

Roger Yang fights the good fight, and sings the tale

Jolin Tsai, a green goddess in the making.
PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES

The all-singing, all-dancing, all-producing, all-directing, all-acting **Jay Chou** (周杰倫) has worn many hats over the past few years. And now he wants to add another to his collection: talk show host. The Mando-pop star announced at a press conference in Shanghai at the weekend that he's interested in hosting a talk show sometime this year.

But with the recent flop of adventure flick *The Treasure Hunter* (刺陵), starring Chou, and paltry ratings for his television drama *Pandamen* (熊貓人), perhaps the Chairman (周董) should focus on what he does best, which of late seems to be whipping gossip hounds into a rabid frenzy by appearing on stage with ex-flame **Jolin Tsai** (蔡依林).

And so it is no surprise that Tsai appears at the top of his list of prospective guests. They would certainly have plenty to discuss. Bowling tips, perhaps, or Taipei's top hot pot restaurants. They might even touch on Tsai's shrinking bust size or her new album, *Vogue*, a Madonna tribute set for release next month, according to the *China Times*.

The promo photos for *Vogue* would undoubtedly kill a few minutes of talk time.

One image, which shows Tsai thrusting her thumb suggestively into the front of her low-cut pants, elicited some drooling and got tongues wagging.

Writer and Internet celebrity **Lucifer Chu** (朱學恆), translator of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, said that Tsai's outfit made her look like *Buzz Lightyear*, the ranger of *Toy Story* fame.

One fan said that her outfit's color, a lurid green, matched the packaging of popular antifungal cream EcoFu (益可膚), which makes her a perfect spokeswoman for the product.

Another celebrity who might appear on Chou's talk show is **Edison Chen** (陳冠希). They could discuss their current musical

collaboration, or tips on how to keep racy photos off the Internet. Having spent much of the past couple of years in self-imposed exile after his 2008 sex photo scandal, Chen told reporters in Shanghai that he was now ready to return to showbiz. He'll be doing so as a producer because he has yet to decide on an acting role.

Unlike Chen, **Cecilia Cheung** (張柏芝), who played a starring role in the sex scandal, just can't seem to shake off negative publicity. In addition to groveling to husband **Nicholas Tse's** (謝霆鋒) mother and strained relations with her own, the actress is now being sued by Langsha (浪莎), for which she did a stint as celebrity spokeswoman, to the tune of NT\$190 million. The Chinese garment company, which specializes in making socks, says the media glare generated by the debacle caused it steep financial losses. Doesn't the company know that there's no such thing as bad publicity?

Still, there is work in the pipeline. Yahoo News reports that Hong Kong directors are lining up to cast her in their movies. She is set to star in a **Derek Yee** (爾冬陞) flick and **Stephen Chow** (周星馳) has said he wants to work with her.

In other silver screen news, the venacular press got hot under the collar at the prospect that this year's Taipei Film Festival (台北電影節) awards ceremony, which took place on July 10, would see a repeat performance of last year's Golden Bell Awards (金鐘獎) gala, when **Mark Chao** (趙又廷) took a surprise win for Best Actor, beating out *Black and White* (痞子英雄) co-star **Vic Chou** (周渝民), who turned out to be a sore loser.

This time it was **Ethan Ruan** (阮經天) battling it out for top honors with Chao for their performances in the movie *Monga* (艋舺).

However, 11-year-old **Bi Hsiao-hai** (畢曉海) pipped both to the post when he won the award for his role in *The Fourth Portrait* (第四張畫).

And finally, a morsel of gossip that the Almighty may find of interest — though omniscience may ruin the surprise.

Taiwanese heartthrob **Van Ness Wu's** (吳建豪) celibacy pledge, made in 2008 and proclaimed to the world at the Festival of God's Power Conference (神大能醫治布道會) earlier this year where he said his philandering days are over after finding God, may be under strain.

Sina.com reported that Wu was caught heading into a movie theater late last week with a "small dark beauty" (小黑妹), leading to rumors that he is two-timing his girlfriend, wealthy Singaporean **Arissa Cheo** (also known as Arissa Luna). But as the posse of paps closed in to snap the money shot, Wu disappeared into the crowd.

