



21 ICONS
SEASON II
SOUTH AFRICA

Adrian Steirn



MEDIA RELEASE

Embargoed until 21 September 2014 at 12h00 (SA)

Johannesburg – 21 September 2014 – “Even in difficult situations, you’ve got to get up and dust yourself off and say this too shall pass.”

On 21 September 2014 at 20h27 on SABC 3, the acclaimed series 21 ICONS South Africa will feature the eighth icon of its second season: ballerina, choreographer and model Kitty Phetla.

21 ICONS is a showcase for the South African spirit; a tribute to the men and women who have helped to shape our country and, indeed, our world. The series is part of an annual project which features unique narrative portraits and short films by Adrian Steirn, one of the continent’s pre-eminent photographers and filmmakers.

Steirn comments, “I’ve met many people whose stories are incredibly powerful – it’s a true privilege to discover more about the human spirit and share these individuals personal accounts, their positive character traits and their propensity to influence and shape perceptions and transform societal norms for the better, impacting the communities around them.”

Steirn’s portrait of Phetla appears in the Sunday paper alongside the collectible poster and will be sold at a charity auction next year. The funds raised through the sale will be donated to Phetla’s nominated charity.

The portrait features Phetla in a classical dancer’s pose, poised at the edge of a lake as if she is about to dance on the water. The photograph is a salute to Phetla’s most famous role as The Dying Swan, which she performed in Amsterdam for former president Nelson Mandela and the Dutch Royal Family.

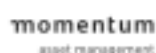
In an intimate conversation with Steirn, Phetla talks about her journey through ballet, and how it transformed her from a chubby nine-year-old tomboy in Soweto to the first black ballerina to perform Anna Pavlova’s famous solo The Dying Swan in 2012, transforming the role and making it her own in the process.

Phetla recalls the day that choreographer Martin Schonberg picked her from a crowd of 60 hopeful children, crammed into a hall at Orange Grove Primary School, all eager to begin the metamorphosis to become a ballerina. “We were given a choice of extramurals, and I thought I would try ballet, even though it was the first time I had heard the word, because it might be fun, a little outrageous. I still don’t know why Martin picked me.”

Some people ascribe the fact that he did to luck – but Phetla dismisses this notion. “Success has nothing do with luck. It’s about the work that you do – not just the hard work, the sweating - but what your mind tells your body.”

In Phetla’s case, hard work is teamed with discipline – which she believes to be the essence of dance – to create a career that is, beyond doubt, a stellar success. After training with Schonberg in classical ballet, Spanish dancing, Afro-fusion and contemporary dance, she joined his Ballet Theatre Afrikan. She won a number of international awards and participated in several competitions, then in 2002 left to establish Mzansi Productions (now the Joburg Ballet), where she is a principal dancer and choreographer. Phetla also models, and has a radio show on Radio 2000.

Of all her triumphs, however, her performance of The Dying Swan lingers in her mind as the greatest. “It was an amazing experience for me. Traditionally, the dance is performed in a pink tutu with pink tights and shoes, but it was Martin’s idea for me to wear a black tutu and black stockings and shoes, because I am black. That was how





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my Dying Swan was born, and to this day, people love it.” Dancing for fellow icon, Madiba was nerve-wracking, she admits, but at the same time, she was able to pretend that she was in a bubble and hone her focus, so that the experience became a “deliriously happy” one.

You might think that it takes passion for a black ballerina to travel from Soweto to Russia, garnering the type of acclaim that Phetla has enjoyed, but she maintains that passion is simply “the cherry on top”. “When you have the know-how and the intelligence, and you have been mentored well – when you understand what you are trying to achieve - that’s when the passion comes.”

She’s intent on helping other black children enjoy the same kind of experiences through her work with Joburg Ballet of which Phetla is actively involved in a number of youth outreach programmes reaching over 300 promising dancers from ‘new suburbs’, “Ballet has always been seen as a westernized art, but we’re slowly breaking that stigma. Ballet, and the arts, are for our people, and there’s a hunger for them in our communities.”

PROGRAMME SYNOPSIS

Award-winning ballerina, choreographer and model Kitty Phetla talks with filmmaker and photographer Adrian Steirn about her journey from Soweto onto the world’s stages, and performing one of the most iconic roles – The Dying Swan – for former president Nelson Mandela.

About 21 Icons South Africa

21 ICONS South Africa is an annual collection of photographs and short films of South Africans who have reached the pinnacle of achievement in their fields of endeavour. These men and women have been an inspiration through their extraordinary social contribution. It is not a definitive list and does not denote any ranking.

The short film-series documents the conversations between Steirn as the photographer and filmmaker and the icons. Each short film provides insight into both the subject and photographer’s creative approach to the portrait.

Season two of 21 ICONS South Africa is proudly sponsored by Mercedes-Benz South Africa, Momentum Asset Management, Nikon, Deloitte and the Department of Arts and Culture.

Season two debuted on Sunday 03 August continuing for another 20 weeks, one of 21 short films will be screened every Sunday on SABC 3 at 20h27.

On each of these Sundays, a poster of the icon’s portrait, taken by Adrian Steirn and his creative team, will be published in the City Press to form a memorable collection that everyone can own. Media partners include SABC 3, City Press (Media 24), Provantage and Mxit.

Social Media:

21 Icons engages with the public through:

Twitter: @21Icons

Website: <http://www.21icons.com>

Mobisite: www.21icons.com

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/21Icons>

Pinterest: <http://www.pinterest.com/21ICONS/>

iTunes App Store: <http://tinyurl.com/lf3cfzm>

Google Play: <http://tinyurl.com/ovtcy45>

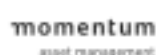
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