

POP STOP

COMPILED BY NOAH BUCHAN

With so many in Taiwan's celebrity firmament embroiled in scandals over the past few years, 2010 may turn out to be the year when some turn to religion to change their evil ways. But don't count on it.

"God is better than sex," screamed a T-shirt worn by actor and singer **Vanness Wu** (吳建豪) while attending a Christian conference late last week, according to a report in the *United Daily News*.

After arriving at the Festival of God's Power Conference (神大能醫治布道會), the 31-year old heartthrob — who recently changed his first name to Van Ness — proceeded to disclose details of his changed lifestyle since being baptized two years ago.

In a tell-all to the media scum following him, Wu confessed to losing his virginity aged 17 and "dating" six women in the past. Those wild days are behind him, though, as he told the assembled gossip hounds that he signed a "celibacy card" in 2008 and prays for one hour every day — this in addition to surreptitious prayers for friends and colleagues. He said that he manages to avoid temptation by putting God first.

He also confirmed rumors that he'd been involved with singer and actress **Vivian Hsu** (徐若瑄), claiming he could no longer lie about their past relationship. (Incidentally, Hsu has been spotted in the past at Xingtian Temple (行天宮) praying for divine intervention to help her find a mate).

When asked if he planned to become a pastor, Wu replied that he'd leave it up to God. If that wasn't odd enough, CTV showed a clip of Wu's hand placed on the head of a middle-aged woman, a sight that could have come right out of America's Bible Belt.

All this talk of clean living is hard to swallow. Several media outlets implied just as much by juxtaposing images of Wu at the conference with those of him lying naked on a fully dressed **Ady An** (安以軒), his co-star in the soap opera *Autumn's Concerto* (下一站, 幸福). Perhaps Wu's abstinence pledge has an opt-out clause for television.

Singer and actor **Jay Chou** (周杰倫) may need Wu's help in calling on the Almighty for a miracle to salvage *Pandamen* (熊貓人), a new television program which he directs. The drama series about two heroic pandas that protect a city received the lowest rating for its

10pm time slot last Friday, according to a report on NOWnews.

Bloggers complained *Pandamen* had a childish plot and seemed to cater specifically to viewers in China. One would expect, then, that it would have received rave reviews when it aired on Guangzhou Television last month. But the NT\$110 million show barely registered, with only 5,000 viewers tuning in on its third day, making it the lowest-rated show in the station's history.

And now to more mundane news. The *Apple Daily* released the results of its "Queen of the Bra" (內衣皇后) poll. **Joe Chen's** (陳喬恩) mammalian protuberances (33D) blew away the competition with 52 percent of the votes, coming out victorious in the ongoing lingerie battle against her *To Love You Is My Destiny* (命中注定我愛你) co-star and undergarment rival **Bianca Bai** (白歆惠). Bai's tatas, practically exploding out of a 33B cup, placed third with 14 percent.

Actress **Cheryl Yang** (楊麗華) came second with 22 percent, and singer **Landy Wen** (溫嵐) placed last with 3 percent. Pop Stop awaits *Apple's* "Queen of the Thong" poll with baited breath, and wonders when the "King of the Thong" contest kicks off.

Yahoo Kimo, meanwhile, came up with its own poll on who is the top male idol, which seems more of a promotional gimmick for popular boy band F4 than anything else.

Jerry Yan (言承旭) topped the poll of 170,000 votes with 30.8 percent, beating out fellow F4 band members Van Ness Wu and **Vic Chou** (周渝民), both of whom tied with 26 percent. Perhaps Yan has been praying in secret.

And finally, Chinese actress **Zhang Ziyi** (章子怡) is in a little hot water lately over allegations that she embezzled money donated to her charity to help victims of the 2008 Sichuan earthquake.

Zhang had publicly pledged the equivalent of NT\$4.7 million to China's Red Cross for victims of the disaster that killed an estimated 68,000 people. China's media and bloggers have been in a tizzy over revelations that she donated only part of that total, leading to speculation that she had funneled the rest into her own personal account.

The Red Cross confirmed on Monday that it had received the balance owed, according to a report on Sina.com.

Joe Chen: *Apple Daily's* "Queen of the Bra."

PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES



BY HO YI



Sirena a la Plancha by Spain's Sol Pico Dance Company.

PHOTO COURTESY OF NICH

For the fun of it

Residents of Taipei who are stuck in the city during the Lunar New Year often resort to eating, drinking and playing mahjong for wholesome family entertainment. A more lively alternative will be staged next weekend: free outdoor performances from Spain and Taiwan's Amis tribe (阿美族) at the Chiang Kai-shek Memorial Hall Plaza, which open the 2010 Taiwan International Festival (2010台灣國際藝術節).

