

## CULTURE

M O N D A Y , F E B R U A R Y 8 , 2 0 1 0

13

Their songs are everywhere, but few seem to notice: The mating calls of frogs can be heard year-round across Taiwan, whether in the forests of Nantou County or the dense urban sprawl of Yonghe City.

Such amorous noises tend to get buried in the commotion of daily life or perhaps taken for granted in nature areas, but a recording by sound artist Yannick Dauby has shone an audio spotlight on the country's frogs.

In the summer Dauby released *Songs of the Frogs of Taiwan, Volume 1* (蛙蛙蛙), which documents the sounds of 16 of the country's 32 endemic frog species. The French national, who is currently based in Taipei, has been compiling recordings on trips around Taiwan since 2004.

With detailed liner notes on each species, photos and an introduction by Yang Yi-ru (楊懿如), Taiwan's foremost expert on frogs, this 68-minute compilation will appeal to nature lovers, conservationists and amphibian experts. Dauby, a self-professed amphibian enthusiast, hopes to draw attention to Taiwan's ecology, but he also has a simpler view of the project.

"For me, this is really a CD of music," he said with a laugh during an interview just after releasing *Songs* in July. "It's really for the pleasure."

Calling it music might be a stretch for some, but what Dauby has captured is certainly pleasing to the ear, and is presented in an engaging format. The compilation's wide diversity of sounds will surprise those who think of frogs as capable of only croaks and "ribbits."

Many of the sounds on the CD could be mistaken for other animals. The Meintin Temple Treefrog (圓天樹蛙) lets out a chirpy whistle similar to a cricket, while the Indian Ricefield Frog (澤蛙) squawks like a duck and Guenther's Brown Frog (貢德氏赤蛙) barks like a dog.

Some frogs produce unusual noises that sound man-made. LaTouche's Frog (拉都希氏赤蛙) croaks like a creaky door; the Taipei Treefrog (台北樹蛙), which I've been hearing a lot this winter outside of my apartment in Muzha (木柵), makes a high-pitched noise that sounds like an engine revving from far away, occasionally switching to a series of slow, puckering kisses.

The CD was inspired by Dauby's self-professed love of nature and the outdoors, cultivated during his upbringing near the French Alps. But its production was driven by his main occupation, sound art.

## NATURE AS SOUND ART

Much of Dauby's work involves recording natural "soundscapes," which can range from abstract noises to social events. His past projects have included aural collages using bird songs; digital compositions made from recordings on a glacier in Switzerland; and an "audio documentary" featuring a portrait photographer interacting with his two subjects, a woman and her dog. He is currently working on a sound archive project for the Chiayi County Government, recording everything from the noises of antique machines to oral history.



Yannick Dauby pays homage to Taiwan's frogs in *Songs of the Frogs of Taiwan, Volume 1*. PHOTO COURTESY OF YANNICK DAUBY



The call of Molrecht's Treefrog sounds like a wood block being struck. PHOTO COURTESY OF YANNICK DAUBY

Dauby developed a fascination with sound as a musicology student in university, where he studied field recording techniques using portable equipment and microphones. His earliest subjects were of wind and streams — sounds that attracted him because they had "lots of energy." Later on, he finished an advanced degree in "electroacoustic composition" at the National Conservatory in Nice and he now curates a Web site devoted to sound art and the environment (kalerne.net).

Though sound art is broad in scope and hard to define, Dauby says in contrast to music, the field "just asks questions about listening — it puts the listener into a situation where he or she must ask, 'What am I listening to? How am I listening [to this sound]?'"

For Dauby, listening — or just paying particular attention to a sound — can deepen our understanding of our surroundings. He uses the cicada as an example when teaching workshops or holding seminars. "In Taiwan, there are more than 60 species, which means there are 60 different sounds. And 60 different sounds of cicadas means 60 different ways of listening to summer in Taiwan."

## THE PLEASURE OF LISTENING

On *Songs*, each of the 16 species of frogs gets its own track, on which Dauby splices together (but doesn't manipulate, mix or overlap) recordings made at different locations.

Dauby works much in the same way as biologists or enthusiasts collecting sounds of nature: He traipses through forests, microphone in hand, wearing big headphones and a backpack full of recording equipment, searching for his subject with his ears.

But his final product differs from the five-second sound bites one might find on educational or science Web sites. His tracks range from three to seven minutes long, and are not just designed to help identify each species. His selected snippets emphasize the "pleasure" of listening and "the experience of sound."

One of the most striking recordings is of Molrecht's Treefrog, which sounds like a wood block being struck. In the first half of the track, two frogs engage in a lively call-and-response session across a ditch. Later on, a group of males starts chirping and their voices cascade into a surreal, polyphonic chorus that sounds electronic.

But is it music? Dauby says what he hears in a chorus of frogs is not so different from the work of one of his favorite classical composers, Gyorgy Ligite (best known for the sound track to Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*). "When you observe it from a distance, you have this amazing structure, which is very complicated and very well done, and very well composed."

Dauby questions the premise of typical recordings of nature, such as the new age variety that blends environmental sounds with atmospheric music. He feels this "promotes an image of nature that is naive" and "doesn't ask any questions."

"This is why on the CD there is no [narration] explaining things," he said. "So the listener is alone with the frogs. This is also why there is no music or other sounds — because we don't really need that."

## Frog chorus

French sound artist Yannick Dauby's newest work, *'Songs of the Frogs of Taiwan, Volume 1,'* is a CD compilation that documents the sounds of 16 of the country's 32 endemic frog species

BY DAVID CHEN  
STAFF REPORTER



PHOTO COURTESY OF YANNICK DAUBY

## CD NOTES:

- \* Yannick Dauby (澎萊生)
- \* *Songs of the Frogs of Taiwan, Volume 1* (蛙蛙蛙)
- \* Available at White Wabbit Records' Shida flagship store, 1-1, Ln 21, Pucheng St, Taipei City (台北市浦城街21巷1-1號) and its store at The Wall (信牆), B1, 200, Roosevelt Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市羅斯福路四段200號B1)
- \* For a list of other locations see kalerne.net/hui-kan/category/publications-出版
- \* On the Net: www.kalerne.net, yannickdauby.net



[ THE WEEKENDER ]

## If the shoe fits, wear it

The newest edition of Kaohsiung City Ballet's annual choreographic gala hits all the right buttons

BY DIANE BAKER  
STAFF REPORTER

Dance Shoe 2010 (2010點子鞋) was one of the strongest yet of Kaohsiung City Ballet's (高雄城市芭蕾舞團) annual choreographic showcases. Saturday night's performance at the Experimental Theater showed that both the choreographers and dancers are growing in strength and confidence.

It was especially interesting to see the new works by Dance Shoe veterans Wang Kuo-chuen (王國權) and Tsai Po-cheng (蔡博丞), which opened and closed the show, respectively.

Wang's *Little Britain* (小英帝國), a duet danced by Wang himself and Yeh Li-chuen (葉麗娟), was no romantic pas de deux, but an intense duel by a couple whose passion for each other has burned out and corroded them. Yet they still can't help but push each other's buttons.

Tsai's *Lunar Eclipse* (月蝕) was all dark elegance and long lines, set to an interesting sound track that mixed the haunting violin of Lebanese Claude Chaloub with the jazzier, percussive rhythms of Canadian electronica musician Aaron Funk, who is better known by his performing moniker, Venetian Snares. The six women were coolly distant in simple black leotards with net mesh shoulders and sleeves, crisscrossing a floor patterned to resemble a moonlit forest. Though the theme was an eclipse, I found the overall lighting was just a shade too dark.

Hsu Cheng-wei (許程威) is a young choreographer, but his *A Little Bit* (一點點) was an enjoyable piece, set on three men and two women, all clad in dancer's black briefs and short black jackets — plus sports bras for the women. It started out simply enough with the three men striding and gliding on white lines, and turned into an interesting combination of duets and pas de trios, with some cartwheel-style turns over a partner's shoulder or back that looked quite tricky but came off quite easily.

I really liked Yeh Ming-hwa's (葉名樺) *Ponytail* (馬尾巴), a very girly ballet for three women, an umbrella, short stepladder and a bucket, set to a beautiful selection of ballet adagios and segments from *The Magic Flute*, all conducted by Richard Bonyngne.

The music was classic ballet and Yeh created an enchanting story that could have come straight from the full-length romantic ballets, mixed with a quirky humor all her own. It's hard to appear graceful when you're dancing with a plastic bucket on your head or foot, but Yeh's dancers carried it off. The deceptive simplicity of the piece showed how much Yeh has grown as a choreographer since last year's *Tightrope Walker* (走索人).

