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Local news

21 Icons features HIV activist

JOHANNESBURG – On 15 November 21 Icons Season III: A Future of a Nation will showcase its 11th icon, 26-year-old HIV activist and founder of Rebranding HIV, Phindile Sithole-Spong.

16 hours ago

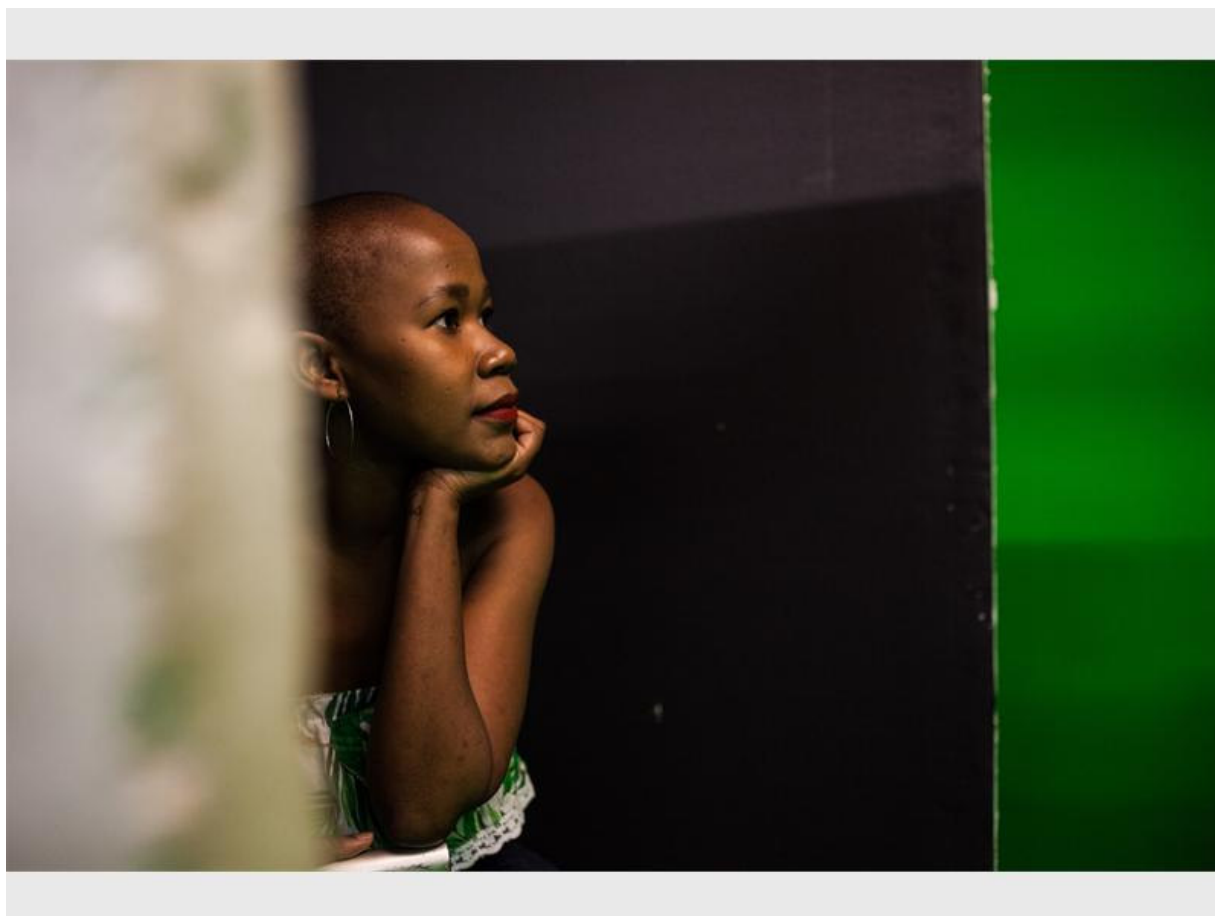


Photo: Damien Schumann REFLECTIVE: Gary van Wyk photographs Phindile Sithole-Spong at the Media Hive studio in Cape Town as part of the 21 Icons South Africa Project.

