

CULTURE

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Twinkle, twinkle, bigger stars

The summer concert season is set to soar with the TWinkle Rock Festival, which presents four shows this week by top British acts, including the Pet Shop Boys and Massive Attack

BY DAVID CHEN
STAFF REPORTER

The summer rock season in East Asia has arrived, with a handful of big-name artists rolling into Taiwan this week.

Massive Attack and Pet Shop Boys are the headliners at the TWinkle Rock Festival (有象音樂祭), a four-day concert series that begins tomorrow night at Legacy Taipei with psychedelic Brit-pop band Kula Shaker. Appearing on Friday is former Stone Roses front man Ian Brown.

Twinkle, so named by organizers as a reference to both the common abbreviation for Taiwan (TW) and the star power of its lineup, is the latest attempt to establish an annual concert mecca for the nation's music lovers.

Since the demise of the Formoz Festival (野台開唱) in 2008, Taiwan has lacked a steady festival to take advantage of the proximity of major Western artists traveling to Japan for Fuji Rock and Summer Sonic. Last year's Music Terminals, which played host to trip-hop legend Tricky and UK glam-rockers Placebo among other indie artists from the US, Australia and the UK, is not being held this year.

One difficulty often cited by promoters and organizers in putting on a festival is the cost involved — they say the market for large-scale rock events in Taiwan has not yet matured. Formoz, which over the years has hosted a variety of crowd-drawing artists such as Megadeth, Yo La Tengo and Moby, had struggled with complaints about the ticket prices, which were NT\$1,600 per day in its final year.

Twinkle's promoter, Very Aspect Culture Group (有象文化), acknowledges the challenge of filling seats, and has taken a different approach by hosting large-scale concerts with fewer artists.

Tickets won't be any cheaper, though. Massive Attack and Pet Shop Boys' concerts each cost NT\$2,000 for the lowest-priced seating areas and up to NT\$5,000 closer to the stage.

But concertgoers will be getting value for their money, insists Fu-Fu Hsu (許維斌), who runs Very Aspect. He says both Massive Attack and Pet Shop Boys will be bringing their full stage shows to the Taipei World Trade Center Nangang Exhibition Hall (台北世界貿易中心南港展覽館).

Hsu is well aware of the "narrow" tastes among Taiwanese when it comes to arena pop concerts. As a veteran promoter, the 40-year-old has organized shows by megastars such as Ricky Martin, Kenny G and South Korean singer Rain.

But he says Taiwan is ready for more "cool" concerts by "interesting" artists — another reason his company is putting on Twinkle.

With the Massive Attack and Pet Shop Boys' shows, Hsu says he wants to show Taiwanese audiences that



a stadium concert can be both entertaining and thought provoking.

He points to Massive Attack's onstage LED signboards that flash political messages across their huge screens (which will be translated into Chinese for the group's show on Wednesday), and Pet Shop Boys' elaborate and artful stage design and production, which almost takes on Broadway proportions.

Even though Hsu looks like the typical rock promoter — he wears his long hair in a ponytail, dons flip-flops at the office and chain-smokes — he says he has spent much of his life working behind the scenes at theater and fine arts performances with his family's agency, New Aspect (新象, Very Aspect's parent company). The company has brought to Taiwan A-list performers such as cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, French actor and mime master Marcel Marceau and opera tenors Plácido Domingo and Jose Carreras.

One New Aspect concert that left a deep impression on Hsu was a performance by Ravi Shankar in Taipei in the 1980s.

"Basically, a great concert will change your life," said Hsu. He's hoping that for some concertgoers this week, Twinkle's program of artists will do just that.



Stone Roses front man Ian Brown plays at Legacy Taipei on Friday.

PHOTO COURTESY OF UNIVERSAL MUSIC



Massive Attack performs at the Taipei World Trade Center Nangang Exhibition Hall on Wednesday.

PHOTO COURTESY OF GOLD TYPHOON



Pet Shop Boys perform their touring show Pandemonium at the Taipei World Trade Center Nangang Exhibition Hall on Thursday.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF VERY ASPECT AND GOLD TYPHOON

FESTIVAL NOTES

WHEN AND WHERE: Massive Attack (Wednesday) and Pet Shop Boys (Thursday) at the Taipei World Trade Center Nangang Exhibition Hall (台北世界貿易中心南港展覽館), 1 Jingmao 2nd Rd, Taipei City (台北市經貿二路1號). Both shows start at 7:30pm
Kula Shaker (Tuesday) and Ian Brown (Friday) at Legacy Taipei, located at Huashan 1914 Creative Park (華山1914), Center Five Hall (中五館), 1, Bade Rd Sec 1, Taipei City (台北市八德路一段1號). Both shows start at 8:30pm

ADMISSION: Tickets are from NT\$2,000 to NT\$4,000 for Massive Attack; from NT\$2,000 to NT\$5,000 for Pet Shop Boys; NT\$1,800 for Kula Shaker; NT\$1,800 for Ian Brown. Tickets are available at the door or through ERA ticketing or online at www.ticket.com.tw

Package deals are available for Massive Attack and Pet Shop Boys. Tickets for both shows are NT\$2,999, NT\$4,999 and NT\$6,999. Ticket packages are available at the door or through ERA ticketing or online at www.ticket.com.tw

Gig guide

Kula Shaker

Rock 'n' roll with sitars and tablas: **Kula Shaker** (www.kulashaker.co.uk) first burst onto the British pop scene in the late 1990s, and stood out at the time for its fascination with traditional Indian culture and mysticism. The group's radio-friendly, psychedelia-laced music is an update on the Byrds, late Beatles and pretty much anything to do with the 1960s. At Kula Shaker's Taipei show, expect to hear cuts from the band's new album, *Pilgrim's Progress*.

Massive Attack

Trip-hop fans in Taiwan are in for a treat. Last summer Tricky came and mingled with the crowd after his concert at the Music Terminals festival. This year, the legendary **Massive Attack** brings its stadium show to the Taipei World Trade Center Nangang Exhibition Hall. On Wednesday, expect to see Grant Marshall, aka Daddy G, and Robert del Naja, aka 3D, performing tunes from the group's new release, *Heligoland*, its first recording in seven years.

Visual elements are a big part of Massive Attack's concert, which include a light show and LED signboards that broadcast the band's political concerns in a format similar to a cable TV news ticker. Expect to see slogans criticizing capitalism and jabs at celebrity culture. Another 1990s trip-hop icon, **Martina Topley Bird**, opens the show with a solo set.

Pet Shop Boys

Futuristic pop-cubist visuals, endless costume changes and classic electronic dance music — expect a theatrical spectacle when **Pet Shop Boys** make their first appearance in Taipei on Thursday with their stadium show, *Pandemonium*.

Singer Neil Tennant and keyboardist Chris Lowe have thrived as pop gurus since the 1980s, when they scored breakout hits like the cool and breezy *West End Girls* and a cover of Elvis' *You Were Always on My Mind*. Although they have since disappeared from the American pop charts, Pet Shop Boys have remained popular, especially in the UK, and over the years they have worked with a wide range of pop royalty, from David Bowie and Madonna to Kylie Minogue and Lady Gaga. Judging from their recent live DVD of the same title, *Pandemonium* is an impressive presentation of the duo's music. The stage set, designed by opera stage designer Es Devlin, looks like a futuristic giant art gallery made of cubes, which double as video screens. Opening the show is Taiwanese electronica artist Li Yu-huan (李雨寰), aka DMDM.

Ian Brown

The chances of a reunion of Manchester rockers Stone Roses appear to be nil, but we get the next best thing with the band's former front man, **Ian Brown**, who plays at Legacy Taipei on Friday.

As one of the godfathers of the "Madchester" sound, a combination of guitar rock, sampled beats and psychedelia that influenced bands like Oasis, Brown's mere presence ought to be more than enough for Brit-pop fans. Expect to hear songs from Brown's newest album, *My Way* (2009), which he says was inspired by Michael Jackson's *Thriller*.



Kula Shaker performs at Legacy Taipei tomorrow.

PHOTO COURTESY OF VERY ASPECT