

Thursday, January 13, 2011

Breton singer Yann-Fanch Kemener meets "Nan Kuan" expert Tsai Hsiao-yueh, designer Sophie Hong and erhu artist Liang Wen-pin



By Nancy T. Lu

East is East and West is West. But artists can make the meeting of the two happen with interesting result.

Yann-Fanch Kemener, one of the best-known voices from Brittany in France, touched down on Taiwan soil for the first time in December for a two-week visit. The specialist in traditional vocal music called "Kan Ha Diskan" (translated "call and response singing") headed straight for Tainan to meet Tsai Hsiao-yueh, a singer of the most refined ancient Chinese music called "Nan Kuan" (southern pipe).

Tsai did a first recording of "Nan Kuan" ballads with an ensemble of musicians from Nansheng Association for Radio



France in
Paris in

1982. The critical acclaim received by this first "Nan Kuan" music album led to subsequent recordings for two more volumes in September and October 1991.

Kemener, himself involved in Breton roots revival, spoke in Taipei of his great admiration for Tsai's traditional singing whom he first heard through her "Nan Kuan" recordings. He had made the special trip to the southern city of Tainan in Taiwan to see her and interact with her.

Kemener, one of just a handful of existing recognized mentors in traditional Breton singing, has likewise done many professional recordings of ballads in a language which he described as of Celtic origin and totally different from French. He performs in live concerts usually with a cellist or a pianist.

Born in Sainte-Tréphine (Côtes-d'Armor) in 1957, Kemener participated in the revival of the Kan Ha Diskan in the 1970s and 1980s. He helped in preserving the traditional songs by collecting and singing them in his beautiful and powerful voice. In Taipei, he expressed his interest in finding a publisher for a collection of 200 ballads in due time.

Kemener hailed from a family of tillers of the soil. Although exposed to a life of hardships, he found everyday joy in singing. Traditional singers of Brittany particularly fascinated him from childhood. He listened closely, eventually even taping their singing.

While in Taipei, Kemener tracked down top Taiwanese fashion designer Sophie Hong whose chic clothes he first discovered in Brittany and, in fact, has



taken to wearing in his concerts and public appearances in the last 10 years. At Sophie Hong's boutique in Taipei, he shopped to his heart's content for his new wardrobe fashioned out of Chinese silk treated and processed using an ancient method for his coming performances in France.

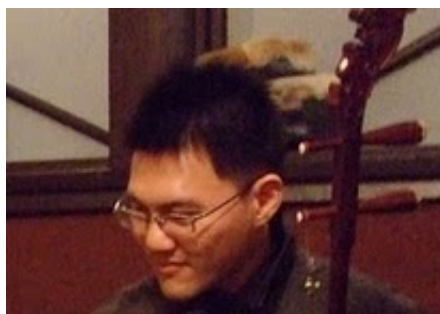
One evening Sophie Hong invited him to dinner at the famous teahouse and restaurant with history called Wistaria. The setting was once the hub of workers in Taiwan's earliest democracy movement. Christophe Gigaudaut, the French diplomat overseeing cooperation and cultural affairs for the French Institute in Taipei, joined them.

Sipping of aged Puerh tea circa 1950 from Lanchang -- said to have been wrapped and kept dry in a special straw mat of the region -- combined with erhu music



entertainment by Liang Wen-pin, a gifted artist of the two-string instrument and also a conductor of at least two Chinese orchestras in Taiwan, made the East-West encounter truly memorable for all.

After bowing classical Chinese musical notes inspired by the romance of the "Butterfly Lovers" Liang Shan-po and Chu Ying-tai, the erhu artist ventured into music suggesting



the excitement of horsing around.

The moment finally came for Kemener to fill the air with his Breton style of singing. He sang in his native dialect and Liang caught up with him in his music-making by repeating his tune like a refrain after him.

Was this like the "Kaner" singing and the "Diskaner" responding in a unique performance of "Kan Ha Diskan"? .



Kemener was drunk not with whisky nor with the special tea poured for him. He felt overwhelmed by the experience of traditions of East and West meeting in his rendezvous with newfound friends in Taiwan.

He earnestly expressed interest in returning despite his fear of flying to teach and conduct a workshop in his area of musical expertise.



*Posted by Nancy T. Lu at **3:42 AM***