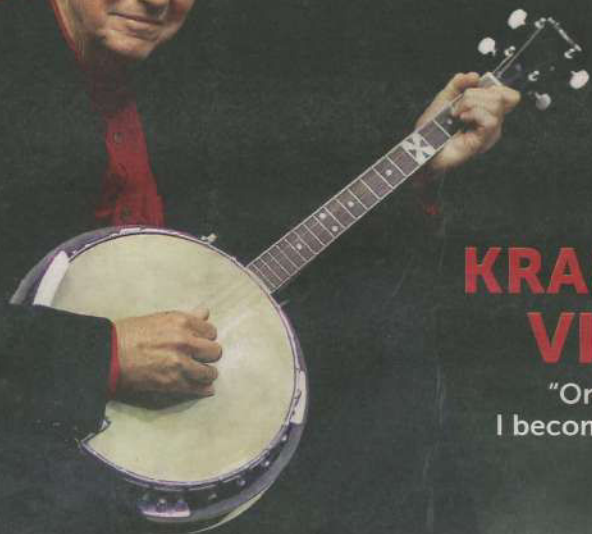


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KRAMER'S VIEW

"On stage
I become a giant"



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{ HUMOUR & BOOKS }



NDUMISO NGCOBO

On the origin of the specious

I've been quietly watching the archaic non-debate over the discovery of the *Homo naledi* fossils with a fair level of amusement.

If you think this column is my entry into that non-starter of a debate, you are forgiven. But no, I'm not interested. I've been saying for years that one of my most predominant personality disorders is that my brain is wired to always ignore the important stuff and worry about all the wrong things.

And what worries me about the bickering is the number of people who are amazed that so many presumably sane grown-ups reject not only *Homo naledi* but also the overwhelming body of fossil evidence amassed by palaeontologists over the past 200 years or so — based on the fuzzy feeling that "I'm no grandchild of any ape or monkey".

What fascinates me, though, is the number of people who expressed surprise that a "learned man like Dr Mathole Motshekga would hold such ill-informed views". Hub?

Even more intriguing is that they went on to enumerate the degrees Dr Motshekga holds: BJuris, LLB, LL.M, LL.D, and so on. All of them are law degrees and should ostensibly make Dr Motshekga appreciate the nuances and intricacies of elementary biology, genetics and Darwin's theory of evolution and natural selection, yes?

The fact that Dr Motshekga had no business making public pronouncements about scientific matters is neither here nor there for me. The man is entitled to his opinions the same way that I'm entitled to

uttering outrageously racist gibberish and afterwards you hear things like, "I've worked with Mrs G for over 15 years. She is the kindest, most considerate and giving colleague I have ever worked with. I would never have thought she had a racist bone in her body."

Whoopi Goldberg said something similar about Mel Gibson after he was recorded wishing that his ex would be sexually assaulted by a "pack of n****ers". Why? Because I suspect he was kind and charming each time she met him.

Some of the worst racists I have encountered were also some of the kindest, most compassionate and God-fearing folks I've ever met. Clearly, kindness and racism are not mutually exclusive attributes. They are not linked genes in the mould of blue eyes and blonde hair. It makes about as much sense as observing, "I cannot believe that a man that tall can sing so well". The one thing has nothing to do with the other.

But this is who we are: a desperately-seeking-patterns bunch. For instance: folks in suits and laptop bags are to be trusted and people in jeans, Mohawk haircuts and sneakers are hoodlums. This is despite all the evidence to the contrary. I don't know about you, but 90% of people who have stolen money from me have been "decent" people in suits, working from high-rise, air-conditioned offices. These are the people we should be most sceptical of.

It is a collective psychological disorder, perhaps the cognitive dissonance Leon Festinger wrote about at length. We generally simply discard all information that does not fit in with what we have already

"decided" and keep on cherishing our delusions.

It is for this reason that I am happy that the numerous delusions I harbour do not extend to political affiliation. Political affiliations will convince most DA members there is something wrong with all ANC members due to some inherent "ANCness" in the party, and vice versa. EFF members generally just wish everyone else would shut up so that they can be "educated".

We simply discard all information that does not fit in with what we have already decided

I'm glad my delusions are confined almost exclusively to sporting allegiances (Orlando Pirates, Manchester United and Floyd Mayweather opponents suck). That, and my insistence that men who wear boxers are superior to the disgusting men who wear briefs.

