

fashion

CELEBRATING
BLACK HAIR IN STYLE

Nontando Mposo

THERE is a beautiful movement taking place in which people, especially black women, are celebrating black hair – past and present.

For a long time the controversial issue of black women's hair has been often debated on mainstream media. Even though arguments continue as to whether it is correct or not to have relaxed hair and wear weaves and wigs, I am excited to see a shift in the narrative.

The internet and social media are at the forefront in driving the story of "my hair, my crown".

I spoke to fashion stylist Kwena Baloyi, whose Instagram photography series of beautiful hairstyles celebrating black hair caught my eye.

Tell us about yourself?

My friends and industry peers fondly call me "Kween Kwena". I'm a vivacious, high-spirited and fun person (or so I'm told). I'm from Moletjie Ga-Makibelo in Limpopo. I'm a professional, on-demand TV, magazine and personal stylist. I'm also a fashion adventurer, who explores different clothes to come up with unique styles. I consider myself a fashion therapist because I help people find their fashion identity. I'm low-key obsessed with hair too.

Tell us about your hair journey?

Like every young woman I have come a long way with my hair. Most of us, as black women, have had a contentious relationship with the kink in our coily hair and it's been influenced by what society tells us is "acceptable".

I've been through that phase where my hair needed to be straight because I thought that was "appropriate". My natural hair was called "untidy" or was not appreciated by those around me, so I thought it would be better to straighten it or shave it off. The older I got, the more I appreciated what my hair meant to me and what it represented to me as a woman in a society with so many negative connotations about African people's hair. Now I wear my hair how I like because it's an extension of who I am. It expresses my personality more than any item of clothing could.

What inspired your social

BE TRUE TO YOURSELF: Kwena hair series titled "Afrikan Krowns" says your Krown is an extension of who you are and an expression of your personality and character. Pictures: TREVOR STUURMAN

media hair photo series?

Being a stylist affords me the opportunity to travel to different parts of the country and to meet many different characters. Each person I have met has always had an interesting aspect of their hair. Some stand out for being unique, while some simply intrigue me because they choose to be "regular" for the sake of fitting in. Experiencing this variety of people sparked the notion of how people relate to their "crown" – which is what your hair is essentially. You can choose to have it bold and in your face, or like other hairstyles considered "generic" or "normal". I've also been attracted to how different tribes around the continent wear their hair – particularly in

West Africa. There is a lot of documentation by history scholars and international artists about black people and their hair. The natives of Ugogo, whose hair traditions are exceptional, are one of a few. There are also the Fante women of Elmina (Edina) in Ghana, who had beautiful thick hair and their hairstyles were always so intricate and crafted to perfection. In fact, my current coiffure hairstyle is inspired by women in West Africa. The hairstyle was later made popular by our beloved mama Miriam Makeba. South Africa also has threading and plaiting techniques that are unique and allow us to express our personalities.

Who is responsible for creat-

Kwena's 5 for natural hair

1. Cut off the dead hair and start fresh – new hair, new you.
2. Wash your hair every day – water nourishes it and, believe it or not, your hair loves water.
3. Avoid using artificial heat on your hair and ditch any harsh chemicals.
4. Find a natural hairstylist who understands black hair.
5. Do kickass protective hairstyles to give your hair time to grow out while you look fabulous.

ing the beautiful hairstyles?

My go-to stylist is Ncumisa "Mimi" Duma. She's a talented hair magician and understands the importance of treating natural hair with care. Can you believe my hair has not seen a hair dryer or endured any artificial heat since I started growing it? It's the healthiest my natural hair has been in ages!

Does your series have a title?

Yes. It's called "Afrikan Krowns". We are each Afrikan and each have a Krown. Your Krown is an extension of who you are and an expression of your personality/character. The series looks at how each person chooses to wear their Krown with pride.

Can you tell us what triggered your hair journey?

This will sound so clichéd, but do you know the song *I'm not my hair*, by India Arie? It's always been one of my favourites jams, but it wasn't until years after I heard it that I began to understand what she was really saying. Often as young girls we sing along to a song without really understanding what its purpose or message is. The way India describes her "hair story" in the first verse is how my hair chronicles kinda went. You start with whatever hair your parents decide you need to have. Then you become a little girl who does certain hairstyles because that's what the school deems acceptable. From there you become a teenager, get influenced by pop culture and base your hairstyles on what's "trending". Then you become an adult and still get peer pressured into doing what your circle finds palatable. Eventually, your hair starts to fall out because you've either put way too many chemicals in it or braided it for too long or sewn on too many weaves.

How do you see natural hair empowering women?

For me it says you're slowly, but surely, getting to a point where society's standards of beauty don't define who you are. You no longer feel forced to relax your hair or wear a weave just because the expectation to have straight hair weighs you down. You are ready to celebrate your hair and turn it into whichever shape of krown you desire because it's an extension of who you are, but by no means defines who you are. In many ways, I hope black women feel free to be whoever they choose to be through their krowns.

Any last words?

Women need to understand that the type of hair they choose to wear is not linked to who they are or who other people assume them to be. Whether you're into braids, weave, wigs, fades, cheese kop, dreadlocks, afro, or anything else you find appealing, remember your hair is your krown. No one can dictate what it should look like nor what it should mean to you. What matters is that you love it, nurture it and make the most of it.

