

AFRICAN NATIVE CHOIR THEATRE PROGRAMME, 1891

REFERENCE: NRO 10504/3 | SUGGESTED AGE GROUPS: KS3, KS4, LIFELONG LEARNERS | TOPIC AREAS: BLACK PRESENCE, VICTORIANS, MUSIC, CULTURE, LANGUAGE

AFRICAN NATIVE CHOIR

The African Native Choir were probably inspired by the Fisk Jubilee singers who toured Britain in the 1870s to raise funds for their African-American college.

The African Native Choir came from South Africa in 1891 with the aim of raising money for technical schools. (See the "Object of Visit" section on the front of the programme.) According to the newspaper reports about the choir's performances, a speech was usually made about the tour and its fundraising aims. The speech was given by the Manager or the Musical Director, both were of white European background.

Early in the tour they performed for Queen Victoria at Osborne on the Isle of Wight. Royal patronage increased the Choir's popularity and was often mentioned in newspaper articles about the tour.

COSTUME

There are a series of photographs that were taken to publicise the tour where the choir members are in costume (see South African History online website). It

seems as if they started wearing "native costume" part of the way through the tour.



From the newspaper interviews that the singers gave we know that most of them received Western-style educations at missionary schools. Their everyday clothing was much the same as the British audiences they performed in front of. The costumes that they adopted could be said to be a performance of “Africanness” that met the expectations of their audiences, rather than reflecting the reality of their lives as Africans.

A series of photographs were taken of the tour by the London Stereoscopic Company. Some of them are reproduced in the articles in the further online resources. A full selection can be seen on the Getty Images website.

A discussion of the costumes that the choir wore on stage and in the photographs can be found in the Jane Collins article below (and extract included).

LANGUAGE

Kaffir is an extremely offensive racial term used in South Africa to refer to non-white peoples.

The front cover of the programme lists the African nations which the performers belonged to: Amaxosa (amaXhosa), Fingo (Fenu/Mfengu), Tembu (or Thembu), Bapedi (Pedi), Bastuo (Basotho), Zulu and Cape. The inside of the programme makes little or no distinction between these groups which had their own languages and cultural heritages but refers to them as “natives”. (See further online resources for articles exploring the use of the words “kaffir” and “natives”.)

Most of the performers are listed on the programme with their initial and then their family name. The first names that are listed tend to be African. We know that many of the troupe had European first names: Eleanor Xiniwe, Paul Xiniwe and Josiah Semouse.

The singers have been grouped together according to their voice – soprano, contralto, tenor, and bass. These are classical Italian musical terms.

MEMBERS OF THE CHOIR

Eleanor and Paul Xiniwe were a married couple. In an interview given to the Illustrated London News, Paul describes how he worked hard to earn money for his education. While he was a child, he worked before and after school. At 15 he left school and started working for a telegraphy company to earn enough to go to college and become a teacher. One of the young boys on the tour, John, also had the family name Xiniwe, so seems to have been their son. Paul invested some of the family’s money into the tour.

Josiah Semouse also talked to the Illustrated London News. He sent a regular report of the tour back to a missionary newspaper in South Africa. These reports were used in the book “Music, Modernity and the Global Imagination” by Veit Ehrmann.



Charlotte Maxeke was known as Makhomo Manye on the tour. Like Paul Xiniwe, she was a teacher in South Africa. When the tour ended Charlotte returned to South Africa and continued with her education. In 1903 she became the first Black woman to earn a degree in South Africa. She also became involved in politics and helped found the Bantu Women's League which became the African National Congress Women's League in 1918.

TRANSCRIPT OF THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS INTERVIEWS