But back to where we started: the good doctor without any ape ancestors. I don't think any connection should be made between his academic qualifications and his opinions about fossils. That makes as much sense as the connection that spawned dartboards in pubs. Clearly, society thinks it makes sense that inebriated folks should be throwing miniature spears inside a crowded space filled with other sloshed people. **LS**

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It makes about as much sense as observing, I cannot believe that a man that tall can sing so well!

my opinions about Nasa's choice of radioisotope thermoelectric generator for the Mars-bound Curiosity Rover of 2012 based on my excellent credentials as an avid *Star Trek* viewer.

I'm just intrigued that people were surprised when the good doctor predictably sounded like he was plucked out of the year 1834 as he went about his rants. Extending that logic, you might as well expect that since Pope Francis seems like a learned man, he should be able to offer intelligent thoughts on which iconic rap album had better lyrical content: *Illmatic* by Nas or Tupac's *All Eyez on Me*.

I see this type of thinking all the time and I'm not immune to it myself. That's because the human brain is wired in such a way as to seek patterns even where there aren't any. After all, how many times has there been some scandal about someone

book bites

The Improbability of Love ★★★★★
Hannah Rothschild (Bloomsbury, R350)

BOOK life



A book that presents itself, at first, as an easy, predictable read: "Girl finds picture, picture turns out to be worth a fortune, girl finds boy with a heart." But this crime caper has more layers than an ornate trifle. There are lessons in art history, World War 2 ghosts, heartbreak

and vile deeds. Food slips in, becoming a major plot point. The large and eclectic cast of characters includes the painting. Full of spunk, vanity and observations collected during its 300 years, the masterpiece has no qualms about telling readers to "piss off". I grew rather fond of the audacious chap. — *Trah Beautement @ms_tiahmarie*

My Life: It's a Long Story ★★★★★

Willie Nelson (Little, Brown, R305)

BOOK buff



Willie Nelson has plenty of experiences to draw from as he crafts his four-score-and-two epic bio with warmth and wit. One of the many parts of his past that Nelson makes no apology for (along with less-than-diligent marital fidelity, heavy drinking and an ongoing devotion to dagga) is listing the songs that influenced

his own writing and the enduring hits he's written. He's a paradox who's as loving as he is irresponsible, as generous as he is single-minded, and as talented as he is obstinate. This book is a "Shotgun Willie" showcase. — *Bruce Dennill @BroosDennill*

Tightrope ★★★★★

Simon Mawer (Little Brown, R310)

BOOK thrill



Simon Mawer's first novel about Marian Sutro, *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky*, was always going to be a tough act to follow, but this sequel, which moves into the Cold War and the nuclear era, is equally taut, scary and vivid, written with stylish pace and punch. Mawer delves deep into the twilight slippery world of spies and counter-spies, betrayal and

clashing passions; he reminds us of the hell of Nazi concentration camps and of the potential horrors of nuclear war; and his sultry, dangerous heroine shows once again how to be a survivor. Le Carré could hardly have done better. — *David Pike @pikedavey*

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Kramer vs. Karma

We tend to associate him with red veldskoens and quirky songs, but that is David Kramer The Performer. David Kramer The Man is so far removed from the public perception of him that it's not even funny, writes **Oliver Roberts**

Picture: Ruvan Boshoff

THIS is an article about David Kramer. Aspects of David Kramer I will not mention, or will mention only briefly, are: David Kramer as a cheeky chappy in the VW Microbus TV adverts c.1983-1996, where he was shown travelling South Africa on a wobbly bicycle, guitar slung over one shoulder and unbuttoned waistcoat flaring in the wind; the SABC's banning of his first album *Bakgat* (1980) because it was deemed rude and politically subversive; *District Six*, the hugely successful stage musical which Kramer co-wrote with Tallep Petersen; how *District Six* made Kramer and Petersen very well known; how Petersen was murdered in 2006 after he and Kramer had collaborated on a number of projects, including *Kat & the Kings*, which ran on Broadway and the West End; how funny and entertaining David Kramer is on stage.

Things about David Kramer or related trivia that you will read about in this article are: (1) *Orpheus in Africa*, the Kramer musical that opens this week in Cape Town for the second time this year; (2) How I initially thought David Kramer was a bit of an asshole and how I came to see that I'm prone to snap judgments; (3) The reason musicals can sometimes seem a

bit silly; (4) David Kramer's hat(s); (5) How serious and introverted David Kramer is in real life; (6) The awkward social moments that David Kramer's introversion sometimes leads to; (7) The loneliness of David Kramer's profession; (8) The surprising number of times in one day that David Kramer is recognised by complete strangers (and how David Kramer feels about this); and (9) What David Kramer says about what happens when you become successful.

