



PRESS RELEASE

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Johnny Clegg – “I got a very strong awareness that music cuts through everything: politics, economics, value systems, religion. Music is that language — it’s that universal moment.”

On Sunday October 6 the spotlight in **21 Icons South Africa** falls on musician Johnny Clegg, arguably one of the country’s most famous performers, musical ambassadors and cultural activists. His interview with filmmaker and photographer Adrian Steirn will be screened on SABC3 at 6.57pm, and an evocative portrait of him published in the Sunday Times on the same day.

A fluent Zulu speaker – “It’s my second language; I read and write and compose in it” – Clegg is a pioneer of bridging the cultural divide in South Africa and bringing different peoples towards a better understanding of one another through his music. He used his bands’ growing international fame in the Eighties to remind audiences of the terrible reality of apartheid South Africa for blacks, and has received both South African and international awards that recognise his promotion of racial harmony and humanitarian efforts.

Clegg wanted to be a Zulu street musician as a child. He had many friends in the Zulu migrant community and had learnt stick fighting, praise poetry, war dancing and their traditional culture. But his mother wanted him to go to university, where he gradually became fascinated by anthropology. “When I stumbled onto anthropology it was like a natural continuation of a real passion I had. So I became an anthropologist, but I was also making music at the same time,” he tells Steirn.

Clegg believes one can be and do anything if one approaches it with passion, and for him the answers to an uncertain future lie in the hands of the youth. “The world is broken right now and, in a way, only

young people can fix it,” he tells Steirn. “I see lots of incredible young people and the thing about them is that they don’t know what they can’t do. There’s such a deep power in that.”

“But education is fundamental. All societies, whether they are tribal, hunter-gatherers or sedentary agriculturalists, from the Eskimos to New York bankers, they fundamentally train and equip their children with techniques to survive. And an education is the highest form of survival technology.”

While lecturing in anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand, Clegg wrote the hit song “Scatterlings of Africa”, and his life took a turn. “The song got onto the Top 50 in England in 1982 and so I walked into my Prof’s office and said I wanted to take a sabbatical. For a year I wanted to follow my musical career, otherwise, you know, I’ll be a very dissatisfied and disgruntled human being,” Clegg says. “And he said: ‘Jonathan, when you walk out the door, we’ll never see you again’. And I said no, I’ll be back because I loved teaching. But he was correct, I never came back again.”

Over the next decade, Clegg would achieve international success with his unique blend of African and Western sounds, initially with the band Juluka, which he started with Sipho Mchunu. They received little radio play in South Africa because the state broadcaster frowned on the mixed languages and a band featuring both black and white members, which also made public appearances difficult and subject to police harassment. But through word of mouth their fame grew and they developed a strong following among especially students and migrant labourers.

After becoming an international success, largely in Europe, Juluka came to an end in 1985 and Clegg formed another crossover band, Savuka. More overtly political, their first album, “Third World Child”, was released in 1987. It featured the song “Asimbonanga” (We’ve Never Seen Him), which called for the release of Nelson Mandela, incarcerated on Robben Island, and spoke to a generation of children who had never



seen the struggle hero because images of him were banned.

Savuka earned Clegg an even bigger international fan base and 1988's "Shadow Man" sold more than one million copies in France alone. Affectionately dubbed "Le Zulu Blanc" (the white Zulu), France would become a home away from home for Clegg, who would tour there almost annually as well as to the rest of Europe, the US and Canada. "To travel is to learn," he tells Steirn.

Following Savuka's disbandment in 1993, Clegg went on to do solo projects under his own name. Collectively with the bands and on his own, this hard-working artist and musical ambassador has released more than 20 albums, selling more than five million records.

Steirn chose to depict Clegg's passion for music and anthropology in his portrait of him, which was shot in the veld at the Cradle of Humankind, northwest of Johannesburg. "We all know Johnny Clegg as the white Zulu and I became fascinated by this concept of a man who started out as an anthropologist and ended up as an incredible musician," says Steirn. Clegg thus stands brandishing a spear with the words "music" and "anthropology" written on either side of it. According to Steirn: "The image of Johnny standing on that African horizon, like a Zulu warrior, really reflects where he began and where he is going."

Like all the portraits of the individuals in the **21 Icons South Africa** series, Clegg's signed portrait will be auctioned at the end of the series and the proceeds donated to the charity of his choice.

Public participation is invited on **Twitter: @21icons**; **www.21icons.com** and **www.facebook.com/21icons**.

21 ICONS South Africa is proudly sponsored by Mercedes-Benz South Africa, Nikon and Deloitte and supported by The Department of Arts & Culture as a nation-building initiative.

PROGRAMME SYNOPSIS

Filmmaker Adrian Steirn explores renowned world music icon Johnny Clegg's dual passion for music and anthropology through a career spanning more than 30 years, which has earned him a huge and loyal following both in South Africa and abroad.

PHOTOGRAPH DETAILS

Musician Johnny Clegg stands brandishing a spear that is adorned with the words "music" and "anthropology" – two interests that have informed much of his life work. The spear is a reference to his nickname "the white Zulu", which he got from his biracial bands and mixing of Zulu and English lyrics and African and Western sounds.

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On behalf of **21 ICONS South Africa**

Jo-Leen Jan

Publicity

joleen@honeybell.co.za

SA Mobile: +27 83 287 0165

+27 74 525 9014

Heidi Pretorius

Project Management

heidi@honeybell.co.za

SA Mobile: +27 82 940 3464