

Chit Chat



**THIS WEEK:
SIYABONGA
RADEBE**

Award-winning comedian/actor Siyabonga Radebe has landed a starring role on Generations as Xolani Mthembu, the toy boy of shebeen queen Ruby Dikobe. He speaks to LESLEY MOFOKENG about making it big in the city

So, what's it like to play a Ben 10 (a toy boy)?

It is a bit of a challenge, you know. Culturally and personally, I wouldn't be comfortable dating an older woman. But acting with Slindile Nodangala (Mam'Ruby) has made my life easier. She is a professional.

How do you see this role impacting on society?

We know that culture is always evolving and we know that this story line is not made up – it happens in real life. There are lots of guys who date older people and as long as both parties are okay, who are we to judge? An individual's perspective is different to that of a society's.

What has been the most challenging scene so far?

On the first day I walked on set, I had nine scenes and they were all about kissing Ruby. Phew! Had it happened on the second day or once I had settled into the role, I would have probably cringed. So there I was, surrounded by these people whom I respect. I had to kiss and kiss someone I used to see on TV.

Is she a good kisser?

We're actors. We don't really kiss; we act out a kiss. She's really good at acting. If viewers find it believable, then I know that she and I are doing a good job.

What is the value for a stand-up comedian to be on Generations?

I studied drama. When I got to my third year, my lecturer, who was a former Generations actor, used to tell us stories about finding a job on a daily soap. I realised how important it is to have a constant place to feed your craft. As a comedian, I suppose people will be intrigued by the stories I could tell about being on set with these people they see every night in their living rooms.

Which do you enjoy the most, comedy or acting?

I love acting. Getting into someone's brain, this person created by a writer or director, is a great feeling. Comedy is my hobby. I share myself with my audience.

You came from Durban and settled in Joburg eight years ago. What are the life lessons you picked up?

I learnt to be more independent. I got a taste of living alone when I stayed 30 minutes from home at the Durban University of Technology campus. Every Friday I would meet my mother in town and she would give me R100 – every Friday without fail. I feared Joburg because people don't portray it in a good light. I learnt to be responsible and take care. I was young, just 22, and now I am 30. I think I was fortunate to grow up away from my

parents to learn from my mistakes and realise that they were correct on a lot of things.

Was it an easy landing in Joburg?

No ways. There was a time we stayed in a room in Orange Grove and didn't know how I was going to pay the rent at the end of the month. I used to do gigs at Horror Cafe and be paid R250. I could buy 2kg of rice and mielie meal. Then I would walk from Orange Grove to Randburg to perform at Tony's Grill & Bar for white people. I was so scared of them, but I resolved to face my fears. I knew that if I was that good, I would be offered a lift back home. Through it all, my friends and I always knew that our art would get us through.

What kind of a person becomes a comedian?

There is no formula. As for me, I always knew that I was funny. Growing up, every time I spoke and how I phrased my sentences made people

laugh. I come from a big family and I can say they encouraged me because they always laughed at what I said.

What sells?

Comedy is in conflict, the differences. Black and white, male and female, Indian and coloured. We all like sex and we laugh about it. We're scared to talk about race and people laugh when you dare talk about it.

Who do you enjoy impersonating?

Nelson Mandela is an easy target. There's so much good that you think of when you hear his name and there is a wealth of stories to work with. Plus, I like the man.

As a movie lover, what do you think of South African movies?

I think local movies are great. South Africa has so many beautiful stories, but I don't know whether Invictus is a South African film or the upcoming Long Walk To Freedom. There is no South African who can play Mandela because we are not tall enough. I wonder where Mandela came from. Did we import him? Was there something he ate that we can feed South Africans? Shaka Zulu was played by little-known Henry Cele and it went on to be an international hit. Why can't they do the same with Long Walk?

What don't we know about Siyabonga?

That I was raised in a Christian home and that I went to the Jerusalem Christian Church in Ntuzuma township, where my grandfather was a preacher.

At what point will you say 'mission accomplished'?

When I am married, and have children and a home. When I know that when I leave work I am going home to my lovely wife and kids. That's it! My parents gave me a happy home and that's what I wish to have.

» Generations is on weekdays at 8pm on SABC1. Radebe stages Smiles and Cries, his one-man show, at the Suncoast Casino in Durban on June 8 and 9

