

# POP

STOP

COMPILED BY HO YI

Fledgling actor **Mark Chao** (趙又廷) played the ungrateful son in this week's tabloids, with his semi-retired entertainer father **Allen Chao** (趙樹海) in the role of the overbearing father. It all started when the younger Chao was named Best Actor for his role in popular police drama *Black & White* (痞子英雄) at the Golden Bell Awards two weeks ago, beating out audience favorite and former F4 member **Vic Chou** (周渝民), to the surprise and consternation of many in the audience and entertainment media. Rumors have been circulating that the elder Chao had an "innocent chat" with an "old friend" who happened to be a jury member prior to the awards ceremony.

Allen Chao says that isn't true. But he's been griping about how his 25-year-old son has turned down jobs for commercials and television shows featuring the father-son duo that Chao Senior had arranged. "I'd be lucky to be seen at all with my son on television these days," Allen Chao was quoted as saying by the *Apple Daily*.

*Black & White* director **Tsai Yueh-hsun** (蔡岳勳), meanwhile, was cozying up to Kaohsiung Mayor **Chen Chu** (陳菊) by throwing a party to thank the city for its support during the shooting of the television drama. Chen and Tsai announced at the party last week that a movie version of *Black & White* will be set mostly in Kaohsiung, which Tsai says he hopes will help boost tourism in the southern city.

In another boost for tourism in Kaohsiung, it is estimated that pop-rock outfit **Mayday** (五月天) will draw more than 7,000 fans from Hong Kong, Japan



Mark Chao bites the hand that fed him. PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES

and Singapore to its sold-out concert scheduled to be held in the city on Dec. 5. According to calculations by local media, the concert will generate NT\$150 million for the local economy, cementing Mayday's role as the new F4, the Taiwanese boy band that had a large following in Asia.

In other music-related news, singer **Joanna Wang** (王若琳) will reportedly return to the stage in January, just a few months after what was billed as a good-bye concert was held at The Wall (這牆) by Wang, who at the time was said to be returning to the US to resume her education.

Gossip observers suspect the bye-bye gig was a publicity stunt and question whether the 21-year-old singer's upcoming show is worth NT\$10,000 per seat, a price that even by big-name pop stars such as **Wang Lee-hom** (王力宏) and **Aaron Kwok** (郭富城) would have a hard time matching.

Wang's record company Sony Music later explained that the NT\$10,000 tickets were for sofa seats for two. But as Wang has been outspoken about her disappointment with Sony Music for making her a sweet, mellow jazz crooner rather than letting her to do what she truly wants, the upcoming concert may very well be an attempt by the record label to cash in on the defiant young star while it still can.

Finally, after months of rumors about pregnancies and miscarriages, Hong Kong paparazzi confirmed last week that **Cecilia Cheung** (張柏芝) is pregnant with twins. The actress and mother of one was reportedly trying to have a child again with husband **Nicholas Tse** (謝霆鋒) to save their marriage in the wake of her star turn in the **Edison Chen** (陳冠希) sex photo scandal.

Bump watch is officially over for Cecilia Cheung. PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES

BY ANDREW C.C. HUANG



PHOTOS COURTESY OF RELAX ONE

As an indie band, **Relax One** (輕鬆玩) revels in a brand of happy-go-lucky, sun-drenched rock that urges you to loosen up and cool off.

But beneath this carefree veneer lies a group that has shown remarkable determination throughout its career.

The outfit's ultimate goal? Opening a villa-style recording studio in Kenting.

"That way, our life, dreams and music can be taken care of in one step!" says vocalist and songwriter **Summer Hsu** (徐鳳玉).

Formed in 1998, Relax One is comprised of Hsu, frontman and guitarist **Hsiao Mao** (小毛), real name **Mao Tsung-wen** (毛宗文); bassist **Hsiaoenguo** (小人國), real name **Chan Chi-yen** (詹期茲); and drummer **Ah Kuei** (阿貴), real name **Chao Kuei-ming** (趙貴民).

