

# POP STOP

COMPILED BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW



Bats in the belfry.

PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES

We all know that Jay Chou (周杰倫) fancies himself something chronic, but his most recent automotive acquisition really takes the cake. Not content with his already considerable collection of luxury sports cars, the Chairman (周董) has recently taken delivery of his very own Batmobile.

According to a report in the *United Daily News*, the custom-made auto is based on the one used in Tim Burton's 1989 *Batman*. The car, which takes up to three parking spaces and cost NT\$5 million, is not just a collector's item. Chou said he might have the chance to take it on the road one day. "We'll see if the paparazzi will be able to keep up with me then," he said.

Chou's new toy is an innocent diversion compared to what other celebs have been getting up to, most notably Ethan Ruan (阮經天), who has been caught, once again, with his pants down.

Pop Stop reported last week that Ruan's girlfriend Tiffany Hsu (許瑄甯) had changed her Facebook status from "In a relationship" to "It's complicated" after the star was spotted at a hotel in Taichung with an unidentified woman.

Since then, additional details have been pouring in of his louche behavior.

At the time of the alleged indiscretion, Ruan was supposed to be on leave from the publicity tour for hit film *Monga* (貓艸), in which he starred, to attend his grandfather's funeral.

Photos submitted by a member of the public to *Next Magazine* suggest that he might have had a date with a "long-haired hottie" (長髮辣妹) whose going price, according to the rag, is NT\$30,000. There is still plenty of controversy as to exactly what might, or might not, have happened, as the dates

and locations of the photos are disputed.

Rather less controversial, though equally eye-catching, is Stanley Huang's (黃立行) most recent romantic involvement. Huang, who is no stranger to speculative gossip, has generally managed to keep a fairly tight lid on the details of his private life.

There has, nevertheless, been intense speculation about a possible new courtship following the breakup of his three-year involvement with singer Dominique Tsai (蔡詩雲). According to *Next Magazine*, his new inamorata is model Hu Jia-ai (胡嘉愛). Up to now, Hu has been very much in the minor league, but perhaps now she'll have a chance to move up from the D list.

Someone else who's going places is Wang Ying (王瀾), niece of singer Harlem Yu (庾澄慶). Wang is getting hitched to Jimmy Yang (楊立傑), scion of the Nankou Construction (南國建設) family.

Suggestions that the whirlwind romance, which is leading to marriage after only six months, is being driven by a pregnancy are providing a rich vein for the gossip rags to mine.

From romance to finance: Chang Chen-yue (張震嶽) is romancing a "long-haired hottie" of his own. The singer is riding a wave, and apart from having nothing to hide (when asked who she was, he simply replied that he had plenty of women friends), his participation in Super Band (縱貫線), together with veteran rockers Lo Ta-yu (羅大佑), Emil Chou (周華健), Jonathan Lee (李宗盛), has proven a huge success.

The *Liberty Times* (the *Taipei Times*'s sister paper) estimates the band's 52-show concert tour (six gigs were added on to meet demand), grossed NT\$4.3 billion, with each of the performers pulling in NT\$100 million.

## Tumbling down the rabbit hole



The Looking Glass is, from left, Jon Hom, Annie Chii, Greg Russell and Iki Chen.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE LOOKING GLASS

In Lewis Carroll's book, *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice's adventures start when she follows a white rabbit down a rabbit hole and discovers a whole new world. For members of The Looking Glass, whose band name was influenced by the children's story, the rabbit is music, and the wonderland is Taipei.

"We just felt that the concept of an alternate reality really matched our situation of being abroad and living this life in Taipei as musicians," said vocalist and keyboard player Annie Chii (紀亞軒). "If Jon [Hom] (譚家輝) and I didn't move to Taiwan to start this band, then we'd probably still be in America. Being in the band and living here has really changed our lives."

The timing of the band's appearance on the scene and the release of the new Tim Burton film might seem disingenuous, but after seeing them perform live it's difficult to be cynical about Chii's glowing sincerity and Hom's indie ethos.

Young, irreverent, energetic and obviously delighted by the crowd, this new synth/pop rock group charms onlookers. The sound is quirky, catchy, danceable and unmistakably independent. Effortless and somehow touchingly naive harmonizing between the lead vocalists, Chii and guitarist Hom, is balanced by early video game synth sounds and drum rhythms that occasionally veer into almost-punk by New Zealander Greg Russell.

Iki Chen (陳奕齊) plays his bass along swingly, keeping the music from becoming too light. Though the lyrics are in both Mandarin and English, Chen is the only member who was born and raised in Taiwan.

