



Indian Ocean Arts Festival 1979 Perth, Western Australia 22 September - 6 October

The INDIAN OCEAN ARTS FESTIVAL forms part of the Australia-wide activities associated with the INTERNATIONAL MUSIC COUNCIL OF UNESCO 18TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND WORLD MUSIC WEEK.

THE INTERNATIONAL MUSIC COUNCIL (IMC) is a non-governmental organisation, created in 1949, in consultative status with UNESCO. The Council acts principally through sixty-four national music committees and nineteen international member organisations representing all fields of musical endeavour ...

The Committee wishes to record its thanks particularly to Mrs. Peggy Holroyde (Executive Secretary) and Mrs. Janet Walters (Administrative Officer) for their outstanding work. It fell to Elizabeth Durack, O.B.E., with her talents both artistic and literary, to draw together the threads of this far-flung Festival with the production of this Souvenir Booklet.

Frank Callaway

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THE FIRST AUSTRALIA

We move on to the last chapter of the 20th century with both the world-widened and the world-shrunk perspective given to us by the eye of the satellite, and, because of this, appreciation of *global* history will increase. There will continue to be a place for the specialist but more people, and particularly young people, will stand in need of broad outlines in preference to filigree and detail.

Only a global view can answer, with any degree of satisfaction, many of our current historical conundrums.

Thus the what/who and when of human occupation of Australia swims into intelligibility when observed in contemporary sequence with Man's career generally.

Whenever a ferment for Man (or pre-man) occurred in those parts of the northern hemisphere where rapid evolutionary development was taking place radiant shock-waves oscillated globally. Whenever, as result of such ferment, numbers built up at the success points, the entire human envelope, including such places as where it was stretched attenuously and archaically, expanded accordingly.

By tracing 'Adam's' emergence — on the Anatolian Plateau, along The Levant, in the caves of Western Europe, down the river-valleys of his agrarian break-through — we can turn up corresponding dates in fossil or technical evidence of human life stirring, though punctuated by long defunct periods, way way down upon the Murray River

Pre-history, for all its opacity, follows the same pattern, albeit languorously decelerated, as recorded history.

Thus, while modern Australia was the result of disturbances in Europe brought about by industrialisation and wars, so, too, in the long dark ages of this country's pre-history, did events taking place far afield impinge 'down under'



At the time when the first tentative trickle of modern men entered Australia there may have been a few survivors of the giant ancestors of the kangaroo, the emu, the wombat and the goanna. Or the bones of these great forbears of the present day daintier models may have lain scattered around for the new comers to wonder at and for them to so pass memorially into the general fabric of myth, legend, ritual and pictorial expression that would animate the lives of all aboriginal people until the 19th century. Reference in legends to 'the great shakings' and 'the big white cold' might also indicate that men were already in Australia when the land was in a more restless state than the calm and pristine scene that presented itself to the eyes of Lieutenant James Cook and Sir Joseph Banks on that beautiful morning at Botany Bay in 1770.



Aboriginal rendering of the sequence of biological and geological event does not tally with fossil remains and the record of the rocks

It was the ancestors of man himself — super men, half man, half animal — who shaped the whole wide featureless surface of the continent, creating every detail of its entire physical geography and all the creatures that dwelt in it,



out of the flatness of the original land as it lay when they first stumbled into it. In the beginning there were no mountains and hills, no rivers and valleys, no stones and rocks, no lakes, water-holes or caves. There were no plants either. No grass, no trees, certainly no seeds, berries, nuts, lily-roots or yams. There were no birds, no fish, no reptiles. No kangaroos, emus, wombats, or 'possums. No honey ants and no honey bees.

The Spirit Ancestors made them all, shaping ideal environments for them in the course of immense journeys across the vast waste land. The earth became criss-crossed with a net-work of tracks as these Spirit Beings moved around performing their great creative work. (It was still possible as late as the 1940s to walk with aboriginal people along the identical routes followed in these first epic journeys and to see the landscape unfolding before one's eyes as the story of its shaping was recalled).

The Spirit Ancestors were huge men like the animals with which they were interchangeable. The great act of creation necessitated reproductive organs accordingly enormous and the weight of these organs weighed them down at times and caused them to rest in certain places. These became the Resting Places of the Spirit Ancestors. They punctuate the landscape and are localities feared, revered and entered only for secret and sacred reasons.

