



21 ICONS  
SEASON II  
SOUTH AFRICA

*Adrian Steirn*



## MEDIA RELEASE

**Embargoed until 12 October 2014 at 12h00 (SA)**

**Johannesburg – 12 October 2014** – Pieter-Dirk Uys: “We are the luckiest people in the world in this country. We could have been every horror story in the world.”

On 12 October 2014 at 20h27 on SABC 3, the acclaimed series 21 ICONS South Africa will feature the eleventh icon of its second season: satirist Pieter-Dirk Uys who has been using comedy and caricature to oppose the Apartheid government for the last 30 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 Uys 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 his nominated charity.

In the portrait, Uys mischievously photobombs a bust of Apartheid architect and former prime minister Hendrik Verwoerd. It celebrates Uys’ ability to infuse himself in the joke and his role as an audacious political satirist. The portrait draws attention to his capacity to engage an audience through humour while creating a powerful political message in the process – an appealing alternative to more traditional political activism.

In an intimate conversation with Steirn, Uys reveals that his alter ego Evita Bezuidenhout first started as a character in a newspaper column. “Between 1978 and 1980 I had a weekly column in a Sunday newspaper, and I needed it because the Apartheid government banned all my plays.”

The plays had been banned, he says, because they portrayed South Africans living in a situation which was reputed to be normal and Christian and civilized – but was not. His characters reflected the confusions and hypocrisies of this society, earning him the outrage of the Apartheid government who lashed out him for blasphemy, obscenity and setting racial groups against each other – “which was great, coming from the architects of Apartheid.”

Not that Uys set out to be an incendiary. The child of a Jewish German immigrant mother and an Afrikaans father, his childhood was marked by bullying – until he realised that laughter was an effective weapon. As a playwright, he tried to harness his talent for comedy, creating entertainment and making people laugh – although he confesses that there is a small part of him that was also trying to anger them. “It’s as if there was a 12-year-old inside of me that was sticking out my tongue at Verwoerd.”

This is ironic, coming from a man who was raised to believe that Verwoerd was untouchable, and idolised ministers to the point where he wrote them letters. It was only as a university student that Uys realised that the principles he had grown up with were not incontestable. “There were some coloured students at university, and we were told that we couldn’t have tea together, couldn’t eat together, couldn’t walk together, couldn’t sleep together. And I think sleeping together actually broke apartheid down for me. Because God did not strike me down the next day. It began a process of exploration, a process of fighting everything: you know, your conscience, your Christian





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Calvinist background, the Ten Commandments, all the nonsense that you grew up with and then you realise that it is all nonsense and you just have to find your own values. And not demean those values for millions of people who still believe in them, but try to bring them up. I tried to help my audience to laugh at their fear, because that is what I do. The things I am frightened of I will not look away from. I grew up with fear, I looked away from everything.”

Having performed over 20 plays and 30 revues and one-man shows both in South Africa and around the world, Uys is committed to helping his audiences share his courage. Although the era of Apartheid may be over, he still finds plenty of subjects – from the comic to the controversial – to tackle, including South Africa’s new political regime and HIV. “In the 20<sup>th</sup> year of democracy, I’m still trying to reflect the ‘mock’ in democracy and the ‘con’ in reconciliation with humour,” he says.

#### **PROGRAMME SYNOPSIS**

Satirist Pieter-Dirk Uys talks to renowned filmmaker and photographer Adrian Steirn about growing up under Apartheid, the birth of his alter ego Evita Bezeuidenhout, and how South Africa’s favourite socialite and political activist continues to tackle issues in the ‘new’ South Africa.

#### **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/ovtcy45>

On behalf of **21 ICONS South Africa**

Issued by: **Grapevine Communications**

Tel : 011 706 9600

Fax: 011 706 9365

#### **Heidi Pretorius**

Project Management

heidi@honeybell.co.za

SA Mobile: +27 82 940 3464

