

# AROUND TOWN

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## Late bloomer

Three years after he shot to fame on the 'Happy Sunday' TV talent show, WeiBird has finally released an album and is preparing for his first stadium shows

BY ANDREW C.C. HUANG  
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

Fans of the now-defunct TV talent show *Happy Sunday* (快樂星期天) had to wait three years for the arrival of their messiah. But it was worth it. The show's champion, William Wei Li-an (韋禮安) aka WeiBird, made a splash this June with the release of his *Wei Li-an Debut Eponymous Original Album* (韋禮安首張同名全創作專輯).

Wei — who performs his first stadium shows next weekend in Taipei and the following weekend in Taichung — possesses an impressive pedigree (he graduated from National Taiwan University), matinee idol looks and talent to spare as a singer and songwriter. He wows his fans with a smoldering charm reminiscent of Wang Lee-hom (王力宏), his down-to-earth persona and the fact that he writes his own songs, all of which help him stand out in a Mando-pop landscape populated by overly polished, self-promoting idol singers with suave dance moves.

"I'm a singer, not an entertainer," Wei said in a phone interview on Tuesday. "People usually don't recognize me on the street. It's good that my career and life are separate."

Much of Wei's charm derives from the fact that he is a bashful, self-effacing star who is quick to flash an awkward smile.

"The most unforgettable thing in life is that I suffered from an acne problem for six years and didn't dare to go out of the door," he laughed. "I channeled my energy into singing and found comfort in music."

"I'm pretty shy and don't usually approach people. I don't even go to out too much unless friends ask me," he said.

But he's propelled by an impeccable melodic drive. For his debut album, Wei crafted a pop opus by waxing poetic about love and the meaning of life. The album's lead single, *Yes or No* (有沒有), is an irresistibly catchy tale of unrequited love.

"I wrote this song in college when I realized my love for a girl was not reciprocated. This song is about unspoken feelings," Wei said. "[It] simply flew out of me in a few days."

Wei isn't considered a vocal powerhouse, but he's a better singer at live performances than he is on his recordings, as he showed when he delivered a ravishing rendition of *Blue Eyes* (藍眼睛) at label partner Angela Chang's (張韶涵) concert last month.

Wei performs at the Taipei International Convention Center (台北國際會議中心) next Saturday and at Taichung's Chung Hsing University Huisun Auditorium (台中中興大學惠孫堂) on Sept. 25. The set list will include covers of songs by Mando-pop/R'n'B star Khalil Fong (方大同) and veteran crooner Fei Yu-ching (費玉清).

### PERFORMANCE NOTES

**WHAT:** Escape of the Two-Legged Bookshelf WeiBird concert (兩腳書櫥的逃亡—韋禮安演唱會)

**WHERE:** Taipei International Convention Center (台北國際會議中心), 1, Xinyi Rd Sec 5, Taipei City (台北市信義路五段1號)

**WHEN:** Sept. 18 at 7:45pm

**WHERE:** Chung Hsing University Huisun Auditorium (台中中興大學惠孫堂), 250 Kuokuang Rd, Taichung City (台中市國光路250號)

**WHEN:** Sept. 25 at 7:45pm

**ADMISSION:** NT\$800 to NT\$2,600, available through 7-Eleven ibon kiosks or at [www.tickets.com.tw](http://www.tickets.com.tw)

**ON THE NET:** [www.weibird.com](http://www.weibird.com)

## Lion dancing aims for the 'mane'-stream

Team-Win Lion Dance Theater's approach to traditional street arts is geared towards reviving interest and finding new audiences



BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW  
STAFF REPORTER

Chen Chin-yi (陳晉億) has spent a lifetime studying the art of lion dance, starting out aged 9 following troupes as they went from temple to temple in search of employment.

It was a hard life — he recalls dancers sleeping on doorsteps and traffic islands whatever the weather, traveling from town to town as they followed an annual roster of temple fairs.

In *A Life of Performance* (藝陣人生), which opens at the Taipei County Arts Center (台北縣藝文中心演藝廳) tonight, he brings his life story to the stage.

The performance is one of the most ambitious productions of the Team-Win Lion Dance Theater (廷威醒獅劇團), founded 10 years ago by Chen and his two elder brothers.

Over the past decade, Chen has extended the boundaries of traditional street arts like lion dancing to broaden their dramatic appeal. With *A Life of Performance*, he brings together dancing lions, dragons and deities in a show that reveals the lot of an itinerant performer.

"When other people had a happy event, whether it was a marriage or opening a new business, we would be there to help them celebrate," Chen said.

The group is a regular participant in religious parades. But Chen laments that for many street artists, such performances have become a routine.

"In many cases, performers, or even pilgrims, don't really understand what is going on at these religious events," he said. "It's just a bit of excitement."

Chen established Team-Win Lion Dance Theater to revitalize the art of the lion dance. His lions are heavily anthropomorphic, and the skill of the theater's performers is in creating a character that audiences can relate to.

"For us, it's not about high jumps and somersaults," Chen said, "but about giving the lion a personality."

Chen's mission hasn't been easy, though. "In the past, you simply had to remember your moves, and be in the right place at the right time to produce a good lion dance," said brother Chen Chin-de (陳晉德), a co-founder of the troupe. "Now even the lion gets to speak. And many of the movements are much more subtle than the big leaps and bounds of a traditional dance. We've had to develop all this over time, it's a process of constant innovation."

*A Life of Performance* includes many traditional street art routines, including giant puppets of guardian spirits Thousand-Mile Eye (千里眼) and Wind-Accompanying Ear (順風耳) and Zhong Kui (鍾馗) the demon slayer, who are all regulars at religious festivals. Chen has also incorporated non-traditional performances, including mime, to enrich the experience.

"This is all about taking traditional

performances out of their narrow category, bringing them into contact with theater, and even making these ancient performance techniques part of the broader theatrical repertoire," Chen said.

Chen believes this approach will introduce traditional performance skills to wider audiences for whom the once vibrant life of the temple courtyard is ancient history.

### PERFORMANCE NOTES

**WHAT:** A Life of Performance (藝陣人生) by Team-Win Lion Dance Theater (廷威醒獅劇團)

**WHEN:** Today and tomorrow at 7:30pm

**WHERE:** Taipei County Arts Center (台北縣藝文中心演藝廳), 62 Jhuangjing Rd, Banciao City, Taipei County (台北縣板橋市莊敬路62號)

**ADMISSION:** NT\$200 to NT\$600, available through NTCH ticketing or online at [www.artsticket.com](http://www.artsticket.com)

**ON THE NET:** [www.0282451183.tw](http://www.0282451183.tw)

