



SPINNING THE GLOBE

Award-winning South African DJ and record producer
Black Coffee's career is headed into outer space

For Nkosinathi Innocent Maphumulo, better known as Black Coffee, the last 18 months of his career have been truly defining for him, both as a man and an artist. International acclaim isn't, and will never be, his driving force, as, for him, making great music for his audience is the holy grail. However, widespread local and international fame has been the by-product of his exceptionally good music. His aptitude for his art has forever transformed his life.

Setting up this cover feature spoke to his growing global profile. It was near impossible to track him down and when we did, it was during a rare quiet moment when he wasn't circumnavigating the globe. This year, Black Coffee has spent less time at home than at any point in his career. Clearly, the grind is real.

This season of his life has been demanding and rewarding in equal measure. Black Coffee says it has stretched and grown him, both artistically and personally. He has felt the weight of

COVER BLACK COFFEE

expectation now, more than any stage of his career. He is too humble a man to offer any estimation of how he has coped, but astute observers have praised his musical prowess.

Crammed slap bang in the middle of a massive year was the world's most renowned music festival, at which Black Coffee was invited to play. The Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival is an experience like no other. Held in the Colorado Desert over two weekends in April, and attracting some 200 000 people – among those, A-list celebs from around the world – the annual event featured endless festivity from the art installations, constant buzz from the crowds, and a never-ending stream of good sound.

Indeed, it was an exciting prospect for Black Coffee to be at a festival featuring the likes of Guns N' Roses and Ice Cube. Nerve-racking, too. But, to look out at the crowd in the Yuma tent, and to feel them mesmerised for more than two hours by his characteristic Afropolitan beats, was one of the biggest rushes of his life.

'Coachella is a different animal,' he says. 'You can't help but want to be there. It's overwhelming. I've always been a fan and I've always wanted to go. So, being invited to perform was big for us ... I came, I saw, and I was conquered by the love.'

After Coachella, Black Coffee was at the annual Cannes Film Festival for the third time, performing for five straight nights at a pop-up club for Provocateur, a New York based brand that produces high-end gigs. And after that, he was in Ibiza performing at nightclub DC10 for the summer opening of its famous Circoloco party.

Invitations to events like these, much like him winning Best International Act:

Africa at the BET Awards in June, have become an important way to grow his brand outside of SA, where he's already done well. At the same time, he doesn't feel a sense of pressure to represent SA as an ambassador when travelling abroad.

'SA is too big a nation for me to nominate myself as an ambassador,' he says. 'There are, and always have been, a lot of artists helping to brand SA. Yes, I showcase South African music at the highest level. But, I

BLACK COFFEE ON SABC RADIO STATIONS PLAYING 90% LOCAL MUSIC

'It is one of the most brilliant things that has ever happened in the country. It's not just bold, but there's so much reality about it. The reality being that SA today isn't the SA it was ten, fifteen, or twenty years ago. Twenty years ago, an 18-year-old living in SA was consuming something different – whether in terms of fashion or lifestyle or the places they hang out – compared to what an 18-year-old in SA is consuming today. And, I have always felt that we were stuck in the past. It is such a bold move, but it is also a hugely inspirational move,' he says. 'I really hope others will learn from it; not necessarily by doing it the exact same way, but by waking up and looking around.'



don't "represent" the country. I concentrate on what I'm doing. I have so much love for it and I get nervous to showcase that.'

Given that the story of who he is and what he does is so widespread thanks to the internet, performing internationally doesn't leave his global audience unfamiliar when they hear his music. If anything, because he often goes to countries where people already know him, there isn't much difference in how listeners respond, but he does make a few adjustments to his music selection depending on where he performs.

'I believe I have a lot to offer,' he says. 'Usually, wherever I play, I sit and watch and learn, hoping that other DJs are also going to sit and watch and learn, too. I've learnt a lot about the songs they play and what makes them tick compared to what makes South Africans tick. It's different things and it's different elements; that's the stuff that I'm learning.'

His process of learning new things 'slowly but surely' isn't just about music. In his travels, he's also learned a lot. More specifically, by experiencing the reality of each place he visits, he has been able to overcome certain misconceptions and hype that the media has fed him for years.

'We grew up in a different world,' he says. 'It shocked me the first time I was travelling. For example, there aren't as many German cars in Germany as there are German cars in South Africa. We assume that there must be. And then you go to Amsterdam and it's bicycles instead of cars. We learn so much and when we come back, we understand things better.'

There has been a lot to discover in his travels so far. His world tour that

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began in January last year saw him perform over fifty acts in 17 countries, including the United States, Canada, Spain, France, Ireland, Poland, Italy, Germany, Japan, and many more. His favourite destinations so far are New York, London and Greece.

'I feel like I'm growing and I have learned so much,' he says. 'I get to go to New York and see that New York is not as it is on TV, and that what's special in New York isn't so special in South Africa. I get to go to London, meet the people, and see it as it is.'

Travelling has literally changed my life.' Because travelling has had such a positive impact on his life, it's not surprising that Black Coffee often encourages his friends to travel too. Even if it's just for a weekend, or just once a year, he is a strong believer that it's something everyone should do. 'I always tell my friends in South Africa to come and see me play or just take time away,' he says. 'I encourage it as much as I can. I also tell the guys at home that it's not as expensive as they think. Save money, book a flight, find a hotel, and go to a place you've never been. It's such an eye-opener.

You always come back a different person. And the more you do it, the more you learn.'

For Black Coffee, this education is ongoing. His talent will continue to grow as he implements the lessons from the experiences he has. To say there has been lift-off in his career would be remiss. Black Coffee was already among the pre-eminent musicians in Africa. Now, however, the rest of the world is getting the addictive buzz that comes with this triple shot of the man. **Man**



USA

EUROPE

ASIA

AFRICA

AUSTRALIA

GLOBAL DOMINATION

USA: 9 CITIES & 15 SHOWS | **EUROPE:** 16 CITIES & 45 SHOWS | **ASIA:** 2 CITIES & 4 SHOWS | **AUSTRALIA:** 1 CITY & 1 SHOW | **AFRICA:** 2 CITIES & 7 SHOWS

With Best International Act: Africa nominees MVZee (left) and Diamond Platnumz (right)



Receiving his BET Award in Los Angeles



Rocking the party at Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival

