

## Vuvuzela – the sound of the African spirit

Written by {ga=staceyv}

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In 2010, when South Africa became the first African country to host the FIFA World Cup, it left a legacy of a people united by sport for the whole continent. On the sidelines, another legacy all together emerged: that of the vuvuzela.

The sound of the vuvuzela became synonymous with African football in 2010. So popular did this plastic horn with its monotone trumpeting sound become that for months it was heard across the world – at the annual hotdog eating competition on Coney Island, at a Hollywood awards show, rock festivals and comic conventions.

No one knows for sure what the origins of the vuvuzela are. Some say that it comes from the kudu horn, which was used to summon villagers for meetings. It has been a familiar sound at South African football matches for decades, and when the FIFA World Cup rolled around, plastics manufacturers made a killing, churning out cheap, brightly coloured vuvuzelas... perhaps in their millions. International tourists who attended the 'biggest sporting spectacular in the world' on African soil, made sure they left with vuvuzelas aplenty in their luggage, enough for everyone back home.

The word 'vuvu' means to make noise in the Zulu language.

It is precisely this loud, droning noise that the vuvuzela makes that has seen it banned from events by many organising bodies. For instance, vuvuzela bans are already in place at all UEFA matches, several English Premier League clubs such as Arsenal, Everton and Liverpool; Manchester United has banned them from Old Trafford. It's not just football circles. Vuvuzelas are banned from the 2011 Rugby World Cup, all Wimbledon games, and a host of other events – for good reason.

It's not just the noise, which Urban Dictionary defines as a "mind-numbing torture device". Several studies have found, not surprisingly, that exposure to blasts of sound from a vuvuzela can lead to permanent hearing loss. As spittle accumulates in the horn when it is blown, there is also the possibility that it can transmit diseases like the common cold, and worse, as germs become airborne.

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However, the FIFA body refused to ban the use of the vuvuzela at 2010 World Cup matches, with president Sepp Blatter saying: “We should not try to Europeanise an African World Cup. That is what African and South Africa football is all about — noise, excitement, dancing, shouting and enjoyment”.

Dangerous or not, the vuvuzela is now a phenomenon in pop culture. It has even been included in the latest update of the Oxford Dictionary of English. And the Global Language Monitor survey, which tracks the frequency of words used by almost 1.6 billion English-speakers, named ‘vuvuzela’ as one of the top 10 most used words around the world in 2010.

It has even made an appearance in the popular ‘Blend It’ series on YouTube, where devices such as iPods are thrown into a blender for fun. YouTube even added a Vuvuzela button to its website during the 2010 World Cup. During the BP oil spill crisis last years, protestors turned out in their hundreds, causing a cacophony of noise with their vuvuzelas. There have been attempts to create a more harmonious ‘symphony’ of sounds in stadiums, with international composers taking part in the project. There is a Vuvuzela app for the iPhone. The humble vuvuzela has even appeared in comic books.

It’s mindlessly cheerful one-note has come to represent the sound of the African continent, and South Africa in particular. The sound of a resilient, optimistic Rainbow Nation!

To hear what a vuvuzela sounds like for yourself, click through to [www.vuvuzela.fm](http://www.vuvuzela.fm) for a listen.