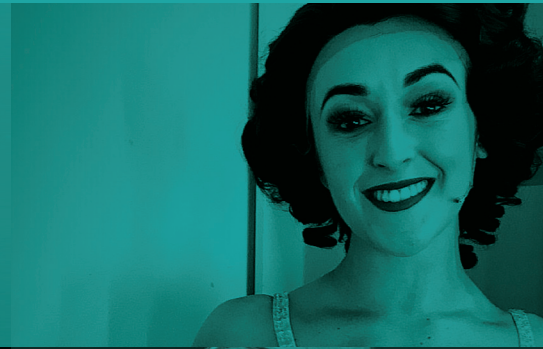




# MERSEYSIDE

## CREATIVE FUTURES

### People Profiles



## SPRING 2023

Summary Report

Dr Kate Blackstone (Researcher) and  
Chris Lennie (Project Strand Lead)

# AIMS OF THE PROJECT

**Merseyside Creative Futures is a project to support young peoples' aspirations and improve access to creative careers in the Liverpool City Region.**

The project aims to:

- Increase teachers' and organisations' knowledge of the needs of young people in relation to their aspirations.
- Strengthen our provision by combining young peoples' concerns with industry needs to implement new initiatives, such as training programmes and work placements.
- Empower young people from disadvantaged areas to work creatively to develop their career prospects.
- Increase young peoples' awareness of their potential in the creative arts.

The people profiles were created to support Aims 3 and 4 of the Merseyside Creative Futures project.

## People Profiles:

The people profiles provide eight case studies of performing arts industry workers who were educated in the Liverpool City Region.

These are intended to supplement Schemes of Work created by Natalie Barker (Head of Music, Litherland High School) in order to support aims 3 and 4 of the project. In addition to the case studies, there is a glossary of terms and a summary document to promote deeper engagement with the resources. Priority was placed upon recruiting industry professionals from the Liverpool City Region, as relatable characters have been found to have a positive impact upon students' confidence when considering a creative career.

Music hubs aided in the recruitment of contributors by providing names and contact details of alumni. The profiles were produced from hour-long recorded interviews which took place over Zoom.

*For a full list of interview questions please see the Appendix.*

The answers are abridged from these conversations (i.e. they are not verbatim) however all profiles were approved and co-created by the respondents themselves. The result of this was a representative, rich account of these people's lives, in language that young people understand.

## Main Findings

**Although each profile represents a different job role within the performing arts industry, there were some commonalities of experience that were particularly striking:**

- Respondents emphasised the need for skills above qualifications. This resonates with employer reports from the survey portion of the Creative Futures project: music performance jobs, in particular, only require the skills that training provides, rather than the resultant qualification. This was illustrated by Jack and Vikki, both of whom did not finish their degrees because they began working instead. Both have continued to work without the qualification they started.
- Many industry-related skills were developed outside of formal lesson time. The settings that participants referenced included extra-curricular school groups, music hub/centre ensembles, and external performance companies not affiliated with the Local Authority. Those who developed technical skills, such as Dan, now working in *technical theatre*, and Craig, a venue manager, worked in a self-directed manner, suggesting that informal learning opportunities can be as empowering for students as more formal settings.
- Some professionals referred to unhelpful advice having come from their school, which is disappointing, but unsurprising given the general lack of understanding that exists about opportunities in the creative industries. Usually this bad advice consisted of being told to 'get a proper job.'
- Respondents emphasised a need for strong interpersonal networks, in order to create opportunity and maintain morale. Often these networks were formed through educational establishments or extra-curricular groups.

## Recommendations

- An emphasis on skills above qualifications suggests that a focus on the conventional progression of GCSE, A Level, degree may not be the best route for young people aspiring towards a career in the arts, especially those in more technical fields. This is especially concerning given the government's plan to scrap more practical BTEC qualifications, which may damage the prospects of students in more disadvantaged areas. Providing opportunities for students to develop these skills in an extra-curricular setting may alleviate this, especially as so many industry professionals found that experiences outside of lessons were so valuable.
- Respondents' reports of receiving counter-productive advice in school is likely due to a lack of understanding of the creative industries. It is important to note that these accounts are retrospective, meaning that the situation may have improved since then, however initiatives such as Merseyside Creative Futures will continue to provide realistic support and advice about music industry careers.
- Creation of a network of young people and industry professionals may be effective in raising aspirations for children and young people. Matt, a musical director for theatre, justifies asking others for help because 'every [professional] remembers where they started.' A careers network within the Liverpool City Region may help young people to build vital networks, get advice and develop their networking skills.

## Guide to the people profiles

These people profiles are all about real people who went to school and grew up in the Liverpool City Region. Now, they all work in the performing arts industry.

You will notice similarities and differences between everyone's jobs and experiences. To explore these further, ask yourself the following questions as you read them.

