

POP

STOP

COMPILED BY HO YI



Jacky Wu is bringing his questionable business acumen to the world of animated cinema.

PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES

How much are you willing to pay for a CD? Hong Kong singer-actor **Jacky Cheung** (張學友) believes his crooning is worth far more than NT\$300. After a five-year hiatus, Cheung has returned to the music scene with jazz album *Private Corner*. The limited-edition glass CD of his record will set you back NT\$60,000.

For those who are not familiar with the relatively new audio format, the transparent glass CD is a Japanese invention that guarantees near-perfect sound quality and is not affected by humidity or heat.

Cheung is the world's first singer to use the glass CD for a major-label release, and there are only 6,000 copies available for purchase.

Meanwhile, Taiwan's Super Band (縱貫線) returned home with two farewell concerts at Taipei Arena (台北巨蛋) last weekend. Comprised of venerable rockers **Lo Ta-yu** (羅大佑), **Emil Chou** (周華健), **Jonathan Lee** (李宗盛) and **Chang Cheng-yue** (張震嶽), the group's recent tour was a smash hit with 58 shows in Hong Kong, Taiwan, China, Singapore, Malaysia, Canada and the US in the past year. An estimated 1.7 million people attended the concerts, with Super Band pulling in NT\$43 billion in revenue.

In film-related news, TV entertainer **Jacky Wu** (吳宗憲) and friends have forked out NT\$120 million to set up an animation company. The celebrity investor said he hopes to produce films similar to *Avatar*.

The studio's first 3D feature-length animation is called *I Am a Little Bird* (我是一隻小小鳥). Wu plans to dub and edit the work himself.

Last June, Wu took up the post of chairman at H&T Electronics (翔昇電子), only to step down from the position 168 days later after learning the company was

NT\$600 million in debt. Another man who's feeling confident these days is **Jay Chou** (周杰倫). The versatile pop star turned to stuffed animals for inspiration while directing *Panda Men* (熊貓人), a television drama co-starring his buddy **Devon Song** (鄧頭) and J-girl (J女郎) **Chiang Yu-chen** (江語晨). (The term J-girl refers to female stars who have been romantically linked to Chou.)

Despite a production budget reportedly exceeding NT\$100 million, the story about two panda suit-wearing super heroes has suffered from low ratings and negative reviews in China.

The Chairman has embraced the criticism by calling his work "retarded in an entertaining, funny way," "very cool" and "a classic." Local audiences can judge for themselves when the show premieres in Taiwan today on CTS (華視).

Finally, China's answer to the Golden Raspberry Awards, the Golden Broom Awards (金掃帚獎), were held in Beijing on Saturday to recognize the worst in Chinese-language cinema over the past year.

Taiwan's **Lin Chi-ling** (林志玲) beat out compatriot **Big S** (大S), otherwise known as Barbie Hsu (徐熙媛), to take home top honors in the most disappointing actress category for her performance in the nonsensical adventure flick *The Treasure Hunter* (刺陵).

The gong for most disappointing director award went to China's **Zhang Yimou** (張藝謀), whose *A Simple Noodle Story* (三槍拍案驚奇) also shared the award for most disappointing film with *The Treasure Hunter* and *City of Life and Death* (南京！南京！).

The Golden Broom Awards were founded and are supported by cinema periodical *Youth Film Handbook* (青年電影手冊) and independent film critics in China.



Lin Chi-ling was named most disappointing actress by China's answer to the Golden Raspberry Awards.

PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES

BALLET

BY DIANE BAKER

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: Kaohsiung City Ballet's Dance Shoe 2010
WHEN: Tomorrow at 7:30pm and Sunday at 2:30pm in Taipei, March 6 at 7:30pm and March 7 at 2:30pm in Kaohsiung, March 13 at 3pm and 7:30pm in Tainan

WHERE: Experimental Theater (國家戲劇院實驗劇場), 21-1 Zhongshan 5 Rd, Taipei City (台北市中山南路21-1號); Chihshan Hall, Kaohsiung Cultural Center (高雄市文化中心至善廳), 67 Wufu 1st Rd (高雄市五福一路67號); Yuansheng Theater, Tainan Municipal Cultural Center (台南市文化中心原生劇場), 332, Jhonghua East Rd Sec 3, Tainan City (台南市中華東路三段332號)

ADMISSION: NT\$400 for the Taipei shows (both are sold out); NT\$300 for Kaohsiung and Tainan. Tickets are available through NTC ticketing or online at www.artsticket.com.tw



PHOTO COURTESY OF KCB

Pointing out the new year

MUSIC

BY ALITA RICKARDS

Free love – for now

When the birthday of the world's most widely known reggae star rolls around, it's no surprise that reggae band High Tide, winner of ICRT's Battle of the Bands in 2008, would want to celebrate the life of the man who introduced the genre to so many people.

"Bob Marley was not a musician as much as a messenger," said Moshe Foster, lead vocalist and guitar player for High Tide, who credits Marley with "voicing the emotions and struggles of millions of people throughout the world."

To celebrate the life of this influential performer, who was born on Feb. 26, 1945, two parties will be held this weekend with live sets by High Tide followed by recordings of Marley's music.

Though Foster used to rock with his prior band Public Radio, the message of Marley's reggae has influenced his current direction in music, and is the reason he feels it is so relevant in Taiwan: "His music was filled with love and optimism," said Foster, "empowering listeners to set aside their differences and see the similarities and unifying qualities of their fellow human beings and raise their own voices to be heard."

The band will do cover versions of some of Marley's best known hits, with Foster as DJ Moses and drummer Gregory Russell as DJ Ting also spinning favorites like *I Shot the Sheriff*, *No Woman, No Cry*, *Could You Be Loved* and *Redemption Song*.

Tonight's show is a chance to see the band free of charge at Roxy Roots before the venue's new cover charge policy begins next month, said Root's new PR manager, Patricia Tsou (鄒佩菁).

"We're not making any profit," said Tsou. "Last weekend we had a full house, it was packed but more than half the people were not

buying drinks."

Indeed, it is common to see customers and musicians standing outside of the club drinking beer from nearby convenience stores. Tsou expressed concerns about the viability of paying bands to play when the fans aren't ordering drinks.

"We want to support the bands," she said. "Especially to be able to pay extra for out-of-town bands to help cover their transportation costs or be able to pay for bigger name acts." Starting next month, the cover charge will be NT\$300, of which patrons can use NT\$200 to purchase food or drink, and the remaining NT\$100 goes straight to the band.

High Tide celebrates Bob Marley's birthday tonight from 10pm at Roxy Roots, located at 90 Songren Rd, Taipei City (台北市松仁路90號). Admission is free.

The party continues tomorrow in Taichung from 10pm at The Light Lounge, 85 Huamei W St Sec 1, Taichung City (台中市華美西街一段85號). Admission is NT\$300, which includes one drink.

High Tide regales fans with reggae.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HIGH TIDE



RESTAURANTS

BY NOAH BUCHAN

Mr Onion

Address: 117, Zhongshan N Rd Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市中山北路二段117號)
Telephone: (02) 2522-1812 **Open:** 11:30am to 11pm **Average meal:** NT\$600
Details: Credit cards accepted; English and Chinese menu; 10 percent service charge
On the Net: www.cafeonion.com.tw

I've wandered past Mr Onion's Zhongshan (中山) location several times and have always wondered about the groups of people mingling out front. The family restaurant must be doing something right, I thought. Intrigued, I decided to give it a try. Curiosity, however, soon turned into perplexity.

The eatery follows the popular Taipei tradition of set meals. Patrons choose an entree of chicken, beef, pasta or fish at the front of the menu and then flip towards the back where they choose a salad, appetizer, soup, dessert and drink. There is nothing wrong with this kind of operation, if it is done right. The Palace, for example, does a more than adequate job of serving homemade fare that is fresh and good value.