Under the shade of overhanging rocks, out of the way of the wind and rain and not too far from water, this was where they took their rest. As they slept they became impressed, or they rose while dreaming and impressed themselves, upon the surface of the rock. This image was living and so it required attention like all living creatures; but only one advanced in spiritual knowledge was eligible to restore the painting to its original clarity and at the right time of year. For an artist the act of refreshing the image of the Spirit Being had special significance — in renewing the image he renewed himself and became one with it. The spirit of the ancestor ran through him as he defined its shape and

restored its sight. The eyes were left till last so that when he saw clearly again the Spirit Ancestor could admire his freshness. The artist, keen sighted himself now, would then go on his way to perform all the other deeds of renewal that went to make up the great and all embracing, the perpetuating and the to-be-perpetuated act of creation. Tacit with the act of total creation went total and mutual possession of the created landscape. A fact too self-evident to require definition.

In spectacular 'art galleries' in western Queensland, the Kimberley region and in Arnhem Land these Spirits Ancestors can still be seen. Fading now as the life drains out of them and no one comes to give them back their strength and sight.

The Pilbara region of Western Australia is particularly rich in the form of visual expression that preceded rock painting. Literally thousands of abraded, engraved and tool-pitted rocks lie in the area. Some of the images are hardly more than cryptic symbols or doodles while others are clearly shaped forms and figures full of life and movement. Some are placed so high on rock escarpments that the artist could only have reached there with the aid of a human ladder — or supernatural assistance.

All such places and all 'art galleries' of paintings are protected by law under the Aboriginal Heritage Act which has contributed to an appreciation and awareness of Australia's pre-history both for modern Australians and the aboriginals themselves. The youngsters of the latter know nothing now of their past other than what they read in their school books. (In out-back towns today one can even see a white teacher taking a group of aboriginal children for 'a nature walk' as part of the curriculum!) Aboriginal painting upon sheets of bark, formerly a limited activity and mostly a secular pass-time for the men in the northern wet season, has now undergone a renaissance. Still using bark and traditional themes and styles but combining them with modern paints and

using a brush instead of a chewed stick, magnificent works of art are being produced and a new door has been thrown open for the release of aboriginal aesthetic talent. Although some of these 'Barks' relate to sacred themes most are anecdotal and decorative and free of fear and control of the Spirit Beings. The Voice to which these artists is now attentive emanates not from the Dreaming but from their agents in Perth, Sydney, London and New York.

The Australian government's policy is one of conservation and preservation of what remains of aboriginal life while at the same time opening doors to the future for the aboriginal people. Tremendous strides have been made over the past two decades. Australia's special ability to homogenise has been accelerated by official resolution and already this is benefitting both 'the First Australians' and those of later vintage. Development is occurring on all fronts — academically, socially and artistically. Anthropology Departments in all the universities have been extended. Special funding assists archeological research. Departments employing aboriginal advisors have been set up. More opportunities for aboriginal people to practice and propagate their traditional songs and dances opened up with the establishment of the Aboriginal Theatre Foundation. In the cities there are distribution points for the smaller traditional crafts — the carved boab nuts, carved wooden figures, bags and carrying vessels, necklaces of nuts, seeds, teeth etc. (Reference has already been made to 'the Barks' which have now achieved an international reputation).

The 'fine art' of body decoration, the full regalia and the supporting artefacts of ritual and ceremonial performances that in olden times brought the bush night to life, can nowhere be seen today unless in a contrived or a degraded form. But songs and stories of the past are still remembered and these are being collected and recorded. In the book shops innumerable publications are available dispersing knowledge and understanding while Australian museums

house splendid collections of the nation's pre-history.

Today urbanised Australians tend to idealise aboriginal people and their way of life. 'Noble Savage' is a persistent image and he is seen as the perfect example of the Conservationist. In fact, the aboriginals, in common with all noble savages, devastated natural resources to the extent of their capabilities. It was just that this capability was not very great and their numbers so small. We are only starting to learn how the reckless use of fire altered the environment and diminished animal life.

