

# OH MAN!

What happens when a self-born performer/producer and in a studio filled with music, made stylist/jazz graduate/natural-record label owner is unleashed lights and fine clothes?

Every generation has its music icons: Sipho "Hotstix" Mabuse dominated the 70s and 80s, Brenda Fassie blazed new trails in the 80s and 90s, and Arthur Mofokate and Mdu Masilela ushered us from the 90s into the new millennium.

As we experience Zakes Bantwini's animated, full of life character for the first time during our studio shoot, we're struck with a curiosity; are we possibly in the same room as a "noughties" (year 2000 onwards) icon in the making? It's with this question in mind that we explore the mind of Zakhele Madida, the name behind some of Mzansi's current musical successes and hot dancelfloor tunes.

"Back in the day, my friends used to call me Arthur, after singer Arthur Mofokate, because all I ever talked about and dreamt of becoming was music related. No one took me seriously of course. It was all a big joke, hence the nickname, which was usually followed by big laughter," he says thinking back to his younger years growing up in kwaMashu, KZN. Being a major superstar is a daunting dream to make a reality, but Zakes was a man with a plan.

His master plan didn't start in a backyard room making beats on a beat up computer. He knew from day one that he wanted to study music at tertiary level. "I didn't want to knock on record label doors without any substance to back me up. Having always had the passion and dream of being an entertainer, I chose to study jazz at Technicon Natal, now known as



Zakes is happy and grateful to his old friend Coffee, as he calls him. He remembers how the two of them stole the key for the music studio on campus and made copies of it so they could sneak into the studio after hours to play around, creating their own house and kwaito sounds. This must have been the foundation for the success of their future collaborations.

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"We took *Juju's* success and poured that energy into making *Love, Light and Music*, my second album, which was released in September last year. Coffee worked as hard as I did on the album and he was a major contributor to its creation. We co-wrote and produced the songs together," he adds on, emphasising his friend's input into his career growth.

Sold on the idea of "knowledge is power" the singer has made his way back to the lecture room. He's doing his last semester at the Durban Institute of Technology for a degree in popular music. "I never want to die poor, where people have to cough up money for my funeral. I want to be educated for whatever the future may hold. My aim for my older self is to become part of the Arts and Culture Department in

Durban Institute of Technology, after matric," he tells us.

It's here where he met his friend and equally famous colleague, Nathi Maphumulo aka DJ Black Coffee who much like Zakes' music studies, helped mould the musical genius we now know as Mr Bantwini. You may remember their 2009 hit collaboration, *Juju*, which gained Zakes immense popularity.

ABOVE AND RIGHT: All clothing, Ephyamol. All shoes, Europa Art Shoes.

By Phila Tyeekana Photographer Isaac Mofokeng Make-up Yuyo Varoyi Stylist Ephraim Molligoana Location Keystone Studios, Milpark, Johannesburg All clothing Ephyamol 083 746 6323









government. I want to add depth to the industry, to offer methods of structure and regulations to it so that artists, for example, do not die poor. I also want to offer guidance to youngsters out there who think the music industry is all about money and fame. I want to leave a legacy that there can indeed be depth in being a musician," he says.

Another page the youth can take from this music star's book is that of being bold enough to be different. Take his choice to join a ballet class instead of playing soccer with other boys, for example. Township life often shuns certain activities as "only white people things" and ballet was just unheard of as a pastime for boys. It couldn't have been easy but he feels it had to be done. As a born creative and learning from an early age to follow his heart and passion, the singer reveals he ignored all the laughter thrown his way. "I understood I was someone slightly different, but my talent

