

FASHION LIFESTYLE ART ENTERTAINMENT

yellow™

MAY 2007
FREE

In Case of
Emergency Call

Kelly Hu

The Imperial Twins of
Cirque du Soleil's *KA*

Wall of Rhymes:
Chen Changfen

Asian Aida

Lights, Camera,
Action: Kauai

Aging Gracefully
at Lac Hong

yellowmags.com



Photo by Debbie Porter

In 1979, President Jimmy Carter signed a joint resolution that established Asian Pacific Heritage Week, which was celebrated during the first ten days of May. It was not until 1992 that President George H.W. Bush permanently established May as Asian Pacific Heritage Month. At Yellow Magazine, we like to think that we have, unofficially, extended recognition of Asian Pacific heritage into a yearlong celebration.

May was specifically designated Asian Pacific American Heritage Month because of two significant historical events that took place during this month: Japanese immigrants first arrived in the United States on May 7, 1843, and they and other Asian workers contributed significantly to the completion of the transcontinental railroad on May 10, 1869. Furthermore, since school is still in session during May, it afforded teachers the opportunity to educate students about the history of Asian Americans.

This issue of *Yellow Magazine* takes you to a local Village and Cafe, remote paradise island, and focuses on the Great Wall of China. If that is not enough, you can also get a fresh perspective on the master of out-of-this-world entertainment, Cirque du Soleil.

You may recognize this month's fashion model. She is a former Miss Teen USA pageant winner who went on to become a sorceress, a mutant and, most recently, a brainy massage therapist on ABC's *In Case of Emergency*. While her beauty is self-evident, her thoughts about her life and heritage provide for interesting reading.

Finally, you may want to take note of some of the significant cultural events we have highlighted that honor Asian Pacific Heritage Month.

Viet Hoang
Publisher

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The color yellow has played a recurrent symbolic role throughout the history of Asian culture. It symbolizes the earth that sustains all life, yet has been embraced by Buddhist monks as an expression of unchallenged power. Such is the role of yellow: always revered but in different ways under different circumstances.

The mission of *Yellow Magazine* is to introduce our readers to the artistic, fashion, lifestyle and entertainment contributions made by Asian Americans. It is our hope that the depth and breadth of the topics and events we cover do justice to the pride that the color yellow has represented throughout the millennia. As the publisher of the *Yellow Magazine*, my last name is Hoang, which also means yellow. Just as I am proud of my name, I am proud of my heritage, and proud of *Yellow Magazine*.

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On the cover:
Dress by Jenny London

Corrections:
In the April 2007 issue, Keiji Asakura's name was misspelled. We regret the error.

May 2007

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Yellow April Release Party

Held at Kuhl-Linscomb

The April issue release party for *Yellow Magazine* was a great success with hundreds of our readers gathering at Kuhl-Linscomb, a unique home furnishings store housed in five contiguous buildings. Many took the opportunity to lie upon an incredible \$23,000 bed by Hastens. The store's owners, Pam Kuhl-Linscomb and Dan Linscomb, generously donated 10% of all sales to the Texas Dragon Boat Association. Guests sipped Level Vodka, Courvoisier Cognac VSOP, and Tiger Beer while enjoying hors d'oeuvres and the talents of DJ Ade. *Yellow Magazine* would like to thank everyone who attended the party and helped make the night a memorable one. We extend special thanks to Kuhl-Linscomb for their gracious hospitality.



Carmen Martinez and Michelle Brown from Courvoisier

Photos by Sopheavy Than



Pam Kuhl-Linscomb and Dan Linscomb



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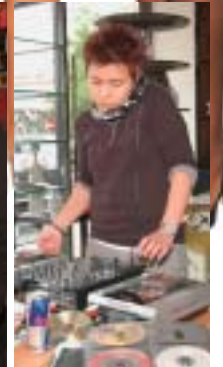
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April issue model Cindy Fu, Jason Mai



April model Clark Shao



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Poetic Photography
for the Ages

The Great Wall

by HUAN LE

Today, Chinese art is sizzling on the world market. A survey of 2006 contemporary art auction results concluded that 24 of the top 100 artists in terms of sales were Chinese, matching the total for American artists. Against the background of a dynamic Chinese economy and a growing contemporary Chinese art market, the Houston Museum of Fine Arts invited photographer, Chen Changfen, to town.

Chen is a product of the Cultural Revolution, a violent era in Chinese history that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. At the end of that era, and almost as a counterpoint to the human struggles that defined it, Chen began taking poetic photographs of the Great Wall of China.

Yellow Magazine spoke to Chen on the eve of his MFAH debut. Although having just arrived, he and his wife showed no signs of jet lag. In fact, the energetic 66 year-old raced from place to place within the exhibition area as he negotiated his schedule for the evening, participated in this interview through a translator, and photographed our photographer.

Photo by Trent Wittenbach



Chen Changfen discusses his photographs during a recent visit.

"The first photograph [of the wall] was from an airplane," said Chen. He explained that after he took that first shot of the wall, he just kept coming back to it. "No one was taking pictures of the Great Wall when I started. Maybe a few tourist pictures, but not like I took them... I wanted to show the world the beauty and greatness of Chinese architecture."

When asked if he chose the Great Wall as a response to the Cultural Revolution, Chen emphatically said, "No. I chose the Wall because it is beautiful." Despite his protestations, his photographs seem to tell a different story. Except for the Wall, the photographs are devoid of images of people and modernity. Although alive with texture, details, and layers of interest, the images are serene. It is a serenity that seems to be designed to counter the chaos of the Cultural Revolution.

"I admire the old Chinese calligraphers and painters," Chen said of his influences. Admirers of Chen's work can readily see the influence of those calligraphers in his photographs. In "Anbian, Shanxi Province," taken in 1998, Chen composed a scene that showed a decaying wall from above. It looks like the carcass of a magnificent dragon and like beautiful calligraphy,

the composition tells two tales. There is the obvious subject, like the calligrapher's choice of word and, for Chen, it is his subject, the Great Wall. Beneath the surface of the subject lies a poetic image. In the case of the "Anbian, Shanxi Province" photograph, Chen alludes to the Wall as something mythical and alive.

The influence of traditional Chinese artists is reflected in other aspects of Chen's work. He uses

a signature stamp to sign some of his works. "Traditional artists think that an imperfection in the stamp is good. It gives the stamp character. But, you can't make the imperfection. It has to come naturally. I got lucky. My son accidentally dropped my stamp. And now, there is a crack!"

Sometimes, Chen will go to the Wall and not take pictures. He has developed a relationship with it and the people who live near it. "I go to the Great Wall a lot. I go in this car," he said excitedly, pointing to a picture of an old Jeep-like vehicle. His affection for his subject is obvious, as is his affection for the tools of his craft.

"I have an idea in my mind. Then, I choose what technology to use," Chen said when asked if he lets the tool dictate the photograph or if he chooses the tools to create the images in his head.

