

Who are South Africa's best, most loved, feared, admired and despised?

This Sunday, 26 September, South Africa's 100 most popular, loved, admired, feared and despised men, women and children will be dramatically revealed on SABC 3's "Great South Africans".

Of the list of 100 Great South Africans, 79 people on the final list are men and the remaining 21 women. Only 32 people who made the final 100 are deceased, as voters have clearly favoured recent heroes and icons in South African history. Politicians dominate (29 on the list), then sportspersons (18), activists (12) musicians (11), entertainers (11) and also business people (9). Four people in the Top 100 weren't born in South Africa; one was also in the Top 100 of Great Britons, there are three husband and wife teams; one cross dresser and even a fossil!

And whilst the Top 100 list will be revealed on Sunday, 10 famous South Africans who didn't make the list are: JM Coetzee; Wilbur Smith; Dolly Rathebe; Cat scan inventor Allan Cormack; George Pratley; Josia Thugwane; Olive Schreiner; Errol Tobias; Saartjie Baartman and Moses 1.

Hosts Noeleen Maholwana Sangqu and Denis Beckett will announce the Top 100 Great South Africans as voted for by the South African public. Numbers 100 through to 11 will be listed chronologically, whilst the Top 10 nominees will be presented in a random order.

What makes for riveting viewing is the often insightful, sometimes hilarious and occasionally scathing comments made by South African personalities as each Top 100 South African is revealed. These include Tim Modise, Jenny Cryws Williams, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Yvonne Chaka Chaka, Gareth Cliff, Pik Botha, Bob Mabena, Jeremy Mansfield, Dan Moyane, Randall Williams, Jovial Rantao, Ruda Landman, Derek Watts, John Perlman, Lawrence Dube, George Bizos, Helen Suzman and John Vlismas.

Says Denis Beckett of the Top 100 names: "There are not only the 'approved' names. There are the obvious choices but it is the unobvious who provide the intrigue. Truly we are a nation shaped by our recent political past so it is no surprise that a high percentage of people on the list are freedom fighters."

Adds Noeleen Maholwana Sangqu: "This is truly the people's choice. The list is as fascinating as it is surprising. What it does reveal is that South Africa has been blessed with an abundance of greatness."

Following the big launch on September 26, a weekly broadcast of 10 documentaries; each profiling one of the Top 10 will be broadcast on SABC 3 from October 3 until December 9, 2004. Each of these documentaries will be presented by a celebrity or high profile "champion" whose single function is to motivate to the public, why his or her chosen individual is the Greatest South African of them all. As these documentaries are rolled-out, the public are encouraged to rally behind their favourite in the Top 10 and vote so as to influence their final standing. .

The December 9 episode features a live debate, hosted by Beckett and Maholwana Sangqu, where the celebrity champions will argue for their great South African. Voting closes at the end of the show and the top 10, in order as voted for by the public will be revealed.

Penguin South African will be publishing an accompanying book on Great South Africans which will be available in store from early October 2004.

The South African project, sponsored by South African Breweries, is modelled on the successful BBC format "Great Britons" when the British public voted Sir Winston Churchill the Greatest Briton of all time.

The National Film & Video Foundation are co-funders of Great South Africans and have jointly with SABC3 selected the 10 documentary directors.

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