

# CULTURE

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[ THE WEEKENDER ]



## Stars shine at international ballet gala

BY DIANE BAKER AND NOAH BUCHAN  
STAFF REPORTERS

The wow factor was up full volume on Saturday night at the National Theater for the 4th International Ballet Star Gala, and that was before the intermission. It was such an evening of superlatives it was hard to know where to begin, except it seemed unlikely my editor would pay for a 500-word review made up of OMG, OMG, OMG!

Everyone more than lived up to their star billing, but three couples — Silvia Azzoni and Alexandre Riabko, Sarah Lamb and Rupert Pennefather and Denis and Anastasia Matvienko — and three works — *The Little Mermaid*, *Tryst* and *Thais pas de deux* really made the evening.

The show started with Nao Sakuma and Chi Cao (曹馳) from Birmingham Royal Ballet in the *Sleeping Beauty* pas de deux; they were the princess and prince that every beginning ballet student dreams of becoming.

Then bam, a sudden shift of mood and what turned out to be the best in an evening of stunners — John Neumeier's *The Little Mermaid*, with Azzoni and Riabko of the Hamburg Ballet. Azzoni, clad in a sea-green bustier and long, long, long silken trousers (to give her an almost fish tail) was mesmerizing. Her arched arms undulated like the waves as she bewitched, enticed and protected her human love. Azzoni was absolutely amazing.

*Tryst*, by Lamb and Pennefather of The Royal Ballet, showed why Christopher Wheeldon has been hailed as one of the saviors of ballet. The work was spare, almost ascetic, yet fully complete, with graceful curves frequently highlighted by the straight line of a splayed foot.

Daniil Simkin had the audience eating out of the palm of his hand with the irreverent *Le Bourgeois* — or he would have if they could have stopped screaming long enough. Charmingly self-assured and tossing off a "540°" like he was simply tying his shoelaces (it's a 360° revolution plus a 180), the 23-year-old Simkin is the epitome of panache.

If the audience thought that Simkin's 540° was an eyepopper, the Matvienkos were a reminder why the Mariinsky Theater continues to set the standards by which other dancers are measured. *Le Corsaire* is a duet, but it's really all about the danseur. He's got the flash and dazzle and Denis exceeded expectations, tussling in his own 540° on top of everything else, while Anastasia nailed every fouette and pirouette.

In the second half Azzoni and Riabko shone again in Neumeier's *Illusions Like Swan Lake/Meditation*, while Lamb and Pennefather took your breath away with their mastery of Frederick Ashton's *Thais pas de deux*. At one point Pennefather placed his hands just at the top of Lamb's thighs and lifted her straight over his head as she posed, ankles crossed, like a goddess; then just as easily he slowly lowered her to the ground and kept going down until he was on bended knee behind her. *Thais* left you aching for more — more of the couple and more Ashton.

In Edward Clug's *Radio and Juliet* the Matvienkos were sharp as knives as very modern, very sexy star-crossed lovers. This was no tentative first love, but the passionate mating of two experienced, equally matched lovers.

Other memorable moments included the *Giselle* pas de deux by Mizuka Ueno and Friedemann Vogel. Ueno was as light and ethereal as the tiny wings on her back. Several times Vogel picked her up and swung her tenderly from side to side in front of him; it was incredibly romantic and reinforced the weightlessness of her character.

Vogel also showed his flexibility and comedic talent in Marco Goecke's quirky, loopy and literally slaphappy solo *Mopey*.

Lorena Feijoo and Vitor Luiz of the San Francisco Ballet were great in William Forsythe's *In the Middle, Somewhat Elevated*, but I have never seen a danseur throw his partner up in the air for the lifts in the *Don Quixote* pas de deux the way Luiz did in the evening's finale.

Once again Wang Tzer-shing (王澤禎) has raised the barre for ballet performances in Taipei. It's a good thing we only have to wait until April for the next gala.

After the show there was even more good news for ballet lovers. Word has it that the Royal Ballet has been scheduled for the National next June. And former American Ballet Theater principal dancer Cynthia Harvey, who was in the audience, has been in Hong Kong working on a production of *Sleeping Beauty* for the Hong Kong Ballet, which opens on Oct. 29.

Yesterday at Representation Theatre's Arts Factory (再現劇團藝術工場), Richard Chua's (蔡兩俊) choice of Lin Li-yun (林麗雲) as the leading protagonist in *Generations* (同蒙), a play about a dysfunctional mother incapable of coming to terms with her divorce, was perfect.

Lin's restrained hysteria, both in the execution of her lines and her gestures, as well as her occasional outbursts, sent shivers down this reviewer's spine. The one-hour production tells the story of a divorcee (Lin) who projects her desires on to a gay son who rebuffs her advances. That is, until he finds out that his lover has been murdered.

