## 14 發光的城市 AROUND TOWN



#### COMPILED BY DAVID CHEN

hen rumors emerged last weekend that Jerry Yan (言承旭) had been born out of wedlock, the TV actor and singer responded with a vague acknowledgement that turned into

a tribute to his mother. "I don't really know [if the rumors are true] but I don't think it's important," Yan said at a Children's Day charity event

on Sunday. "My mother worked hard to raise me, and I never robbed, I never stole. She is my role model," he said. "No matter what, I'll support her and I hope when I grow older I can make her even more proud of me.'

The 33-year old heartthrob talked about growing up in a oneparent household that struggled to pay the bills and also revealed he was offered work during high school as a gigolo.

He turned the offer down but admitted that he was highly tempted, especially after watching his friends who got into the business driving expensive cars.

"I remembered what my mother told me: 'A poor man must keep his integrity. Whatever you do, don't let yourself down and don't let others down.' So I said I wasn't interested," said Yan. "Besides, if I really went and did that, my mom would have killed me."

One of Yan's former bandmates from boy band F4, Van Ness Wu (吳建豪), was spotted in Hong Kong last weekend with a new girlfriend.

Paparazzi stalked the couple at a shopping mall in Central District and the *Apple Daily* posted video footage on its Web site, which began with a shot of the Taiwanese American singer and mystery girl looking amorously at each other while riding an escalator.

The pursuit culminated at a clothing boutique when Wu's sweetheart discovered cameras pointed their way and ducked behind the counter. Aww. isn't that cute? She's not used to the media, was the tone of the Apple Daily video report.

Wu played it cool and spoke to the reporters, avoiding their uestions about his companion. But later on he confirmed through his manager that she was indeed his new girlfriend. Wu's manager wouldn't reveal her name but offered a few details. Ms "A" (as in Ms "ABC" or American-born Chinese) is 25 years old, 160cm tall, and a Christian. Pop Stop wonders whether Wu, a recent convert, has started to look for a loophole in that "celibacy card" he signed in 2008. Meanwhile, Stefanie Sun (孫燕 姿) was in Kenting to perform at a Spring Scream weekend event. The Singaporean pop singer raked in a cool NT\$3 million for playing at the Peninsula Pop Music Concert

Ethan Ruan is staying in school — and out of the military. PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES

(半島音樂盛世演唱 會), according to our sister paper the Liberty Times. But her singing was the last thing the media was interested in. Reporters were

dying to know

when Sun is

going to finally marry "mustache man" (鬍鬚男), aka Nadim van der Ros, the Dutch beau she's been dating for three years. Was a secret marriage in the works? "When we have the time, and of course we won't be telling you when," said an uncharacteristically shy Sun.

Ethan Ruan (阮經天) has been catching flack lately, not for cheating on his girlfriend as alleged last month, but for being in school.

The star of the hit gangster flick Monga (艋舺) has been enrolled at Hsing Wu College (醒吾 科技學院) for six years, prompting speculation that he has avoided graduating in order to stall his compulsory military service. The Apple Daily did some digging and found that Ruan is in good company. Entertainers Joseph Cheng (鄭元暢), Mike Ho (賀軍翔) and Chang Shu-wei (張書 偉) are fellow Hsing Wu students who have also been enrolled for

six years. But the real kings among celebrity draft-dodgers, the report said, are pop idols Matthew Lin (明道), who is entering his ninth year of school, and Bobby Dou (竇智孔), who has been enrolled in university for 10 years.

Actress Shu Qi (舒淇) has been discovering her inner otaku. The starlet has become addicted to the Facebook game Happy Farm. She fessed up to her obsession in a recent posting on her official blog: "I check [my farm] when I get up in the morning, I check before I go to bed. When I go out to eat, I think about that farm and often find myself saying, 'I have to go ... you guys keeping eating, I have to get back to my harvest."

# Sex, lines and no videotape

scar Wilde once said he regarded "the theater as the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being." It is with that sense of sharing the human experience that Taipei Players was founded in 2008 by two expatriate Canadians seeking an outlet for English-language theater in Taiwan.

**BY ALITA RICKARDS** 

This weekend in Taipei the group will be holding its fourth production, An Evening of Shorts III, comprised of four comedic shorts each between 10 and 30 minutes long.

For Brook Hall, who directs one of the shorts, there "was a gaping hole in the lack of contemporary theater in Taipei, especially for an English-speaking audience" before Taipei Players was founded. "My day job is working with various Taiwanese theater companies," he said. "It's hard enough to be a Taiwanese theater company in 2010, but there is no pre-conceived notion or path whatsoever for a foreigner-run operation."

