

# Inuit rock music: It's exhilarating

by June I. Degnan  
for the Tundra Times

What may have been "only rock and roll" to any one else attending the outdoor concert meant far more to me. It was the ultimate in experiencing new sights and sounds.

I was in the midst of a live Inuit rock band. Never before had I ever seen or heard anything that resembled it. It was an exhilarating experience.

What was unfolding before me was in our language, the Native language of the circumpolar people. It was a prayer answered for me. To be able to hear, see and dance to these sounds was "incredibly delicious."

In America, particularly Alaska, we as Natives are considered backward, stoic and passe and because of it are put down, maligned and beaten.

But I wasn't in America. Today I was in Greenland. Here the government advocates home rule for its indigenous people. This simply means the Native Greenlandic have the right to self-determination in shaping their destiny.

They develop the policies that steer the course of their lives. Just as the music was upbeat, so were the people. Once your eyes have been opened by education, observation and travel, to compare the treatment of Alaska Natives by the government and imports, you can see the problem and feel the pain.

It is the inequality of treatment and the class discrimination that we as Natives suffer from. This did not erupt overnight. It was planned. We are the largest private landowner in this state.

We are hunters, fishermen and gatherers, non-Western and group oriented, due to the latitude and climate of our placement in this world.

By design we have been placed within a nearly uninhabitable land and have survived for centuries prior to the intervention of the dominant Western culture.

Now the plan has been made to displace us. This became evident through the passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971, when Congress mandated that our lands be placed in for-profit corporations registered in Alaska.

Congress could have granted us the settlement without strings attached, but because of the priceless status of our mineral-rich land, this was not done.

We must now wrestle with the problem of the sale of the stock in 1991. This will mean the loss of the land, since the land title and the stock are bound together to form the corporate assets.

Since we are land-rich and cash poor, many of us will sell our birth-right for a pittance of its worth and pave the way for us to become the fourth world poor.

Once we sell our corporate shares, the land goes with it. Tell me, what is the value? Selling the stock will seem like the answer. If we look with those expectations, we will be highly disappointed.

Our homeland is priceless. It is the place of our birth, where we hunt and fish. It is the only thing we have left that is ours. Some of us have been abused and maligned by the very government sent to protect us.

It will take a lot of effort, planning and solidarity to combat the negative forces coming at us. We must be sober to conquer these fears. We cannot allow anyone else to steer our future; it is far too important. We must do that for ourselves.

Responsibility and respect go hand in hand. We need to develop them both. Taking responsibility for our ac-

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## OPINION

tions will gain us world respect. It is time to get a grip on our lives.

Can we put our differences aside and fight for our very existence? I believe we can.

It took years of study and a long hard struggle to acquire the gift of knowledge I possess. I fought for blacks and women in the state of Florida, while attending college and graduate school.

I had excellent training as my parents scraped together the few dollars we earned fishing, so our

father, Frank A. Degnan, could fly to Washington, D.C., to speak to Congress on behalf of all Alaska Natives.

For those still with us, we can show our appreciation at the forthcoming AFN convention Oct. 25, 26 and 27, beginning at 9 a.m., at the Egan Convention Center in Anchorage.

We have an opportunity to save our home, land and children. No one can

do it for us. We'll have to define our priorities and work hard together to protect what we own.

With the help of God and a lot of collective cooperation, we can succeed, but only if we want to. The choice is ours. It will take hard work and planning to do this. We are worth the time and effort. We do have a prayer, of that I'm sure.