

AWARD-WINNING SOUTH AFRICAN RECORD PRODUCER AND DJ, NKOSINATHI INNOCENT MAPHUMULO (BETTER KNOWN AS BLACK COFFEE), IS A FIRM BELIEVER IN THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF TRAVEL.

WORDS: EUGENE YIGA (@eugeneyiga)

# Black Coffee travels the world

One of the big winners at the 22nd annual South African Music Awards was DJ Black Coffee. He won Best Dance Album, Best Engineered Album, and Album of the Year for *Pieces of Me*. He also won the International Achievement Award in recognition of his meteoric rise on the global dance scene. Achievements like these add to his global stature (he won Best International Act in Africa at the BET Awards), and they are an important way to grow his brand outside South Africa. At the same time, he doesn't feel a sense of pressure to represent the country when he is travelling abroad.

"South Africa is too big a country for me to nominate myself as an ambassador," he says. "There are, and always have been, a lot of artists helping to brand South Africa. Yes, I showcase South African music at the highest level, but I don't take on the responsibility or 'represent' the country. I concentrate more on what I'm doing. I have so much love for it and I get nervous to showcase that."

Given that DJ Black Coffee's story is known around the world, his international performances are in front of fans, not curious first-timers. If anything, because he often goes to countries where people already know him, there isn't much difference in how listeners respond, although he does make a few adjustments to the selection depending on where he is.

"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. 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 I'm learning."

His process of learning new things "slowly but surely" isn't just about the music. In his travels, he's also learnt about so much more. By experiencing the reality of each place he visits, he's been able to overcome certain misconceptions and hype that the media have fed him for years.

"We grew up in a different world," he says. "It shocked me the first time I went 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's been a lot to discover in his travels so far. His world tour, which began in January last year, saw him perform more than 50 acts in 17 countries, including the US, Canada, Spain, France, Ireland, Poland, Germany, Italy and Japan. His favourite destinations so far are New York, London and Greece.

"I feel like I'm growing and I have learnt a lot," 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 DJ Black Coffee often encourages his friends to travel, too. Even if it's just for a weekend, or just once a year, he's 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." ●