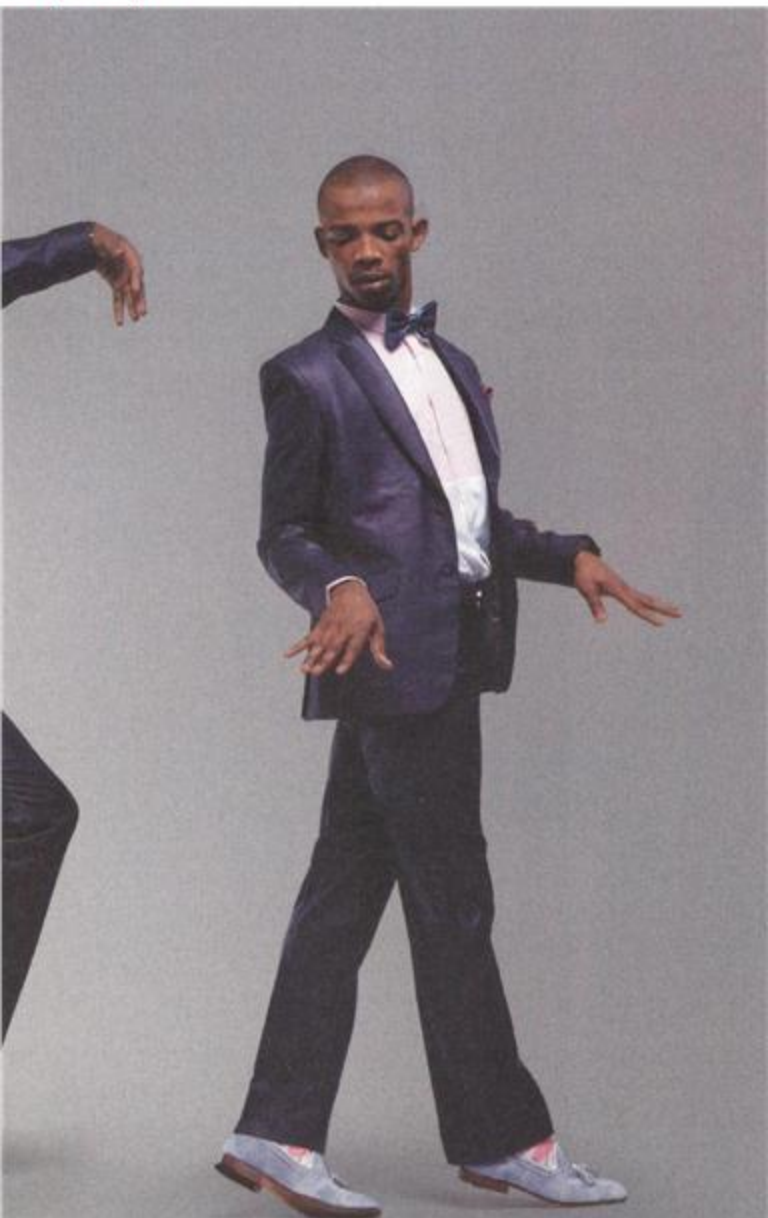
was God-given."

This music man's multiple talents are magnified as the camera clicks away during the shoot and Zakes whips out his famous James Brown moves. It's clear his background in theatre and dance (ballet and pantsula) has stuck with him. So how does a professional contemporary dancer and jazz music graduate cross over to being a kwaito artist?

"As a creative, you should fit in anywhere; no artist should be boxed into a certain genre of music or artistry. I believe creativity flows and gels in with whatever it is you are doing." Thinking back to his sizzling SAMA 2011 performance or any of his stage acts for that matter, it's clear that his extensive contemporary dance experience dating back to 1994 has greatly boosted this crazy character that people just adore. "My stage act is always rehearsed and I put my all into giving the crowd

satisfaction. Jazz and theatre offered me a foundation for the art of entertaining my fans," Zakes says flashing his funny smile.

During the course of the shoot, Zakes talks about his mother very often and he's not even aware of it. It's nice to see this sensitive side of him after he's spent much of the day refusing to actually smile for our cameras, maybe because smiling isn't cool for a smooth guy like him. We thoroughly enjoy hearing him tell stories about how his mother would often peep into the studio and offer to help write lyrics for kwaito songs he was producing for L'vovo's album. "Your mom did what?" we ask. "The song *Mzimba Awung'Dedele* on L'vovo's second album had my mother's influence; she helped me with the lyrics. She was very fun and I miss her always," Zakes says with a huge smile now lighting up his face. His mother unfortunately passed away from cancer in 2007. "I hate the disease with a



passion," he confides.

"My mother was only 47 when it took her from us. It snatched away the opportunity for her to see me becoming successful and for us as a family to rejoice in this beautiful time I'm enjoying in my career," he says with a pained expression. Zakes' dad is still around and he refers to him as *i-outy yam* (my boy) who is a fun character and someone he looks up to.

Without a doubt, 2010 belonged to Zakes and in 2011 he continues to flourish. *Love, Light and Music* went gold and won Best Male Album last year at the Metro FM Awards. The hits *Bum Bum* and *Clap your Hands* dominated dancefloors across the country.

With artists like kwaito musician Beezory under his seven-year-old record company, Mayonie Productions, he plans to continue raising the Durban flag high. "I want kids growing up in kwaMashu, for instance, to have an example of someone amongst them who's made it. I want to be a living example that hard work does indeed pay off. As a child I never imagined being on the cover of *BONA* but look at me now," he boasts.

Our country needs more young people like Zakes, who dream big and work hard. "Next time you see me, don't just ask to take a picture with your cellphone," says the man himself. Ask him how he made it and he'll tell you his story. [e]





COVER STORY

