

BY DIANE BAKER

Dance

POP STOP

COMPILED BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW

Supermodel **Lin Chih-lin** (林志玲) is getting an image makeover with her role in *Treasure Hunter* (刺陵), a big-budget action flick scheduled to open next week. This is her second role in a feature movie. Clearly Lin is making the right kind of moves because *Treasure Hunter* stars **Jay Chou** (周杰倫), features a high-profile cast including **Eric Tsang** (曾志偉) and **Chen Dao-ming** (陳道明) and is directed by **Kung Fu Dunk** (功夫灌籃) director **Chu Yin-ping** (朱延平). This is a significant shift from Lin's previous role as Xiao Qiao in **John Woo's** (吳宇森) *Red Cliff* (赤壁). In *Treasure Hunter*, Lin casts off her demur demeanor and takes up sword and spear in a martial role akin to that of **Angelina Jolie's** Laura Croft.



Above: Vic Chou took first place in *Apple Daily's* poll for Taiwan's hottest man. Below: Lin Chih-lin is looking to become Taiwan's answer to Laura Croft.

At a press conference in Singapore to promote the film, Lin said that she gave herself a seven out of 10 for her performance. Lin garnered mixed reviews for her presence in *Red Cliff*, but on this occasion she has certainly impressed other cast members, including Chou, with her energy and eagerness to learn. The *United Daily News* quoted Chou as saying: "When a beautiful woman fights, it looks good no matter what. That's the important point." Perhaps Chou wasn't being so complimentary about Lin's talent after all. Lin also took it upon herself to write the lyrics for the film's theme song. Chou, who composed the music, dispensed with the services of **Vincent Fang** (方文山), the much sought-after lyricist, after seeing Lin's efforts. "Next time we won't have to book Fang," Chou said. "He always has so much work on hand."

In regard to his directorial style, Wang said he wanted to be a director like Ang Lee, someone who didn't have to resort to shouting at people on set. "I'm not very good at telling people off," he was quoted as saying.

Wang — once regarded as one of the hottest men in the Chinese-language entertainment industry — is nowhere to be seen in the *Apple Daily's* poll of best looking men, with heartthrob **Vic Chou** (周渝民) of boy band F4 fame taking the top spot. Singer **Jerry Yan** (言承旭) took second place, and **Ethan Ruan** (阮經天) third. **Takeishi Kaneshiro** (金城武) placed fourth. The 36-year-old actor is doing well to have kept his place in the top five lookers despite his age.

Fifth place went to **Mark Chao** (趙又廷) of the recent hit cop series *Black & White* (痞子英雄). On the romantic front, **Jolin Tsai** (蔡依林) is back on the prowl and *Next Magazine* reports that following her traumatic breakup with **Eddie Peng** (彭于晏), she has picked up with model **Godfrey Kao** (高以翔).

According to *Next*, Kao is keeping a low profile on his conquest as Tsai's former boyfriend. Peng is a buddy. This hasn't prevented the paparazzi from catching the two flagrantly trying to avoid public scrutiny by leaving various nightspots surreptitiously, and by different exits.

