

Connecting with filmmaker and media talent Nontobeko Sibisi

 By [Emily Stander](#)

21 Jun 2022

Talents Durban is a competitive training and development platform founded by the Berlin Film and International Film Festival - and award-winning media talent and storyteller Nontobeko Sibisi has been selected to be part of it.



Image supplied: Nontobeko Sibisi

After finding her passion through Rhodes Music Radio at Rhodes University and working her way to winning Best News Reader in the student category of the SABC News Awards, Sibisi is a force to be reckoned with. Now, she has decided to translate her talents to filmmaking.

Tenacity and fervour are intricate to who she is. “A lot of things will happen to you and the dream along the way, the key is to accept, heal and lean into your experiences as well as your higher sense of purpose – the things you believe to be true. One thing we will not do is completely give up on ourselves and our role in our ancestral family trees – we really are our wildest dreams,” she said.

We caught up with her to find out more about her work and her filmmaking journey...

■ ***Congratulations on being selected for Talents Durban, how are you feeling about it?***

I’m so excited. Honestly, it’s still a “wow girl, you did that?” moment for me. There’s nothing as validating as this, especially at the critical start of one’s filmmaking journey. Sometimes it can take a big inner and outer journey to listen to the work that intuitively calls you by name.

I’m grateful to be able to process that under the guidance of amazing and well-accomplished mentors such as Sara Blecher, Nadine Cloete, Bongi Ndaba, Mohamed Siam, and Akosua Adoma Owusu – there are mountains of wisdom being shared not just on the creative processes but also the business of film.

■ ***Tell us a bit more about yourself.***

I am a storyteller who is curious about connections, conversations and resonance around universal truths and shared lived experiences. My interests and perhaps also sources of inspiration are African arts, culture, history & heritage and

indigenous knowledge. To feed and formalise this yearning for intimacy in stories and connected conversations I founded my brainchild Okay Sho! Media! Where I'm also honing my skills in documentary filmmaking.

To feed my yearning for nature, connection and truth – is another big part of me - Higher Ground Africa. It's a rurally rooted and re-imagined space that focuses on rekindling our relationship with nature and self. Here I combine creative storytelling and African nature experiences to celebrate cultural and indigenous connections to the Earth.

That's Nontobeko right now I guess – learning, unlearning and embracing being an intentional artist in what I do. Refining my voice before following up with being proactive in making the visions and the healing come alive through expressive art forms and collaborations.

▣ **How did you end up in the world of media?**

Oh my gosh! I've always-always been such an eager beaver for broadcast. Absolutely loved and still love it so much – it was just impossible to not see it for myself growing up. I'm a product of many hours of the Oprah Show. I'm also a product of many hours of listening to the news, on the hour every hour, quickly running to the mirror trying to remember what was said just so I could sign off at the end. Hilarious really.

After enrolling for a Bachelor of Journalism degree at Rhodes University my curiosity in broadcast and media saw me take up a lot of extra-curricula. I started as a feature writer for the *Mail & Guardian's* campus publication called *Campus Times*. But a big part of my heart and time was spent on campus radio - Rhodes Music Radio.



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I also had my first international trip to Nigeria after being selected as part of a cohort of 36 young African storytellers trained to cover the buildup of the 2010 World Cup as well as the African Cup of Nation. My work would go on to win local and international awards such The Siemens Profile Award in Doha, Rhodes Top 100 Students including our station's Best News Anchor, Best Radio Presenter & Station's Lifetime Achievement Award.

Looking back, I was so wild and free with my passions and I was so fortunate that many doors opened including an internship at the SABC after graduating in 2011. So story conversations and I have really come a long way. It's gotten me here.

▣ **What do you hope to achieve through filmmaking?**

My great-grandmother was a captivating storyteller, I miss that feeling of connectedness when sharing a story - I miss having resonating conversations about stories. I want to carry that energy in my work as a filmmaker. I want to practice

intimacy, intention and impact in my work – creating a space to gather and be in ritual with or without words.

▣ ***What stories do you want to focus on through film? Why?***

My interests have always been in the arts, culture and entertainment space. But as my sense of being continues to evolve, there's been a louder call towards storytelling, preservation healing and archiving of our history, heritage and indigenous knowledge narratives in re-imagined ways.

I've been learning to allow myself to be a vessel to many ideas that I've tried to intentionally note down, trusting that it will let me know again when it's ready to be told and how it wants to be told. It's such an intimate relationship/companionship that has to be carved, one that involves leaving your ego at the door, especially when talking about African history, heritage and indigenous knowledge.

▣ ***How will your experience as a media talent and journalist translate to filmmaking?***

All the traits and variables that I've learned or enhanced in one way or the other have been aided by my experience as a media talent and journalist.

Entrepreneurially, it's really helped me realise the value of media and production skills gained over the years and how those can be customised with your bespoke touch and thereafter translated to business services.

This has opened both on and off-camera business opportunities, from an acting debut on Mzansi Magic's telenovela *Gomora* and being a TV Talk Show host and producer on DStv's *Show Me Love* – to ultimately evolving my media and TV production business to include working with brands such as Mzansi Magic, Bet Africa/Paramount Africa, The National Arts Festival, Standard Bank Arts, Moja Love Channels and Rhodes University.

I've found being honest about the work in a selfless and transparent way really has a way of igniting future collaborations. I love helping businesses tell their brand stories and histories in a very sacred and true way. I really want to bring forth a lot of the energy work in my film work.

▣ ***Any advice for aspiring filmmakers?***

Being intentional also means being proactive in doing the work. There are numerous film and television professionals, platforms and institutions whose sole existence is to help aspiring and emerging filmmakers, not just with content and storytelling, but also in the business of film.

Before you send your ideas out there do some research on what makes a good story – what makes a good character, and ultimately, how do you put that together in a good pitch - particularly one with an audience in mind?

ABOUT EMILY STANDER

Freelancer specialising in games and entertainment | My first loves are writing, music and video games

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