

>> Snapshot

Gemma Boyd

Musician, Poet and

Organic Allotmenteer

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"I see this training as the backbone of what I do as an artist and it has helped me maintain my resilience."

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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 self-employed 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.

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.



