

## AROUND TOWN

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## Mando-pop's 'bel canto diva' marches into the pub

Chou Huei's brand of Mando-pop engages heart and mind. She performs at Brown Sugar each Tuesday this month

BY ANDREW C.C. HUANG  
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

When Chou Huei (周慧) released her first album a decade ago, she was widely expected to become one of the four lesser "Queens of Heaven" (四小天后) of the Chinese-language music scene along with Jolin Tsai (蔡依林), Stefanie Sun (孫燕姿) and Elva Hsiao (蕭亞軒). Dubbed the "bel canto diva" (美聲天后), Chou — who performs every Tuesday this month at Brown Sugar — is a talented singer with a voice that can take on many colors. Even her most conventional Mando-pop ballads have a degree of controlled elegance that can be quite appealing in contrast to the overblown sentimentality of the genre as a whole. But in 2003 a contract dispute derailed her career and forced her to take a four-year hiatus from the music industry.

"Had I followed up on the success of my first album and released an album every year for the past decade, I would have become a really egocentric person," Chou said. "I was forced to take a break ... it's allowed me to become a better singer because I understand the kind of frustrations the average person has to deal with."

Chou spent 2004 traveling around the globe and returned with a new perspective on life, one that is reflected in her choice of album titles. Her 2002 release is called *Lonely City* (寂寞城市). Her 2007 album is titled *Blossom* (綻放).

Chou's four-part "mini concert" at Brown Sugar is called Listen With Your Heart Chou Huei (醉心聆聽周慧). Each Tuesday night she will choose 14 songs from a list of 20 to perform. The set includes some of her own hit ballads; two Shanghai-era oldies, *Barbecued Pork Bun* (叉燒包) and *I Want Your Love* (我要你的愛); Lady Gaga's *Bad Romance* and Kylie Minogue's *Can't Get You Out of My Head*.

"These two [Shanghai] oldies are naughty and lively songs. I chose Lady Gaga and Kylie Minogue's songs because I personally listen to dance songs," Chou said

during a rehearsal last week. "I think it's important to change the mood for the audience a few times during the evening."

Chou achieved fame overnight with an animated music video of her delivering a crystalline cover of Hong Kong pop diva Faye Wong's (王菲) *Promise* (約定), but she did not show her face on an album cover until her fifth album of original material, which was released last year.

Contrary to her shy and introspective public persona, however, in private Chou is upbeat and even mischievous at times.

"I once fell off the stage while performing in China. My agent's face totally turned green," she said. "I just laughed and climbed back on the stage."

Chou says she listens to an eclectic range of music including dance, rock and trip pop. "I listen to Lady Gaga to study her," she said. "Many people see her as an entertainer who's famous because of her bizarre antics, but I see her as an entertainer with substance who is worth emulating."

Chou is now her own producer and is currently screening songs for her next album.

"I want to show my quirky side more on the next album," she said. "It will be an album based on the theme of city life."

### PERFORMANCE NOTES

**WHAT:** Listen With Your Heart Chou Huei (醉心聆聽周慧)

**WHEN:** Tuesday and June 29 at 10pm

**WHERE:** Brown Sugar, 101 Songren Rd, Taipei City (台北市松仁路101號)

**ADMISSION:** Tickets are NT\$760, available by calling (02) 8780-1110 or online at [www.brownsugarlive.com](http://www.brownsugarlive.com)

**ON THE NET:** [tw.myblog.yahoo.com/whereforever-whereforever](http://tw.myblog.yahoo.com/whereforever-whereforever)



### [ DANCE ]

## Journey to the Moon

Choreographer Ryohei Kondo is bravely taking audiences where no Japanese or Taiwanese dance troupe has ever gone before

BY DIANE BAKER  
STAFF REPORTER

Next week's performance of *Moon River* (月球水) at the National Theater is shaping up to be something of a "dance-off" between one of the top contemporary dance troupes in Taipei and one from Tokyo. Judging from the video clips on YouTube, it also looks like a whole lot of fun for dancers and audiences alike.

