



Q&A with **Siba Mtongana**

Siba's Table was the first TV show by a non-American presenter to reach 60 million homes in the US. **Eugene Yiga** spoke to South Africa's home-grown celeb about her journey so far and her brand-new second season.

Why do you think the show has been such a global sensation?
When we signed with Food Network, I said to them that even though it's an international platform, I still need the real me to come through. People have to connect with the presenter. Realness – a person being who they are and not pretending to be someone else – is important in our time. I guess that's why reality shows are so popular!

What was your first time on camera like?
While I was still a food editor at *Drum* magazine, I had a show on Mzansi Magic called *Cooking with Siba*. We used to cook with local celebrities. The first time I had to speak on camera, I asked the producer to get everyone out of the room because they

were making me nervous! That's what stars from *Idols* experience. When people enter, they don't know there [will be] a whole crew when they have to audition.

How have things changed over the years?
It's been quite a long journey since then. And I think you get more comfortable as you interact with the camera. I'm no longer intimidated. I can do an interview anywhere and still be me because I'm more experienced now. But in the beginning, it was quite intimidating.

What can we expect from the second season of *Siba's Table*?
I wanted to make what our grandparents used to make, but give it a light, inclusive,

modern twist. I also wanted to draw [on] more experiences that reminded me of my childhood... For example, I remember braaing fish once; especially if it's in foil, the bottom part will braai but the top part won't. And then I remembered how, as a child, they used to put coals on top of food. Now it makes sense why they did that!

How do you hope to change overseas perceptions about South Africa?

For the international audience, I want them to know what we eat. South Africans will know bread baked in a tin but other people won't. Maybe they'll know a bobotie or a melktert, but that's about it. They'll have no idea about everything else. Once, when I was in Lisbon, I said I was going to make a wonderful relish that is traditional to South Africa and called 'chakalaka.' And they said, "Waka-Waka! It's time for Africa!"

Will your husband still feature in the show?

He's such a support. There are times when I just feel like I can't do it and Brian is the one who says that I should see what he sees in me. He's that strength that keeps me going even when I feel like I can't. We are one.

Could you tell us about your first cookbook (*My Table*), coming out later this year?

Even when I was still at *Drum*, I wanted to have a cookbook. It just never felt like it was the right time. This time, it's the right time. Many people are asking why I'm self-publishing. Because food editing was my first introduction into media, I want to be the one who gives the final direction, without having to compromise.

How do you feel about your life right now?

I believe that God has opened an opportunity for me and for that I say thank you. Being a celebrity is a privilege because you get to decide what you're going to influence people with. And I decided to influence people to enjoy their time in the kitchen because I believe that food needs to be a pleasurable experience for everyone. I also believe in family values like loving your husband, loving your kids and being happy. I'm happily married, I have two wonderful kids and life is good!

The second season of Siba's Table Fast Feasts is currently airing on Food Network (DSTV Channel 175) every Friday at 20h00.