Poetic concepts aside the aboriginal way of life was an extremely hard one. Hard and disciplined beyond any point of endurance to which man would be capable of submitting today. Life span was brief, longer for the Old Men — the custodians of the lore, they would sometimes live to a great age supported by the group but for other members of the tribe life expectancy was short.

Women were old by 40. Old women, when past usefulness and mobility, would be left, mutely acquiescent, to die. Young men had to struggle to gain foot-hold and even if they survived the rigours of initiation not many made it to the top. Children were few. Infants, in times of drought, eaten. One twin and the deformed, killed at birth. Blood-letting rites in brother-bonding ceremonies resulted in many fatalities. Retribution and vendetta amounted to obsession. Prolonged drought could void thousands of square miles of country of all life including whole tribes. To prevent dehydration children were buried up to their necks in sand for hours at a time. There was no beast of burden — the neck and shoulders of the women took the load.

The survival of the tribe depended upon maximum freedom of movement for the male and survival was what life was all about. There was no such thing as Art separate and distinct. It too was part and parcel of the general struggle for survival.

This is not to say that aboriginal people were

not able to play and to rejoice at times in simple exuberance and well-being. They did so when ever possible and secular corroborees and seasonal get-togethers were enjoyed by all members of the tribe.

But they lived with threat and there was more sense of urgency and sense of time in their life than is realised. Unlike the no-beginning-and no-end of the Wheel of Hindu life, there *was* a beginning to the Dreaming and there *could* be an end — unless. The Old Men with their special knowledge of and access to the past could look back on it as an easier time — when rivers flowed longer, when water-holes were larger, when the rains came earlier, when animals were more numerous and bigger, when women were stronger, when there were less forest areas denuded by fires, when the Spirit Ancestors were more relenting and responsive. What had they left undone? What more was there to do?

By the 18th century the web of aboriginal life in Australia was stretched to breaking point. The entire world, for it was the entire world as they knew no other, and the continuance of human life upon it was dependent upon not more than a few thousand men. The population, unevenly distributed, was reckoned to be only some 250,000 — in an area of 3,000,000 sq m! Human life in pre-historic Australia may have been a wonder of skill and adaptation but it was not a great numerical success and the level of culture into which the people were trapped was self-restricting.

The 'Iron Age' was just reaching the north via the Indonesian fishing fleets which started to collect beche-de-mer there in about the 18th century. Macassans from the Celebes were making annual visits to the Kimberley and Northern Territory coast and in exchange for cooperation from the aboriginals they left them shovels with which to tend the gardens that they had sowed. As a result of this the dreaded 'shovel-nosed spear' was to make its appearance in the flanks of the cattle coming into northern Australia in the 1880s.

How long this metal may have taken to spread and what its effect might have been we will never know. In the past up-grading in material culture moved very slowly from north to south through the continent. Not much had reached Tasmania before the relic race of people living there was extinguished soon after European occupation.

The guy-lines of the taut web stretched across the continent gave first in the south east. Then one by one in a great arc south of the Tropic of Capricorn.

Badly snarled, they nevertheless held in the centre and around the north where a partial adjustment between the old tribal life and new pastoral occupation was effected.

Mainly though, the process of demise for an archaic culture was simply slowed down by the sheer size of Australia and the slow response of the northern regions to progress and development.

From the establishment of the very first colony in 1778 aboriginal life in Australia had been rendered meaningless. Initially, for the Old Men — the custodians of the lore — there was a sense of relief. Responsibility was abnegated almost too readily as they accepted or appropriated food-stuffs and the flesh of animals remote from their guardianship.

The fact that the new comers to Australia were uncaring and totally oblivious of any spiritual support-system existing in the lives of a people whose very humanity they doubted did not add to the chance for survival of a unique way of life in the longest preserve of the Stone Age on earth.

Western Australia

Western Australia is the largest state in the Commonwealth of Australia and occupies one third of the total land mass of the continent —

7,686,000 sq km (c. 3,000,000 sq m). The Indian Ocean washes Australia's entire western coastline and the Pacific its east. The Arafura Sea separates the continent from Papua New Guinea and the deep reaches of the Southern Ocean divide southern Australia from Antarctica.

The position, size and geography of Australia came only very slowly out of the wraps of theory and conjecture and barely more than 200 years ago the previous sentence could not have been written with certainty.

