



QUEEN B

FROM SMALL SCREEN TO BIG STAGE

Most people remember her as a finalist on the first South African season of *Idols*. But Bianca le Grange has kept busy since her television appearance back in 2002. Eugene Yiga caught up with her to find out more.

✕ WHERE AND WHEN DID YOU LOVE FOR MUSIC START?

Music has always been a part of my life. My mom was a music teacher. She played the organ in church and would lay me on her lap to accompany the choir. She says I would be humming and singing along.

WHEN DID YOU FIRST DECIDE TO BECOME A PERFORMER?

I've been performing since I was six years old. It's all I have ever wanted to do. So from a young age I knew I would be on a stage. I would take every opportunity awarded to me, from singing at weddings and funerals to friends' birthdays and family gatherings.

DID YOU CONSIDER ANY OTHER CAREERS?

Teaching is the only other profession that I would consider. If I didn't become a performer, I would be teaching performance art.

WHAT FAILURES OR DIFFICULTIES HAVE YOU HAD IN YOUR CAREER?

Not reading contracts and knowing where your signed copy is. This was a huge setback in my career. But failures are there to teach us. My challenging moments in life and my career have always taught me to get up and try again. Cry, wipe away your tears, and start over.

I still get challenged and people's perceptions are: "You're famous, so you must be rich now." Or: "You've been exposed, so do it free for the community." But people don't realise that I still get rejected and I still get disappointed. I still have to try hard, be better, and always ready for anything.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE BIGGEST PROFESSIONAL HIGHLIGHT IN YOUR CAREER?

Meeting Nelson Mandela and singing for his first 46664 concert with Usher, Alicia Keys, and P Diddy.

WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE AS A PERFORMER?

The first time the top 12 of *Idols* sang for an audience of 25,000 people at the Dome in Northgate, Johannesburg, I cried seeing the crowd. I was so nervous!

WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO BE A FINALIST ON THE SHOW?

My *Idols* experience was bitter-sweet, but I enjoyed doing it. I still watch the show every year to see the new talent they will be putting through that gruelling audition. I received a lot of exposure from it and it opened many doors for me, from being a presenter on TV to being an actress. After 13 years, people still refer to me as the girl who did *Idols*!

HOW DO YOU FIND TIME FOR THE SINGING, ACTING, AND OTHER GIGS?

Time management. I don't say yes to every event and job. I choose what is beneficial for my career as well as my purpose.

My goal is not just to entertain, I want to touch and help people by connecting with their souls.

COULD YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT YOUR ROLE AS ANITA IN *WEST SIDE STORY*?

Anita and Maria are dear friends who confide in each other. Two strong women who know what they want and aren't afraid to speak their minds. Anita is opinionated, savvy, charismatic, and flamboyant. Outgoing and gregarious, she wears colourful frocks. I can't wait to play this character!

WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT THE CHARACTER?

Anita is considered to be most people's favourite character, and rightfully so. She's a badass. I'm a badass too.

HOW ARE YOU PREPARING FOR THE ROLE?

I go to gym every day, with contemporary dance class twice a week. I've also seen every YouTube video and watched the film ten times.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT THIS MUSICAL?

I love everything: the thrilling dancing, the high energy that the actors bring to their performances, and the powerful plot. It's got terrific songs and I'm a sucker for a good love story.

WHAT DREAM ROLES WOULD YOU LIKE TO PLAY IN THE FUTURE?

I would love to play Velma Kelly in *Chicago*.

WHAT ARE YOUR DREAMS FOR 2015 AND BEYOND?

I would love to nail my character as Anita. I'll also be getting married this year, so my biggest dream is to have a special day with family and close friends.

'West Side Story' is at the Artscape Opera House from 23rd July to 23rd August. Tickets are available from Computicket. ✕

BIANCA'S TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Opportunities are not awarded to you. Sometimes you have to create those opportunities for yourself.
- Have persistence, courage, and drive. Learn from your mistakes, swallow your pride, humble yourself, and try again.
- Treat people the way you would want to be treated. You never know who someone might become.