The band — which performs tomorrow evening in Kaohsiung — issued two indie EPs before releasing its first full-length album, *I Want to Take It Easy and Have Fun* (我要輕鬆玩), through Avex in 2005. After a brief stint with the mainstream label, the band recorded two more indie EPs: 2008's *Unplugged Commemorative Edition* (不插電紀念版) and July's *You Just Don't Understand Relax One* (你才不懂輕鬆玩). A new unplugged full-length album is currently in the works.

"When you reach a certain stage in life, you see things differently. It's no longer just rock any more," explains Hsu in an interview last Friday at the band's recording studio in Taipei's East District (東區). "We want to do unplugged albums and concerts now because we want to go back to the basics."

*You Just Don't Understand Relax One* contains three old tunes revamped as acoustic numbers. *Bitch It Out* (幹誰) is a rousing rocker that advises people to vent their angst by complaining. *See Through It* (看清) is an uplifting number that urges listeners to regain sight of their dreams. *Take a Part* (放一個屁) is a rock anthem that encourages everyone to recover their sense of perspective by ... farting. In their latest music permutation, the jaunty, provocative lyrics contrast with Hsu's laid-back vocals and stripped-down guitar and bass.

Frontman **Hsiao Mao** chose the name Relax One because the band's motto is to "take it easy and have fun." Each band member works in the music industry: Hsiao Mao does album and concert production, Ah Kuei and Hsiaoenguo work on other music projects when not performing with their own band, and Hsu has been making a living singing in pubs.

## Flawlessly carefree

### PERFORMANCE NOTES:

**WHAT:** Relax One (輕鬆玩)  
**WHERE:** National Sun Yat-sen University (中山大學), 70 Lianhai Rd, Gushan Dist, Kaohsiung City (高雄市鼓山區蓮海路70號).  
**Tel:** (07) 525-2000 (國立故宮博物院)  
**WHEN:** Tomorrow at 4:30pm  
**ADMISSION:** Free  
**ON THE NET:** www.relax-one.com; www.avex.com.tw/relaxone; tw.streetvoice.com/profile/home.asp?sd=410910



While her three male bandmates were performing their compulsory military service, Hsu worked as a production assistant at a music company. A tape of her singing was discovered by producer **Chen Wei** (陳偉), the maestro behind Elva Hsiao's (蕭亞軒) early hits. Chen offered to sign her as a solo act, but Hsu chose to stick with Relax One.

The band later signed with mainstream label **Avex** (with Chen as their agent) and released *I Want to Take It Easy and Have Fun*. Despite aggressive marketing, the band's LP failed to achieve commercial success.

"The people at the label were very friendly, but I think they were trying to sell us as a pop idol act — which is misleading," says Hsu.

"We won't change our music no matter who we sign with," she adds. "The label who signs us must believe in our music."

After its contract with Avex expired, Relax One dropped off the radar. Then, last year, Hsu's obsession with life in Hengchun (恆春) brought about the group's latest breakthrough in the dazzling form of a song from the blockbuster movie *Cape No. 7* (海角七號).

"A friend introduced me to director **Wei Te-sheng** (魏德聖), who offered me a small part as **Ma Nien-hsien's** (馬念先) girlfriend," recalls Hsu. "It turned out that I was too short when standing next to Ma, so I didn't get to be in the movie."

"After they finished filming, Wei asked to hear our music and I directed him to our Web site," says Hsu. "He told me *Beautiful Scenery* (風光明媚) was ideal for the movie and that he wanted to use it as the end credit song."

The song, a celebration of Hengchun's natural charms delivered in breezy bossa nova style, was later covered by *One Million Star* (超級星光大道) alumnus **Rachel Liang** (梁文音), who has a brief cameo at the end of the movie.

"I wrote the lyrics seven years before moving to Hengchun and finished the melody after going to the beach one day," says Hsu. "You can say it represented my longing for a utopian life in Hengchun before I actually moved there."

