

BY DAVID CHEN



COMPILED BY CATHERINE SHU

Like the polar ice caps, Jolin Tsai's (蔡依林) breasts are in danger of disappearing. Or so claims *Apple Daily*, which noted ruefully that Tsai's chest appeared flatter at a recent performance, where her low-cut costume revealed cleavage that was far less luxurious than in previous years.

When questioned by a reporter, the formerly pneumatic singer, whose rack once earned her the sobriquet G Milk (G奶), a reference to her supposed cup size, dismissed rumors that she had had previous plastic surgery reversed. "I just didn't stuff my bra today," said Tsai, laughing uncomfortably. "I didn't want anything to pop out while I was dancing."

Apple Daily provided readers with a detailed timeline (and photographic evidence) charting the evolution of the pop idol's hooters, even as they appear on the verge of extinction. When Tsai released her first single in 1999, she was fresh-faced and flat-chested. But after Tsai released her album *See My 72 Changes* (看我72變) in 2004, one of those changes evidently included jug enhancement. Around that time, the G Milk moniker made its first appearance; soon afterward Tsai denied that her lady lumps were man-made, insisting that special undergarments and the side effects of acupuncture and Chinese medicine had inflated her steamed buns. In 2006, Tsai made waves at a concert by dangling upside-down from an acrobatic swing in a tight, low-cut dress, a maneuver that seemed designed to showcase her chesticles.

Dedicated chroniclers of Tsai's growing bazookas are doomed to be let down, as the twins appear to have shrunk considerably in recent months. But the scrutiny continues unabated. In response to a reporter's questions about her dirty pillows, Tsai asked, "why are you paying so much attention?"

Boobs also got **Joe Nieh** (倪震), the husband of Hong Kong actress and singer **Vivian Chow** (周慧敏), in the spotlight this week. Nieh caused a media furor in 2008 when he was caught kissing another woman, but the longtime couple made up and married last year. This time, however, Nieh was nowhere near the scandalous melons.

The brouhaha erupted over a videotape showing a man and woman engaged in some dirty dancing at Joe's Billiards and Bar in Hong Kong, which is co-owned by Nieh. The two patrons didn't just bump and grind — the woman stripped down to a thong and the man went shirtless as she rubbed her bare chest against him in front



Jolin Tsai, shrinking before our very eyes. PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES

of 50 excited, screaming onlookers.

Nieh denied such a bawdy event could have taken place at Joe's until he was confronted with stills from the raunchy tape. He rushed back to the establishment before emerging and stating, "It's probably because someone had a private party, we'll look into it immediately." Whoever was in charge that evening would be fired, Nieh promised, presumably to ward off charges that the bar had morphed into a den of iniquity. *Apple Daily* noted that the punishment for obscene performances is up to 10 years in jail under Hong Kong law.

Since news broke last week that **A-mei's** (張惠妹) "former" boyfriend **Sam Ho** (何守正) was caught dallying with another woman, the Queen of Mando-pop has kept a low profile. Her celebrity friends are speaking up for her in the press, letting her fans know that A-mei is doing fine.

But pop star **Little S's** (小S) attempt to vouch for her buddy stirred up a media frenzy. When asked on a talk show how A-mei was holding up, Little S, real name Dee Hsu (徐熙娣), cheerfully replied that the two had recently spent time together, taking a child to their mutual friend's house. Gossip rags immediately reignited persistent rumors that A-mei has a secret kid and that the moppet she took visiting with Little S was none other than this mysterious offspring. Little S quickly explained that the little boy was just A-mei's nephew.

When reached for comment by the *Liberty Times*, our sister newspaper, A-mei's agent snapped, "A-mei doesn't have any children! I've already said this at least 20 times! It's ridiculous I even have to say it again!"

Laughter, the best medicine

Get ready, get set ... laugh! It's harder than it sounds, but John Chen (陳遠斌), a practitioner of laughter yoga, is confident that the chuckles will flow at the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall on Sunday morning for World Laughter Day.

Chen, who heads the Taiwan Laughter Yoga Club, said last year 150 people showed up for the event, which is held yearly on the first Sunday of May. This year, Chen aims to gather "100 pairs of family members" to laugh together for 100 seconds under the theme of "World Peace with families" and hopes to see participation from the foreign community. All are welcome to join in and participation is free of charge.

World Laughter Day was started as an offshoot from the laughter yoga movement began by Indian Madan Kataria in 1995. Kataria, a former physician, came up with a set of breathing and laughing exercises while researching the health benefits of laughter.

He founded the first laughter yoga club in Mumbai, which quickly grew into a global phenomenon. Today there are more than 6,000 such clubs in over 60 countries, according to Kataria's Web site www.laughteryoga.org.

Chen, a 52-year-old who runs a shop selling medical equipment in Taoyuan, learned about laughter yoga through a Discovery Channel program that featured Kataria and his laughter yoga regimen. He was immediately impressed.

"It was so easy, the laughter was so great," he said. "You don't need any equipment, or devices, or special places."

Chen started his own laughter club in 2004, now one of 21 such groups in Taiwan, and became a certified instructor. He leads a group 30-minute session of laughter exercises every morning at a Taoyuan park, which sometimes starts with a routine of fake laughter for which participants chant "ha ha ha, ho ho ho."

Fake laughter inevitably turns into real laughter, says Chen.

For more information on laughter clubs in Taiwan, visit www.laughteryoga.org.tw. This BBC television report by John Cleese (via YouTube) offers a nice introduction to Kataria and laughter yoga: www.youtube.com/watch?v=yXEfjVnYkqM



PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: World Laughter Day in Taipei
WHERE: Renai Road entrance of Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall, 505, Renai Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市仁愛路四段505號)
WHEN: Sunday from 9am to 10am
ON THE NET: www.laughter-yoga.org.tw
DETAILS: For more information, call John Chen at 0987-880-522



Scenes from World Laughter Day 2009. This year's event takes place on Sunday from 9am to 10am at Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall. PHOTOS COURTESY OF JOHN CHEN

MUSIC

BY BRADLEY WINTERTON

Unrivaled Ravel

The Orchestra Philharmonique de Radio France is devoting its two Taipei concerts next weekend exclusively to music by Maurice Ravel. The main work on May 7 is his version of *Pictures at an Exhibition*, and on May 8 his *Piano Concerto in G Major*.

At the beginning of the 20th century many composers were trying to liven up the sound of the traditional symphony orchestra. Richard Strauss led the way in the German musical world, creating sounds you still feel you've never encountered before. Stravinsky followed suit, and in the sphere of French music the leader in this exercise was Ravel.

Ravel is normally considered an impressionist. Following in the footsteps of the introspective and somewhat more "feminine" Claude Debussy, he continued the push to make music conjure up atmosphere rather than follow a set structural pattern in the tradition of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. But his works are more vigorous and dazzling than Debussy's often dreamy, albeit exquisite, productions.

Pictures at an Exhibition was originally a series of piano pieces by the Russian composer Modest

Mussorgsky, each item intended to evoke a different painting at a particular gallery. But in adapting this for orchestra Ravel produced something far more extraordinary. He managed to create an instrumental sound that was more astrigent and "modern" than anything heard from the sonorous 19th-century heavyweights. Anyone wanting to hear an outstanding recent performance should acquire the DVD *Live From Salzburg* by the Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra of Venezuela (DGM 073-4515). There have been several other arrangements of this music — incidentally, one for small orchestra by the Taiwanese composer Chao Ching-wen (趙菁文).

Ravel's only piano concerto (other than one for the left hand only, written for a pianist who had lost his right hand in World War I) is characterized by its liveliness and eagerness to incorporate jazz rhythms. The soloist next Saturday will be Roger Muraro, winner of the International Franz Liszt Piano Competition, and frequent performer of the original piano version of *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

Next Saturday's concert also includes the two suites Ravel made from his music for *Daphnis et Chloe*, a ballet premiered



Myung-whun Chung, conductor of the Orchestra Philharmonique de France Radio.

PHOTO COURTESY OF RICCARDO MUSACCHIO

in 1912 by Diaghilev's Ballet Russes, with Nijinsky dancing the part of the goatherd Daphnis. Stravinsky considered the score "one of the most beautiful products of all French music."

