



UC DAVIS PRESENTS
Community Outreach Program

• 2000-2001 School Matinee Series •

Mapapa African Acrobats

Monday, April 30 and Friday, May 4, 2001
Freeborn Hall, UC Davis 11:00 am

Dear Teachers:

We hope you will find this Teacher's Guide helpful in preparing your students for what they will see and hear at the Mapapa African Acrobats matinee. The Guide provides background information on the performance troupe and a review of theater conventions and audience protocol. The Mapapa African Acrobats matinee, which is specially designed for student audiences, will introduce this hybrid of traditional African music and dance and circus-style acrobatics.

UC Davis Presents gratefully acknowledges the corporate sponsors supporting the Community Outreach Program during the 2000-2001 Season of Performing Arts:



MAPAPA AFRICAN ACROBATS

From the world's top performing arts and children's festivals to *Late Night with David Letterman* to touring with such young pop stars as Monica, 98 Degrees and Blackstreet, the MAPAPA AFRICAN ACROBATS have introduced countless audiences to "Afro-batics," a high-energy blend of music, dance, drumming, tumbling, contortionists, acrobatics and traditional African circus arts. This six-person ensemble from Mombassa, Kenya has performed throughout

the world, amazing audiences of all ages with a highly entertaining program filled with amazing feats of strength, balance, agility and coordination.

When Matano Ismael, the leader of the group, put this circus show together 10 years ago, he had no idea that it would lead to the success that they are presently experiencing in many countries throughout the world. "We came off the plane thinking it was a gamble," says Ismael; "In my country we have an expression, 'you only live once but you will die many more times second guessing yourself.'" Matano Ismael's program combines elements of traditional African dances and music and age-old circus acrobatics. People marvel at the teamwork displayed, the cooperation, which exemplifies the rewards of working together. The Mapapa acrobats also have an uncanny ability to get people involved in their show, with conga lines, skipping, acrobatics, limbo, and even hand-clapping and laughter.

Because of the energetic style of the show, there was a natural connection to organized sports. The Mapapa acrobats have worked with almost every NBA basketball team as half time entertainment. In addition, they have also started doing shows for NFL, NHL, MLB and WNBA teams as well as opening for the 1999 World Cup of Soccer and the Pan-Am Games. They have performed at over 300 festivals worldwide, most recently Nickelodian's Summer Kickoff, Central Park Summerstage, and the Music Midtown Festival in Atlanta.

THE CIRCUS AS THEATER

The Mapapa Acrobats offer a uniquely African version of public spectacle termed "nondramatic theater." The more common form of theater is *dramatic*, that is, most typically, the presentation of a scripted play in which the actions of the performers depict a narrative. Performers of such works consist of actors portraying characters, although Sicilian Paladin puppets, Javanese *wayang* shadow puppets, and Japanese *bunraku* puppets are examples of nonliving representations of characters, manipulated by living performers. *Nondramatic* productions include oral and musical presentations, circus and vaudeville acts, gymnastic displays, and ceremonial occasions such as the coronation of a monarch. There is no narrative line, or story, in such productions, but the technical skill of the performers or the ritual significance of the event becomes the focus of audience attention.

As a form of presentation, the **circus** encompasses a wide range of different types of performance, including feats of daring, illusion, and skill. The type of circus performance that comes closest to dramatic theater is that of clowns. The clown engages in simplified dramatic activity, sometimes a ridiculous parody of other forms of performance, but one that follows established conventions of dress, gesture, and behavior. The word 'circus' has the same root as

circle and circumference and therefore also recalls the distinctive environment in which such entertainment is presented—the ring, a circular performance area usually bounded by a short fence (or “curb”) and surrounded by tiers of seats for spectators, which may itself be enclosed in a circular building or tent.

In the latter part of the 20th century, boundaries between types of theatrical production have been increasingly eroded. As circuses have declined in popularity, circus techniques have been incorporated into other forms of theater. So-called “third theater” companies often use circus training techniques, and actors employ juggling and acrobatic skills in their dramatic performances. The British Footsbarn company, which travels the world in a manner reminiscent of the medieval and Renaissance players, uses circus imagery and techniques in its productions of Shakespeare. Samuel Beckett used the image of the clown in *Waiting for Godot* to create a parable on the absurdity of the human predicament.

For information about Kenya, please visit <http://www.britannica.com/seo/k/kenya/>

ATTENDING THE THEATER

What is expected of student audiences at the matinee:

- Enter the auditorium quietly and take seats immediately (*note that all matinees for 2000-2001 have reserved seating*);
- Show courtesy to the artist and other guests at all times;
- Demonstrate appreciation for the artist's work by applauding at the appropriate times;
- Refrain from making unnecessary noise or movements;
- Please eat lunch before or after the performance to avoid disruption;
- Relate any information acquired from the pre-matinee discussion to the new information gained from the matinee.

What you can expect of your experience in a performing arts theater:

A theater is a charged space, full of energy and anticipation. When the house lights (the lights that illuminate the audience seating) go down, the excitement level goes up! Theaters are designed so that the voices of the singers and actors and the music of the musicians can be heard. But this also means that any sound in the audience: whispering, rustling of papers, speaking and moving about, can be heard by other audience members and by the performers. Distractions like these upset everyone's concentration and can spoil a performance.