- What technical skills does this person need to do their job? Technical skills include things like singing, playing, sound engineering and dancing.
- What 'soft skills' does this person need? These are equally important life skills: things like teamwork, communication, and negotiation.
- How and where did they develop these skills?
- How would you describe this person's lifestyle?
  - Do they have a regular place of work?
  - Do they do the same thing every day?
  - What are their work hours and do they get time off?
  - How do they describe their financial situation?
- Are there any of these jobs you could see yourself doing? Why/why not?
  - If yes, which skills do you have already and which do you need to develop further?
  - If no, which of these people's skills might be useful *outside the performing arts*?

Any words that are *italicised* are explained in the Glossary on page 22.

**6** Keep reminding yourself  
of why you play and  
why you love what you do.

**JACK**

**Fusion Guitarist  
from Liverpool**

**8** I'm glad I followed the  
advice to do what I love,  
because I'm very happy  
in my job now.

**DAN**

**Theatre Technician  
from Wirral**

**10** Believe in yourself  
but be supportive  
of your friends too.

**HANNAH**

**Musical Theatre Performer  
from St Helens**

**12** You can keep working  
as a performer without  
always doing high  
profile jobs.

**VIKKI**

**Performer  
from Knowsley**

**14** There is no conventional route into this industry. Everyone has to start somewhere.

**MATT**

**Musical Theatre Musical Director  
from Sefton**

**16** The best thing you can do is smile and be welcoming. It can open a lot of doors.

**LINTON**

**Freelance Musician  
from Wirral**

**18** Just because it's going to be hard doesn't mean it's going to be impossible!

**HANNA-LIISA**

**Opera Singer  
from Halton and Warrington**

**20** One of the most exciting things about my job is the wide range of things I get to do.

**CRAIG**

**Venue Technician  
from Wirral**





# JACK

## Fusion Guitarist

There are loads of home videos of me as a child miming to Steve Vai and Jimi Hendrix on a plastic guitar.

### What is your job?

I'm a professional fusion guitarist. I started learning classical guitar at school when I was 9 or 10. I was desperate to play even before but my dad is a musician and was scared I'd start too young and grow to hate it! Luckily, I didn't and I'm still in love with the guitar. I started *gigging* and teaching at 13 and opened my YouTube channel around the same time – back in 2007 YouTube wasn't such a big deal at all! As a young musician, I did everything from playing weddings and pubs to touring with Stu Hamm and the 80s band China Crisis. Since the pandemic, my activities mix has changed – I am doing a lot of music collaborations virtually, work on my lesson packages and occasionally teach via Skype.

### Can you tell me about a normal day or week at work?

My aim is to get two hours of practice every day – that's really important. I try to allocate time for it in my calendar, otherwise it tends to be forgotten among other tasks. The rest of my day is managing projects which typically include writing and producing new music, creating content for social media, recording demos commissioned by music gear companies, and, last but not least, creating and recording video lesson packages. There are a lot of deadlines to be dealt with! For example, releasing a new album requires so much beyond actual music creation: promotion, dealing with my producer, aligning with other musicians, production of physical CDs, and so on. I'm also trying to post two videos a week on Instagram and YouTube focusing on technique, new music ideas, or free lessons. You can easily see how this is a full-time job! I have a lot to do and must plan my time carefully to avoid slacking off. Someone once told me I can't have career-level pay for hobby-level commitment, which sounds harsh but this the mindset I need in order to be a career musician.

## What qualifications did you need to get your job?

I actually don't have a degree and nobody has ever asked to present one! I started university in Liverpool but it conflicted so much with performances and tours I already had in the diary that I had to leave after a year. Degrees and qualifications are really valuable for development of skills and meeting other musicians, but for me, the timing was just wrong. Although I had an amazing teacher, it didn't make sense to stay for the qualification.

## What most surprised you about the job when you first started?

I was surprised that the way I present myself and my work is easily as important as the quality of the work itself. You can't always rely on your playing to speak for itself. You must manage, promptly and precisely, a huge amount of communication on day-to-day basis – performance confirmations, emails, text messages, social media comments. You could be the most amazing player on earth but if you aren't replying to your messages you won't get booked, or you won't get booked again!

## What most surprises other people about your job?

Lots of people – even people close to me – don't really see all of what I do. They don't see me editing a ten-minute video from 10pm to 4am, they don't see me worrying about social media content development. Some may think it's a just load of fun: I play a few tunes and then I get paid. It is fun, but there's a lot of behind the scenes work that goes unnoticed, not to mention the 15 years of practice needed to get to this point. It's not like a game: you can never 'complete' it, only get better!

## What drew you to the job you do now?

I guess I just always really wanted to play. There are loads of home videos of me as a child miming to Steve Vai and Jimi Hendrix on a plastic guitar. Later, I discovered crazy music on YouTube and by the time I was 17, I was practising 7 or 8 hours a day!

