



The final concert and, for "Orkney Wedding with Sunrise," a brief respite for pints of Murphy's for the conductor, leader and first cellist. (Picture: Alistair Peebles)



The Ola Band pictured in the Festival Club - from the left are Micky Austin, Alan Reid, Dairmid Flemming, Colin Pirie and Ian Chisholm. (Picture: Orkney Photographic)

FINAL ROUND-UP OF REVIEWS FROM THIS YEAR'S ST MAGNUS FESTIVAL

Australian Aboriginal art from the Western Desert

"Yes," said Mrs Lacey, sighing with satisfaction at having found a catchy phrase. "The song and the land are one."

"Amazing," he said. The American woman had pulled out her handkerchief and was dabbing the corners of her eyes. I thought for one moment that she was going to kiss old Stan. She knew the painting was a thing done for white men, but he had given her a glimpse of something rare and strange, and for that she was very grateful.

Mrs Lacey re-adjusted her spectacles to fill out the American Express form. Arkady waved goodbye to Stan and we heard the triumphant - rumpff - of the machine as we went out into the street.

The contemporary paintings of Aboriginal artists have taken the Western art world by storm. These artists have established themselves as modern contemporary artists and all due credit must be given to the Pier Arts Centre at Stromness for giving us the opportunity to see this work at first-hand with their St Magnus Festival exhibition. It is a further example of the centre's valuable contribution to the local community.

Thanks should also be extended to Rebecca Hossack and Colin Johnstone for making this exhibition possible.

Evaluating these strangely different works is not easy, whether in terms of modern

but their iconography reveals them to be pictograms - almost maps, representational in a tantalising way, but relatively simple to decode once the iconography had been grasped. This relates to the Aboriginal dreamtime when the ancestors traversed the land singing up the country along the songlines of Aboriginal mythology.

Originally made in the sand using natural materials and part of a far more encompassing ritual event, the present works use paint and canvas - Western materials and colours provided for them by arts co-ordinators - transposing the original paintings into a very Western form, saleable, marketable

ket. Is this a part of Western colonialism? A destruction of the essential values of an ethnic culture and imbuing it with materialist values? A salving of guilty consciences with money, turning the sacredness of the mythological icon into the sanctity of the dollar . . . "singing all the way to the bank . . .?"

These are extraordinary works of art, and very modern art as that. That their subject is "as old as the hills" is not really a contradiction, but that they are on the walls of a Western art gallery may be. Painted in acrylic colours on canvas - Westernised to a high degree - made by artists made individual and judged great by Western standards,

patronising, it assumes they are the ones being tricked, perhaps it is us?

The most sacred symbols are sometimes over-painted so we cannot see them - they are too important for the likes of us - you like our pictures, you give us paint and canvas, pay us large sums for them, swoon over them in wonder at their rootedness in everything you have destroyed in your own facile culture, wine and dine us, fly us around the world and back. All this you can do but you cannot possess and buy what is most vital - indeed, "singing all the way to the bank" with an "up yours" for a chorus line.

Or is this a real transformation - changing these ancient ritual images into a

and modern in feel, transforming their ancient icons into something we can get to grips with in our environmentally conscious age - searching for a new direction and rootedness which we have lost in our quest for material growth and progress.

Perhaps the whole process is akin to the relationship between a book and a film of a book - that actor is not your image of the character. The role is created anew, unfolding from the printed icons on the page. The film is a recreation of the book, interlinked and intertwined but essentially a new form not to be confused with the old but to be seen in relation to it. Perhaps the symbolic icon

From *The Songlines*
by Bruce Chatwin

art or anthropology. They appear to be highly abstract

form, saleable, marketable and a business worth a great deal in the Western art mar-

greatly by Western standards, is however somehow problematic.

But why not?

Why should they not be given paint and canvas to make their works? Why should they not use their skills to make money for themselves and their communities and to raise the profile of the Land Rights Movement. Why not?

Why not feel that they are yet another indigenous people being robbed of their culture, bought out by Western money, subjugated and duped by double standards, tricked and duped by some marketing ploy. But is that

inflation - changing these ancient ritual images into a modern medium and giving us a glimpse of something rare and strange with the possibility of seeing a radically different way of relating to the past and the world around us.

The works do have distinct stylistic differences both between artists and groups, e.g. the work from the Balgo Hills group and the Papunya Tula artists.

Also these new "modern" works have a distinctly different feel from the paintings on bark that are in the exhibition.

The paintings are vibrant

to it.

Perhaps the symbolic icons we see on the canvas bear this relationship to their ancestral role-models and it will be fascinating to see how this art develops in the hands of the new generation of painters.

An example of this is shown in Robert Campbell Jr's "Red Light Man." This could be a turning point for a people to discover itself in a modern Western world or perhaps something else will come along to titillate us and gobble our "plastic" and the Kangaroo will continue to dream as it had for the last 50,000 years.

Richard Welsby