The festival, whose theme is Diversity and Sustainability, runs through March 28 and features Taiwanese and international performances of dance, music and theater from nine countries including Germany, France, Denmark and Colombia.

Spain's Sol Pico Dance Company draws attention to the issue of dwindling water supplies in *Sirena a la Plancha*, an abundantly humorous and sensual

performance that tells the story of a woman who changes into a mermaid to save the world from drying up.

Sirena a la Plancha is approximately one hour long and begins at 8pm on Feb. 19.

For *Ilisin — Amis Harvest Festival Dances*, the Formosa Aboriginal Song & Dance Troupe (原舞者) brings the harvest dances of the Amis communities of Hualien to the capital.

More than 200 Aboriginal performers will participate in the year-end festival, held to worship and offer gratitude to ancestors and deities as well as pray for good harvests and fortune in the coming year.

The Ilisin festival, which usually lasts several days, has been condensed into a two-hour long event that begins on Feb. 20 at 6pm.

A daring attempt at blending tribal sounds with a Western orchestra and contemporary music, *On the Road* (很久沒有歌我了你) was born of a collaboration between Aboriginal musicians from Taiwan Colors Music (角韻音樂) and the National Symphony Orchestra (NSO, 國家交響樂團) under conductor Chien Wen-pin (簡文彬). It hits the National Concert Hall stage later this month.

British composer George Fenton continues the green theme with *The Blue Planet Live*, a concert that sees the NSO and Taipei Philharmonic Chorus (台北愛樂合唱團) performing the multi-award winning score Fenton wrote for the television documentary series *The Blue Planet*, produced by the BBC and Discovery Channel.

Taiwan International Festival's bilingual Web site can be found at tif.ntch.edu.tw.

THE VINYL WORD

BY TOM LEEMING

Forget about the name, next week, FreakFest in Kending is going to be lovely. Hedonistic yes, but still a fabulous place for party people from different cities to congregate where good weather is most likely.

"We put this party in a beautiful spot with lots of great hikes and trails," said Rock Starkey, brainchild of the operation. "It is near the ocean and out in the country, all at the same time so that everyone gets everything wrapped up in a single cheap package."

From Monday afternoon to Wednesday afternoon, attendees get some of the cream of Taiwan's DJs on the old Spring Scream site, Liufu farm (六福山莊). "The real point of the party being a FreakFest," said Starkey, "is the idea that all these people who love electronica and often go to clubs in the cities and share similar interests and tastes with each other, never really get the chance to hang out."

Camping is free with tonnes of places to throw down, and hot showers are



THC will decamp to Kending for FreakFest.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THC

also available. "More important than that is the fact that all the DJs rock," said Starkey, who will also be providing food. The musical menu includes **Mixer T**, **Marcus Aurelius**, **Duckie**, **vDub**, **Koala** and **Dragon** serving up hip-hop, drum 'n' bass, break beat, electro and the much misunderstood psy-trance. There will be a big slice of melted-in-a-pot **THC** (H中P在台北) live hip-hop and other cheeky

toppings including burlesque troupe **Rock in Hose** with some new material.

FreakFest, at Liufu farm (六福山莊) in Kending from Monday at 2pm until Wednesday at 5am. Address: 5, Dasi Ln, Gongyuan Rd, Kending Village, Hengchun Township, Pingtung County (屏東縣恆春鎮墾丁里公園路大溪巷5號). Admission: NT\$800 on the door for the full two days, NT\$700 for Tuesday onwards.

Those staying in the north also have something to shout about: In Taoyuan on Wednesday night at Hong Chen Film Studio there's a big fat old-fashioned rave-up.

This is a possible treat of a party for those old enough to remember a time when a rave was an almost mystical event to be savored, and everyone brought something to the party apart from crappy promoter hyperbole straight from a thesaurus and a "look at me on the stage I'm better than you" attitude.

You can be sure the Taiwanese tigers will be on this one. The roster:

Shin Nishimura, **Sodemaya**, **Elvis T**, **A-Tao** and **Ju**.

Factory One at Hong Chen Film Studio, Taoyuan, on Wednesday from 9pm until 5am. Address: 868-1, Jhongyi Rd Sec 1, Gueishan Township, Taoyuan County (桃園縣龜山鄉忠義路一段868-1號). Admission: NT\$1,200 at the door. On the Net: factoryone.tripper.com.tw (for more information and pre-sale outlets).

