>>Snap**shot**

Gemma Boyd Musician, Poet and

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Organic Allotmenteer

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

Music has been a joyous, healing thread that's run throughout my life.

I loved listening to my dad's Buddy Holly records as a child, achieved Grade 5 in Piano, Theory of Music and Violin plus Grade 8 Double Bass, and had an intense love/ hate relationship with my double bass at university.

As a star-struck teenager, I decided that I wanted to pursue a career in television - either as an actress, producer or director, and joined the Grange Players Theatre Company and Rage Young Peoples' Theatre. I graduated from the University of Chichester with an English and Related Arts BA and embarked on a seven-year stint working as an usher, box office assistant and dresser in mainstream theatres. I returned to Chichester in 2006 to do the jazz course at Chichester College.

While dressing at the National Theatre, I set up and ran creative writing workshops in London with homeless people at St Mungo's North Lambeth Day Centre in Waterloo, the Union Chapel Project in Highbury and the Spires Centre in Streatham. I published and edited a magazine for group members which appeared on the shelves of The National Poetry Library. This period also heralded the publication of my own poetry in various magazines and journals.

Missing the sea, I moved to Brighton & Hove in 2001 and worked as a support worker for young adults with learning difficulties. I also qualified in Integrative Hypnotherapy and Psychotherapy and Counselling Skills and Theory. However, during my training to become a therapist, I did a lot of painful but enlightening soul-searching, concluding that it was music that I really wanted to do.

Having reached my goal of earning a living as a selfemployed professional musician I also worked as a volunteer at the National Jazz Archive in Loughton. Here I researched, précised and catalogued the Johnny Simmen Archive; a collection of letters written by over one hundred and sixty jazz musicians, donated by John Chilton. "I see this training as the backbone of what I do as an artist and it has helped me maintain my resilience."

In 2009 I fell in love with Paris and for 10 years performed as a jazz and folk multi-instrumentalist with bands and as a soloist around the terraces and bars of Montmartre.

From 2014-15, I wrote live jazz gig reviews for Jazzwise Magazine and Serious, and my poem, 'Double Bass Sonnet' was nominated for The Forward Prize, Best Single Poem Competition, 2015.

I currently work as an all-round artist in Essex, run organic allotments in Hainault, fundraise for Marie Curie, and have obtained certificates of achievement in Online Creative Practice with LIFEbeat, and Forensic Science and Psychology.

What do you like most about your work?

I like how my career has evolved organically and how the challenges of being self-employed have forced me to learn new skills and to draw on old ones. I have a strong drive to express my creativity which has given me a fearlessness which has not only helped me overcome OCD / PTSD, but it's taken me to Europe to create art in Paris, Spain and Ireland. When it comes to career choices, I have followed my goose bumps in life, which has been very rewarding.





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What are the biggest challenges of maintaining a freelance career?

Being a female double bass player has been tricky at times: I've encountered a lot of sexism. I've also had to prove myself as a musician while avoiding being exploited or my efforts minimised. My biggest challenge has been learning how to set personal and professional boundaries. After doing a lot of work on myself, I have learnt to seek out and work with people who share my values. I find this helps me maintain the integrity of my work.

Have you added new work/skills to your portfolio over time?

I taught myself creative coding in order to deepen my abilities as a mixed media artist and developed skills in jazz journalism. I now teach multiple instruments live and online and am also proficient in French, Spanish and Norwegian.

When tendinitis prevented me from performing, I taught myself the accordion so I could still earn money. I have a passion for organic gardening, not just because it is a form of art, but I can also eat what I produce.

I'm fascinated by forensic science and psychology, which has not only empowered me as victim of crime, but it's enabled me to become more methodical and analytical as a teacher.

My yoga and meditation practice underpins all of the other skills.

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

I get easily overwhelmed with information, which can make it difficult to act on new ideas. I also experience the double bind of not liking social media, but feeling obliged to use it in order to get work.

What FEU Training courses have you attended?

Several including:

- Tools for Goal Setting
- Stress Busting
- Diversify your Portfolio

"FEU Training keeps me future-focused and hopeful."

• Build your Creative Brand to Win Work

• Write that Book and Get it Published

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

The 'Tools for Goal Setting' workshop has helped me to set goals more effectively, which in turn has allowed me to help my students set better goals. The 'Build your Creative Brand' workshop was useful in that it showed me how to drill down into the specifics of what I do and why people should care. It shifted my perspective in how I can present myself.

My wish is to enhance face-to-face communication, creativity and connection for the well-being of diverse communities in an age where all living beings are facing existential crisis. 'Write that Book' has aided me in this quest. I am now writing my third book. Snippets of wisdom shared on that workshop inspired me to get involved with The Poetry Project in New York, where I now vibe with likeminded poets.

What has encouraged you to attend FEU training sessions?

I have been attending FEU Training workshops almost as long as I have been self-employed as a musician, writer and artist. The trainers are consistently good. I see this training as the backbone of what I do as an artist and it has helped me maintain my resilience.

While I really enjoyed the live in-person workshops, I was experiencing difficulties travelling even before Covid-19 hit, so the online workshops mean I can still attend and to be able to maintain a sense of community. FEU Training keeps me future-focused and hopeful. I heartily hope the decision to cut the funding is reversed.

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