



# GQ&A WITH SIPHIWE MPYE

The fashion mogul talks about friendships, making a million and becoming a DJ  
**WANDI NZIMANDE**

**A DECADE AGO**, friendship and an entrepreneurial spirit brought together two dreamers from different backgrounds. Wandie Nzimande, a poor township boy, and Sechaba 'Chabi' Mogale, a worldly returnee from exile, wove a fashion business out of a love for the positive things about township life. Loxion Kulca blazed a quick trail to success that was born of a nexus of the duo's passion and street connectedness, and the expertise of their mentor Brian Abrahams. Following Abrahams' death and Mogale's departure from the company, Nzimande rebuilt the label over six years, surviving legal woes, depression and a strain on a lifelong friendship, reinventing himself as a relentless one-man, pop-culture machine.

**GQ: I bumped into you some years back and you were in quite a state. I think it was near the time Abrahams died.**

**WN:** Ja, it was, around 2003. After he died I went underground, I fucked out for two years. It was kind of a forced sabbatical.

**GQ: Where were you when you heard the news of his death?**

**WN:** I was hungover after a hectic Jozi night. I was woken up by Chabi, crying. He said, 'Brian's gone.' I went back to bed, I didn't want to believe it. All my life I was told I was crazy and he was the one guy who taught me that if there is a method to your madness you can make money from it. He was larger than life. That [his death] was a catalyst for change. Since then, I understand my purpose.

**GQ: There is debate about this pride and romanticisation of the ghetto, yet it was an inferior place we were told we had to live. With the kind of brand you created, centred on township culture, what's your take on the debate?**

**WN:** Russell Simmons has tweeted, 'I snuggle with struggle'. That is what we are really good at in the township, taking struggle and making something positive out of it. Yes, I know the mentality was to put all these bastards in one place and eventually they would kill each other, but I am celebrating the victory, to be able to overcome that. If my family hadn't broken up, if I hadn't dropped out of Wits, if Chabi's family hadn't gone the way it did, there might be no Loxion Kulca, no victory.

**GQ: What drove your partnership with Chabi and later the decision to let go?**

**WN:** Our partnership started at school. When it came to business it was easy because we knew each other. There are a lot of negative things that happened around our court case [when Abrahams died and his family fought for a share of the business]. Chabi had been doing this for so long he had lost his passion. I still felt as if we hadn't started running the race.

**GQ: What did that do to your relationship?**

**WN:** It's like being in the army and we are fighting, we are bleeding and then you tell me you want to quit. I got angry and bitter and I regret how things were handled. But he and I are super cool. We will always be. He supports everything I do. At the launch of Sixteen Stitches [Chabi's label], I was the DJ. It's as if there was never any negativity.

**GQ: So when Chabi left and Abrahams died you were coming off a huge high, heading for a hundred million revenue and then you had to start from scratch.**

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**WN:** The past six years have been about that, reinventing.

**GQ: What is the most reckless thing you have done with money?**

**WN:** I was in Cape Town on my birthday, I bought champagne for the Waratahs [the Australian rugby team]. That bottle ran out and I ordered another one, that's when I really got fucked up!

**GQ: What was your worst experience of being hurt by a woman?**

**WN:** [Long pause] What hurt me was the first woman I ever hurt. She was a coloured girl and her parents didn't like her going out with a black guy. I was seen with someone else and she stuck by me until I just dropped her. That really hurt me because I am not that kind of person.

**GQ: You have also become a DJ.**

**WN:** I have always loved music. When I started I was practising about six hours a day and now I try to do about two hours every day. It [music] is very therapeutic; it got me out of my depression.

**GQ: How long did that [depression] last?**

**WN:** About two years, I drank to forget about it. I didn't realise it at first, but it affected me in many ways. The depression came from Brian's death and from being an empty vessel. I had just been about work and my family had fallen apart.

**GQ: You have recently got into television. What is it that you saw there?**

**WN:** In the past, the [foreign] television programmes we were exposed to were way ahead of the market. In recent times, with the internet and social media, I feel as if local productions are way behind the market. The gap is right there. There is so much potential out there and so many platforms for video content other than TV.

**GQ: Any people you model yourself on?**

**WN:** Many people. Richard Branson, Russell Simmons, I'm also a hectic Michael Jackson fan, but mainly moguls. The one thing that strikes me about a lot of them is their humility. **GQ**

