

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW

DRAMA



COMPILED BY NOAH BUCHAN

When Canadian-born Hong Kong actor and singer **Edison Chen** (陳冠希) and **Jolin Tsai** (蔡依林) strutted down the catwalk in 2007 to promote a leading brand of jeans, it seemed like just another fashion show. Months later, however, when explicit pictures were stolen from Chen's computer showing him with some of Asia's top female stars in various sexually explicit poses, Netizens were drooling over the prospect that Tsai was among the handful of starlets Chen had photographed.

None, however, emerged. When the pair showed up last week at the same fashion show, all the old rumors resurfaced.

Organizers, however, were careful to keep the two apart, with Tsai appearing at the beginning of the show and Chen at the end. And then there was the mutual backslapping.

Commenting on Chen's fall from grace, Tsai told the assembled press pack that the scandal wasn't that bad and she wished him good luck on his forthcoming projects, which include an album of "confessional" songs, slated for release next month. Chen, for his part, said that he admires Tsai's singing and dancing.

He's not the only one. Rumors continue to circulate that Tsai's former flame, **Jay Chou** (周杰倫), wants to sign her to his JVR Music (杰威爾音樂) label after her current contract with Warner Music (華納音樂) expires this summer.

Both pop stars denied the reports, according to a story in the *China Times*. The *Apple Daily*, meanwhile, reported that Tsai has already opened her own record company, which is the precedent set by Chou is anything to go by, is a smart move.

Model **Timi Hsiao** (蕭依婷), who once appeared in one of the Chairman's videos, has, allegedly, been caught with drugs.

But that's not all. A follow-up investigation by the police revealed that Hsiao was involved in a prostitution ring operated by *mamasan* and former beauty pageant finalist **Ling Wei-wei** (凌葳葳), reported *Apple*.

Ling is alleged to have pimped out B-grade actresses, singers and models to patrons in Taiwan, China and Singapore for NT\$60,000 a pop.

Hsiao later said that she had recently run into financial trouble and only agreed to "dinner dates" as a way of earning extra money and denied that anything untoward had happened.

Ling was quoted as saying that



Blue Lan, and child star Hsiao Hsiao Bin.

PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES

she only arranges the dates with clients and what they do on the assignments is their own affair.

Meanwhile, a SetTV (三立) reporter is in the firing line over a question she posed to child star **Hsiao Hsiao Bin** (小小彬), the stage name of Wen Hsuan-yeh (溫玄燁).

At a promotional event attended by **Bianca Bai** (白歆惠), **Xiao Xiao Bin's** mom on the hit television series *P.S. Man* (偷心大聖P.S.男), the reporter queried the five-year-old about a report in the *United Daily News* that suggested whenever he appeared in a show, its ratings plummeted.

"You are always on television, [but] how would you feel if [audiences] didn't want to see you anymore?" the reporter asked. The comments clearly got to the youngster because he later asked his father, "Why doesn't everyone want to see me?"

Needless to say, the stunt has turned into a PR nightmare for SetTV. In a statement, the company said its reporter asked the question as a way of giving the kid "an opportunity to explain himself."

And finally, an addition to the annual roster of ridiculous polls. The People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) Asia-Pacific's annual Sexiest Vegetarian Celebrity vote celebrates those in the entertainment industry who don't eat meat. **Big 5** (大S), otherwise known as **Barbie Hsu** (徐熙媛), and **Blue Lan** (藍正龍) were leading the Taiwanese pack as of press time. To cast a ballot, visit www.petaasiapacific.com/featureSexiestVegCeleb2010-Eng.asp?c=paps10epr.

Brevity is the soul of wit

To bring the curtain down on the drama component of the 2010 Taiwan International Festival (2010台灣國際藝術節), a new production of *Hamlet* by Thomas Ostermeier and the Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz will be performed at the National Theater this weekend. Following on from his huge success with Ibsen's *The Doll's House* at the National Theater in October 2006, all three Taipei shows of Ostermeier's *Hamlet* have long since sold out.

At a press conference to welcome the arrival of the company in Taipei, Ostermeier said that despite being in charge of artistic direction at the Berlin Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz, which is described by the Goethe-Institut as one of "the most important venues of German-language theater," many of his works are better appreciated overseas than in Germany itself.

Ostermeier's *Hamlet* created a sensation at the Festival d'Avignon when it premiered there and it has since toured widely to great acclaim, with some critics suggesting that Ostermeier might be the man to bring Shakespeare into the 21st century. Certainly he is not the only artistic director who is trying to do that, but Bardolatry is not among Ostermeier's sins. When asked how his hugely condensed play, which runs for just two-and-a-half hours without interval (full productions aiming to reproduce the canonical text can run well over four hours), Ostermeier began talking not of the Bard, but of the many interpretations that have existed of this story over the centuries, each trying to make of it something different.

