

Actors enter a brave new multimedia world



No fear of cyberspace . . . Charlie Chan will perform live for downloading on the Internet — Picture: NICK CUBBIN

By multimedia writer DEBORAH BOGLE

ACTING has always been a profession fraught with anxiety. Will I get the part? Will I end up on the cutting room floor? Will I ever work again? Such questions are the leitmotif of most actors' lives.

That was before the digital revolution. These days, if you really want to see an actor sweat, hiss the word "synthespian", or mutter "multimedia" in his ear.

The finely modulated tones, the thoughtful expressions, the sensitively rendered movements might be stirred into the software soup to produce a digital lizard. Or one might be presented with a CD-Rom script with a non-linear narrative that calls for a single character who is effectively splintered into several. Or an actor might be replaced altogether by a computer-generated being.

For writers and directors, the new technology offers breathtaking possibilities in the realisation of their ideas. For performers, the advantages are less obvious.

Today, a conference which aims to address their unease opens at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School in Sydney. Jointly organised by the School and the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, it will attempt to explain the new and emerging technology and address issues of performers' copyright, moral rights and the demands of working in new media.

"Performers start off from a greater disadvantage than other rights holders in that we effectively have no copyright at all," says Anne Britton, joint sec-

retary of the MEAA. The Alliance has joined with the Screen Actors Guild in the United States and actors' unions around the world to lobby for an international standard for performers in the new media.

One of the guests at the conference is film designer and director Ron Cobb, whose conceptual design credits include *Allen*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *The Abyss* and *Total Recall*.

Cobb describes computers in filmmaking as "a false nose", an enhancement to the performer's art.

"I think there's a lot of misunderstanding about what this means," he says. "It's really no different than the invention of the camera or the advent of colour or sound."

Like Cobb, Charlie Chan is an artist who has embraced the new media. Her performance at the conference will be recorded on her CU-Seeme camera and broadcast live over the Internet.

Visitors to her Web site (www.charliechan.com.au) or to the AFTRS site (www.aftrs.edu.au) can view the show, and download it if they please. She is untroubled by copyright issues.

"It's such terrible quality and low resolution," she said. "If people want the Charlie Chan CD they have to walk into a shop and buy it."

● Today *The Weekend Australian* launches a new eight-page section, *Syte*, devoted to multimedia and the Internet. Visit The Australian On-Line (<http://www.australian.aust.com>) for links to *Syte*'s hottest sites on the Web, as well as news, special features and jobs.