He credits Taipei Players founders Mandy Rovenda and Sarah Zittrer for being "unbelievably passionate about getting the word out, getting people motivated and finding what was necessary to launch the company last year.'

The piece he is directing, *The Game*, by Dennis Noble, was written in the 1970s and is "near and dear" to his heart. Hall saw the play when he was still in high school but doesn't want to say too much about it: "I hope audiences get to experience the same thing I did when I first saw it," he said. "There are certain plays that you will remember 24 hours, a week, maybe even a month later, and I think this is one of them.'

Another of the plays being shown, Room 69 by Bruce Ward, features actress Katie Partlow who has been studying for her MFA in acting at Taipei National University of the Arts (國立臺北藝術大學) since 2008. She has been in all of the Players' previous shows and said that it "provides a different voice for the Englishspeaking community in Taiwan."

In *Room 69*, which is based on a recovering homosexuals group meeting, she plays Doris, a woman having problems with her sexual identity. "She is driven by her anger, her passion and her internal fears," said

MUSIC

Above: The battle of the sexes continues in *Wedding Story*. Right: Uncovering the true story behind "recovering" homosexuals in Room 69. PHOTOS COURTESY OF MOUSE CHEN

Partlow. "I can't say that I have quite the amount of energy that Doris has, but I really admire her passion, even if it's misplaced. It's fun to play such an angry woman."

Brandon Thompson, frontman for indie-rock group Sons of Homer, stars in the only monologue of the night, Matt Mayerchak's The Great Outdoors, in which the character pursues the woman of his dreams on a NordicTrack.

Actor Thomas van Niekerk narrates in *The Wedding Story*, by Julianne Homokay, which has Zittrer facing off against Ben Cunningham in a not-quite fairy-tale romance. The play itself is a comedy, but in rehearsal things got taken to another level when Niekerk flubbed the line "It was a real ego boost to have snagged up a hot stud 11 years younger than she," and said instead "It was a real ego boost to have snagged up a hot 11-year-old stud," to the chagrin and shocked laughter of the cast.

This is one of the charms of live theater — that it is not prerecorded, but raw, influenced by the moods of both cast and audience, by the talent and foibles of the



**PERFORMANCE NOTES:** 

WHAT: Taipei Players, An Evening of Shorts III

WHEN: Tomorrow and Sunday at 2:30pm and 7:30pm

WHERE: Guling Street Avant-Garde Theatre (牯嶺街小劇 場), 2, Ln 5, Guling St, Taipei City (台北市牯嶺街5巷2號)

ADMISSION: NT\$300 in advance or NT\$400 at the door

**DETAILS:** Advance tickets can be purchased from both Toasteria locations, at 2, Ln 248, Zhongxiao E Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市忠孝東路四段248巷2號) or 1, Ln 72, Yunhe St, Taipei City (台北市雲和街72巷1號). The performances contain adult content and are not recommended for audiences younger than 16

**ON THE NET:** www.taipeiplayers.com

actors and the response of those watching. "Coming to see theater in general gives everyone involved a sense of being in the moment," said Partlow. "You can't download us and watch us later. You're either there in the theater laughing hysterically or you're not."

**BY BRADLEY WINTERTON** 

## Strings attached

nne-Sophie Mutter is a special figure in the world of classical music. A child prodigy on the violin, she was taken up by Herbert von Karajan who conducted her in a performance with his Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra when she was only 13. She subsequently went on to enjoy an international career, recording numerous works and performing worldwide. Her current series of Taiwan concerts, plus a master class, is part of a short Asian tour — she will go from here to Shanghai, and then on to Japan.

In Taiwan, Mutter will play Brahms' three violin sonatas (with Lambert Orkis, piano) in Taipei tonight, and in Kaohsiung tomorrow night. She will then play Dvorak's Violin Concerto in A Minor with the National Taiwan Symphony Orchestra under Michael Francis in Taichung on Sunday and in Taipei on Wednesday. In addition she will give a violin master class on Tuesday.

#### **PERFORMANCE NOTES:**

WHAT: Mercedes-Benz Classical Music Festival - Anne-Sophie Mutter Festival (世紀古典音樂年 2010系列 — 安·蘇菲·慕特音樂節)

WHEN: Evening of Brahms: today at 7:30pm (Taipei) and tomorrow at 7:30pm (Kaohsiung). Evening of Dvorak: Sunday at 7:30pm (Taichung) and Wednesday at 7:30pm (Taipei)



Pop Stop concludes this week with a nod to Taiwan's latest YouTube star, Lin Yu-chun (林 育群), who has been dubbed by UK newspaper the Daily Mail as "Taiwan's Susan Boyle."

