

Vumani Bo! Align Yourself!

Pre-task: Valuing African Music Heritage

Geoff Tracey is a musician, storyteller and sangoma, who comes from a well-respected family of African music collectors. He grew up surrounded by musicians from all over Africa and other parts of the world so Geoff has a deep knowledge and appreciation of a wide variety of musical styles, instruments and performance philosophies. He is especially influenced by forms from southern Africa, including the mbira dzavadzimu or thumb piano of Zimbabwe and the timbila xylophone orchestras of Mozambique.

Geoff's grandfather, the late Hugh Tracey is known for having established one of the greatest collections of African music recordings and instruments in the world, the International Library of African Music (ILAM). Associated with the university currently known as Rhodes (UCKAR) in Makhanda, this collection features thousands of audio recordings and hundreds of musical instruments from across the African continent, much of it personally collected by Hugh and his team. ILAM is an immensely valuable site for research and education, regarding collection, preservation and repatriation of African musical forms. It includes a fast-growing, indigenous southern African music performance curriculum. Hugh's son, Geoff's father, Andrew Tracey is a well-respected performer and educator of indigenous southern African musical repertoires in his own right. He has been an important figure associated with ILAM for a long time.

ILAM is associated with the field of Ethnomusicology, which is the study of music within a social and cultural context. While it has problematic origins deeply connected to the history of colonialism, the field has mainly been concerned with preserving music and other parts of cultural heritage for future generations.

Geoff regards his grandfather's work about "creating a bridge between cultures", by promoting African music to European audiences as valuable and worthy of appreciation. Andrew Tracey's development of the kalimba, a version of the mbira lamellophone is more accessible to Western classically trained musicians through the inclusion of the diatonic scale. Because he recorded all this creative heritage so systematically, today we have a rich resource for understanding the lives and histories of indigenous people before colonialism eroded pre-existing cultural values of the country and, in many cases, completely erased various musical traditions. Through this resource, people have access to musics and histories that would otherwise be forgotten completely.

Geoff is a White man practising as a healer in a Zulu tradition and he also views his own work as being about "bridging cultures", by promoting, in his case, the musical, medical and spiritual values of indigenous culture in a society that is quick to undermine and devalue these contributions. He wants to bring people to an

understanding and appreciation of our differences, of those stories that make us unique. He also wants us to appreciate our similarities, those stories that have the power to unite us. It is important to Geoff that we acknowledge difference, because it means we have unique skills and insights to contribute to the bigger picture and can see things that other individuals or cultures may be blind to. The important thing to Geoff is not about seeing differences as being right or wrong, but as parts of a whole. If we can see difference and even conflict as a creative opportunity, then we can manifest something new in the world, together.

Music, of course, is especially rich in different cultural expressions working collaboratively. These elements, together, create something unique, dynamic and exciting. A new whole can be produced from all these parts, often a whole new future in music.

Now for some exercises:

1) Activity: Archive experiment

Music usually plays a significant role in the lives of people, whether they are musicians or not. Certain kinds of music are attached to strong memories and emotions. Why don't you experiment with making your own mini archive by using the video and/or voice recorder on your phone? You can start by asking three or more older people in your family or community (e.g. parents, aunts or uncles, grandparents, etc.) about what kind of music they played or listened to, when they were growing up. If your phone has a video editor, try putting the videos together to create a mini documentary.

NB: Always ask permission from interviewees before recording and sharing anything of theirs. Some people may not be comfortable about being recorded on video, in which case the voice recorder is handy. Tip: You can make someone more comfortable by explaining why you want to interview them and letting them have a say in how they are represented, e.g. you could let them choose the recording location, and what information is shared with others afterwards.

Consider asking them questions about the role of music in their lives, such as:

- Do they have a favourite artist or favourite song that they grew up with?
- Do they have any strong memories attached to this music?
- Where and how did they play or listen to this music? For example, was it at parties or maybe at church or at school? Perhaps they sang protest songs or songs of mourning? Was it on a record or cassette or was it live music?
- Can they sing any of these songs for the camera or recorder?

- What has music meant to them in their lives?
- What kinds of changes have they heard in music over the years and how does that differ from the music of their own childhood?

Reflection:

- Is there an artist or a music style talked about in the interviews that you've never heard of? Try listening to that music. You could try find it online or perhaps your interviewees still have records or cassettes or CDs of that music that they can play for you.
- Did you learn something new about your interviewees?
- What can this music tell you about the period of history it was made in?
- Were there any examples of music bringing people together, in the answers you got?