

POP STOP

COMPILED BY CATHERINE SHU

Jay Chou (周杰倫) and model **Lin Chi-ling** (林志玲) have finally fulfilled every pap's dream by appearing in public as a couple — or have they? *Next Magazine* reported that the two went on a date to a hot pot restaurant in Taipei's East District (東區) — but our sister newspaper, the *Liberty Times*, says the outing was a ploy to energize lackluster ticket sales of the duo's flick *The Treasure Hunter* (刺陵).

The super-hotties were spotted late at night last week. In an alleged attempt to throw off reporters, Chou swapped his BMW for a Ford borrowed from lyricist **Vincent Fang** (方文山) before driving into Lin's apartment complex. Despite his attempts at subterfuge (or perhaps because of), photos quickly surrounded the two — *Next Magazine* published grainy photos of Chou and Lin in and out of the Ford as they arrived at the restaurant on Civil Boulevard (市民大道).

Oddly enough, for a pair trying to avoid publicity, the two had gathered not only a contingent of celeb friends, including **Devon Song** (彈頭) of pop group Nan Quan Mama (南拳媽媽) and **Jackie Chan's** (成龍) son **Jaycee Fong** (房祖名), but also what appeared to be Chou's entire entourage.

"It's like he called in a naval escort (護航)," *Next Magazine* tartly noted.

Chou and Lin's inability to keep their "secret love affair" a secret may indeed be a scheme to raise ticket sales of *Treasure Hunter*. The epic is rumored to have cost NT\$500 million to produce, but has made only NT\$6,270,000 at the box office since opening two weeks ago, according to the *Liberty Times*. Even a limited edition souvenir book autographed by the two actors and filled with glossy photos of them in character has found few takers. There were 600 volumes issued, but as of the beginning of this week, 264 books were still lingering in stores, despite Chou's status as one of the sexiest men in Asia and Lin's as "Taiwan's most beautiful woman."

Only time will tell if the Chou-Lin matchup will increase interest in *Treasure Hunter*, but one thing's for sure: Chou sure does like that hot pot restaurant on Civil Boulevard. *Next Magazine* noted that it was his favorite meeting spot during his

on-and-off relationship with pop superstar **Jolin Tsai** (蔡依林). "Only the face beside him has changed, from Tsai to [talk show host] **Patty Hou** (侯佩岑) to Lin," the gossip rag wrote.

On the opposite side of the coin, actor **Mark Chao** (趙又廷) was not only probably a lot less eager to talk to reporters, but also tired of promoting his latest film, *Monga* (艋舺). Chao was hit with a cold after a rigorous round of publicity events and recording for the flick's sound track. *Apple Daily* spotted the actor heading into a clinic on Minquan East Road (民權東路) known for its clientele of celebrities. A brave reporter got close enough to the germ-laden heartthrob to ascertain that he sounded nasal behind his facemask and that his "electrifying eyes" looked spiritless. Chao burst into a coughing fit as soon as he opened his mouth to answer a question, before managing to choke out, redundantly, "I have to wear a mask, this cold is really bad." When asked if he had H1N1, Chao replied, "No way! I don't have a fever!" before launching into a hacking fit once again.

Taiwanese songstress **Elva Hsiao** (蕭亞軒) had weightier things on her mind last Monday as she and her younger brother bade good-bye to their mother, who passed away after a battle with cancer. *Apple Daily* reported on the memorial service in exacting detail, thanks to information provided by Hsiao's management company. The funeral cost NT\$150,000, mourners were surrounded by 6,600 white roses, NT\$180 million worth of paper money was burned, along with paper versions of two maids and a Louis Vuitton handbag, and donations were to be made to the Formosa Cancer Foundation (台灣癌症基金會), Dharma Drum Mountain (法鼓山) and Tzu Chi (慈濟). Hsiao's former flame, **Jacky Chu** (祝鎮剛), was in attendance. Chu reportedly let down Hsiao and her mother 10 years ago when he was unable to commit to Hsiao. *Apple Daily* reported that he showed up at the funeral to pay his respects to mother Hsiao and promise to take care of Elva "as a friend."

Other famous mourners included socialite and model **Aimee Sun** (孫芸芸), actress **Terri Kwan** (關穎), and Fong, who went to the funeral a few days after hanging out with Chou and Lin at the hot pot restaurant.