Although some theater purists have questioned whether Ostermeier has any love for Shakespeare or the other playwrights he has reinterpreted, it would be hard to doubt his high regard for the longevity of Shakespeare's words, which he spoke of not as something written four centuries ago, but as part of a very contemporary philosophical inquiry about what it is to be ... or indeed, not to be.

It was particularly refreshing to hear Lars Eldinger, who takes the title role, speaking of the greatness of Shakespeare's character not as something that an actor should seek to inhabit, but as something so flexible, so comprehensive and capacious that it is able to serve



the actor in presenting himself. In this case, it is a self that is filled with self-loathing and the anguish of self-imposed alienation.

Hamlet is famously a play in which pretense and acting are major plot elements, which makes it a great vehicle to express various aspects of modern drama theory. This production also makes use of multimedia, though when speaking to the press, Ostermeier didn't make much of the technology, simply saying that it was part of the toolbox modern directors work with. In this case, it provides the occasion for an additional layer of



Thomas Ostermeier brings Shakespeare into the 21st century with his streamlined version of *Hamlet*.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF NTC

the play (*Hamlet* is gadget mad, and annoys his family by constantly filming their activities, images which then get projected onto a moving background screen).

Many of the elements used by Ostermeier are also popular with local directors, but while *Hamlet* has its full share of technological props and conceptual game playing, it also possesses an in-your-face physicality and grotesqueness that has clearly contributed to its success. Although all tickets have been sold, the good news is the huge local response to this production should ensure that there will be more to come.

MUSIC

BY ALITA RICKARDS

On the road, with a tale to tell

The man who defines himself as the Hi-fi Hobo is taking his guitar and a rented scooter back onto the highways of Taiwan for a nationwide tour over the next six weeks. Scott Cook, Canada's prairie balladeer, will be playing a series of more than 15 shows which began last night at Sappho de Base with special guest David Vorster.

His road trip will take him around the east coast, first stopping in Hualien for a couple of shows with Mister Green, winding down to Kenting for Spring Scream, and coming back up the west coast with shows in Kaohsiung, Tainan, Changhua, Taichung and Taipei.

He'll be reuniting with his former band The Anglers for the latter leg of his tour from April 30, ending up at Roxy Roots on May 7 for a last big show, and at Alleycat's Pizza in Tianmu on May 8 for a final small show (free of charge).

Well-crafted acoustic roots music and honest lyrics enrich Cook's songs, which tell a rambling rendition of life on the road, love lost and found, and strange characters met and befriended. His solo debut *Long Way to Wander* — which made the folk and roots Top 10 on Canadian college radio — was recorded in Taiwan in 2007, where he lived for six years. He has toured extensively since then, most

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: Scott Cook's This One's on the House Taiwan Tour 2010

WHEN: Through May 8

WHERE: Various venues around the country, and at Spring Scream. The next show is Wednesday from 10pm at All-Star Live House, 403 Linsen Rd, Hualien City (花蓮市林森路403號). NT\$250 admission includes a drink

ON THE NET: For tour dates and venues visit www.scottcook.net/news.php

recently to promote his second album *This One's on the House*.

Cook's humble charm and growling, intimate voice have been known to make girls get dreamy-eyed, dancing the night away at his live shows. Reviews of his music frequently refer to campfires and creeks, and he's a local legend in the live music scene in western Canada. He played 137 shows and 13 summer festivals last year alone across North America.

Scott Cook, "Hi-fi Hobo."

PHOTO COURTESY OF TRACY KOLENCHUK



RESTAURANTS

BY CATHERINE SHU

HsiaoWei Chuantsai 小魏川菜

Address: 3F, 13 Gongyuan Rd, Taipei City (台北市公園路13號3樓)

Telephone: (02) 2371-8427

Average meal: Most dishes range from NT\$128 to NT\$280

Open: 11:30am to 2pm and 5pm to 9pm

Details: Chinese menu. Credit cards accepted

Located on the third floor of a non-descript building near Taipei Main Station, HsiaoWei Chuantsai (小魏川菜) is equally bland on the inside. The restaurant's reasonably priced Sichuan food, however, is another matter.

Its kongpao chicken (宮保雞丁, NT\$158) is one of the best versions I've had in Taipei. HsiaoWei's liberal use of Sichuan peppercorns left my tongue tingling. The peanuts are fried until they are slightly browned and rich in flavor, their crunch adding a counterpoint to the moist chunks of meat.

Another fiery dish is the sauteed eggplant (魚香茄子, NT\$96), which is cooked until tender with a liberal amount of diced garlic, black bean sauce and ground pork. The garlic is so soft that it melts in the mouth and most of its piquancy had been absorbed by the rest of the dish (if I hadn't known what the ingredients were, I would have assumed it was made with firm tofu). If your taste buds need a rest, however, consider the much milder huobao sanxian (火爆三鮮, NT\$220), which comprises slices of sea cucumber, abalone and cow stomach stir-fried with snow peas, carrot, mushroom and

HsiaoWei's Sichuan cuisine leaves taste buds tingling.