Mando-pop singer Roger Yang (楊培安) belongs to a special breed of pub-trained crooners who are highly revered on the TV talent show circuit but who have yet to demonstrate the ability to fill venues. Dubbed the "high-register prince" (高音王子) by the media, Yang is known for his powerhouse delivery of inspirational, octave-jumping anthems such as *I Believe* (我相信) and *See the Whole World* (看見全世界), chosen as theme songs for a Taiwan Beer advertising campaign and the 2009 Kaohsiung World Games, respectively.

On Wednesday, Yang will test his commercial appeal by holding his first large-scale solo concert — Roger Yang: 2010 Back to the Ego (楊培安【2010 Back to the Ego:回歸自我】演唱會) at Legacy Taipei.

Yang will be putting his story to music — his 12-year struggle on the pub circuit before landing a record contract and the release of his debut album at the age of 35.

"I want to present my story," Yang, now 39, said in an interview. "I've always believed that, besides hitting the right notes, music has to tell a story for it to linger in audiences' hearts."

Yang won the best vocalist award at the Yamaha National Pop Music Contest at the age of 19. At the age of 23, he started performing as a pub singer in Kaohsiung. "Those years in the pubs were formative because I was immersed in a lot of music," he said. "In southern Taiwan's pubs, we often had to continue singing when fights broke out in the audience or sometimes even when

people pulled out guns. It was scary at the time, but fun thinking back on it."

Acclaimed for his Mariah Carey-esque multi-octave delivery, Yang considers himself blessed. "I was lucky because after puberty, I didn't lose my higher registers but instead broadened my range by gaining some lower registers."

"When my friend Chen Kuo-hwa (陳國華) contacted me to tell me that his label wanted to sign me, I was initially hesitant," Yang recalled. "I told them I don't have the looks or the networking skills. All I have is this voice. It turned out that they wanted this voice, so I became a record newbie at the age of 35."

Yang released his debut album *2AM After Midnight* (午夜兩點半的我) in 2006 and has gone on to release two more studio albums. His live album *10,000 Thanks ... Live & More* garnered him a nomination for best male Mandarin singer at the 2008 Golden Melody Awards, the same year he served as a judge on the hit TV talent show *One Million Star* (超級星光大道).

Yang became friends with Ricky Hsiao (蕭煌奇) while performing in Kaohsiung's pubs. The two later joined forces to stage the best-selling joint tour *Ricky Hsiao & Roger Yang 2008 Tour* (蕭煌奇 & 楊培安 2008 巡迴演唱會). "As soon as I heard Ricky's voice, I was bowled over by his passion," Yang said.

"Even though Ricky is blind, he doesn't let anything get in his way," said Yang. "His optimistic and warm personality has affected my outlook a lot. We chat on MSN every day."

"For my future albums, I would love to try recording with a live band because that's the most real and direct experience," said Yang. "Even though there will always be some minor flaws, that will only make it more human."

