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21 Icons Season III: The Future of a Nation

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On 6 September 2015 on SABC 3 at 19h27, the acclaimed short-film series 21 ICONS will unveil the first of 21 youth icons for its third season: the next generation of South African leaders, influencers and role models exploring these creative and exceptional young people's lives who are shaping our future.

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.

Inspired by the life of Mandela, previous seasons' icons included social masters like George Bizos, Nadine Gordimer, Desmond Tutu, Albie Sachs, Hugh Masekela, Sophie Williams de Bruyn and many more.

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.

Gary van Wyk (34) will step 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 initially conceived the project, continues his involvement capturing the behind-the-scenes images.

"We've got a young South African photographer shooting the best of young South Africa. There is something beautiful about that," says Steirn.

This season shares the stories of these icons experiences, deeds and positive actions that are shaping the country's future, shedding the spotlight on youth icons all under the age of 35 who are the cornerstones of a brighter future. Their energy and drive has been captured in colour portraits to reflect the vivacity and exuberance of youth; a major departure from previous seasons which featured black-and-white fine arts portraits.

The transition represents the renewed energy and vision that the Season III icons will drive; the embodiment of South Africa's next generation of leaders and influencers. The objective is to inspire young South Africans through the future icons who echo the psyche and pulse of the youth.

"This season of 21 ICONS is the most relevant so far. It's all about South Africa in the now, and nothing represents that more than Gary. He is one of the most talented photographers I've ever worked with, and handing over to him – a person who I first got to know through work and then as one of my closest friends – is one of the highlights of my career," says Steirn.

Season III's first five icons include performance artist Athi-Patra Ruga, rape survivor and gender activist Jes Foord, community activist and co-founder of the Kiptown Youth Program Thulani Madondo, Paralympic wheelchair tennis player Lucas Sithole, International Climate Activist, former Miss Earth South Africa, Catherine Constantinides, and textile and knitwear designer Laduma Ngxokolo.

While this generation does not have a foot in the past, only a respect for it, each of these icons has already started a compelling journey to make good on those opportunities afforded by their forefathers. Often, they have been motivated by the pursuit of a personal goal, but their struggle to achieve their objectives has impacted positively on those around them. In overcoming their personal challenges, these people have proved themselves to be selfless individuals who act for the benefit and greater good of others – true icons.

21 ICONS' purpose is to provide a platform for their stories, providing a showcase for their tremendous passion and infectious candour. South Africa's youth need role models; and these icons demonstrate that small achievements have the ability to transcend barriers and overcome adversity. They prove that, collectively, we can move humanity forward and the future is now in their grasp.

The third season uses creative colour imagery and eye-catching short films to grasp the attention of a generation that responds powerfully to visual stimuli, and which has embraced the immediacy of platforms like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

In order to continue the series' tradition of demonstrating how the attributes of each icon have helped them contribute significantly to shaping the past and future of South Africa – which is what makes 21 ICONS such a powerful vehicle – the new series concentrates on capturing the vibrancy and fierceness of South Africa's 'born-free' generation. In this way, it resonates with the spirit of a younger audience and what is being achieved in the present moment.

With an emphasis on the potential of South Africa's talented youth, Ginkgo Agency has appointed Zee Muller (26) as the lead video editor on the project.

Muller combines her ability to compose visual storytelling with vibrant imagery using fast cuts and sharp out-takes to affect mood and influence emotions and intends to inject new life into the three-minute narratives with a style that is entirely unique.

She says, "Season III celebrates the emerging youth which explains our transition from black and white to colour treatments in the portraits and films. This direction stands to symbolise a new energy and vitality that is reflected in the youthful Season III icons. We aim to convey the promises that these people hold for our future – those of possibility, creativity, determination and talent. The project provides an inspirational road map that gives South Africans the confidence to make a difference in their communities and presents a collective and unified message of hope through the insights of 21 South African contemporary influencers. Their opinions reflect their hopes and dreams for the future."

By sharing the personal stories of the icons whose work has inspired the lives of many, the series shows the way forward for a new generation aspiring to be socially conscious and active citizens.

Van Wyk comments, "Working with the people from the first two seasons was an incredible privilege. It meant having the chance to be a part of South Africa's history. Now in Season III we are getting to meet emerging South Africans. These are our country's new leaders and change makers, and working with them, taking their portraits is an extraordinary opportunity. They are all creative people in their own ways, so coming up with original concepts and working with the icons on their execution is an exciting and important challenge. I've also loved having the chance to speak to them; it's meant finding greatness and wisdom in the most unlikely places.

Taking over from Adrian is both a challenge and an honour. We have very different personalities, which influences the photographs, and being in front of the camera is a new experience for me. Shooting this season in colour is also a change. It's a way for the project to evolve and move forward. To me black and white deals with memory, whereas colour represents the world the way it is today. At the end of the day though, it's not about whether or not the portraits are shot in black and white or colour; the project as a whole and the vision behind it are what matter."

"Each of this new generation of icons has found success while staying true to themselves. This season is all about celebrating people who have found success while discovering new ways to help the people around them," Steirn concludes, explaining the selection of the icons.

"Mercedes-Benz South Africa (MBSA) has been a proud sponsor and supporter of 21 ICONS since inception. The focus on the youth for Season III and the vibrancy and life added by both the short films and the portraits being shot in colour is a natural progression and perfectly resonates with the company's continuous drive to be a socially responsible corporate. MBSA, through its rich heritage here in South Africa, firmly commits to the on-going development of youth and the critical role they play in our country's sustainability," says Mayur Bhana, Vice-President Corporate Affairs, Mercedes-Benz South Africa. "This series celebrates the magnitude of hopeful, talented, creative young South Africans that this country has and leaves you with a sense of confidence that our nation's future is firmly, and safely, in the hands of these leaders of tomorrow."

Behind each portrait lies a carefully planned concept that captures not only the essence of each icon visually, but also in spirit. Each portrait pays tribute to the unique path carved by each.

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

SABC Group Executive: Television Verona Duwarkah comments, "This series of short films serves as a reminder to young people that passion, commitment and sheer love for a pursued cause can lead to much success and personal satisfaction while still delivering the greater good of others. It is a celebration of what a little disruption and risk taking can achieve. Fear should not stop anyone from achieving their dreams and these young people have exhibited just that. May everyone that is exposed to this content be left inspired, invigorated and ready to create the waves of change wherever they are in the spirit of making a positive and long lasting difference in their spaces."

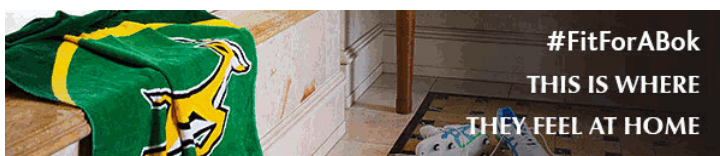
Programme synopses for each of the icon shoots will be distributed on a weekly basis as the series runs.

Following the broadcast on Sunday evenings, the icons' portraits, taken by Van Wyk, will be published online and on digital platforms on the following Tuesday.

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.



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