Extracts from the Illustrated London News, 29 August 1891

Paul Xiniwe

I was born in November 1857, of Christian parents. I attended school from my youth and contributed in some measure to the cost of my education by doing some domestic work for an English family before and after school hours. This materially assisted my mother in paying the school fees and for my clothing. At fifteen years of age I left school and entered the service of the Telegraph Department as a lineman having to look after the poles and wires, and to repair breakages by climbing poles in monkey-like fashion. Being transferred to the Graaff Reinet Office, 130 miles from home, I had to go there alone without any knowledge of the road, or of any person there; but I got there in three days, travelling on horseback. The officer in charge at Graaff Reinet found my handwriting better than that of the European clerks, and, in consequence, gave me his books to keep, with additional pay, and any amount of liberty in and about the office. This was a privilege which I highly valued and turned to the best advantage by studying the code-book, taking them home to pore over them at night, and coming to the office about two hours before opening time, as I kept the keys, to learn, privately, the art of telegraphy. I surprised the mater and clerks one day by telling them that I could work the instrument, and to dispel their serious doubts went through the feat to their great astonishment, but happily, also, to the pleasure of my master. After three years' service I left the post of lineman, quitted Graaff Reinet, and was employed on the railway construction as telegraph clerk, timekeeper and storekeeper: a highly respectable and responsible post of a native to hold. When I left school and home I only had a little knowledge of the "three Rs"; but I was assiduous in improving my learning and seeking to qualify myself for a higher position. I had now, earned a good sum of money on the railway, as well as a good name, as the testimonials I hold from there could show. Still desirous of greater improvement, I went to Lovedale, and held the office of telegraphist also in that institution, which helped me to pay my college fees. I stayed there two years, and passed the Government teachers' examination, being one of only two who passed from the institution out of twenty-two candidates presented. I then took charge of a school at Port Elizabeth, which I kept for four years, and which I gave up to carry on business at King William's Town, until the period of my joining the "African Choir".

Makhomo Manye



Born 7 April 1871

My father is a Basuto of the Transvaal, and my mother an Umbo, the people commonly known as Fingos. Both are Christians of the Independent Church; my father is a local preacher of that church. I was brought up at Uitenhage and at Port Elizabeth, where I got my schooling under efficient teachers, who passed me through the Government requirements of mission schools. My parents being unable to send me to one of the girls' high school, I therefore had to stay and work under mistresses. We left Port Elizabeth and came to Kimberley, where after two years or a little more, I was engaged as an assistant teacher and sewing mistress in a Wesleyan Government-aided school; there I served for a year. During my stay there, a Government Inspector visited our school and gave a favourable report of its condition; he spoke in high terms of the lower section, which was under my supervision. During my time of service in the above school, we had local concerts, in which I was the conductor's assistance and leading voice. I resigned, through unavoidable circumstances, and joined the African Choir."

Johanna Jonkers

The little I know of my parents is that they were taken captives by the Dutch which they were about twelve years of age. They were badly treated by the Dutch, till it happened that some good friends pitied my mother, and advised her to go to the town, and she was waiting outside when she met a gentleman who passed her three times that day. At last he spoke with her, and bade her come to his house. She went with him, and told him, as she reached the house, that she came from a farm-house where the Dutch people were very hard and cruel to her. The new friends who now received her, being very sorry to hear her sad story, took good care of her, and she stayed with them till she got married and had a happy life. I was born here, at Burghersdorp; my parents were Christians.

Josiah Semouse

I was born in 1860 at Mkoothering, in what is now known as one of the conquered territories (Basutoland). My parents being Christian people, I was naturally so brought up; I first attended school at a small village called Korokoro, where my father was appointed local preacher, and there I learnt to read and write my own language. Then I went to the Morija training institution, about thirty-six miles from my home. I heard from a native teacher that there is a school in Cape Colony, called Lovedale, which is famous for the practical knowledge that it imparts in its pupils. But, a few months after, war broke out between Basutoland and the Cape Colony about the order of disarmament. I took part against the British during this war, but I was not happy, because I did not know the English language then. When the war was over, which was decided in our favour, I left Basutoland for Lovedale, travelling day and night; I slept for a few



hours till the moon came out, and then pursued my course, till I reached my destination in eleven days, the whole distance being about 400 miles. At Lovedale I received both education and civilisation; then one day, in March 1886, the principal of the college received a telegram from Kimberley to say that there was a vacancy in the office there for an honest, educated young man. I was sent to fill up the vacancy, and I remained there till the end of March 1891, when I received an esteemed offer from the manager of the African Choir to join the choir for England. We left Kimberley on April 10, and called at several towns as we proceeded. On May 20 we embarked at Capetown in the Warwick Castle; during the first two days we were sea-sick, but I was the first one to get over it, and I became a general servant of the choir till they all got better, I had a pleasant voyage till we landed on the English shore on June 13. In England, I was very much surprised by many things. The trains running at the tops of the houses in London, much faster than railway trains to in South African, especially struck my notice. Wandering about this big city, which seems endless, I admired St Paul's Cathedral and the Houses of Parliament; I have visited the British Museum, the South Kensington Museums, the Zoological Gardens, the Crystal Palace, and other places. What I have see here is more than all I had every heard of before. I am the correspondent of a Basuto paper, but I doubt whether its readers will believe the reports in my writing, as everything is so wonderful here.