Mr Onion's interior is perhaps one reason for its popularity. The stained glass and candelabra chandeliers hanging from the ceiling cast an ambient glow over heavy wooden tables covered with floral-patterned tablecloths in earthy tones. Wainscoting on the wheat-colored walls and wooden laminate flooring round out the feeling that one is dining somewhere in 19th-century rural

America rather central Taipei.

I ordered the grilled New York steak (NT\$600), which came with two slices of abalone, a salad, appetizer (from a list of six), soup (from a list of five), dessert (from a list of nine) and drink.

The garden salad of iceberg lettuce, cherry tomatoes and yellow pepper was fresh but the lemony dressing came with too much Parmesan cheese. Much less could have been used — the surplus would have come in handy to enliven the escarrot that came next. Served with a slice of bread dripping with garlic butter, the rubbery snails were buried under a dollop of blackened coagulated butter and garlic. I left half of them on the plate.

While I was wondering if I was going to leave the restaurant hungry, the seafood soup arrived. One of the meal's two highlights, it came loaded with clams, crab, prawn and cuttlefish, and the light tomato broth allowed the individual flavors of the seafood to shine through. As with the escarrot, however, the rubbery texture of the seafood suggested it came from a packet.

After going through the appetizers, my expectation



Mr Onion's mediocre fare doesn't justify its prices.

PHOTO: NOAH BUCHAN, TAIPEI TIMES

of receiving a steak of even mediocre quality had largely vanished. But I was surprised. The 7oz slab was grilled to my specifications — medium rare — and free of gristle. But avoid the pepper sauce. It tasted like the packaged variety that you can buy at any supermarket.

Fortunately, I only added a little sauce on the side so it didn't interfere too much with the robust flavor of the juicy meat.

The chocolate brownie, like the escarrot, was basically an afterthought that I barely touched.

At NT\$600, Mr Onion certainly wasn't worth what I paid — especially considering that Palace offers considerably better fare at two-thirds the price.

Mr Onion has four other locations throughout Taipei, which can be found at www.cafeonion.com.tw.

Fusing Township, located in the hills bordering Taipei County and Taoyuan County, is famous for its scenic beauty. The Swiss Village Garden restaurant, located just off the Northern Cross-Island Highway (北部橫貫公路), does its best to capitalize on this fact. Perhaps it's the cool mountain air and wide vistas that suggest a Swiss alpine environment, but this tenuous link is about as close to Switzerland as this restaurant gets.

The food is best described as scenic restaurant international, with "international" connoting the negative quality of being nowhere in particular. A main course, mostly Western in inspiration, is coupled with a salad with a Japanese style dressing and served with a Chinese hot pot of mixed cooked vegetables, which also provides the base for a soup. There is an undercurrent of health-conscious cuisine running through the menu, highlighted by organic coffee, purple rice and herb-infused dishes inspired by the restaurant's own garden.

There was nothing intrinsically

Come for the location, stay for the location.

PHOTO: IAN BARTHOLOMEW, TAIPEI TIMES

Swiss Village Garden 瑞士鄉村農莊

Address: 13-1, Ward 1, Sanmin Village, Fusing Township, Taoyuan County (桃園縣復興鄉三民村1鄰13-1號)
Telephone: (03) 382-2380
Open: 9am to 5pm weekdays, 9am to 7pm weekends
Average meal: NT\$500
Details: Chinese menu; credit cards not accepted



BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW

MUSIC

BY BRADLEY WINTERTON

Move over Mozart

Any city laying claim to be a center for classical music must stage its share of world premieres. Taipei can usually boast quite a number, and tomorrow evening sees the unveiling of Ted Runcie's *String Quartet No. 1* at the Taipei Philharmonic Recital Hall.