Both concerts will be conducted by Myung-whun Chung, the orchestra's

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France (法國印象之美—法國廣播交響管絃樂團)
WHERE: National Concert Hall, Taipei City
WHEN: May 7 (Ravel's Rapsodie Espagnole, La Valse and Mussorgsky/Ravel's Pictures at an Exhibition) and May 8 (Ravel's Rapsodie Espagnole, Piano Concert in G Major and Daphnis and Chloe Suites No. 1 and No. 2) at 7:30pm
ADMISSION: Tickets are NTS1,200, NTS1,800, NTS2,400, NTS3,000 and NTS3,600, available through NTCH ticketing, online at www.artsticket.com.tw or by calling (02) 3393-9888

musical director since 2000. Born in South Korea, he's nowadays a very prominent figure in the Parisian musical world and is probably the most distinguished Korean in the classical music sphere. The great French modernist Olivier Messiaen, who based his musical style on birdsong, dedicated his last work to him — an honor that, for musicians of this kind, can't have many equals.

RESTAURANTS

BY DAVID CHEN

Ever Green Vegetarian Restaurant

Address: 38, Xinsheng N Rd Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市新生北路二段38號)
Open: 11:45am to 9pm **Average meal:** NT\$500 per person for lunch, NT\$330 from 2:30pm to 4:30pm and NT\$560 for dinner
On the Net: www.egvr.com.tw

長春素食

Telephone: (02) 2511-5656

The Ever Green Vegetarian Restaurant (長春素食) offers hotel-quality dining that's relatively inexpensive and guilt-free — that is, unless you overeat. The restaurant, located near the intersection of Xinsheng North Road (新生北路) and Changchun Road (長春路), has an excellent all-you-can-eat buffet with dinner priced at NT\$560 per person.

It's a good deal, considering the well-prepared food and the surroundings. The enormous dining room, which seats more than 400 people, falls between a hotel conference room and traditional wedding banquet hall in terms of decor. Diners sit on soft plush chairs, perfect for enjoying the buffet at a leisurely pace and then leaning back when you're stuffed.

The restaurant calls its spread a "European-style buffet," which refers to the presentation and open kitchen where chefs prepare made-to-order stir-fry dishes, noodle soups and hot pot.

Most of the food consists of vegetarian versions of standard Chinese and Japanese dishes, along with a fresh salad bar of organic vegetables. Like many Buddhist vegetarian restaurants, Ever Green doesn't cook with onion or garlic, but there are plenty of flavors to be found. One memorable dish on a

recent visit was a Sichuan-style mushroom stir-fry, which had a nice smoky flavor from the hollowed-out red chili peppers. The buffet also offers a few comfort food indulgences — there was an unusual but deliciously rich deep-fried taro ball stuffed with a dollop of curry sauce (have more than one at your peril), and fried battered mushrooms meant to emulate the night market staple yansuji (鹽酥雞), or fried chicken with basil.

Ever Green embraces the idea that being a vegetarian doesn't mean you can't pretend to enjoy consuming meat. Diners will also find a chilled "sashimi" bar stocked with fake salmon, tuna and yellowtail made out of konjac (蒟蒻), a plant-based gelatin. The look and texture came surprisingly close: The fake salmon was even dyed with white fat lines and tasted pretty good, especially with a dab of wasabi. But it won't have sashimi lovers giving up the real thing anytime soon.

With the exception of the curried fried rice, which was



The Ever Green Vegetarian Restaurant's buffet is guilt-free, unless you overeat. PHOTO: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES

cold and bland, it was hard to find anything unlikable. All of the vegetables, whether stir-fried or from the salad bar, tasted fresh and crisp.

Finish off the meal with a slice of marble cheesecake or Black Forest cake — just several among a dizzying array of desserts — and choose from a selection of herbal teas and juices.

As far as buffets go, Ever Green is worth visiting with a large appetite and time to spare.

Barn Canteen 穀倉法炊

Address: 3, Ln 16, Zhongshan N Rd Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市中山北路二段16巷3號)
Telephone: (02) 2523-3277 **Details:** Chinese menu, credit cards currently not accepted
Open: 11:30am to 10pm **Average meal:** NT\$1,000 (lunch), NT\$1,500 (dinner)

Barn Canteen (穀倉法炊) does refined rustic with a designer sensibility and blue-ribbon presentation. Located in an alley by SPOT — Taipei Film House (台北光點), the newly renovated three-story restaurant is still in its soft-opening phase (credit card facilities will be coming online "soon"), but even at this early stage, this is an establishment that intends to make a major splash on Taipei's Western dining scene.

The simplicity of undressed wood, the mismatched chairs, the bales of fresh hay (all the way from Europe), placed with calculated casualness about the restaurant, the elegant crockery (mixed and matched with plenty of thought, ranging from thick farmhouse to fine bone China), all suggest vast quantities of time spent looking for just the right effect.

The service is friendly, but is not as sophisticated as the furnishings. Waitresses are a tad over attentive, and explanation of the dishes on offer (and these are the sort of dishes that cry out for the kind of added information such as provenance of the meats or composition of the sauce) could be more instructive.

I opted for the set with a main course of spring lamb with dauphinois potatoes and Chinese radish with mixed vegetables

and Basque-style sausage (NT\$880 with a starter and a mixed, non-alcoholic drink). The lamb itself was divine, and the dish came together with great finesse (the Chinese radish was a very subtle touch), without any silly flourishes. The appetizer, tripe and white beans stewed in dark beer, which is likely to appeal to anyone with a taste for offal, was a bold offering and very tasty, though slightly heavy for summer. The staff might have mentioned beforehand that the bread recommended for sopping up the rich gravy incurred an additional charge (NT\$120), which seemed a little less than generous given the price of the set, and was more disappointing still for not having any particular wow



Even the hay is from Europe. PHOTO: IAN BARTHOLOMEW, TAIPEI TIMES

factor. It was good *pain ordinaire*, but that's as far as it went. This was a minor blip, easily pushed aside to enjoy the greater delights of the main event.

I also tried the pan-fried wild sea bass with Rhone valley grapes, mushrooms and orange vinegar reduction (NT\$580 with starter and drink). As with the lamb, presentation was five-star, but the vinegar reduction didn't quite have enough sharpness to bring out the best in the otherwise delicious piece of fish. Once again, here was technical French cooking without the flourish. It was also the sort of food that by its appearance and promise of exciting flavors invited you to sharpen your critical faculties as you tucked in. In the case of the fish, a few little tweaks and it would have been perfect.

Two drinks were offered, one lemon and the other grape, mixed with sparkling mineral water, cucumber and, unfortunately, way too much sugar. These colorful mixed drinks didn't taste bad for a poolside cooler; it just wasn't something I imagine most people would want with their lunch.

Other dishes on the menu showed flair, and presentation provided a sense of occasion despite the simple furnishings. Barn Canteen has no need for leather upholstery or velvet wallpaper to scream sophisticated dining.

According to the staff, both lunch and dinner menus are still in progress, but given what Barn Canteen is already offering, it would seem to be a place to check out sooner rather than later.

TIDBITS

BY HO YI

It is hard to find a decent smoothie in Taipei. Whenever I have a craving, I go to Taste Buds Fruithies (天使果沙, tastebuds.pixnet.net/blog) in the East District (東區). Taste Buds has a selection made with juices, sugarless yogurt, low-fat milk or sparkling water. The versions I've had (including Jamaican Passion, Strawberry Surfer and Mango Bubbles) taste like the real deal and not the sugary, syrupy renditions found at most tea and juice stands.

Taste Buds Fruithies' beverages come in three sizes (400ml, 500ml and 700ml), with prices ranging between NT\$70 and NT\$125. The shop only has a small seating area for customers so it is better to make orders to go.

Address: 135-1 Yanji St, Taipei City (台北市延吉街135-1號). Tel: (02) 8772-7941. Open daily from 11am (midday on Saturdays and Sundays) to 10:30pm.

A mobile cart that parks outside Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall MRT Station (國父紀念館捷運站) exit No. 2 vends homemade yogurt from Granny Sara (莎拉奶奶, www.grannysara.com.tw). Originating in Taichung, Granny offers yogurt (NT\$45 for 180ml and NT\$168 for 999ml) and small bottles of yogurt drinks (plain, brown sugar, carrot and mulberry flavors) for NT\$40 each. Homemade jam, which comes in several flavors including mango, carrot, pineapple, grape, strawberry, mulberry and kiwifruit, can be added to the yogurt.

Judging from experience, the cart doesn't keep fixed business hours, but is usually open from midday to 7pm Tuesdays to Sundays. Granny Sara has another location inside Banqiao Train Station (板橋火車站), B1, 7, Xianmin Blvd Sec 2, Banqiao City, Taipei County (台北縣板橋市縣民大道二段7號B1).