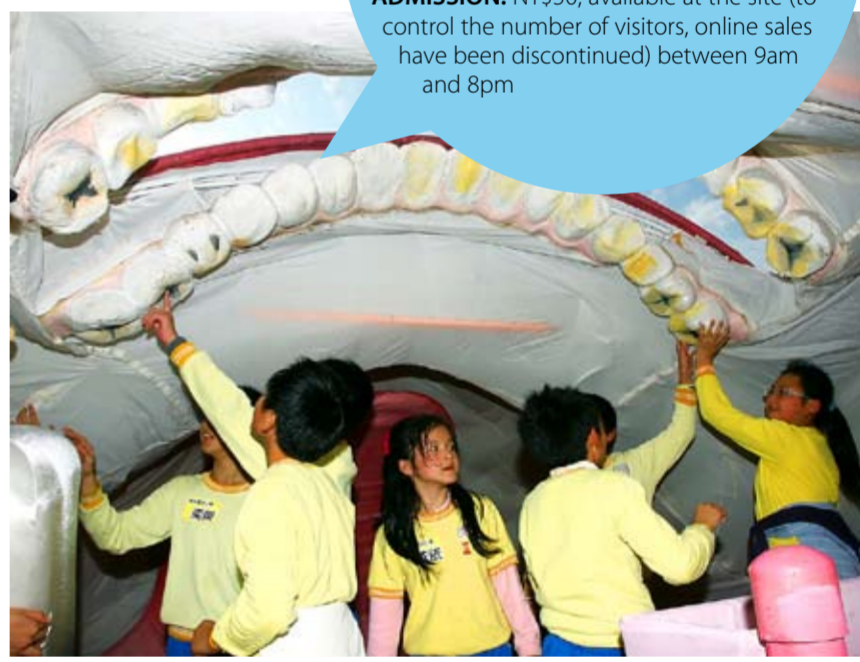


With *Treasure Hunter*, Chou's bid to make it in the movie business, on both sides of the camera, is clearly being established. Another singer who has dabbled in acting — and who now wants to take the director's chair — is **Wang Leehom** (王力宏). According to the *United Daily News*, Wang has quietly begun shooting in China for a new feature film and has received support and advice from mentors **Ang Lee** (李安) and **Jackie Chan** (成龍). Chan's own new feature film *Big Soldiers* (大兵小将), starring Wang, is scheduled for release early next year.



PERFORMANCE NOTES:
WHAT: The Nutcracker, Grand Dance Theater, Grand Symphony Orchestra of National Taiwan University of Arts
WHEN: Tonight and tomorrow at 7:30pm, tomorrow and Sunday at 2:30pm
WHERE: National Theater (國家戲劇院), 21-1, Zhongshan S Rd, Taipei City (台北市中山南路21-1號)
ADMISSION: The only tickets left are NT\$1,200 and NT\$1,600 for tonight and tomorrow and NT\$1,600 for Sunday, available through NTCH ticketing or online at www.artsticket.com.tw

Above: Dancers rehearse for the National Taiwan University of Arts' festival production of *The Nutcracker*. Below left: Gulliver outside the National Concert Hall. Below right: Inside Gulliver.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF NATIONAL TAIWAN UNIVERSITY OF ARTS DANCE DEPARTMENT, AND HU SHUN-HSIANG, TAIPEI TIMES

Warming chestnuts for the festive season

Dancing snowflakes and Nutcrackers, battling mice and squabbling children, it's that time of year. For ballet lovers around the world, it's December, its *Nutcracker* season.

Although the ballet was considered a failure when it was first performed in 1892, it has become one of the most widely performed productions in the world.

The director of the Imperial Mariinsky Theater in St Petersburg commissioned Alexandre Dumas to adapt German author E.T.A. Hoffman's story *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King* into a story for a ballet, which was set to a score by Pyotr Tchaikovsky. French choreographer Marius Petipa choreographed the two-act ballet.

While Tchaikovsky's luscious *The Nutcracker Suite* was a hit as a concert piece, Petipa famously complained that the ballet score was too difficult to dance to. It languished in the Russian repertoire — and that of a few other companies — until New York City Ballet choreographer George Balanchine created a new production for his troupe in 1954. Balanchine's production continues to be a staple of the holiday season in New York City and the foundation for various other versions of the show around the world.

This year the National Taiwan University of Arts has stepped forward to provide a true Christmas treat for dance lovers and children in Taipei. The school's Grand Dance Theater and Grand Symphony Orchestra are performing *The Nutcracker* at the National Theater tonight through Sunday afternoon. They kicked off their production — which boasts more than 200 performers, brand new costumes and scenery at a

cost of NT\$10 million (US\$309,000) — with a special performance last night to benefit a host of local charities and orphanages.

The Nutcracker tells the story of Clara and the gift of a very special nutcracker in the shape of a soldier that she receives from her godfather at a Christmas Eve party at her parent's house. Act One centers on the party and Clara's receiving her gift. She sneaks back downstairs after the party to take another look at her new doll but falls asleep under the Christmas tree. She awakens to find herself surrounded by the Mouse King and his troops. The Nutcracker comes to her defense, leading a group of toy soldiers. The Nutcracker emerges victorious, with help from Clara, and turns into a prince.

The prince whisks Clara away to the Land of the Sugar Plum Fairy — sometimes called the Kingdom of the Sweets — which is where Act Two opens. This is the section of the ballet that has all the most recognizable melodies and dances: the Spanish, Arabian and Russian dances, the Waltz of the Flowers and the wonderfully grand Sugar Plum Fairy pas de deux.

Even if you don't want to dance yourself, this is one ballet that is almost impossible not to like.

If you go to *The Nutcracker* this weekend — or even if you don't, take some time to go through the *Discover the Gulliver* (紙風車格列佛人體藝術探索館) exhibition erected this week in the plaza between the National Theater and the Concert Hall.