## At what point did you feel financially comfortable?

It's hard to say, probably only this year. For the last few years, live performances were my main income source, so when I lost all of them in 2020, I was really worried. I managed to quickly get back on my feet by reigniting my online presence and realized I should have shifted my focus there a long time ago! I feel quite secure now about what money is coming in every month from my music sales, lesson packages, gear demos payments, and various small projects like guest solos.

## What is the best piece of advice you ever received?

That consistency is way more important than perfectionism. Instead of making everything perfect, I try to focus now on doing a certain number of practise sessions or *gigs* a week, or releasing a certain number of videos. It helps you look towards the future with a plan, instead of being trapped living day by day.

## What is the worst piece of advice you ever received?

A schoolteacher (not my music teacher!) once told me that doing music wasn't a 'proper job' and that I would never make any money doing it. I'm lucky my parents were open minded enough to help me ignore it! It's really stuck with me though, I'd love for that teacher to see me now. Some musicians used to call me a 'bedroom guitarist' for making YouTube videos, and for a while I lost my confidence, whereas now I know I should have been quicker to ignore them.

## What advice would you give to a young person hoping to go into a job like yours in the future?

Keep reminding yourself of why you play and why you love what you do. There will be times when you don't feel like playing. It's totally normal, so go back and listen to the music that inspires you. Don't get too bogged down with the numbers, either. Chasing Instagram follows, views and likes can get distracting and it's OK to take a break from that. Stay in touch with why you love music, stay consistent and the rest will come.



# DAN

## Theatre Technician

A lot of my job is very practical. It involves setting up microphones or rigging lights for different shows or groups.

### What is your job?

I am a venue technician at the Floral Pavilion Theatre in New Brighton on the Wirral. That's a part time contract, so the rest of my time I do other, smaller jobs. One of the main ones is working with a *company* called StageEd, who run West End workshops for students between the ages of 4 and 16. Usually they are a week long over the summer: we choose ten songs from West End Musicals and come up with a script to make it into a show. You could say I have lots of fingers in lots of pies at the moment! I really like working at the Floral but it's really important for me to be able to pursue my other interests as well.

### Can you tell me about a normal day or week at work?

It's very varied! I used to work as a Performing Arts Technician at a school, and that was basically doing the same thing every day – supporting the different departments around the school. Since starting work at the theatre every day is different depending on what show you have in. A lot of my job is very practical. It involves setting up microphones or *rigging lights* for different shows or groups. This can be quite challenging when tours bring their own gear because our theatre is smaller than others. You have to be willing to change the design when you arrive. However when we are doing the annual pantomime things can be a bit more routine. I'll arrive in the morning, top up the haze machines, check all the fixtures, and then operate the *follow spot* for the show when it starts. The schedule can get quite busy at that time of year – we do two shows in a day and once we even did three!



## What qualifications did you need to get your job?

Apart from my GCSEs, the highest qualification I have is a BTEC in Music Technology. I do have theatre technician training as well: a bronze award from the Association of British Theatre Technicians. I always put it on my CV, but not every job asks for it. In the end, the skills and experience I have helped me to get my job doing what I do now. I started developing those skills whilst I was at school, working backstage on school productions, setting things up, operating the lights. We even set up a school radio station!

## What most surprised you about the job when you first started?

I was surprised that some things can take ages to sort out. For example, the panto is the biggest thing that we do at the Floral, and that has so many jobs that need doing before we can start putting on the shows. On the other hand, sometimes things can be turned around so quickly. We can load one show out and a new one in within 24 hours if we need to! So I suppose what I mean is you can't always predict how long something will take!

## What most surprises other people about your job?

That I really don't get to meet famous people! Once Jimmy Carr did a show here a couple of years ago and perhaps he walked past me backstage, but that was it. I'm really not chatting with celebrities! I did meet Lulu once though – our conversation was one sentence!

## What drew you to the job you do now?

It was probably the ten-year period I spent working as a Performing Arts Technician in a school. I came from an audio engineering background when I got that job, but the school had just had a new drama studio built and it was my job to oversee all the different aspects of that, so I had to learn a lot about the staging and the lighting as well. It really ignited my interest in one day going into the professional world.

## At what point did you feel financially comfortable?

Right after finishing my BTEC, I was doing loads of wedding *gigs* with a band, and the money was really good. I liked it for a while but I got fed up, and once I stopped doing those *gigs* I wasn't earning as much. I have more job security now that I am contracted at the theatre, but you do have times when it's up and down, especially if you're freelancing. I did have to accept a pay cut to change my career direction but I feel closer to what I want to do, and will have better paid opportunities in the future because of it.

## What is the best piece of advice you ever received?

My drum teacher told me not to sell my drum kit. I was going to sell it before *music college* to pay for some computer equipment and he told me I'd regret it. I didn't sell it and I'm glad, because when I got back from *music college* I started to pick up *gigs* and I needed it! Later on, I made a change when I moved from working at the school to working at the theatre. I'm glad I followed the advice to do what I love, because I'm very happy in my job now.

