

Blissed up no more?

It's 11pm on a Friday night at Bliss, a nightclub near the World Trade Center popular with foreigners and live music fans. The bar downstairs is crowded and animated with the conversations of 20 customers, while Pan Africana is drumming up a raucous beat on the stage upstairs.

The lively scene is hardly what one would expect from a bar that's in danger of closing, but that's exactly what will happen if Barry Smit can't find a new owner by the middle of next month.

Smit is moving to Taitung to open a guesthouse near the beach. He says business at Bliss is good, but it's time for him to leave, try something new — and give his liver a break. Still, he would hate for the place close, and since his lease expires on Oct. 18, he's willing to accept less than his NT\$1 million original asking price.

"It's just great fun having a bar — it's just great bloody fun," says Smit. "A new owner would be walking into a business that has already proven itself."

Bliss started life in 2003 as Chocolate and Love. Smit renamed the bar, remodeled the stage and upgraded the sound system when he assumed full ownership four years ago.

Among the perks of running Bliss, he says: "you can drink at cost price," "make more money than teaching," and "girls come after you." Smit says he would stay on a few weeks to train a new owner.

Gregory Dion Russell, who books bands for Bliss and other nightclubs, calls Bliss a "major musical institution" for foreigner bands. "Bliss is the only live house to offer a 100-percent ticket return to bands," he wrote in an e-mail.

Abandoned Machines, Barry's Band and the Pinetop Surgeons play tonight at Bliss; tomorrow it's Sinister Sound Syndicate. Shows start at 10pm. Bliss is at 148, Xinyi Rd Sec 4, Taipei City (台北市信義路四段148號), tel: (02) 2702-1855, www.myspace.com/blisslivehouse.

— RON BROWNLOW



Barry Smit is selling Bliss. PHOTO: RON BROWNLOW, TAIPEI TIMES

Music without borders

The Migration Music Festival (流浪之歌音樂節) created by the independent music label Trees Music and Art (大樹音樂團體) has, since its inception in 2001, been a much-anticipated public event, most notable for its outdoor concerts at Taipei's Da-an Forest Park (大安森林公園). Over the years, however, the musical part of the festival has suffered huge disruptions due to bad weather; this year, it will find a new home in Zhongshan Hall (台北市中山堂). And, in a break from tradition, this year's concerts will not be free.

In an interview on Monday, Trees Music and Art director Chung She-fong (鍾適芳) expressed confidence that this shift in venue — and the sale of tickets — would not have a significant effect on the nature of the festival. "Unlike when we first started, there are many outdoor musical events these days," she said. "Our emphasis is on carrying on the spirit of the festival," which for her is to be a starting point of a debate on broader issues, rather than just musical entertainment. "Those who are interested will still come," she said.

The concerts are just one part of a series of events that include film screenings, talks and workshops. The festival opens tomorrow with a screening of the documentary *Firekeepers* (2007) about the development of the *joik* singing style of the Sami people, which has received some exposure on the popular music scene through the efforts of the Norwegian band Adjugas. A second film, *When Your Hands Are Tied* (2006) explores how American Indians are finding ways to express themselves in the modern world. There will also be a talk given by *pipa* (琵琶) performer Chung Yufeng (鍾玉鳳), a traditional musician who performed and composed music in the German town of Apffelhof as part of the Music Beyond Borders project earlier this year.

Speaking of Chung Yufeng's experience, Chung emphasized the role that events such as the Migration Music Festival play in fostering musical development. "She comes from a very classical tradition that emphasizes skills over creativity, and the opportunity to work closely with performers from other traditions had a profound impact. She started to think more about creating music and her relationship to the music she performed," Chung said. "As a result, she now has a repertoire of her own compositions."



Sameer Makhoul, left, and Itamar Doari will perform two concerts at Zhongshan Hall and give music classes on Arabic songs as part of this year's Migration Music Festival. PHOTO COURTESY OF TREES MUSIC AND ART

Chung believes that migration, both enforced and voluntary, is one of the most important factors in the development of music. "I believe that most music, both established forms and musical styles that are still being developed, is the result of migration of one sort or another," she said. Chung pointed to STriCat from the Netherlands, a group of young musicians who draw inspiration from Romanian music in their efforts to break free of the constraints of traditional folk, as an example of voluntary migration. New types of music can also result from forced migration, as with chanteuse Huong Thanh, born into a family of musicians who fled to France after the Vietnam War.

