



BEING NUU



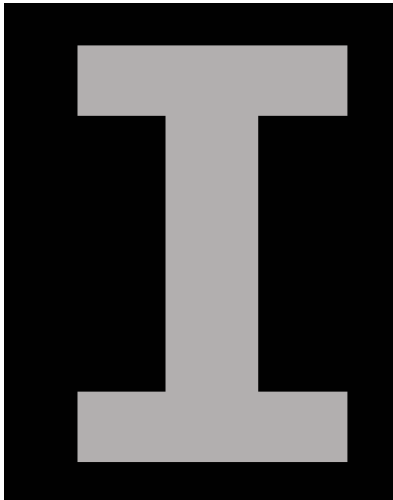
For her
first GQ
cover story,
BONANG
MATHEBA sits
down with
Features
Editor Bernd
Fischer
to discuss
the role of
power in the
year of the
woman, as
she divulges
her hopes
for the
future and
reveals what
you'll never
hear her
talk about

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NUMBER ONE



INTERVIEWS AREN'T FUN THINGS,'

Matheba tells me, laughing, as we sit down for lunch at The Terrace. When my appointment with Matheba was scheduled, it came as no surprise that she – or rather, her team – suggest that we connect at Jo'burg's ultra-exclusive Saxon Hotel, Villas and Spa, the residence where the super rich and famous, like Lady Gaga and Oprah Winfrey, take refuge. In her dark Céline sunglasses, Burberry check shirt, blue jeans and red-lacquered Louboutins, Matheba looks

right at home. 'They have an amazing Caesar salad here,' she tells me, confirming my observation.

Matheba has distinguished herself as one of the most influential and recognisable women in African media, gaining her start through radio and television presenting over a decade ago. Today, brand Bonang includes a production company, numerous product and service ambassadorships, fashion collaborations, an app, and more recently, a reality show called *Being Bonang*.

Over time as Matheba's career prospered and her star power increased, so did the heightened interest in her private life. In our constantly connected digital age where sharing on social media has become a business – one that Matheba has mastered – it's also allowed the professional and personal choices of those at the helm to be publicly scrutinised and criticised.

In June, a Twitter troll attempted to slut-shame Matheba. The 31-year-old responded, tweeting: 'My vagina. My rules,' which prompted her 3 million plus followers on the platform to tweet out their support with #iamBonang, where they touted her success.

'What I love most about #iamBonang was that it wasn't about me. It was about other young men and women, boys and girls, who were using that hashtag to kind of celebrate themselves, identify important characteristics and strengths within themselves, that maybe they weren't confident to share,' explains Matheba. 'It's something that once again shows the power and impact of social media. There is power in recognising how powerful you are in the world and I think #iamBonang is a perfect example of that.'

And Matheba is right. When we met, her limited-edition T-shirt collection with online retailer Spree – called BONANG by Bonang Matheba, obviously – had just launched 'like two hours ago.' Emblazoned on one of the white T-shirts is #iamBonang. Shortly after our interview, Matheba took to Instagram, posting

a celebratory message announcing that some of her items had already sold out. At the same time, the Twitterverse was debating the high price tag of the range, the issue quickly becoming a celebrity news story, and it was the first thing (at the time of writing) that would pop up when you Googled 'Bonang'. The two seemingly contradictory reactions come with the territory.

Matheba is well aware of her clout, but she's still level-headed. She acknowledges that her #iamBonang moment was preceded by plenty of others before hers, like the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements, both which spurred international action and responses, yet leaving South Africa to still have its definitive moment.

When I ask her why she thinks this is, she pauses with a thoughtful 'hmm,' continuing: 'You know, culturally, South Africa is different, but also, constitutionally, South Africa is fresh, South Africa is young, South Africa is new. There are many wounds that we are yet to still deal with before we can move on and tackle anything else. There's so much forgiveness that still needs to happen in South Africa

and we can't compare ourselves to the globe. We are ahead in other aspects internationally, but in some aspects unfortunately we fall very, very short.'

In terms of shortcomings, Matheba affirms that nothing much has changed for South African women today. 'We can disguise it as much as we want. A woman is killed or raped in our country every 30 seconds. That needs to stop.'

In light of these facts, and especially while some are calling this the year of the woman, I ask Matheba what message she hopes she could impart to men. 'You don't have to be abusive. It doesn't make you less of a man if you don't show your physical strength,' she says, adding that she lives in fear everyday. 'I shake because we are literally living among monsters. And it's not everybody. But unfortunately because there's so much of the bad, the good doesn't shine through.'

Of the zeitgeist, Matheba calls it bittersweet. 'It's an important time in that more and more voices and stories are being heard. More women are speaking out. We know their names,' she adds, referring to local victims of violence against women, like Karabo Mokoena. 'We can say who they are, we know their stories, we bury them, they live amongst us. That's an important start.'

About ten minutes into our conversation, a waiter arrives at our table and Matheba turns to her personal assistant, Renton, who wants to confirm her order. 'A chicken Caesar salad and a Cosmopolitan, and they must bring the Cosmopolitan now and then they must bring me a glass of Champagne and six oysters before they bring »



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“It’s important to me that my fans get an end product that is
It’s better than being too messy or being all over the place.”

the Caesar salad. Thank you.’ I now fully assume that this is what it would feel like to be on an episode of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*. Or *Being Bonang*.

