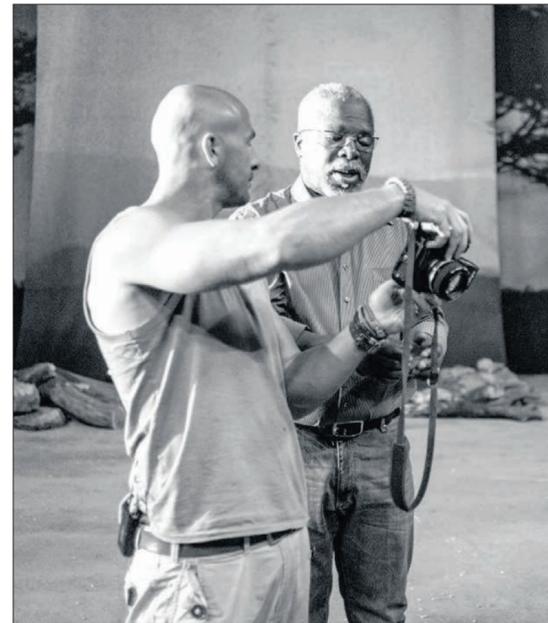


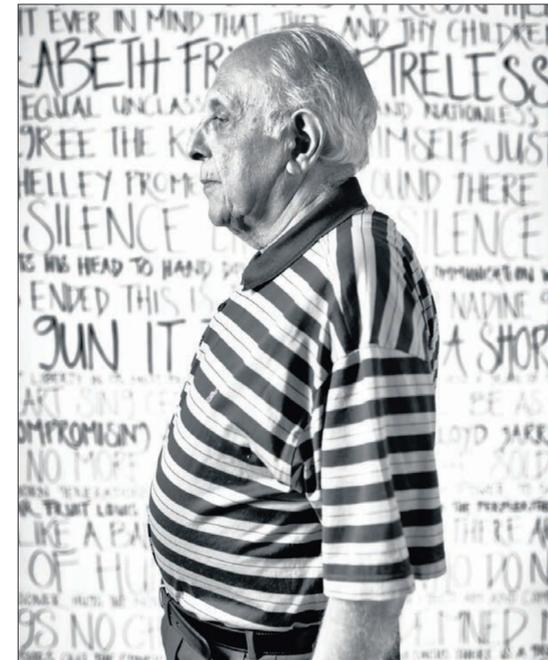
Nelson Mandela portrait

Stories of History



Photographer and film-maker Adrian Steirn and internationally acclaimed actor, playwright and director John Kani discuss Kani's portrait on location at the Market Theatre in Johannesburg.

PICTURE: GARY VAN WYK



Ahmed Kathrada is pictured at his home in Johannesburg, as part of photographer and film-maker Adrian Steirn's 21 Icons South Africa series

THE PAST lives on, it's alive, and you feel as if you can touch it. And two documentaries, *One, Humanity*, *One Justice* and *21 Icons*, serve as reminders – of how far we've come, of how much hope we have experienced. They are a chance to remember that hope among some of the negativity that hangs over us today, as well as a chance to celebrate.

First a look back at history, and where we've come from with *One Humanity*, directed by Mickey Madoda Dube.

This two-hour documentary takes a look at the production of two star-studded global television broadcasts produced by Tony Hollingsworth in 1988 to celebrate Nelson Mandela's 70th birthday and raise awareness of his plight; and after Mandela's release in 1990.

The story intertwines interviews with Hollingsworth and some of the artists who appeared at the concert, along with historical footage of the creation of apartheid in South Africa and the reasons for its fall.

While the history is not new for the majority of us, watching some of the footage is a sometimes necessary reminder of the road we've travelled. Seeing former prime minister Hendrik Verwoerd intoning in a chillingly reasonable voice, "This is 'our' country" while defending the creation of apartheid is spine-chilling. And I was surprised to learn that the newly independent India was, despite its impoverished state, the first to impose sanctions on South Africa. It's a look back at the sports boycotts that hit hard, and the banning from the Olympics.

Archive footage of a young Mandela being interviewed in the 1960s is also included, as is that of activist Steve Biko. Sharpeville erupts with its senseless deaths. "The deaths of children illuminated the animal nature of apartheid," said British Labour MP Neil Kinnock.

