

## FEATURES

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To the uninitiated, Joanna Wang's (王若琳) voice sounds like it emanates from a singer who's lived long enough to experience the roller coaster of life's joys and sorrows.

But Wang was only 18 years old when she released her first album, *Start From Here*, in 2008.

The daughter of famed producer Wang Chi-ping (王治平), Wang's velvety, mature and emotionally nuanced voice quickly captured audiences' imaginations, and in a short time she rose to become the Chinese-speaking world's preeminent jazz chanteuse.

On Saturday night, Wang will present her first stadium concert in Taiwan, titled 2010 Taipei Concert Adult Storybook (2010台北演唱會大人故事書), at the National Taiwan University Sports Center in Taipei.

Although much admired for her renditions of jazz classics, Wang says cover songs are not her favorite repertoire.

**Taipei Times: Tell me about your second album.**

**Joanna Wang:** The second album is a two-CD set. *Joanna and 王若琳* is the CD of cover songs. *The Adult Storybook* is the CD of original compositions written by myself and co-produced with my father. It's dark and shows a self-deprecating sense of humor.

**TT: Are you happier with this album than your first?**

**JW:** Definitely. This album conveys my character and portrays me for who I am. What comes across on the album is how I feel. It's a correct representation of me.

**TT: What do you want to achieve and what does your record label want you to do? How do you find a balance?**

**JW:** It's a tricky art. I'm still looking for the answer. In the beginning, they wanted me to cover some pop songs like — [starts singing] "just like flower ..." Some kind of cheesy pop. I was like, there's no way I will sing that kind of song!

**TT: Is the double CD set part of this compromise?**

**JW:** That's a very keen observation of yours, and yes, it's a constant tug of war.

**TT: Is working on a double CD album exhausting? Will you be doing it again?**

**JW:** I hope not. I am not doing this for the money. I just hope it won't happen again.

**TT: What are your feelings about doing a cover album of love songs?**

**JW:** It's not ideal. I want to do an album of my own songs.

**TT: How about the musicians you admire, such as Billy Joel or the Beatles? Would you consider covering their work?**

**JW:** I have covered the Beatles live, but not in a CD. They are just so amazing. I will do it live only because covering them in a CD would be too formal and kind of like making a joke out of yourself. I actually like Disney's old songs a lot.

**TT: Would you consider doing a cover album of Disney songs?**

**JW:** That's a very interesting suggestion. I will think about that idea. If you take the care to approach the material, it might come out great. It can't be too childish, but it can't be too adult either, that you take away the innocence.



When I performed old Disney songs in concert, I found out there are such dark stories behind them. Audiences were surprised to see me singing morbid songs — songs about death or pedophilia.

**TT: You once said you wanted to make music for a lowbrow, uncouth musical (低檔俗氣的音樂劇). Tell me more about that.**

**JW:** It was an example of mistranslation. I said that originally in English. I said I wanted to make music for a "cheesy musical," such as *The Phantom of the Opera* or *Cats*, because they are so over-the-top and dramatic. I want to do it in a cheaper production.

**TT: What was it like to be catapulted to stardom?**

**JW:** I don't think about it much. It's not something I have control of.

**TT: What do you feel about your status as a celebrity now? Have you lost your privacy?**

**JW:** Actually, I still have my privacy. I don't get recognized that often. I think it's because I'm not on TV that much. I am no hobo, but obviously I don't dress like what I do on the album photos in my daily life.

**TT: What does making a career out of singing mean to you?**

**JW:** Not that much, honestly. It's not the focus of my life. There will be many more stages in my life. I will be doing plenty of other things in life apart from this career. Some good things have come out of it, though. I have met some really amazing musicians and it opened so many doors for me. And the concert. Originally I thought it would be very corporate, but they gave me a lot of freedom. I am very happy with the concert. Let me tell you something I am telling the press for the first time: I am going to Florence to study this winter.

**TT: The media compare your voice to Laura Jones' and Lisa Ono's. What do you think of that?**

**JW:** Sometimes it's just too much for me. Sometimes when I am dealing with the local press, I pour my heart out, only to find out later that the report is terrible. They seem to treat me more as a pop star, rather than a musician.

**TT: Which musician would you say you are closer to in spirit: Alanis Morissette, Tori Amos or Laura Jones?**

**JW:** It's interesting that you mention Alanis because I totally admire her. She is someone who does her own music, who is popular but at the same time respected. Alanis had a pop music career before she became famous. She performed a perfect transformation. I hope I can break off my baggage and transform myself like that someday.

**TT: When you performed at The Wall (這牆) in August last year, the gig was billed as your farewell performance. Why did you decide to come back?**

**JW:** I didn't decide. I went back [to the US] for education. Then Sony told me they planned a concert for me. I have to tell you, I had such a blast doing this concert. I've done the Shanghai and Hong Kong shows and totally loved it. But it won't be worthwhile because I can't stay in this career just because of the concert, if I don't like the media and don't like the record label.

**TT: 2010 Taipei Concert Adult Storybook is your first stadium concert in Taiwan. What do you want to present to the audience that night?**

**JW:** I want the audience to have a good time and to feel some emotional resonance. I will be doing some freewheeling dancing, barefoot on stage.

I will also be performing a duet with Rainie Yang (楊丞琳). She sings this song that I really like. I started covering *Running Into Love* (遇上愛) three years ago. Originally I wanted to keep this as a secret and surprise the audience, but the record company revealed it to boost ticket sales.

**TT: You have been packaged as a jazz singer with proper manners and a flawless hairdo. What are you like as a person in real life? Are you rebellious?**

**JW:** I am rebellious sometimes. But I have such a boring life because I stay home a lot and play video games. Sometimes I do my music writing. I am very opinionated. I like to joke a lot, but the Asian media don't seem to get my jokes.



**TT: Maybe that's because you have such a prim and proper image.**

**JW:** That's true. I have a self-deprecating sense of humor. I am like this pathetic character, which I portray in my music. If you listen to *The Adult Storybook* closely, you will find this cynical, angry character singing.

**TT: Given your fame and schedule, does romance take a back seat?**

**JW:** It's not that bad actually. I can still have romance. Because of the type of singer I am, the audiences are more into the music than the image. I keep a pretty low-profile life too.

**TT: What kind of romance would you be looking for?**

**JW:** One that is passionate and unforgettable. Maybe it will happen when I am in Florence [laughs].

*This interview has been edited and condensed.*

ON THE NET: [www.sonymusic.com.tw/pop/joannawang](http://www.sonymusic.com.tw/pop/joannawang)



Singer Joanna Wang with her father, producer Wang Chi-ping. PHOTOS: TAIPEI TIMES AND COURTESY OF SONY MUSIC

# The reluctant celebrity

*Joanna Wang is one of the Mando-pop world's biggest stars, but she's no prepackaged idol*