

TIDBITS

The National Palace Museum's (國立故宮博物院文會堂) extended opening hours, which began yesterday, are 8:30am to 6:30pm (originally 9am to 5pm). Silks Palace Restaurant (故宮晶華), which is located at the museum, is serving a dinner special Mondays to Fridays. Parties of four National Palace Museum ticket holders who dine at the first-floor restaurant will receive a Treasure Chest Dessert Collection for free.

The Grand Formosa Regent Taipei is also getting in on the act. Its National Palace Culture Fest package comprises a two-day, one-night stay at the hotel anytime before the end of December, a complimentary breakfast for two, two tickets to the National Palace Museum, dinner at Silks Palace for two, and shuttle services between the hotel and the museum. The package is priced at NT\$6,200 per room.

Silks Palace models its dishes after the museum's many artworks, including renditions of the famous *Jadeite Cabbage With Insects* and *Meat-Shaped Stone*, and artistic interpretations of classic fare, such as Buddha Jumps Over the Wall (佛跳牆) stew, which is served in a white bowl that references the classic three-legged cauldrons of the Warring States period.

The National Palace Culture Fest package is limited to Taiwan National Identification Card or Alien Resident Certificate holders. To make a reservation, call Grand Formosa Regent Taipei at (02) 2523-8000.

Address: National Palace Museum (國立故宮博物院), 221, Zhishan Rd Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市至善路二段221號). Silks Palace is located to the left of the museum's main exhibition hall. Tel: (02) 2882-9393. On the Net: www.silkspalace.com.tw

For those looking to celebrate US Independence Day, Mr Sausage's kitchen is holding a 4th of July party on Sunday from 12:30pm to 6:30pm, comprising a menu of American favorites as well as lots of Americana on sale.

Address: 5-1, Alley 4, Ln 12, Bade Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市八德路三段12巷4弄5-1號). Tel: (02) 2579-0396



Silks Palace's Treasure Chest Dessert Collection. PHOTO COURTESY OF SILKS PALACE

COMPILED BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW

It is a sorry state of affairs when the country's top gossip rag is reduced to peddling rumors based on tarot card readings, but the denials of Jay Chou (周杰倫) and former inamorata Jolin Tsai (蔡依林) have offered little room for creative (mis)interpretation. Pop Stop reported last week that Tsai had simply replied, "Getting back together? Thanks, but I'm not crazy," when asked if she would be rekindling romance with Chou after a steamy onstage performance at a recent concert.

Next Magazine unearthed various circumstantial details about the frequency that Chou and Tsai have been in communication over the past half year and provided a report of Tsai's sister Tsai Min-wen (蔡旻紋) visiting a tarot card reader and asking about Jolin's love life. While the fortune-teller would not reveal the content of the consultation, he agreed to make another reading for the magazine, in which he revealed that the two superstars are likely to build on their recent good relations. The cards say that the Double-Js (雙J) are about to become an item. But don't hold your breath.

The dust is still settling on the 21st Golden Melody Awards ceremony that took place on Saturday, with mixed

reviews of an event that was disrupted by heavy rain, time overruns and some uninspired emceeing. Harlem Yu (庾澄慶) has taken lots of flak since and has even promised to swear off future MC gigs.

As everyone already knows, pop diva Chang Hui-mei (張惠妹), better known as A-mei (阿妹), was the biggest winner of the evening, which according to the aforementioned fortune-teller, was a direct result of her breakup with basketball heartthrob Sam Ho (何守正), who brought bad luck to her career. Ho had the good grace to text A-mei to congratulate her, but local media are already designating him as very much a "former" boyfriend.

While most applauded A-mei's recognition by the Golden Melody Awards (she received her first Best Female Mandarin Singer award eight years ago), consensus did not go across the board. There are some who beg to differ regarding the Golden Melody Awards given to David Tao (陶喆) and boy band 1976.

The girl group S.H.E and crooner Lin Yu-chia (林宥嘉), who were both given the cold shoulder by the Golden Melody panel, won recognition from HitFM's Global Pop Music Charts (全球流行音樂金榜), who picked them as the most



popular band and male mandarin singer, respectively, for the first half of this year.

