



Ethekwini Municipality's head of Museums, Sinothi Thabethe, right, looks at the exhibits at the KwaMuhle Museum. Pictures: SANDILE MAKHOBA

Preserving a rich cultural heritage

An exhibition now on at Durban's KwaMuhle museum pays tribute to the musical history of Africa, writes Mervyn Naidoo

WHEN Englishman Hugh Tracey defied colonial thinking that traditional African music was not "worthwhile" or of cultural benefit, he managed to preserve the continent's rich heritage of traditional music and instruments for generations to come.

Now an exhibition titled *For Future Generations*, which includes musical recordings produced between 1930 and 1970, is on display at Durban's KwaMuhle Museum until February.

Recordings of southern African folk music and the 20 traditional instruments, including drums, mbiras, horns, Xhosa bows and xylo-

at the organisation's headquarters in Grahamstown's Rhodes University.

His passion for African music was ignited when he relocated from Devonshire, England in 1921 to work on his older brother's tobacco plantation in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe).

Eighteen-year-old Tracey soon learnt the language of the local Karanga workers. This helped him gain a deeper understanding of the tone and tempo associated with traditional African tunes and sounds.

As his interest grew, Tracey recognised the artistic value of the music and made it his life's work to preserve this rich heritage for future gener-

record) series comprising 218 traditional music albums, Tracey referred to their misgivings.

"At the time the public showed little interest in African music and did not understand why I consistently stressed the social and artistic value of the music for future generations of Africa," said Tracey.

His recording technique was to hold a microphone in one hand and a stopwatch in the other. During the recording of songs he would follow the voices of lead singers for better clarity.

While the music of Zimbabwe gave Tracey his first taste of African music, with time he travelled to other parts

the current head of ILAM, said: "Tracey was inspired to document and record the music of Africa.

"He travelled sub-Saharan Africa, as far north as Congo, Uganda, Rwanda and the Swahili coast.

"He loved it all and wanted to preserve it for future generations because the Africans did not have the ability, necessary equipment and technology to do it themselves."

Apart from enthusiasts of traditional music, the exhibition is being visited by school children eager to learn more about their musical heritage.

"The phone has been ringing off the hook, particularly with schools wanting to view the display" said Sinothi Thabethe.



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Recordings of southern African folk music and the 20 traditional instruments, including drums, mbiras, horns, Xhosa bows and xylophones, dominates the exhibition, which was put together by the International Library of African Music (ILAM).

Tracey, who died in 1977, was the founder of ILAM, a research and heritage archive institute.

The bulk of the archaic music recordings and instruments Tracey collected is kept

at the organisation's headquarters in Grahamstown's Rhodes University.

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As his interest grew, Tracey recognised the artistic value of the music and made it his life's work to preserve this rich heritage for future generations.

However, he encountered resistance from the local colonial community, particularly from those in education, church and government departments, who saw no merit in African music.

When addressing a public gathering in 1973, during the launch of an LP (long-playing

record) series comprising 218 traditional music albums, Tracey referred to their misgivings.

"At the time the public showed little interest in African music and did not understand why I consistently stressed the social and artistic value of the music for future generations of Africa," said Tracey.

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While the music of Zimbabwe gave Tracey his first taste of African music, with time he travelled to other parts of Africa to capture their music.

While managing the SABC's radio station from the late 1930s, he also recorded Princess Constance Magogo KaDinuzulu, mother of IFP leader, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who was a well-known Zulu bow player.

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the current head of ILAM, said: "Tracey was inspired to document and record the music of Africa."

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Apart from enthusiasts of traditional music, the exhibition is being visited by school children eager to learn more about their musical heritage.

"The phone has been ringing off the hook, particularly with schools wanting to view the display," said Sinothi Thabethe, the eThekweni Municipality's Director of Local Museums.

"The exhibition is all about African music heritage and we've used modern technology to complement this well-documented essence of African music culture. It makes me feel proud to be African," said Thabethe.