Neighbouring countries were punished for their opposition to apartheid, with the government going to war in Angola. President Jacob Zuma reflects on that time, saying that the ANC said to the neighbouring countries that help



Mahotella Queens



Anton Harber



Jonas Gwangwa

Arja Salafranca takes a look at two documentaries which celebrate our heritage and people.

could be found in remembering, "Just don't see us as we go through."

Former US president Ronald Reagan meets with then British prime minister Margaret Thatcher – we hear her reiterating her stance that her government won't talk to a terrorist organisation.

The US finally imposes sanctions on South Africa.

The townships are burning. Censorship is in full force. Journalist Anton Harber recalls working under those conditions as part of the alternative press: "If we got stories we couldn't use, we gave it to our friends in the overseas press here, and then we'd go and report on that."

Then, the Berlin Wall tumbles, the Cold War ends, apartheid crumbles and FW de Klerk releases Nelson Mandela. There are interviews with British politicians Peter Hain, Richard Caborn (treasurer of the Anti-Apartheid Movement) and Robert Hughes (chair of the Anti-Apartheid Movement); Alan Yentob, Frene Ginwala, Pallo Jordan, Mac Maharaj and Ron Dellums, the first African-American to be elected to Congress, who campaigned for disinvestment.

History is on the march. But the real fire of this documentary comes in the thriller-like footage of how Hollingsworth man-

aged to secure a starry line-up of performers to take part in the Nelson Mandela 70th Birthday Tribute concert. It focused the world's attention on the plight of Mandela and increased awareness, and thus pressure to release him.

Footage of the concert plays between the interviews and the build-up to the concert. Hollingsworth had to get broadcasters involved to show the concert, and artists to come on board who would lend real star-pulling power. The artists signed up, from Stevie Wonder to Annie Lennox, Peter Gabriel, Whoopi Goldberg, Sting, Mark Knopfler, Eric Clapton, Chrissie Hynde, Jerry Dammers, Ali Campbell, Joan Armatrading, The Manhattan Brothers, the Mahotella Queens, Caiphus Semenya, Letta Mbulu, Soweto's "People's Poet" Mzwakhe Mbulu and Whitney Houston among the giants who lent their talents to the concert.

The coming together of the concert was like, "75 000 orgasms all at once", said Hollingsworth. Tracey Chapman, an almost unknown black person singing *Talkin' 'bout a Revolution*, which was, says Hollingsworth, was symbolic of Nelson Mandela himself. Goldberg remarks on stage that she's been asked not to talk about politics, but we see her mouthing "We all know

apartheid is wrong". When she ends her speech with "Happy birthday Nelson Mandela, we'll see you next time!" you want to cheer too. The 11-hour concert played to over 600 million viewers in its entirety – although Fox channel in the US showed a delayed, edited version.

When Mandela was released in 1990, another concert was staged, and Goldberg's words came to fruition – Mandela receives an eight-minute standing ovation. His words to the crowd at Wembley stadium capture it all with beautiful simplicity: "Thank you that you chose to care."

It took an Australian photographer and documentary film-maker Adrian Steirn to shine a light on 21 icons of the South African scene, engaging them in conversation while shooting their portraits for this series. At a preview last week, Steirn admitted that they didn't intend to produce a documentary – what started out as a photographic journey – soon evolved into something much larger, into the series. "I became fascinated by a community that exists in spite of itself. I wanted to shine a light on South Africa, on those who had accepted us."

And it's that hope, energy, and fun that infuse this highly watch-

'One Humanity': 20 years on

FREEDOM Day, April 27, saw the double premiere of the documentary *One Humanity*, with the documentary being screened simultaneously to guests in London and in Pretoria, with a live link to London.

Held at the Atterbury Theatre, *One Humanity* was screened to a line-up that included Frene Ginwala, Jerry Dammers, UK High Commissioner Judith Macgregor, Mac Maharaj, South Africa's astronaut Mandla Maseko, and poet Wally Serote.

Watching the documentary exactly 20 years after democracy, among an enthusiastic audience, was moving. At the end, when Nelson Mandela takes the podium at the second Wembley concert to celebrate his release, the cheers and atmosphere in the theatre echoed the excitement of that concert in 1990. We were all emotional, filled with something bordering on pride, hope, and in the end, a joy at the occasion. Mandela's face lit up the screen again – and his presence in this world was missed with an ache that is impossible to describe.

The premiere was followed by two panel discussions, held on the stage in Pretoria and with a link-up to that in London. Pretoria panelists included Ginwala, Macgregor, Mac Maharaj and Collins Chabane. The London panelists included the film's producer Mickey Madoda Dube, Peter Hain, Abdul Minty, and Chichi



Mac Maharaj

Maponya brand ambassador for South Africa.

Maharaj reminisced about being a first-year student in 1953, saying, "Life was very simple – you either succumbed to apartheid, and lived every moment under humiliation, or you joined the struggle and fought and were punished for that. What it taught us is that the struggle was larger than you, whatever the struggle asked you to do, you did, and lived with the consequences. "We need to tell these stories more and more."

Dube said: "One thing that drove me throughout the process was the need to recapture the essence of... empathy, and connects us as human beings, and that humans can rise up against insurmountable objects." – Arja Salafranca

able documentary, which celebrates both the people in it as well as this country. The series showed on SABC last year and this film reflects a distillation of that.

Refreshingly for a documentary, there's a fair amount of laughter as Steirn coaxes his portraits and conversations from the icons chosen. The stories are poignant, funny, honest and sometimes heartbreaking. As in hearing John Kani relating that, "I was 51 when I voted for the first time". He speaks of his children being given bread from some of the fellow voters in the queues and then, in turn, his wife sharing bread with the others there too. "That, for me, was April 27th."

Later on, he reminisces that, "I could use theatre, art as a weapon of change. That was my AK47." It's a thought that is echoed by singer Johnny Clegg: "Music cuts through everything, it goes beyond politics."

Or here's politician and former prisoner Ahmed Kathrada talking about being in prison and bringing it all vividly to life with his story of Mandela's annoying habit of running at 4 and 4.30am. "We never imagined that Nelson Mandela would be president one day..."

And writer Nadine Gordimer answering a question on what advice to give to a young girl writing today. Ever on point, the literary icon retorts to laughter from the preview audience: "Why a girl? A writer is a writer – we don't write with our genitals." Too true.

Musician Hugh Masekela speaking poignantly about the fact that, "When you are in exile you are always translating. In the US I started dreaming in English." Artist Helen Sebidi echoes that with her comment, "In America I was very bored with just one language, English".

Singer Yvonne Chaka Chaka says it was difficult becoming a singer in the turbulent mid-1980s, but there were ways around the censors. She wrote a song called, *I'm Winning (My Dear Love)* and recorded it as such with those lyrics,

but at concerts the words morphed into Winnie Mandela... Ah yes, there were ways and means.

Then there are unexpected views – Steirn has former president FW de Klerk posing for a portrait, sitting on a hillock in the veld, barefoot, the way we've never seen him before. "In South Africa we all need each other," he says. Golf champion Gary Player says to enjoy other people's success, while Desmond Tutu provides yet another delightful counterpoint to any lingering seriousness. They pose him with a tutu for his photograph – and he hams it up for the cameras, dancing faux ballet steps with the tutu – the Arch as we've also never seen him before.

Most poignant of all is watching the elderly Mandela being photographed, frail, completely white-haired, straining into a handheld mirror, in essence "watching" himself as Steirn takes his portrait. "Where are you?" he calls out in a reduced voice as Steirn looks through the viewfinder. He will be gone soon – and this knowledge foreshadows our viewing of this photo session.

This image recently sold for R2 million to an anonymous US buyer. The proceeds have been donated to the Nelson Mandela Children's Hospital and the World Wide Fund for Nature South Africa.

The remaining 20 icons' portraits will be auctioned at a charity gala event to be held in the Tshwane City Hall later this month. All funds raised will be donated to each icon's charity of choice.

The documentary is dedicated to Madiba, and Zackie Achmat's words sum up the hope symbolised by the icons: "We will make South Africa a better place. We will. Black and white together."

● *One Humanity* will be flighted on SABC tonight and shows as part of the Durban Film Festival. Two DVDs will be released, one for the documentary feature film *One Humanity* and another of the concert highlights special. 21 Icons was shown on SABC: www.21icons.com