



Simphiwe Dana raises black consciousness through her music

BY ROXANNE FRANCIS
February 8, 2016



The celebrated Afro-soul and jazz songstress will be featured on the acclaimed short-film series 21 ICONS on 14 February 2016 on SABC3 at 19h27

"I use my music to heal, I use my music to inform and I use it to bring out that warm feeling inside, so I think I'm doing quite well with my freedom," says songstress Simphiwe Dana.

Dana has been selected to be featured in *21 ICONS South Africa Season III*. She is being recognised as an artist using music as a vehicle to address social issues in SA. Through her music, she voices her opinion on socio-political challenges, always making sure that her black consciousness and feminist views are clearly brought across. She is also the first African ambassador for Amnesty International.

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On her selection as an icon, Dana says: "I don't shy away from including social messages in my music. I'm an activist at heart. I'm very passionate about the continent and about justice, so my work is very much in that space at all times."

Dana has performed at key national events and festivals like Arts Alive, the Cape Town International Jazz Festival and the Standard Bank Joy of Jazz. Internationally, she has toured China, Germany, Spain, Switzerland and the Netherlands.

"I don't like to define my sound, but if I were forced to, I would say it's Afro-soul, because it's the kind of music that touches you, that makes you feel something and – I'd like to believe – also changes you somehow," she adds.

Born in 1981 in rural Gcuwa in the Transkei, Dana grew up in the village of Mayaluleni. The daughter of a preacher, her music draws strongly on her upbringing in the gospel church and she credits the powerful singing of her mother as an inspiration for her and her siblings and a key motivator in her resolve to pursue her musical career.

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"My earliest influence, musically, was my community. In the village, everything has a soundtrack: when we play, we always sing or do something rhythmic. When we work or cook, there's always a song," she says.

Dana matriculated in 1997 from the Vela Private School in Mthatha before moving to Port Elizabeth to study information technology. In 2000, she relocated to Joburg to pursue her musical career, while completing her diploma at Wits Technikon.

She says: "Education, for me, is basically a way of getting out of life alive. It's the difference between poverty and being self-sufficient. Had I not been serious about my studies, I don't think I would be where I am today. It helped me find and create my place in the world."

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Dana first attracted attention in 2002 while singing in small clubs across Joburg. Roshnie Moonsamy of Urban Voices saw her perform and recommended her to the Gallo Record Company. Four months later, she was signed by the music label.

In 2004, Dana released her debut album, *Zandisile*, which made an enormous impact on the South African music scene, achieving platinum status and claiming the number one spot on the Billboard Chart.

Dana's second recording, the acclaimed *The One Love Movement on Bantu Biko Street*, won her numerous South African Music Awards, including Female Artist of the Year.

Last year, Dana launched her fourth release, *Firebrand* – a reflection of herself; "It took many years of being in denial about the labels that people were giving me; 'You're a writer, you are a politician, an activist...' you know, all of these posh things, and I felt... I didn't want these labels. I fought them for a long time because I just wanted to be an artist and to say that whatever else I do is what informs my art. It's all about my art, but I



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knew I was lying to myself. So at some point after going through some experiences, I just finally accepted that I am all of these things and there's nothing wrong with being all of them."

[READ MORE: Seven days until the SA launch of Simphiwe Dana's fourth album](#)

Tune into *21 ICONS SEASON III* on 14 February 2016 on SABC3 at 19h27.



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.

Source: [21Icons.com](#)

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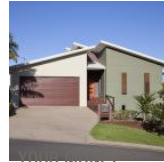
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