



21 ICONS SEASON THREE (A FUTURE OF A NATION) FEATURES OLIVER HERMANUS

Oliver Hermanus – “Cinema is powerful. It can inspire viewers and give people a sense of identity.”

On 10 January 2016 on SABC 3 at 19h27, the acclaimed short-film series 21 ICONS will feature the 16th icon of its third season: 34-year-old multi-award winning South African film director, writer and photographer, Oliver Hermanus.

The 21 ICONS three-minute film examines the rise of Oliver Hermanus and how his films have gained global praise for their unflinching examination of the challenges of the post-apartheid landscape. The episode 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. This season has been envisaged as a tribute to the country's future, shedding the spotlight on young South African icons.

Young South African talent Gary van Wyk (34) has stepped up as principal photographer for the third season. Adrian Steirn, who conceived the project, continues his involvement as one of the photographers capturing the behind-the-scenes images.

Hermanus has been selected for 21 ICONS South Africa Season III for addressing uniquely South African social issues through cinematic commentary. He has written and directed three feature length films since his debut in 2009 and won numerous international nominations and awards for his work.

Best known for his films *Shirley Adams* and *Skoonheid*, Hermanus has racked up a long list of awards and his latest film, *The Endless River*, made history as the first South African film to be nominated for the Golden Lion Award at the 2015 Venice Film Festival.

His first feature, *Shirley Adams*, premiered at the 62nd Locarno Film Festival. The film is about a mother who struggles to deal with the gunshot injury that disabled her son and providing for the two of them. A deeply moving portrait of ordinary courage in present-day South Africa, it captures the claustrophobia, intimacy and hushed anguish surrounding the tender daily routines of a mother and her child.

In 2011, his film *Skoonheid* was announced as one of the films to be screened at the 64th Cannes Film Festival in the Un Certain Regard competition. It was the fifth South African feature film to be invited to the festival. Hermanus won the 2012 Best Director award at the South African Film and Television awards, and *Skoonheid* was selected to represent South Africa as the official entrant to the 2012 Foreign Film Academy Awards nomination.

Shot in Bloemfontein and Cape Town and starring Deon Lotz as Francois, a repressed Afrikaner obsessed with a young object of desire played by Charlie Keegan, *Skoonheid* tells the story of a middle-aged man who has suppressed his sexual preference for men his whole life. It addresses homosexuality, a relatively taboo subject in the conservative Afrikaner community as well as the latent anger of a large number of South Africans no longer part of a ruling class.

His third feature film, *The Endless River*, stars French film star Nicolas Duvauchelle as an ex-pat living in South Africa whose wife and children are murdered by a gang. It debuted at the 72nd Venice Film Festival and was the first South African film invited to the festival's competition.

He comments, “The Venice Film Festival is the oldest film festival in the world. So being nominated for a Golden Lion award is like having your work exhibited in one of the most prestigious galleries in the world. The fact that I was able to show my work there is the real prize.”

Hermanus grew up in Montanna in the Cape Flats, and moved across country during his childhood with his family before returning and settling in Cape Town when he was 12.



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“South Africa made me who I am, in terms of what I make and what I do now. I’m committed to living here and working here. I don’t want to go to America to make movies,” he says.

Reflecting on his childhood, he tells Van Wyk that he would watch movies with his father every Sunday afternoon. He credits his parents for fostering his passion for cinematography and encouraging him to immerse himself in film.

“The cost of a video camera was beyond what my family could afford so I would just go to the movies and watch a lot of films. My mother and father really encouraged me to go to film festivals that were happening in Cape Town,” he says.

Years later he started his undergraduate degree in Film, Media and Visual Studies at the University of Cape Town which he completed at the University of California after receiving an exchange programme scholarship.

In 2006, Hollywood film director Roland Emmerich offered him a private scholarship to complete his Master of Arts degree at the London Film School.

“With film, it’s about learning the process by doing the job. You can’t learn the job in theory – you have to just make the movie. For this you need to find people who are prepared to give you the opportunity to make your mistakes on-screen, not off,” he adds.

When he returned to South Africa, he worked professionally in documentary film, journalism and screenwriting as well as press photography; “I ended up working at the *Cape Argus* and the *Cape Times* where I met Gary Van Wyk. That part of my life influenced making movies but I also think I wouldn’t be as interested in telling social real stories if I hadn’t worked in press.”

For the portrait ‘*Deep Connection*’ which will appear digitally on the Monday after his short-film is released, Van Wyk describes the visual elements, “Hermanus is pictured holding a TV set in front of his torso, on which an image of the director beside a sprawling river is seen. A literal reference to his work within the medium and to the title of his award-winning film, *The Endless River*, the portrait also holds a more personal significance.

Van Wyk continues, “The image on the screen was taken by me five years ago when Hermanus and I worked together in press photography, bringing both myself the photographer and Hermanus as the subject full-circle, referencing a deeply personal journey of creative success for both of us.”

Hermanus concludes by saying, “The South African film industry has never been bigger than it is right now. New, younger voices in film are still going to emerge, but the industry is still in its teething phase. We’re infants still, but we’re going to learn to run sooner or later.”

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PROGRAMME SYNOPSIS

Making his directorial debut with a horror film that starred his cousins and landed him a spot on KTV, Hermanus’ talent was evident even as a young boy. Here he tells Gary Van Wyk about his journey from wide-eyed teenage film-buff, to the golden boy of provocative South African cinema, and why he believes that South African moviegoers ought to be challenged by the reflections of themselves they see on screen.

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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