EXTRACT FROM UMUNTU, NGUMUNTU, NGABANTU: THE STORY OF THE AFRICAN CHOIR

Extract from Collins, Jane (2007) *Umuntu, ngumuntu, ngabantu: the story of the African choir*. *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 27 (2). pp. 95-114. ISSN 14682761

However, as Erlmann reveals (pp. 103–104), this is a construction of the 'native' tailored to appeal to the Victorian audience and bearing little resemblance to clothes as worn in Africa. Many of the Choir are wearing woollen blankets, European imports to Africa as part of the trade in manufactured goods. They were gradually adopted in South Africa through the nineteenth century and, for the wearers, signified a very complex relationship with modernity, as much a sign of protest as one of acquiescence. A semiotic system is in operation between the members of the Choir themselves, which would not have been read by Europeans. There are other incongruities in this 'generic' African folk costume. The beads worn by some of the women closely resemble Victorian costume jewellery; the woman in the middle appears to be wearing some sort of western gown. Could it be that this 'bricolage of Victorian and African sartorial elements', to use Erlmann's phrase, demonstrates that 'the performers, like many other Africans involved in the emerging international show business', as Annie E. Coombes suggests, 'knowingly exploited a presentation of self and identity which re-appropriated and transformed anticipated western assumptions about the African and Africa and which was calculated to have a particular effect in Britain' (Coombes: 107)?

Collins refers to Veit Erlmann's book "Music, Modernity, and the Global Imagination. South Africa and the West" Oxford University Press, 1999.



OTHER ONLINE RESOURCES

FIKJ JUBILEE SINGERS

African Stories in Hull and East Yorkshire website, page about the Fisk Jubilee Singers: <https://www.africansinyorkshireproject.com/fisk-jubilee-singers-part-one.html>

Tennessean website, page about 2015 tour of Jubilee Fisk Singers to England, includes history of the group: <https://eu.tennessean.com/story/entertainment/music/2015/05/21/years-later-fisk-jubilee-singers-return-england/27673883/>

Connecting Histories (West Midlands) website, page with scanned advertisement for Fisk Jubilee Singers and history: <https://www.search.connectinghistories.org.uk/details.aspx?ResourceID=1037&ExhibitionPage=2&ExhibitionID=407&SearchType=2&ThemeID=230>

Guardian website, article about Fisk Jubilee Singers: <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2019/mar/18/spiritual-journey-fisk-jubilee-singers-gospel-freedom-song>

AFRICAN NATIVE CHOIR

South African History Online website, page about Native African Choir: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/south-african-choirs-pathbreaking-tour-1891-1893-martin-plaut-6-january-2017>

University of the Arts London, pdf article “Umuntu, ngumuntu, ngabantu: the story of the African choir” by Jane Collins: https://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/id/eprint/1928/1/Jane_Collins_Africa_Choir_2007.pdf

Mail and Guardian (South African newspaper) website, article about exhibition <https://mg.co.za/article/2017-08-11-00-portraits-of-the-small-histories-that-define-big-ones/>

YouTube website, film of exhibition of photographs and music “Cuius! The African Choir 1891 Re-imagined”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOBJtrKP4iM>

The Guardian newspaper website, page of early photographs of Black people (including African Native Choir): <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2014/sep/15/hidden-histories-the-first-black-people-photographed-in-britain-in-pictures>

CHARLOTTE MAXEKE (MAKHOMO MANYE)



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South African History online, page about Charlotte Maxeke: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/charlotte-nee-manye-maxeke>

The Heritage Portal website, page about Charlotte Maxeke: <http://www.theheritageportal.co.za/article/remarkable-life-charlotte-maxeke>

National Museum (South Africa) Publications website, page with article about Charlotte Maxeke: <https://nationalmuseumpublications.co.za/charlotte-maxeke-1872-1939-mother-of-black-freedom-in-south-africa/>

British Newspaper Archive website (subscription), includes Illustrated London News: <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>

LANGUAGE

Guardian Newspaper website, article “What about the K word?” about the use of the word “kaffir” in South Africa:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/nov/28/whataboutthekword>

Jaspan, M. A., and B. Nomvete. “On the Use of the Terms ‘Kaffir,’ ‘Native,’ and ‘Bantu.’” *Science & Society*, vol. 19, no. 4, 1955, pp. 343–345. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/40400366 Accessed 30 Apr. 2021.

(This is a subscription website, but articles can be accessed online for free.)

PHOTOGRAPHS OF AFRICAN NATIVE CHOIR

Getty images website, photographs of the African Native Choir:

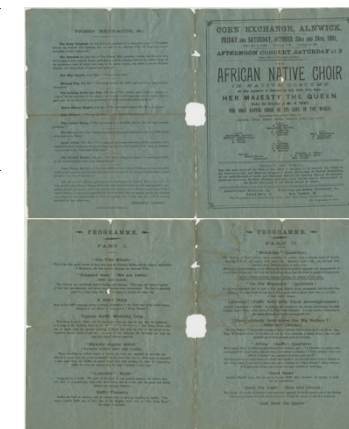
<https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/search/photographer?assettype=image&events=775589940&family=editorial&photographer=London%20Stereoscopic%20Company&phrase=african%20choir&sort=best#license>



LEARNING ACTIVITIES: AFRICAN NATIVE CHOIR THEATRE PROGRAMME, 1891

TOPIC: BLACK PRESENCE, VICTORIANS, MUSIC, CULTURE, LANGUAGE

SUBJECT AREAS: HISTORY, LITERACY



Background	Activity	Resources
<p>The African Native Choir were probably inspired by the Fisk Jubilee singers who toured Britain in the 1870s to raise funds for their African-American college.</p> <p>The African Native Choir came from South Africa in 1891 with the aim of raising money for technical schools. (See the “Object of Visit” section on the front of the programme.)</p> <p>According to the newspaper reports about the choir’s performances, a speech was usually made about the tour and its fundraising aims. The speech was given by the Manager or</p>	<p>See: What is this a theatre programme for?</p> <p>See: Where were the African Native Choir performing?</p> <p>See: When was the performance taking place?</p> <p>See: What were the names of the members of the choir?</p> <p>See: What was the aim of the performance?</p> <hr/> <p>Think: Why are most of the choir members listed by their first initial and last name?</p> <p>Think: Why are only those Choir members with an African first name listed by their full name?</p> <p>Think: What impression do you think the programme aimed to give by not including European names?</p>	<p>https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/search/photographer?assettype=image&events=775589940&family=editorial&photographer=London%20Stereoscopic%20Company&phrase=african%20choir&sort=best#license</p> <p>https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/south-african-choirs-pathbreaking-tour-1891-1893-martin-plaut-6-january-2017</p> <p>https://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/id/eprint/1928/1/Jane Collins Africa Choir 2007.pdf</p>



the Musical Director, both were of white European background.

Think: How might the performers who were listed by their first initial and last name have felt about not having their full name included on the programme?

Think: How might the performers whose full names were listed have felt about how their name appeared on the programme?

Think: How important is someone’s name? How does it connect to their identity?

Think: What does your name say about you?

Think: How would you feel if your name was used to highlight an “otherness”?

Think: How would you feel if you were addressed by your initial to hide something about you or your name?

Think: What ideas or expectations might a Victorian British audience have had about an African Choir?

Think: Why did the Manager or Musical Director, who were of white European background, give a speech at the beginning of the performance?

Think: What does having a white Manager or Musical Director speak on behalf of the choir imply about power dynamics?

Think: How much of an input do you think the members of the choir had about what they performed and how they were presented?

Think: What is performative culture?

<https://mg.co.za/article/2017-08-11-00-portraits-of-the-small-histories-that-define-big-ones/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOBJtrKP4iM>



Think: How do you think the audience responded to the choir?

Think: How can we embrace culture in performance without it coming across as a novelty?

Think: Do performances of culture for novelty take place in Britain today? Consider traditional music festivals, etc.

Think: Do performances of traditional culture to a modern audience still represent that culture today? E.g., Does traditional Morris dancing represent British culture today?

Do: Begin by reading the press extracts and reviews before reading the context to this document. What do you think the extracts are about?

Do: Analyse the language used in the press extracts. What can you infer from the language choices?

Do: Read the extract from the Evening News and Post 3rd July. What does the tone and choice of language in this extract imply about attitudes towards the performers?

Do: Compare the press extracts to each other. Are there any recurring words or themes used in each of the extracts? Are there any that stand out as giving a different message or impression?

Do: Compare the press extracts to newspaper articles about minority groups in Britain today. Are there any similarities in a way these groups of people are written about?