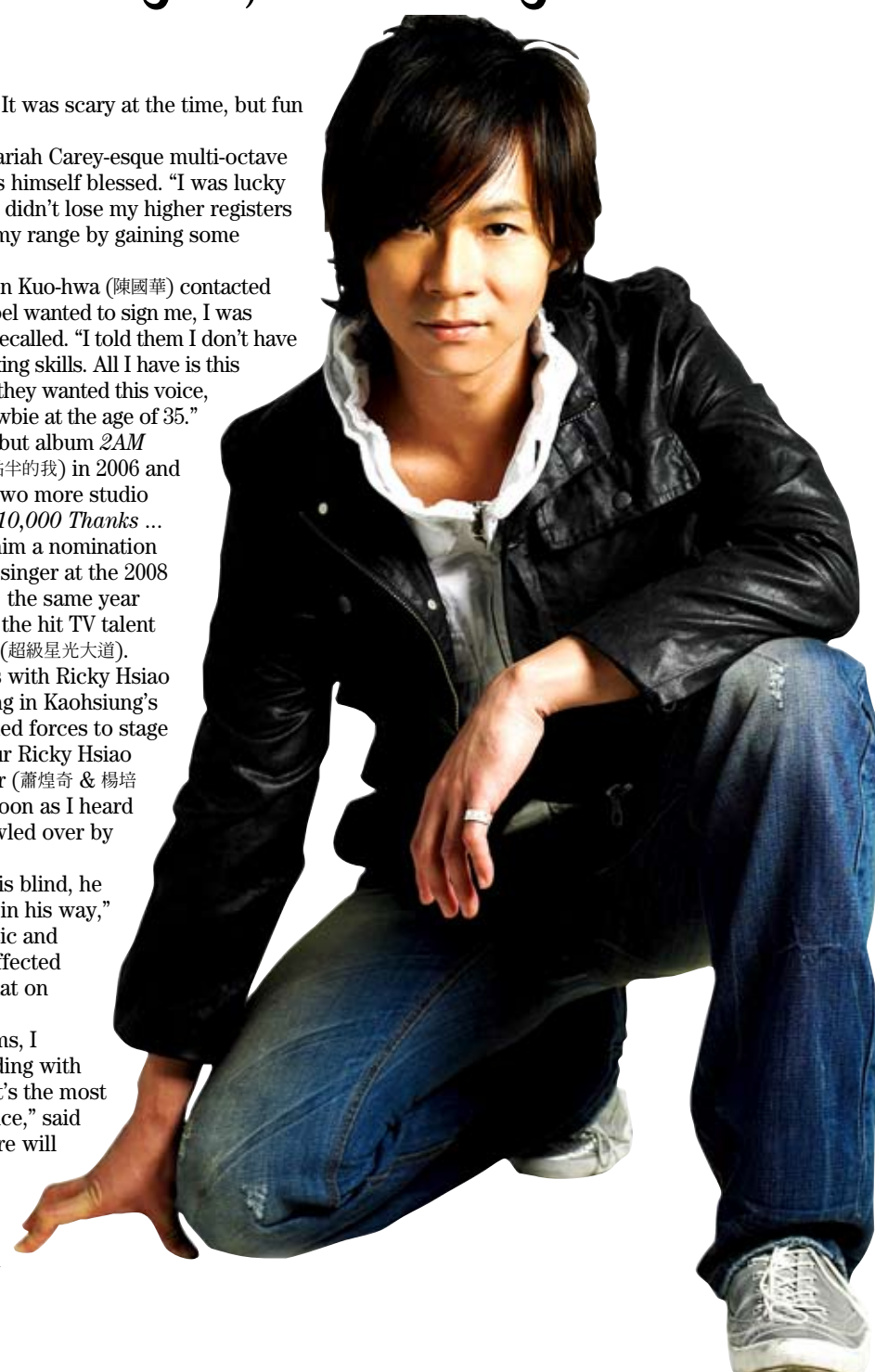


PHOTO COURTESY OF SKY HIGH ENTERTAINMENT

BY BRADLEY WINTERTON

PERFORMANCE NOTES

WHAT: Roger Yang 2010 Back to the Ego concert (楊培安【2010 Back to the Ego:回歸自我】演唱會)

WHEN: Wednesday at 8:30pm

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\$400 in advance or NT\$500 at the door. Tickets are available through 7-Eleven ibon kiosks or at www.tickets.com.tw

ON THE NET: iampcain.pixnet.net/blog and www.wretch.cc/blog/roger650

MUSIC



PHOTO COURTESY OF NEW ASPECT

Faith and a fiddle move mountains

Thursday sees a solo recital by the young South Korean violinist Shin Hyun-su in the National Concert Hall, Taipei.

To begin such an event with Bach's *Ciaconne* is already making a bold and confident statement. Bach wrote three sonatas and three partitas for solo violin (the two forms seem indistinguishable to modern ears), and the *Ciaconne* forms the final movement of the second partita. It has long been viewed as the Everest of all Bach's violin compositions.