The point of departure for this year's theme — "city borders" — is the 60th anniversary of the creation of the state of Israel. The cultural and political complexities of this event are represented at the festival by two musicians from Jerusalem, who specialize in traditional Arabic, classical Turkish and Andalusian music. Sameer Makhoul and Itamar Doari will perform at two concerts at Zhongshan Hall and give two music classes, one to introduce Arabic songs, the other an introduction to the *oud*, a kind of Middle Eastern lute.

The key for Chung is to get people talking, not just about the music, but the cultural, social and historical changes

that are the music's generative force.

"In terms of social activism, we are not active (on the front line), but I think that through a music festival such as this one, we are able to bring certain topics forward for consideration and discussion," Chung said.

— IAN BARTHOLOMEW

FESTIVAL NOTES:

WHAT: 2008 Migration Music Festival — City Borders

WHEN: Film screenings begin tomorrow; concerts begin Nov. 3

WHERE: Film screenings will take place in the Recreation Room and lectures in the Bamboo Room of Taipei Artist Village (free admission); concerts will take place at Zhongshan Hall (台北市中山堂), 98 Yenping 5 Rd, Taipei City (台北市延平南路98號); concerts are also scheduled for Chiayi (Nov. 6), Bali (Nov. 10) and Bitan (Nov. 11 and Nov. 12)

TICKETS: Concert tickets are NT\$500 for one concert, NT\$800 for a one-day pass and NT\$1,200 for a festival pass. Tickets are available through NTCH ticketing

ON THE NET: Detailed program in Chinese and English at www.treesmusic.com/festival/2008mmf



Sayonara, Ageha! The only "straight" dance club in Taipei that catered to the strictly electronic dance music crowd, a franchise of Tokyo's famed mecca of hedonism, abruptly closed two weeks ago, shortly after its one-year anniversary. The move not only left the club's employees in shock as they had no prior warning, but is bad news for the capital's electronic dance music fans who have few choices of venue left.

"It's a bummer that a great venue with such a good sound system is no longer available," one regular patron said. "I'm not completely surprised about the news though, because their business has always been quite slow in general. There were only about 20 to 30 people at tops who go there every weekend, and that's obviously not enough to keep it going."

Meanwhile, a novelty bun shop has been raising eyebrows in Kenting with its nightly DJs and thumping music since it opened

in May. Run by a bunch of dance music maniacs (known as the Moonlight crew, Kenting's premier rave party promoters), the shop's loud, bass-heavy music and DJ booth, which is set up by the second floor window that overlooks the street, have had some passersby wondering whether a dance club is hidden within. But no, it's really just a shop that sells nothing but hot steamed buns. As for the dance music, what better accompaniment than eating a bun?

The store is located on Kenting's main drag, next to the area's biggest disco pub, Golden Beach (金灘). The facade sports Chinese-style eaves and red banners that read "General Ron's Handmade Buns" (戎將軍手工包子) in Chinese. Both the patio in front of the shop and the interior offer seating and enough space to accommodate patrons who feel like getting down to the music.

"The way that the DJ booth is set up here has a 'deejaying at a street party kind of feel,' so it's really fun," says Askashu, one of the resident DJs. "And the best part is that you get to play whatever you want. I play a lot of house, breaks and progressive.



Bun tunes in Kenting. PHOTO: QUEEN BEE

The other DJ, **Su-Bin** (蘇餅), likes to play house, especially the kind with Afro-beats.

General Ron's Handmade Buns is located at 233 Kenting Rd, Hengchun Township, Pingtung County (屏東縣恆春鎮墾丁路233號). DJs play from 6pm to midnight, every night.

Tomorrow, something a little bit

special is going down at Paris Night Club in Ximending (西門町). Frog in a Club boys **Angus Yeates** and **Matt Barker** have persuaded renowned hip-hop group Ugly Duckling, of Long Beach, California, to make its first trip to Taiwan. These underground superstars have been mocking the hip-hop world with tight and comic rhymes for the better part of 15 years. They aim for the soft underbelly of mainstream rap and gut it with old-school blades.

Not since November last year, when **Numark** graced these shores with Coldcut, has Taiwan hosted a hip-hop turntablist as good as **Young Einstein**. His cohorts, **Dizzy Dustin** and **Andy Cooper**, wax lyrical with a downhill, laid-back flow.

