



SNUG. Pops Mohamed keeps warm during the 21 Icons shoot.
Icons shoot.
Pictures:
Gary van Wyk

SIMPLE. One of Pops Mohamed's many traditional stringed instruments.

Top of the Pops

ACCLAIM: POPS MOHAMED CHOSEN FOR 21 ICONS PROJECT

➤ **Respected artist continues to fight for the preservation of African musical traditions.**

Genevieve Vieira

In life you get two types of people: those who are self-seeking and those who are self-sacrificing, with the latter the rarer of the two. Pops Mohamed is a fine example of the second class. For the last four decades, the acclaimed musician and producer has dedicated his life and musical abilities to the preservation of indigenous African instruments and rhythms.

His home is filled with handmade stringed instruments put together using a variety of gadgets – some identifiable, others not. The innovation behind them is impressive. One realises how far technology has come, but at the same time is saddened by the lack of ingenuity in today's advanced world.

Showing immense respect for different cultures, Mohamed takes music from numerous African tribes and fuses it with Western sounds, such as layering

chants over jazz or hip-hop beats. That has laid the foundation for numerous creative projects and the multi-award-winning artist has managed to spark people's interest in ancient forms of music.

He says, "The youngsters of today are tired of Americanism. They want to identify with their roots and create their own unique sound in our modern-day world."

Being interested in the Kalahari Bushmen, Mohamed has travelled around Africa recording and restoring the San heritage.

He says: "These were the first people of the world. They've been around for thousands of years and they are still living the same lifestyles. You go there and you see men over 100 years old still telling stories and imparting wisdom. Then you have these people that come in and want to buy out their land and get rid of their cultures for tourism purposes. It's really upsetting."

Of sitting around the fire listening to these men and women sing and dance, he says: "It's like nothing you've ever heard before. Imagine climbing into a time machine and going back hundreds of years. And it's more than just the music; it's about getting together as a community."

Mohamed goes on to describe how the melodies are always the same, but everything around it

Info



- ▶ Pops Mohamed plays an array of instruments and is known for his wide range of musical styles which include kwela, pop and soul.
- ▶ The 21 Icons show broadcasts every Sunday at 8.27pm on SABC3 until December 21.
- ▶ Mohamed has performed with and sits on the board of the Johannesburg Youth Orchestra Company.

is dependent on their emotion. They sing according to how they feel that day and in that particular moment, making it extremely difficult to document in staff no-

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Pops Mohamed

tations.

Chosen to be part of the 21 Icons project, Mohamed continues to work with young people in Platfontein, where he has set up a recording studio with state-of-the-art equipment, schooling the youth to produce and record their original works.

"You should listen to these kids rap in their language – and they're really good too. Some of them could give our guys a run for their money," he says.

The 21 Icons project is a series of short films and photographic portraits documenting the stories of key figures in South Africa's recent history.

Mohamed concludes: "I don't feel like an icon, but I know I've done a lot for this country."

For more information
visit 21icons.com