Of the 31 movements of the combined sonatas and partitas it is, at some 15 minutes, far and away the longest. It combines difficulty with exceptional brilliance. Beginning with a theme that is then given 14 variations, a second theme follows, which is subjected to a

huge variety of treatments. There can be no doubt that Bach knew he was setting down something exceptional, even for him, when he penned it.

But then Shin Hyun-su is no ordinary talent. Just 23 years of age (today is her birthday), she's already a force to be reckoned with in the fiercely competitive world of classical violin playing. She made her debut at the age of 10, and in 2008 won first prize in the Long-Thibaud International Violin Competition in Paris. She was named "New Artist of the Year" by the Music Association of her native South Korea in 2007.

After her giant-killing opening number, Shin will play Beethoven's *Violin Sonata No. 3*, and then end the first half of the evening with the *Polonaise Brillante No. 1* by 19th-century Polish virtuoso Henryk

Wieniawski. After the interval there will be a Mozart sonata (K.301), and then Cesar Franck's *Violin Sonata*. Neither the Mozart nor the Beethoven sonatas are widely known, but the Franck is a major item in the composer's output, and a fit piece to close with. The Beethoven, Mozart and Franck numbers will all require an accompanying pianist.

Shin Hyun-su is appearing as part of New Aspect's Rising Stars concert series. She has a page on Facebook under the name "Hyun-su Shin, violinist" where many performance clips, often complete concerto movements, can be accessed.

Shin Hyun-su performs at the National Concert Hall, Taipei, on Thursday at 7:30pm. Tickets are from NT\$400 to NT\$1,500, available from NTCH ticketing or online at www.artsticket.com.tw.

RESTAURANTS

BY NOAH BUCHAN

BY HOYI

Oola Mexican Grill

Address: 3, Alley 1, Ln 136, Roosevelt Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市羅斯福路四段136巷1弄3號) **Telephone:** (02) 2363-1111
Open: Sundays to Thursdays 11:30am to 9:30pm, Fridays and Saturdays 11:30am to 10:30pm **Average meal:** NT\$150
Details: Chinese and English menu, credit cards not accepted

Oola Mexican Grill could easily become habit forming. Located directly behind Cineplaza (東南區) theater off Tingzhou Road just around the corner from Gongguan MRT Station (公館捷運站), exit No. 1, the recently opened restaurant offers a limited but belly-busting menu of Mexican-style food that is tasty, fresh and inexpensive.

The competitive prices are perhaps unsurprising because the interior decoration resembles that of a Subway. And like the sandwich chain, Oola's fixings are located behind a long glass counter. Customers order in three stages. First, select one of five options: burrito, fajita, burrito bowl, tacos or salad. The next step involves the fillings, of which there are also five varieties: chicken (NT\$130), steak (NT\$150), carmitas (NT\$130), barbacoa (NT\$135) and vegetarian (NT\$120), each served on a bed of rice (sadly, pinto and black beans are absent here).

Then you choose any or all of the available toppings: mild salsa, medium green-chili salsa, hot red-chili salsa, corn, sour cream, shredded cheese and lettuce. We went with the barbacoa and chicken fajita, turning one into a set meal (add NT\$29), which came with a side of corn chips imported from Mexico, fresh-cut salsa and bottomless

Mexican-style food that is habit forming.
PHOTO: NOAH BUCHAN, TAIPEI TIMES

drink. An order of guacamole (NT\$30) rounded out the feast.

The barbacoa consisted of shredded beef in a slightly spicy chipotle sauce with hints of garlic and oregano. The lime and spice-infused long-grain rice that it came on provided a tangy backdrop to the rich braised flavors of the meat. As it was my first time visiting Oola, I got a little carried away with the toppings. So a warning to the finicky: Things can become a bit messy if you try to pack too many ingredients into your wrap.

The chicken fajitas also scored high points. Sautéed sliced green peppers and red onions with what tasted like basil rested on top of cubes of smoked chicken. As with the barbacoa,

the rice soaked up the juices of the meat, and the mild flavors of the chicken and vegetables were brought to life by the spicy salsa, which I asked the server to add generous portions of.

The servers were less bounteous with the guacamole. But it is still worth ordering. The delicate flavor and smooth texture of the Hass avocado was not overpowered by the cilantro and lime.