The next topic I raise to Matheba results almost immediately in what might appear to be induced laughter, but this before I’m even finished with the short, straightforward question. It’s likely one that Matheba has come to expect, perhaps having been asked it way too many times before, or maybe she’s read about it online or been confronted by those who dare. Regardless, her answer is arguably one of the most recognisable characteristics at the core of her brand’s image.

The question: ‘What misconceptions do people have about brand Bonang?’ The answer: ‘Number one: that I am a diva!’ Matheba responds dramatically, dragging out the last word. ‘I can never ever crack that mould. “Oh darling, I want this and that and the other thing”,’ she says in a mocking tone. ‘And that I’m over the top, I’m an ice queen, I’m difficult to work with. But I think my track record

speaks for itself. I’ve been in the industry,’ she continues, correcting herself. ‘I’ve been top of the game for fifteen years consistently. I haven’t dropped to number two. I’ve been running this race because of professionalism and pure hard work and I think if I had all those other things that people, you know, say I am, I don’t think I would’ve gone this far so long.’

Still answering the question, Matheba continues. ‘Also, that I’m quite self-centred, which is very true.’ We laugh. One of Matheba’s most endearing traits is her sense of humour. ‘I am my brand, I am me, I am my glass and my cup of Coca-Cola and therefore I have to treat myself in a certain way, unfortunately. It’s a bad thing, I’m working on it.’

I continue to press Matheba on her image, raising the opinion and criticism that her brand is too heavily curated. ‘Well, maybe that’s why I’m number one,’ she says bluntly. ‘Because I pay attention to detail. And I care about things being done right and at a right time, and that the end product is wonderful. I don’t want to be a flip-flop brand that jumps

from one thing to the next. I want things to be thought through because I spend a lot of money on this. And it’s important to me. It’s important to me that my fans get an end product that is magnificent,’ responds Matheba. ‘And so what if I’m curated? Who cares? Wonderful. It’s better than being too messy or being all over the place.’

On her personal life, Matheba says it will continue to be exactly that: personal. I ask her about her much-discussed *Real Talk* interview with Azania Mosaka in July, where critics (read: Twittics) blasted Mosaka for not getting the dirt on Matheba’s personal relationships. When Mosaka pushed for answers, Matheba’s response was simple: ‘I think what people want me to do is speak about my personal life, publicly, which is something I have not done, and something that I will not do, and something that I will not start doing anytime soon.’ She tells me why: ‘Because that’s the only thing that I have to myself when the



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magnificent. And so what if I'm curated? Who cares? Wonderful. I'd rather be overdressed than underdressed

lights and cameras switch off. The world can't own all of me. I am on TV, I entertain, but I have a family, I am a human being, I have loved ones, I have people I care about. People whose feelings I care about. People who I want to protect. And the things that I know will still be there when the lights stop shining and I can't share that with everybody.'

Matheba has, however, often shown that she is vulnerable, never shying away from the fact that she does break down, but chooses to do so in a safe space around people she trusts. Once again, the demand to share more and more seems to come with the territory, but Matheba refuses to give in to the pressure. 'That's it – they want to know when I break down, how I break down, what time I was on the bed while I was breaking down... No no no no no no.'

This doesn't mean Matheba ever yearns for the simple life, though. 'What is the simple life?' she responds when I ask her. 'What is the definition of a simple life? This is simple life for me. This is my simple life. I get to wake up

every day and do what I love, travel the world, make people happy, go to bed and do it all over again. It doesn't get any simpler.' Pushing her to consider the idea some more after I mention the negative side of fame, Matheba remains steadfast. 'No. It doesn't seem fun,' she says with a big cackle. 'Maybe that's a horrible thing to say,' she continues chuckling. 'No. Because I think if I wanted that, I'd want this. But I'm here and I don't want that.' Even bigger laughter ensues. Another one of her charming qualities is Matheba's honesty.

At this stage of the interview, she seems more relaxed and open. 'The simple life? I can create a simple life. And I will create a simple life for myself when I'm ready. Right now I'm enjoying the fruits of my hard work, bringing change to people's lives, putting women through school, being a voice for the voiceless,' she happily reveals to me. 'Let me tell you – you can do whatever you want with your life. And when I want a simple life, it's going to happen because I have the ability to carve my life. When I want to be married,

with children, live the quiet life, it's going to happen.'

The powerhouse hopes to see children in her future. That's a definite yes. A husband? In her own words, that's up for negotiation. 'Why can't I be my own self-made billionaire? A single mom of six boys all from sperm donors? You know the reason why I haven't had a child is because I haven't met a man who I think is worthy of being the father of my children, because I see my children as formidable human beings who are going to change the world,' she confesses. 'And you need a certain kind of man to support that level of thinking. I see myself raising an Elon Musk and a Trevor Noah. My kids are going to change the world.'

In the meantime, Matheba has another superpower on her side, guiding her personal and professional decision-making. 'I'm intuitive. Like, it's scary. I'm intuitive and I read people very, very well – their energies – and almost always their intentions. It's a very special gift. The more I observe and keep quiet, the stronger it becomes.' ✨