## What is the worst piece of advice you ever received?

I wanted to go to the local grammar school for sixth form, because I wanted to study creative subjects and I couldn't do them at my school. Someone told me I wouldn't get the grades to get in there and I believed them, so I stuck at my school, did subjects I didn't like and dropped out. Was it the worst decision I ever made? Perhaps, but without that decision I wouldn't be where I am now, and I'm happy where I am now, so it's not all bad!

## What advice would you give to a young person hoping to go into a job like yours in the future?

Show interest and get involved. If you think you might be interested in *technical theatre*, go and find out as much about it as you can. Go and watch shows and see if you can work out what's going on behind the scenes. Explore whether you can get involved at schools, with school plays and concerts. That's where I got a lot of my experience. And don't expect glitz and glamour – it's hard work sometimes, with a lot of evening and weekend work, but it's worth it at the end. It's cool to be able to look back on an event or a show and think 'yeah, I helped make that sound or look great.'



# HANNAH

## Musical Theatre Performer

When I was 14 I went to a theatre summer school in London and I remember seeing *Wicked* on the West End and being absolutely mesmerised.

### What is your job?

I am a musical theatre performer. I'm currently Brenda in the touring *company* of *Blood Brothers*.

### Can you tell me about a normal day or week at work?

There is no normal day but when I'm on tour there is a weekly schedule. We have every Sunday and Monday off as the crew load into that week's venue. Then we start with tech rehearsal on a Tuesday afternoon, which is really important because every venue is different, so we might come on and off in different places or have different sets depending on where we are. Then we have tea, do a vocal and physical warm up, and we do our first show of the week at 7.30. For the rest of the week we do one show a day, except on Wednesdays and Saturdays when we have matinee performances at 2:30 as well. When the show is over on a Saturday, everyone gets in their car or runs for the last train so we can get Sunday and Monday at home before heading to the next venue the following week.

### What qualifications did you need to get your job?

I had a choice whether I wanted to go to drama school at 16 or at 18, but I chose to get my A levels and do a degree at 18 because it would mean I had a degree to help me get another job outside of acting if I needed to. To get on my degree I needed GCSEs and A Levels as well as passing an audition process.

### What most surprised you about the job when you first started?

I was so happy and surprised I could do something that I loved every day and get paid for it!

### What most surprises other people about your job?

Everything that goes on backstage! I get all my washing done for me overnight and the *dressers* lay your clean costume out for you in your dressing room the next day. Also the gunshot sounds aren't recorded, they fire real guns into a cushion backstage – they're not real bullets, though, just caps!

### Was this job always something that you wanted to do?

I think so. When I was 14 I went to a theatre summer school in London and I remember seeing *Wicked* on the West End and being absolutely mesmerised. I decided I wanted to do musical theatre as a career so I enrolled in singing lessons as well as all the different types of dance lessons. I went to summer schools at the college I ended up studying at, Bird. They wanted me to audition to join full-time at 16, but I'm glad I waited until I was 18 because moving to London so young would have probably been quite difficult. And now I have a degree!

### At what point did you feel financially comfortable?

I didn't have loads of money as a student but I worked a part time job and have always been sensible. When I started touring with *Summer Holiday* and *Blood Brothers* I started earning enough to save for a house deposit, so probably around then. I've always been a grafter, though, and always have two or three jobs on the go – I'm a qualified fitness instructor as well!

### What is the best piece of advice you ever received?

Don't take too much notice of other people's opinions!

### What advice would you give to a young person hoping to go into a job like yours in the future?

Believe in yourself but be supportive of your friends too. If you get jealous of other people's successes it can get quite nasty. So instead ring your mum and have a cry if you need to, but then hold your head high and move on, because your self-belief will shine through in the end.





# VIKKI

## Performer

When I was little I only wanted to work on the West End, but there are so many other pathways you could take, and I have definitely taken them!

### What is your job?

I am a performer! I sing, I dance and I act. I do bits of circus, even fire breathing! I'm always wondering what I can do next. I once learnt to do aerial hoop in ten days before a seven week contract! Most recently I've been doing lot of plays and a little bit of screen work. I'm also starting to do more choreography. My job is very mixed!

### Can you tell me about a normal day or week at work?

If I'm not on a contract, then my normal week is teaching. I teach acrobatics, dance and musical theatre all week and then I might have a dancing job or a tribute *gig* at the weekend. If I have a contract, then the first week of that will be all day rehearsals, and then we'll go into doing shows in the evening. Often I'll still be mixing other work with that, though, for example rehearsing something different at the weekends or recording *self-tapes* for my next job. I have never had a 9 to 5 job. I think If I did the same thing every day I'd get itchy feet!

### What qualifications did you need to get your job?

I have a foundation degree, but that's it – I left my degree in my final year because I'd got a professional job and then jumped from contract to contract. When you're a performer at a casting and they look at your CV, they're interested in height, hair colour and your skills, what you can bring to the room and the role. However, I do have gymnastics coaching qualifications, because I have to be qualified and insured to teach gymnastics. That's where I make most of my money outside of my performing work so those qualifications are really important to me. For my performing, the skills are more important than the qualification, so you still have to train.



### What most surprised you about the job when you first started?

There are so many jobs that I didn't know existed – you can keep working as a performer without always doing high profile jobs, for example touring schools. When I was little I only wanted to work on the West End, but there are so many other pathways you could take, and I have definitely taken them!

### What most surprises other people about your job?

People are surprised that I'm working all the time as a dancer or an actor but that they have never seen me in anything! I haven't stopped working since I was 17 or 18, but often it's not in anything people would recognise me in. My mates are really surprised about the amount of different things I'll do. For example, I'm doing a fire breathing *gig* tonight, but tomorrow I might be performing in a Little Mix tribute and the day after dressed as a cat for an advert! I know I have to be versatile because there are thousands of 5 foot 4 blonde dancers like me all going for the same jobs, so why would I limit myself?

### What drew you to the job you do now?

I think I always wanted to perform, ever since I was little. I have never wanted to be famous because I like my own privacy, but I just love being on stage. I went to so many live events and thought 'this is what I want to do.' I got really good grades in school, and I enjoyed studying English, but not enough to do it for the rest of my life. That's how I knew!

### At what point did you feel financially comfortable?

Whilst I was training, I worked in a bar. Money was OK but the hours were really long alongside my classes and it was hard. Then I started picking up singing *gigs* and I could stop the bar work. I have a good work ethic and I'm used to going out and working on lots of different things. Financial security happened gradually, and a lot of it comes down to the teaching work I have now. When I have a contract that's great, but if I'm between contracts, it's stable income that I can rely on.

### What is the best piece of advice you ever received?

Learn to rest! When I first started I was working all the time – every day, every evening. My dad said to me 'stop, you're making yourself ill.' He was right, you can't work well if you're burnt out.

### What advice would you give to a young person hoping to go into a job like yours in the future?

Be a good person. So turn up on time and be polite. Talent will get you in the room, but attitude will keep you there. You can be as good as you want on stage but if you're not a good person to work with then you can't expect to keep being booked. Putting on a show is a team effort and you have to be willing to work well with others. Also enjoy the journey: mine has been so different to what I thought it would be. I thought I'd graduate college and straight away get onto the West End at 21. Now I know that if that had have happened I wouldn't have had all these amazing opportunities I've had along the way.



# MATT

## **Musical Theatre Musical Director**

I used to go to the theatre a lot with my parents and I remember seeing the conductor up at the front and thinking 'that's what I want to do.'

### **What is your job?**

I am a musical director for musical theatre productions. That means that I play the keyboard with the band that accompanies the production. I'm also in charge of conducting the band and rehearsing the singers.

### **Can you tell me about a normal day or week at work?**

If I'm on a contract, then I have a weekly routine. I'll play for 8 shows a week and will sometimes do cover rehearsals in an afternoon. Sometimes you'll get thrown a curveball: once we did some shows in China where none of the automated set was working, so we had to do a concert version instead! But mostly, every week is the same. If I am not on a show then things are different: I'll split my time between teaching, arranging, and playing. Sometimes I get to jump onto a cruise ship for some musical supervision: that means I'll check how the cast are getting on on one of the onboard shows. So you never know what's round the corner! I like the energy of it.

### **What qualifications did you need to get your job?**

What I will say is that nobody has ever asked for my qualifications! But my music degree was a really important part of my development as it helped me to meet other musicians and make my network, and get my name out there doing what I do now. I also learnt a lot of skills at university. Musical skills, but also soft skills like teamworking, organisation, professionalism – they're important too! I do teach at drama schools though, and they do like to see that I have a degree.

### What most surprised you about the job when you first started?

That nobody is perfect! I thought that professional musicians and actors wouldn't put a foot wrong, but actually we're all working it out together. It's a good thing because it means the whole process is a lot more collaborative. So being prepared is less about being perfect and more about being prepared to share ideas, and being prepared to change your mind if someone else's is better!

### What most surprises other people about your job?

How much work we are doing to keep working, and that we aren't all famous. Often whilst you're working on one thing you're thinking 'what am I going to do next?' and that's equally true for the 'big names' as well.

### What drew you to the job you do now?

I used to go to the theatre a lot with my parents and I remember seeing the conductor up at the front and thinking 'that's what I want to do.' I went and sat in with the band on Hairspray when I was 17. I was amazed that you could go and sit with the musicians and see and hear what they do. It was amazing! I just knew that was what I wanted to do.

### At what point did you feel financially comfortable?

I feel financially buoyant right now (I can pay my bills) but I am always thinking about where my next *gig* is coming from, so I don't know if that is comfortable. I do have a steady source of income in my teaching job though, so if the playing work is quiet I'll still be OK.

### What is the best piece of advice you ever received?

Controversially, working for free can be a real help. My piano teacher once told me that you never know who's going to be in the room, and you won't work for free forever. I built a network doing free playing work where I spent a fair bit on train fares getting there.

### How could you afford to work for free?

I worked for my summer holiday at the Olympics, when those were held in London. I also decided not to take any holidays abroad whilst I was a student! I had to decide what to spend my money on.

### What is the worst piece of advice you ever received?

Somebody once talked me into negotiating a higher fee for something, and it was the wrong thing to do. What I learnt from that is that not everyone gives good advice and you should trust your instincts in the end!

### What advice would you give to a young person hoping to go into a job like yours in the future?

Don't be afraid to ask people for things, whether it's for their time, some lessons or a coffee. You so rarely get a negative response from anyone when it comes to asking for advice because everyone remembers where they started. There is no conventional route into this industry. Everyone has to start somewhere, and everyone was provided an opportunity which catapulted them so everyone remembers it.





# LINTON

## Freelance Musician

I wanted to do something that I wouldn't get bored of.  
When I was a teenager I worked at a shop in Birkenhead.  
I didn't know four hours could go so slowly!

### What is your job?

I'm a *freelance* musician, so my job means I combine lots of different roles to make a living. I play the bassoon with a lot of the main orchestras as an 'extra,' which is a sort of visiting player. I wasn't a full-time member of any particular group for a long time but I am now second bassoon with the Chineke! Orchestra, an orchestra which champions diversity in the arts. When I am not playing, I am an audience development manager at the Multi-Story Orchestra, I work with the Musicians' Union on their equalities committee, and most recently have been doing some broadcasting on BBC Radio 3. So there are lots of strands to my career!

### Can you tell me about a normal day or week at work?

It's more like a normal week at work, and I find that that has changed a lot. I used to have a more set pattern when I was teaching, but now I no longer do that it's a lot less routine. Every week is different and it's brilliant! It also means I can dictate when I work and when I have time off.

### What qualifications did you need to get your job?

I got my A Levels before getting onto my degree course in bassoon, but really I needed to make sure I played really well to pass my audition.

### What most surprised you about the job when you first started?

I feel surprised and fortunate that I really can be doing totally different things every day. One day could be a recording session and then the next day presenting a live broadcast for Radio 3. Or I could be analysing the audience numbers from our most recent Multi-Story concert. I can't put into words how satisfying it is to do such an incredible range of things.



### What most surprises other people about your job?

Again, the sheer range of things that I do. Some *freelancers* don't do as many different things, they might focus most of their time on playing their instrument. However I know that whilst I want to be top of my game at the bassoon I want to be doing other things that are helping make a difference in our industry.

### What drew you to the job you do now?

I wanted to do something that I wouldn't get bored of. When I was a teenager I worked at a shop in Birkenhead. I didn't know four hours could go so slowly! So when I learnt that you could do classical music as a career, where 10 hours could pass and it didn't feel like work, I knew it was something I wanted to take seriously.

### At what point did you feel financially comfortable?

Money wasn't easy when I first started but I made it through by living within my means, which meant I didn't spend money on things I couldn't afford. Now I am in my 30s I do have extra cash but I also have job satisfaction which is equally important. I might not be booking a big holiday every year, but I am going to New York and Australia this year with work which is pretty cool! If you ever run into serious financial difficulty, there are organisations who will help with that.

### What is the best piece of advice you ever received?

There's one piece of advice that's really stuck with me, and that's 'practise hard but stay humble.' Getting really good at your instrument is a huge achievement and you shouldn't lose sight of that, but no matter how good you are, you shouldn't forget that there is always room for improvement.

### What is the worst piece of advice you ever received?

A careers advisor once told me that being a musician is hard, and maybe I should look at something else. She didn't know anything about me, and in actual fact it probably made me want to be a musician even more because it annoyed me so much!

### What advice would you give to a young person hoping to go into a job like yours in the future?

Recognise the value of any situation you're in. I used to teach the bassoon, and I wouldn't say it was my favourite thing to do, but the skills I developed in that time have been very helpful to me: there's no way I'd be able to speak at conferences or broadcast on the radio if I hadn't stood up in front of classes of children and had to explain complex things in a clear and interesting way. My other piece of advice is to always wear a smile. It might sound a bit pathetic, but you are going to end up in a lot of situations with new people or people you don't know very well, and the best thing you can do is smile and be welcoming. It can open a lot of doors. One simple smile can be reflected back to you ten times brighter.



# HANNA-LIISA

## Opera Singer

I surprised myself when I realised how much I love my job and how much uncertainty I am willing to go through just because I love it so much.

