Those amazing adventures in Chan-land

CHARLIE CHAN: The Adventures
Of ... (Sony Masterworks).

Here is an amazingly mature debut
from a young Australian musician
that defies all boundaries, shatters
musical categories and constantly
takes the listener by surprise.

Chan is a multi-instrumentalist
former prodigy with experience in
writing for theatre, film and televi-
sion. Her debut — intriguingly on
classical label Sony Masterworks —
mixes classical influences, African
and Indian percussion, reflective
jazz, popular song and ambient
music with astonishing confidence.

The album arises from the word
go. Chan’s heavenly organ and
Heather Lee’s soaringly operatic
vocals suggests a kind of music of
the spheres. From here things shift
daringly into a persuasive, African-
influenced percussion workout.

Later Edie Quansah (ex-Osibisa)
provides plaintive trumpet and
GondwanaLand’s Charlie McMahon
digeridoo, while Chan plays the
keyboard parts, including a gero-
gously romantic piano interlude.
Luxuriously produced by Chan and
Rob Rowlands, this is intelligent,
sensuous music for the open-minded.
The only complaint is that, at only 30
minutes, there’s not enough of it.

KATE BUSH: The Red Shoes (EMI).

The sing-song Rubberband Girl hit
the airwaves like a latter-day Yellow
Submarine — no less irresistible for
being little more than a nursery
rhyme.

The rest of the album takes some
living with. Initial impressions are
that it’s straight-from-the-can Kate
Bush — sophisticated, romantic and
a little too dependable to surprise.

Bulgaria’s Trio Bulgarka appeared
on her last album, The Sensual World,
and again prove a more interesting
presence in theory than practice.
More successful are the tracks us-
ing her folk musician brother, Paddy
Bush — what sounds like Latin
American instrumentation used in an
Irish manner.

Meanwhile, Prince and Eric Clap-
ton do guest turns that look good on
the credits but which no-one would
really have missed.

All up, a mixed bag — always
listenable, sometimes splendid, at other
times vin ordinaire. For sheer consis-
tency of tune craft, Bush looks in
danger of being outstripped by her
young American admirer, Tori Amos.

THE VELVET UNDER-
GROUND: Live MCMXCIII (Sire).

Recorded over three nights in
Paris in June, this two-CD live set
from the band no-one thought would
ever get around to re-forming has the
odd shaky moment and a very boring
15-minute jam but otherwise shows
the legend remarkably intact.

While most of this material dates
from the late ‘80s, the band so
profoundly affected the landscape of
post-punk rock that this sounds less
like an exercise in nostalgia than an
urgent, contemporary missive.

Minimalistic, performance-oriented
songs such as Heroin and Black Angel’s
Death Song made the band’s reputation
and the versions here lose none of the
power of the originals.

The album often works best if you
put aside the myth — “the precursors
of punk”, “rock’s princes of dark-
ness”, etc) and recognise that Lou
Reed, John Cale and co. were also
good at being (a) whimsical (b)
wistful and (c) unpretentious, good-
time rock ‘n’ rollers.

Charlie Chan ... intelligent, sensuous music.

GEORGE CLINTON: Hey Man...
Smell My Finger (Paisley Park).

Like the Velvets, George Clinton
has exercised such a powerful influ-
ence on today’s music — in his case,
via his ‘70s funk bands Funkadelic
and Parliament — that he can still

sound bang on the button without
having to change his essential style.

Doubtless new converts, hearing
the similarity of some of his latest
and parts of Prince’s Diamonds and Pearls
and noting the Paisley Park label,
may assume Clinton owes a debt to
Prince when in fact it’s the other way
around.

This hot-wired album incorporates
every facet of current black music,
from reggae to rap and house music,
into the colourful Clinton world view.

Whether experimenting with sitars
and tablas or weaving intricate jazz-
horn arrangements around the beat,
Clinton never loses sight of the
dance-floor imperative. The result:
entirely music for the mind. Or is
that just mind music for the body?

INXS: Full Moon, Dirty Hearts (East
West).

The recent back-to-basics round
of small gigs has been good for INXS:
the first few tracks tear out of the speakers
with a ferocity that will surprise those
who, like this writer, found the band’s
‘80s success hard to fathom.

A pity they settle back into shallow
bluster so quickly — also that they
waste time with under-realised
collaborations with the likes of Ray
Charles and Chrissie Hynde. Tracks
such as Rising Wide show they’re
capable of being a fine rock band
when they decide to get serious.