Lin, a chubby young man who calls himself "Little Fatty" (小胖), sported a bowl haircut and bow tie while singing a stunning rendition of the Whitney Houston/Dolly Parton hit I Will Always Love You on the TV singing contest show One Million Star (超級星光大道). The video can be viewed at www.youtube.com/watch?v=aAtOsM6F4Y&feature=channel

For some reason, although the term "piano sonata" always means a work for solo piano, "violin sonata" generally means a work for violin and piano. Brahms wrote three such sonatas (there was another, written in his youth, that he destroyed). The first two of them are in three movements, the third in four. This final sonata is the most taxing and complex of the three.

Orkis is a frequent collaborator of Mutter's, and earlier often accompanied the late cellist Mstislav Rostropovich. Mutter and Orkis' new CD of the three Brahms sonatas was released last month by Deutsche Grammophon. They can be seen discussing this music on Mutter's official Web site (www.anne-sophie-mutter.com).

Mutter has never recorded Dvorak's Violin Concerto

WHERE: National Concert Hall, Taipei City; Kaohsiung's Chih-teh Hall (高雄市文化中心至德堂), 67 Wufu 1st Rd, Kaohsiung City (高雄市五福一路 67號); Taichung's Chungshan Hall (台中市中山堂), 98 Syueshih Rd, Taichung City (台中市學士路98號)

ADMISSION: NT\$1,200 to NT\$4,800, available through ERA ticketing or online at www.ticket.com.tw

in A Minor. Who knows, perhaps her playing it in Taiwan will be a prelude to an eventual recording release. The work, though less popular than Dvorak's Cello Concerto in B Minor, is well-known, and was given a stellar rendition by Chinese violinist Siqing Lu (呂思清) in Taipei in October 2006 with the Evergreen Symphony Orchestra.

Violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter received the International Ernst von Siemens Music Prize in 2008. She plays four concerts in Taiwan . PHOTO: BLOOMOBER

## RESTAURANTS

### **BY CATHERINE SHU**

Very Thai 非常泰 NEO19 branch

Address: 2F, 22 Songren Rd, Taipei City (台北市松壽路22號2樓) Telephone: (02) 8789-6200 On the Net: www.verythai.com.tw Open: 11am to 3pm and 5pm to 11pm, closes at midnight on Fridays and Saturdays Average meal: NT\$500 to NT\$700 plus 10 percent service charge Details: Chinese and English menu. Check Very Thai's Web site for information on the chain's other branches

ery Thai's (非常泰) three locations (in a savory-sweet sauce. The other two Sogo Tianmu, Xinyi District's NEO19 and on Fuxing North Road (復興 北路)) are sleek almost to the point of sterile. With a predominantly black and luminous green color scheme, the walls are pasted over with pages taken from *Pop* and other arty fashion magazines, while the wait staff is bedecked in sharp black suits and crisp shirts.

Despite the restaurant's painfully hip interior, its menu features excellent Thai classics. Spicy dishes are sweatinducingly piquant, curries are creamy and rich, fish is tender, and meats are juicy. Very Thai also distinguishes itself with a drinks menu offering 30 beers imported from 12 countries, including Belgium, Denmark, Switzerland, Australia, the US and, of course, Thailand.

The restaurant's appetizer menu features the basic fried golden shrimp cakes (NT\$250), pork or chicken satay (NT\$220) and fried egg rolls (NT\$160). I opted for the Very Thai Combo (NT\$380), with fried shrimp cakes, egg rolls and chicken wrapped in orchid leaf. The latter is available as a stand-alone dish for NT\$280 and was wonderful. The meat was succulent and glazed in

items, however, were lackluster. The shrimp cakes had very little flavor, even after being dipped in the accompanying sweet-and-sour sauce. The egg rolls were slightly spicy, but also forgettable.

My main course, the grilled boneless short ribs with Thai dip (NT\$320), made up for the appetizer plate. Each slice of beef, served simply with a spicy dipping sauce, was cooked to flavorsome, meltin-your-mouth perfection.

On a separate visit, my companion and I ordered a Jim Thompson shrimp salad (NT\$300), Thai-style raw shrimp (NT\$300), green curry chicken in coconut sauce (NT\$280) and steamed sea bass in lemon sauce (NT\$480).