The works on display at the MFAH are varied. He prints his photographs using traditional techniques like gelatin silver, and also novel techniques that are unique to him, such as inkjet printing on traditional rice paper.

"I like to mix traditional things like hand-made paper with new technology... Look at the paper. Beautiful. I asked the maker to make this paper for me. See the edges? They are ragged," he pointed out. And the edges are ragged. They lend a timeless element to an art form uniquely suited to capturing a single slice of time. The ragged edges of the paper play beautifully against the sharp lines of the photographic print.

"I like this one best," Chen said, pointing to a photo of the Great Wall in the middle of winter. "I like the white and the detail of the Wall in the photo. Very detailed." The photograph is one in a series that show the Wall during each of the four seasons. The light gray sky and the snow covered Wall and grounds look like a computer-generated scene from the movies *Lord of the Rings* or *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Grays and white dominate the landscape, but through the snow the viewer can still distinguish individual bricks in the Wall and all the other details captured in the photograph.

Many contemporary Chinese artists use their works to depict the struggles of Chinese life in the country during that period of dynamic growth and change. Chen removes himself from that dialogue, focusing instead on the strength and stability of the Great Wall. The danger of such focus is a tendency towards the extreme romanticism of so many nature photographers. Chen deftly avoids that pitfall by using the tools of his craft, and his deep love and understanding of the subject, to create texture and depth in his photographs not normally seen in this genre. His photos are romantic in the best sense of the word.

Chen did not follow the crowd when he began taking photographs of the Great Wall. Today, while many contemporary Chinese artists use beauty as a means to pose a question through their art, Chen tries to depict beauty. He said, "I don't want the viewer to see the photo or art. I want the viewer to see the beauty of the Great Wall. I want the viewer to appreciate the architecture." Like good architecture, a piece of art that is well composed will disappear, and all that remains is the experience of the piece. By that standard, Chen's art meets the mark.



Plate 15
ANBIAN, SHANXI PROVINCE, 1998 inkjet photograph on rice paper



Plate 11
NIUJIAOBIAN, BEIJING, 1989 inkjet photograph on rice paper

The Great Wall of China: Photographs by Chen Changfen is featured at *The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston*, through August 12, 2007. For information visit mfah.org.

I chose the Wall
because it is beautiful.



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Kauai, Hawaii

by MATT SIMS

Although you probably already know the answer, I'm going to ask anyway. What do the movies *Jurassic Park*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *6 Days/7 Nights*, *George of the Jungle*, *Dragonfly*, *Outbreak*, *Lord of the Flies*, *Body Heat*, and *South Pacific* have in common with the television show *Fantasy Island*? They were all filmed on the Hawaiian island of Kauai.

Kauai is one of those rare places that has retained its beauty and serenity in a world trampled by tourists. You will enjoy the same giant green cliffs and seemingly endless waterfalls that have awed moviegoers on the big screen for years. While some other islands attract road-clogging tour buses of retirees hustling to visit all the "cultural shows" and curio shops before dark, Kauai retains a surprising level of authenticity. Its scenic beaches, waterfalls, and other points of interest are lightly traveled and sometimes well-hidden, giving you the sense that you have arrived at a place where people live normal, albeit relaxed, lives in a private paradise.

During my time on Kauai, I made a point to experience almost everything the island had to offer from 5 star luxury to "no star" hippie surfer communal living. Families generally head to the south side of the island for its gentle surf, nice beaches, and mid-range accommodations. Independent travelers usually find their way to the north shore where they can either surround themselves in luxury or go native. Whichever direction you go, you can travel from one end of the island to the other within a few hours.

Following my arrival, I checked in at the Kauai Marriott Resort on Kalapaki Beach, the perfect place to relax and adjust to my new surroundings. In front of an enormous circular pool, my stress melted away with the sound of the waves as they crashed on the beach. Towering palm trees were everywhere. The pool, claimed to be the largest in Hawaii, is surrounded by a faux island upon which "resort nirvana" could be experienced. If you want a bit more activity, you can play a round of golf at the adjoining Jack Nicklaus-designed 36 hole golf course or rent a surfboard to tackle the nearby breaks. I was happy gazing at the palm trees and admiring the hotel's impressive Greek-influenced architecture. When it is time to eat, forego the usual assortment of cliché island-themed restaurants and get a table at Café Portofino, the resort's Italian restaurant. If you are in the mood for Asian cuisine, get directions to Pho Kauai. This small hole-in-the-wall noodle restaurant is a real rarity – excellent Vietnamese food near a tourist resort! I must admit that I had low expectations, but the *ga xao xa ot* (chicken with lemongrass) was the best I have had outside of Vietnam.

If you seek the ultimate in luxury, the Princeville Hotel on the north side of the island will not disappoint you. Perched atop a bluff overlooking magnificent Hanalei Bay, you can play golf, dine on fresh seafood in one of the hotel's restaurants, or just stare across the 5,000 square foot infinity pool overlooking lush green sea cliffs in the distance. The Sunday champagne brunch is worth trying even if you stay elsewhere.

Although there are several North Shore beaches worth visiting, I most enjoyed the ones at Ke'e and Ha'ena. They seemed much prettier and more remote than the others. As you travel on the only road to these beaches past the famous Hanalei Valley, you will notice that the scenery gets greener (if that is possible) and more like that of Southeast Asia. Vines, flowers, and fruit trees encroach upon the ever-narrowing road, and you will pass numerous little coves and creaky wooden one-lane bridges. A few houses built on stilts remind you that you are not too far from civilization.

Once you reach your destination, you will appreciate being able to relax on a beach surrounded by jungle rather than one surrounded by hotels and restaurants. It was hard to pull myself away, but I had to see the place they called Queen's Bath, a natural swimming pool formed by a lava flow a few miles away. The lava formed a deep clear water pool that is fed by fresh water and, occasionally, by a wave that bursts over the wall of natural lava rock. It is hidden by a long stretch of large boulders and strangely shaped rocks.

Helicopter rides over the island are also worth considering, but they vary in quality. I chose Inter-Island Helicopter based on their safety record and because their helicopters don't have doors that get in the way of taking

pictures. For less than \$200 you can see the beautiful Na Pali coastline, Waimea Canyon (Hawaii's version of the Grand Canyon), and the rest of the island in about an hour. I recommend it, if only to see the Na Pali cliffs and all the waterfalls at eye level.

Another fun activity is to rent a kayak and paddle up one of the many rivers that invariably end at a cascading waterfall and a great place to swim. I chose to go up the Wailua River. The small amount of energy required to paddle up this calm river was definitely worth the experience. The weak current will take you past picturesque hills thick with jungle as the river narrows and you approach the beginning of a footpath that leads to a waterfall. The native people maintain that it is a magical place where you can be granted a wish if you are brave enough to swim. When I dipped my toe into the water, I knew that the price of getting my wish might be a mild case of hypothermia. The water was freezing cold. Still, I couldn't resist, so I made my wish and slowly eased closer to the powerful waterfall that thundered over the lip of the cliff like an avalanche. Its power forcefully pushed me back. The return trip down the river was even easier since I was now going with the current.

The next day, I traveled down the Kalalau Trail where I heard there were amazing waterfalls and a remote valley where few tourists go. The first few miles follow the Na Pali coast to the Hana-Kapiali Valley, where an awe-inspiring waterfall plummets down from high green cliffs into a small river that continues out to sea. If you decide to go farther be prepared for some serious hiking and camping. The views are beautiful along the 12-mile trail, at the end of which is the Kalalau Valley.

I had heard many things about the valley: it was a sacred place once inhabited by native Hawaiians; it was a modern day Garden of Eden with edible fruits growing everywhere; that it was surrounded by impassable cliffs and impossible to reach except via the trail (or by boat during the calm summer season); and, that it was a place where some people lived year-round to escape the pressures of life and return to nature (sometimes sans clothes). All of these things turned out to be true.

After a long and grueling hike, I encountered the most beautiful sunset I had ever seen. A small group of surfer/hippie/travelers between the ages of 18 and 25 sat on a pile of stones staring at the fiercely crashing waves. They directed me to the beach campground where I staked out an empty spot under a small tree, set up my tent, and promptly collapsed.

I spent the next few days exploring the valley, taking photos of the steep canyon walls, gathering fruit once planted by native Hawaiians (but which now grew wild), and talking with those who had also found this place. Some of them had lived there for a year, while others came for a few days and ended up staying a few weeks. They were Americans and Europeans who picked what they needed from the local fruit trees and relied on a native Hawaiian man with a small inflatable zodiac boat who occasionally went into town for supplies when needed.

I felt like I had just landed in the middle of that Leonardo DiCaprio movie, *The Beach*, except much friendlier and safer. Our Hawaiian friend prepared a huge meal of roast turkey and breadfruit wrapped in banana leaves, which he cooked slowly over hot stones. Using leaves for plates, we ate our feast as the sun set and the surf relentlessly pounded the beach. It was all very surreal. I did not want to think about leaving to go home. But then I thought, "I'll miss my flight." But hey, there'll always be another one. And then I thought of my responsibilities. "They can wait," I told myself.

And then I thought of that narrow spot in the trail that I had just traveled that was ten inches in width at the edge of a precipice that separated me from a deadly plunge into the sea below and offered no safety net in case I slipped. And I thought, "Okay, I really must be getting back."



Photos by Matt Sims



Q How can I undo some of the sun damage to my skin?

A A very successful way to treat sun damaged skin and regain a more youthful appearance is a skin peel utilizing a combination of ingredients.

Q What does the procedure entail?

A The procedure is done in the office and takes only about ten minutes. There is minimal stinging during the peel procedure. Afterwards, you will have to follow simple instructions to apply medication two additional times.

Q What is the down time and when should I see some results?

A You will be able to go back to work right away, and you can even start putting on your make up or your regular skin care products as early as four hours afterwards. Over the next few days you will notice a slight, darkening color change in the upper part of your skin. Then you will begin to see the old dead skin shed off and after one week you will have a brand new, younger looking layer of skin.

Q How often should I do the peel?

A It depends on certain conditions and the needs of your particular skin. Some may have the process only twice a year, while others may need it as often as every two to four weeks. For example, for bad acne you may need to have at least two peels at about one week apart, then possibly once a month.

Q Can you get rid of black freckled spots?

A It is possible to make some freckle spots lighter. However, any minimal sun exposure at all will reactivate the melanocyte to make these spots come back again. But together with different creams we can help keep these spots as light as possible for your skin type.



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In Case of Emergency, Contact Kelly Hu

by HENRI MERCERON

The beginning of her career may be traced back to an innocent kiss she shared with Kirk

Cameron in the popular hit series *Growing Pains*. Seen worldwide, the gasps of countless jealous girls could be heard from around the planet. Since then, she has dazzled us with her sorcery in *The Scorpion King*, impressed us with her mutant power in *X-Men 2*, and now, she humorously and seductively plies her trade in our living rooms as she massages her way around on ABC's *In Case of Emergency*. But don't dial 911. We'll hook you up with the 411 on Ms. Kelly Hu, instead.

While it is widely known that you are a black belt in karate. What sparked this interest?

I have always been intrigued with martial arts growing up, due to my brother whom I admired. He took kung fu on Saturday mornings while I went off to ballet classes. When we'd meet up in the afternoon, he'd show me some of the techniques he learned. He was also very much into Bruce Lee and, of course, then, so was I. It wasn't until much later that I had a roommate who got her black belt. She encouraged me to meet her Shihan at the dojo. I've been hooked ever since. I think it's made me more confident and less fearful of getting hurt. Women don't often do contact sports so we're not used to getting hit and banged around. Once that initial fear of getting hit is gone, a whole new universe opens up.

It is interesting that your sport of choice has Asian origins and that you have made learning Mandarin Chinese your 2007 New Year's resolution. Are you "getting back to your roots"?

My roots have certainly influenced how I live. I grew up in a household that had a blend of many cultures and I attended an all Hawaiian school, Kamehameha. I am very proud of my heritage. But I didn't learn karate to get back to my roots. If that were the case I would have taken kung fu instead. It just happened to be the martial arts I was exposed to at the time. Also, if I were getting back to my roots I would have chosen to learn Cantonese. That's what my grandparents and father spoke. I chose to learn Mandarin for more practical reasons. I have always wanted to learn another language and Chinese seems to be the most practical right now. I am planning on attending the 2008 Beijing Olympics and my goal is to be able to get around without an interpreter. The last time I was in China, I couldn't even get the cab driver to understand the name of my hotel!

*You have said that the syndication of *Growing Pains*, the mid-1980s sitcom on which you got your lucky break as Kirk Cameron's love interest, is the role for which you are most recognized around the world. Do you think this can be a marketing bonanza for you in China, especially, if you speak Chinese?*

I don't know of any "bonanzas" to be had there yet. I do know there are a lot more films being done in China and I would love to be able to get into some of them, but from what I understand, they do a lot of dubbing for those films, anyway. But if the opportunity for more work in China does come about, I'd like to be ready.

What kind of fan mail do you get? Do you get fan mail from Asian countries and, if so, what are their interests?

I get some fan mail. Most fans ask about my martial arts. They want to know what style I studied and what other actors I can beat up. I get some fan mail from Asia, but not much since I think the language barrier is a problem. I have been to Japan numerous times. I modeled there as a kid and would spend months at a time working there. I love the country and try to go back as often as possible. I promoted *X2* there a while back. The Japanese fans were very gracious. At the moment, my Japanese is much better than my Chinese, but that isn't saying much.

*Your career is filled with television episodes and an increasing number of roles in films in recent years. Is it true that your series *In Case of Emergency* on ABC may be at risk because of having to compete in the same time slot as *American Idol*?*

It is unfortunate we were up against *Idol* for so many weeks, but when *Idol* changed to shorter episodes, we were able to build on our audience. We're doing well now and I think we'll continue to grow. Our show has not been cancelled and I think we'll see another season. I absolutely love the show and the cast is so much fun to work with. We all get along so well. In fact, I'm meeting a few of them tonight for a game of poker at Greg Germann's house.

Do you have a favorite clothing designer?

For casual stuff I like Miss 60 a lot. It has fun designs with a sense of humor. For evening, I just checked out Bebe yesterday and I love their couture line. It's upscale but still very young and edgy. I'm not ready to be

classic yet. It makes me feel old. For jewelry, I like Rosalina and Tat2. Rosalina is a more upscale diamond line. She made a special piece for me that I absolutely love. It's a black diamond dragon with ruby eyes. It's awesome. The Tat2 line is more casual and fun. My favorite piece from that line is a long silver chain with gold coins and keys attached all around. It's very versatile.

Is there something about you that not too many people know and that would be surprising?

I think people would be surprised to find out how involved I am with charities. I helped jump start Reef Check Hawaii, which is dedicated to protecting the Island's reefs, and I'm currently working with my friend, the Bishop of Botswana, to raise money to build a school there. I truly believe in community service and helping others. I think charity work should be mandatory for all high school students. I realize it would be nearly impossible to get something like that approved with our current education system, but volunteering gives kids an invaluable sense of responsibility, leadership and appreciation. I think Americans, in general, do not do nearly enough for charity, whether it's giving time or money. Imagine how much better a country this could be if everyone did just a little bit for each other every once in a while.

In reading your website and other interviews, I wanted to share my impression of you and see if you think I am fairly accurate. I think you are uninhibited, adventuresome, passionate, confident, modest, and focused yet flexible. And, you are probably a little mischievous and playful. Am I right?

Wow, those are pretty complimentary words. I think I should just leave it at that and quit while I'm ahead.

*You are currently in a relationship with a musician who has written songs for former *American Idol* contestant, Chris Daughtry. What is it about actresses and rock musicians?*

Both music and acting are very creative so it's only reasonable to think that people of both industries would get along. I enjoy watching Mitch through his creative process and can empathize with his frustrations in the business. We are very similar in a lot of ways. Besides, rockers are just so sexy.

It seems like our society is obsessed with role models. Just because you are an Asian American actress should not necessarily make you a role model for Asian American women. And yet, it would seem that often times this is inevitable. Do you feel that you are such a role model?

Funny, I used to hate the term "role model". It was thrust upon me at 16 when I won the Miss Teen USA pageant and I never felt like I could live up to it. At 16, I was still trying to figure out who I was, making mistakes, and being awkward. I was not ready to be anyone's role model. Now that I'm older and have a better idea of who I am and what I stand for, I am much more comfortable with that term. I realize it is a privilege to be considered a role model but I'm still far from perfect.

Having had a taste of the regularity that a steady television series provides, do you think you like it from the aspect of steadiness?

I do appreciate the steady paycheck of a television series, but in this day and age of television nothing is certain. One cannot get too comfortable in a job with networks canceling shows left and right. I simply try to enjoy the work while it still comes my way.

Do you have a dream or vision as to what your perfect situation would be? Would you prefer to be in a hit series or be a movie star? It seems that the lifestyles of each would be quite different even though at that level, the financial rewards may be similar.

It's a difficult choice. I like the idea of doing films where I get to play different characters all the time, but the constant traveling and uncertainty of when my next job will be is not an easy way for me to live. I prefer the comfort of living in one place for more than 3 months at a time.

*What do you think about fame? Is it worth it? When people bother you at inopportune times, do you wish you could just whip out your *Lady Deathstrike* claws or do you graciously smile and autograph something?*

I try to be gracious all the time. I'm still at the point in my success where I don't get asked for autographs so much that it's become a nuisance. Living in L.A., people don't get too excited about seeing celebrities since they are everywhere. If it got to the point where people were camped out in my front yard, then I might have a problem, but I don't see that happening anytime soon.

*In this, the Year of the Pig, I have to ask, do you have "a thing" for pigs? I couldn't help but notice that your dog's name is Mushu (reminds me of *Moo shu pork*) and your favorite dish is *pork lumpia*. Coincidence?*

I actually do like pigs a lot. That's why I try not to eat pork anymore. Pigs are very smart animals. I try to stick to eating the dumb ones.


Photographer
Jhane Hoang @ glossartists.com

Wardrobe
Diana Chan @ dianacstylist.com

Makeup
Kauila Barber

Hair
Stephen Lewis @ Exclusive Artists Management

Fashion Production
Gloss Management

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a white sleeveless dress with a blue patterned train and a red necklace, is posing in a garden. She is looking towards the camera with her hand near her face. The background features various plants and a stone wall.

They want to know what
style of martial arts
I studied and what other
actors I can beat up.

Dress by Jenny Packham

I realize it is a privilege to be considered a role model but I'm still far from perfect.

Dress by La femme
Bracelet by Sage Jewelry



Dress by Jenny Packham



Dress by La Femme
Necklace by Sage Jewelry

A woman with long, dark, wavy hair is standing on a balcony. She is wearing a black, long-sleeved, floor-length dress with large, puffed, gold-colored sleeves. She is also wearing a gold necklace and a gold bracelet. She is leaning against a black metal railing. The background shows a stone wall and lush greenery.

Imagine
how much
better a
country
this could
be if
everyone
did just a
little bit for
each other
every once
in a while.

Dress by Jenny Packham
Necklace by Safia

Short Cirquited for
Your Entertainment

Cirque du Soleil

by HENRI MERCERON

While in Las Vegas, I elected to see Cirque du Soleil's *KÁ* because it follows a strongly Asian storyline. I had the good fortune to dovetail my review with an interview of one of the performers in the show, Lo Ngaching. In addition, I spoke with Merri Hagan, the publicist for *KÁ* and discovered some interesting facts that may not be widely known.

KÁ, which means duality, combines martial arts, acrobatics, puppetry, interactive video projections and pyrotechnics to tell the epic saga of Imperial Twins who embark upon a journey rich with adventure in fulfillment of their destinies. The cast includes 80 artists representing 18 nationalities, the majority of whom are from China, Canada, France and Brazil. In fact, this show has more performers than any other Cirque production, either permanent or traveling.

Lo Ngaching is from Hong Kong and she plays a "good guy" as a soldier in the Royal Army. While she appeared to be 22 years old, in fact, she has been practicing Chinese Wu Shu for that long. She first developed an interest in martial arts from seeing it in the movies. Her parents are in the Beijing Opera in which her mother sings and her father sings and performs martial arts.

Before Lo auditioned for *KÁ*, she represented China in the World Cup and Olympics. Cirque du Soleil actually discovered her husband who was featured in a Kung Fu magazine for his expertise in Wu Shu. He now coaches at a Wu Shu school while Lo performs in *KÁ* twice daily, five days per week. She has done so since joining the show when it first opened two years ago.

In fact, the only time she has missed performing was for four and a half months during her pregnancy – she resumed a month after she gave birth.

Lo auditioned for *KÁ* specifically because it emphasizes her specialty of Wu Shu. As is standard practice with Cirque, her contract is for two years and renewed annually, thereafter. Once hired, performers complete a test to establish a baseline of their peak level of performance. This measurement is relied upon to make decisions about their ability to perform in the event they are injured.

When you see a Cirque show that is performed on a permanent stage, you quickly develop an appreciation for the difference from a traveling show. The theater that was created for *KÁ* is a technological marvel and at \$185 million, it is the company's most expensive. As the audience trickles into the theater in search of their seats, 20 foot bursts of flame spring from the vacuous space where a stage would normally be located. You can feel the heat of each flare, even if you are seated many rows distant from it.

QUICK FACTS

The official Cirque du Soleil language is English because most performances take place in North America and in English speaking countries. The company actually teaches English to all of its performers.

Do you recognize the language spoken during performances or in which songs are sung? You may think you do but, in fact, it is almost always "Cirquish", a truly international language created by Cirque du Soleil understood by everyone the same, yet understood by no one, in reality.

Did you ever wonder about the flags that fly above the Cirque du Soleil tents? They include the flags of Canada, the host country, Cirque du Soleil and Quebec.

Have you ever wondered about the people who are picked out of the audience to participate in the show? Of course, like me, you probably assumed that they were always part of the act. Well, the only thing I can say is that during the first show of *Corteo* in Houston, one of the clowns pointed me out to another clown who looked at me as though to ask me something. I shrugged and before I knew it, a bag of salted popcorn was poured on my head. Hmm. I am not so certain anymore as to who really is part of the act. I sure am glad, however, that I wasn't the one thrown over the edge of the stage at *KÁ* into the pit that was belching flames. Come to think about it, I never saw the guy climb back out!



KÁ: Boat

Picture credit: Tomas Muscionico
Costume credit: Marie-Chantale Vaillancourt



KÁ: Imperial Twins

Picture credit: Tomas Muscionico
Costume credit: Marie-Chantale Vaillancourt

There are several stages. Some move up and down like vast elevators; another one that impressed me the most was a massive post and beam stage. Picture a stage that pivots much like your car's rearview mirror except that the arm can move up and down from the dash to the top of your windshield. And now enlarge your mirror to the size of an IMAX screen. This will give you an idea of the scale of which I am speaking. The production's most dramatic scene is of a battle. The stage is positioned so that it faces the audience as though they are watching the battle from above. The performers jump into the air (towards the audience) while suspended by cables, and when they "land" upon the stage the impact visually radiates away from them much as a ripple leaves the point of impact when a pebble is thrown into a pool of water. With so many performers landing, the overlapping ripple effect is visually stunning. Only in a permanent setting can this technology be utilized.

In another scene, a diver "swims" down the full depth of the area above the non-existent stage. Notwithstanding the performer's ability to imitate swimming, it would not be possible to complete the image on a smaller portable stage. Seeing *KÁ* is the closest to having a stage performance approach the special effects power typically reserved for movies.

In seeing *KÁ*, Cirque du Soleil's most expensive permanent show and *Corteo*, the most expensive traveling show that recently visited Houston, it seems that the performances are evolving from ones that rely primarily on contortionists and extreme gymnasts, to ones that produce more compelling imagery, music and storylines. Rather than just watch performers do incredible feats that I could never imagine doing myself, I wanted to be the one launching off a vertical stage in *KÁ* or floating into the audience while attached to a balloon and passed around like a giant beach ball in *Corteo*.



Corteo: Helium Dance

Picture credit: Marie-Reine Matterna
©Cirque du Soleil, Inc. 2005
Costume credit: Dominique Lemieux

Picture credit: Marie-Reine Matterna
©Cirque du Soleil, Inc. 2005
Costume credit: Dominique Lemieux



Corteo: Dead Clown



KÁ: Battle

Picture credit: Tomas Muscionico
Costume credit: Marie-Chantale Vaillancourt

Houston Independent School District Lunar New Year Event

Held at Kim Son

Houston Independent School District and the Asian Advisory Committee celebrated the Lunar New Year at Kim Son Restaurant to benefit HISD's Asian Activities.

Photos by Sopheavy Than



Yuki Rogers, Pamela Tranpark



Gasper Mir III, Rosalind Young, Abelardo Saavedra



Children in native dress



Dr. Sabrina Nguyen



Marie Leung, Joyce Chen




Hai and Julie Nguyen



Sahar Wali, Mini Timmaraju




Linh Vo, Andy Nguyen



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Asian Heritage Month
Resonates with Music

Hitting All the Right Notes

by VIVIAN LI

This Asian Heritage Month offers an exciting array of musical performances around town that highlight Asian and Asian American artists and their culture.

Their passion for karaoke may be legendary, but there is a growing number of Asians turning to a more classical, demanding form of singing – opera. This season, Houston Grand Opera's dazzling production of Verdi's famous *Aida* features three Asian artists in the main roles for the alternate cast. On Saturday, May 5, at 7:30 p.m. in the Wortham Center's Brown Theater, Chinese mezzo-soprano Guang Yang will sing Amneris, Korean tenor Dongwon Shin will sing Radames, and Chinese baritone Chen-Ye Yuan will sing Amonasro.

Set in the Egyptian desert, *Aida* recounts the ill-fated love story of Radames, commander of the Egyptian army, and Aida, the Pharaoh's daughter's slave girl. Unbeknownst to the Egyptians, Aida is also the daughter of Amonasro, king of their rivals, the Ethiopians.

Since vocally the main roles are especially challenging, the performers' vocal ability was emphasized during auditions.

"Incidentally, baritone Chen-Ye Yuan is an alumnus of our Houston Grand Opera Studio, a post-graduate training program for exceptionally talented young opera singers. Since leaving our Studio he has been moving into the Verdi baritone roles, so he was a wonderful choice for the alternate cast Amonasro," said Diane Zola, Head of Houston Grand Opera's Artistic Administration.

All three artists are celebrated opera veterans with a long list of national and international productions and prestigious singing competitions under their belts, such as Plácido Domingo's OPERALIA Competition, the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and the International Tchaikovsky Competition.

"Guang Yang and Dongwon Shin have been on our radar for a long time," said Zola. "With *Aida* we felt we had a good opportunity to invite them to HGO;

these roles are ideal to showcase their artistry, and we're very excited about having them here."

For the full schedule of *Aida* and more information, visit houstongrandopera.org or call 713.228.6737.

On Sunday, May 6, at 4 p.m. in Zilkha Hall at the Hobby Center, local Asian art groups will join the United Nations Association International Choir (UNAIC) to share an evening of Songs from Asia: Embracing the Eastern World. UNAIC will perform songs in their native languages from all over Asia and Asia Minor: Azerbaijan, China, India, Iran, Israel, Japan, Korea, Lebanon, Philippines, and Vietnam.

UNAIC, a diverse choir of 80 members, was founded in 1999 as an affiliate of the United Nations Association-Houston to promote international understanding through song. Under the tutelage of Phillip Kloeckner, Artistic Director, UNAIC began its tradition of focusing on the music of a particular continent in their annual May concert. Last year was

Africa and this year is Asia. Besides exposing a medley of international songs to a wide and diverse audience, the event also serves as an outreach tool into the richly talented and diverse Houston population.

"We try to engage as many different communities as we can," said Kloeckner. "[The May concert] is not just a matter of performing, but also about collaborating with international groups."

In addition to the twelve songs UNAIC will perform, the Yellow River Chorus, conducted by Lily Tsang, will sing two songs: a southern Chinese love serenade called *The Half Moon Rises* and *Gao Li-tai*, a Xinjiang regional folk song about lost love.

Yellow River Chorus' audience and venues are usually based in the Chinese community. Ailin Yin, who is a board member of the Yellow River Chorus and council member of UNAIC, introduced and acted as the liaison between the two groups.

"This will be Yellow River Chorus' first collaboration with a non-Chinese choir," said Yin. "We are excited about this very special cooperation because it brings us to the Hobby Center, a professional environment, and to a non-Chinese audience."

A variety of distinguished musicians, such as the Space City Gamelan (traditional Indonesian percussion orchestra), Iranian violinist Namdar Ilampour, and a Vietnamese ensemble, will also accompany UNAIC in songs from their respective native countries.

For more information, contact UNAIC at 281.498.7562.

On Friday, May 18, at 7:30 p.m., the Rothko Chapel will be bathed in reflective music. The Looking East concert honoring Asian Heritage Month will feature accomplished pianist Adam Tandler performing John Cage's *Sonatas and Interludes* (1948).

The program will open with the world premiere of Houston composer Robert Bridges' *Kinhin Twelve Minutes* for string quartet. Each member of the quartet will be given a sequence of notes to play and twelve minutes in which

to play them. The duration of each note is also left up to each performer to decide. This improvisational process piece will be accompanied by a couple of dancers who will perform kinhin, or Zen Buddhist walking meditation, in the chapel space.

Kinhin will then be followed by *Sonatas and Interludes*, which was the breakthrough piece for John Cage (1912-1992), one of the foremost experimental modern composers of the twentieth century. Tandler calls the seventy-minute *Sonatas and Interludes* an "endurance test for the mind...to take an hour to be still. It's almost like meditation."

For this rigorous piece, he takes about two hours to prepare the piano per Cage's written instructions by inserting objects, such as screws, bolts, nuts, rubber, and plastic, between the piano strings. Each key is transformed into a different instrument, essentially turning the piano into a one-man gamelan percussion orchestra.

Especially with the broad base of support he has received from local sponsors—the Rothko Chapel, the Jung Center, Asia Society Texas, the Consulate General of India, Multicultural Education & Counseling through the Arts (MECA), and the Foundation for Modern Music—Tandler looks forward to making Cage's abstract music more accessible to a wider audience. He hopes that his performance will act simply as an intervention, a "quiet wake-up from our routine."

"The audience will realize that the more they try to figure out the piece, the more frustrated they become," said Tandler. "You'll leave not quite sure what just happened, but definitely changed by it."

This event is free and open to the public. For more information, call 713.524.9839.



You'll leave not quite sure what just happened,
but definitely changed by it.

Hope Initiative Appreciation Dinner

Held at Kim Son

Hope Initiative hosted an appreciation dinner at Kim Son to thank all the individuals and organizations that have supported them financially or with the contribution of their time. Based in Houston, Texas, Hope Initiative operates several fundraising enterprises designed to raise donations for orphanages in Vietnam as well as community service activities designed to assist the local Vietnamese communities in Houston.

Photos by Sopheavy Than



Jacqueline and Dan Lee Thoa and Jonathan Dizon



Danny Bui, Catherine Tran, Thuy Nguyen



Gia Phan, Binh Nguyen Phi Nguyen, Michael Dang



Bandon Nguyen, Paul Nguyen Suzette Nguyen, Angelia Guinara



Tina Tran, Dylan Nguyen, Judy Ngo



Judy Ngo, Vy Pham, Ly Tran



Hope Initiative Officers



Hope Initiative Members



Kathy Nguyen, Sandy Tran, Theresa Luong

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On Bellaire and
In the Village

Dining Out 101

by HENRI MERCERON

This month, we sampled the food of two restaurants that tackle Korean food in different ways. One, Tofu Village, offers a traditional menu, while the other, Cafe 101, is influenced by Japanese and Chinese cuisine.

Café 101 9889 Bellaire Blvd., Suite 101, Houston, TX 77036,
Sun-Thu 11:30am-Midnight, Fri-Sat 11:30am-2:00am, 713.272.8828

What separates Café 101 from other restaurants has a lot to do with presentation. As I describe its ambiance, food and beverages, I am obliged to write about the textures, colors, and other details that enhance the overall dining experience, whether one is aware of it or not.

Like an artist's pallet that is filled with a broad spectrum of colors, this establishment draws upon a wide array of textures, lighting and colors to create its mood. It seems that each corner is set apart from the others by color. As you enter the restaurant, there is a wall constructed of the thin type of brick pavers that is so popular right now on the exterior of new construction. Beyond that is the bar that is accented by a three foot pink strip of fabric or glass (I did not get close enough to distinguish) that runs horizontally for the full length of the bar. The adjacent wall that separates the dining room from the kitchen is pale blue with ripples of elevated white strips that run unevenly for the full length. It is relaxing on the eyes and mood. Sharing the same wall towards the other corner, hunter green paint and bronze toned perforated fabric dominate. The next wall is pale yellow with strands of bronzed metal pieces hanging ornamentally from floor to ceiling. Finally, the fourth side of the restaurant is entirely glass and overlooks the parking area. It is lined with tables over which traditional looking wood lantern lights hang with a glow of rice paper.

The ceiling is a series of alternating panels; one set houses recessed lights and between them are rectangles of what appear to be woven tree branches.

The dining area is divided into sections separated by partitions that are painted in a faux suede to match the texture of the chairs. The top portions of the dividers are narrow glass encasements overlaid with an opaque white rice paper. The combined treatment offers a very soft way to effectively divide the dining area and provides a sense of privacy. Even when the restaurant was full, the volume of the background music, while low, could be heard throughout the meal.

Cafe 101's drink menu is several pages long and lists 191 options among 13 categories, including fresh fruit juice with milk, oolong tea, oolong milk tea, green tea, green milk tea, bubble tea, frappe, ice flaked, hot drinks and specialty drinks. Honestly, if you can't find something to quench your thirst here, I don't know where you can go. I tried the grass jelly green tea, which was perfectly (lightly) sweetened. It is presented in what appears to be a large brandy snifter. Like bubble tea, instead of tapioca balls, I suctioned every small cube of grass jelly with the large gauge straw provided. Half the enjoyment of these types of drinks is in the texture of the added items and not letting any go to waste.

I also tried the hot grass jelly tea. It arrived in a small white ceramic pitcher, topped by a small glass cap filled with beans. You pour the thick green brew into a cup and add a spoonful of sweetened beans. It offers a completely different experience in terms of flavor, temperature and texture. This beverage is sweetened only by the addition of the beans.

The menu offers a blend of Japanese, Chinese and Korean influenced cuisine. Whereas Café 101's dishware is all white, it soon became apparent that the shapes of those dishes represented every variation found in

geometry. Perhaps because of the manner by which I sample a restaurant's menu, the shapes really stuck out. At one time I must have had twenty different plates and bowls, large and small, on my small table.

For starters, I had fried squid, served on a triangular plate with soft corners. Most people would

think "calamari", but here it really is squid, large pieces mildly seasoned, fried to a moist consistency and not greasy. The garlic chili dipping sauce was not spicy, so I liked it.

My other starter, which is popular with guests, was an order of chicken nuggets. Although the name quickly conjures up thoughts of fast food,

this selection uses dark meat that remains moist and highlights subtle flavors. (Oh, and it is served on a triangular plate, the corners of which are so rounded, it is barely recognizable as such.)

Two of the three main dishes I sampled were presented on trays. The Seafood Hot Pot came out with a personal metal pot that rested on a frame with a lit sterno underneath to keep it hot. Sides of lightly sautéed bean sprouts, scrambled eggs and mustard greens accompanied the pot, which was filled with squid balls, shrimp, tofu, fish cake and cabbage simmering in a flavorful broth. The second entrée served on a tray was the Kim Chi Fried Rice. If you like kim chi, you will be satisfied. Finally, the Chicken with Three Flavors really has more than the three flavors. The Chinese oil, sesame and soy sauce are further enhanced by the addition of sliced ginger, garlic (I think) and fresh basil.

I have been to 101 Café twice and have observed that it is generally patronized by a younger, well-dressed and attractive group of people who either dine with friends or with older family members. Even when filled, the noise volume is low. I could not help but wonder if it was due to the design of the restaurant or the absence of small children.

Tofu Village 9889 Bellaire Blvd., Suite 303, Houston, TX 77036,
Mon-Sun 10:00am-10:00pm, 713.777.9889

I have found that Korean restaurants seem to share a preference for light stained wood as the dominant part of their décor. As we continue to highlight restaurants in future issues, I will see if this pattern holds.

The tables at Tofu Village are incredibly shiny, having been lacquered to perfection. They are dark stained wood framed by a lighter stained border. Dark wood chairs with black cushions complete the set up. Aside from these, everything else is light and bright. Four foot high light wood paneling covers the walls, above which are light wood rice paper screens. Running in between them is a thin band of light that changes color at a gradual and regular pace. Along with foot long tassel decorations that hang between each rice paper screen, these are the only splashes of bright color.

At the entry of the restaurant hang four large posters of Korean entertainers. Two flat panel televisions play DVDs of Korean pop stars whose singing comprises the restaurant's background music.

The waiter brought me what appeared to be cloudy water in a water glass. Before I could question him, I grabbed the glass and found it to be very warm and realized that it wasn't plain water. It was basically a rice/corn tea that offered a mellow flavor.

Tofu Village is a very popular place – so popular, in fact, that I was not able to taste their best-selling short ribs because they were sold out. I settled for another popular selection, Korean BBQ pork. It arrived with several side dishes: a whole small pan-fried fish, crisp salty anchovies, kim chi, fish cake, squid salad and sesame spinach. I loved the fish but it required a lot of care because it was very boney. The squid salad exceeded my tolerance for spiciness but the other items offered a variety of flavors. The spinach still retained a little of its crunchiness which is something I always appreciate because it is not overcooked. This entree is sufficient for two persons.

The other entrée I ordered was the Tofu Village Special Soup. It is a steaming bowl of light tomato consommé (served either spicy or mild), teeming with soft tofu, beef, clams, prawns and oysters. You break a raw egg into the mix, which cooks in the hot broth. If a seafood soup is what you are yearning, this entrée will satisfy you.

There are no desserts offered at Tofu Village but you will get a small container of "Ya Kool" strawberry milk to let you know that the meal has come to an end. As I was leaving, I promised that next time, I will arrive earlier to try the short ribs.



Café 101

Photos by Sopheavy Than



Café 101



Tofu Village

Honestly, if you can't find something to quench your thirst here, I don't know where you can go.

Monks Prayer Event Held at Quantum Physicians

Buddhist monks from Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Tibet, India, Burma, Sri Lanka, Japan, Taiwan, China and Indonesia joined local monks in Houston to pray for world peace. It was a day for healing the body and the mind. Many people participated and brought canned goods for the Houston Food Bank and toys for Texas Children's Hospital. Linda and Dr. Minh Le sponsored the event.



Gordon Quan



Linda and Dr. Minh Le



Monks chanting



Hubert Vo, Dr. Minh Le



Monks blessing food



Monks praying

Photos by Sopheavy Than

Houston Community College International Mixer Held at The Epic Club

Photos by Sopheavy Than

Houston Community College hosted an International Mixer at The Epic Club to benefit their Office of International Initiative. HCC faculty, administrators, staff and friends were in attendance to show their support.



Julie Do, Gigi Do



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Geraldina Reina, Sandra Reina



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Lac Hong and Yellow Cross
Make a Difference

Charity Begins at Home

by HENRI MERCERON

Photo by Debbie Porter
Make-up by Ann Nguyen and Nick Day

Lac Hong Adult Day Center is located just outside Beltway 8 on Wilcrest near Bellaire Blvd. Its mission is to provide a safe, healthy and active environment for physically challenged adults and senior citizens in a manner that is culturally sensitive.

We found that the Center has made major strides since it opened less than 2 years ago. It stands as testimony to the vision of the Nguyen family, which originally honed its civic involvement skills by participating in the annual Fall of Saigon Remembrance ceremonies. The seeds that were sowed have blossomed into a very successful and important community facility. Whereas, the whole family is involved in handling the business aspects, provider billing, and meal preparation, we connected with Kimsa Nguyen who could best inform us of the day-to-day activities over which she serves as director.

In 1996, Kimsa joined the family's real estate business as a loan officer at Accurate Fidelity Mortgage alongside her sister, Bobbi Nguyen, and while also assisting with public relations activities at a sister company, Professional Realty Associates. While she enjoyed the work she was doing, her passion was focused on community service. She studied geriatrics in the medical center and by the time Lac Hong was ready to open, she had received her facility director certification. Prior to its opening, Kimsa participated in a diverse array of activities relating to architecture, permits, licensing, construction, build out, marketing, budgeting, dietitians, staffing, community affairs and, perhaps most importantly, the planning of activities that would identify those who had dementia for whom special activities would be tailored.

The center has the capacity to serve 305 members, although the daily average attendance ranges from 90-120, as many members do not attend the center every day of the week. In essence, for many physically challenged adults and traditional senior citizens, Lac Hong is the last stop before having to live in a nursing home. There is often misunderstanding within the senior citizen community as to their eligibility to access the benefits that a facility such as Lac Hong can provide to them. Many have the impression that their Medicaid benefits would be terminated if they were to become members and, therefore, they elect to maintain the status quo by continuing to receive home healthcare benefits. It is a choice that is driven by fear and by a lack of clear understanding.

For many, Lac Hong is the last stop before having to live in a nursing home.

It is a choice that results in seniors being bored and disengaged within the confines of their homes versus benefiting from the stimulation provided by a more spiritual and active lifestyle at Lac Long, which delivers a diverse list of planned activities. Kimsa's father holds seminars at the center to educate the public about patients' rights and benefits.

Lac Hong is open Monday through Friday from 8:00am to 6:00pm, and serves breakfast, lunch, snacks and desserts. Once a month, a dietician comes on site to consult about the facility's menu, which must be approved by the state. As you would expect, special menus are prepared to meet the specific nutritional and dietary needs of the members. In general, the meals are free of MSG and consist of all natural ingredients.

The state of Texas covers the costs up to 20% of La Hong's capacity, or 61 individuals. The families of the rest of the members are responsible for paying for their memberships. Kimsa asked, "When do you know when you have given enough? When do you stop?" This is a question that she and her family will have to answer if and when they ever reach that point. For the present, however, they have met the greater need by developing another tool



(l-r) Bobbi and Kimsa Nguyen

of charity, the Yellow Cross.

Yellow Cross is a 501c3 charitable entity that was launched to generate funds needed to cover the costs of attending Lac Hong by those who are financially unable. As Kimsa says, "The need is so great and the heart is so big." One of Yellow Cross' biggest and most successful initiatives was launched six months ago. Kimsa's sister, Bobbi Nguyen, dedicated the last fifteen minutes of her weekly radio show to publicize that 40,000 pounds of food would be distributed at Lac Hong every Saturday and Sunday. The organization enlisted the assistance of area churches to provide volunteers to help distribute the food that would provide relief to more than 1,000 families. Lac Hong members are provided first access.

Lac Hong's members consist of the following ethnicities: 60% Vietnamese, 30% Chinese and 10% African American, Hispanic and Caucasian. Kimsa stated that it is a challenge to cater to the diverse members who rely on the center's services. She stated further that she speaks only two languages, English and Vietnamese. And yet, she added, there is a third way to communicate that is only heard by a few. And that is the language of Patience and Humanity. In their humble way, Kimsa and her family are teaching all of us this language. I hope everyone is listening.

Photos by Trent Wittenbach



Lac Hong members enjoy a game of dominos with their friends.



Breakfast, lunch, snacks and desserts are served daily.

Drinking Wine A Matter of Taste

by PHILIP CUSIMANO

There is a difference between tasting wine and drinking it. One tastes wine to evaluate the quality of the cuvee being sampled and should be done in a critical and analytical manner. Drinking wine, on the other hand, is an endeavor engaged purely for the fun of it. Wine makers, wine producers and wine writers are all experts in the science of rating the fruit of the vine but, in reality, isn't there a bit of the wine reviewer in all of us? Evaluating wine is intertwined with its enjoyment. Here are a few pointers for all of us closet wine critics.

When tasting wine, only pour an ounce or two into the glass and always let the juice sit for several minutes in order for it to "aerate" or open up. This is a process in which oxygen interacts with wine in such a way as to enhance its components. You can maximize the aeration process by gently swirling the wine within the glass.

Evaluate the wine's color although, keep in mind, that color is the least reliable indicator of a wine's quality. White wines can appear clear in hue to dark gold. Whereas, too dark a color might indicate that the wine is old, an exceptionally clear body can indicate the opposite. The color of red wine can range from lightly red to inky black. Older red wines may appear slightly orange at the outer rings where they meet the inner surface of the wine glass. Cloudiness is one element

of color that may be an indicator of damaged goods in both red and white wines.

Now, let's look at the wine's "legs". "Legs" are a measure of viscosity. Better wines have pronounced legs. Tilt your glass at a slight angle and return it to the straight position. Examine the film or trace of the wine that remains upon the glass after it is tilted to measure the legs.

Next, we can smell the wine to get a sense of its "bouquet". "Bouquet" is the complex aroma wine develops after being bottled. You can learn to pick up traces of some of the following scents; orange blossoms, violets, pepper, cinnamon, lemon, red berries, blackberries, apple, grass, mint, vanilla, chocolate, honey, tobacco, toast and oak amongst others. Be on guard for any unpleasant scents.

Finally, we consider taste. Place a small amount of wine in your mouth and pull in some air across your palate. The wine will begin to bubble, enhancing its flavors. Identify the dominant flavors; fruits, peppers, spices, cream and/or wood. Evaluate the body of the wine as to its weight on a continuum of light to heavy. Is the wine in balance? That is, is no single component overpowering? Determine if the wine has a long or short finish (degree to which the after taste lingers). Answer the most important question of all; do you enjoy this wine?



How about some wine suggestions to taste and to drink, as well?

Mormoraia Vernaccia di San Gimignano 04
Vernaccia is the grape that produces the best white wine from Tuscany and Mormoraia is recognized as one of the region's foremost producers. It is located near the town of San Gimignano, home of Michelangelo, who legend has it sipped Vernaccia as he painted the Sistine Chapel. This offering of Vernaccia presents a straw yellow color with an aroma of flowers and apples in an intense full body that is both crisp, brisk, mineraly, with a hint of nuttiness and a medium-length finish. Serve with seafood, especially shellfish, and some grilled white meats. \$17.00

Fetzer Merlot Valley Oaks 05
Fetzer vineyards is an important California winery that has been instrumental in the promotion and growth of a "culture of wine" within the United States through its marketing of premium varietal wines. Environmentally sensitive, this producer continues to bring forth quality juice at very competitive prices. The Valley Oaks Merlot is sourced from grapes primarily from the north and central coasts and presents aromas of blackberry fruit and plum, undercoated with a deft touch of earthiness, licorice and vanilla. The tannins are soft and the body light. The wine is quite pleasant for sipping by the pool or when being served with lighter dishes. The price is very nice. \$6.00

St. Clair Vineyards Bellissimo
This producer is located near Deming, New Mexico about 34 miles from the Mexican border. I have to say, I am continually impressed by the overall quality of sparkling wines produced in New Mexico. Bellissimo is Italian for beautiful and this wine is indeed very pretty. It is sparkling and sweet in a non-sugary, fruity manner with good acidity that allows it to be both crisp and brisk. Think "Moscato d' Asti". The wine is great by itself and will pair well with cakes, cookies and fruit desserts but to really enjoy this cuvee, share it with a friend. \$12.50

Wines available at Spec's Wines, Spirits, & Finer Foods, various locations. Visit specsonline.com for the store nearest you.

Drinking wine is an endeavor engaged purely for the fun of it.

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