



21 ICONS  
SEASON II  
SOUTH AFRICA

*Adrian Steirn*



## MEDIA RELEASE

**Embargoed until 14 September 2014 at 12h00 (SA)**

**Johannesburg – 14 September 2014** – Pops Mohamed: “We’re like a pregnant country. We keep giving birth to good things, bad things, whatever it is, but we are here now.”

On 14 September 2014 at 20h27 on SABC 3, the acclaimed series 21 ICONS South Africa will feature the seventh icon of its second season: acclaimed musician and producer, Pops Mohamed, who has been playing, protecting, and nurturing traditional ways of making music in South Africa for the last 30 to 40 years.

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.”

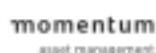
Steirn’s portrait of Mohamed appears in the Sunday paper alongside the collectible poster and will be sold at a charity auction next year, with funds donated to the charity of his choice.

On his selection as an icon, Steirn says, “Pops understood the fragility of musical culture through apartheid. As a result he started to leave behind the commercial focus of his music and immersed himself in a traditional way of making music. He spent time with the San Bushmen which ultimately allowed him to make a seamless shift from pop music to traditional music. He also quickly understood how easily cultures can evaporate, be suppressed and forgotten, and for that reason, he has played a major role in protecting South Africa’s indigenous music. He is vitally important for South African music because he is the conduit between the past, the present and our future generations.”

The portrait features Mohamed crouched against a sand dune, in the traditional pose of a South African tracker. In his hands, he holds a traditional musical instrument; a symbol of the musical tradition which he has fought to protect and preserve throughout his long and diverse career.

In an intimate conversation with Steirn, Mohamed talks about his life as a musician; a journey which got its start when he was a boy watching the jazz greats in his hometown of Benoni. “My best childhood memories are of watching the musicians who came from Johannesburg – Zakes Nkosi, Kippie Moeketsi, Miriam Makeba. They were all in exile but they used to come and play at our community centre. We would sit on the steps of the hall, waiting for the musicians to come, and we would watch them and think ‘wow, I want to be like that when I grow up’.”

Mohamed’s first step towards fulfilling this childhood dream came as a student at Johannesburg’s Dorkay House; a musical hub where sightings of greats like Abdullah Ibrahim weren’t uncommon. This fuelled Mohamed’s ambitions further, so that when one of the music teachers took a special interest in him, he leaped at the opportunity with alacrity.





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Even so, Mohamed turned away from the prospects of commercial success when he realised the power of music as a weapon against the government's Apartheid policies. "It was during the 70s, and I was listening to some heavy struggle songs, most of which got banned," he recalls. "And I just looked at my career as a musician and thought, I'm playing top 40 stuff and all that, and there's all this stuff happening around us. If I want to continue with music I must have a reason for it. I want to be part of what's happening now. And that's when I started looking back to where I'm coming from."

It was also around this time that Mohamed became aware of indigenous music – or, more specifically, aware that such music was no longer being played on radio stations. "I wanted to commit myself to something that would still satisfy me passionately inside, but would be a contribution to the country. And that's when I decided I want to start preserving and protecting our culture. That was also part of the struggle - that we shouldn't forget where we are coming from."

Mohamed sees his commitment to preserving traditions as "futuristic". He explains this view: "It's the same as if you're having a problem with your hard drive. If we don't back up things, we lose them. It's the same with culture. If you don't know where you're coming from, you'll never know where you're going to. In order to move forward in life you have to take a few steps backwards. You can't just live for now, or live in the future without understanding your background. It's not possible."

#### **PROGRAMME SYNOPSIS**

Acclaimed musician and producer Pops Mohamed discusses culture and tradition with filmmaker and photographer Adrian Steirn, explaining how he came to protect indigenous music as his contribution to the struggle against Apartheid, and why he believes we cannot have a future if we don't appreciate our past.

#### **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](http://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/ovtey45>

On behalf of **21 ICONS South Africa**





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