Runcie, currently vice-principal of Annie's English School in Taipei County, has had an active and varied musical career in Canada, the US and Taiwan. He studied composition at McGill University in the 1990s, but soon found himself at odds with the school's focus on contemporary experimentation and electronic music.

Instead, he was drawn to the more colorful and passionate music of the Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos (1887-1959). "In his music I discovered that 'art' music could also reflect a mid-American or South American experience," says Runcie.

Runcie decided that a similar approach could also see Caribbean traditions incorporated into a classical format. This doesn't mean that tomorrow's premiere will necessarily prove easy-listening — neither this quartet nor the second one, also completed, will be easygoing for the audience or the performers, Runcie warns. Even so, a work born of love and performed by professional soloists is always likely to have its rewards.

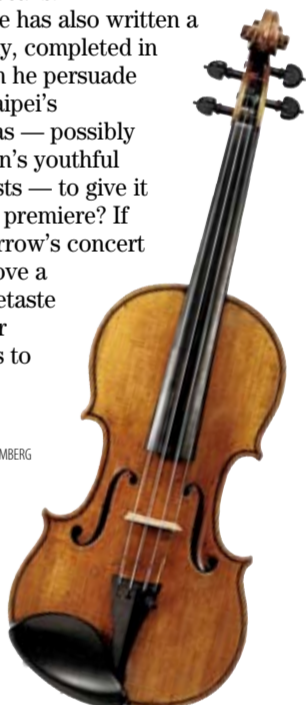
The quartet's first movement contains folk-like melodies and percussive moments packed into a clear sonata form. The second movement is in a habanera rhythm, while the last could be equated to a traditional rondo, while tipping its hat to Latin American music at the end.

This world premiere will be given by a lineup of musicians from Germany, Belarus and Taiwan.

The program also contains shorter pieces by Runcie, to be performed before the quartet itself. One of these, *Two Maroon Folksongs*, will be given its Asian premiere. At its premiere in Montreal in 1996 the audience reaction was so enthusiastic that the piece had to be played again from start to finish, Runcie recalls.

Runcie has also written a symphony, completed in 2006. Can he persuade one of Taipei's orchestras — possibly Evergreen's youthful enthusiasts — to give it its world premiere? If so, tomorrow's concert could prove a mere foretaste of greater pleasures to come.

PHOTO: BLOOMBERG



RESTAURANTS

TIDBITS

BY HO YI

With Valentine's Day just around the corner, Shangri-La's Far Eastern Plaza Hotel is serving up a dose of French sweetness with a selection of chocolate desserts crafted by the French patissier Stephane Leroux. Currently the chef trainer at the headquarters of Belgian chocolatier Belcolade, Leroux has been honored at the prestigious pastry competition Meilleurs Ouvriers de France and the World Pastry Championship in Las Vegas.

The Cake Shop on the ground floor is offering two of the chef's chocolate cakes for about NT\$900. The blushing raspberry cake delights with a harmony of flavors composed of pistachio-flavored dacquoise and jaconde, raspberry puree, almond-flavored cream and a glazed chocolate layer. The orange jasmine cake is made with chocolate mouse and almonds as well as orange and jasmine puree.

Slices of the French confections as well as Leroux's handmade chocolates are also available on the chocolate-themed afternoon tea menu at the hotel's lounge, including Li Bai Lounge (6F) and Marco Polo Lounge (3F).

Afternoon tea is NT\$880 for two plus a 10 percent service charge. The chocolate promotion lasts until Feb. 28. Tel: (02) 2378-8888.

Across town, Toscana, the Sherwood Taipei's Italian restaurant, is making fresh strawberries from Dahu (大湖) in Miaoli County into an assortment of afternoon tea pastries (starting at NT\$450). Choices include strawberry dill cheesecake, sponge cakes with strawberry scones, strawberry cupcakes, strawberry scones and strawberries with tiramisu. The promotion runs until March 15. Tel: (02) 2718-1188 X3001.