One small quibble with Oola is the music and flat-screen televisions. Both were blaring at top volume on the afternoon I visited earlier this week — so much so that I found it difficult to hold a conversation. But this is a minor issue for a Mexican-style restaurant that stands out from the crowd.

Simplicity comes first at Faust Pizza Lounge (明月光). Opened last month on Renai Road (仁愛路), across from Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall (國父紀念館), the pizzeria sells only two things: pizza and beer. The restaurant's laid-back, charming ambiance and its reasonable prices stand in stark contrast to its competition in the upscale Xinyi neighborhood, where ritzy shopping complexes loom nearby.

Between an indoor dining area and outdoor seating lies an open kitchen where the chef tosses circles of dough up in the air and into the large brick oven, allowing the aroma of baking pies to emanate throughout the establishment.

The interior design is casual and minimalist. Who needs fancy cutlery and hip design with unpretentious, hearty fare that's this good?

At Faust Pizza Lounge, meals come in the form of nine types of thin-crust, 12 inch pizzas and four flavors of German brew Faust.

My dining group has already visited the establishment a few times and tried almost every available option on the menu.

"Light" and "grease-free" are the words that pop up in conversations about the restaurant's pizza. Those hoping for a heart-attack inducing

grease-pit of a pizza may be disappointed.

But fans of stone-oven baked pizza will be pleased to know that the thin crust of the pizza is always done just right — satisfyingly crispy on the sides and slightly charred on the bottom.

Diners looking for something more savory can try the Roma (salami, onion, mushroom and olives, NT\$220) or the Frankfurter Sausage (sausage, bacon and basil, NT\$220). Pizza staples such as the Margarita (NT\$180) and Hawaiian (NT\$220) are popular items as well, while vegetarian options include the Funghi (king oyster mushrooms, tomato, Italian capers and

chilies, NT\$260) and the Veggie (tomato, mushroom, olives and green pepper, NT\$220).

The three fresh-out-of-college proprietors act as the restaurant's chefs and handle their business with aplomb.

Any review of Faust Pizza Lounge would be remiss not to mention the public relation work carried out by the owners' five-year-old poodle, impeccably groomed and well-mannered, who never fails to elicit remarks of admiration from patrons.

Faust offers takeaway but no delivery service. Make sure to give the chef plenty of time to make your pies since the pizzeria is usually packed on both weekends and weekday evenings.

Thin-crust pizza and ice-cold German beer at Faust Pizza Lounge.
PHOTO: HOYI, TAIPEI TIMES

Faust Pizza Lounge 明月光

Address: 502-1, Renai Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市仁愛路四段502號-1)
Telephone: (02) 2758-7687 **Open:** Tuesdays to Sundays from 11am to 10:30pm
Average meal: NT\$300 **Details:** Chinese and English menu, credit cards not accepted

WARNING: Excessive consumption of alcohol can damage your health.

TIDBITS

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW

Finding inner peace is not always easy in the hectic modern world, and traveling to India for a retreat is not always convenient, so The Lulu hotel is turning a corner Sun of Moon Lake (日月潭) into an oasis of calm, where guests can practice water yoga at dawn in the hotel's infinity pool and enjoy a "cleansing" menu at the restaurant, all under the direction of Rajesh Mishra of Bhagalpur University, who recently took up the post of spa manager at the hotel. For bookings and more information, contact the hotel at (04) 9285-5311 or visit its Web site at www.thelulu.com.tw.

Another high-profile addition to Taiwan's increasingly diverse hospitality scene is the appointment of Antonio Tardi as the head chef of the Shangri-La Far Eastern Plaza Hotel's prestigious Marco Polo restaurant. Tardi, 36, a native of Naples, was a guest chef at the 2006 World Gourmet Summit, and has also worked at numerous Michelin-starred restaurants. He will draw on his vast experience of Italian cuisine to launch a new menu that represents his own culinary style.

More information about Tardi can be found at his blog at www.antoniotardi.com. For bookings, call (02) 2376-3156 or visit the hotel's Web site at www.shangri-la.com.tw.