

CULTURE

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Summer rock stars shine

A series of concerts last week presented an abundance of riches for local fans of modern rock

BY DAVID CHEN
STAFF REPORTER

Top: Indie-rock supergroup Broken Social Scene performed at Legacy Taipei on Sunday last week. Above: Trip-hop legends Massive Attack played to an audience of more than 7,000 people at the Taipei World Trade Center's Nangang Exhibition Hall on Wednesday.

PHOTOS: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES

Taipei enjoyed a first-class lineup of modern rock last week, as a handful of international acts brought their shows here en route to Japan's Fuji Rock and Summer Sonic and festivals in South Korea.

The week started off with a highly anticipated appearance on Sunday by Canadian indie rockers Broken Social Scene, in a one-off concert presented by White Wabbit Records (小白兔唱片).

Brit-rock fans got their fill from psychedelic pop band Kula Shaker, which performed on Monday, and former Stone Roses frontman Ian Brown, who played at Legacy Taipei on Friday as part of the TWinkle Rock Festival.

But the highlight for many concertgoers were stadium shows from trip-hop legends Massive Attack and electronica duo Pet Shop Boys, who headlined the festival at the Taipei World Trade Center's Nangang Exhibition Hall (台北世界貿易中心南港展覽館).

The two concerts offered a stark contrast in mood and atmosphere. Massive Attack's show on Wednesday was dark and brooding. Pet Shop Boys, who performed on Thursday, were flamboyant and jubilant. Both shows were visually spectacular and smoothly executed.

MASSIVE ATTACK

Massive Attack's five-piece band provided a solid root for the evening's downbeat, dub-flavored music, directed by group founders Robert del Naja, aka 3D, who sang on many of the evening's songs, and Grant Marshall, aka Daddy G, who kept a low-key presence on stage.

Martina Topley Bird, best known for her work with trip-hop icon Tricky, featured in many songs during Massive Attack's two-hour set. The British singer, who donned a masquerade mask on stage, also opened the show with an impressive solo performance as a one-woman trip-hop band, beat-boxing her beats into a loop machine and laying down orchestration on a synthesizer while she sang.

But it was the band's rotating guest vocalists who drew the strongest responses from the crowd. Roots reggae legend Horace Andy elicited a wild cheering on *You Are My Angel*, while Deborah Miller brought the house down with a soulful rendition of the group's signature tune *Unfinished Symphony*.

Massive Attack's stage was adorned with

dark-hued lighting and shadows, which underlined the concert's political tone. The visual centerpiece was a set of life-sized LED screens behind the performers, one of which ran a cable TV news-like ticker, flashing a long list of facts, statistics and trivia that included quotes on freedom from Jean-Paul Satre, John F. Kennedy and Noam Chomsky. Another LED screen segment included a world map visualization of the US' extraordinary rendition program for terrorism suspects.

While Massive Attack's show searched for solace in a heartless world, Pet Shop Boys and their audience were intoxicated by love and romance. The duo performed its colorful, theatrical show *Pandemonium* on Thursday at the Nangang Exhibition Hall.

PET SHOP BOYS

TWinkle's organizers said more than 7,000 people showed up for Massive Attack, but the crowd seemed bigger at Pet Shop Boys, who began the evening with a medley of *More Than a Dream* and their forgotten 1980s hit *Heart*.

Singer Neil Tennant pranced and strode about on stage throughout the evening, all the while keeping the signature cool composure that also marks his distinctive vocal style. His counterpart Chris Lowe kept busy behind the DJ booth, working the synthesizer and drum machine magic that fueled their long list of dance club classics.

The beats kept everyone dancing (the floor at the exhibition hall literally shook), and the pace never let down. From start to finish, *Pandemonium* was visually engaging. The brilliantly conceived stage set consisted of hundreds of cubes made of white cardboard paper, with their arrangement reflecting the show's loose narrative. At the beginning, the cubes were stacked neatly into a huge wall, which disintegrated into a strewn mess of boxes. From this backdrop, a budding romance emerged, portrayed by a crew of four dancers.