The tension created by the mother's disturbing behavior and the struggles the filial son undergoes at the expense of his own sexuality speak to the generations of Chinese who have repressed their sexuality under the pressure of a culture that expects them to marry, have a family and perpetuate the ancestral line. However, the somewhat uneven script, with its pretensions to *Oedipus Rex*, reverts to a number of clichés about homosexuality that distracts the audience from the primary theme: how an individual suppresses his own identity for a perceived greater good. The fact that the son is making a conscious decision to be with the mother does little to evoke sympathy for the predicament of either character.

The final performances of *Generations* take place on Wednesday and Thursday at 7:30pm at Representation Theatre's Arts Factory, B1, 43, Nanchang Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市南昌路一段43號B1). NT\$300 tickets are available through NTCH ticketing or online at www.artsticket.com.tw.



Silvia Azzoni, from the Hamburg Ballet, was outstanding this weekend at the National Theater as part of the 2010 International Ballet Stars Gala. PHOTO COURTESY OF HAMBURG BALLET

## Culture rock!

Canada gets a dose of Taiwanese culture with Telus Taiwanfest 2010

### TOP FIVE MANDARIN ALBUMS

AUG. 20 TO AUG. 26



1 Jolin Tsai (蔡依林) and *Myself* with 26.98 percent of sales

2 Kuo Shu-yao (郭書瑤, aka Yaoyao) and *Honey* with 21.99%

3 Wang Lee-hom (王力宏) and *The 18th Martial Arts* (十八般武藝) with 17.74%

4 Ariel Lin (林依晨) and *A Wonderful Journey* (美好的旅行) with 8.67%

5 Chen Wei-quan (陳威全) and *Goodbye, Single* (再見·單身) with 3.61%

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

BY ALITA RICKARDS  
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

The scent of Taiwanese dishes wafted through the air. Hip-hop group Kou Chou Ching (拷秋勤) and electro rockers Go Chic were headlining acts. An exhibit from the National Museum of Taiwan History was on display alongside traditional puppet shows. And designers Jasper Huang (黃嘉祥) and Chiu-I Hsu (徐秋宜) battled it out on the runway this past weekend.

Did you somehow miss out on a huge festival in Taipei? Or perhaps in Taichung?

Try halfway around the world.

The annual Taiwan festival kicked off this weekend at Queens Quay West in Toronto, with a second event scheduled for Sept. 4 through Sept. 6 in downtown Vancouver.

Telus Taiwanfest 2010 is a part of Harbourfront Centre's World Routes 2010. Concerts, culinary showcases, films and a fashion show drew Canadians to check out what Taiwan is all about.

The festival began in Toronto in 1990 as a classical concert night but has evolved into a multi-disciplinary cultural carnival since then, said Sherry Wang, communications director for ACSEA (Asian-Canadian Special Events Association).

This year's invitation from Vancouver to have stage the festival debut in its downtown was a major coup, she said.

"The goal of the festival is to show Taiwan's culture and innovation," Wang said.

Although a tribute to Teresa Teng (鄧麗君) and programs such as I-Wan-Jan Puppet Theatre (亦宛然掌中劇團) showcase aspects of mainstream and traditional Taiwanese culture, the focus this year is on indie bands "to really show how Taiwan continues to progress and move forward in the modern world," Wang said.

Wang was especially excited to see Kou Chou Ching play because "they actually compose [their] music using the traditional Taiwanese musical scale," she said. "They go back to the roots of rap" and "are not afraid to speak their minds about current social or political issues, even if that is not necessarily what the market would want."

Kou Chou Ching rapper Fan Chiang (范姜) said he hopes his group "can make more North American people like Taiwan and become [fans] of Taiwan's culture and music." He was looking forward to

introducing Canadians to "new music" styles beyond hip-hop. Taiwanese Canadian musician, producer and DJ Leo Shia, aka Leo37 said Taiwanfest has allowed him to continue touring and to support himself through merchandise sales. "The connections I've made and the opportunities that stem from this festival have opened up a whole new set of doors and further opportunities," he said. "Getting to play in front of a group of people that might not understand what you say really forces you to be flexible and you have to figure out how to work crowds regardless of barriers."

Taiwan-based Canadian expatriate Nick Fothergill, who also played the event in 2008, said he relishes the chance to be involved in Canadian and Taiwanese cross-cultural activities. "Anything that provides a bridge between my old home, Canada, and my new home, Taiwan, is real treat for me."

The festival's music lineup is diverse, with reggae band Matzka, singer and multi-instrumentalist Suming (蘇米恩), and indie-rock acts 1976, Aphasia (阿飛西雅), Masia One and Sissy Chao (趙一翳).

But the band that might end up representing the most modern face of Taiwan is electro-rock diva explosion Go Chic, which has recently toured China, Japan, Hong Kong and Macau. This was the band's first concert in Canada, where it is on a 12-day tour with seven shows in Toronto and Vancouver, including Taiwanfest.

