

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 television. 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 arrests 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 Eddie Quansah (ex-Osibisa) provides plaintive trumpet and Gondwanaland's Charlie McMahon didgeridoo, while Chan plays the keyboard parts, including a gorgeously 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 using her folk musician brother, Paddy Bush — what sounds like Latin American instrumentation used in an Irish manner.

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

All up, it's a mixed bag — always listenable, sometimes splendid, at other times *vin ordinaire*. For sheer consistency of tunecraft, Bush looks in danger of being outstripped by her young American admirer, Tori Amos.

THE VELVET UNDERGROUND: *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 '60s, 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



Charlie Chan . . . intelligent, sensuous music.

put aside the myth — “the precursors of punk”, “rock's princes of darkness”, 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.

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

Like the Velvets, George Clinton has exercised such a powerful influence 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: vital body music for the mind. Or is that vital 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 *Viking Juice* show they're capable of being a fine rock band when they decide to get serious.