

# no Swanning about

**PROBABLY even worse than the monosyllabic answer interview subject you sometimes get in this business is finding someone with an opinion, or a number of them, who can express them articulately, and you are left stuck with what to leave out as we've only got this amount of space to get the point across.**

CHARLIE CHAN INTERVIEW BY ROSS CLELLAND

**C**HARLIE Chan is in this category. Get past the fact that first-throws people, that Charlie is, in fact, female. 'It started as a nickname, but it can be disarming,' she says of the gender and cultural play that still works. 'I want to be recognised as Australian, Chinese Australian even, but I do like the little confusion I get from it.'

BUT that's just the one hat Ms Chan wears: 'I've just done my list for the week, and at different times I will be artist, song composer, web developer, head of Martian Music - that's my own label - then there's a personal life, I'm in a relationship with a partner, then I'm an administrator, and a friend, as well as other musical projects. Yes, I reckon that's a good juggle keeping all that together.'

'REST? Well, Sundays I don't answer the phone. But it's more like I don't want to miss a damn thing. I've just back from Lismore and Byron Bay, and even up that I was still getting up at 6a.m. to see people, or do things.'

THING at the top of the list for our purposes is Charlie's new album, *Wild Swans* by name, gaining notice as it has taken her away from her more expected instrumental style, and over into more song-like structures, with some radio notice for her duet with Monique Brumby, *Storm In A Teacup*. 'She's a mate, and we've always wanted to do something together, and this was the first chance.'

WHICH leads to another category problem, for while Charlie's piano and technology based music is widely regarded as good, just what pigeonhole do we put her in, for that's what we have to do. 'No, I can't say I'm this kind of musician, because I use this kind of equipment. It just doesn't work like that, you oscillate and expand backwards and forwards' she muses.

'THE jazz nazis would say I'm definitely not jazz - thank god for that - but I'm working with some jazz players for this show next week, and that stretches you as a player, cause they have the chops, I only have the ideas to start with. And I'm not that complexist kind of new music serious contemporary composer. Since a lot of what I do is improvised, they'd say I'm not writing the dots, so it's not music

'I ACTUALLY just spent the weekend trying to write the byline as to what it is I do, so I started to steal quotes. 'Brilliant songs' one said. Okay, we'll use that. A friend said it was ambient, but a bit radical with it. How about 'radical ambience'? She's beginning to laugh as she warms to it. 'Right, it's not world music, though I am into rhythm - so 'exotic global rhythms'. But then, my solo piano records are different to this new one, is different again to my soundtrack work, so maybe forget all that. In a way, I think I've only just settled what my music is, and where I want to go with it.'

AND enthusiasts of the Chan work are a hardy bunch, with live performance also a rarity. 'It is as simple as not being able to get venues, and when you have to use a grand piano, that's expensive. I don't even consider myself a performer, but I like the fact people want to hear what I'm doing, and gives me the chance to work with different combinations of people. I don't want to do like a formal concert, but I don't like doing the rock gigs - that's not what this music is about.' She adds a perhaps surprising postscript: 'Though I did go and see The Testeagles the other week, they're interesting - and good, and loud. And Cactus

TO balance, technology has been embraced, not just in the music, but putting Charlie in the forefront of artists using the internet as contact point, marketing tool, and even presenting performance over the web. 'It is a way to interact with the audience, and I've always played with technology, even had crystal sets when I was a kid and stuff. Went on through the Prophets and a DX-7, which were the old reliables of electronic music when they came through. Took to electronics organically,' she ironically concludes. 'The net as well, from bulletin boards to being searchable, with images and pictures. Now, I even host a chat session once a week, and I'm getting feedback direct from the people, my music is affecting, and I find that really special.'

