

## FORBES LIFE

TUMI MORAKE

# When I'm on Stage, Screw You



If you want a good laugh or a shock, Tumi Morake is your woman.  
For an apology, look elsewhere.

BY RUTENDO NYAMUDA

**Y**ou're standing on stage, sweat dripping and your hand shakes as it grips the mic. The spotlight blinds. The booing crowd throws popcorn. A man, who sounds like Mufasa from *The Lion King*, yells "Get off!" You look for sympathy from a young woman in the front row, but she looks away. Desperate for a laugh, you try one last joke.

As you reach the punch line an apple core hits your head. Then, Tumi Morake wakes up.

"I never want to be the protagonist in that story," she says.

It can be worse.

Now for a real story: A few days after one of her night club gigs, Morake went to perform at a school. One of the



teachers in the audience had seen her at a previous gig, when she recalled the things Morake had said, she kicked her out of the school.

"I was marched off the property because she said that she would not have me in that place because she knows exactly what I have to say and she's not interested."

Morake was quite insulted. In a way it reflects the conservative views about what an African woman can and cannot say.

"I'm not an idiot, there is no way I would repeat what I [had said] in a club full of drunk people to a room full of parents and children," she says.

She might be Tumi Morake on stage but at home she's Tumi Osei-Tutu.

"I paid cows for that," laughs Morake's husband, Mpho Osei-Tutu.

At the beginning of her career as a comic, Osei-Tutu knew Morake would push the envelope and potentially offend someone. During each show, he sat with sweaty hands and brows furrowed as he waited for what she would say next.

"It wasn't easy dating somebody who speaks so openly about personal things... I was a little bit like 'Woah! Do you need to swear so much and does that joke need to be so dirty?'"

As Osei-Tutu begins to explain one of the jokes, Morake raises her hands in protest and jokingly cuts him off.

"Okay, okay. We get it," she interrupts as Osei-Tutu nervously laughs.

He is an established actor, writer and producer who was born in Paris to a Ghanaian father and mother from Lesotho. He met Morake at the University of the Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg, where they were both studying drama.

Interestingly enough, it was Osei-Tutu who got Morake her first show in 2004. Back then Osei-Tutu ran a comedy show for different charities, which were supported by Rotaract. He was well connected in the

industry and put together a comedy night with some of the biggest names in comedy. The line-up included: Joey Rasdien, Riaad Moosa, Tshepo Mogale and David Kau. When Osei-Tutu told Morake that she would be the opening act, he got an unexpected response.

"Are you mad? You have celebrity comics and I must go on that stage? No, thank you!"

It didn't take much to convince her. She went up, did her five minutes and killed it. But it would be another two years before she stepped back on stage. Morake struggled to find acting jobs and soon realized that the life of a script writer was not sustainable.

"With writing work the money only comes when the scripts are approved. So in the meantime I started doing stand-up comedy in clubs."

Morake's transformation over the years has gone from trying to find the funniest thing to say and just saying it in the moment, to intentionally saying things to shock the audience. As a black woman, when she became a wife and mother, she felt as though there were rules about what she was allowed to say.

"When I get on stage, screw those expectations and rules. That's my world, when I'm on stage that's my hood. That's why when I've been on stage and I've said something I will never apologize for it, ever. I don't care how offended you are, you should not come to a comedy club if you get offended. We don't take offence applications."

She went from opening acts to corporate gigs and as she became better so did the money. Once someone asked her who her manager was and when they heard her response, they quickly pointed her in the right direction.

"I don't have one... I'm not a comic I just talk rubbish," laughs Morake.

That "rubbish" has turned her into one of the most successful female comics in South Africa. If you disagree with her, hard luck.



**"When I get on stage screw those expectations and rules. That's my world, when I'm on stage that's my hood. That's why when I've been on stage and I've said something I will never apologize for it, ever."**