The dancers put on inspiring, top-notch performances. They encouraged audience members to move on the anthemic songs and attracted their gaze on the tightly choreographed numbers. One memorable segment came from dancers Sean Williams and Charlotte Walcott's dramatic portrayal of a lover's spat during *The Way It Used to Be*.

Unsurprisingly, Pet Shop Boys saved a few of their best-known songs for the finale. *It's a Sin* was one of the last songs of the set, and *West End Girls* was the encore to this two-hour spectacle, which gave credence to the TWinkle Rock Festival's moniker.

BROKEN SOCIAL SCENE

Also worth remembering in this year's summer of rock was the loose, spirited show on Sunday last week from Broken Social Scene. The beloved Canadian indie-music "collective" played to a packed house at Legacy Taipei's 1,000-person capacity venue.

Their set, which lasted around two hours without a break, mostly covered material from their latest release *Forgiveness Rock Record* and their classic *You Forgot It in People*.

The band's wall-of-sound jams came across well that evening. The group had up to 10 members sharing the stage, as they constantly traded duties on guitar, bass, synthesizer, percussion and vocals.

The musicians were clearly having fun on stage, and their infectious energy made it easy to forgive occasional lapses such as the lackluster, off-key singing in *Forced to Love*, one of the new album's catchier tunes.

Lisa Lobsinger, who was mostly in the background on percussion and backing vocals, drew a rousing response halfway through the show for her singing on synth-pop tune *All to All* and *Anthems for a Seventeen-Year-Old Girl*; it's too bad she didn't feature in a few more songs.

There was no seating at the venue, so you had to squeeze through the crowd to get close to the stage. One drawback to Legacy Taipei, despite its relaxed, art-space/warehouse vibe and excellent sound system, is the layout. The room is long and narrow, which makes it feel a little claustrophobic closer to the stage. It's also hard to see from the back.

In the latter half of the show, the band obliged fans with crowd-pleasing songs like *KC Accidental* and Kevin Drew's ballad *Lover's Spit*. By then, it felt like the audience was part of the band's onstage party.

Electronica duo Pet Shop Boys brought their touring show *Pandemonium* to the Taipei World Trade Center's Nangang Exhibition Hall on Thursday.

PHOTO: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES

Martina Topley Bird opened Massive Attack's show with an impressive solo performance as a one-woman trip-hop band.

PHOTO: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES

TOP FIVE
MANDARIN ALBUMS

JULY 23 TO JULY 29



1 Terri Kwan (關穎) and *The Secret That Can't Be Kept* (關不住的秘密) with **32.69** percent of sales

2 Jing Chang (張芸京) and *The Opposite Me* (相反的我) with **12.87%**

3 Nick Chou (周湯豪) and self-titled album with **7.97%**

4 Chyl Chin (齊秦) and *A Beautiful Mind* (美麗境界) with **5.55%**

5 Delia, aka Ring (丁噐), and *Fu Good* (下一站天后) with **4.15%**

ALBUM CHART COMPILED FROM G-MUSIC (WWW.G-MUSIC.COM.TW), BASED ON RETAIL SALES

PLANET POP

The woman widely regarded as the "Queen of Mando-pop" is making a long-awaited comeback with a limited series of concerts in Beijing and Shanghai in October and November, six years after her last release.

The almost effortlessly cool **Faye Wong** (王菲) has sold millions of albums and won fans across Asia, with songs ranging from the heart-rending early hit *Easily Hurt Woman* (容易受傷的女人) to the ersatz, Buddhist-inspired trip-hop of her 2000 album *Fable* (寓言).

The entertainment pages of Chinese Internet portals were dominated last week by pictures of Wong at a brief Beijing news conference to announce her return, many simply carrying the headline "The Diva Is Back."

Her popularity shows little sign of fading, with advanced sales for the just 10 concerts of her comeback tour — five each in Beijing and Shanghai — reaching US\$2.79 million in only 10 days.

"Is this figure really that accurate?" the typically taciturn Wong asked, in one of her few utterances at the news conference in which she kept the press waiting for three hours and was then on stage for a mere three minutes.

Famous for her icy demeanor, Wong, 40, had more or less withdrawn

from the limelight five years ago to concentrate on her charity, set up to help children born with cleft lips and palates, as her second daughter was.