Relax One's sound has evolved from the rock and punk ethos of the band's early days to its current electronica and psychedelic-flavored fusion.

"Having a child changes everything. I want to sing in a more relaxed atmosphere these days," says Hsu, who gave birth to her first child 10 months ago. "Our musical tastes have broadened a lot. We never thought before that we could be this eclectic."



## RESTAURANTS

### California Grill

**Address:** 1, Ln 238, Dunhua 5 Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市敦化南路一段238巷1號)  
**Telephone:** (02) 8771-9423 **Average meal:** NT\$250  
**Open:** Mondays to Saturdays 11:30pm to 9pm; Sundays noon to 9pm  
**Details:** Chinese and English menu; credit cards not accepted

California Grill opened its second location in Taipei's East District (東區) last summer, but recently expanded its previously tiny storefront. The restaurant, which is right behind the Sogo on Dunhua South Road (敦化南路), is plainly decorated but roomy and, like California Grill's Yongkang Street (永康街) location, features a flat-screen television that plays TV shows of extreme sports on constant rotation. The footage might give you ideas for how to burn off the calories you'll consume in the form of California Grill's hamburgers. The restaurant was founded by two Americans in 2007 and features patties made with 100 percent USDA beef. Vegetarians and health-conscious diners will also find plenty of options. All burgers are served with a side of salad or thick-cut fries.

A standout on California Grill's menu is the Mofu burger (NT\$195), which is a beef patty or teriyaki chicken breast topped with bacon, American cheddar cheese, BBQ sauce and garlic mayo on a white bread bun (a tofu version is available for NT\$175). The smorgasbord of flavors, from the savory bacon to the sharp cheddar cheese, is satisfying. Another particularly decadent option is the western bacon burger (NT\$205), beef or teriyaki chicken topped with strips of bacon, BBQ sauce and cheddar cheese with a heap of crispy, fresh onion rings on top for some extra crunch.

California Grill has three burgers on its menu made exclusively with chicken breast. The best is the very flavorful teriyaki chicken breast (NT\$155), the worst for your arteries is the breaded fried chicken sandwich (NT\$165) and the most original is the hidden valley (NT\$195), which is topped with red onion, sprouts, pepper jack cheese, bacon, is smothered in ranch dressing and comes in a whole wheat bun. Despite the very piquant ingredients, however, the hidden valley sandwich was bland compared to the restaurant's burgers. The pepper jack cheese and red onions were the dominant flavors and overwhelmed the other ingredients, including the juicy chicken breast.

If you can't decide what to order, consider the sliders platter (NT\$250), which includes four mini-burgers (beef, chicken, salmon and tofu) and a salad or fries. The slice of Canadian freshwater salmon fillet was plump and delicious (it comes as a regular-sized sandwich for NT\$200), while the tofu, marinated in a sesame, soy and ginger sauce, was also surprisingly satisfying, even though its texture is softer and less toothsome than the meat-filled sandwiches.

California Grill offers three salads. The Green Goddess and Napa Valley (both NT\$160) are topped with hot, freshly grilled chicken breast and are hearty enough for meals by themselves.



California Grill features burgers, chicken sandwiches, salads and other American-style offerings made from premium ingredients. PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

The Valley Girl is the house salad that is served as a side with hamburgers and is NT\$140 when ordered as a dish.

The restaurant's weekday lunch specials (NT\$159 each from 11:30am to 3pm) include a Napa Valley, Green Goddess salad or two classic beef, teriyaki chicken breast, tofu or breaded fried chicken sliders with French fries or salad. Each set includes iced tea (soda for NT\$15 more).

BY CATHERINE SHU

Creative Taiwanese cuisine meets rustic tranquility at **Shi-Yang Culture Restaurant** (食養山房), located at a mountainside property on Yangmingshan. The restaurant, which first opened as a modest teahouse in Sindian in 1996, offers one of Taipei's more unique dining experiences.

