

## AROUND TOWN

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FRIDAY, AUGUST 20, 2010

BY DIANE BAKER  
STAFF REPORTER

What a difference a year makes. A few sponsors to help with promotional efforts don't hurt, either. A year ago, Taiwanese ballerina and dance teacher Wang Tzer-shing (王澤馨) was ready to call it quits. No more International Ballet Star Gala, at least in Taipei; she was too run down from trying to do it all on her own.

This year, she's not only looking forward to the fourth gala at the National Theater next weekend, she already has the dates and the theater confirmed for next year's show and is talking about plans for a 10th. Plus, she's working on her second ballet gala for the Esplanade in Singapore in October and bubbling over with excitement as she describes her hopes for reviving a tradition of ballet in Taipei.

Her enthusiasm is infectious. She has a cast of 14 established stars and a program that includes seven pas de deux or solos never before performed in Taiwan. She's also arranged for a pianist and violinist for two of the pieces.

Although she didn't look frazzled, she said she felt it. "This year my pressure is a lot more than last year because I know a lot of audience members will be coming back, so I don't want to disappoint them. I know people will compare [the shows]. I know some like classical more and some like half and half, some like more contemporary. But the dancers are so established, so good, they are going to be wonderful no matter what they do," she said in an interview last Friday. "I also want to show contemporary works that haven't been seen in Taiwan before."

"I want people in Taiwan to have a different view of ballet. It's the 21st century, I want to open their eyes to what is going on around the world," she said.

The casting, as usual, is impressive. Sarah Lamb and Rupert Pennefather from Britain's Royal Ballet, Nao Sakuma and Chi Cao (曹馳) from Birmingham Royal Ballet, Anastasia and Denis Matvienko from the Mariinsky Theater (the Kirov), Friedemann Vogel from Stuttgart, Silvia Azzoni and Alexandre Riabko from Hamburg, Iana Salenko from Berlin, Lorena Feijoo and Vitor Luiz from San Francisco, Mizuka Ueno from Tokyo and Daniil Simkin from the American Ballet Theater.

Though many of the names are familiar to balletomanes, three faces will be familiar to Taipei audiences. Salenko danced at the 2007 gala, Vogel was here last year and Wang was lucky to be able to get the 23-year-old Simkin for a third time. The young Russian has been a Taipei favorite ever since he leapt through the window in *La Spectre de la Rose* in 2008. He's been in Japan for the past few weeks, dancing with the Tokyo Ballet in *Don Quixote*.

"A ballet performance is a product, commercially. We have to be able to sell it. It's not a charity performance; we still depend on ticket sales for everything. We want to show the audiences the most exciting performers and Daniil is fantastic," Wang said. "It's always a struggle to decide who to bring."

Cao has also become well known outside of the dance world, having played a leading role in Bruce Beresford's 2009 film *Mao's Last Dancer*, which has yet to be shown here.

When asked if she had favorites, Wang laughed and refused to name names.

"I think each dancer is unique. It's hard to compare. Each pas de deux is special, it's like comparing bananas and apples," she said.

But Wang was a little more willing to talk about the pieces she's looking forward to, such as British choreographer Christopher Wheldon's *Tryst*, created for the Royal Ballet in 2002, and Marco Goeke's solo *Mopey*.

"The music is Bach. The movement is not ballet-ballet — the technique is ballet, but it's just beyond your imagination. It will be a surprise," she said of Goeke's piece.

Classical ballet fans should be happy with the pas de deux from *Sleeping Beauty* and *Romeo and Juliet*, which will be danced by frequent partners Sakuma and Chi, as well as *Giselle*, *Le Corsaire*, *Don Quixote* and a solo from *Raymonda*.

Works by other masters include George Balanchine's Tchaikovsky *Pas de Deux* and Sir Frederick Ashton's *Thais Pas de Deux* as well as two by John Neumeier — *The Little Mermaid* and *Illusions Like Swan Lake/Meditation*.

From choreographers working today there will be excerpts from William Forsythe's *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated* and Edward Clug's pairing of Radiohead and Shakespeare, *Radio and Juliet*.

Simkin will reprise Ben Van Cauwenbergh's *Le Bourgeois*, which he performed here in 2008.

Meanwhile, Wang is dreaming of bigger shows.

"There are still so many great dancers out there who don't know how to promote themselves. They are working so hard on their own. That's why I want to do this gala every year. The life of a dancer is so short. I'd love to invite everyone. Maybe for the 10th anniversary I could invite 26 dancers for a week-long event with multiple programs," she said.

What caused her change of heart after last year's despondency?