The performers on stage show respect for their art form and for the audience by doing their very best work. The audience shows respect for the performers by watching attentively. Applause is the best way for audience members to share their enthusiasm and to show their appreciation for the performers. Applaud at the end of a performance! Sometimes the audience will clap during a performance, as after a featured solo. Audience members may feel like laughing if the action on stage is funny, crying if the action is sad, or sighing if something is seen or heard that is beautiful. Appreciation can be shown in many different ways, depending upon the art form and the culture(s) of the people in the audience. While the audience at a dance performance will sit quietly, other types of performances invite audience participation.

THINK ABOUT IT!

Talking with your teacher, friends, and family about a performance after attending the theater is part of the experience. When you share what you saw and felt you learn more about the performance. You can now compare ideas and ask questions and find out how to learn even more. Here are some questions to think about:

- 1) How would you describe The Mapapa African Acrobats' performance to a friend?
- 2) What feelings did you have while you listened to the music and watched the gymnastics?
- 3) What did you like best about the performance and why? Was the program different from what you expected? How?

Additional reading:

For studies of the circus in the United States, see Stuart Thayer, Annals of the American Circus, 2 vol. (1976–86); Charles Philip Fox and Tom Parkinson, The Circus in America (1969); David Lewis Hammarstrom, Behind the Big Top (1980); John Burke, Buffalo Bill: The Noblest Whiteskin (1973); and Don Russell, The Wild West: or, A History of the Wild West Shows (1970). Noteworthy: Henry Ringling North and Alden Hatch, The Circus Kings: Our Ringling Family Story (1960); P.T. Barnum, Struggles and Triumphs: or, The Life of P.T. Barnum Written by Himself, ed. by George S. Bryan, 2 vol. (1927), the best edition of the famous autobiography; and Neil Harris, Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum (1973, reprinted 1981).

CAMPUS RESOURCE GUIDE

The University of California, Davis campus is a very beautiful and interesting place to visit and there are many learning experiences available to young student visitors. We have listed some of these below. While on campus, consider taking advantage of these resources. The enclosed campus map can help you find the locations.

Transportation and Parking Services (TAPS) 752-8277

Private cars may park in several lots on campus for \$4.00. Please call Sandy Morgan (752-7657) to arrange for bus parking.

Places to Eat *(Please call ahead if you have a large group)*

On Campus: Coffee House, Memorial Union (752-6622)
Silo Student Union (752-1900)

In Davis: Carl's Jr., Sub City, Pizza Hut, Brennan's Coffee, Taco Bell, Le Crepe

Art Galleries *(Please call ahead for current exhibits and possible tours)*

Design Gallery (Walker Hall) is an innovative space known for its exciting exhibitions of design-related objects such as architecture, textiles, and folk art. 752-6150

Richard L. Nelson Gallery (Art Building) is located south of Shields Library. It is well known for its regularly changing exhibitions of historical and contemporary works of art. 752-8500

Fine Arts Collection (Art Building) represents various historical periods and cultures as well as houses the Davis campus' major collection of art.

Craft Center (South Silo) provides opportunities for workshops and classes in woodworking, weaving, jewelry-making, art and graphics, computer imaging, ceramics, photography, silk-screen printing, welding, leather-working, stained-glass, and other crafts. There is always a

display of students' work. 752-1475

C.N. Gorman Museum (Hart Hall) features changing exhibitions of works by Native American and other diverse artists. 752-6567

Memorial Union Art Gallery (Memorial Union), 2nd floor exhibit. 752-2885

Campus Tours Available

The Tram provides a one-hour tour of the campus for 20-40 people. Reservations should be made one week in advance. The pick-up is at the Buehler Alumni and Visitor Center on Old Davis Road. 752-8222

Animal Barn Tour Program tours are offered during the Spring for classes K-5. The tours consist of visits to three campus locations where cows, pigs, and horses can be observed. Student guides conduct the tours, providing information on the animals. 754-8111

Peter J. Shields Library (located south of the Quad) houses collections in the humanities, arts, social sciences, biological sciences, agricultural sciences, mathematics, and computer science. It is one of the premier research libraries in North America. 752-6561

Bohart Museum of Entomology has an educational program about insects. The 60-minute tours can be arranged by appointment only. The museum is located in the Academic Surge Building. Tours use permanent and hands-on exhibits as well as live insects for demonstrations. The primary objective of the educational programs is to teach children about insects, particularly (1) their enormous diversity in form, color, behavior, (2) their impact on daily human life, (3) their importance in ecosystems, and (4) their general harmlessness. Contact Steve Heydon, 752-0493.

California Raptor Center has an on-site program to increase the public's awareness of raptors (birds of prey) and their environment. The facility has a museum containing displays, exhibits, and hands-on materials. The Center is located in South Davis. 752-9994

Davis Arboretum is an 80-acre public garden on the UC Davis campus. The Outdoor Education Program is geared particularly for K-6 class visits and uses the "guided discovery" approach to increase children's awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the natural world. 752-4880

Equestrian Center (located on Garrod Road near the Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital) provides instruction in both English and Western riding along with training in horse care and stable management. 752-2372

Environmental Horticulture Teaching Gardens, located on Old Davis Road next to the Alumni Center, are opened to the public and include common and unusual species of trees, shrubs, ground covers, perennial, and bedding plants. The arrangement of plants is based on botanical and horticultural principles rather than on design principles. Tours last a half hour and are suitable for 5th grade through high school students. 752-0349

This Teacher's Guide was written by ANETT JESSOP, Department of English, UC Davis