The 60m-long, 7m-high, 12 tonne inflatable Gulliver's Paper Windmill Museum, was made by the Paper Windmill Cultural Foundation in the shape of Lemuel

Gulliver, the main character in Jonathan Swift's 18th century novel *Gulliver's Travels*.

The foundation created the NT\$10 million (US\$30,000) traveling museum to help children learn about human anatomy as well as Swift's classic tale.

Visitors enter the exhibition through a hole in Gulliver's foot. Inside are telephone-pole-sized bones, a stomach full of food, a large intestine laid out like a maze, a pumping heart and lungs that blow air. You can climb up into the giant's head for a close up view of his teeth, including some cavities, nostrils and brains and a stairway that takes you up onto his forehead for a Lilliputian view of the entire balloon.

"Older brother and sister" guides are on hand to explain the internal workings of humans. The tour takes 10 to 15 minutes.

The exhibition is recommended for children aged 3 and up, however, it is not baby stroller or wheelchair accessible.

Gulliver was exhibited in the Wenshin Forest Park in Taichung in April. The exhibition opened in Taipei yesterday and runs through Jan. 3. It is open from 9am to 9pm and admission is NT\$50.

The Paperwindmill Cultural Foundation, a non-profit organization for the performing arts, especially children's theater, created Gulliver as a gift for the children of Taiwan, but like *The Nutcracker*, he's really for all ages.

EXHIBITION NOTES:

WHAT: Discover the Gulliver (紙風車格列佛人體藝術探索館)
WHEN: Now through Jan. 3, open 9am to 9:30pm daily
WHERE: NTCH plaza, 21-1, Zhongshan S Rd, Taipei City (台北市中山南路21-1號)
ADMISSION: NT\$50, available at the site (to control the number of visitors, online sales have been discontinued) between 9am and 8pm

RESTAURANTS

BY CATHERINE SHU

Kito Kito (魚丰魚丰)

Address: 2F, 15 Yongkang St, Taipei City (台北市永康街15號2樓)
Telephone: (02) 3322-5825 **Open:** 11am to 9:30pm
Average meal: NT\$198 to NT\$398
Details: Chinese picture menu; credit cards not accepted

Kito Kito (魚丰魚丰) recently opened next to Yongkang Park (永康公園) with a menu that focuses on one thing: chirashi, or sushi rice topped with seafood. The sparse but comfortable restaurant offers a mid-priced alternative for sushi lovers who forgot to make a reservation at You Sushi (游壽司) on Lishui Street (麗水街) and want to avoid Sushi Express (爭鮮), a branch of which happens to be located directly beneath Kito Kito.

Kito Kito's prices are higher than Sushi Express, but worth it for the quality ingredients — and service is almost as quick. Customers order at a counter and then wait at their table for the food to arrive; on several visits during different times of the day, I received my orders within five minutes.

The two most expensive dishes are the uni and snow crab chirashi (海膽松葉蟹蓋飯), the Kito seafood chirashi (魚丰海鮮蓋飯) and the "flagship" chirashi (旗艦蓋飯), which is loaded with snow crab still in the shell and cooked prawns, for NT\$398 each. The crabmeat in the uni and snow crab chirashi is imitation, but the quality of the sweet sea urchin coral makes up for it. Each piece is firm and has a melon-like flavor that slowly dissolves

on your tongue. The dish was served with ikura and tobiko roe, slivers of green onion and a raw egg yolk. The fish eggs and onion were distracting because I wanted to enjoy the uni sashimi on its own. After I'd finished the urchin, however, I mixed up the remaining ingredients; the two different types of roe held together by the yolk created an interesting mix of textures and flavors.

The big Kito chirashi is topped with three different types of sashimi (tuna, yellowtail and salmon), two raw prawns, uni, tobiko and ikura roe, two scallops and a raw egg yolk. Each of the ingredients on its own was very good, but the combination was somewhat overwhelming. The "flagship" chirashi is a better bet for diners who shy away from raw ingredients. In fact, the snow crab was so overcooked it was hard to get out of the shell, even with a small pick. On the other hand, the meat was tasty and succulent, despite the slightly rubbery texture. The prawns, however, were tender but surprisingly filling.

For diners who prefer having the health benefits of seafood canceled out with batter and oil, try the fried combination



Rice, rice baby. PHOTO: CATHERINE SHU, TAIPEI TIMES

set meal (炸物綜合套餐, NT\$268). Our batch of prawns, shrimp and fish filet came to us directly from the deep fryer, with just the right amount of crunchy batter. You can choose from sweet and sour sauce or honey mustard dipping sauce (you have to pay NT\$5 extra to get both). My dining companion thought the two sauces were lackluster, but I liked the tiny mustard seeds in the sweet and sour sauce, which added a burst of unexpected texture and spiciness every time I bit into one.