"We've got tight schedules and tight pants!" said lead singer Ariel Zheng (鄭恩齊) with her characteristic tongue-in-cheek sense of humor. "We've heard that the music scene is massive there [and] can't wait to see what Canada has got."

"Where you are from definitely affects what you do and what you think," Zheng said. "In terms of music, we also think it gives us an edge to bring something different. In our song *P.O.D.*, we shout at English teachers in Taiwan trying to get laid, and in our new song *Culture Shock*, we share some of our thoughts looking at the world as an Asian. I think it's about time we put [a] spotlight on Taiwan and start putting it on the music map."

PHOTOS COURTESY OF STANLEY CHANG KAI-WEI AND SHERRY WANG/ACSEA

## PLANET POP

Smoke wafting from a Cadillac Escalade on the Las Vegas Strip set off Paris Hilton's latest legal troubles when a motorcycle officer who suspected the smell was marijuana stopped the vehicle and police say a bag of cocaine later fell out of the 29-year-old socialite's purse.

It's the second time this year Hilton has been arrested on drug possession allegations, although authorities in South Africa dropped marijuana charges earlier this summer. In 2007, Hilton pleaded no contest to alcohol-related reckless driving and was sentenced to 45 days in jail.

This time, the hotel heiress was with her boyfriend, Las Vegas nightclub mogul Cy Waits, who manages a club inside the Wynn Las Vegas and was driving the black SUV that the officer stopped nearby at 11:22pm local time on Friday.

The officer "followed the vapor trail and the odor of marijuana to the Escalade," police Sergeant John Sheahan said.

As other police arrived and a crowd gathered on the busy neon-lit Strip, Hilton asked to go into the Wynn resort for privacy, Sheahan said.

"Miss Hilton pulled out a tube of lip balm," Sheahan said. "At the same time ... a bundle of cocaine in a plastic bag came out of her purse" in plain view of police in the room.

Officer Marcus Martin characterized the cocaine as a "small amount," or a package

of the size usually associated with personal use. Police would not specify the weight of the cocaine or whether any marijuana was confiscated.

Hilton, a prolific tweeter, didn't mention the arrest on her Twitter site, although less than an hour after she was released her account was updated with a posting that said the actress was in bed watching the television show *Family Guy*. It was unclear if the tweets came from her, were posted by time-release or were sent by someone else. Hilton spokeswoman Dawn Miller wouldn't comment when reached by an Associated Press reporter Saturday afternoon.

Earlier this week, Hilton was in the news when a 31-year-old man allegedly tried to break into her Los Angeles home.

Authorities have said that someone carrying two big knives banged on Hilton's window on Tuesday. She posted a photo of the arrest on Twitter and described it as "scary." Nathan Lee Parada faces a felony burglary charge.

Speaking of scary, Leonardo DiCaprio has been granted a restraining order against a woman who believes she is his wife and is carrying his child — called Jesus.

The *Titanic* and *Inception* star said in documents filed with Los Angeles Superior Court this week that he was frightened of the "delusional" woman and felt his personal safety was in jeopardy.



A "vapor trail" led to Paris Hilton's arrest on cocaine possession charges in Las Vegas. PHOTO: REUTERS

His lawyer submitted a number of handwritten letters from the woman, named as Livia Bistriceanu, to DiCaprio.

"Do you want to be with me for real and to be the father of Jesus? I've explained you I can't be with nobody virtually. I have to have a father in reality for Jesus not like this," read one of the letters, obtained by celebrity Web site TMZ.com on Friday.

The court ordered Bistriceanu to stay at least 100 yards (91m) away from DiCaprio, 35, who remains one of Hollywood's leading heart-throb stars actors despite attempts to move away from romantic dramas in film

since the success of *Titanic* in 1997.

Fresh out of rehab and a 13-day stint in jail, Lindsay Lohan returned to Twitter last week — and blasted the paparazzi who have been following her every move.

"Clearly ... Paparazzi shouldn't be allowed to take pictures or video while someone's driving or at a stop light. 4ever1's sake," Lohan said in her first Tweet since the eve of being locked up on July 20.

Lohan, who was released on Tuesday after just 23 days of a court-ordered 90-day rehabilitation program, has also got back behind the wheel, after the suspension of her driving license for a 2007 drunk driving and cocaine possession charge.

The 24-year-old actress got her license back on Wednesday and was soon seen driving a Maserati sports car and picking up friends after midnight in Los Angeles.

Lohan, whose promising acting career in movies like *Freaky Friday* and *Mean Girls* has been eclipsed since 2007 by headlines about hard partying, has been trailed by photographers since her release.

She is also reported to have been inundated with offers, including interviews and celebrity endorsements.

Lohan's legal troubles have delayed shooting on her next movie in which she will play 1970s porn star Linda Lovelace. She was last in movie theaters with the 2007 flop *I Know Who Killed Me*. —AGENCIES