Ugly Duckling plays tomorrow at Paris Night Club (夜巴黎舞廳), 5F, 89, Wuchang St Sec 2, Taipei City (台北市武昌街二段89號5樓). Admission is NT\$1,100 at the door. As of press time, a limited number of advance tickets were available at NT\$850. For information on outlets, call 0917-865-622 (English). The night runs from 9pm until 5am. On the Net: www.uglyduckling.us

— QUEEN BEE AND TOM LEEMING

EVENTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Tonight at **Riverside Cafe** (河岸留聲) there's funk, rock and jazz with **Yellow Funky Stuff**, featuring Japanese guitarist Eiji Kadota and drummer Toshi Fujii. Taiwanese folk songstress **Jasmine** (蔦竹) appears tomorrow night, followed by a set from Aboriginal folk singer **Panai** (巴奈), who enjoys a following for her rich voice and intimate acoustic style. On Sunday, the **Wen Rhythm Jazz Band** takes to the stage.

► B1, 2, Ln 244, Roosevelt Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市羅斯福路三段244巷2號B1), next to Taipower Building (台電大樓). Call (02) 2368-7310 or visit www.riverside.com.tw for more information

► Shows start at 9:30pm tonight and 9pm tomorrow; 5pm and 9pm on Sunday

► NT\$400 tonight and tomorrow, and NT\$350 on Sunday; admission includes one drink

This weekend, **VU Live House** hosts two sets tonight and tomorrow. Tonight starts off with a trio of punk and indie pop groups: **Abandoned Machines** (留聲機工廠), **The Same Day** and **Sen** (仙樂隊). Later on, there's reggae, dub and ska with **High Tide**, funk rockers **Coach** (教練樂團) and **Ting** from New Zealand. Early tomorrow, it's **Human Bratley**, **Chant the Dirge** and **Maelstrom**. Afterwards, **Pan Africana**, a drum ensemble of African and Caribbean expats, takes to the stage.

► B1, 77 Wuchang St, Taipei City (台北市武昌街二段77號B1). Call (02) 2314-1868 for more information

► First sets start at 7:30pm; second sets at 10pm

► NT\$400 per set tonight and tomorrow; entry for the first set includes one drink while admission for the second set includes two drinks

Tonight at **Tone 56 Live Bar**, a new restaurant near the corner of Fuxing North and Minquan East roads, is the **Rubber Band**, which plays rock, pop and dance music every Friday. Tomorrow it's house band **Loaded**, which plays everything from "rock classics to today's hits." Every Sunday features a regular rotation of groups, and this week it's blues and reggae from **Revue Band**.

► 1F, 56, Minquan E Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市民權東路三段56號1樓), near the corner of Fuxing North Road (復興北路) and Minquan East Road (民權東路). Call (02) 2517-3869 for more information

► Music shows go from 9:30pm to 12:30pm tonight and tomorrow, and 7:30pm to 9:30pm on Sundays

► No entrance fee

Every Wednesday night at the **Cosmopolitan Grill** there's a blues open mic, held by the Blues Society on Taiwan and hosted by Torch Pratt. All are welcome to bring their instruments and sit in on guitar, bass or drums.

► 1F, 218 Changchun Rd, Taipei City (台北市長春路218號1樓). Call (02) 2508-0304 or visit www.cosmo.com.tw for more information

► 8pm to 11pm every Wednesday

► Free admission

Cloud Gate Dance Theatre (雲門舞集) will broadcast its Tuesday night's performance of **Moon Water**, featuring acclaimed Russian cellist

Upcoming

The **Taipei County Shihmen International Kite Festival** (台北縣石門國際風箏節) is not just a chance for groups like the Stunt Kites Association (中華風箏特技推廣協會) to show off their chops, but also a magnificent display of traditional kite-making culture from around the world and advance kite-making technology. Tomorrow and Sunday, kite enthusiasts, including competitive kite-flying teams from Australia, the UK, the US, Japan, South Korea and Malaysia will congregate at the seaside town of Shihmen for displays of kite flying, kite-making classes, fireworks displays and the international competition. Free shuttle buses run



