



## THE PROFESSIONAL PERFORMER: AN INTERVIEW WITH MARCUS COLLINS (ANDRE MAYEM)



Marcus Collins is a Liverpool born English performer who finished as the runner-up on the eighth series of *The X Factor* in 2011. He was mentored by Take That frontman Gary Barlow. His debut album, *Marcus Collins* became his first top 10 UK album which features his self-penned single “Mercy”. Collins starred as Seaweed Stubbs in the 2013 UK Tour of *Hairspray*, he has also appeared in *Kinky Boots* and in a tour of *Hair* playing Hud.

As part of his pathway into the industry, Marcus did a BTEC Performing Arts course, which he attributes to developing his skills and knowledge in the craft of performing. He really enjoyed this experience and is still in touch with members of his group.

In the interview, without directly aiming to do so, Marcus highlights several important professional performer attitudes and behaviours. Read the interview and underline or highlight sections that demonstrate the following;

- Openness to developing skill set/ craft
- Trust and respect for other professionals
- A collaborative and inclusive approach to working with others
- Awareness of how the industry works and working practises

### On working with a new script...

At the beginning of rehearsals, we were still manipulating the script. The writers had ideas, the director had different ideas, the producers had different ideas, the actors had things they wanted to contribute and it was like a merry-go-round of try this, try that, ooh that’s not working let’s try this, that’s better but let’s take it back to the drawing board. I had a different script to work with every day for about three weeks. On a new show you have to be ready and open to working like that. It was fun but intense!

### On respecting a script and playing comedy...

‘The script is funny. You are not.’ That was a key nugget of information I got from Jerry Mitchell [the director of *Kinky Boots*] to take away. Don’t over think it. Tell the joke. It has to appear as

though you have just had the thought when you deliver the line. Play the action and let it land. For *Mrs Doubtfire*, Jerry Zaks told the cast “...we have worked really hard on this script. Every pause, every comma is there for a reason and I need you to honour that.” And that kept us in check! [...] So, for comic roles, timing and clarity are key.

### On working in a double act...

If you are working in a comic double act like I am [with Cameron Blakely who plays Frank] you need to be able to read each other's thoughts on stage. You need to trust them and look into the whites of their eyes and know that they are waiting for the audience to settle after a laugh, not because they have forgotten their line! I didn't know the actor playing Frank, I'd never met him before rehearsals but from day one I thought to myself it's so important that I build a rapport with this person because we are together in every scene and if we don't connect, I would be concerned that could leak out in the performance when you are on stage. I do believe when performers don't like each other, or don't connect, it can read in that context. Being in Cameron's company for ten minutes let me know that not only had I met my match [he laughs] but that I had so much to learn from this man. He's daring, confident, funny, emotionally connected and intelligent and paints with every colour at all times. It's really important as a performer to keep learning, I learnt about his journey and he learnt about mine. He's an older white straight guy, I'm a younger, mixed race gay guy, there's also a North South and class difference too, so everything that could have been sprinkled into the mix to make us different but in the contrast of our lives we found the connection! We really worked hard work together, working on our scenes after rehearsal, building that rapport.



### On what playing the role means to him...

The cherry on the cake for me is being able to portray an openly gay person of colour on stage who is in a same sex marriage that then moves forward to adopt. To be able to be at the forefront of how the [movement and drive for] equality is changing society and how we [the Mrs. Doubtfire team] are managing to play a part in that. Since the 1980's and long before that gay people had stigma attached to them [...] around being unreliable or even predators. There was a lot of negativities written about it through the press, it was everywhere. It's something that I think hasn't been shed to this day and there is still stigma and homophobia. And that's challenging. So, to be able to do this role, where I'm at the forefront showcasing that there's

so much to be enjoyed about love and that it doesn't matter who you love, your integrity is everything. That means everything to me. A heteronormative way of life isn't everything. Gay people don't just conform to the stereotypes portrayed about them either, like wearing tank tops and shorts at Mardi Gras or Pride. They have strong relationships, make great families. The wonderful thing about nowadays is that the LGBTQIA movement are so inclusive of everyone, it's all about love, that's the soul, that's the heart of it, lifting each other up and making space for love. I'm so proud and glad that I'm getting to do this, to be able to tell this story night after night to sold out audiences... To give another perspective of what a gay man, a gay black man looks like. It's the biggest pull for me to do the job and I'm so honoured to become part of the alumni of people that get to play the role, and will continue to play it, it's so cool.

