

## Entertainment

MY CULTURAL LIFE: ROBERT BLUMENSCHINE

# Mr Bones

I've been in Johannesburg for nearly a year. I have focused on volunteering for Past [the Palaeontological Scientific Trust, a non-profit organisation working with origin sciences and Africa's fossil heritage] and haven't got around as much as I would have liked. One of the things that drew me here, aside from palaeo, was the wildlife in South Africa. I've been to the Kruger Park once and taken day trips to a couple of other places.

I've spent five years of my life, cumulatively, in Tanzania. The vast majority of that time was in the Serengeti, especially Olduvai Gorge. But I've yet to take the time to climb Kilimanjaro or go and see the chimps at Gombe. I suppose I always thought it was such a privilege to conduct research at Olduvai I should maximise my time there.

When I'm on a dig I usually wake up before sunrise and do a little work in the field laboratory. After breakfast I'll either work with one of the excavation crews or go out on a fossil survey. That's the most enjoyable part of the job. There are places in Olduvai where you know you are one of very few people ever to have been there and the scientists who

have been before you are legends, like the Leakeys. There's always the chance of finding something spectacular: a hominid fossil or a beautifully crafted stone tool. Even pieces of bone can provide wonderful information. So many stories are written in the bones.

It's a gorgeous area. The Olduvai Gorge cuts through the Serengeti plains. In the late afternoon I'll go to one of the many beautiful vistas. I enjoy that.

When I travel I'm a junkie for techno thrillers, military or espionage stories. I started with authors like Tom Clancy, but that got a little too technical for me. It's the adventure of those books I really like.

iPods and iTunes are wonderful. I love music. My family is very musical, I the least of them. I play the trumpet and the piano. I favour brass quintets playing classical music, baroque especially. I'm a big fan of Mozart, his instrumental stuff but more recently, a little bit of opera too. And I like classic rock 'n roll. Jimi Hendrix is one who stands out.

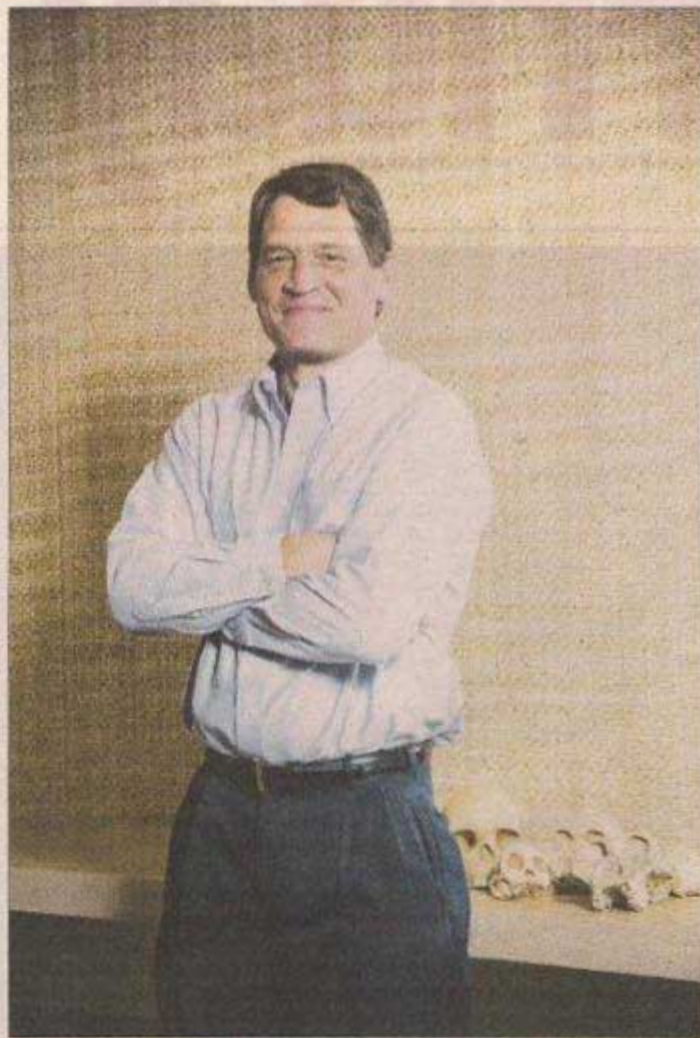
I haven't listened to a lot of South African music but I have almost everything Johnny Clegg ever released. Clegg is a champion of

Past's programme, *Scatterlings of Africa*, and he's wonderful. His music reflects the coming together of cultures I see here in South Africa.

One thing I struggle with is watching sport. As an American, and coming from New York, I was very into the Yankees and baseball in general, and American football. There's a little bit of coverage here, but not a lot. I'm trying to get into cricket, rugby and soccer. The world cups helped a lot. I didn't understand cricket at all before. I'm looking forward to going to a one-day cricket match.

If I was in New York I might make a special trip to see the Natural History Museum. Natural history museums aren't great here, which is surprising. But I suppose that's one of the advantages of being in South Africa: why go to a museum when you can drive a few hours and see it for yourself.

Robert Blumenschine is professor of anthropology at Rutgers University, and chief scientific, education and fundraising strategist for Past, based at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. He spoke to Nechama Brodie. For more information, go to [www.past.org.za](http://www.past.org.za)



Palaeontologist Robert Blumenschine specialises in 'reading' his finds