

Mann Made Media captures the King of SA Comedy

When local comedy hero John Vismas turned 39, he refused to let the experience of maturation pass without commentary or provocation. In true Vismas style, he chose to celebrate with "38' Special", a two-hour comedy special at The Lyric Theatre.

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Mann Made Media, a leading brand experience agency, was tasked with capturing this comedic feat on film. The mandate was to take the entire live experience and translate it into a 90-minute comedy special that would air on DStv's new Comec Central channel.

"The challenge was in heightening the atmosphere and creating a flow out of the evening's proceedings that would entertain audiences viewing it at home," explains Youri Licht, of Mann Made Media.

The first step was to engage with Vismas and get a feel for his 'off-stage' personality in order to tap into his persona on a deeper level. This would give the audience insight into what was to come, in terms of tone, and present the idea that this was not humour by itself, but something significantly more personal - delivered with real craft and considered intent.

Viewers were taken behind the 'fourth wall' into the backstage environment - allowing them to see what is usually hidden: the monitors, the empty seats, the instruments belonging to the band K.O.B.U.S., the heavy metal outfit that would open the performance. In addition, viewers would see Vismas in his room backstage, writing notes, studying his mind maps, getting dressed and putting on his war paints and jewellery - focused on the task ahead.

"The seriousness and humour of the man are then paralleled as our video illustrates the solemnness with which he prepares dressing himself, while the words 'Dick Jokes' get superimposed on the cut," says Licht. "Seeing this gives us a sense, that perhaps, this is a man, who takes laughter quite seriously."

Mann Made Media captured all of this in one day, using a multi-cam shoot that would include five-camera set-ups (including one on a jib) that would pan over the audience and auditorium, visually covering the distance Vismas' jokes would travel.

Each movement was carefully considered before the performance, and Mann Made shot all the requirements for the open video before the curtains rose.

The result was a final product that seamlessly captured the raw genius of Vlismas, the delight of the audience, and the transformative power of great comedy.

"Like Mr Vlismas himself, it helps to take funny a little seriously," adds Licht.

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