



21 ICONS SEASON THREE (A FUTURE OF A NATION) FEATURES MICHAELA MYCROFT

Michaela “Chaeli” Mycroft– *“The struggles and challenges someone overcomes are a lot more telling than the awards and things that they receive.”*

On 1 November 2015 on SABC 3 at 19h27, the acclaimed short-film series 21 ICONS will feature the ninth icon of its third season: award-winning “ability activist” and the founder of the Chaeli Campaign, Michaela “Chaeli” Mycroft.

At the age of 16, she won the 2011 International Children’s Peace Prize, and the following year, Nobel Peace Laureates’ Medal for Activism. She received the awards for her commitment to the rights of children with disabilities in South Africa through her project: the Chaeli Campaign. Earlier this year she became the first female quadriplegic to summit Mount Kilimanjaro after undergoing extensive training to prepare for the ascent.

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. 21 ICONS is a celebration of individuals who inspire multitudes through their impact, integrity and influence.

As a world-class communicator of powerful stories, 21 ICONS uses 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 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.

Mycroft has been selected for 21 ICONS South Africa Season III as an individual who exemplifies an inspiration to all South Africans. Having conquered setbacks and adversity, she uses her disability to take a stand against the world’s misconceptions about people whose mobility is affected and to highlight their potential using various international platforms to spread her message and create an inclusive society.

She seeks to create a global community that accepts and embraces disabilities and on her selection as an icon she says, “A lot of people refer to me as a disability activist, but I don’t see myself that way. I focus on the ability. I concentrate on potential and empower people to see their own greatness.”

At 11 months, she was diagnosed with cerebral palsy, a neural brain condition that restricts movement and which confined her to a wheelchair. The film gives an insightful and inspiring glimpse of her journey and how it all started in 2004, when at just nine-years-old, she teamed up with her sister and three friends to raise R20 000 for her own motorised wheelchair.

Following the success of this small fundraising project, Mycroft realised that more needed to be done to help others in her position and to promote the ability of others. Since then, the non-profit organisation has assisted over 3 000 children to receive wheelchairs, hearing aids, food supplements and more.

She uses her story of courage and hope to motivate the disabled to nurture their uniqueness and find opportunities and to educate the able-bodied about what it means to live with a disability. She says, “I think my disability has made me who I am because without it I wouldn’t be the activist that I am, and I wouldn’t have had to overcome the things that I have.”

Nothing seems too big or small for this incredibly determined young woman. She recently celebrated her 21st Birthday during her Kilimanjaro Summit and in her spare time, is a competitive wheelchair ballroom dancer. However, she is never one to take the full limelight, and emphasises that people need other people to get the big





things done, and you don't always have to be the leader to play an important role, everyone has something to contribute.

In a conversation with Van Wyk, she explains that misconceptions and stereotypes about the disabled exist because people are too afraid to ask questions. "It's okay not to know everything. People don't want to ask because they don't want to seem ignorant. I think we need to acknowledge our ignorance because it's there, and by not speaking about it we're not dealing with the issue at all," she adds.

Upon her enrolment at the University of Cape Town, where she is studying politics and social development, she became the first disabled student in the institution's history to live in an on-campus residence. She says "It's empowering to have a wheelchair. It's not a negative thing."

During a portrait sitting she tells Van Wyk that rather than focusing on limitations she advocates that we all have the capability to achieve greatness and overcome adversity. She states, "The struggles and challenges someone overcomes are a lot more telling than the awards and things that they receive."

Mycroft continues, "People assume I'm going to say that all the awards are significant but they represent the work, they don't necessarily represent me as an individual. The more significant things are the little things that we get to witness and experience."citing examples of their everyday achievements through the NPO such as when they witness the freedom provided to someone the first time they receive a wheelchair, a simple act but so empowering.

For the portrait 'XXX' which will appear digitally on the Monday after her short-film is released, Van Wyk describes the visual elements, "The image shows Mycroft in her wheelchair, leaning back and being supported by her ballroom dance partner. Dressed in a gown that she wears when competing in the Wheelchair Ballroom Dancing Championships, she is depicted in a manner that most would not expect from someone in her position. The portrait seeks to embody Mycroft's inclination to shatter perceptions, as well as her assertion that no matter our goals, we will always need to involve others in our journey, and that greatness is seldom achieved alone."

On the future of South Africa, she comments, "Young people are such a powerful force in our country and young people are the people who have changed history. As a collective we need to acknowledge our power and we need to use it effectively, but also responsibly."

Van Wyk concludes by asking the audience: "*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 tangible difference.

Connect on Twitter: @21Icons using the hash-tag #OurFutureIsNow or Facebook: www.facebook.com/21icons

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PROGRAMME SYNOPSIS

At Camps Bay High School in Cape Town, Michaela Mycroft and photographer Gary Van Wyk discuss her global impact as an activist, why she believes such strong stereotypes with regard to the differently-abled exist, and her refusal to allow her circumstances to dictate her life.

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.



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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.

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.

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