

PAUL TRACEY

Song Savvy

Art Form: Music
Style: Contemporary
Culture: Anglo/American

MEET THE ARTIST:

Music and songs have been important in **Paul Tracey's** life since he was a child. He was fortunate to be part of a musical family - folk music on his father's side and classical music on his mother's. His formal study of music began in England when he was eight. He attended British boarding schools where he had the opportunity to take voice lessons and join the school choir. The choir sang hymns and psalms in the small village church next to his school. Paul's natural talent, which was being developed and refined, soon led him to sing the solo parts. At age fourteen, his brother gave him a used guitar, so Paul got a book and taught himself to play it and accompany himself as he sang. At age 22 he collaborated with his brother and a few others to create a musical revue called "Wait a Minim!" - a stage production based on the folk music of many nations. The show ran internationally for seven years, including a year on Broadway. However, it was the birth of his daughter that inspired Paul to begin writing his own songs which have been heard on "The Tonight Show" and "The Muppet Show," as well as in hundreds of schools for the past 25 years. The California Alliance for Arts Education gave Paul their Lifetime Achievement Award in 1996.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

In Song Savvy, students learn about songwriting and also witness a seasoned performer in action. The performance presents the particular elements that Paul Tracey uses in his songwriting. Each element is illustrated through selected songs, performed with wit and skilled musicality. Paul acknowledges that there are many ways to write songs, but focuses on the particular elements he uses in his style of songwriting, emphasizing that you have to know a subject to write a song about it.



Throughout the performance Paul sings a variety of songs, each highlighting a specific element including lyric composition, rhyming, melody, rhythm, scansion, repetition, humor, surprise and contrast. From the imaginative "Upside Down Song" to the hilarious "Dog Walk," he guides the audience through an amazing musical journey offering insights into lyrics, music and self-expression.

PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

Here are some elements of songwriting that Paul will introduce in the performance:

- Lyric composition - putting words to music
- Rhyming - words that have similar ending sounds
- Melody - rhythmical succession of musical tones
- Rhythm - distinctive grouping of sounds/silences in time
- Scansion - words in a rhythm
- Repetition - repeating words or melody for emphasis
- Humor - telling about the amusing side of things
- Surprise - the unexpected
- Contrast - sharp differences or opposites

Singing has been a part of most cultures since the time of early man. Songs were sung to comfort babies, tell about a hunt or other important event, express sadness and happiness, communicate with gods and spirits, record history and to entertain. A songwriter usually has a strong musical background and an ability to express thoughts and feelings through language. However, there are many songwriting teams consisting of one partner who is a musician and the other the lyricist. A good test of a melody is whether or not you can easily whistle it.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Can you name some of the elements of songwriting that Paul Tracey demonstrated? (Refer to 'Preparing for the Experience')
- Which of the songs did you like best? Why?
- If you want to write a song, what is the most important thing to do when choosing your topic? (Answers: think about something you know well and brainstorm ideas)
- What subject do you know more about than anyone else that you could write lyrics about? (Answers: your pet, a family experience, your best friend, etc.)
- What skills did Paul Tracey need in order to perform "The Dog Song?" (Answers: different accents, ability to act like both the dog and the owner, singing lyrics very fast, breathing correctly, coordinating the guitar, singing and acting)

FRAMEWORK FOCUS - LANGUAGE ARTS:

Language is central to our cultures. Words allow people to communicate ideas and express feelings. When words are put into a song, they are called lyrics, and when you give lyrics a rhythm, it's called scanning. Rhyme is also a big part of songwriting - poems don't always rhyme, but songs usually do.

A song structure could go like this:

Da de, da de, here's the plan
Da de, da de, ought to scan
Da de, da de, now's the time,
Da de, da de, ending rhyme.

Suppose you want to write a song about your cat. Use the rhyming formula to fill in your own lyrics. Take out the "da de, da de's" and put in your own words that have the same rhythm as the da de, da de, so that they scan with the rhyming words at the end. First, make a Word Web with the word "CAT." Then write down all the words that come to mind including colors, actions, feelings, etc., e.g. 'purr' and

'fur' rhyme and so do 'claw' and 'paw.' These are the words that will end the lines. Now find things you want to say about your cat for the beginning and middle parts. When music is added, the lyrics will have an enhanced ability to communicate.

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- ❖ Take a nursery rhyme and substitute new rhyming words for the original ones, e.g.:
Humpty Dumpty sat in a chair
Humpty Dumpty didn't know where.
When he found out, it was too late,
He was all scrambled on somebody's plate.
- 🌀 Take a song you know and like. Analyze it to see if it has the following: a clear theme, rhyming words, melody, rhythm, scansion, humor and contrast.
- ❖ Paul sang a song about a Fairy Godfather who granted three wishes. Think of what you would ask for if you were granted three wishes. Why?
- ❖ Take one or two of the ideas from the "Upside Down Song" and create a drawing or painting to illustrate them. Here are some choices: men grow scales along their long tails, fish grow most beautiful hair, animals fly through the air, people are in the cages at the zoo and are visited by the animals, people are cold when they're hot, old people get younger until they're young enough to be born.

Legend:

- 🌀 Artistic perception
- ❖ Creative expression
- ▶ Historical & cultural context
- ☰ Aesthetic valuing
- * Connections, Relations, Applications

SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

Wood, Clement. *Rhyming Dictionary*. The World Publishing Company, New York, NY: Sixteenth Printing, 1971.

Kasha, Al and Hirschhorn, Joel. *You Can Write a Song*. A Fireside Book, Published by Simon & Schuster, New York, NY: 1990.

<http://www.paultracey.org/>

An excerpt of original sheet music from the "Yucky Song," written by Paul Tracey.

ALSO
Cajun-style 2 x 4 (4/4)

YUCKY SONG words + music by Paul Tracey

Can you imagine anything as wonderful as this? A