● Connect with Kwena on Instagram: @kwenasays

Pitso is a breath of fresh air in a market saturated with rappers

HIP hop artist Neo Pitso continues to wow audiences with his electrifying life performances.

Pitso has vowed to work on more collaborative efforts with like-minded artists.

With his mantra, "Obsessed with Success", inspiring a legion of followers, there is no doubt Pitso

will make his mark in the music world.

The independent artist is based in Sydney, Australia.

Pitso is a breath of fresh air in a market saturated with rappers.

Using the skills acquired at law school, he has been able to manage his career, increase his fan base

and get noteworthy endorsements.

Pitso has partnered with Adidas, Alizé and other global brands. BlackBerry also put him on its radar and flew him to Florida with other BlackBerry ambassadors – singer Alicia Keys and F1 driver Lewis Hamilton.

In 2015, Pitso was awarded an

iconic African Australian of the year award at the Sydney Opera House. In the same year he released a song with hit-maker AB Crazy titled *We On*.

The song went #1 on DJ Ms Cosmo's Hot99. It stayed at #1 for three weeks in South Africa and cracked the top 10 in Australia.

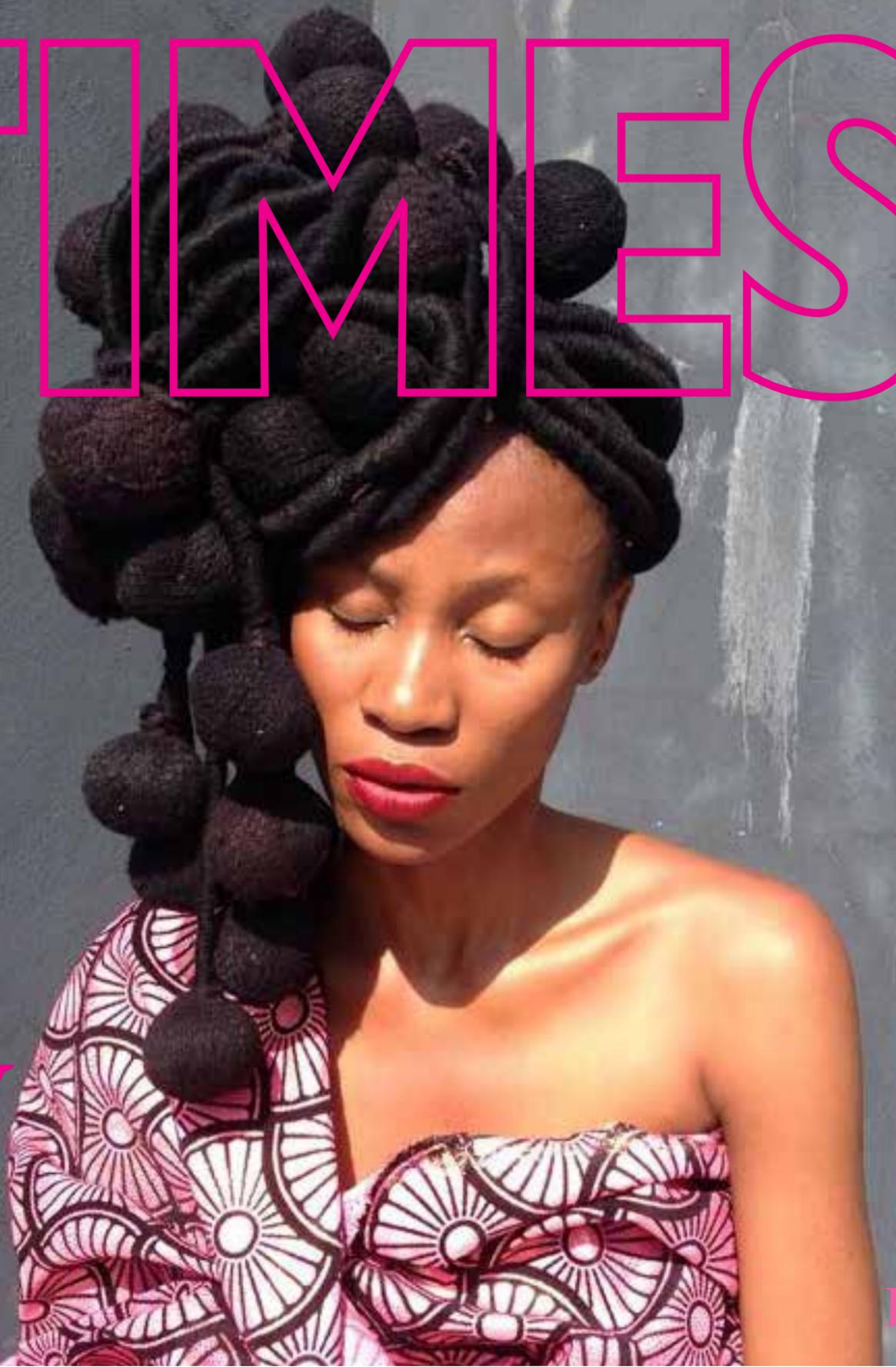
Last year Pitso released the first single from his debut album, *The Neo Pitso EP*, titled *Money First*.

The song earned him a Best Rap Act of 2016 award at the prestigious AMMA Awards.

Pitso will release his debut album in September. – Staff Reporter

TOP
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THE

TIMES



‘My
hair, my
crown’

P2

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