

Nyanga Tshabalala on voicing *Takalani Sesame's* Zikwe

By  Karabo Ledwaba

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This week we get to know Nyanga Tshabalala the voice behind *Takalani Sesame's* Zikwe. With over three decades of expertise, he has cultivated a remarkable portfolio of distinct educational puppetry projects for both live theatre and television productions.

Furthermore, his influence extended to consulting with the Children's Television Workshop on adapting the *Sesame Street* series for South African audiences, leading to the creation of *Takalani Sesame*. In 1997, Tshabalala co-produced and performed in *Kid Gloves*, a 13-part children's television series tailored for South African viewers.

Driven by his passion, Tshabalala took the initiative to establish the Sibahle Educational Puppetry Programme (SEPP), a non-governmental organisation dedicated to his vision and mission.



Nyanga Tshabalala- The voice behind Zikwe and Reshoketswe Maredi- Zikwe's left arm. Source: Supplied.

■ How did you get into this industry?

I remember being an usher at the market theatre and heard from Mike Mvelase that there are auditions for puppet theatre. Curiously I met with Gary Friedman who then trained me to be a puppeteer. At first, I was a narrator and later a puppeteer. This new knowledge and skill allowed me to travel the world.

■ What is a typical workday for you?

Working on a project like *Takalani Sesame* especially in studio, is like being at the F1 pit stop. We all know why we are there and have respect for each other's discipline so when we start to shoot, we all work towards a common goal.

▣ *What have been the highlights of your journey?*

One of the highlights that stand out is when Zikwe, my character, was teaching Jimmy Dlodlu, a brilliant guitarist and musician how to play the guitar. This was epic and therefore I should complement the script writers, costume, and set designers of that segment because it was hilarious. Most importantly Jimmy was humble and this for me, made parents believe that they can learn how to play the guitar from a Muppet.



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▣ *How do you deal with conflict in the workplace?*

Thankfully, one has never really encountered conflict and it's all because over the years we have learnt to communicate with each other irrespective of position. It is always important for all of us to remember that we are working towards achieving the same goal.

▣ *Describe yourself in one word.*

Humble

▣ *Who inspires you?*

People in general.

▣ *What did you want to be when you were a child?*

I wanted to be a doctor.

▣ *What do you think you have in common with Zikwe, or what have you learned from him?*

Zikwe and I both love travelling, we love languages and we both believe in always learning and discovering new things or ways of doing things.

▣ *Give three pieces of advice for young people waiting to enter this industry.*

1. Be humble to every person young and old.
2. Always make time for yourself to become one with your craft.
3. Always read and teach yourself to listen.

ABOUT KARABO LEDWABA

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