The Jim Thompson salad (named after the American founder of the Thai Silk Company) was the blandest dish. Sliced cherry tomatoes, diced cucumber and steamed prawns were tossed and marinated in a tart dressing that lacked aroma. But the Thai-style raw shrimp certainly atoned for the salad. Each shellfish was butterflied, with a heap of minced garlic, chili peppers and various spices scooped on top. The garnish left us sweating even



Very Thai serves excellent Thai classics in a hip environment. PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

having scraped half of it off.

The sea bass' light yet zippy lemon sauce provided a welcome contrast to the fish. Fortunately, the coconut milk in our mellow, creamy green curry, filled with sauteed chicken strips and plenty of Thai basil, soothed our tongues.

Very Thai's signature dessert is its homemade ice cream (NT\$120). The large coconut flavored scoop we ordered (mango and durian are also available) was well complemented with slices of fruit hidden inside. The "ruby fruit" (small balls of plump and firm pomegranate-flavored jelly) in coconut milk with crushed ice (NT\$90) was also excellent. I had Very Thai's signature mojito (NT\$170) with my meal. but I should have saved the very sweet (and only slightly citrusy) cocktail for dessert.

on't let the name fool you. Diantai Shifu (滇泰食府), or "Palace of Thai and Yunnan Cuisine," looks nothing like a palace. But the restaurant makes up for its unremarkable decor by offering decent Thai fare at reasonable prices.

Diantai Shifu, located near Guangfu South and Zhongxiao East roads, used to be part of Yunxiang (雲鄉), a small chain of budget Thai restaurants. Not much has changed, at least judging by the menu, which still bears the old name.

Family-style dishes range from NT\$100 to NT\$180. The selection is extensive, so when in doubt or in a hurry, go for the menu's starred items, mostly popular Southeast Asian dishes. There were a couple of duds out of the 14 items we ordered, but everything else passed muster.

The dapao zhurou (打抛豬肉, NT\$100) — ground pork stir-fried with basil and onions — was the top favorite among our party of 10 persons. With this many people, order two servings of this simple but tasty dish.

Another starred item that disappeared quickly was the jiaomaji (椒麻雞, NT\$129), crispy fried chicken

## Diantai Shifu 滇泰食府

Address: 1, Ln 180, Guangfu S Rd, Taipei City (台北市光復南路180巷1號) Telephone: (02) 8771-3188 Open: 11am to 2pm and 5pm to 9pm Average meal: NT\$250 to NT\$350

with cilantro, minced chili pepper and garlic.

The Thai shrimp cakes (月亮蝦餅, NT\$169) were also a favorite at our table, but another deep-fried option, the Thai-style spring rolls (泰式春捲, NT\$100) failed to impress. They had a bland filling (mostly rice noodles) and were too oily. These shortcomings

might not be as noticeable if accompanied with beer — tall bottles of Taiwan Beer and regular-sized bottles of Heineken are NT\$80 each. Sadly, there are no Thai brews available.

Those with adventurous palates might enjoy the prawns with glass vermicelli noodles (冬粉蝦煲, NT\$169), which are cooked in a sauce that had a subtle herbal flavor that resembled xiancao (仙草).

The cold raw prawns (涼拌生蝦, NT\$149) are well worth a try. The crustaceans, topped with a potent dressing of lemon juice, chopped garlic, chili pepper and cilantro, melt in the mouth and had a rich, almost buttery flavor.

But pass on this house specialty: steamed fish with lemon (清蒸檸檬魚, NT\$179). The lemon and garlic sauce tasted fresh and tangy, but it couldn't served on a bed of coleslaw and topped hide the mediocre quality of the fish.

The wait staff, mostly college student-aged women, often holler orders to the kitchen staff in Thai and were polite and efficient when serving our table. Our waitress didn't hesitate when we asked to hold the chili on certain dishes or make vegetarian versions of others. Everything arrived at the table promptly and as requested.

**BY DAVID CHEN** 

Though dining at Diantai Shifu is probably best with four or more people as you can order a wider variety of dishes, couples can find a good deal too. On a separate visit, my dining companion and I spent just under NT\$500 for four dishes, which included a tasty Yunnan-style egg omelet with bamboo shoots (雲筍烘蛋, NT\$100).

Located a three-minute walk from Sun Yat-Sen Memorial Hall MRT Station (國父紀念館捷運站) exit No. 1, Diantai Shifu offers a quick fix for a cheap family-style meal.



Diantai Shifu's prawns with glass vermicelli noodles. PHOTO: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES