

Merging gospel to African fashion

Just because you are religious does not mean you should not care about looking good.

Lindani Ndwandwa, a 25-year-old Johannesburg-based designer, is targeting the Christian market and says "if you are looking for sexy, you've got the wrong guy".

"Christians are often viewed as not being stylish. So, I want to bring style and trends to them. My designs are a bit more conservative compared to a lot of what is out there. That is what my market wants," he says.

Ndwandwa has been responsible for styling gospel ensemble Joyous Celebration since 2010 and later went on to style several other gospel artists, including the likes of Jabu Hlongwane and, lately, Judith Sephuma.

As a result of working so closely with gospel artists and because of his design style, Ndwandwa has attracted a largely religious client base.

"Most of my clients are also Christians. Even when they come to my shop for fittings, we will end up praying together," he says.

"I'm talking of people like Sophie Ndaba and Penny Lebyane. They are not necessarily gospel singers, but they are Christians."

The devout Christian, who never fails to attend church every Sunday, was first a wardrobe stylist for the popular SABC1 soapie, Generations, before working with gospel artists.

He says he always knew that he wanted to dress Joyous Celebration, specifically. "My music collection is 99% gospel. I'm a gospel fanatic."

'No one surprised'

Next week, Ndwandwa merges his love for fashion and gospel music in a show to be held at the Yamaha Theatre in Johannesburg.

The audience at Fashion Meets Gospel will be given a runway spectacle and treated to some gospel performances with Joyous Celebration founder Lindelani Mkhize as musical director. Artists on the line-up include Xolani Mdlalose, Hlengiwe Ntombela, Margaret Motsage and Kabomo.

"When I started with this concept no one was surprised," says Ndwandwa.

"Having dressed gospel artists for a long time, I wanted to fuse my fashion with the music. People were saying: 'We love the look and feel of what you've done with Joyous Celebration. It's stylish, very fashionable'."

While other platforms for showcasing fashion exist, Ndwandwa says he feels it is important for him to also showcase privately.

"At Fashion Week, people always compare designers on the platform and they don't get to see the vision

behind your collection and your label because there are so many shows, one after another.

"This show is about me. What I can do and what I'm about. People get to see my clothes and enjoy some gospel music, that's what Lindani is about."

At next week Friday's show Ndwandwa will present two collections. The one is titled "Our South African Pride" and takes inspiration from the national flag. The second collection, says Ndwandwa, is purely about African styling.

"I love prints. That's what a lot of people know me for. So I wanted to do two collections: one that is about prints and what people know of Lindani Styling and the other just about me celebrating being South African."

Source: Sowetan, via I-Net Bridge

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