Elsewhere, the news on the street is that actress Gong Li (鞏俐) has finally called time on her troubled marriage to Singaporean tobacco tycoon Ooi Hoe-seong (黃和祥). The story broke in *The Southern Metropolis Entertainment Weekly* (南都娛樂周刊) earlier this week and is now being coupled with rumors of a possible budding relationship between Gong and John Cusack, her co-star in the film *Shanghai*, which is currently showing in Taiwan.

In other celebrity news, things may be getting hot and sweaty, but in a good way. The rumored affair between aspiring actress Angelbaby, real name Yang Ying (楊穎), and successful actor and singer Huang Xiaoming (黃曉明) is now out in the open. According to NOW.com, Huang

has used his connections to advance Angelbaby's career in China, where the 21-year-old actress is currently promoting a "photo album" titled *Paradise* featuring pics of her in various states of undress while staying in Guam.

Otaku, eat your hearts out.

Speaking of which, a new star has appeared on the otaku firmament. Meet Da Yuan (大元), real name Lin Ying-chen (林盈臻), who has leveraged her 32E breasts into celebrity status across the Chinese-speaking world. A recent spot on the CtiTV (中天) variety program *University* (大學生了沒), where her cleavage served as a more than adequate substitute for wit or personality, seems to have cemented her place in otaku heaven and secured a number of advertising contracts. She will now be going tit-to-tit with other big-breasted beauties such as Yaoyao (姚瑤), real name Kuo Shu-yao (郭書瑤), and Tofu Sister (豆花妹), real name Tsai Huang-ru (蔡黃汝). Let the battle begin!

Tofu Sister faces new competition in the form of Angelbaby. PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES



BY DAVID CHEN

A new neighbor, a new lover

PERFORMANCE NOTES

WHAT: TungCo Performance Group presents Apartment 3A by Jeff Daniels
WHEN: Tomorrow at 7:30pm, Sunday at 2:30pm
WHERE: Crown Theater (皇冠藝文中心小劇場), B1, 50, Ln 120 Dunhua N Rd, Taipei City (台北市敦化北路120巷50號B1)
ADMISSION: NT\$350, available at the door or in advance through NTCH ticketing or online at www.artsticket.com.tw
ON THE NET: www.tungco.org, tungco.pixnet.net/blog



Looking for love in all the wrong places. TungCo Performance Group presents *Apartment 3A*, a romantic comedy written by American actor Jeff Daniels. PHOTO COURTESY OF TUNGCO PERFORMANCE GROUP

Your lover has cheated on you. You have an emotional meltdown at work. The world suddenly seems meaningless. But everything gets turned around by moving into an empty, shabby apartment with paint peeling off the walls and befriending the oddball neighbor next door.

This is the backdrop for the character of Annie in *Apartment 3A*, a play written by the American actor Jeff Daniels that is being staged by TungCo Performance Group (體口表演團體) tomorrow and Sunday at Crown Theater (皇冠藝文中心小劇場).

Annie, played by Chang Man-shu (張曼書), decides in haste to move into Apartment 3A after a rotten day. She walks in on her boyfriend while in the middle of performing acrobatic acts of adultery with another woman on the dining room table. Then she suffers an embarrassing breakdown at her job as a fund-raiser for a public television station, which culminates in her telling viewers during a telethon that *Sesame Street's* Big Bird was going to die unless they donated money.

But Annie's escape to a new neighborhood in a quest to start anew only places her in another love triangle. There's the neighbor in Apartment 3B, Donald, played by Canadian expat Brandon Thompson, who invites himself into Annie's apartment and warns her not to fall in love with him.

Donald exercises a weird charm over Annie, who starts to confide in him, but he tells her that he's happily married even though his wife isn't around.

At work, she is pursued by a smitten co-worker, Elliot, played by Ofey Chen (陳承佑). Patty Wu (吳可熙) also stars in the play as Annie's landlord.

Daniels' romantic comedy is full of fast-paced, witty banter that could go over the heads of non-native English speakers, so TungCo will be providing Chinese subtitles on a projector screen for the audience.

TungCo, a group of a half dozen actors and theater enthusiasts, was founded by 29-year-old director Don Tung (董董), a Chaiyi

native who first cultivated a love for theater as an English literature major in university and spent several years in the UK getting an MFA in actor and director training at the University of Exeter.

As with many small theater troupes, TungCo is a labor of love for Tung, who teaches English during the day to pay the bills. The group launched in 2008 with a Chinese-language version of Edward Albee's *Zoo Story*, and *Apartment 3A* is the group's first English-language play.

Tung stumbled upon *Apartment 3A* during one of TungCo's weekly readings and says he was immediately struck by its "entertaining" humor. But he finds Annie's predicament — living in a world where "nobody cares" — even more compelling.

"Annie is like everybody, because we all have rent to pay, we have jobs to go to, and she is also looking for an answer for life," he said.

"What are we doing here?" she says at some point ... and that's kind of the million-dollar question that everyone's asking."

RESTAURANTS

BY NOAH BUCHAN

BY DAVID CHEN

Sanda 三大

Address: 205 Tingzhou Rd, Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市汀洲路二段205號)
Telephone: (02) 2366-0103 **Average meal:** NT\$200 for lunch, NT\$400 for dinner
Open: Tuesdays to Sundays 11:30am to 2pm and 5pm to 9:30pm
Details: Chinese menu, credit cards not accepted, reservations necessary

The first thing you need to know about Sanda (三大) is that reservations are required. Tucked among a row of teashops and breakfast nooks along Tingzhou Road (汀洲路) close to the Guting MRT Station (古亭捷運站), the Japanese-style restaurant serves a steady stream of clients for its lunch and dinner specials.

Sanda's tiny interior has the feel of a fish bowl in the way patrons are squeezed into its cramped space. The kitchen, with its rectangular shape and glass front, looks like a small aquarium and enables diners sitting at the tables for two or four directly across from it to watch the chefs slicing raw fish and rolling maki. Listed above the dining area is the week's special, which was a seven-piece sashimi set platter (NT\$200) on the day we went.

Two pieces each of salmon, yellowtail and saba kazuonoko and one slice of tuna arrived on a plate with separate dishes of garden salad, miso soup, kimchi, egg custard, white rice, octopus salad and dessert. The saba (mackerel) with kazuonoko (herring roe) sashimi was particularly memorable. Not usually a fan of roe, I found that the briny and slightly crunchy yellow eggs balanced nicely with the sweet saba. The other fish slices were fresh and free of any additional

ingredients, such as mirin, that might have distracted from their subtle taste. Also notable was the octopus salad. The tiny — perhaps far too tiny — dollop came presented on a soup spoon and was enlivened by spicy hints of wasabi.

The bland kimchi and salty egg custard were standard additions and seemed more of an afterthought, as did the dessert. But the miso soup and fresh salad with miso dressing made this weekly special good value.

Somewhat disappointing was the Taiwanese interpretation of maki sushi (NT\$120). The virtue of maki resides in the flexibility of the ingredients you can add. The two versions served here — one wrapped with nori (dried seaweed) and the other, inside out, with a layer of roe — contained cooked egg, imitation crabmeat, cucumber and the dreaded fuzzy pork. My dining companion, who didn't share my reservations about the latter intrusion, eagerly gobbled them down.

Sanda's menu also has a number of a la carte dishes that are worth a try. The gorgeously presented seafood salad (NT\$130) contained cuttlefish and shrimp that were mixed with fresh greens and a tangy miso dressing and topped with salmon roe. Also containing cuttlefish and prawns was the seafood with



A reasonably priced menu, fresh ingredients and generous portions keeps Sanda's reservation book full. PHOTO: NOAH BUCHAN, TAIPEI TIMES

thick noodles (NT\$130), but here Sanda slightly upped the ante with the addition of clams. Fried with soy sauce and sweet vinegar, the seafood retained its delicate flavors, and the cabbage and spinach added a flavorful crunch.

Sanda doesn't score high marks for originality. But with a reasonably priced menu, fresh ingredients and generous portions, it is easy to understand why the place is always booked.

There's not much room for dancing at Mango Tango, but diners might find themselves wooed by this East District establishment's creative variations on Thai cuisine and chic lounge bar atmosphere.