### What is your job?

I'm a *freelance* opera singer. I also teach singing and piano, as well as doing a little bit of office-based work. Like many of us, I have several different jobs to supplement the times when there is no singing work in the diary.

### Can you tell me about a normal day or week at work?

If I'm in an opera contract, it's more like a normal week. That means rehearsals from ten till six every day, but of course I have to arrive early to warm up and prepare for the day ahead. If it's a contract where we are doing two shows at once, we will rehearse one show in the day and perform the other in the evenings. Even when I don't have a contract I still create a routine, usually through teaching, and ensuring I sing every day, because you've got to oil the machine!

### What qualifications did you need to get your job?

I don't think you need a qualification, as such. You need training. There's training and qualification. I have a bachelor of music degree, a masters in music and a postgraduate diploma. And then I did a year at an opera studio, which you don't get a qualification for, but it is a training programme. The qualifications are not really what people look for, they focus more on experience, technical skill and suitability for the role. I do, however, think it's good for my teaching to have the qualifications on my CV.

### What most surprised you about the job when you first started?

How difficult it can be to find work! I also surprised myself when I realised how much I love my job and how much uncertainty I am willing to go through just because I love it so much. To me, it really is worth it - it's the best job in the world.

### What most surprises other people about your job?

I may dress up for a living, but it's not very glamorous. I travel a lot to amazing places, but I miss a lot of family events. Sometimes I have to pay a lot to travel to auditions, though in lockdown I did do an online audition. I really do hope that it might change in the future, and more first round auditions can be done on Zoom. It's a lot more accessible – and cheaper!

### What drew you to the job you do now?

I threw myself into every performing arts club I could when I was at school, and I always knew I wanted to do music in some way. At first it was musical theatre, but through more singing lessons I discovered classical music and decided I wanted to go to *music college*. When I joined the Royal Northern College of Music, I was one of the least experienced – not under-prepared, but surrounded by people who knew a lot more about opera than I did! I loved it though, and it was a very varied course, with the best training I could have asked for.

### At what point did you feel financially comfortable?

I'm comfortable now, but it's not stable. I can't ever guarantee that I'll earn a certain amount per month. It's important to be sensible by budgeting and making sure you are regularly putting a little bit into savings.

### What is the best piece of advice you ever received?

To remember and accept that two days will never be the same, especially as a singer! Your voice is your instrument, and directly connected to your body, mind and emotions. You have to be prepared that from one day to the next it might not be exactly the same.

### What is the worst piece of advice you ever received?

I've never had bad advice as such, but I have had useless feedback. Someone at an audition once criticised my trousers! It's easy to overdo and overthink, so I would avoid getting too hung up on people's feedback. Find people you trust most, and listen to them.

### What advice would you give to a young person hoping to go into a job like yours in the future?

Just because it's going to be hard doesn't mean it's going to be impossible! Surround yourself with supportive people, make new opportunities for yourself, and - if it's what you want to do, and you feel it is your calling – keep going!



# CRAIG

## Venue Technician

The most important preparation for this job was the skills I learnt when I was putting on gigs myself – the first one was in the back room of a pub when I was 11!

### What is your job?

I run an organisation called Future Yard, which is a community music venue and music sector hub in Birkenhead. It's mainly a live venue, so we host artists from all over the world alongside the best of contemporary British artists who might come and do a date here as part of a tour. We're also committed to helping the next generation of young artists, so we make sure we're a safe and supportive space for new artists and acts to have their first taste of performing live. Alongside the venue, which is at the heart of Future Yard, we run training opportunities where young people can learn music industry skills such as sound engineering and lighting, as well as supporting young artists to create sustainable careers in music.

### Can you tell me about a normal day or week at work?

One of the most exciting things about my job is the wide range of things I get to do within a short space of time. I can have a 24-hour period where I'm working to put on a *gig* with Ethiopian jazz musicians, and then 14 hours later we will be hosting a folk band from Atlanta, or a battle of the band from a local school. Because of the role I have at Future Yard, as the director, I have to make sure that everything is working. So in a week I can expect to be working with the production manager to make sure that we have all the technical equipment we need for the week's shows, and then checking in with the community manager to make sure that all the training programmes are on track. I might meet with the food and beverage teams to help decide what beers to put on that day and check stock. And I've got my eye on the money as well, to make sure we can pay everyone's wages! It's a lot but it is incredibly exciting and varied.



## What qualifications did you need to get your job?

I have a geography degree from the University of Leeds, but I wouldn't say that that degree directly helped me get the job I have now. I created my own job, because I set up this business myself! The most important preparation for this job was the skills I learnt when I was putting on *gigs* myself – the first one was in the back room of a pub when I was 11! Whilst I was at university I had a lot of experiences which really shaped my future. I put on *gigs* at the student union and did a show on the student radio station. So it wasn't the qualification that got me where I am today, it's the skills I developed along the way.