	<p>Do: Look at the list of songs/dances and the descriptions of each performance. What impression does this give of the performers?</p> <p>Do: Discuss how a sense of “otherness” is portrayed through the document?</p> <p>Do: Look at the photographs of the African Native Choir on the Getty website. How are the performers dressed? What impressions do their outfits give?</p> <p>Do: Discuss how wearing costumes and emphasising “Africanisms” was adopted to meet the expectations of a Victorian British audience.</p> <p>Do: Discuss whether you think the African Native Choir presented an accurate depiction of themselves and their culture. Use evidence to back up your discussion.</p>	
<p>Eleanor and Paul Xiniwe were a married couple. In an interview given to the Illustrated London News, Paul describes how he worked hard to earn money for his education. While he was a child, he worked before and after school. At 15 he left school and started working for a telegraphy company to earn enough to go to college and become a teacher. One of the young boys on the tour, John, also had the family name Xiniwe, so seems to</p>	<p>See: Which members of the choir were interviewed by the Illustrated London News?</p> <p>See: How were Eleanor and Paul Xiniwe related?</p> <p>See: How did Paul fund his education?</p> <p>See: Which profession did both Paul Xiniwe and Charlotte Maxeke have?</p> <p>See: How did Josiah Semouse record the tour?</p> <p>See: Which League did Charlotte help found?</p> <hr/> <p>Think: What are stereotypes?</p>	<p>https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/xhosa</p> <p>https://www.southafrica.net/za/en/travel/article/xhosa-culture-the-clans-and-customs</p> <p>https://www.britannica.com/topic/Mfengu</p> <p>https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tembu</p> <p>https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pedi</p> <p>https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sotho</p>



<p>have been their son. Paul invested some of the family’s money into the tour.</p> <p>Josiah Semouse also talked to the Illustrated London News. He sent a regular report of the tour back to a missionary newspaper in South Africa. These reports were used in the book “Music, Modernity and the Global Imagination” by Veit Ehrmann.</p> <p>Charlotte Maxeke was know as Makhomo Manye on the tour. Like Paul Xiniwe, she was a teacher in South Africa. When the tour ended she married Marshall Maxeke and became involved in politics. She helped found the Bantu Women’s League which became the African National Congress Women’s League in 1918.</p>	<p>Think: How are stereotypes developed?</p> <p>Think: How is prejudice shown through stereotyping?</p> <p>Think: What was the aim of interviewing members of the choir?</p> <p>Think: What stereotypes might British people have had about South African people at this time?</p> <p>Think: Do the interviews dispel or corroborate these stereotypes?</p> <p>Think: Does the programme promote stereotypes?</p> <p>Think: How do the interviews with members of the choir compare to the press extracts about the choir? Do they give the same impression?</p>	<p>https://www.southafrica.net/za/en/travel/article/the-culture-of-basotho-history-people-clothing-and-food</p> <p>https://www.britannica.com/topic/Zulu</p> <p>https://www.sahistory.org.za/people/charlotte-nee-manye-maxeke</p> <p>https://digital.library.cornell.edu/catalog/ss:3293793</p> <p>https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2006/nov/28/whataboutthekword</p> <p>https://www.jstor.org/stable/40400366</p>
<p>Do: Read the interviews with members of the African Native Choir. What can you learn about each of the members of the choir based on their interviews?</p> <p>Do: Read the interviews with members of the African Native Choir. Are any attitudes towards British culture and the British Empire shown?</p> <p>Do: Create a map showing each of the places mentioned in the interviews.</p> <p>Do: Research each of the tribes mentioned on the programme. Create a map showing the location of each mentioned tribe in South Africa.</p>		



Do: Create a profile for each of the tribes to highlight each of their individual cultures and practices.

Do: Compare your profile with each tribe to the information included on the programme. How well does the programme represent the members' individual cultures?

Do: Using the resource links provided and the interviews, research members of the choir. Can you build up biographies for the members of the choir?

Do: Discuss the stereotypes of African people depicted in the programme. What other stereotypes might British people have had of African people at the time? Why did they have this stereotype?

Do: Look at the Imperial Federation map of the world showing the British Empire in 1886. What stereotypes of members of the British Empire are illustrated on the map?

Do: Think about where you live. What stereotypes are associated with the area?

Do: Think about the U.K. What stereotypes do the rest of the world associate with it? Why do people have this image? How accurate is it?

Do: Discuss the use of the words "kaffir" and "native". Why do these words appear on the programme? What do the use of these words say about attitudes towards people of African descent?

Do: Discuss whether words used in the past, such as "kaffir", were ever excusable or if they have always been unacceptable.



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	<p>Do: Discuss how using terms such as “kaffir” emphasised “otherness” of people of African descent.</p> <p>Do: Discuss which terms should be used today to refer to Black people and people of African descent.</p>	
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