NINA MOINI: Tonight on Food Network, a local chef will be competing to win $25,000 on the competition show *Bobby's Triple Threat.* The Bobby refers to Chef Bobby Flay, and his triple threat are Bobby's three titans that compete against a challenger. Minnesota's own Yia Vang competed against all three, and the episode airs tonight at 7:00. Chef Yia Vang joins us now. Thanks for your time today, Chef.

YIA VANG: Hey, thanks for having me.

NINA MOINI: I remember when you a couple of years ago when I was starting out hosting the program, you were kind enough to come and do a live, fun show with all of us. And we had such a great time.

So we appreciate you being a supporter here of *Minnesota Now,* and you've got so many cool things going on. But for people unfamiliar with the show, tell us a little bit about *Bobby's Triple Threat* and how it works. Were you nervous?

YIA VANG: Yeah, very, very nervous, but I was very blessed to have a few friends who've been on the show. So honestly, I actually called him up when we got casted. I called him up and said, bro, what's the strategy. Kevin Lee, one of my buddies, he's a chef from Oklahoma out in Oklahoma City. I call Kev, and I'm like, hey, what's the strategy. Help me out.

And it--

NINA MOINI: Well, what'd he say?

YIA VANG: Well, he's like-- for example, so the whole premise of the show is Bobby has these three titans he calls them and they're incredible chefs. They're well known chefs, lots of award behind every chef that they have there. And you come in as the challenger, and then you go-- you pick.

So it's like this one right here, one on one. Let's go. And then Bobby will pull out a secret ingredient. It's like-- think of *Iron Chef.* So he'll pull out a secret ingredient. He has two secret ingredients he puts out, and then you have I think it's 40 minutes to make two completely, distinctly different dishes in 40 minutes against-- and then you get a certain amount of points for that.

And then you go to the next one. You pick the next one. And you get a certain amount of points for that. And in the third round, you get to bring the secret ingredient. And then what you do is then you-- and then it's your signature dish. And then that round is worth twice the points.

And so it's literally wham, wham, wham. You go-- and you go against every single one one on one. Yeah it's, pretty intense. And then Kevin was like, hey, here's the deal. If you're making two dishes, make sure that your mise en place or all your little setups for each dish just cross utilize them so you don't-- like, for example, you're not cutting garlic for two dishes. Just cutting up garlic for both dishes.

NINA MOINI: Right. Streamline.

YIA VANG: Stuff like that.

NINA MOINI: So that's deep strategy.

YIA VANG: Yeah, you have to streamline it.

NINA MOINI: I love it.

YIA VANG: Yeah, yeah.

NINA MOINI: So I know you can't tell us what happened, but I do want to play just a clip from the trailer of tonight's episode. Let's take a listen.

YIA VANG: OK.

[AUDIO PLAYBACK]

- How you doing, Chef?

- Good, good.

- We have these guys perplexed.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

- You don't these guys, do you?

- From afar.

- Yeah.

- Big admirer, big fans. My biggest thing coming out here is not to fanboy out. I'm just trying to keep myself all together.

- In some ways do have the advantage here. They have no idea where you're going to do. It's fun to watch.

[END PLAYBACK]

NINA MOINI: Ooh, so as Bobby was alluding to there, the three chefs you took on were not familiar with you, but he calls it an advantage because they don't your cooking style. Did you feel like it was an advantage, and for folks who may not know, you're such a part of the fabric of the food scene here in the state of Minnesota and beyond.

YIA VANG: Yeah, I think that one thing that people have to realize, too, that these three chefs here are pretty well known celebrity chefs if you want to call them that. They're really well known within our cooking world or chef world. We know them. But I don't pretend to be like, hey, I'm whatever.

NINA MOINI: Oh, no, no, yeah.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

NINA MOINI: You guys, you don't me.

YIA VANG: Yeah, yeah. So I'm just like, hey, man, this is fun. But you know what the thing I love though, Nina. This is what I love. I love being the Midwest kid because it was so funny because I think I read a comment that they're like, oh, he's from the Midwest. Is Midwest even America? And I'm like, yeah, it is.

NINA MOINI: Yeah.

YIA VANG: And I love that. I love that because people don't realize that it's actually, no, there's some incredible things going on here and so you--

NINA MOINI: Absolutely.