### On inclusivity and representation...

To be Included, that's the point. I didn't see a person on stage and think I could do that, that could be me, for so long. I thought about roles and thought it would be great to play that - but I'd never be seen for it. It's only recently that *Wicked* have started casting diversely and they have people of colour playing any role... which is important because it doesn't matter what colour they are. It's brilliant they are opening things up and the casting is so diverse. I saw Billy Porter on stage in *Kinky Boots* in 2014 and I just couldn't stop crying when I came out the theatre and throughout actually, because it was the first time I had seen someone like me somebody I could grow up to be like [...] He gave me the kick up the bum and the realisation that I could do it. I want to do that for the next generation. I want to have the effect Billy Porter had on me and pay that forward in any way that I can and doing these roles where I am visible is only going to pay off, it can only pay dividends.

## SELF - REFLECTION TASK

Wherever you are on your journey to meeting your aspirations, what can you 'take away' from the interview with Marcus? Score yourself from 1- 10 on the following skills;

- Openness to developing skill set/ craft
- Trust and respect for other professionals
- A collaborative and inclusive approach to working with others
- Awareness of how the industry works and working practices

### Where do you score highest and where are the areas for development?

As we learnt from the transformation Daniel undergoes in the musical, to make changes, you need to put in the effort! It helps if you break the journey down into manageable chunks, and hold yourself accountable by setting goals!

### Can you set yourself a SMART target, below.

S (specific) M (measurable) A (achievable) R (realistic) T (time-bound)

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## 2. WORKING COLLABORATIVELY: *MRS. DOUBTFIRE THE MUSICAL* FAMILY

**Theatre is a unique art form where collaboration is the key to success.**

Theatre is different to the work of a solo artist like a sculptor or author because the production is the outcome of a collective investment from a large group of people working toward communicating a set of intentions for an audience. Each member of the team is responsible for creating the right conditions for this to happen. Working in a group is not without its challenges.

**Task 1:** Sit in a circle and have a respectful and honest discussion about the following, moving around the circle so that each group member can speak;

How have you worked well as a group?

Can you identify challenges you have encountered when working as a group?

At the end of the discussion make a list of three key areas of strength and three areas for development.

**Working in a truly collaborative way involves key skills including;**

Clear communication. Listening is especially important because it aids understanding and can help find solutions to problems.

Navigating differences of opinion/ perspectives: In theatre we must channel our ideas to support the intention / big idea behind the production. A skilled collaborator will find an appropriate opportunity and use a productive tone to offer their ideas.



**Task 2:** Look at your list. **Discuss:** Do these skills underpin some of the successes and some of the issues you may have had as a group?

Another essential aspect of productive and successful collaboration is an **inclusive spirit** through a **professional approach** to the process and by the **demonstrating respect** for all involved through all interactions and communications. This fosters a special camaraderie among the cast and crew of a show and the experience of being part of a production can feel like being part of a “family.” When carried through all levels of production and performance from the producers and director to the cast, stage manager and technicians this can ensure the final production is worthy of the collective effort. This is true of the *Mrs. Doubtfire* team, who discuss the importance of creating an inclusive, positive, and productive working environment.



### **John O'Farrell (co-writer) on collaboration...**

When you collaborate, the important thing is that you're all trying to make the same show. Thankfully the director, the actors and writers on this project are all trying to make the same show so we're all making a stronger version of that show when we collaborate. The difference is, if you get someone [with an opposing vision] then you're going to end up with a hotchpotch in the middle. I love working with actors and directors, and seeing those clever people bring something to life. [When you] sit down to write a script, you know you're going to hand it over to an actor. We talked to lots of directors before we got Jerry Zaks [who directed the *Mrs Doubtfire musical*]. You have to employ your own boss – so you're finding someone who's going to take your material

and run over the hill with it. You have to trust that person and respect them. Sometimes there are things we disagree with [...] there's stuff that he hasn't liked of ours and we've kept it in. You have to compromise, actually – which is hard for an artist!



## **Tara Overfield Wilkinson (UK Associate Director) on getting the best out of actors as a director...**

My personal one is just to always treat people with respect, and make sure that they know what they do is worthwhile and appreciated, because like with any job, nobody wants to come to work and not feel loved and appreciated. It comes right from the top – it comes from the producers in the first place, making sure that everyone feels that they've been paid well, that their working conditions are great and that is also what unions are for. To make sure those conditions are in place.



