT\$38 per gram and come in a wide range of unusual flavors, including balsamic vinaigrette (very accurate) and rose and litchi.