Valentine's Day is for hip-hop lovers, so follow your heart to the amphitheater at Taipei's Da-an Park (大安森林公園), where from 7pm until 6am anyone with heart on the mic is invited for a freestyle.

And at the buzzer, a last-minute entry for what is billed as Taipei's only Lunar New Year party. Earworm presents City Sounds Tiger Beats at Hook tomorrow night with **BB** and **Kolette**, plus **vDub**.

City Sounds Tiger Beats tomorrow at Hook from 11pm until 5am. Address: 1, Alley 7, Ln 205, Zhongxiao E Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市大安區忠孝東路4段205巷7弄1號). Admission: \$350 with a drink.

RESTAURANTS

BY CATHERINE SHU

BY HO YI

Kiki Restaurant

Address: 28 Fuxing 5 Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市復興南路28號1段) Telephone: (02) 2752-2781 or (02) 2752-2791 Open: 11:15am to 2pm and 5:45pm to 10pm Average meal: NT\$500 to NT\$600 On the Net: www.kiki1991.com Details: Chinese and English menu; credit cards accepted



The wait is worth it at Kiki Restaurant.

PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

With a celebrity owner (singer and TV host Pauline Lan, 藍心湄) and a prime location in Taipei's East District (東區), Kiki Restaurant is one of the best-known spots for Sichuan cooking in Taipei. Reservations are a must: On a Friday visit, one of our six-member party was reduced to sitting on a stool when the restaurant ran out of chairs even though we had called ahead for a table. The waiting time last Sunday night for walk-ins was an hour.

The long lines, slightly snooty service (we were curtly informed on the phone that reservations are held for only 10 minutes) and less-than-comfy seating (chairs are made of the same hard plastic as the stools) are made up for by the sheer deliciousness of the food. Kiki rates the spiciness of its dishes from one to four stars, with the latter being for diners with iron tongues. On our first visit, we seared our taste buds with the Sichuan-style spicy braised bean curd (麻辣豆腐, NT\$200) and stir-fried pork with Chinese chives and fermented black beans (蒼蠅頭, NT\$220) — and those two dishes rated only three stars. Slightly gentler courses include the very good four seasons beans with minced pork and Chinese spices (千扁四季豆, NT\$210) and "the pan fried

eggs until they are golden brown and then stir-fried with ground chili peppers" (回鍋蛋, NT\$180). The menu's detailed description of the latter dish doesn't capture its sheer awesomeness. Hard-boiled eggs are sliced and then stir-fried with a variety of tasty spices and minced chili peppers. The resulting combination of flavors and textures — the sharp and savory spices against the firm egg white and soft yolk — will make your tongue happy, even if it is still recovering from the mapo tofu. The Sichuan-style stir-fried chicken with chili peppers (宮保雞丁, NT\$280) was also very good, if a tad salty, with large chunks of meat mixed with peanuts and slices of chili peppers.

On a second visit, my companion and I ordered braised oysters with fermented black beans (豆瓣青蚶, NT\$290). The fermented beans added just the right amount of kick and contrast to the plump and juicy shellfish. Throwing caution to the wind, we taunted our arteries with salted grilled pork slices (鹽豬肉, NT\$270), which probably consisted of the fattest cuts the butcher could find on the pig. As a counterpoint to the strong flavors of the braised oysters and pork, we selected the very mild braised silk melon with clams (絲瓜炒蛤蜊, NT\$270). Each

slice of melon was indeed silky and smooth and the clams were fat, but a little tough. Salty dried shrimp kept the dish from becoming bland.

Tables for two are available, but you'll get the most out of Kiki if you go in a larger group. For one thing, the portions are somewhat skimpy, and expensive. Drinks include Kiki's special plum juice (烏梅汁, NT\$140 per carton or NT\$45 per glass), which is supposed to help soothe chili-addled mouths. Red and white wines are available by the bottle (NT\$1,000); the former is pleasantly dry but not particularly memorable. A small selection of cocktails, Taiwan beer, and teas are also available; the most incongruous option on the beverage menu is probably the iced Oreo smoothie (Oreo 冰沙, NT\$200).

Go to www.kiki1991.com for information on other Kiki franchises.