It's not working. PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES

BY DIANE BAKER

THEATER

No language, no story, no reason

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: Riverbed Theatre, *Electric X!*
WHEN: Tonight and tomorrow at 7:30pm, tomorrow and Sunday at 2:30pm
WHERE: Barry Room, Taipei Artists Village (台北國際藝術村), 7 Beiping E Rd, Taipei City (台北市北平東路7號)
ADMISSION: NT\$400, available through the NTCH box office, www.artsticket.com or by calling (02) 3393-9888

You never forget your first time. My first encounter with Riverbed Theatre (河床劇團) was at the Eslite Bookstore (誠品書店) on Dunhua South Road (敦化南路) in October 2006 when they were performing *The Man Who Became a Cloud*, a piece about Belgian surrealist Rene Magritte.

For more than a decade, artistic director Craig Quintero and his team have put together some of the most visually stunning — and disturbing — productions seen in Taipei's smaller venues. Some have examined the lives of famous people — Magritte, US theater director Robert Wilson, Albert Einstein — while others have been harder to contextualize.

Quintero, who used to teach at Shih Chien University, moved back to the US in 2008 to become an associate professor at Grinnell College in Iowa, but he remains closely connected to Taiwan. He arrived in Taipei on Dec. 12 to mount his company's newest production, *Electric X!* at the Taipei Artists Village (台北國際藝術村) last weekend and this weekend.

He held auditions on Dec. 13 and several dozen people turned up.

"Jan Heui-ling (詹慧玲) — I knew her from all her work in the late 80s, she came with props, costumes, all ready to audition and I was amazed. The French guy [Valentin Lechat] came with balloons, props and juggled," he said in a telephone interview on Tuesday. "They gave us a breath of fresh air, new possibilities."

New possibilities are key to Quintero and Riverbed's work, because "we don't know where we are going ...



Riverbed Theatre explores the intersection of images and performance art. PHOTO: JIHEI CHING/S21 COURTESY RIVERBED THEATRE

We don't start with a set script ... We don't have a final scene when we start, sometimes we only have it the day before the show starts." What they do have is images.

"Riverbed Theatre is primarily interested in the intersection of image and performance art ... We're trying to find a language that goes beyond spoken language," he said.

The fact that there is usually very little dialogue in the plays means there's no language barrier. This doesn't translate, however, into an easier time for the audiences, because the shows tap into your subconscious.

"Forgoing language allows you to go deeper,"

Quintero said.

"You don't leave the show thinking 'great actors,' you leave with images of yourself," he said.

Quintero admits that the images can sometimes be disturbing — "I see these images and wonder 'what is this' — but he then quoted Wilson: 'I don't give answers, I ask questions.'"

I can't give answers either. I saw *Electric X!* last Saturday, but I can't tell you what's it about, I can only tell you what I saw — a woman's head in plastic box, a voiceless man speaking as water pours from his head, huge flowers — and (spoiler alert) a very, very big rabbit. Some things you just have to see for yourself.

DRAMA

BY NOAH BUCHAN

Sad memories from a chaotic past

An elderly woman sits at center stage luxuriously attired in a vanilla jacket and crimson dress, checkered stiletto pumps adorning her feet. Her trendy appearance, however, belies bitter memories of a traumatic past — memories that well up as a phantom-like figure clad in black circles her and throws sheets of paper into her lap.

The pages serve as a symbolic reminder of the accusations of infidelity she faced in her younger days, the lingering recollections of which are deftly portrayed in Lee Qingzhao the Private's (李清照私人劇團) *Chen Qingyang* (陳清揚). The play begins tonight at Huashan 1914 Creative Park's (華山1914) Fruit Wine Building (果酒禮堂).

The title of the production takes its name from the female protagonist in *The Golden Age* (黃金年代), a novella written by Wang Xiaobo (王小波) and adapted for the stage by playwright Liu Liang-yen (劉亮延).

Following a preview of the play on Wednesday, Liu said that 70 percent of *Chen Qingyang*, a mise en scene monologue, comes from the novella.



