

# PAUL TRACEY

## *About Africa*

**Art Form: Music, Storytelling and Dance**  
**Style: Contemporary**  
**Culture: East, Central and Southern Africa**

### MEET THE ARTIST:

Paul Tracey was born in Durban, South Africa, where his father, Hugh - a well known ethnomusicologist - was director of the local radio station. Paul's parents separated when he was seven, and for the next ten years he attended boarding schools in England. On his return to South Africa, he learned of the immense amount of work his father had accomplished traveling throughout Eastern, Central and Southern Africa recording traditional music. His father was a font of fascinating stories and information about African culture, its songs and stories, its music and dancing. Paul worked as a chicken farmer alongside the farm foreman, a Swazi man named Simon Shabalala who gave Paul great insight into the character of Africans. At the same time, Paul was developing his show business skills and joined by his brother, Andrew, sang concerts as "The Tracey Brothers." Together they formed the nucleus of "Wait a Minim!," a musical revue that ran for seven years on four continents, including over a year on Broadway. Paul appeared in other Broadway and television shows, and in 1976 moved to Los Angeles where he has created seven different musical assembly programs, many of which reflect his international background and travels.

### ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

The one man show About Africa is an introduction to the culture of several African groups. Mr. Tracey wears a Zulu man's costume under his Sotho blanket, and starts out by singing a song from Zimbabwe. He describes his heritage of being a white person born in a predominately black country, and tells of his father's lifetime dedication to the preservation and dissemination of African music. He teaches a few words of the Zulu language and performs a short gumboot dance. Assisted by some of his father's recordings, he demonstrates several instruments, from the mbira (thumb piano) and the "talking" drum, to flutes, xylophones and the great kudu antelope horn. After a delightful story about a snake who was a doctor, he ends the performance with a question and answer period.



### PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

Using a globe or a map of the world, point out Africa. This large continent comprises more than 50 different countries. Over 1,000 different languages are spoken, each with its own local dialects, but because of the colonial period, English is the most widely understood language. French and Portuguese are second and third. Of the African languages, Swahili and Zulu are two of the most spoken. Each country has its own national flag, its own currency and its own type of government. Because most African countries became independent from the colonial powers within the past half a century, their political institutions vary considerably, some far more democratic than others.

By air from California, it takes almost 24 hours to reach Johannesburg in South Africa and when you get there your body clock will be off by ten hours. The linguistically related group "Bantu" live in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa, but not in West or Northern Africa. Within Bantu Africa, totally different cultures exist, each with its own indigenous traditions, social structures, unique music and musical instruments. Where there is wood available, you may find great drums; where there is only grass land, you'll find great singers instead. The Spanish guitar was introduced to Africa centuries ago and can now be considered an African instrument as well.

This continent is a land of many contrasts, from deserts to forests, from grass covered plains to snow covered mountains, from simple huts in villages to skyscrapers in cities. It is famous for its wildlife, and game reserves have been established to save some of the endangered species that might otherwise be

eradicated by a protein-starved populace. Poverty, illiteracy, wars, starvation and disease are still unfortunate realities of life in Africa, starkly contrasting with the rich cultures of its people.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- When the drum music was being played, where did you feel the vibrations in your body?
- Do you remember the Zulu words that Mr. Tracey taught? (*Sabona* - hello; *Kunjani?* - How are you? *Sikona* - I'm all right; *Hamba Gahle* - goodbye.)
- Is Mr. Tracey an African, or an African-American, or something else?
- Would you like to travel to Africa yourself? Why or why not?
- In the story of Nyangara, the python, why do you think the children were braver than the men?