Zabu

Address: 9-4, Pucheng St, Taipei City (台北市浦城街9-4號) Telephone: (02) 2369-6686 Open: Sundays to Thursdays from 3pm to 11pm, closes at 1am on Fridays and Saturdays Average meal: NT\$500 Details: Chinese and English menu, credit cards not accepted On the Net: www.zabustudio.blogspot.com

Nestled on quiet Pucheng Street (浦城街) near Standard Bookstore (水準書店), Zabu looks and feels a world away from the hustle and bustle of the nearby Shida night market and the area's mushrooming youth-fashion shops. Deriving its name from two Japanese words *zakka* (many goods) and *burrokku* (block), the cafe-cum-bistro has a definite *zakka* feel to it with each nook and cranny adorned with everyday objects, offering patrons a seemingly disorderly but snug haven where they can read, surf the Net or relax.

Zabu is home to two laid-back house cats, whose favorite resting spot seems to be on top of its large fish tank. Retaining much of the original structure of an old apartment house, the space is outfitted with vintage wooden tables, chairs and leather sofas. Christmas lights, pencil sketches, drawings, Polaroid photos, and posters and flyers for exhibitions, movies and performances decorate the walls.

The palette of light grays, olive greens and grayish blues is soothing. Yellowish, subdued lighting adds an almost fairy-tale-like aura to the cafe. A white wooden cabinet that stands on one corner sports handmade goods for sale. (Patrons

interested in selling their own art and design items can contact the store directly.)

Zabu serves a decent selection of coffees, organic teas, fruit or milk teas, and drinks including cinnamon milk (NT\$150) and black sesame milk (NT\$150). Alcoholic beverages on offer include plum wine, sake and various Japanese, Belgian and Scottish beers.

The desserts are no disappointment, either. The banana cake (NT\$100) is warm and moist and comes served with either whipped cream or syrup.

Unfortunately, Zabu's savory food is not a strength. The menu consists of mostly simple Japanese-style meals and appetizers such as salmon ochatsuke (rice with tea) (鮭魚茶泡飯, NT\$160), beef with sweet sauce and egg on rice (牛丼蛋飯, NT\$170) and wasabi fried chicken (芥末唐揚雞, NT\$220).

The Japanese fried eggs (玉子燒, NT\$120), however, met expectations with a tasty fusion of egg, mayonnaise, dried kelp, katsuobushi (smoked skipjack tuna) shavings, mustard and honey sauce.

Another signature dish is Zabu's handmade onigiri, or rice ball, a surprisingly filling item with a pleasantly

crunchy texture on the outside that comes in several flavors, including miso (NT\$130), cheese and katsuobushi (NT\$140) and pomelo and salmon (NT\$150).

Zabu offers free WiFi access but charges NT\$50 to plug in your laptop to the electricity. Shelves and cabinets are lined with manga, novels and Japanese design books and magazines.

The ambient music is a touch louder than what you'd expect from a neighborhood cafe, but that's no problem if you're into the likes of Cat Power, The Cure, Radiohead, Joy Division, PJ Harvey and Arcade Fire.

Zabu closes tomorrow for the Lunar New Year and reopens on Feb. 21.



Zabu's savory options are not its strength.

PHOTO: HO YI, TAIPEI TIMES

TIDBITS

BY NOAH BUCHAN

P&P Food and Spices offers pretty much everything you need to create a Mediterranean-style meal — and often at one-third the price of regular supermarkets.

Parmesan from Italy, oysters from France and sardines from Spain are some of the specialties P&P flies in once a week from European countries.

Located on the first floor of a building at the corner of Dingzhou Road (汀州路) and Jimmen Street (金門街), the wholesaler's cramped warehouse is packed full of easier to find items such as olive oil and pesto, and harder to find goodies such as truffles and caviar. The walk-in refrigerator overflows with stacks of Roquefort, camembert and buffalo mozzarella cheeses — to name just a few — while boxes of fresh herbs and spices from the Netherlands (basil, mint, rosemary, chives, thyme and sage) are stacked on the cooler floor beside crates of romaine, squash, radicchio and whole spice.

P&P stocks a broad selection of Italian wines, ports and aperitifs. The only thing missing is fresh bread. For that, head off to Boite de Bijou, located in an alley directly behind National Taiwan Normal University (get there before 5pm because the bread sells out fast).

P&P Food & Spices, 9-14 Jimmen St, Taipei City (台北市金門街9-14號). Open daily from 8:30am to 6pm, closed Sundays and from Feb. 13 through Feb. 19. Tel: (02) 2365-2340. On the Net: www.pnpfood.com

Pâtisserie Boite de Bijou (珠寶盒法式點心坊), 19-1, Ln 33, Lishui St, Taipei City (台北市麗水街33巷19號之1). Open daily from 10am to 9pm. Tel: (02) 3322-2461