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Sithole-Spong was selected to appear in the third season of 21 Icons because she defiantly combatted the stigma faced by South Africans living with the HIV virus, and she has been recognised for her advocacy surrounding HIV and sexual health, locally and internationally.

Her initiative, Rebranding HIV, focuses on providing organisations and companies with relevant HIV and sexual health programmes. She told principal photographer for 21 Icons, Gary van Wyk, that she was 13 when she lost both parents to full-blown Aids, and five of her aunts and uncles. Tragically, seven years later at the age of 19, she discovered that she had been HIV-positive from birth.

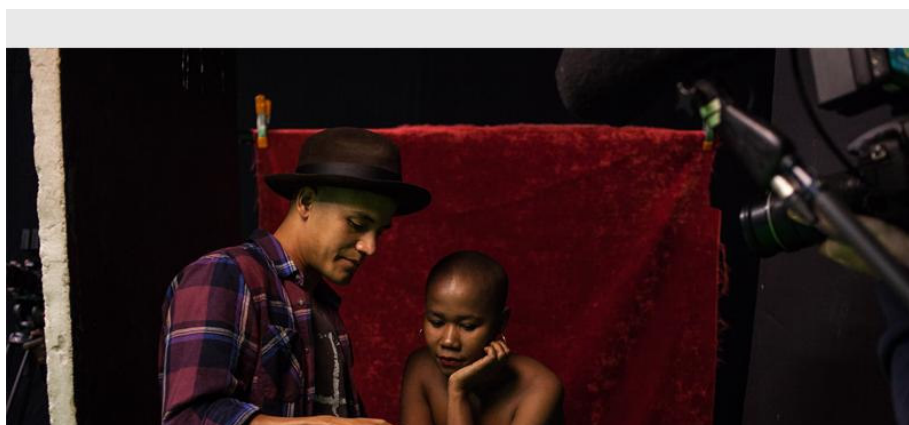
She made the brave decision to publicly disclose her status to her fellow students while completing her studies in media and English at the University of Cape Town. "For me, the best way to educate anyone about HIV – if you're living with HIV – is to just be yourself, because there's this misconception that HIV positive people are scary. But I'm still Phindi," she stated.

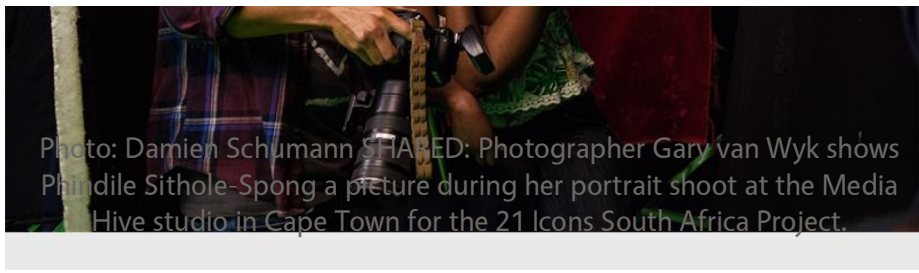
Her short film focuses on how she came to establish Rebranding HIV, using her personal story as a voice for people living with HIV and her aspirations to create an HIV aware generation. "Being HIV positive has been the best and worst experience of my life," she said. "It teaches you to be more present. It teaches you to be more understanding and open. If I didn't have HIV I'm not sure I would be as open."

Van Wyk explained the inspiration behind her portrait which is titled, Still Me. "Sithole-Spong is photographed in front of a red backdrop, seemingly naked above the waist – acknowledging her birth with the virus and her shunning of stereotypes," he said. "With a vibrant energy and natural smile on her face, the portrait challenges what the world has been taught HIV looks like, and instead captures her innate joy, sincerity and vulnerability."

Sithole-Spong's short film will be released on 15 November on SABC 3 at 7.27pm, with a repeat airing the next day at 5.57pm on the same channel.

Details: www.21icons.com





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