

Oz still has its wizards

WORLD

The Black Arm Band

Queen Elizabeth Hall

★★★★☆

JANE CORNWELL

PART Aboriginal soul revue, part civil rights statement, The Black Arm Band have been a huge hit in Australia, where this year's official apology to Indigenous people felt long overdue. Organisers took a huge risk bringing this sprawling 28-piece collective to London. Last night, it paid off.

Backed by strings, horns and piano, before a backdrop of often poignant film images, a wealth of Aboriginal talent sound-tracked contemporary Aboriginal life — and revealed the other side of the Lucky Country.

Here were national treasures such as bluesman Archie Roach and his wife, the deep-voiced Ruby Hunter, singer/songwriter Joey Geia, rock-reggae icon Bart Willoughby and honorary blackfella Shane Howard reprising his 1982 hit Solid Rock — Aboriginal Australia's first mainstream political anthem. And didgeridoo player Mark Atkins, circular-breathing the sound of the oldest culture on earth.

Here was new, vital talent: Dan Sultan, bashing a tambourine and leaping from growl to falsetto, and Shellie Morris, singing up the stolen generation on the glorious Swept Away.

Traditionally-painted lawman Gapanbulu Yunupingu — dancing and clapping sticks on a cover of Yothu Yindi's Treaty — underlined the spirit of reconciliation in this creative outpouring.

As Australia's Motown — and its conscience — The Black Arm Band should soon be very big indeed.



ARTS HOUSE

521 QUEENSBERRY STREET
NORTH MELBOURNE VICTORIA 3051

www.artshouse.com.au

Phone: (03) 9322 3720

Fax: (03) 9326 8349