DJ Music and Fast Food

Address: 9, Ln 62, Yanji Street, Taipei City (台北市延吉街62巷9號)
Telephone: (02) 8772-7628 **Open:** 11:30am to 11pm
Average Meal: NT\$200 **Details:** Credit cards not accepted

It's all hip-hop and hot dogs at DJ, a "music and fast food" restaurant in a hipster neighborhood in the East District. A turntable booth stocked with a collection of rap and R'n'B vinyl takes up a sizable portion of the dining area. The shelves proudly display albums by Eminem, Ying Yang Twins, Michael Jackson and Mariah Carey.

As for America's favorite snack, DJ offers seven varieties, including the "American-style" hot dog (NT\$90), which comes loaded with onions, sauerkraut and pickles, and the chili hot dog (labeled "spicy meat" on the menu, NT\$130). For the adventurous, there's the calamari hot dog (NT\$130), recommended by the friendly manager.

Another house recommendation, the cheese hot dog (NT\$130), is basically the American-style dog with a combination of processed American cheese and cheddar shreds melted on top. The frankfurter or "German wurst," tasted much better than the average store-bought sausage. DJ, which seats about 20 people, did this dog right by keeping it simple. Looking appropriately messy and lowbrow, the frankfurter arrived with artificial-looking yellow cheese blistering on top. The side of French fries and soda at an additional NT\$70 delivered on "fast food" comfort. The only drawback was the slightly overcooked bun.

Those with American-sized appetites should also order from



It's all hip-hop and hot dogs at DJ. PHOTO: DAVID CHEN, TAIPEI TIMES

the deep-fry selection, which includes French fries (NT\$100), fried potato wedges or "Golden Fries" (NT\$130), onion rings (NT\$100), chicken nuggets (NT\$120) and cheese sticks (NT\$120). Spicy chicken wings are also available for NT\$180.

A flat screen TV hanging on the wall played a DVD mix of hip-hop and R'n'B. Scarfing down greasy food and watching rap videos almost felt like the equivalent of getting mesmerized by a Bollywood movie at an Indian restaurant. Halfway through the meal, I suddenly realized that I had sat through several clips by rappers Young Buck and Lil' Wayne, as well as Mary J. Blige's stylish video for *We Ride (I See the Future)*, in which she cruises Los Angeles and the southern California coast on a chopper motorcycle. Consider getting takeout if such a playlist would detract from your hot dog moment.

According to the manager, DJ has more of a bar vibe in the evenings, when they turn down the lights and have live DJs work the turntables. The drink selection includes Budweiser (NT\$120) and Smirnoff Ice (NT\$120), while teetotalers can have canned sodas or tea for NT\$70, and Mango or Cranberry juice for NT\$90.

Though it doesn't quite match the selection or the quality at Gusto Street Hot Dogs (located on Ruian Street (瑞安街) and open only on weekends), DJ makes for an acceptable quick fix if you are in the neighborhood and in a hip-hop mood.

BY DAVID CHEN

TIDBITS

BY DAVID CHEN

Still stuck without Christmas dinner plans? Have a look at Page 14 of the Dec. 10, 2009, edition of the *Taipei Times* (www.taipeitimes.com/News/feat/archives/2009/12/10/2003460570) for a rundown of hotels, pubs and restaurants offering yuletide meals, as well as a few tips on avoiding over-eating.

For latecomers, Carnegie's (Tel: (02) 2325-4433, www.carnegies.net) and Capone's (Tel: 02-2773-3782, www.caponess.com.tw) are still serving Christmas dinners tomorrow.

Give and receive tonight at the Taipei Artist Village's bar, which is holding a traditional Christmas gift exchange. Anyone interested in participating should bring a present worth NT\$500.

The exchange will be held at midnight, but revelers who arrive before 11pm receive a free glass of a wine-based punch. Drink specials include Peroni Beer for NT\$100 all night and Jameson shots for NT\$50 until midnight. Taipei Artist Village is located at 7 Beiping E Rd, Taipei City (台北市北平東路7號).

If planning a night out at the pub to spread yuletide cheer, please remember to leave your vehicles at home and take taxis instead. The *Taipei Times* wishes everyone a safe and merry Christmas.