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| Publication | | |
| WEEKEND ARGUS - SUNDAY EDITION | | |
| Page | Date | AVE (ZAR) |
| 17 | Sun 26 Nov 2017 | 64846.07 |



Schadeberg made it look like a snap

In a book which represents the flavour of the times, iconic photographer Jürgen Schadeberg tells the story of his rise to fame in the photographic business, writes **Vivien Horler**

YOU could call Jürgen Schadeberg a bit of a name dropper, but that would be unfair. The fact is, he just happened to know some pretty famous people in the 1950s and 60s, and he took their pictures. And, while you might not be familiar with his name, you'll recognise many of his pictures that appeared in Drum magazine. The word iconic is overused, but his pictures – of the Sharpeville funerals, of Mandela in his Robben Island prison cell, of Mandela in his attorney's office, Hugh Masekela with the trumpet given to him by Louis Armstrong, and Miriam Makeba in front of a microphone – really are iconic.

The stories of how he came to take them sometimes belie their iconic status, though, and describe what sounds like an often chaotic news-gathering operation. The picture of a young Mandela in his office in Chancellor House was taken one afternoon when Schadeberg accompanied the reporter Ted Hughes to interview him. But Hughes had forgotten where he had parked his car and by the time they found it they were very late.

When they entered Mandela's office he was standing there with books and papers under his arm, on his way out to an appointment with a client. Schadeberg says he had time to expose just two frames with his Rolleiflex before Mandela left – but one of them was a winner. Another famous picture was of the blues queen and film star Dolly Rathebe. Schadeberg shot some pictures of Rathebe at Zoo Lake, but realised they were being watched with disapproval by an elderly white couple. Then a police car cruised past and photographer and model decided to leave. But Schadeberg had not got his bikini shot, so they headed to a small mine dump near Kensington and climbed to the top for a "beach" pic. Rathebe was a natural, says Schadeberg, and amid jokes and laughter the photographer shot off four rolls of film. But as they were packing up, four panting policemen appeared on top of the mine dump from different directions, shouting and seeking evidence of interracial sex, then an offence under the Immorality Act. Both were arrested, and the entire incident reminded Schadeberg of his youth in Nazi-dominated Berlin.

At the time, Drum magazine was owned by the legendary Jim Bailey and edited by the man who became almost

equally legendary, Anthony Sampson. Neither comes out particularly well in this book. Bailey, one of the richest men in Africa, is described as a miser who spent most of his time at the Rand Club, while Sampson was quixotic, bad-tempered, and made at least two passes at Schadeberg.

The book is dedicated to Henry Nxumalo – "a great and courageous journalist with whom I was privileged to work". Nxumalo exposed slave conditions on potato farms in the Bethal area, about 200km east of Joburg, by signing up as an agricultural worker. After two weeks with no word from Nxumalo, Schadeberg drove to Bethal and found the farm. Workers grubbed in the soil for potatoes, overseen by a "boss boy" on horseback who cracked a whip.

Schadeberg opened the bonnet of his car, hoping he would look like a stranded motorist, while surreptitiously taking pictures. Then he spotted Nxumalo, slammed down the bonnet, opened the passenger door and waited while Nxumalo fled towards him, the "boss boy" giving chase.

Nxumalo made it safely to the car and his subsequent story in Drum of working conditions in Bethal was a revelation.

For the times, Schadeberg was an unusual white man. His experiences as a child in Berlin during World War II somehow destroyed prejudice against "the other". He took people as he found them, respecting them for who they were, although he was often appalled by the drunkenness of his colleagues at Drum. Weekends were party times and people tended not to come to work on Mondays, and often not on Tuesdays either.

Schadeberg's mother, an actress, had married a British serviceman in Berlin after the war, and they emigrated to South Africa, leaving a teenage Schadeberg behind to fend for himself in a devastated Germany. He trained as a photographer while working as an unpaid photographic volunteer, and a couple of years later came to South Africa too.

The names of his colleagues and subjects read like a Who's Who of the times: Can Themba, Ruth First, Ernest Cole, Trevor Huddleston, Miriam Makeba, Bloke Modisane, Nat Nakasa, Todd Matshikiza. From behind his camera he watched as history was made: the Sophiatown removals, the Women's March of 1955, the joy of the defendants when they were acquitted after



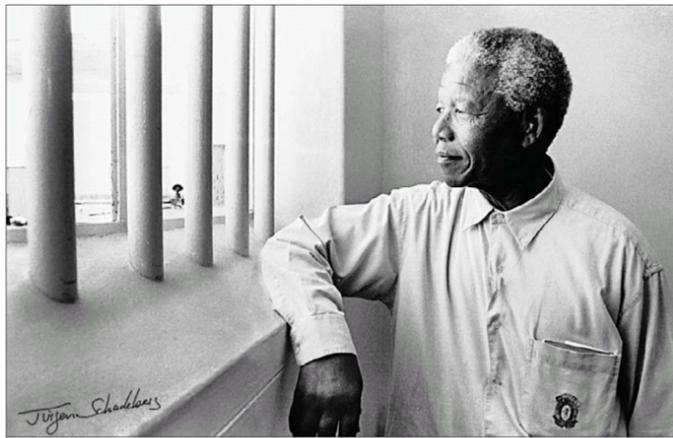
Dolly Rathebe on a mine dump.

the Treason Trial, and the Sharpeville funerals.

The memoir covers his boyhood in Berlin during the Allied bombing and his life working and teaching photography in Britain, Europe and America after he left South Africa, but it is the description of the Drum years that stands out.

It is well worth reading for a flavour of the times: full of astonishingly creative people, oppressive, often frightening but vividly alive.

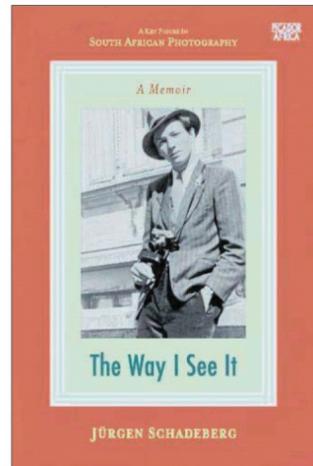
• For more of Horler's reviews, see her website *The Books Page* (thebookspage.co.za).



Former president Nelson Mandela visits his old cell on Robben Island in 1994.



The Sharpeville Funeral. On Monday March 21, 1960, the PAC launched a campaign against the hated Pass Laws. Outside Sharpeville police station about 3 000 people, including women and children, demonstrated. The police opened fire and 67 were killed and 186 wounded. Most of the victims were shot in the back.



THE WAY I SEE IT – A MEMOIR
BY JÜRGEN SCHADEBERG
Picador Africa



Drum staff in 1954, (from left) Henry Nxumalo, Zeko Mphahlele, Casey Motsisi, Can Themba, Arthur Maimane (with hat & cigarette), Victor Xashimba, Dan Chocho and Bob Gosani (right with camera).



Miriam Makeba posing for a Drum magazine cover in a downtown Johannesburg recording studio in 1955.