## FRAMEWORK FOCUS - HISTORY/SOC. STUDIES:

Design your own version of a traditional Zulu village. Here are some questions to help you as you think about designing your village plan. Where is the best spot to put the chief's beehive hut? Where will you place the huts for his close family members and the huts for the "Sangoma" (the Spiritual Healer) and the "Inyanga" (the medicinal healer who prepares "muti" medicines) and the rest of the villagers? Where will you put the cooking hut and the storage bins for the corn? Where will you find the wattle trees that can supply the branches to make the huts' framework and where can the people cut the tall grass to make the thatching straw that covers these dome shaped structures? Where are the fields? Where will you find the cow dung that covers the floors? (Surprisingly, cow dung makes a wonderful, non-offensive, antiseptic surface.) Will there be a stream nearby where the clothes can be washed? Does the path to the river zig-zag down the hill? Water is needed for cooking; will it be far for the women to carry those heavy 10 gallon buckets on their heads back up to the village? Are there trees for shade when the women pound the corn, do their beadwork or work on each other's elaborate hair styles? Where will the corral be placed so the valuable herd of cattle can be safe at night? Will the young cattle herder boys have dogs to help them? Where will the children play? Where will they practice balancing pots on their heads (this is how they carry heavy things)? Is there a special arena set aside for traditional Zulu dancing and music and for religious ceremonies?

- Legend:
- 🌀 Artistic perception
  - ❖ Creative expression
  - ▶ Historical & cultural context
  - 📖 Aesthetic valuing
  - \* Connections, Relations, Applications

## ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- ❖ You saw Paul do a few steps of a "Gum Boot Dance," stamping, slapping his boots, clicking them together, clapping his hands and whistling. Create your own rhythmic dance using these elements. This is not supposed to be a solo dance; have several classmates learn your choreography and perform it in unison.
- ▶ Look at a map of Africa. How many countries can you find that end with the letter "A"? Make a list and compare it with classmates.
- 🌀 Africans make effective musical instruments out of whatever materials they find in their environment. Make a simple xylophone from discarded broom or mop handles. Remember to support the notes 2/9th the way down (if your note is 9 inches long, at the 2 inch and 7 inch spot.) Higher notes will be shorter. For accurate tuning, remove wood from the middle section to lower the note, or from the ends to raise the note.

- \* Beadwork has been practiced in Africa for centuries. However, they work only with a thread and needle rather than weaving on a loom. Traditional style Zulu beadwork is based on diagonal patterns because the second row of beads ends up diagonally below the first.



Using grid paper, draw a simple picture of a person, house or flower using only diagonal and horizontal lines.

## SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

*Making Musical Things* by Ann Wiseman  
*Homemade Musical Instruments* by Tom Keynton  
Tracey, Hugh. *The Lion on the Path*, published by Paul Tracey (more information at the website below)  
<http://www.paultracey.org/>

## VOCABULARY

### PAUL TRACEY - ABOUT AFRICA

- *Hamba gahle:* the Zulu words meaning "Goodbye."
- *Kalimba:* a modern version of the uniquely African musical instrument, mbira, commonly known as "thumb piano"
- *Kunjani:* the Zulu word meaning "How are you?"
- *Musical revue:* a stage entertainment without a story line
- *Sabona:* the Zulu word meaning "Hello"
- *Sikona:* the Zulu word meaning "I'm all right!"
- *Sotho:* (pronounced Sutu) an ethnic group based in Lesotho
- *Swahili:* a lingua franca spoken in East Africa
- *Swazi:* an ethnic group based in Swaziland
- *Zimbabwe:* a country in Southern Africa formerly called "Southern Rhodesia"
- *Zulu:* a large ethnic group based in Zululand, near Durban, South Africa

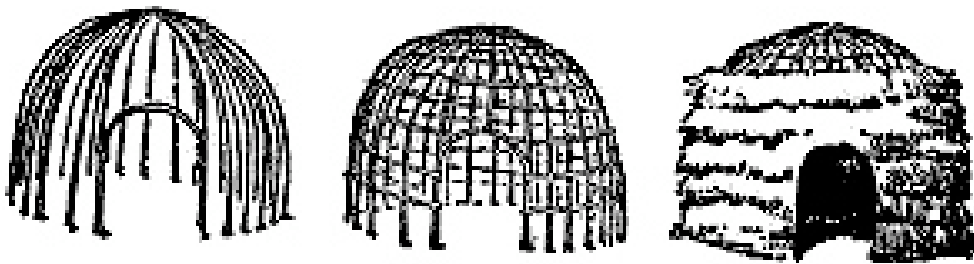


Illustration of a traditional Zulu grass hut  
from *Scouting for Boys*