YIA VANG: You love being the underdog. So you go in, and I'm like, OK, cool. Swing for the fences. You got nothing to lose. So it's like that old Rocky story. You got nothing to lose here. Yeah.

NINA MOINI: Yeah. And you've got Vinai. You've got so many wonderful-- you were at the State Fair this year with a hot item. Was the Hmong corn dog. So I mean the Midwest is a place that I feel like we have so much when it comes to food, and so that's wonderful to be able to meet new people. And you can expose even more people across the country who are watching Food Network.

I want people to know that you also have done-- you did *Iron Chef* spin off show on Netflix in 2022. And I was mentioning you were on our little game show that we put together for the show one time. Do you like that kind of competition? Do you like that environment?

YIA VANG: It-- you know what. I will tell-- I'll tell people *Triple Threat* is probably one of the hardest things I've done.

NINA MOINI: Wow.

YIA VANG: Because it's like-- it's nonstop. It's like-- and you're not just going against one person and that's it and that's the show. It's like, no, you go against one, and then they go back and sit down and you get another one. And you're so tired. You know what I'm saying? And you're still recouping from that. And you got another one that comes in, and you're like let's just go.

And so it is tough and then I-- it's fun. Those shows are very fun to do. But I do love because I've been very blessed to be able to host a few shows. I just love being a host, too.

NINA MOINI: Yeah. Yeah.

YIA VANG: It's just fun. You go in, they make food, you taste it, and you guys just talk about food. I'm like, man, I did come back from that show going, yeah, man, being the host is a lot easier than this.

NINA MOINI: Being a judge and a host and a competitor are probably all very different experiences, but you have a lot of running around in the kitchen anyway. You're used to a fast paced or maybe a hectic or a busy night. But without spoiling the outcome, we want-- we need to know if you are happy with how you did, if you felt good about your I guess performance.

YIA VANG: Yeah. I think that there were some dishes where I'm like could have done it differently--

NINA MOINI: Yeah.

YIA VANG: Where you're like ugh. You come back, and obviously everyone knows the judge that comes in is Michael Mina. So when you're in the show, you don't know who the judge is until that first dish is made. Then when you see the judge come in, you're like, oh, shoot, that's the judge we're going.

And it's just straight up. It's-- everything is him. So Michael Mina, world renowned chef, many Michelin stars, many chefs around-- he has many restaurants around the country, around the world. And so it's like-- and a lot of times when you do these competition shows, it's like you have to understand their tastes and what they like. So--

NINA MOINI: Right. It would have been nice to know.

YIA VANG: Yeah. So they purposely do that so you don't know who the judge is, too. So right when you begin-- by-- so by the second round, you can adjust whatever you need to adjust on your-- when you're making to play to the judge a little bit. So that was another strategy Kevin told me.

NINA MOINI: For sure. Yeah.

YIA VANG: Said to me once you know who the judge is, you can play that up. Yeah, but there are some things where I wish I could take back. There were moments where I'm like when you're working that fast, that clock goes. I tell people that clock goes, and there's no--

And here's something that nobody realized. For example, if I wanted rice, I had to make rice. It wasn't like, oh, yeah, we have rice here, or you couldn't pre-make anything.

NINA MOINI: It's like a from scratch type of--

YIA VANG: It was legit--

NINA MOINI: Wow.

YIA VANG: Yeah.

NINA MOINI: Well, so--

YIA VANG: Yeah, like, for example, one of the contestants, Michael Voltaggio, I think he did a pasta dish, and he literally made pasta in less than 30 minutes for one of his dishes while making the rest.

NINA MOINI: So this is going to be the real deal happening tonight on Food Network at 7:00. We're all just going to have to tune in to see how you did, but I'm sure you did a wonderful job. And we thank you for coming by the show again, Chef Yia Vang.

YIA VANG: Well, thank you. It was an honor to represent the Midwest, Minnesota there, too. It was super fun.

NINA MOINI: Take care. Thank you, Chef.

YIA VANG: Thanks. Appreciate it.

NINA MOINI: That's chef Yia Vang. You can watch him again compete on*Bobby's Triple Threat* tonight on Food Network at 7:00.