PHOTOS: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES



other vegetables. The seafood and meat were cooked just right and the vegetables perfectly crispy, but the dish was bland compared to our other orders, even though it was listed among HsiaoWei's signature dishes.

Another way of soaking up the spices is an order of HsiaoWei's fried bread (酥炸銀絲卷, NT\$40), a slightly sweet mantou



with a crispy golden crust. HsiaoWei's service is curt but efficient. All our dishes arrived within eight minutes of our order (though that might have been because we arrived half an hour before the kitchen closed). There are three private banquet rooms in the restaurant, but drinks are limited to tea, beer and a selection of whiskeys.

Choosing from among the teahouses clustered on the hillsides of Maokong (貓空) can be a daunting task, and even more so if the expected hordes of tourists return when the Maokong Gondola officially reopens on Tuesday.

But you can't go wrong with Ching Chun (清泉) if you're looking for a place to relax with a good brew and a spectacular view of Taipei.

Dining at Ching Chun can last two to three hours, as each set menu comes with an ample serving of tieguanyin (鐵觀音), a type of oolong tea cultivated in the area, and food piled so high you'll have trouble finishing it. An early evening supper can soon become a night cap, as candles are lit, insects begin to chirp, and Taipei 101 glitters in the distance.

Ching Chun offers an extensive menu including several set meals for groups of various sizes. My dining partner and I ordered a set for two (NT\$1,000), and the portions turned out to be enough for three.

Our meal included several of the teahouse's signature dishes that incorporate tea as an ingredient. Among the most memorable was the chicken soup with tea and clams (冷凍茶蛤仔雞

湯), which was delightfully light in flavor and seasoned with ginger slices and fragrant tea leaves. De-boned chicken leg with tea (茶油雞) offered a pleasant aroma of Chinese herbs, with dried longan and Chinese red dates sitting on top of the meat, while the fried tea leaves (炸茶葉), a rather curious creation, was mildly sweet.

Fifty-year-old proprietor Chang Ching-te (張慶得), also known as Fourth Brother (四哥), loves a good chat and is happy to instruct diners on the art of tea preparation. He also will read your palm or face for free if he has time.

When asked what he thought of the reopening of the Maokong Gondola, Chang said it would definitely bring in more customers. But he prefers tourists

who take time to appreciate the area's natural beauty to those who just want to eat and move on to the next attraction.

Chang said the best time to visit is at dusk, when the setting sun paints the sky with kaleidoscopic colors. Weekdays and Sunday evenings are better for those who wish to avoid the throngs of tourists.

To get to Ching Chun, look for billboards indicating various attractions including restaurants after you exit Maokong MRT Station (貓空捷運站). These will lead you to a very inconspicuous sign that reads Ching Chun Pen Tien (清泉本店). Enter the teahouse on the second floor and ask for a table on the third. That's where you'll find the best view.



A teahouse with a view.

PHOTO: HO YI, TAIPEI TIMES

Ching Chun 清泉

Address: 33-1, Ln 38, Zhinan Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市指南路三段38巷33-1號)

Telephone: (02) 2939-2832

Average meal: NT\$500

Open: 11:30am to midnight

Details: Chinese menu. Credit cards not accepted

On the Net: water29392832.pixnet.net/blog

TIDBITS

BY HO YI

For an authentic taste of Nagasaki, head to the Far Eastern Plaza Hotel's ibuki Japanese restaurant. Head chef Eiji Nakamura has composed an elaborate multi-course set menu featuring seasonal ingredients imported directly from the Japanese prefecture.

The kaiseki-style meal, a traditional Japanese culinary art form similar to haute cuisine, costs NT\$2,980 plus a 10 percent service charge.

Dishes include grilled sun-dried marinated snapper with grated white turnip and pickled sweet-and-sour Japanese ginger and udon noodles with yuzu-flavored spicy pepper sauce.

Aside from the set menu, around 30 dishes are available a la carte, including sea urchin omelet (NT\$320), poached pumpkin miso soup (NT\$180) and crayfish sashimi (NT\$980). The Nagasaki promotion lasts until April 8.

Address: 7F, Far Eastern Plaza Hotel (台北遠東國際大飯店), 201, Dunhua S Rd Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市敦化南路二段201號). Tel: (02) 2378-8888.

Checkers at the Caesar Park Hotel, Taipei is offering a specially crafted dinner buffet made with flowers. Main course highlights include beef skewer with roselle sauce, Japanese yam with plum and cherry blossom sauce, grilled lamb chop with osmanthus and baked mussels with jasmine sauce. The dinner buffet costs NT\$650 on weeknights and NT\$700 on weekends, plus 10 percent service charge. The promotion runs until the end of next month.

Address: 38, Zhongxiao W Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市忠孝西路一段38號). Tel: (02) 2311-5150 X2237 or X2238.