The songman of Arnhem Land...

THREE poets sat on a remote beach in Arnhem Land.

It was raining heavily, so they were huddling in a small, corrugated iron hut belonging to one of them.

One poet toyed with aboriginal song-sticks and sang a short aboriginal song about a will-o'-the-wisp — a song of the Pitjantjatjara group of central Australia. He was Allen Ginsberg, American.

One of them listened, occasionally clapping his hands in time with the music, and looked thoughtful. He was Andrei Voznesensky, Russian.

The third experimented with a pair of small Tibetan prayer drums, and laughed a lot. He was the owner of the hut, Wandjuk Marika, a member of the Rirritjingu tribe.

There has probably never been a meeting like it.

Allen Ginsberg, one of the first of the "Beat generation" poets in the U.S., was doing his thing.

Wandjuk Marika, one of the great aboriginal songmen, didgeridoo player and artist, was mystified and amused.

Mr. Ginsberg had been itching for such a meeting — grasping for an opportunity to hear the best of what he considered the highest art.

Mr. Voznesensky and Mr. Marika, . . .

Wandjuk, Ginsberg and Voznesensky... with poetry as a common language.

From KIM LOCKWOOD in Darwin

The song was building to its climax after almost two days.

We watched and listened as the Dua women did the dance of the bees, buzzing like bees, and the dance of the seagulls, waving their arms like seagulls' wings.

The didgeridoo throbbed on, the song-sticks tapped their complicated rhythms in unison. Wandjuk, responding to questions, supplied a running commentary for the two white poets. They were fascinated.

But this was the end of the Dua ceremony and the beginning of the Yirrkala one.

We watched and listened as the Dua women did the dance of the bees, buzzing like bees, and the dance of the seagulls, waving their arms like seagulls' wings.

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For that reason it would pay a so-called sophisticated civilised community to subsidise the recording, transcription and dissemination of aboriginal songmen's knowledge.

Mr. Ginsberg said simply: "It is beautiful music."

I returned to Darwin. The famous white poets left for Cairns and the rest of the world. Wandjuk Marika went back to his beach.