Under the leadership of founder Ping Heng (平衍), Dance Forum Taipei (舞蹈空間舞踏團) has become known over the past two decades for collaborative, innovative work. Ping has frequently created shows by pairing a foreign choreographer's work with that of a Taiwanese. This time, however, she turned things completely over to dynamic Japanese dancer-choreographer Ryohei Kondo, founder of the 14-year-old, all-male troupe Condors.

Kondo has developed a reputation for works that skillfully weave dance, comedy, theater, live music, multimedia imagery, puppetry

and storytelling. There is also a lot of slapstick — after all, this is a group of men, of all shapes and sizes, and not all of them are dancers. After a Condors performance at the Japan Society in New York, the *Village Voice* critic called them "the Japanese Monty Python" — an image I'm still trying to come to grips with since grace and speed are not among my memories of John Cleese and company. Maybe it's because the Condors are famous for not taking themselves too seriously.

Ping invited the Condors to perform in Taipei in 2002 for the Little Asia Dance Exchange Network, which turned out to be memorable for everyone involved because Typhoon Nari had flooded large parts of Taipei, including the basement-level Crown Theater (皇冠藝術中心小劇場).

In an e-mail interview, Ping said the Condors impressed people with their dramatic style, energy and adaptability. Since the theater was out-of-bounds,

they performed in the building's lobby. She said she had wanted to do a project with them ever since.

"We talked about this project through my agent friend in Japan, Mayumi Nagatoshi, whom I've known for 25 years ... It became a reality when we confirmed the dates with [the] National Theater last spring," Ping said, adding that the Condors came to Taipei in April and last month, while her company went to Japan in April for 10 days.

Even with such a short rehearsal period, Kondo was apparently not at a loss for ideas, ending up with 120 minutes' worth of material.

"We will condense [it] into 90 minutes for the final show. It's one dance with 21 sections, some are dance, some are more dramatic, but all of them are beautiful and full of surprises," Ping said.

The Condors are a 13-man troupe, but only seven will be dancing in Taipei, including



▲ Dance Forum Taipei dancers rehearse *Moon River*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DANCE FORUM TAIPEI

Kondo, alongside Dance Forum's 10 dancers. For more than half the show, the two troupes will be performing together.

"They are aged from 36 to 46, we are 23 to 33, so it will be a nice mix of generations. We all learned so much from each other," Ping said, adding that she really likes the way Kondo's troupe tries to localize their shows when they are traveling.

As for what *Moon River* is all

about, Kondo's program notes say it best.

"When we were little, there were no mobile phones. Nor flat screen TVs. Yet we had dreams; like a dream someday we would make a trip into space. Now, thanks to the Internet, we can easily learn almost everything and do shopping online. But we no longer dream of space travel. I feel the dreams we used to dream years ago were grand and joyful.

### PERFORMANCE NOTES

**WHAT:** Dance Forum Taipei and Condors, *Moon River*

**WHEN:** June 25 and June 26 at 7:30pm, June 27 at 2:30pm

**WHERE:** National Theater (國家戲院), 21-1 Zhongshan S Rd, Taipei City (台北市中山南路21-1號)

**ADMISSION:** NT\$400 to NT\$1,200, available at the NTCH box office or through [www.artsticket.com.tw](http://www.artsticket.com.tw)



◀ Japanese-all-male dance troupe Condors rehearse, with choreographer Ryohei Kondo kneeling in front.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CONDORS

*Moon River* is full of such hopeful wishes," he wrote.

"All the members of the Taipei team are masters of yoga who love the body. On the other hand, the members of Condors have stiff bodies and are not so young. But we know how to drink beer and how to entertain people," Kondo wrote.

There you have it: space travel, the Moon, dreams, yoga and beer. Add in the video clip images of

a woman "body surfing" on a giant plastic bubble, incredibly fast-moving Japanese dancers almost attacking the floor and another woman being passed along over a line of bodies — a la Pina Bausch's *Masurca Fogo*, only she's not being passed from hand to hand, she's cartwheeling slowly from one raised foot to another. Mix it all together and you get — well, we'll have to wait a week to see the results.