



COMPILED BY DAVID CHEN

It was supposed to be business as usual for **Jay Chou** (周杰倫), who launched his latest album *The Era* (跨時代) last month with the standard public relations blitz. There were autograph sessions with fans that included a surprise visit from pop diva **A-mei** (張惠妹), as well as television interviews, including an appearance where the aloof Mando-pop star revealed that he had a strict upbringing as the son of two teachers. But the Chairman's spotlight got hijacked by a young B-list television model whose claims of an unwanted romantic advance from Chou spawned a media circus.

Earlier this week **Honey Chen** (陳以庭) told the *Apple Daily* that Chou had once invited her to his Taipei office, led her into a "secret room," pressed her against a wall and "forced a kiss" upon her.

Chou's management denied the accusation and threatened to take legal action. Meanwhile the gossip press and blogosphere have cast doubt on Chen's story, portraying her as an opportunistic 20-year-old out to capitalize on her newfound fame as the star of a racy commercial for an online video game.

And they couldn't get enough of her. On Monday night, the starlet featured in a bizarre two-hour spectacle — the debut episode of CúTV's (中天) *Liang Chen Ji Shi* (梁陳即時), a live talk show co-hosted by **Vincent Liang** (梁赫群) and basketball star-turned-entertainer **Charles Chen** (陳建州), better known as Blackie (黑人).

The episode, billed as a "Citizen's Press Conference," began with Chen getting hooked up to a polygraph machine. She was then grilled with questions from the co-hosts, a panel of celebrity guests and call-in viewers throughout the entire show, which took a mostly patronizing tone toward Chen.

"[I] didn't lie, but I don't want to say too much. If I hurt [Chou], I will hurt myself," she said when pressed to elaborate on the alleged "forced kiss." In one melodramatic moment, Chen started to cry, which prompted her mother to walk onto the set to console her.

Blackie, who was visibly annoyed at Chen's circuitous and vague answers, had little sympathy. "If you want to get into show business, you can't knock other people down just to get ahead," he said. The entire evening apparently left such a bad taste in his

It started with a kiss: B-list model Honey Chen's accusations have led to a media frenzy.

PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES



mouth that he announced his resignation from the show on Facebook the following day, much to the surprise of CúTV and its viewers.

The announcement prompted a divided reaction among Internet fans, observed our sister paper *The Liberty Times*. Some criticized Blackie for taking Chou's side too easily and "evading responsibility" while others thought the show was "ill-suited" for the dapper entertainer.

Geek-chic rocker **Crowd Lu** (盧廣仲) narrowly avoided an awkward moment at a YouTube Music Day concert in Taipei last Saturday. Lu was part of a star-studded bill that included **Yao Yao** (姚瑤), the busty sex kitten popular among *zhainan* (宅男), a term that refers to nerdy guys into manga and computer games.

While Lu is something of a *zhainan* himself, he is not exactly a fan of Yao Yao — last year, when asked to comment on her newfound stardom, he said, "Not every *zhainan* loves big breasts — there are even *zhainan* who have good taste."

The Liberty Times noted that the two managed not to cross paths backstage at the concert. When asked by reporters if they were willing to be photographed together, Lu's camp diplomatically answered that they would be fine with a group picture with all of the evening's performers. Yao Yao's manager, however, was even more forthcoming, if not eager to win over Taiwan's hippest *zhainan*: "The two didn't run into each other, but Yao Yao appreciates Crowd Lu's artistic talent and hopes to have a chance to work with him in the future."

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW

OPERA

An ancient heritage restored

The revival of *kun* opera (崑劇) has come a long way in the last decade, and much credit for this must certainly go to the Taiwan Kunqu Opera Theater (台灣崑劇團), which is currently celebrating its 10th anniversary with a program of operas and opera highlights at Taipei's Metropolitan Hall (城市舞台).

Although *kun* opera is often described as the "mother of Chinese opera," its foundation in Taiwan is much weaker than that of Beijing opera (京劇), which has long received strong government support. Much of the strength of the Taiwan Kunqu Opera Theater is drawn from national Beijing opera troupes and a few talented amateurs, who find time to broaden their performance repertoire. They are assisted by performers from China — where *kun* has also experienced a revival — who are regularly invited over by the Taiwanese company. The current program will include performances by the Zhejiang Kunqu Opera Theater (浙江崑劇團).

Titled *A Gathering of Kun Opera Talent* (千里風雲會), the performances are also being held as part of the anniversary celebrations of the National Central University (國立中央大學), which under the leadership of Hung Wei-chu (洪惟助), a professor of Chinese literature who is also the director of the Taiwan Kunqu Opera Theater, has become a center for *kun* studies. In addition to a special performance at the university last Tuesday, a series of academic seminars including scholars from China will also take place.

Hung said that despite the financial challenges faced by *kun* opera in Taiwan, considerable progress has been made in breathing new life into this ancient art form. He pointed to the Qing Dynasty opera *The Mistaken Kite* (風箏誤) — which will be

performed tomorrow night — that has been revived by the Taiwan Kunqu Opera Theater. It won high praise when presented at the 3rd Kun Opera Festival in Suzhou, China (蘇州第三屆崑劇藝術節) in 2006.

On Sunday, the Zhejiang Kunqu Opera Theater will present its highly acclaimed production of *The Tale of the Western Garden* (西園記). This, like *The Mistaken Kite*, is a comedy, and provides ample opportunity to show off the lighter side of *kun* opera. Tonight, a series of highlights will be presented, showcasing the artists' skills in well-known scenes from famous operas.

In previous years, the main feature of this annual event has been the presence of "national treasure" and "first grade" artists from China. This year the emphasis has shifted to presenting the new generation of emerging artists whose dedication over the last decade represents the hopes for a long-term future for *kun* opera in Taiwan.



PERFORMANCE NOTES

WHAT: A Gathering of Kun Opera Talent (千里風雲會)
WHEN: Today and tomorrow at 7:30pm, Sunday at 2:30pm
WHERE: Metropolitan Hall (城市舞台), 25, Bade Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市八德路三段25號)
ADMISSION: NT\$400 to NT\$1,800, available through NTC ticketing or at www.artsticket.com.tw

MUSIC

BY BRADLEY WINTERTON

NSO taps master talents

After the recent sky-high prices for the BBC Symphony Orchestra, sanity returns to Taipei's music scene with two concerts by Taiwan's National Symphony Orchestra (NSO).

But there's no question of any diminution in quality. The NSO has recruited some stellar talent for each event and, together with the orchestra's own habitual high standards, the two represent both excellent value for money and the promise of rewarding artistic experiences.

Next Friday, for instance, will see Brahms's late and challenging *Double Concerto* (for violin and cello) performed by two young instrumentalists who it would be hard to better.

US-based violinist Joseph Lin (林以信) is a founding member of the Formosa Quartet (which won first prize in the 2006 London International String Quartet Competition), and has even spent a year in Beijing mastering the intricacies of Chinese classical music. Still only 31, he's a major talent in the early years of what's sure be an imposing career.

He's joined by the charismatic cellist Amit Peled, another of the US's most promising young string soloists. You can hear a sample of his heart-wrenching style of playing wherever you happen to browse on www.amitpeled.com.

Nor is this all. On the rostrum will be Derrick Inouye, Assistant Conductor at New York's Metropolitan Opera (responsible, for example, for the 2009 premiere of the Met's new production of Berlioz's *Damnation of Faust*).

After the interval, the concert concludes with

Bartok's scintillating *Concerto for Orchestra*.

The following Friday, June 11, sees the NSO with yet another noted international soloist, pianist Alex Kobrin. He won first prize in the Busoni International Piano Competition in Bolzano, Italy in 1999, as well as a special prize dedicated to the memory of the great pianist Michaelangel. In Taipei he will play the ever-popular *Second Piano Concerto* of Rachmaninov.

Adding to the youthfulness of the pair of events, the conductor this time will be the 28-year-old, Hong Kong-born, Perry So (蘇柏軒). He's currently assistant conductor of the Hong Kong Philharmonic, as well as having a close relationship with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. In addition, he founded and leads the Huangshan International Music Festival (中國黃山國際音樂節), which takes place in the mountains of central China.

As well as the Rachmaninov concerto, the concert includes Cesar Franck's *Symphony in D Minor*, plus Tchaikovsky's *Hamlet* overture. The program will be repeated the following evening, June 12, in Hsinchu.

Both these concerts, it should be noted, are simply part of the NSO's regular program, not mega-events sponsored by Lexus and the like. How the orchestra's administration manages to recruit such international talent, almost as a matter of course, is baffling to say the least. But it's hugely to Taiwan's benefit that it does so, and that the resulting concerts are then marketed at distinctly non-inflated prices is marvelous indeed.

Amit Peled adds luster to the NSO's program next month. PHOTO COURTESY OF NSO



RESTAURANTS

BY THOMAS WALK

A-ji-shi 阿吉師

Address: Stall 88, 1F Shidong Market, 100 Shidong Road, Taipei City (台北市士東路100號士東市場一樓88號)

Telephone: (02) 2834-6136

Average meal: NT\$800 or NT\$1,600

Open: 10:30am to 5pm or 6pm, closed on Mondays

Details: No menu, credit cards not accepted

A-ji-shi (阿吉師) sushi stall, at the Shidong fish and vegetable market (士東市場) in Tianmu, is the place to go if you are looking for adventures in seafood. Here you will find the freshest seafood served with flare, including some very interesting and unexpected denizens of the deep.

Not only do you get the very freshest of fish — thanks to eight full-scale fishmongers surrounding the sushi stall boasting crustacean-filled aquariums fit for an ocean park — you also get creatures you might not expect to see on a dining table, including various sea insects served any way from completely raw and almost kicking to slightly charred with a Bunsen burner-like flame thrower.

I had walked by A-ji-shi many times, but always hesitated, as there was no set menu, no seats, and it seemed that everybody there had a subliminal idea of the price. But as it's always more or less standing room only, I decided to give it a try with a date.

After negotiating the price — the boss told me NT\$800 or NT\$1,600 — I accepted the cheaper version and we set about

on our eating extravaganza, all the while standing at the stall. This was blue collar dining at white-collar prices.

The first course was a bowl of assorted fish bits to which the boss told me to add soy sauce. This was my least favorite dish, because the fish was cut against the sinew. However, he quickly plopped some very red squares of raw fish on the counter top in front of me — no dishes necessary. Next to me was a bubbling pot of soup where all the fish skin would get tossed, with other vegetables and spices — strictly a self-service affair.

There followed a series of sushi, sashimi, nigiri and slightly cooked fish that filled me up far quicker than I was expecting. The nigiri consisted of much larger slabs of fish than I'd ever seen, with just enough rice to rest on, and a dollop of wasabi in the middle. The couple next to us were eating cracked-open king crab legs — they must have ordered the NT\$1,600 set.

The only thing that was missing was a draught of ice-cold Kirin beer. When I asked, the boss encouraged me to go to a neighboring kiosk that sold beer, and voila! problem solved.



A-ji-shi provides fine dining in a market setting. PHOTO: MICHAEL RIDER

When I went to pay the NT\$800 bill, surprise, surprise, he had actually meant NT\$800 per person, not per couple. So, although NT\$1,600 poorer, I was full, feeling healthy, and very satisfied with the quality of the food.

Kagawa Sushi House 賀川壽司屋

Address: 45, Lin 107, Jianguo Rd, Hualian City (花蓮市建國路107巷45號)

Open: 11:30am to 2pm and 5:30pm to 8pm, closed on Wednesdays

Details: Chinese menu, credit cards not accepted

Telephone: (03) 833-4060

Average meal: NT\$300



Kagawa is big on quantity. PHOTO: IAN BARTHOLOMEW, TAIPEI TIMES

The first thing you notice about the Kagawa Sushi House (賀川壽司屋) is the crowd of people waiting to get in. Located along the normally quite streets of downtown Hualian, the crowd marks out the otherwise inconspicuous glass-fronted store with its unremarkable diner furnishings of black and chrome seats and dark wood-grain veneer.

Kagawa makes a point of not accepting telephone bookings, and the lines outside have become the stuff of much Internet comment — based on the prevalent idea that if there's a line, the food must be good. Once inside, it is clear that Kagawa's appeal is not so much in the quality of the food, but in the fact that it provides a sense of getting your money's worth.

When the heavily laden plates

of nigiri sushi or plump temaki sushi (sushi cones) are brought to the table, it is easy to be wowed by the quantity of fish on the plate. This is clearly one of Kagawa's main selling points.

The unusually large piece of fish served atop the nigiri, almost double the length of the dab of rice and trailing off one end, looks tantalizing. This gives the nigiri a particularly meaty quality, and for NT\$120 (for a plate of five nigiri), you certainly feel you are getting value for money. Unfortunately, flavors of soy sauce and sweet mirin, which lightly coat the fish and give it a glossy sheen, are intrusive. Sushi purists might feel that the restaurant is making up in quantity for what it lacks in quality, because the fish is short of the subtle and refreshing flavors of the ocean. Nigiri

are available with salmon, tuna, marlin, and yellow tail. The sashimi was not so roughly treated, and a plate of local yellow tail (紅甘魚) sashimi was perfectly adequate for NT\$140. Once again, slices were large, but the flavor not so pure. Other fish available were the same as for the nigiri.

The temaki sushi had similar flavor issues, being either too bland (the salmon roe at NT\$90) or over-flavored (the grilled eel at NT\$60). They were nevertheless plump and well-packed, and unless you were paying attention, remarkably satisfying.

Presentation, on Japanese-style black crockery, is attractive, the fish looking glossy on the plate, and the colors are vibrant and appealing. This works particularly well at the less expensive end of the spectrum. Kagawa offered excellent maki sushi (roll sushi), a heavily laden mixed platter costing just NT\$80, which looks and tastes excellent. The rice balls with salmon (NT\$50 for two), both attractive and tasty, are exceptional value.

There is a small selection of cooked dishes, including a hugely popular sukiyaki (NT\$120, available with beef or pork), as well as dishes which cover plenty of non-Japanese territory, including sweet and sour ribs (京都排骨, NT\$120) shrimp with pineapple (鳳梨蝦球, NT\$100) and a seafood tofu hot pot (海鮮豆腐煲).

Service is fast and efficient, and once you get in you are not kept waiting for your food.

TIDBITS

BY NOAH BUCHAN

With Dragon Boat Festival around the corner, hotels throughout Taipei City are busy whipping up rice dumplings (粽子), a traditional delicacy made of glutinous rice and various fillings wrapped in bamboo leaves. The Grand Formosa Regent Taipei (台北晶華酒店) presents its take on this dish with two gift sets: Formosa Rice Dumpling Set (NT\$720) and Taiwanese Food Court Imperial Rice Dumpling Set (NT\$550).

The Formosa Rice Dumpling Set includes five dumplings: Chinese style with pork, chicken, abalone and Japanese scallops; low-calorie vegetarian; Aboriginal-inspired dumplings with fried red onions; shredded chicken and pumpkin; azuki bean paste and organic purple rice; and three-flavored shrimp.

The Taiwanese Food Court Imperial Rice Dumpling Set includes 12 dumplings, four of each in the following flavors: salty mung bean with pork and rice; 10-grain dumpling with pork, egg and mushrooms; and a traditional-flavored dumpling with pork, mushrooms and peanuts.

Any of the above rice dumplings can also be ordered individually with prices ranging from NT\$120 to NT\$280. There is a 10 percent discount on orders placed before June 10.

To place an order, call the Grand Formosa Regent Taipei at (02) 2523-8000 X3157.