1. *Orpheus in Africa*

Orpheus in Africa premiered at the Fugard Theatre in February and is now back by popular demand. The production tells the true story of Orpheus McAdoo and the Virginia Jubilee Singers' tour of Queen Victoria's colonies in the 1890s. McAdoo, the free-born son of a slave, graduated from The Hampton Institute of Virginia and was the first African-American impresario to perform in South Africa (back when it was a British colony). *Orpheus in Africa* also charts the evolution of African-American music, from spirituals to jazz, and includes at least 12 new songs from Kramer.

For Kramer, the second production presents a rare chance for him to improve on the first.

"It's a risky business," he says. "A musical on paper and a musical on stage are two very

different things. And we're quite spoiled in South Africa because we only ever see the tried and tested musicals that come from overseas, and those sometimes go through years of development before they even get on Broadway.

"With *Orpheus* I've had the opportunity to rework some of it, and whether or not I've improved it, the audience will decide. People will say, 'Oh, why did you change it, we loved it,' but as the author I felt we were onto something that was nearly there; it just needed another song or two, a bit of trimming. I've taken songs out and written new songs.

I saw then that he was not an asshole at all but a true gentleman

I think I've found the ending I was looking for."

2. How I initially thought David Kramer was a bit of an asshole and how I came to see that I'm prone to snap judgments

Before I met with Kramer I told publicist Allison Foat that I wanted to sit in on a rehearsal for *Orpheus* to get a feeling for what it was about. Foat said something along the lines of Kramer not liking journalists to be present at rehearsals because he'd had a bad

experience with a journalist before.

After convincing Foat that my intentions were in no way nefarious, Foat said she would "speak to David's wife" to try to persuade Kramer to concede to my request. That Foat was going through Kramer's wife made me think that Kramer was a difficult and controlling man who, having agreed to be interviewed, was now being weird about it and how the eff did he expect me to get anything decent out of the interview if I couldn't see some of the production et cetera.

Well, it turned out that the reason Kramer was reluctant for me to be there was because it was only day two of rehearsals and all that was happening was that the cast was assembling to practise a few of the songs and Kramer was concerned that this might be terribly dull for me (it wasn't).

Also, when I arrived at the rehearsal, Kramer was sitting in the centre of a circle made up of the cast and when he saw me come in not only did he stop what he was doing and introduce me to everyone, he actually got up, walked over and shook my hand. He was clearly very busy with what he was doing and he in no way had to do this but he did and I saw then that he was not an asshole at all but a true gentleman and that I am prone to snap judgments.

3. The reason musicals can sometimes seem a bit silly

You're either able to suspend your disbelief and be entertained by people bursting into song and dancing with brooms and swivelling chairs around, or you think musicals are absurd. Kramer is very aware of this.

"It's a strange mechanism that the audience accepts the concept of a musical because musicals are kind of funny in a way. But they accept it because if the song hits an emotional beat, be it comedic or tragic, going into song seems quite acceptable because it touches the emotions, and if it doesn't do that, sometimes the song feels out of place. Perhaps a lot of people are put off by musicals because of that, because it's not realistic enough."

4. David Kramer's hat(s)

Kramer started wearing hats c.1986. He reckons it was a reaction to the baseball caps that people were wearing at the time. He has always liked hats. He used to wear a Homburg but it was on a trip to New York in the late '80s that he discovered the pork pie that has now become his staple.

Kramer says there is never a time when he is not wearing his hat (except, surely, when he is in the shower?). He currently owns four hats and has owned about 20 in his life, including one that he left under his chair at a restaurant



NAUGHTY: David Kramer's first album, 'Bakgat', released in 1980, was banned by the SABC because, among other things, it mixed English and Afrikaans. Picture: JANICE HILLIER

after a show and never saw again.

5 (i). How serious and introverted David Kramer is in real life

The most striking thing about meeting Kramer for the first time is just how unlike he is to the David Kramer you've come to expect. In the rehearsal room I noticed he spoke very, very softly and was not at all funny and did not jump around or even wear a waistcoat. The only thing familiar was the pork pie hat with the rainbow-coloured feather in it.

