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people by Kate Ferreira · 26 November 2015

21 Icons celebrates Kyle Shepherd

In the spotlight with 21 Icons this week is acclaimed jazz pianist and composer Kyle Shepherd.

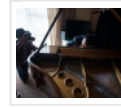
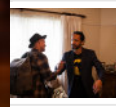
Jazz man Kyle Shepherd unites music lovers and creatives with his remarkable talent for composing and improv.

The 12th 21 Icons portrait and short film release of the new season focuses the lens on remarkable jazz pianist and composer, Kyle Shepherd. Kyle comes from a musical family. His mom is violinist Mechell Shepherd, who played with jazz legend Abdullah Ibrahim, Basil Coetzee and Robbie Jansen. It was this early influence, his exposure to many musical forms, and watching Abdullah and the other artists play together that, Kyle says, set him on his path.

Born musician

And it was a swift journey from newly minted enthusiast to professional musician. 'In less than a year, I had learned to play piano from scratch and really in a very obsessive way practised all the time. Before I knew it I was still in high school but going to gigs at night,' Kyle says. Today he also sings and plays sax and a *Xaru* – a traditional mouth bow.

Another contributor to his development, Kyle explains, was Settlers High School teach Mr Smuts – a mentor who allowed him much 'creative freedom' while still grounding his music in foundational skills. After school, Kyle went on to study jazz at the University of Cape Town. Then he cut his first album *FineART*, which garnered two South African Music Awards (SAMAs).



Critical acclaim

More albums, critical acclaim and the Year, and in 2015, he received towards a Masters degree. His new home, but Kyle cautions, 'If you're

Standard Bank Young Artists of Stellenbosch University studio, inside his grandmother's is the mistake.'

Photographer Gary van Wyk has titled the portrait *Making It Up*, in reference to Kyle's skill in jazz improvisation. 'Seated before the instrument – his eyes shut – his reflection in the polished wood is caught in frame. The resulting image is one that imagines a musician and his instrument as one,' says Gary.

This season of the 21 Icons film and photography project is its third, and is themed, 'The Future of a Nation. Gary is the second principal photographer, having taken over the reins from 21 Icons founder Adrian Steirn (who remains involved, and is currently the behind-the-scenes photographer). This season's subjects are all South African youth leaders, under the age of 35. The project's broader aims include 'showcase[ing] the pivotal moments of South Africa's nation-building journey'. You can engage with them on Twitter, @21Icons, or with the hashtag #OurFutureIsNow

For more coverage, check out our stories on the third season so far:

- [Phindile Sithole-Spong](#)
- [Ashley Uys](#)
- [Michaela Mycroft](#)
- [Ludwick Marishane](#)
- [Thato Kgathanye](#)
- [Laduma Ngxokolo](#)
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- [Athi-Patra Ruga](#)
- Photographer [Gary van Wyk](#)

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