

AROUND TOWN 13

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2010



Joanna gets real

Joanna Wang is in charge of the set list for the first time tonight at her concert at Legacy Taipei

BY ANDREW C.C. HUANG
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

For fans of Joanna Wang (王若琳), now is your chance to see the "real" Joanna, the outspoken singer/songwriter engaged in a very public struggle to break free from the jazz princess image manufactured by her label, Sony.

In a candid e-mail interview, Wang — who will perform more than 20 new, unreleased songs tonight at Legacy Taipei — slams Sony for packaging her music as "jazz," reveals why her band is called New Tokyo Terror, and shows her sardonic sense of humor when she says she drinks "a glass of hatorade every morning."

Taipei Times: Will you be performing new songs you've written at the Legacy concert? Can you describe them?

Joanna Wang: I will be performing about 20 or more new and unreleased songs. All written in the last four or five years. The show will be divided into two parts, the former part being my more classically influenced songs, which are played in a baroque-esque manner, the latter being my more pop/rock influenced music played in a traditional rock band setup. There's a costume involved as well! How very exciting.

TT: Will you perform songs from *The Adult Storybook CD* from your second album? Any cover songs?

JW: I will perform three songs from *The Adult Storybook*. As for covers ... a most rockin' and totally awesome tune called *This Town Ain't Big Enough for the Both of Us* by a badass band by the name of Sparks.

TT: What do you think about your current status as the preeminent "jazz singer" in the Chinese-speaking world?

JW: I think anyone who dares call him or herself a music buff (I suppose one such as myself ...) would say that I am not, in fact, a so-called jazz singer. I've always been infuriated at the fact that the marketing team I worked with decided to promote me under the guise of "jazz," when I clearly only sang commercial pop ballads. If these ballads I had to sing are so easily labeled as jazz or bossa nova, then I'm sure that would be a true insult to actual jazz musicians. Deceit is a

terrible thing and this is a blatant (and not unusual) case of deceit to consumers from the record label.

TT: What kind of musician would you like to become? What kind of songs would you like to sing?

JW: I'd just sing my own songs. Trust me, if you've been misunderstood ever since the beginning, the first thing you'd want to be would be yourself.

TT: Which singer do you admire and would like to emulate?

JW: Danny Elfman. What a colorful musical career he's had! From his time in *The Mystic Knights of the Oingo Boingo*, to *Oingo Boingo* and to his career as a TV and film composer ... I've adored works from all of those phases.

TT: Tell me about the story behind the group New Tokyo Terror. Do you write songs with them or by yourself?

JW: New Tokyo Terror is actually just me with a roster of musicians that is constantly changing due to mostly location and what kind of music we're playing. I write all of the music. The names New Tokyo Terror and my sometimes-used stage name Chicken Joanna come from a manga called *Fourteen Years I read in my teens*.

TT: You described yourself as a "cynical, angry character" in our previous interview. What kind of songs do you write these days? Are you going into darker and more emotional terrain?

JW: My writing style hasn't changed much, as a few of my more representative pieces were written when I was around 18. I think "emotional" is a pretty lame-o word. And yes, I am very, very cynical. I drink a tall glass of hatorade every morning! Also I don't trust people who use LOL without being ironic.

TT: What do you envision your next album to be like?

JW: Dark and mischievous. A mix of the classical (think baroque), prog rock (if I may ...) and synthesizers! I hope it doesn't come out too terribly.

This interview has been edited and condensed.

PERFORMANCE NOTES

WHAT: Joanna — New Tokyo Terror Live Concert (Joanna—新東京恐懼 Live Concert)

WHEN: Tonight at 8pm

WHERE: Legacy Taipei (傳音樂展演空間), 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\$600 to NT\$1,000, available through 7-Eleven ibon kiosks, ERA ticketing outlets or online at www.ticket.com.tw

ON THE NET: www.sonymusic.com.tw/pop/joannawang



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SONY MUSIC

Not just a pocket instrument

Sirius Harmonica Ensemble challenges the boundaries of harmonica music with arrangements of some unlikely tunes

BY CATHERINE SHU
STAFF REPORTER

People who associate the harmonica with campfire songs might be surprised by Sirius Harmonica Ensemble's (天狼星口琴樂團) repertoire, which ranges from pop and jazz to classical and folk songs. Just as unexpected is the appearance of the sextet's instruments, which they will play tonight at Witch House (女巫店).

The small chromatic harmonica, which plays the melody, is what most people picture when they think of harmonicas. The long and thin chord harmonica, on the other hand, resembles a metallic baguette sandwich. It is used to keep the rhythm, along with the squat, wide bass harmonica.

Harmonicas are often used in blues and country music or folk tunes, but Sirius challenges musical boundaries by finding unlikely songs and arranging them for the instrument. The group's repertoire includes Handel's *Water Music*, jazz standard *As Time Goes By* and Pablo Sarasate's *Zigeunerweisen* (Gypsy Airs).

"For us, one of the best parts of performing is that we can twist traditions and change what people think about harmonicas," says Sirius founder Chen Yang-ming (陳彥銘). "It's actually a very versatile instrument."

While there have been harmonica ensembles in Taiwan

PERFORMANCE NOTES

WHAT: Sirius Harmonica Ensemble (天狼星口琴樂團)

WHERE: Witch House, 7, Ln 56, Xincheng S Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (女巫店台北市新生南路三段56巷7號). Tel: (02) 2362-5494. On the Net: www.witchhouse.org

WHEN: Tonight at 9:30pm

ADMISSION: NT\$300 at the door

ON THE NET: www.siriussharp.idv.tw

since the 1940s, it is still a relatively obscure instrument. Chen estimates that there are about 10 harmonica ensembles that actively perform in this country. But its players are passionately devoted.

"I think what makes the harmonica special is that it is so close to the musician. You create the sound by breathing and that's also how you control it, so it's like the sound of your heart," says Jang Li (李讓), Chen's friend and a member of Judy's Harmonica Ensemble (茱蒂口琴樂團).

"I never thought of it that way," says Chen appreciatively.

Chen first discovered the harmonica in high school. While choosing between instruments, he nearly decided to study the guitar because of his interest in folk rock, but picked the



Sirius seeks to blow stereotypes of harmonica music out of the water.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SIRIUS HARMONICA ENSEMBLE

harmonica instead because it is more unusual.

"You can use it to create some very interesting and unique sounds and music," says Chen, who formed Sirius in 2001 while an undergraduate student. Currently a doctoral candidate in electrical engineering at National Tsinghua University (國立清華大學) in Hsinchu, Chen balances his studies and teaching harmonica lessons with Sirius performances. Along with music festivals and other events, the group appears every one or two months at Witch House.

At the end of July, Sirius performed on the TV talent contest *One Million Star* (超級星光大道) with pop singer Queen (魏如昀), who asked the ensemble to accompany her on renditions of Stefanie Sun's (孫燕姿) *The Moment* and Wang Lingrou's (王麗) *When We're Together* (當我們在一起).

Chen says the group wasn't nervous about appearing on the popular television show, but worried about how they might impact Queen's overall score. But the singer fared well, with judges praising her for choosing an unconventional accompaniment.

"People usually think of accompanists as pianists or guitarists, but I think the *One Million Star* performance helped change people's minds about harmonicas," says Chen. "Our main goal is to get people to look at harmonicas with new eyes."