Competitors and novices alike are welcome to the Taipei County Shihmen International Kite Festival. PHOTO COURTESY OF SHIHMEN TOWNSHIP OFFICE

from the Hongshulin (紅樹林) MRT Station on both days of the event (the Shihmen-bound service runs from noon to 8pm on Saturday and 9am to 5pm on Sunday; the Hongshulin-bound service runs from 1pm to 9pm on Saturday and 10am to 7pm on Sunday). Detailed information can be found at the festival Web site at www.shih-men.com

Mischa Maysky, live on giant screens set up in the plaza between the National Theater and Concert Hall. Tickets to the five performance run of *Moon Water at the National Theater, which begins tonight, sold out in early August, but the company said it was flooded with e-mail and phone requests from disappointed fans seeking additional shows for Lin Hwai-min's (林懷民) 1998 masterpiece. Since it couldn't squeeze in more shows, the company decided to simulcast the final performance. Lin used Maysky's recordings of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Six Suites for Solo Cello* for the production, but this revival is the first time Maysky will have performed with the company.*

► Main plaza of the National Theater and Concert Hall

► Tuesday at 7:30pm

► Free

Exhibition

Chu Te-chun 88 Retrospective (朱德群88回顧展). Born in China and well regarded in France, the painter is noted for his artistic vocabulary that combines traditional Chinese aesthetics and Western abstractionism. In celebration of Chu's 88th birthday, the exhibition comprehensively reviews the painter's career, ranging from his early realistic works of the

1950s to his abstract oil paintings, ink-washes and calligraphic works.

► National Museum of History (國立歷史博物館), 49 Nanhai Rd, Taipei City (台北市南海路49號). Open Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 6pm. Tel: (02) 2361-0270

► Until Nov. 23

Vietnamese Contemporary Art (越南當代知名藝術家畫展). The exhibition features oil paintings by more than 12 contemporary Vietnamese artists that depict ordinary people's lives with bold colors.

► Emily's Art (愛麗藝術), 23, Alley 33, Lishui St, Taipei City (台北市麗水街33巷23號). Open daily from 12pm to 11pm. Tel: (02) 2397-4754

► Until Sept. 30

A Rhapsody About City Cats (貓·天使). In celebration of Angel Art Gallery's fifth anniversary, the exhibition puts together works by more than 10 contemporary artists.

► Angel Art Gallery (天使美術館), 41, Xinyi Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市信義路三段41號). Open daily from 10am to 9pm. Tel: (02) 2701-5229

► Until Oct. 5

Time — Hung Su-chen Solo Exhibition (洪素珍個人展—時間). San Francisco-based artist Hung Su-chen returns with a new installation piece that features her favorite elements of light, sound and motion.

► National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts (國立台灣美術館), 2, Wuchuan W Rd Sec 1, Taichung City (台中市五權西路一段2號). Open Tuesday to Sunday from 9am to 5pm. Tel: (04) 2372-3552

► Until Oct. 12

RESTAURANTS

Howard Skyline Restaurants

(福華雲采餐廳)

Address: 45F, 66, Zhongxiao W Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市忠孝西路一段66號45樓)

Telephone: (02) 2381-2323 X703, X705

Prices per person and business hours: Weekday lunch (11am to 2pm), NT\$580; afternoon tea (2:30pm to 4:30pm), NT\$400; dinner (5:30pm to 9:30pm), NT\$780; Saturday and Sunday lunch, NT\$680; afternoon tea, NT\$480; dinner, NT\$780

Details: 10 percent service charge; reservations recommended for window seating

You can no longer visit the observation deck of the Shin Kong Life Tower, Taipei's second tallest building, as it closed to the public at the end of 2005, but the Howard Hotel chain's restaurants on the 44th and 45th floors, and its Skyline Buffet, which offers a "European-Japanese" spread, serve decent meals with tableside views of western and southern Taipei.

The Skyline Buffet's decor might be considered fancy if it were the 1990s. There is a half-hearted attempt at a cruise ship atmosphere, with a large model of a sailing ship at the center of the salad and sushi bar. A violinist came in at one point and played along to canned music piped through the room's PA system. He played mostly classics from the great American songbook like *Moon River*, as well as the irritating theme from the movie *Titanic*, *My Heart Will Go On*.

At least this ship didn't sink. The buffet was decently presented and well kept; there was plenty of variety, but it didn't feel overwhelming.

The salad and sushi bar was stocked with sushi rolls and slices of salmon, tuna and sea bream sashimi, all of which tasted fresh.