## What most surprised you about the job when you first started?

Something that never ceases to amaze me is how free you can feel when you love what you do for a living. Before Future Yard I ran lots of my own projects including a new music magazine called Bido Lito, a small record and promotions *company* in Leeds, and a rehearsal space in Armley. I have always created my own work, and even though it's not always easy I feel so glad I don't have a 'proper job.'

## What most surprises other people about your job?

People are always surprised about the amount of things I need to be on top of. We've been trying to create a completely new type of music venue: one that's open in the day as well as the evening, so it surprises people when they find out just how much we do in addition to putting on the *gigs*. I also think that people aren't aware of how much opportunity there is in the arts and how it is possible to make a living from it.

## What drew you to the job you do now?

I'd been organising music since I was 11, so that sort of thing was a part of my life for so long. I worked at Sheffield University Students' Union for a while after graduating, at the events venues, and I watched how the students ran and promoted the shows. I realised that the opportunities they were getting were life-changing because they were learning that a career in the music industry was possible for them. I wanted to create the same atmosphere at a community music venue and show young people from the Liverpool City Region that they can do the same, and Future Yard came out of that!

## At what point did you feel financially comfortable?

It depends on what your expectations are, and what you mean by financially comfortable. I started running my own businesses when I was 22. I didn't have many responsibilities which meant I could afford to live on not very much! There are ups and downs, but you have to remember that the UK music industry is a 3 and a half billion pound *export industry*. Creative people are always going to be very in demand, especially as technology moves on.

## What is the best piece of advice you ever received?

My mum and dad told me to just get on with doing what I want to do. Don't wait around for the opportunities to come, make them yourself and try things out. Don't worry about making mistakes, just be humble and be willing to admit them and learn from them.

## What is the worst piece of advice you ever received?

To go and get a 'proper job!' The sort of life I have isn't for everyone, but I'm glad I do what I do, and I'm glad I can introduce young people to all these creative music industry skills.

## What advice would you give to a young person hoping to go into a job like yours in the future?

There's no such thing as a bad idea. Test anything, try anything. Whether that's *gigs* for kids, five course kind dining experiences with live music or *gigs* with wrestling rings... all manner of crazy things that we're doing. Put together the most dream team of individuals that you can. Find people who share the mission and goal of what you're trying to achieve. And then remember to treat fairly and treat them kindly. When everyone's pulling in the same direction that can be really powerful. Together you can do amazing things.

# GLOSSARY

The following words will help you to understand the Creative people profiles.

**Company:** Used in theatre, the company is everyone involved in the show, so actors, musicians, crew, creative team and office staff

**Dresser:** Somebody who works backstage in the wardrobe department of a show. The dressers take care of the costumes and help actors get in and out of their costumes, especially when they have to do a quick change.

**Export industry:** Craig, the venue manager talks about music being a 3 and a half billion pound export industry. This means that people outside the UK pay 3 and a half billion pounds per year for UK music, which might include record sales, gig tickets or merchandise.

**Extra:** This is when a freelance, visiting player fills a gap in an orchestra or band, when they are not a regular. This might be because someone is off ill, or because they need an additional player that they wouldn't usually need.

**Fee:** How much you get paid as a freelancer. Employees get a wage or a salary, which is a regular weekly or monthly payment. Matt talks about 'negotiating a fee' – that's where he decides how much somebody will pay him for the work he is going to do.

**Follow spot:** This is the spotlight that follows the performer moving around on the stage. Somebody has to stand behind the light to move it.

**Freelance:** Also known as self-employed and the opposite of employed. Anyone who is a freelancer works for themselves rather than for anyone else, which means that they pick and choose the work they do and charge whoever they do the work for directly. Think about Dan, the theatre technician. He is employed at the Floral Pavilion which means he is paid the same amount every month to work there for four days a week. Sometimes he takes freelance work which is more one-off, for example providing technical support to youth theatre shows for a day here and there. He is paid for the day as a freelancer, so he charges the group directly, they pay him and he might not see them again until next year.

**Gig:** Any sort of concert. Most people use the word gig to refer to a pop or rock concert, but even classical and theatre musicians will call concerts or shows gigs.

**Music college:** This is a type of university that musicians go to from the age of 18. It's different to university because there is an emphasis on practical performance skills rather than academic skills only. Sometimes you might hear this called conservatoire.

**On/in a contract:** People who work in theatre and opera will often get contracted, which means that they are signed up to do a show for a certain amount of weeks, months or even years. Being doesn't mean you can't do other work as well, but often it takes up most of a musician or creative's time, especially if it involves touring to other venues.

**Rigging lights:** The process of attaching lights to the metal frame above the stage in a theatre.

**Self-tape:** A film that an actor makes at home to submit for an audition.

**Technical Theatre:** Any aspect of theatre that involves making the production happen, that isn't the performers. This might include lighting, sound, stage management, costume and scenery.



# MERSEYSIDE CREATIVE FUTURES



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