

Soldering her own  
leads to happiness ...  
musician Charlie Chan

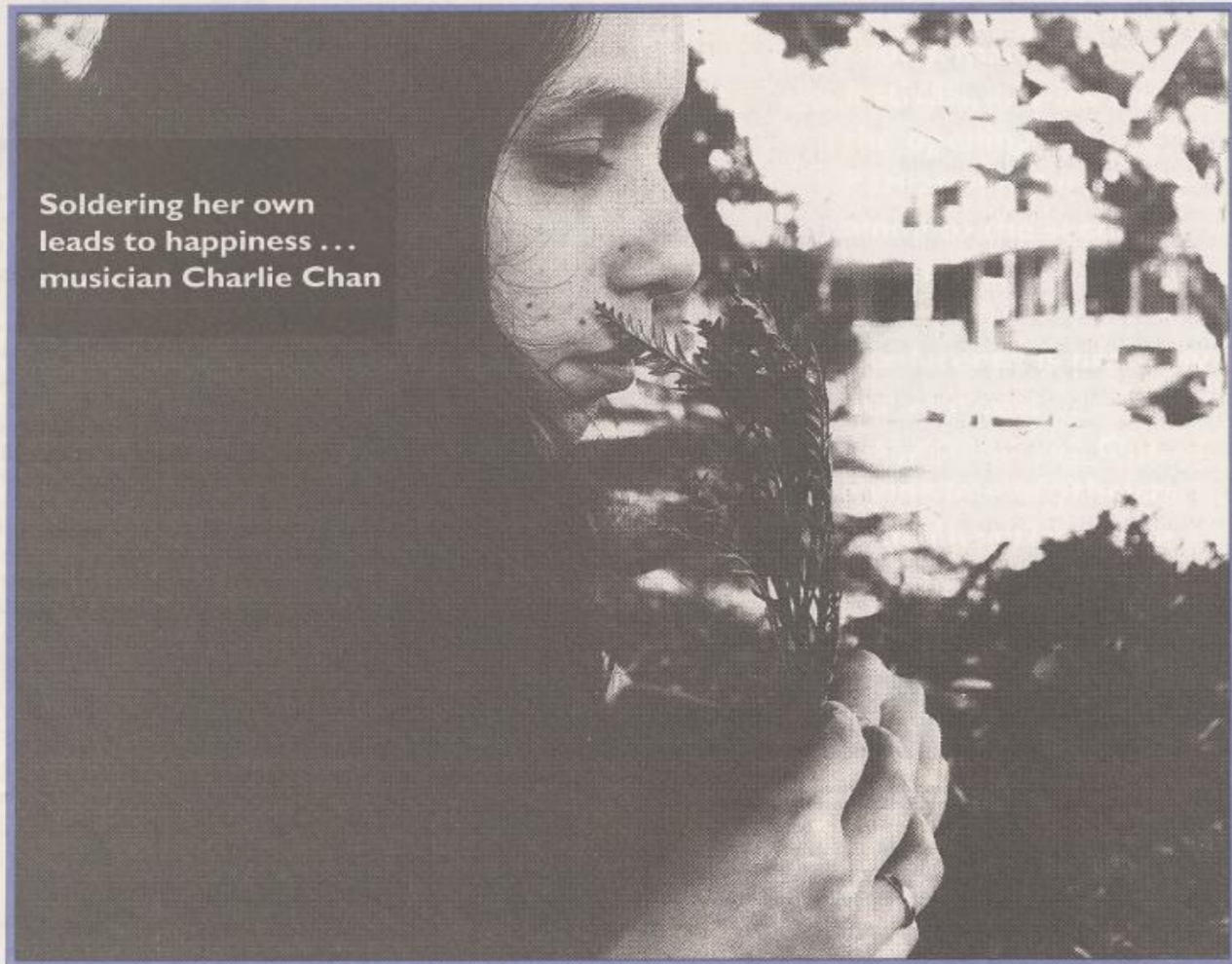


Photo: JWP Photography

Charlie Chan was born in 1966 and raised in the Dandenongs in the shadow of General Motors Holden. Like every other three-year-old that year, Charlie, who was already playing the piano, was given a ukulele at the GMH Christmas party. When the ukulele was beyond repair, Charlie insisted on a guitar. Then lessons, then a double bass, before long she was composing, writing to *Young Talent Time*, scoring music for the show's band. Charlie's achievements are already legend. Although she doesn't like the "child prodigy" label, she did get down and determined at a mighty young age. Charlie is a theatre and screen composer of note, a musical director and recording artist with two albums under her belt.

I arrived at the inner-city house the dynamo shares with her girlfriend Sally, and was immediately invited into their bedroom to play with their Scaletetric (a racing car track with hand controls). I have to admit that I hadn't had that much fun in a bedroom for ... well over a week. Charlie has an intense energy and wild-ranging mind which is exciting to be around. We talked in her whiz-bang studio which is so sophisticated I wouldn't even dare to describe it. To see for yourself, visit her web page [www.TheAdventuresofCharlieChan.com](http://www.TheAdventuresofCharlieChan.com).