Lee Qingzhao the Private's *Chen Qingyang* examines the traumatic experiences of a doctor during the Cultural Revolution. PHOTO COURTESY OF LAN SHI-SHEN

"Thirty percent is my own interpretation ... of Chen [in old age] to show Taiwanese the internal [pain]

of China's people. Not just the shallow issues of commercial relations and trade," Liu said.

Set during the chaotic years of the Cultural Revolution, Wang's story satirically examines the experiences of Chen Qingyang a 26-year-old married female doctor, who has answered Mao Zedong's (毛澤東) call for young and educated urbanites to be "sent down" to the villages to work alongside the peasants.

Accused of cheating on her husband (who has been jailed), she seeks the help of 21-year old Wang Er (王二), one of her wards and the narrator of the novella, to clear her name.

This sets off a series of events that eventually finds Chen sleeping with Wang Er and turning the accusation into a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy.

Although Wang Er narrates the novella, Liu's play has Chen recall the story.

"I wanted to look at the perspective of the accused," Liu said.

It works to great effect. Whereas the reader of Wang's story is offered a glimpse into the motivations of Wang Er, Liu's play shows, through Chen's

recollections, the tremendous struggles individuals faced during the Cultural Revolution and the emotional scars they continue to bear.

In yet another example of how the Cultural Revolution remains a taboo subject in China, *Chen Qingyang* was banned from being performed in Beijing last year.

PERFORMANCE NOTES:

WHAT: Chen Qingyang (陳清揚)
WHEN: Today, tomorrow, Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Jan. 22 and Jan. 23 at 7:30pm
WHERE: Huashan 1914 Creative Park (華山1914), Fruit Wine Building (華山創意園區果酒禮堂), 1, Bade Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市八德路一段1號)
ADMISSION: Weekend performances are NT\$600, Tuesday's performance is NT\$300, and Wednesday and Thursday performances are NT\$400, available through NTCH ticketing

RESTAURANTS

BY HO YI

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW

TIDBITS

BY STEVE PRICE

Ji Yuan 齊元小館

Address: 489 Fujin St, Taipei City (台北市富錦街489號) **Telephone:** (02) 2747-5886
Open: 11:30am to 2pm and 5:30pm to 8:30pm **Average meal:** NT\$200
Details: Chinese menu, credit cards accepted **On the Net:** www.jiyuan.tw



Ji Yuan's signature dishes include san cha yueh, top, which is braised beef tendon in sweet brown sauce, and baby peas with chicken slices, above.

PHOTOS: HO YI, TAIPEI TIMES

a meal at Ji Yuan without sampling its pen tou dishes (盆頭菜), or appetizers in Jiangzhe cuisine. Highlights include green chili stuffed with meat (青椒鑊肉), osmanthus-flavored duck tongue (桂花鴨舌) and the highly recommended braised crucian carp with scallion (蔥燒鱖魚). The restaurant serves more than a dozen pen tou dishes a day priced between NT\$60 to NT\$180.

When it comes to choosing a Chinese restaurant, the common opinion is that the longer the history, the better the quality. Not the case with the relatively young Ji Yuan. Since its inception in 2005, the restaurant has built up a broad clientele ranging from gourmards to local politicians to neighborhood families.

Service is efficient and the well-kept interior is warmly lit and embellished with red lanterns and Chinese brush paintings.

The menu of Jiangzhe cuisine (江浙菜) is extensive, but what makes Ji Yuan special is the unassuming vegetable called shepherd's purse, or jicai (蔞菜), which is used as the key ingredient in the establishment's feature dishes and is hardly found anywhere else in the city.

Jicai is commonly used as food in Shanghai and neighboring areas. The plant's healing qualities have long been touted in China, Japan and Korea.

Grown in cold climates, jicai has a short harvest season during the springtime. To ensure a year-round supply of the vegetable, proprietor Cheng Wan-hua (程萬華) works with local farmers who grow the plant at high altitudes and makes his stock by first boiling

the greens before preserving them in a freezer.

Jicai novices can't go wrong with the restaurant's Ji Yuan tofu (蔞菜招牌豆腐, NT\$200). The vegetables deliver a distinct grassy tang, while the scallops lend the pot a fresh, oceanic aroma. It's a simple dish that packs a burst of flavors, one this reviewer wonders if she will ever tire of.