"I always ask myself, 'Am I going to do this again?' but at the end of the show I hear the audience screaming and then I watch the DVDs afterwards, I think, 'How can I stop?' Even for one year — you stop for a year and people forget you. So I just do the best I can," she said. "I'm hoping the whole environment will be different in 10 years, that maybe we'll have a company by then, our [dance] education system will be changed by then, our [ballet] kids might have a place to show their talent."

Aug. 28's performance starts earlier than normal for a show at the National Theater, 7pm. The program is long, about 150 minutes with a 20-minute intermission, but if past galas are anything to go on, the audience won't want to go home.

## PERFORMANCE NOTES

**WHAT:** 2010 4th International Ballet Star Gala**WHERE:** National Theater (國家戲劇院), 21-1, Zhongshan S Rd, Taipei City (台北市中山南路21-1號)**WHEN:** Aug. 28 at 7pm and Aug. 29 at 2:30pm**ADMISSION:** NT\$1,200 to NT\$6,000, available through the NTCH box office or online at [www.artsticket.com](http://www.artsticket.com). The cheapest and top-priced seats for tomorrow's show are sold outSarah Lamb of Britain's Royal Ballet dances in *The Nutcracker*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHAN PERS



Ukraine-born Denis Matvienko is a principal dancer with the Mariinsky Theater in St Petersburg, Russia.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GENE SCHIAVONE

## Stars in your eyes

A year after almost giving up in despair over the lack of support for quality ballet in Taipei, Wang Tzer-shing has produced another gala packed with some of the best dancers and choreographers in the world

Daniil Simkin of the American Ballet Theater performs *Le Corsaire*.

PHOTO COURTESY OF EDUARDO PATINO

## Pop-soup for the soul

BY ANDREW C.C. HUANG  
CONTRIBUTION REPORTER

A-me's (張惠妹) ground-breaking *A-mit* (阿密特) album made Aboriginal music chic, but indie sensation Suning (舒米恩) is bringing it into the modern era.

The multi-instrumentalist and member of indie-rock band Totem (圖騰) plays tomorrow at The Wall (這牆) before traveling to Canada to perform in Toronto on Aug. 29 and in Vancouver on Sept. 4 to conclude his Suning World Tour (舒米恩世界巡迴演唱會).

"I want to express the feeling of living in the moment," said Suning, a member of the Amis tribe (阿美族) from Taitung. "People tend to focus on the traditional aspect of Aboriginal culture. I want to show the changes that have taken place."

Released in May to critical acclaim, *Suning's Debut Original Album* (舒米恩首張創作專輯)

features a spell-binding mix of Aboriginal music and modern electronica, endearing itself to a much wider audience than more traditional music typically does.

Suning is not just a flash in the pan. His band Totem (圖騰) has released two albums, *I Sing* (我在那邊唱) in 2006 and *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* (放羊的孩子) in 2009 and regularly draws packed crowds for performances at venues like The Wall and Riverside Cafe (河岸留言) with its ingenious blend of chanting, reggae, bossa nova, hip-hop, metal and folk tunes. Totem has been nominated for best band at the Golden Melody Awards twice and has been the subject of no less than nine documentary films, most notably *Ocean Fever* (海洋熱) in 2004 and *Who Is Singing There* (誰在那邊唱) in 2009.

In 2008, Suning won the Best Newcomer Award at the Golden Horse Awards for the indie

short film *Hopscotch* (跳格子) by director Chiang Hsiu-ching (姜秀瓊) in which he portrays a tow truck driver who falls in love with a schoolteacher.

"I overslept, rushed there and just stumbled through the recorded audition. But that silliness was what they wanted," he recalled. "I learned a lot about performing in front of the camera from this project."

Suning is also a respected songwriter for other performers and has penned songs for Mando-pop stars such as Landy Wen (溫嵐) and Chi Chin (齊秦).

"I bring a guitar everywhere I go," said Suning. "When I get inspired, I will go to a quiet corner and write down the song."

"If money is not an issue, I want to perform on a bigger stage such as Taipei Arena for our fans," said Suning. "Music is the thing that connects us after all."

## PERFORMANCE NOTES

**WHAT:** Suning World Tour Taipei Concert (舒米恩世界巡迴演唱會台北場)**WHEN:** Tomorrow at 8 pm**WHERE:** The Wall (這牆), B1, 200, Roosevelt Rd Sec 4, (台北市羅斯福路4段200號B1).

Tel: (02) 2930-0162.

**ADMISSION:** NT\$400 in advance or NT\$500 at the door, available online at [www.thewall.com.tw](http://www.thewall.com.tw)**ON THE NET:** [johnsuming.pixnet.net/blog](http://johnsuming.pixnet.net/blog), [johnsuming.com](http://johnsuming.com)

Suning gives traditional music a contemporary twist.

PHOTO COURTESY OF WONDER MUSIC

