

Art's Heart & Evolution

Charlie Chan

The real challenge in talking about local musician Charlie Chan is to keep to the music, and not to spend a few hundred words raving about technology. As well as being known for her forays into sampling and electronica, this cutting-edge pianist and songwriter has an association with multi-media that goes back about eight years further than most musicians who are jumping on the internet gravy train today.

Having said that, she doesn't feel that far from the live scene, either: she's been spotted around rock outfits and electronica outfits since the age of fourteen. As she puts it, in her characteristically quirky way, "Gaffer tape and me are old friends". On a more serious note, she's struggling with the old chestnut of 'out-there' music: that is, how do you do it live. Lately, she feels, she's being finding success.

"I'm still trying to work out this performance thing. Some of it's a bit hard to perform live. Luckily I've struck a balance between the two... Because [much] of my solo piano work is improvised, as you say it's a contradiction... a lot of that stuff is often backed by a track, so what I tend to try and put a combination of those things together. So it makes really interesting music: I play a solo over a track, and it's totally different every time I do it".

It's a problem that's as old as sixties psychedelia: one of the big criticisms of Pink Floyd and late Beatles albums (for example) is that they couldn't be done on stage. Meeting that challenge, for Charlie, has been a great impetus towards her own development as a musician:

"I can unashamedly say that when I

performed that piano CD live, I had to practice my little butt off, like, I had to really learn to articulate some of the ideas I'd managed to create on a record".

The other thing that Chan's experience has led her to believe is that our traditional understanding of live performances and live audiences is undergoing sweeping change. Not only is technology changing the way in which players can play, but also the manner in which audiences can respond:

"Although I create my music exactly the way I want it, I'm able to perform a lot of that music live, and get feedback from my audience - at shows. I always like to give things to people when they come to a show. The last time we did a show I gave people a little bookmark for the site, and people who had access to the web e-mailed me and said 'blah blah blah, I like that song, I liked that thing'. It's a really nice perspective. ...I can see a real shift in the industry...a lot of things that are happening are really changing how we deal with our audiences."

Long association breeds dependence, and Charlie Chan is the first to admit how strongly her work is tied to the ever-developing multi media network. It's a vital tool in the hands of an individual on the fringe. She's even happy to say that she's taking cultural fringe-dwellers with her.

'Absolutely. My audience is wider than Australia. It's not that Australia can't support me, it's just that we're not a very big place. We're a big country but not many people. I make music because I want people to hear it, and I also make music because I


think I can affect some change: social, personal, political (I hope). Am I dragging my audience into the twenty-first century? Probably I am. Charlie's new release *Wild Swans* is a rare blending of two worlds. On one level it bristles with new technology, on another it's organic and exploratory, bringing together song and improvisation with a "get it down in one or forget it" recording philosophy. It's also a milestone in her own development.

"It's the first time in my recording career that I've felt comfortable with what I'm trying to say. I'm at that

stage where I don't really care if people don't like it anymore. I'm an artist. You know, artist's work is an organic process, where people make an input and it's all part of the whole thing. Like Websites: they grow and you add more pages".

You can check out Charlie Chan's Website at www.Charliechan.com.au She launches her latest foray into muse *Wild Swans*

Cal Clugston



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