The jicai pork dumplings (蔞菜上肉水餃, NT\$100 for 10) are a luscious mix of succulent pork and vegetables. Other popular choices include jicai fried with rice cake (蔞菜炒糕, NT\$150) and jicai with bamboo shoots (蔞菜筍筍, NT\$200), a savory must-try for vegetarians.

Baby peas with chicken slices (豆米雞絲, NT\$350) are a signature Jiangzhe dish. Using clear chicken broth to add a light, sweet taste, Ji Yuan's version is almost on par with that of the famed Hsiu Lan (秀蘭小館) restaurant.

Another signature plate is the san cha yueh (招牌三叉月, NT\$350) or braised beef tendon. The protein-rich collagen has a velvety, almost fat-like texture and is paired with a sweet brown sauce condensed from cooking wine, sugar and soy sauce. One should never start

PHOTO: TAIPEI TIMES

Maoli County is a stronghold of Hakka culture and the town of Dahu (大湖), which is probably best known as the source for Taiwan's best strawberries, has, unsurprisingly, many Hakka restaurants. In the center of town, across from the main tourist center, the Dahu Winery (大湖酒庄) and Strawberry Museum (草莓博物館), is Shanglai Kechuan (上來客饌), an unpretentious Hakka restaurant that serves up good Hakka food for a very reasonable price.

Located on the second floor above a convenience store, the curtain windows provide an excellent view of the busy town center, and there is an appealing absence of ostentatious Hakka or strawberry-related paraphernalia. At the main entrance, a photo of Shanglai Kechuan's chef together with Cheng Yen-chi (鄭衍基),

better known as Ah-Chi-Shi (阿基師), Taiwan's very own celebrity chef, testified to the serious aspirations of the restaurant.

Celebrity chefs and celebrity signatures can be misleading, but in the case of Shanglai Kechuan (上來客饌) the food does not disappoint. With many unusual dishes on the menu, the extremely friendly and helpful staff come in handy.

Starting with the Hakka basics, the first dish was a plate of Hakka-style flat rice noodles (客家板條, NT\$60), a simple dish that has been subject to much abuse by noodle stalls that serve it up as a soggy, stogy mess in a glutinous and over-seasoned sauce. At Shanglai Kechuan the noodles were plump and tender, but still al dente, and the sauce was light and tasty, with the flavor of the shallots, dried

shrimp and dried mushrooms coming through distinctly.

Unlike run-of-the-mill regional restaurants, especially those in tourist centers such as Dahu, Shanglai strives to put its own spin on traditional Hakka dishes. While it caters to the tourist trade with dishes such as fried fish with strawberries (草莓魚片, NT\$250), which is nothing more than a culinary gimmick, there are also more serious, if not such audacious, attempts to create flavors that reinterpret Hakka standards.

Dry-fried pig's intestine (乾扁肥腸, NT\$250) was an unusual take on Hakka cuisine's love of pig offal, and a change from the ubiquitous large intestine fried with ginger (薑絲大腸, NT\$180), which was also available. Another dish of interest was the fried fish with plum sauce (梅汁魚片, NT\$230), which uses local pickled plums to flavor a thick sweet and sour sauce that coats the lightly battered fish. The strong taste of the plums may not be to everybody's liking, but it certainly deserved high marks for effort. The flavorsome xiancao (仙草) tea which is served with meals has a subtlety of flavor that made it more than palatable, unlike the overwhelming sweet and viscous drink it becomes at many drink stalls. Xiancao is also used in one of the restaurant's signature dishes, xiancao chicken soup (仙草雞湯, NT\$250), which has a delightful lushness and fragrance.

While there are certainly trendier Hakka options available, Shanglai Kechuan offers good food at reasonable prices — without sacrificing the spirit of innovation.



Shanglai Kechuan keeps it simple, but tasty.

PHOTO: IAN BARTHOLOMEW, TAIPEI TIMES

Shanglai Kechuan 上來客饌

Address: 3-8 Baliaw Wan, Fusing Village, Dahu Township, Maoli County (苗栗縣大湖鄉富興村八號3-8號) **Telephone:** (037) 990-123 **Open:** 11am to 8:30pm
Average meal: NT\$400 **Details:** Chinese menu; credit cards not accepted