Chii was born in Taipei but immigrated to California at the tender age of 4. When she returned three years ago to study she met Hom, born and raised in Los Angeles, and they decided to start a band.

They don't like to discuss their influences: "I generally don't like telling people who we sound like because for example, if we were to say to a person that we sounded like Weezer, and that person didn't like Weezer, then we're kind of screwed aren't we?" said Hom. "Or what if they really liked Weezer, and we didn't live up to that expectation? You get the point."

Lyrical they bring to mind The Postal Service, with a smart, storytelling style. Hom just wrote a song "in the perspective of a character in a TV show that [he's] currently obsessed with."

"The Chinese lyrics are surprisingly not written by me," said Chen, "but are written mostly by Annie and some by Jon [who didn't learn to speak Chinese until he was 22]. This explains why it's not exactly the most

proper Chinese." That only adds to their unique, engaging style. One of their most catchy, fun songs involves the repetition of the word banana loudly and cheerfully.

"My favorite song is *Goodbye Hello* because it hits pretty hard but it's also really nerdy with kind of a retro video game vibe," said Chii, and this description could be used to pretty much sum up the band.

Catch them this weekend with My Skin Against Your Skin and Dr Renculous Lipz and the Skallyunz (白悟空) at Light Lounge for the Tuck Yourself In birthday party for Spring Scream co-founder Wade Davis and Russell (who also drums for Lipz).

Dr Lipz, real name Nick Sylvester, is reminiscent of the Mad Hatter, and Andrea Huang (黃蕊韻), lead singer of My Skin Against Your Skin, would make a fine Red Queen, with her "Off with her head!" dance moves.

In the words of Lewis Carroll: "We're all mad here," said the Cat. "I'm mad, you're mad." "But how do you know I'm mad," said Alice. "You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here."



PHOTO: ALITA RICKARDS

### PERFORMANCE NOTES:

**WHAT:** Tuck Yourself In with The Looking Glass, Dr Renculous Lipz and the Skallyunz, and My Skin Against Your Skin  
**WHERE:** 85, Huamei W St Sec 1, Taichung City (台中市華美西街一段85號)  
**WHEN:** Tomorrow from 10pm  
**ADMISSION:** NT\$300 with one drink for men, free for women  
**ON THE NET:** thelookingglassband.com

## RESTAURANTS

BY HO YI

### Ginkatsutei 田村銀勝亭

**Address:** 12, Alley 32, Ln 216, Zhongxiao E Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市忠孝東路四段216巷32弄12號)  
**Telephone:** (02) 2721-4440  
**Open:** 11:30am to 2:30pm and 5:30pm to 9:30pm. Closed on Mondays  
**Average meal:** NT\$350, plus 10 percent service charge  
**Details:** Chinese and Japanese menu with pictures, credit cards accepted

Taipei is home to a fair number of Japanese chain restaurants serving tonkatsus, or Japanese fried pork cutlet, with Saboten (勝博殿), Anzu (杏子) and Koshiya (晃士家) among the most popular.

In its hometown of Hakone, Japan, Ginkatsutei has been making tonkatsu for more than 35 years. The restaurant opened a branch in Taipei's East District (東區) last year.

Unlike many tonkatsu eateries, whose interior designs favor wood and shades of brown, Ginkatsutei's strong palette of black and reds exudes a chic mien.

The clever use of glass to partition the dining space makes the restaurant look deceptively spacious.

However, when it comes to the food, the chef sticks with old-school simplicity rather than a fancy menu of tonkatsu stuffed with various fillings.

Ginkatsutei's pork fillet and pork loin cutlets are coated in a homemade breadcrumb mix, which alone deserves special mention, and deep-fried until golden and crispy.

The cutlet may look dry on the outside, but is gratifyingly

succulent on the inside, and is served with a tart tonkatsu sauce and punchy Japanese mustard sauce.

Health-conscious diners may find it consolatory to know that the restaurant uses brown rice oil, which it touts as rich in vitamins, to deep-fry the tonkatsu.

Besides the pork fillet set (里脊豬排御膳, NT\$320) and pork loin set (腰內豬排御膳, NT\$350), the ginkatsu set meal (銀勝御膳, NT\$350), a popular choice, consists of two tempura prawns and one tonkatsu chopped up into four portions.

Ginkatsutei's must-try signature dish has little to do with meat: deep-fried breaded tofu, served on a bed of tangy onion in a clay pot, and accompanied with a small portion of ground pork (豆腐勝煮御膳, NT\$350).

The bean curd is made specially for the restaurant through a process that employs sea salt to coagulate the soy milk instead of the often-used quicklime.

All set meals come with white rice, miso soup — exceedingly salty — Japanese pickles, shredded cabbage dressed in a piquant vinegar and mustard sauce, an additional side dish,



Top: Fried tofu with a small serving of ground pork is Ginkatsutei's signature dish.

PHOTOS: HO YI, TAIPEI TIMES

dessert and a soft drink. Shochu (燒酒) and beer are also available.

### Burned Cheese 焦起司

**Address:** 11, Ln 93, Shida Rd, Taipei City (台北市師大路93巷11號)  
**Telephone:** (02) 2369-7532  
**Average meal:** NT\$200 to NT\$300, plus 10 percent service charge  
**Open:** Noon to 3am  
**Details:** Chinese and English menu, credit cards accepted

Burned Cheese (焦起司) near Shida night market has several identities. Its ground floor is a cozy cafe with wooden furniture, an antique gramophone and free Wi-Fi — except for dinnertime, when guests with books and laptops are booted out (unless they order a meal). At night its basement bar (BC Bar) takes center stage, with gaudy decor (including a chandelier enclosed in an acrylic table) that is a complete turnaround from upstairs. The restaurant's English name sounds odd, but its Chinese moniker connotes luscious melted cheese.

Unfortunately Burned Cheese's menu, like its decor, is all over the place, ranging from pasta dishes to barbecue ribs to a particularly awful sandwich. The latter was the restaurant's goose

liver pate and orange segment sandwich, the most exciting option among a list of ordinary-sounding submarines. For NT\$140, I expected the portion to be small, but I wasn't prepared to get four triangles of plain white bread topped with single slices of orange plunked on top. The bread was held together by a very, very thin smear of pate — so thin, in fact, that the flavor was lost underneath the bread (too soft) and fruit (too dry and pithy). My appetizer, baked crabmeat and cheese in mushroom (NT\$120) was also unsatisfactory. I could barely taste any shellfish and the accompanying sauce, made of a sugary substance flavored with a hint of balsamic vinegar, was extremely sweet and a poor match for the mushroom and cheese.

The food on a second visit

was better, but still not great. We started with baked escargot and cheese in potato (NT\$160). The potato slices were mealy and the snails were lost under layers and layers of cheese.

For our main course, I stuck to pasta, the restaurant's signature, and ordered the country-style farfalle with pesto sauce (NT\$200). The butterfly pasta was too soft, the pesto sauce bland and, in addition to diced pepper and broccoli, the dish was also topped with baby corn and enokitake mushrooms. The latter was an incongruous touch, but added some welcome texture and flavor. My companion had the roasted pork spare rib with barbecue sauce (NT\$390). The ribs had some deliciously tender meat; the sauce, however, was unusually sweet and had little tang.

We had the restaurant's signature cheesecake (NT\$80), which was topped with a shell of hard caramel-like creme brulee and probably the best part of our meal.

Despite its lackluster menu, Burned Cheese seems to be doing well. Both floors were filled on a Sunday evening and many diners were sipping cocktails (which range in price from NT\$180 to NT\$400) or glasses of wine (NT\$160 per glass or NT\$800 to NT\$1,200 per bottle) from a short wine list. The service is friendly and quick. On both my visits, the appetizers arrived in the middle of the meal. On my second visit, there was a 15-minute lag between our main dishes, but at least dessert arrived promptly.



Burned Cheese's menu is all over the place.

PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

## TIDBITS

The Grand Formosa Regent Taipei's steakhouse, Robin's Grill, is flicking US beef detractors the birdy by throwing a bone-in beef promotion featuring American rib eye, short rib and T-bone steak.

Each prime rib eye steak (NT\$3,800 for two) weighs 32 ounces and the short ribs (NT\$1,800 per person) are prepared sous vide, which involves placing the steak in a vacuum-sealed plastic bag along with a red wine jus, steaming it for eight hours, and then grilling it immediately before serving.

Robin's Grill is located at the Grand Formosa Regent Taipei (晶華酒店), 41, Zhongshan N Rd Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市中山北路二段41號). Tel: (02) 2523-8000.

St Patrick's Day is on Wednesday, but the Village Bar and Carnegie's are getting a head start. At the former, tomorrow and Wednesday from 8pm to 11pm, Irish expat bartender Niall Clinton will be serving up the bar's specials, including cans of Guinness at two for the price of one and NT\$50 shots of Jameson, Tullamore Dew Whiskey and Baileys. Address: 7 Beiping E Rd, Taipei City (台北市北平東路7號).  
 At Carnegie's on Tuesday from 7pm to 8pm there's free Guinness, and the menu consists of corned beef and cabbage (NT\$360) and Irish lamb stew (NT\$390). Address: 100, Anhe Rd Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市安和路二段100號) Tel: (02) 2325-4433.