

Songlines

Over 100 CD reviews

Spring 1999
£2.95/\$6.50

Journeys in world music

The art of music

So what *are* songlines?

In the first instalment of a series exploring connections between music and the visual arts, we look at a painting by **Jimmy Pike**, an Australian Aborigine and one of the country's best-known artists. His paintings depict his native land in the same symbolic way as songlines are used to evoke the Australian landscape



Janirrlangu 1: Grandfather and Grandson by Jimmy Pike Photo Rebecca Nissack Gallery

Songlines are the musical maps invented by aboriginal Australians, people who had no documents or other permanent physical records. They connect important sites: in the desert, where Jimmy comes from, songs and stories link waterholes, the very hubs of life. They can be understood as mnemonic aids as well as creative interpretations of the landforms and the species that inhabit them. Nowadays, when so many people have been displaced from their own country, they are able to call it up wherever they are by singing the songs associated with particular places. They do the same thing in their art, by painting their country.

Pat Lowe

The song/story behind Jimmy Pike's painting *Jamirtilangu 1: Grandfather and Grandson*

A boy was living with his grandfather, but the grandfather was cruel to him. He slept inside the cave, but the boy

had to sleep outside. He didn't let the boy sit by the fire. He starved the boy and kept the best food for himself. One night the grandson took the firestick and hid it away. Then he came back and stole all the food from his grandfather. When the grandfather woke up he found his grandson gone, with all the food. He was angry and followed his tracks.

The grandson went a long way and met some small animals. He picked them up from the ground and they turned into small dogs. The old man was coming along behind, singing out and swearing. When he came to where the boy was, he saw all the dogs. They were lying down, looking at him. 'Why are they watching me?' asked the old man. 'Just for fun,' said the grandson. 'Don't worry, it is safe for you to come here.' When the old man came close his grandson threw a stick towards him and shouted to the dogs, 'Get him! Get him!' The dogs grabbed the old man and killed him. They tore off his testicles which flew off a long way and turned into two rockholes. (During the rainy season the rockholes fill up with water and people drink from them.)

The story illustrates the strong connection between stories and places. ③

Jimmy Pike



Painting his country: artist Jimmy Pike with his wife Pat Lowe
Photo Rebecca Hussack Gallery