



## 21 ICONS SEASON THREE (A FUTURE OF A NATION) FEATURES TERRY PHETO

**Terry Pheto** – “*Storytelling has the power to make people forget their reality and – whether it’s film or television – for those 30 minutes or two hours, you can learn someone else’s story.*”

On 31 January 2016 on SABC 3 at 19h27, the acclaimed short-film series 21 ICONS will feature the 19th icon of its third season: 34-year-old, Terry Pheto who is best known for her role as the leading actress in the 2006 Oscar-winning Foreign Language Film, *Tsotsi*.

She is also the award-winning producer of the critically acclaimed *Asanda* which has been picked up by *Selma* director, Ava DuVernay, for international distribution. The 21 ICONS 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.

For this reason, 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.

Pheto has been selected for 21 ICONS South Africa Season III for the strides she has made in her career in recent years as well as the impact and contribution she has made to the South African film and television industry. Pheto has also started producing her own work with the goal of pushing the agenda of women in film and broader society. In 2015, she was chosen as a juror for the International Emmy Awards.

On her selection as an icon Pheto comments, “Most of the things that have happened in my life – the good, the bad, the ridiculous – I feel like there was a reason for all these things. Life experience always gives you more emotional depth and layers – and I have experienced great loss and great love – but more than anything it’s having an interest in people. Acting is connecting with others.”

Born in Evaton township in 1981, at the age of 10 she had her first stint in the spotlight when she was cast as Nzwaki in a school play – a musical tribute to bid farewell to her then headmaster.

She says, “It was at that moment that I realised you can become someone else. It’s possible and there’s power in that, there’s power in being able to be someone else and just forget about yourself and I was hooked from then.”

Pheto was raised in a shack until she was 19 and after matriculating from high school she studied Information Technology for two semesters but was unable to complete her studies for financial reasons.

“I wasn’t able to go to the best schools, but that has never stopped me from learning every day from every person that I meet. The minute you stop learning, you might as well die,” she notes.

Pheto convinced her mother to let her pursue her lifelong dream to become an actress. She moved to Soweto to join the Soweto Community Theatre Group and two months later she was discovered by talent scout Moonyeenn Lee.

After a year of auditions she was cast as the leading female role in *Tsotsi* directed by Gavin Hood. The film won the Best Foreign Language Film at the 78th Academy Awards.

“While we were filming *Tsotsi* I didn’t know that it was going to have such an impact, that it was going to make history”, she comments.

Pheto was 24 and looking back she reflects on how attending the ceremony was surreal and admits that she was star struck, “It was the most out of body experience, the most incredible thing that anyone can ever experience.”



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In an intimate conversation with Van Wyk she talks about her passion for acting and how she is fulfilling her dreams; “My work gives me permission to fulfil each and every wish I had as a kid. Every little dream that I have ever had, I’m in the position to make happen for myself, even if it’s just for two hours.”

“I’ve always had that burning desire for more, and that fire is still hot. I’ve always wanted the best for myself, and that’s why a part of me is not surprised that I’m sitting here today, doing what I’m doing,” she adds.

In 2010, Pheto spread her wings and started a production company called Leading Lady Productions and produced her first film, *Asanda*, in 2014 – 10 years after her debut in *Tsotsi*.

She tells Van Wyk, “I started a production company five years ago. I’ve always know that there’s a life span when it comes to being in front of the camera – especially for women – and I wanted to be a storyteller, not just as an actor.”

Her first role model was her mother and she explains the importance of being an individual that other women can look up to; “I never had anyone in the industry who was a mentor. No one told me anything when I was starting out. I want to be that person to someone younger than myself.”

Pheto cast Fulu Mugovhani as *Asanda* ‘The Mechanic’ in the production. The film pushes gender boundaries and explores the role of women in today’s society offering a different take on what it means to be a good example.

In 2011, the actress landed a recurring role in the long-running US soap opera, *The Bold and the Beautiful*, playing a heart surgeon.

She has been chosen as one of the first South African artist ambassadors for Save the Children South Africa which aims to ensure that every child, especially the most vulnerable, attain the right to education, survival, protection, development and participation.

During a portrait sitting she says, “I don’t wish that for any child, because it’s the most terrible thing for a child to realise that we have nothing at home. It’s a burden that no child should carry.”

For the portrait ‘*Leading Lady*’ which will appear digitally on the Monday after her short-film is released, Van Wyk describes the visual elements, “A beaded “Oscar” laying to her right – a reference to her starring role in the Academy-Award winning film *Tsotsi* – Pheto, clad in a tuxedo, is photographed seated in an empty theatre leaning toward the camera. Her expression strong and focused, Pheto is depicted as a formidable force within the film industry, a resilient woman whose grit has seen her rise from township theatre performer to South Africa’s leading lady.”

On the future of South Africa she says, “Knowing that with all the scars we have, there’s still hope, there’s still love, and there’s still a need for us to be present and to stand up for what’s right.”

She concludes by saying, “You can be whoever you want to be. You have to believe in and trust yourself. If you can imagine it, there is no reason why you can’t have it. There is room for all of us to chase our dreams.”

**ENDS/**

### **PROGRAMME SYNOPSIS**

South Africa’s preeminent film actress, Terry Pheto, tells photographer Gary Van Wyk about her journey from a shack in Evaton to the bright lights of Hollywood, and why she believes there is room for all of us to chase our dreams.

### **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



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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.

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.

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 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.

#### **Social Media:**

**Twitter:** [@21Icons](https://twitter.com/@21Icons)

**Hash-tag:** #OurFutureIsNow

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**Website:** <http://www.21Icons.com>

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