BY ROXXY BENT

# A day in the life of . . .

## CHARLIE CHAN

### Tell me about a good day?

It starts with a soy milk smoothie and banana. Sal makes the smoothie and all the noise and mess in the kitchen. I'm a real tidiness freak so I stay up here and do the email. We get up between 6.30 and 7am. I've got a friend in New York. We do real time chat. I like to get up that early to work because it's quiet. After we've done email—we're a wired household—then I'll surf the web. If the phone rings at 9am I always know it's going to be a hard day. It means that the energy out there is going to be focused in on me. I look at what I have to do, try and do a bit of music, try and do a bit of yoga. I arrange to have lunch with someone otherwise I don't eat lunch and it's important to have that hour in the middle of the day. For lunch I always go down to the yacht club cos it's right on the water.

### When do you finish?

I never really finish work. I don't feel like I ever start. Because I work at home I work all the time. My computer is both my creative and working tool. I'm quite stimulated by new things. New software is very exciting. Because I'm always sitting I make myself go out otherwise I would never leave the house, unless it's to shop for food or see friends. Hence bicycles and racing car sets. There is structure. I turn off my mobile phone at 5pm and sometimes I don't answer it at all. It rings all the time and often it's things that aren't urgent. It's a battle. I like to chat, I'm a socioholic, but I don't tend to get anything done. Like yesterday I spent most of the morning renewing the video aspects of this studio. This studio is a recording studio and a multi media studio. The video camera is hooked up full time, I have it set up so I can record videos into the computer [an image of the Mardi Gras launch, kicks in on the computer screen.] My predominant interest in the web is because it's free and it gives me low band broadcast possibilities, a way of getting people to listen to my music. So I've done concerts with "See You See Me" (video conferencing software). I got an industry attachment to go to America to research their software, bring it back to Australia and show people how it works. It's full on work and it's varied. Like I like to do music and I like to do the computer as well. I'm battling between wanting to create music and wanting to publish music so that people can see and hear it.

### Who inspires you?

Leonie Lanolin, my teenage teacher did. She ran the music side of things at school. She'd allow me to play my music and put my scores into the instrumentalists' folders and play those at rehearsal. Eric Goston Phillips was a childhood mentor. Laurie Anderson is an intellectually astounding, innovative technologist. Miles Davies. Brian Eno for what he represents.

### When did you come out?

I didn't. I was just sort of out. I was involved from a young age with all sorts of weird people, I went to my first drama camp at 15. All those crazy theatre people are gay. The people I was around then didn't care if I was gay, they wouldn't have cared if I was purple! I've never had conflicts about being one way or the other. I've had it about being a woman. My first conducting teacher said 'women don't succeed as conductors, I'd give up now.' I conducted one of the biggest youth choirs and orchestras at the Melbourne Concert Hall. I succeeded. I was 17.

### What do you think, if anything, sets lesbians apart from other creatures?

Short hair? Sometimes I think people have fractionised their values. There's the younger lesbians who don't care about politics and just wanna look beautiful, go out and own things. The positive thing is that we have the freedom of choice.

### What, if anything, gets you down?

Bad food in restaurants. That Jackie's at Bondi have taken their hamburger off their menu. Not going to yoga. When I'm not achieving anything. The Internet because it's slow and people don't understand it. No email. I judge my level of popularity by how much email I get.

### Are you who you thought you'd be?

According to the clairvoyant I am. I'm having the exact relationship he predicted. When I was about 18 or 19 I reasoned I would build a studio to record my own and other people's music. As a result of having the studio I'd create a label. I recorded a solo piano album the year before last. It was something I'd always wanted to do. It was

funny, a bit disappointing because I'd done it.

### What about you would you like to change?

I wish I'd brushed my teeth more often when I was young.

### How much does money drive you?

A bit. I have to pay for an engine in a vintage car. I like to buy equipment and stay abreast with new technology. I live in a nice house in the city. You can't avoid money.

### What are you reading?

I just finished *Snow Crash* by Neil Stevenson. I'm reading *The Mac User*, *The Logic Audio Manual*, a history of the Chinese in Australia. I have been known to read the *Triumph Club* magazine from cover to cover.

### What's your fave TV program?

*Chicago Hope* because it's so predictable and pathetic. I like Indira Naidoo. I don't watch TV much. I watched all the Ellen stories on Fox News on Real Video.

### What's your best outfit?

A Jasper Conrad suit coat. It's navy blue wool with beautiful buttons that look like shark eggs.

### What was your most memorable date with a woman?

I have to say it was the night I met Sal.

### Where would you like to be in ten years time?

On a sailing ship.

### If you could give other lesbians a piece of advice, what would it be?

I think people find it hard to be happy. I think it would be nice if people could find what they want to do. For some it's a never ending search. I've found something I'm good at and it makes me happy. I'm obsessed with this music thing. So much so that I make every lead in my studio, I have to learn everything. I'm a really happy person. The fact that I can solder my own leads makes me happy. I can create my own music, watch what's going on in the rest of the world from the comfort of my own home and that I can buy CDs. I'm self-sufficient—that makes me happy.