



Equity

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Can you tell us a bit about your career to date?

I originally studied couture fashion, but the course I took was far too restrictive for me. I was never allowed to make what I wanted and, by the end of the course, I didn't want to see another piece of fabric for many years.

Afterwards I stayed within the creative world and began working as a photographer photographing bands, people and corporate gigs and eventually working as a stills photographer on films. After a while I had problems walking and it was becoming increasingly difficult to lug the two stone's worth of equipment around.

I ended up on crutches for eight years but during this time I did a lot of research on my situation and I opted to have an operation, followed by two years of rehab while I learned to walk again. I am currently in my third year of walking unassisted. It was really challenging to learn to walk as an adult. Your brain is constantly doing calculations and, as an adult, you can actually feel that.

I have always sung and have performed in all the great jazz venues in London including Ronnie Scotts. I have recorded two albums and worked with The National Youth Jazz Orchestra, Scott Hamilton, Roy Castle, Dave Green, Bill Le Sage and Len Skeet to name but a few.

After I moved into the world of media, I freelanced for an Argentinian film company as Production Assistant and then I worked as an Assistant Productions Manager on Channel 4 but I knew that ultimately I would be in front of the camera, initially through my singing, then moving into acting.

Acting highlights include playing Gloria Jones (who recorded the original version of 'Tainted Love') in a film about Marc Bolan and playing HRH Princess Helena in Granada TV's 'Victoria & Albert', which I absolutely loved. I found myself in full Victorian costume, throwing pebbles into the sea in between filming and thinking, "I'm getting paid for this!"

What do you like most about your work?

I like the challenge of being someone else completely and seeing the world from their eyes. In the theatre it's also about connecting with the audience. If you are good, you get this instant amazing intense live connection, there's nothing like it.

What are the biggest challenges of maintaining a freelance career?

Getting work has to be the biggest challenge and negotiating a good rate, even though I know it is work and I should be paid appropriately, I find it hard because I enjoy it so much.

Have you added new skills to your portfolio over time?

I've done a lot of programmes on personal development and people skills. I've attended seminars on getting more organised, which have been really helpful. I now appreciate the value of spending the time to prepare and set things up in advance.

I did a course on reading on autocue, which previously terrified me as I thought I would freeze up, but I didn't and actually enjoyed the experience. However, once the course was over I realised that TV presenting wasn't something I wanted to pursue, which was good to know. Since you can't do everything, it's important to narrow down your options by

trying things out so that you can discover what is and what isn't for you.

What is the biggest challenge of learning the skills that you need?

Keeping the motivation going to learn new things. I have found that using Passion Planner, a tool which helps you plan your goals, has helped structure my day and has therefore made me more productive.

>>Snapshot

Maria Davis

Equity

What FEU Training courses have you attended?

- Get Noticed!
- · Get Hired!
- 5 Strategies for Success

What are the most important things that you've learned?

The workshops have been very helpful. I have discovered that my CV is much better than I thought it was and that I'm actually pretty good at interviews! I was really pleased to discover these two things and it has given me more confidence to receive that feedback.

During the training, I became aware that I don't do a lot of research and rely on my ability to 'wing it'. I found it useful to see what a difference a bit of planning and research in advance can make. All the courses have helped me become more focussed.

On the 5 Strategies for Success day, I met a fellow novel writer, and we have stayed in contact to help spur each other on.

What has encouraged you to attend FEU **Training sessions?**

I came along at first because of the connection with my union and thought I would give it a go but now having experienced the sessions I realise it is a really important resource because, in this business, you are on your own and it is so easy to get stuck.

Working in any other fields such as banking or accountancy you automatically receive training, from new policy to new systems but freelances tend to work on their own so these workshops are vital to keep you sane, connected in your field and to acquire new information and skills as well as develop your current ones.

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performers works really well to the benefit of everyone on the workshops. I love that it's not just actors at the workshops because the cross over from the other unions offers a balance and a different perspective. Writers often look at content in a way that actors don't and I've really enjoyed learning from what the other union members focus on

I'm such a fan of FEU Training that when I was visiting a very sick friend in hospital, I got chatting to another hospital visitor, who was also an actor, and recommended she join up! It isn't just a great idea, it's essential.

Do you know any other organisation that offers business skills courses for creatives?

Every now and then something comes up but you have to look for it.