Yet although Australia is politically the youngest country in the Indian Ocean zone, in terms of human habitation it is archaic, and what makes this country unique is that there is nothing between prolonged occupation by a Stone Age people and very recent historical times. Australia lies at the cross roads to nowhere. Neither in the past nor today is it a transit point. Australia is a destination.

The boundary line dividing Western Australia from the rest of Australia was drawn for us by the Pope in 1494, when, in order to settle territorial disputes between Portugal and Spain, he divided the world vertically into two great hemispheres. All west of his 'Line of Demarkation' was to be forever after a Portuguese preserve and all east a Spanish. This line was to be fought over and shifted about as contention arose over the Philippines, over South America and over a dozen other places, but by a quirk of fate and cartography the 129th degree of longitude that separated 'India Meridional' from the rest of Australia has remained the boundary line to this day.

The island of Timor lies only about 280 miles from north western Australia and these shores were known to the Portuguese. In 1916 two of their cannon were found on a small island in Napier Broome Bay. One of these, dated 16th century, is now in the Maritime Museum in Fremantle. This cannon and the stories told by old seamen in Broome about the wrecks of 'Spanish galleons' seen at low tide near the Lacepede islands, may be all we will ever know

about the Portuguese having visited Western Australia.

It was a long way from Sofala.

The first recorded landing of a European on the shores of Western Australia was in 1616 when Dirk Hartog, while trying out the new direct east-then-north route to the Indies, was blown further west than was intended. He landed on Dirk Hartog Island and left an inscribed pewter plate to record the happening —

AD 1616 — on the 21st October there arrived here the ship 'Eendraght' of Amsterdam — Skipper Dirk Hartog of Amsterdam set sail for Banta on 27th.

The land he saw was referred to as New Holland from this time.

Silence. Then 72 years later William Dampier an Englishman turned up on the north west coast at Cygnet Bay. In communicative mood he remarked — 'the land is dry, sandy and destitute of water . . . and the inhabitants of this country are the miserablest people in the world'.

However there must have been something about the country that attracted him for he was back again a few years later. The Dampier Archipelago is named after him and Roebuck Bay, upon which the town of Broome is situated, commemorates his ship.

All through the 18th century many Dutch vessels came to grief on the shores of New Holland. Remains of some of these wrecks have been retrieved and these can be seen in the Maritime Museum in Fremantle.

The mysterious disappearance of Captain La Perouse — last seen sailing out of Botany Bay in 1788 — was the reason for French ships visiting the shores of New Holland. In their search for their countryman they explored and mapped the coast from Joseph Bonapart Gulf in the north to Esperance in the south. They never found La Perouse but the thought of them poking around quickened English interest who foresaw they might claim the land for France.

But Waterloo put a brake on French

expansionism and it was the English who, in 1827, planted the Union Jack on the shores of New Holland and declared it a British possession.

Two years later the Swan River Colony was founded by Captain James Stirling and a handful of settlers.

The near past of Western Australia is particularly close in 1979 when the mood is one of reflection, assessment and celebration. Western Australia has grown in just 150 years from a frail social experiment teetering on the brink of failure to become the most progressive and successful state in the Commonwealth. Not the most populous nor the most industrialised State, nevertheless Western Australia contributes per head of population in a much greater way to the national treasury than any other State because of its tremendous export industries.

Western Australia has become one of the world's great mineral producers. Port Hedland, the exit port for the iron ore, handles the biggest tonnage of shipping annually of any port in the nation. The giant refinery at Kwinana imports crude oil from the Middle East and exports the refined products to the eastern States. The production of wheat, wool, beef, dairy produce and beer is proportionally high. The great North-West Shelf project is about to release its riches to the world . . .

All such statistics would not be of great significance were it not for the fact that the 1,000,000 citizens of Western Australia enjoy a life-style unmatched anywhere in the world. Science has overcome the disadvantages of being a country that is the cross-road to nowhere while retaining all of the advantages. The Mediterranean climate is healthy and invigorating. The short wet winter is followed by a Spring wherein the whole State bursts into flower and thousands of square miles of bush country become a vast garden. And on long hot summer days Western Australians revive themselves by diving into the sweet soft salt surf of our Indian Ocean . . .