The dimly lit dining area is furnished with plush sofas and easy chairs, perfect for leaning back after stuffing yourself with Mango Tango's tapas-style entrees and stir-fry dishes.

When ordering, it's hard to go wrong with the chef's recommendations listed on the menu. Don't let the awkward English names for the dishes turn you off. The Thai style pesto sauce mutton chop (泰式青醬羊排, NT\$380) is more appetizing than it sounds: The "mutton" is actually tender lamb chops grilled medium rare; and the pesto is more of a vinaigrette dipping sauce spiced with finely chopped red onion, cilantro and chili peppers. The lamb is garnished with freshly chopped lemongrass, which shows up in a lot of Mango Tango's dishes. Here it adds a sharp zest and the proves to be a nice alternative to the usual rosemary seasoning.

The fried shrimps with Thai sauce (蒜蓉蝦, NT\$350) sent me deep into a soul-food comfort zone. Medium-sized prawns are covered in a flour wrap and then



Grilled lamb chops with lemongrass and Thai pesto at Mango Tango. PHOTO: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES

a layer of stringy rice vermicelli before being deep-fried. The result is an unusual look and a nicely textured crunch. Each order comes with five pieces topped with a squiggle of wasabi mayonnaise, which made the perfect grace note.

It's hard to pass on the lemongrass spare ribs (香茅醬燒排骨, NT\$280), the restaurant's answer to the classic Chinese dish of sweet and sour pork. The deep-fried chunks of spare rib meat are juicy and tender and garnished with lemongrass and kaffir lime leaves.

The misnamed grass mushroom soup (香茅野花湯, NT\$260) also uses fresh

lemongrass as its main ingredient and comes with a generous serving of chopped shitake and white button mushrooms. A few sprigs of cilantro enhance the subtle fragrance of this soup, which serves two.

The menu lists plenty of Thai restaurant standards, including green papaya salad (青木瓜沙拉, NT\$200), a variety of vegetable greens stir-fried with shrimp paste (NT\$160 to NT\$200) and a selection of green and red curries (NT\$220 to NT\$270). For those who like to keep it simple, the pad Thai (NT\$200) is a winner.

The wait staff is comprised of mostly 20-somethings who are polite, attentive and efficient,

if a little stiff in demeanor. The intimate seating arrangement suits couples on a date, but the atmosphere seems geared more toward revelers warming up for an evening of club-hopping. Ambient electronic music plays on the house speakers a little too loudly even at dinnertime, when the restaurant is just starting its day. Indeed, Mango Tango offers many reasons to stay until the wee hours. It has an extensive selection of tropical cocktails starting from NT\$250, wines starting from NT\$1,000 per bottle and beer, with Singha NT\$150 a bottle.

But teetotalers aren't left out of the fun. The house specialty happens to be a non-alcoholic version of the Mango Tango (NT\$200) cocktail, a refreshing blend of fresh mangoes, orange juice and lemon.

Mango Tango is located near Zhongxiao Dunhua MRT Station (忠孝敦化捷運站) exit No. 4.

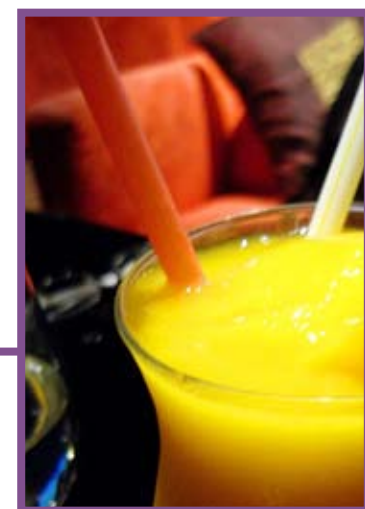


PHOTO: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES

Mango Tango

Address: 12, Alley 17, Ln 170, Zhongxiao E Rd, Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市忠孝東路四段170巷17弄12號)
Telephone: (02) 8773-2724 X8206 **Details:** English and Chinese menu, credit cards accepted
Open: Monday to Thursday 5:30pm to 2am, Friday and Saturday 5:30pm to 3am
Average meal: NT\$400 to NT\$500 **On the Net:** mangotango-taipei.blogspot.com