"When I step on stage I become someone quite different; I'm very bold and confident and out there. But when you get to know me, I'm quite low-key, quite serious. I think I have a sense of humour but I don't want to be, cannot be, that persona in real life, the life and soul of the party.

"I don't want people to ... I know some people who are the same on stage and off, but I'm not one of those, I would find it exhausting. So the David Kramer I live with is much more introspective."

5 (ii) Why Kramer has this split personality thing

"When I was young and started playing guitar I was the smallest boy in the class. I grew up in the Boland and went to an Afrikaans school where rugby was the thing; you either played rugby or cricket or you didn't count at all. Things like intellect and art weren't rated, but I discovered with the guitar that I had power. When I walked onto stage it was like I became a shaman, I discovered that I had these magical powers, I could kind of hypnotise people with what I was doing.

"I found that the stage gave me licence to be something way

beyond what I was in real life. On stage I became a giant, and that was very attractive to me."

6. The awkward social moments that David Kramer's introversion sometimes leads to

When I ask whether, upon meeting Kramer for the first time, a person is expecting the guy from the Volksie ads, Kramer goes, "That happens a lot. They say, 'Where are your red shoes?', et cetera."

Does he get tired of that? "You do, you do, you do. I mean, it's lasted a long time. I'll be standing around having a drink and people come up to me and it's the first time they've seen me and then immediately it's,

'It's their moment, and it's the price you pay for success'

"Oh, there's David Kramer, and they want you to kind of be that person that they think you are, which is a TV persona and you can see they're kind of disappointed that I'm just an ordinary guy who's having a drink at the bar and, you know, I'm just trying to ... I'm not going to perform for them.

"So yes, that happens, that happens, and it's difficult for people to understand that. But it doesn't worry me because I've come to understand that for someone meeting me for the first time, it's their first time, so I try to be as pleasant as I can to them, you know, have a photograph taken, give an autograph, kind of, you know, but it happens a lot and it can become tedious but you have to keep reminding



IN CHARACTER: Kramer in the early years before pork pie hats. Picture: SUNDAY TIMES ARCHIVES

yourself, um, you know, it's their moment, it's their moment, and in some ways it's the price you pay for success."

7. The loneliness of David Kramer's profession

The essence of any creative profession, ie the actual work, tends to be done alone in a room, the creator cut off from the world and very much immersed in his/her own head. This is the reason (a) the creative person tends to be introverted or at least enjoy his/her own company to a mildly pathological degree;

(b) the creative person is sometimes difficult to live with; (c) the creative person will stand on balconies and stare out at nothing for unusually long periods of time and consider this "work"; and (d) the creative person will often suffer from a neurosis that can make them seem unsure of themselves or depressed or overly serious and this neurosis may sometimes result in self-destructive behaviour such as obsessive work habits et cetera.

"A lot of the time people who have artistic success are unlikely people because in some ways they express themselves because of some kind of damage that's been done earlier in life. So say, with me, it was like trying to prove myself in a very physical world, and I couldn't prove myself physically so I had to make my mark in some other way. It's a very lonely profession, especially comedy or comedic film or whatever. You know, ja, people see the product and confuse the process with that. If you're uncomfortable spending time with yourself, if you don't have that kind of personality, then I don't think this would be easy."

8. The unexpected number of times in one day that David

Kramer is recognised by complete strangers (and how David Kramer feels about this)

"You'd be surprised if you walked through this city with me how often I get recognised and how people will stop me. I kind of like feeling like an ordinary person occasionally but when I do something like take the bus, people will recognise me and it exposes me to being pestered — no, let's not call it that — but there's the sense that by walking through the streets I can't expect not to be stopped. In the '80s it got to a point where people camped outside my house. That was very difficult."

9. What David Kramer says about what happens when you become successful

This is because I ask Kramer whether his totally unforeseen seriousness/reticence has ever been mistaken for arrogance: "When you're successful people start saying all sorts of things about you. Ja, success breeds a certain kind of envy and jealousy and I like to think that I get along with people, but, you know, I'm quite sure that my shyness at times or whatever, is misinterpreted, so, uh, ja." Refer again to point 2. **LS**



INTROSPECTIVE: Kramer during a rehearsal of the musical 'Orpheus in Africa'. Picture: RUVAN BOSHOFF

● 'Orpheus in Africa' opens on Tuesday at the Fugard Theatre in Cape Town. Book at Computicket.