



## 21 ICONS SEASON THREE (A FUTURE OF A NATION) FEATURES ASHLEY UYS

**Ashley Uys** – *“For me, success is what makes you happy. Everybody should move towards that.”*

On 8 November 2015 on SABC 3 at 19h27, the acclaimed short-film series 21 ICONS will feature the 10th icon of its third season: 33-year-old biotechnologist and entrepreneur Ashley Uys of Cape Town.

The three-minute film, which showcases how Uys came to develop a range of notable medical testing products lauded for their potential to transform the ordinary African’s ability to diagnose and treat diseases, will repeat the next day at 17h57 on the same channel.

21 ICONS traces South Africa’s history over the course of its three seasons, moving from the fight for freedom to the country’s growth during democracy, and concluding with a vision of the future. It is a celebration of individuals who inspire multitudes through their impact, integrity and influence using photography, film and narrative to showcase the pivotal moments of South Africa’s nation-building journey.

Young South African talent Gary van Wyk (34) has stepped up as principal photographer for the third season. In previous seasons, Van Wyk has been a crucial part of 21 ICONS camera work, visually recording the nuances and intimate moments of each shoot in his distinctive reporting style. Adrian Steirn, who conceived the project, continues his involvement as one of the photographers capturing the behind-the-scenes images.

This season has been envisaged as a tribute to the country’s future, shedding the spotlight on young South African icons. Their energy and drive has been captured in coloured portraits; a major departure from previous seasons which featured black-and-white fine arts portraits.

Uys has been selected for 21 ICONS South Africa Season III for developing medical products that can detect life-threatening diseases and reduce the high-risk fatality through accurate and timeous diagnosis. For example, his development of a self-testing malaria kit has led to global recognition, as the tests’ reliability and affordability present a more promising health future for people in low-income areas.

As the managing director of Medical Diagnostech and OculusID, the combination of Uys’ entrepreneurial sense and business savvy has seen his work praised and profiled by the likes of CNN, Forbes and SAB.

From humble beginnings in Belhar, where he attended Belhar High School, he always dreamed of being a scientist and after matriculating he enrolled at the Faculty of Science at the University of the Western Cape. After his first year, he was awarded an academic scholarship and worked part-time while completing his studies.

He says, “At University I worked quite hard knowing that four or five years of sacrifice could potentially yield something big. “Being the eldest of six children, I decided I needed to set an example. I was going to sacrifice at least six to eight years of my life to see where we could go.”

And he achieved ‘big things’ taking his first steps towards achieving his dream when he attained a B.Sc. Honours Degree in Biotechnology. He also holds a Management Advancement Programme certificate from Wits University.

In 2010, he established the company Medical Diagnostech in Cape Town, which is run by an award-winning team of scientists. The facility locally manufactures its own cost-effective, high-quality medical test kits for pregnancy, syphilis, malaria, HIV/Aids and ovulation. It has also introduced a diagnostic tool to identify a variety of recreational drugs.

During a portrait sitting he tells Van Wyk that it was while he was growing up in Belhar when he first noticed how kids were no longer participating in recreational activities and ‘wheeling and dealing’ on the streets.

“Kids were doing less sport and hanging around at the corner. You could see they were up to no good. That transition (active to apathetic) encouraged me to look at inventions and things that could impact socially in our community. That’s when I identified a gap in the market to manufacture scientific products that would influence and address health and social issues such as substance abuse,” he says.



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He explains in a conversation with Van Wyk how he used that window of opportunity to transform his ideas into problem-solving innovations that can make a positive impact in areas such as the Cape Flats where alcohol and drug abuse is on the rise. “Our products benefit communities in terms of accessibility, availability and cost. They are there for everybody,” he says.

At the age of 23 he approached a pharmaceutical chain in the Western Cape to brand a diagnostic kit for methamphetamine by positioning the product to the wholesalers as part of their corporate social investment. On the uptake of his product, not only in retail but also by members of the public, he comments, “Substance abuse in schools has a big impact on learning, so it’s very satisfying to know that my product can help in this area.”

While his test kits impact socially by providing cost effective diagnostics of disease, epidemics and drug use, the organisation is also creating jobs by employing unskilled labour from the local community rather than automating the laboratory’s operations. “I believe you need a team to be great. You need people who complement you and share your vision. Everything starts with hard work and getting a team together,” he notes.

This a life lesson that he shares wherein nobody is good at everything so surround yourself with experts in their field and a supportive team.

For the portrait “*Knowing and not Knowing*” which will appear digitally on the Monday after his short-film is released, Van Wyk describes the visual elements, “Responsible for the development of affordable, reliable and, in many cases, life-saving malaria testing kits, Uys is photographed walking along a dirt road in Hout Bay, traversing a straight white line - representing the visible linear result that appears on the tests themselves. The portrait imagines Uys walking the line between information and unawareness, fear and courage, and speaks to a generation of Africans for whom knowledge brings empowerment.”

On the future of South Africa, he comments, “As South Africans, we should carry this country forward, and the way to do that is through social impact – creating employment and jobs.”

Van Wyk concludes by asking the audience to share their stories on social platforms by answering the question: “*What do you stand for?*”

Followers are encouraged to share their personal triumphs or to nominate a member from the community who is making a profound difference.

Connect on Twitter: @21Icons using the hash-tag #OurFutureIsNow and [www.facebook.com/21icons](http://www.facebook.com/21icons)

**ENDS/**

## **PROGRAMME SYNOPSIS**

Chatting at his diagnostic lab in Brackenfell, Cape Town, Ashley Uys tells Gary Van Wyk about his humble beginnings on the Cape Flats, the difficulties and setbacks he encountered on his path to success, and the dedication, commitment and hustling that it takes to reach your dreams.

## **ABOUT 21 ICONS SEASON III**

By making accessible the personal stories of young individuals whose lives are catalysts for positive change, the purpose of the project is to show the way forward for a new generation to aspire to be socially conscious and active citizens. 21 ICONS has built a truly unique platform for connecting and imparting key attributes of the lives of the people it features who transform societal norms for the better. It is not a definitive list and does not denote any ranking.

The short film-series documents the conversations between Gary Van Wyk 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.



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Behind each portrait lies a carefully planned concept that captures not only the essence of each icon visually, but also in spirit and in terms of their unique legacy.

The narrative storyboard incorporates the icons' descriptions of the people and social advances that have created opportunities for them. By sharing their personal stories and what they have done with their freedom, the short-films communicate these stories to inspire the next generation to follow in their footsteps and move forward collectively as a new democracy.

Following the broadcast on Sunday evenings, the icons' portraits, taken by Van Wyk, will be published online and on digital platforms immediately available for individuals to engage and interact with these 21 remarkable new South African icons.

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Season three debuted on Sunday 6 September 2015 and broadcasts for a further 20 weeks, with a short film screened every Sunday on SABC 3 at 19h27.

This is an exciting opportunity for South Africans to engage with, and among, themselves to drive nation building and cohesion in a way that redefines the South African identity.

Season three of 21 ICONS South Africa is proudly sponsored by Mercedes-Benz South Africa.

#### **Social Media:**

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