Shi-Yang is about slowing down, soaking in the sights and savoring every morsel. It takes three hours to serve this artfully presented 10-course meal, which is priced at NT\$1,100 per person (NT\$935 for vegetarians). There is no a la carte selection — the prix fixe menu is determined by whatever fresh and local ingredients are available.

The lush forest grounds of Shi-Yang, which cover around 5 hectares, look more like a quiet spiritual retreat. Indeed, owner and chef **Lin Pin-hui** (林炳輝) lives there with around 20 staff members; they start every morning together by reading Buddhist prayers.

Before entering one of the restaurant's three dining rooms, patrons take off their shoes to walk on the tatami-covered floor. The minimalist decor has a decidedly Zen flavor, with table displays of sutras written on scrolls and a few antique Chinese sculptures.

Shi-Yang's meals are a healthier take on the traditional Taiwanese banquet. Seafood shows up in many dishes, but fresh vegetables receive a lot of emphasis.

Each course was a surprise or delight, often both. Our meal started with a trio of sparsely

presented but memorable appetizers. The centerpiece was a slice of homemade peanut tofu, which had a grainy texture but a pudding-like consistency.

The bite-size portion of chilled eggplant, string beans and a sliver of ginger was a symphony of flavors and textures: silky and rich, sweet and crunchy, light and zesty.

One of my dining companions had already been won over by another bite-sized hors d'oeuvre: smoked salmon wrapped in roasted green pepper and topped with onion and salmon roe. Her reaction: "This was worth the trip."

The appetizers were followed by a light, frothy concoction of blended strawberries and passion fruit, served in ceramic espresso cups with a flower on the side. Also worth the trip.

Each course arrives at a relaxed pace — enough time to marvel over the food, sip high mountain tea (高山茶) and admire the surroundings. Wall-sized windows offer views of the adjacent gardens during the day; candles light the space in the evenings. The recorded sounds of a Chinese zither set a contemplative mood, while the lively chatter of diners brings a cozy warmth to the room.



Food for body and soul. PHOTO: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES

### Shi-Yang Culture Restaurant 食養山房

**Address:** 160, Ln 101, Jingshan Rd, Shilin Dist, Taipei City (台北市士林區菁山路101巷160號) **Telephone:** (02) 2862-0078  
**Open:** Tuesday to Sunday noon to 3pm and 6pm to 9pm **Average meal:** NT\$1,100 per person, NT\$935 per person for vegetarian meal  
**Details:** Reservations recommended two weeks in advance on weekdays and six weeks for weekends. The restaurant moves to a new location in December. Visit [www.shi-yang.com](http://www.shi-yang.com) for details and the new address. Credit cards accepted

BY DAVID CHEN

## TIDBITS

**La** Petite Cuisine Brasserie by JQ at the Evergreen Laurel Hotel, 63 Songjiang Road, Taipei City (台北市松江路63) are rolled out a home and corporate catering service.

The brainchild of Justin Quek (郭文秀), a member of the Confrerie de la Chaine des Rotisseurs who runs French restaurants in Shanghai, Taipei and his native Singapore, La Petite has garnered rave reviews.

His Just In Bistro & Wine Bar on Zhongxiao East Road offers French comfort food with a few upscale twists.

The new service is available in the Taipei area for parties of six or more. Two weeks to one month advance notice is required, depending on the scale of the event. A range of seasonal set menus, desserts and buffets are available. A typical set lunch menu costs NT\$2,000 per person, for a minimum of six guests, and for dinner, it's NT\$2,500 per person. For further information, call (02) 2509-0332.

Starbucks is going local. Well, ever so slightly. Taiwanese teas have debuted on the coffee empire's menu here.

Oriental Beauty Tea (東方美人茶), an oolong variety unique to Taiwan that relies on green leaf cicadas which suck the plant's sap before it is picked and fermented to impart the dried product with honey notes, Bi Luo Chun (碧螺春), a naturally sweet green tea, and Fancy Black Tea (蜜香紅茶), are available by the cup (NT\$105), or in a packet of a dozen tea bags (NT\$280).

Reservations are a must.