

AROUND TOWN

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13

Van Fan

comes of age as a rocker

After a minor scandal upset his career, the star found renewed fortune on screen and now returns to the stage with his indie group Craze Band

BY ANDREW C.C. HUANG
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

Mando-pop icon Van Fan (范逸臣), 31, has performed that most miraculous of feats — he revived a flagging showbusiness career.

The heartthrob shot to overnight fame with his delivery of *I Believe* for the 2002 South Korean blockbuster comedy flick *My Sassy Girl* (我的野蛮女友), but his career nose-dived after he was photographed peeing in public on a Taipei street by *Next Magazine*.

In 2008, the idol formerly nicknamed “the prince of love songs” (情歌王子) returned as a rocker with crew cut and scruffy facial hair and released a greatest hits album titled *No-Bars-Hold Fun* (無樂不作), but the big time proved elusive.

His turn as the down-on-his-luck band member Aga (阿嘉) in the 2008 blockbuster *Cape No. 7* (海角七號) jolted his career out of limbo.

After his rebirth as a movie star, Van Fan returned to his indie band roots by forming Craze Band (酷愛樂團) with guitarist Alex (黃冠龍) last year and went on to release the group's debut album, *Fresh Blood* (初生之犢), in April.

“Rock is a music style I'm good at,” said Van Fan in a telephone interview earlier this week. “I formed this band in order to have a new beginning with my career. As part of this band, I am no longer just a pop star and am allowed to experiment with different ideas and music styles.”

Next Saturday, Van Fan performs with Craze Band and Aboriginal pop singer Tai Ai-ling (戴愛玲) in an evening titled Craze Ai-ling's Rock Night (酷愛樂隊的搖滾之夜) at Legacy Taipei. The three will perform songs from Craze Band's recent album and some of Van Fan's signature songs in addition to covers of English-language rock anthems.

“It's much more fun performing as a band,” said Van Fan. “You share all the experiences together: the crying, the sweating, the joy and the sorrow.”

A maturing songwriter, Van Fan co-wrote all seven songs from Craze's debut album.

“Writing songs is a process of self-discovery for me,” said Van Fan. “You internalize what you have experienced before and inspect yourself.”

Since his acting breakthrough in *Cape No. 7*, Van Fan has continued to pursue his cinematic career with a role in the four-part romantic comedy *L-O-V-E* (愛到底) last year and then in the mafia comedy *Gangster Rock* (混混天團), released in April.

“Acting has enriched my life so much,” said Van Fan. “As a singer, you record alone and go to promotions alone. With a movie, it's a collective experience that's an accumulation of everyone's work.”

“I got to meet many friends and learned ideas and experiences from them,” said Van Fan. “When you are alone too much, you run out of ideas.”

Unlike many aspiring singers who start their careers by bombarding record companies with demos, Van Fan found luck early on.

“I was in a band when I was 16 and started performing in pubs,” Van Fan said. “It was while [playing] in pubs that I was spotted by a producer and signed.”

Even if early success came easy, Van Fan is made of sterner stuff. After his micturition scandal he decided to go it alone and founded his own company, Paradise Bird Music, to release Craze Band's first album.

“That was a low in my career, but it didn't affect me that much as a person,” said Van Fan. “I see myself as a normal person who makes mistakes. That incident was blown up by the paparazzi. You can't change what was done, you simply move on in life.”

PERFORMANCE NOTES

WHAT: Craze Ai-ling's Rock Night (Craze Band and Tai Ai-ling) (酷愛樂隊的搖滾之夜(酷愛樂團+戴愛玲))

WHEN: June 12 at 8 pm

WHERE: Legacy Taipei, located at Huashan 1914 Creative Park (華山1914), Center Five Hall (中五館), 1, Bade Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市八德路一段1號)

ADMISSION: NT\$600 in advance or NT\$800 at the door

Tickets are available through 7-Eleven ibon kiosks or at www.tickets.com.tw

ON THE NET: vanmusic.pixnet.net/blog; crazeband.com

Craze Band members, Van Fan, left, and guitarist Alex play at Legacy Taipei on June 12.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PARADISE BIRD MUSIC

[BEIJING OPERA]

Old operas in a ‘Novel’ setting

Taipei Li-Yuan Peking Opera Theatre mines tradition with a program of four works plucked from the heart of the Beijing opera canon

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW
STAFF REPORTER

As the title suggests, Taipei Li-Yuan Peking Opera Theatre's (台北新劇團) *New Old Operas* (新老戲), which opened yesterday at Taipei's Novel Hall (新舞臺), is about putting a new burnish on tradition. This program of four operas, which are all established works at the heart of the Beijing opera canon, is a perfect way for Li Bao-chun (李寶春), the director and main performer of the company, to celebrate 20 years in Taiwan, where he has become a beacon of hope in the beleaguered traditional arts.

Taipei Li-Yuan Peking Opera Theatre has always endeavored to maintain a balance between tradition and innovation, and its programs alternate from season to season between the two, says Vivien Ku (辜懷群), the company's executive director. Most recently, productions of *The Jester* (弄臣), based on Verdi's opera

Rigoletto, and *The Wilderness* (原野), based on an unfinished play by China's greatest modern playwright, Cao Yu (曹禺), showcased the company's ability to modernize Beijing opera. This current program is a return to tradition, with a production of *The Lotus Lamp* (寶蓮神燈) tonight, *Wu Zixu* (伍子胥) tomorrow and the *Women Generals of the Yang Family* (楊門女將) on Sunday.

These are big productions, and intentionally so, with a number of set pieces that bring students from the high school section of the National Taiwan College of Performing Arts (國立臺灣戲曲學院) to the stage. Fostering talent in the next generation is something that many opera troupes are concerned with, and the frustration at the lack of proper training given to young people burst out Wednesday, when senior figures in the opera world, including opera diva Wei Hai-ming (魏海敏), Wu Hsing-kuo (吳興國), founder of the Contemporary



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE KOO FOUNDATION

Legend Theatre (當代傳奇劇場) and Li, presented an open letter to the Ministry of Education lamenting the parlous

state of opera training in Taiwan. A set piece designed by Li for tonight's performance of *The Lotus*

Lamp, in which tigers, part of a divine army, prepare for battle, is a fascinating mixture of opera and dance that takes place against an orchestration that is stiffened with Western orchestral instruments and traditional percussion. According to Ku, all the movements of the dance are drawn directly from the repertoire of Beijing opera, but they have been put together in such a way that the whole scene could easily be mistaken for a piece of contemporary dance.

The Lotus Lamp is a splendidly exotic story of a minor deity who falls in love with a mortal man. She is imprisoned by her brother for her feelings, but her son, after training in martial arts, takes on his uncle in combat to save his mother. This is Beijing opera at its most fanciful, and it showcases a wide range of skills, from the romantic, at the beginning, to the athletic, in the final sequences of on-stage combat, as well as plenty

of elaborate costumes. *Wu Zixu* is a popular tale of political corruption, murder and vengeance, and is topical, as an alternative tradition has it that the Dragon Boat Festival (端午節) commemorates the death of Wu Zixu, a famous scholar and general, rather than the poet Qu Yuan (屈原). *Women Generals of the Yang Family* tells the popular story of a group of sisters who take up arms after all the men in their family have been killed in the course of a long war.

Ku emphasized that although these are all very traditional operas, the stories allowed the often heavy moral tone of Beijing opera to be sidetracked and a more appealing and modern interpretation presented, an important factor in giving these classics a new lease on life.

For a performance schedule and ticketing information, visit www.novelhall.org.tw.