Kaohsiung City Ballet fans down south will have a chance to see the show next month, when the company performs in its hometown on March 6 and March 7 and then gives two shows on March 13 in Tainan City.

However, the real highlight of the evening for me was meeting up with Wang Tzer-shing (王澤馨) at the intermission, who said that despite all the frustration caused by staging last year's International Ballet Gala and her vows never to do it again, she had been convinced to give it another go. She's been in contact with the National Theater about trying to find a date. Last year's gala was a delight from start to finish and hearing that there could be a fourth in the series was like getting a Lunar New Year's gift a week early.

## TOP FIVE MANDARIN ALBUMS

JAN. 29 TO FEB. 04



1 Alan Luo (羅志祥) and *Rashomon* (羅生門) with **19.08** percent of sales

2 Rainie Yang (楊丞琳) and *Rainie & Love...?* (雨愛) with **11.97%**

3 Jeremy Liu (劉子千) and *Mr. Why* with **8.32%**

4 Jerry Yan (言承旭) and *My Secret Lover* (我的秘密情人) with **5.13%**

5 Magic Power (魔幻力量) and self-titled album with **3.31%**

ALBUM CHART COMPILED FROM G-MUSIC (WWW.G-MUSIC.COM.TW), BASED ON RETAIL SALES

## PLANET POP

been characterized as its charm.

Even Spears used to wear T-shirts advertising the site. It had the flavor of a cheeky outsider pressing his nose against the window of a Hollywood party that was taking itself rather too seriously, panting a while, then writing rude words in the condensation its breath left behind.

It's difficult to pinpoint the exact point at which Perez passed through that window, but passed through it he most certainly has. He appears in music videos and on celebrity reality shows. He co-hosted the MTV Europe music awards, and has been touted himself as a candidate to fill **Simon Cowell's** soon-to-be vacated chair on *American Idol*.

In joining the throng of those he mocks, Perez Hilton has completed the transformation from blogger to satirical character. That he presents TV gigs in the manner of someone who has just won a competition to do so must be part of his appeal. The Internet's biggest star is a man who would trample over his grandmother to get inside the tent he was pissing into minutes before.

Meanwhile, former 1970s teen idol **Leif Garrett** has been charged with felony possession of heroin after his

arrest in a Los Angeles subway station.

The 48-year-old singer and actor was charged on Friday and is free on bond. He is scheduled to be arraigned on Feb. 24.

Los Angeles County sheriff's spokesman Steve Whitmore says deputies confronted Garrett at the downtown Metro Red Line station on Monday. They say he admitted having black tar heroin in his shoe.

Garrett was also arrested for heroin possession at an LA subway station in 2006.

A phone message left for publicist Barbara Papageorge was not immediately returned, and it was not clear if Garrett had an attorney.

Garrett had a handful of hit songs and was a constant cover boy on teen magazines in the 1970s.

In Hong Kong, police said on Friday they had released a feng shui master suspected of forgery in his failed claim on the estate of late billionaire **Nina Wang** (龔如心), once Asia's richest woman.

**Tony Chan** (陳振聰), 50, Wang's former lover and spiritual adviser, spent more than a day in custody before his release early Friday on bail of US\$640,000, a police spokesman said.

Chan, who has not been charged,

must report back to the police in the middle of next month while the investigation continues, the spokesman added.

"A man surnamed Chan, aged 50, was arrested for forgery and was allowed to get police bail of five million Hong Kong dollars today," the spokesman said.

On Tuesday, a Hong Kong court rejected Chan's bid to inherit Wang's estimated US\$13 billion property empire, ruling he had forged the eccentric tycoon's signature on a 2006 will.

Police arrested Chan on Wednesday evening following a search of his luxury home in Hong Kong's upmarket Peak district.

The sensational case gripped the former British colony and generated blanket media coverage, with Chan often cast as a charlatan who duped the pigtailed billionaire by promising to find her kidnapped husband and cure her cancer.

Famous for her outlandish dress and thrifty nature, Wang died in 2007 at the age of 69.

Wang's husband Teddy, whose body has never been found, was abducted in 1990 and declared legally dead in 1999.

—AGENCIES



Perez Hilton's celeb-bashing blog has created a filthy new mainstream. PHOTO: REUTERS