A Beijing native, Wong started out singing syrupy Cantonese love songs in Hong Kong under the English name of Shirley. She has recorded in her native Mandarin almost exclusively since 1994, as well as the odd song in English or Japanese.

Still, there is no word on a new album to follow up 2003's *To Love* (將愛).

Wong generates passion bordering on hysteria among fans and manic screaming at her concerts and public appearances.

"She is great, and her songs always touch the deepest places in my heart," wrote "Love You" on Chinese Web site qq.com.cn.

Wong is known for writing a fair number of her own songs, rare in the fast-moving, bubble-gum world of Chinese-language pop music where artists often put out several albums in one year.

Counting even President Ma Ying-jeou (馬英九) as a fan, Wong is also famous for her hit Chinese-language covers of tracks by The Cranberries, Tori Amos and the Cocteau Twins.

Outside of Asia, she is perhaps best known for her occasional film roles, including in **Wong Kar-wai's** (王家衛) award-winning *Chungking Express* (重慶森林).

While Wong is returning to the limelight, **Ellen DeGeneres** has decided to give up her job as a judge on *American Idol*.

DeGeneres unexpectedly quit the top-rated television singing show last Thursday after just a year in the job, saying it was not the right fit for her.

The popular US talk show host and comedian, whose addition to the panel had largely disappointed viewers, said the workload was more than she expected and she found it hard to hurt the feelings of contestants.

"A couple months ago, I let [TV network] Fox and the *American Idol* producers know that this didn't feel like the right fit for me," DeGeneres said in a statement.

DeGeneres, who signed a five year contract with *Idol* last year, is the second judge to quit the show this year. Abrasive British judge **Simon Cowell** left in May to launch his own talent show in late 2011.

A fine judge of "talent" of a different sort, 84 year-old *Playboy*

founder **Hugh Hefner** embodies the lifestyle of sexual freedom that his men's magazine has espoused since it was founded in 1953, featuring a nude centerfold of **Marilyn Monroe**.

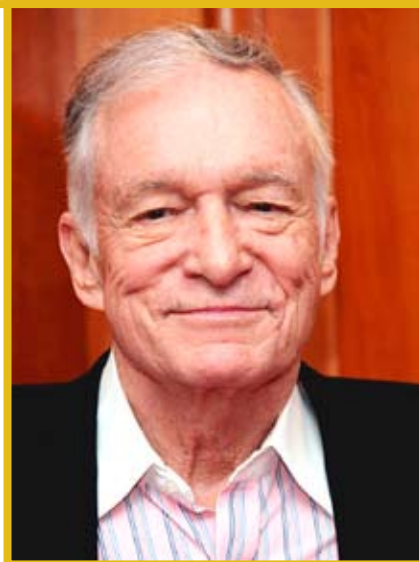
Yet, there is another side to the pajama-loving man known around the world by his nickname, Hef. Along with sexual freedom, he has championed civil rights, published stories challenging McCarthyism and the Vietnam War, and backed gay causes and the legalization of marijuana.

The new documentary film, *Hugh Hefner: Playboy, Activist and Rebel*, debuted in US theaters on Friday offering audiences this other side of Hefner. He sat down with Reuters in the Playboy mansion to talk about the film.

Q: The documentary addresses the irony of the two sides of you: the carefree life vs the serious political activist. Where is the common ground between the two?

A: "Aren't they exactly the same? In other words, aren't the sexual revolution and racial emancipation the same thing? I just think these are areas of our free society that have not been truly free and properly dealt with."

Q: A lot of people would say "no,"



Playboy founder Hugh Hefner is the subject of a new documentary.

PHOTO: EPA

and that your brand of sexual freedom is really just the objectifying of women.

A: "Anybody who thinks we objectify women in a negative sense has a political agenda of their own. It comes right out of our Puritan heritage. The simple truth of the matter is we are two different sexes. We are attracted to one another. That is the basis of civilization. That is what makes the world go around. The notion of the denying the fact that women, in a positive sense, are objects of sexual desire is to simply not deal with reality."

—AGENCIES