Of the 10 or so main course selections, the baked chicken with miso marinade and steamed fish with Chinese herbs stood out. There were a few unusual selections, like the pigeon in red wine sauce and deep-fried frog legs in black bean sauce.

But before you dig into the main courses, try some of Skyline Buffet's made-to-order dishes, which are worth the wait.

The dessert selections seemed to favor small Japanese-style cakes and jellies, which were a hit-or-miss affair. I wished I had waited for the walnut pie that appeared later. The ice cream, also of a Japanese brand, was aptly described by one of my dining companions as more like iced milk.

While it favors seafood, Skyline's above-average buffet will have something for everyone. The nice views and comfortable seating make the Skyline worth an occasional visit, with dinner priced at NT\$780 per person. Go with a large appetite, and plenty of time.

It's best to make reservations to ensure a window-side table. You can't access the top floors through the department store on the ground floor; instead, you'll find a dedicated elevator to the 45th floor on the left side of the building from where you face the main entrance.

— DAVID CHEN



Take your time at the Skyline Buffet, which offers a decent spread and nice views of Taipei. PHOTO: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES

Yaya's Oyster Bar (Yaya's生蠔酒館)

Address: 83, Changan E Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市長安東路一段83號)

Telephone: (02) 2568-1532

Open: 6pm to 2am

Average meal: NT\$500 to NT\$1,000

Details: Chinese and English menu; credit cards accepted

For an island nation where oyster omelets (蚵仔煎) were once voted the exemplar of Taiwanese *xiao chi* (小吃), or snacks, Taipei suffers from a curious — and tragic — dearth of raw oyster bars. Yaya's Oyster Bar (Yaya's生蠔酒館) strives to fill that gap. Located on Changan East Road near a strip of seafood joints, the large sculpture of an oyster on a half shell mounted next to the restaurant's door makes it hard to miss.

In all honesty, if you are the type of oyster aficionado who can tell the difference between the sweet finish of a Kumamoto oyster harvested from the cool waters off the north of Japan or a Long Island blue point, and who caresses each plump, quivering mass with your tongue like a sip of fine pinot noir before sliding it down your throat, then Yaya's will probably leave you underwhelmed. But if all you are looking for is a plate of reasonably priced bivalves to slurp down with a mug of Coors Light or Corona (NT\$150), then you should leave satisfied.

The interior of Yaya's is cozy and grotto-like, with low ceilings, wooden floors, wall murals and an entertainingly large and detailed poster of cheerful, mostly nude sunbathers on Wreck Beach, a clothing-optional beach near Vancouver. We ordered Set A for two people (NT\$1,400), which comes with Boston clam chowder, four raw oysters, four baked oysters, salad, and spaghetti or a rice dish. We also ordered an additional plate of six raw oysters (生蠔拼盤, NT\$720 for small oysters, NT\$780 for larger ones; sets of three oysters with different toppings are available for NT\$360 or NT\$390 each).

The oysters are firm, fresh and reasonably flavorful — as far as we could tell. It was difficult to gauge the shellfish's natural aroma because each one was served with a heavy, overwhelming dollop of topping, including salsa, cocktail sauce, fish roe or miso paste. The latter left a particularly indelible impression and not in a good way — the saltiness of the miso coated my taste buds for the rest of the meal, a situation that no amount of house wine (NT\$150 per glass) could rectify. The oyster flesh practically screamed for freedom and we obliged by scraping off half of each topping (except for the fish roe, which was a suitably light complement) before tipping it into our mouths. The flavors in the baked oysters, which were topped with melted cheese, were better balanced.

The clams in the chowder were generously apportioned and tender, but we wished the texture of the soup itself had been a bit thicker and heartier, with more brininess to balance the rich cream base. The al dente texture of the spaghetti was pleasingly toothsome, while the marinara sauce was unexpectedly spicy.

If you want to avoid overeating, order from the restaurant's a la carte menu. Most of the dishes have an Italian or French twist. Entrees include garlic prawns (義大利蒜蝦, NT\$250), escargot (法式田螺, NT\$240), plate ribs (鐵板牛小排, NT\$350) and meatball pizza (貢丸比薩餅, NT\$200). Pasta and rice dishes are available for NT\$200 to NT\$350, while carb-shy diners can order salads for NT\$180 to NT\$300.

— CATHERINE SHU



Aw, shucks: Yaya's oysters are plump but overwhelmed with toppings. PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES