

As the stunning pairing of flute and the astounding purity and intensity of Mia's voice enveloped Ximen's Red Theater, it was as if a collective shiver ran down the spines of the audience. This was the opening of Indian influenced "Ganesh" from their recent album, and the evening that followed was one of the most stirring and exciting I had seen for a long time. The sheer originality of the music stubbornly rejects labeling but - although grasping and full of praise - the music press has used "avant garde," "spiritual" and "experimental."

Founders of A Moving Sound are husband and wife Scott Prairie and Mia Hsieh. Scott hails from America and Mia's home is Taiwan, although the two met in 2001 while Mia was in New York studying on a Fulbright scholarship. A year later they came to Taiwan together, initially starting up as an experimental theatre company, and since that time have been a valuable and innovative addition to Taipei's art and original music scene. When telling Mia's story, Scotts says that when she found her passion, she "became convinced that the universe wanted her to do creative work," and Mia responds that Scott is like "a hungry kid who could never get enough of creating," and this sparked a magic seemingly hard to rival.

Although recently they have focused more on the music side, these theatrical performances involving dance and vocal exploration have remained a passion for Mia in particular with her background in modern and Indian dance, and are something they will continue to explore.

But theatrical and visual elements are also central to their musical performances including, in last year's Taipei shows, being joined by a juggler, trapeze artist and fire dancer!

In terms of music, Scott and Mia have been joined by some very talented local musicians who had already made

a name for themselves. Tang-Hsuan Lo graduated from Taiwan's Chinese Traditional Music College and has been playing the *erhu* (a traditional Chinese string instrument played vertically with a bow) since the age of nine. Alex Wu has performed with various music ensembles for 12 years and as well as

Performance at the Red Theatre.



# A Moving Sound

By Claire Tyrrell

Photo courtesy of A Moving Sound

A Moving Sound combines amazing dancing, singing, and visual elements to give audiences a lavish experience in a theatrical way.



the *erhu* adds the flute to the mix along with a whole host of Latin and African drums and percussion instruments, and Hua-Chou Hsieh (well respected for collaborations with jazz ensembles and pop singers) switches between the guitar and *JongRan* (Chinese guitar). In fact, since arriving in Taiwan, Scott has also developed a passion for this instrument; although his background is the bass, and as a trained conservatory French horn player. Mia's voice transcends mere singing to become an instrument as truly remarkable as the others, and has also received training in *Nan Guan* as well as contemporary vocal performance with the pioneering Meredith Monk and Lynn Book in New York. Although Scott writes the music, the other musicians add ideas and create all their solos, with Mia adding vocals often in her own uniquely made up language.

The product of the first couple of years' work was their first album "Little Universe." Well received, this album was a compelling blend of uplifting indie pop, edgy vocal improvisation, spoken word and offerings inspired by world rhythms. As well as Asian and Western influences, African and Middle Eastern beats also ring through, in an apparently effortless crossing between stylistic boundaries, within songs themselves as well as the album as a whole.

Already receiving rave reviews in North America when they have performed, and in World Music circles, 2006 was a big year in terms of gaining further recognition. Lonely Planet, in making a special travel feature on Taipei for the Discovery Channel, chose Mia as one of the people to represent Taipei to the world audience. This program, to be first aired here in Taiwan on 24/25 March 2007 on Discovery Travel and Living, will give A Moving Sound the chance to introduce themselves to a large range of countries world wide.

Equally as exciting was a recent trip to Europe, part of which involved a world music convention in Spain. With international representation on the look out, performances and radio station interviews, it served as a launch pad into the European consciousness. The time

spent there was pretty intense, almost serving as an audition with a whole array of agents and record companies present. While African and Latin beats are often combined with western principles, Asian traditions have been less integrated and with the world's eyes beginning to look towards this part of the world A Moving Sound could not fail to make a stir. Contacts have been made, positive things are happening, and it certainly seems that theirs is a sound that is on the move!

These occasions also result in another

Scott is, of course, happy to open people's minds to the country that he now calls home and even with increased foreign interest there are certainly no plans to leave these shores. Scott thinks it is great to have Taiwan as a writing and performance base. He has said before how he finds the atmosphere here very "open and creative" and certainly conducive to the path they are taking, and also claims that "to a certain extent Chinese musical traditions are better preserved here than in China itself."



A Moving Sound travels around the world to further integrate more beats to its already dynamic music.

kind of promotion to the international audience. "People inevitably ask about Taiwan" Scott says, "especially with this CD's cultural references, and some songs are also very Taiwan based." None more so than the vitality packed "Market Song." Beginning with a rally on the unusual and whining Suoana horn, the song continues to dynamically portray the sounds and voices, energy and fun of a traditional Taiwanese market, which from her childhood Mia sees as "the most vivid picture of Taiwan's earthy and vital working energy." The image is unmistakable to anyone who has visited one of Taiwan's busy morning markets!

With *Nan Guan* traditions as well as native Aboriginal and Hakka influences, creatively it is very fertile ground. He adds that for several years now Taiwan has been their source and pool of inspiration and nothing has changed.

In fact over the last couple of years since "Little Universe" they have much further explored the musical traditions of Taiwan as well as other parts of Central/Eastern Asia. The fantastic new album released September last year is called "Songs Beyond Words" and focuses on these themes, embracing the vast array of sounds hailing from the east by drawing on inspiration from India, China, Kazakhstan

and Mongolia as well as home.

Scott simply describes their work as “new music sourcing from the old music of Asia,” and a prime example of this working is “*Ku Chin*.” The *Ku Chin* was a stringed musical instrument, used by ancient scholars in meditation and spiritual practice, and Scott interprets and represents this sound

theatrically choreographed display of her skills with the Tai Chi fan and the overall effect is captivating.

They travel further afield in, for me, the most stunning piece, “Silk Road.” The Silk Road as an image symbolizes not only the exchange of goods, but also a blending of thoughts, cultures and

Qing-Yang Xiao, the first ever Taiwanese person nominated for an American Grammy. It is available throughout Taipei including Eslite book shops.

As their home, it is still in Taipei that you can most often see performances of A Moving Sound. For 2007 they have already scheduled several university shows, and also Taipei Arts Festival later in the year, but more chances will certainly be added. The best way to keep informed of where to catch them is to check the website and sign up to the computer mailing list. Whether you are in Taipei short or long term, their performances can not only give an insight into Taipei’s vibrant original music scene, but also a view into the musical traditions of the region, now rarely seen.

Then, once inspired, if you too want to delve into your creative depths, you can gain from Mia and Scott’s energy and experience by taking part in one of their Taipei workshops. Mia runs workshops on vocal exploration and movement and by joining their computer mailing list you can be notified of any upcoming opportunities. Although they do hope to set up a studio here, most workshops at present are held due to local groups approaching them. Scott is also an artist, and as well as having work exhibited in both USA and Taiwan, he provided the thought provoking artwork for the “Little Universe” accompanying booklet. Drawing on this and also a background in Psychology he runs workshops on painting as a creative process for self-exploration.

“I am amazed and grateful for this beautiful phenomenon called life.” Scott writes, and this is the resounding feeling and celebration A Moving Sound leave with their audience. For an unforgettable music experience search them out because, to finish again in their words: “what can I tell you about A Moving Sound that wouldn’t be better said by the music?” For further information, please check their website: [www.amovingsound.com](http://www.amovingsound.com) @



Mia displays her skills with the Tai Chi fan and the overall effect is deemed to be captivating.



The cover of the “Little Universe” displays Scott’s work on psychology.

using sliding techniques on the bass guitar. Mia then uses the words of a Sung dynasty poet and the traditional *Nan Guan* tone to create an original song, which she sings in ancient Taiwanese dialect. In addition, during the live performance Mia performs a

music, in effect an undertaking the band themselves have many ages later also embarked upon. The mournful *erhu*, Mia’s timeless vocals and the rhythm of the accompaniment all beautifully evoke the vast expanses of the central Asian plains. More romance is added by the use of the intriguing *Sheng*, a blown instrument from southern China, which Scott says he can only describe as “a portable pipe organ.” And elsewhere the voyage exceeds earth’s boundaries with “Interplanetary Heart” and pushes experimental margins in remarkable ways such as creating unearthly sound by using a bow on an electric guitar.

The album was released by Jingo Records and the band are thrilled that it has been specially and beautifully packaged by the design studio of highly respected