## **Laura Tebbutt (Actor playing Miranda) on approaches to rehearsal...**

This was a particularly special group of people who magically really came together. Everyone there was very good at what they do and chosen for their specific skill set. The main thing in the room was overwhelming respect for everyone else in room, not just those in charge but everyone. Jerry Zaks is a four times award-winner and the respect that you feel for him trickles down.

Be aware that different people have different ways of working and you have to give and take a little bit. The director Jerry Zaks, likes everyone to be off-book as soon as possible because that helps in finding a character, however I prefer to learn the general blocking alongside the

script so that I can put the two together like choreography. So, your best methods might not be theirs and you have to adapt and navigate that. Especially when working with teams from two different countries.

## **Lisa Mathieson (UK Associate Choreographer and Actor) on fun warm ups...**

I love having a nice positive, fun rehearsal studio. I have fun music for warm ups – once we get into the run of the show I usually do 'Whitney Saturdays' where we listen to Whitney Houston music, or we might do '70's Saturdays', I always try and have some fun. Paulo, who is our Dance Captain does the exact same thing, we always go for fun warm ups to get everyone in a good mood. We also buy them sweeties on a Saturday so that keeps them onside! [She laughs.]



**Task 3: Discussion: What are your favourite warm up exercises and games? What do you like about them and how are they useful? Make a list and order them in terms of preference.**

Warm ups can have a different purpose, i.e., you may want to use tongue-twisters to achieve more vocal clarity, get your energy going for improvisation work or steady your focus just before a performance. Have you tried the warm ups below?

**For energy try 'Funky Chicken':** Stand in a whole group circle and all at the same time loudly count down from 8 to 1 each time shaking as fast as you can first your right arm, then your left arm, then right leg and finally left leg. When you've done all four limbs, start again with each limb counting down from 4 to 1, then 2 to 1 and then just 1. At the end you do your best impression of a funky chicken!

**For a strong group dynamic try 'Keepy Uppy':** Using a balloon or beach ball, the whole group must move it around the circumference of the whole learning space without allowing it to touch the floor once.

**For focus try 'Clap, Click, Stamp':** Stand in a whole group circle. All count from one to three, each learner saying one number at a time, and keep repeating this. So, learner one would say one, two, three, one, two, three, and so on. Once you get this, replace the 'one' with a 'click' (click your fingers). Once you have that, replace the 'two' with a hand-clap. Finally, replace the 'three' with a stamp of the right foot. Play at high speed! Mix it up and add in sounds, actions, even short lines for the three numbers.

**Task 3: In pairs, research new warm up games and exercises. Can you create a rota and each agree to lead a new warm up at the start of your sessions together.**

**How can you explain it carefully and ensure everyone enjoys it?**





### 3. PATHWAYS & AUDITIONS

## AN INTERVIEW WITH KIERA HAYNES (ENSEMBLE)



#### On her pathway to becoming a performer...

I started dancing when I was four as a hobby, I did ballet, enjoyed it socially and wanted to go all the time. It built from there. I went to a performing arts school at 14, called Boer, it's similar to the BRIT School but in Birmingham and free and that was where I first did musical theatre, not just dance - we did acting classes too.

I was the first Year 10 cohort to go. That's when it became less of a hobby and more of a career aspiration. I auditioned for all the big drama schools when I was 16 and didn't get in but got offered the year foundation at BIRD. It wasn't a formal qualification but it prepares you to get onto the full course. I decided to do it...and I think that is what 'made me'

because in that year I never wanted anything more. I never had to fight for something, I had just been 'going along' but to not get in straight away I knew I had to really work hard and I learnt so much. I was in London on my own and I really buckled down that year. It changed something in me and I knew I really wanted it and if I didn't get in, I would be really sad. Then I got into BIRD on the three-year Diploma course. In the third year you do musicals and showcases and they get agents to come and watch. My agent came along and he had clients in the West End and I thought if he can get them in, he can get me in, so I joined his agency. I got new headshots and that is when the auditions started to flow!

**TASK 1:** If you aspire to become a performer, have you considered what training you might undertake? Why not research some of the training providers Kiera and some of the other performers went to.





## DID YOU KNOW

The actress Blake Lively blew her audition to play Natalie in the film. It came down to the future Gossip Girl star and Mara Wilson. To try and calm her, Lively's father told the five-year-old that she would be reading with Robin Williams's twin brother at her final audition, not the star himself. That plan failed when someone in the room introduced Williams as Robin. Lively described the experience as "horrible."

### On auditions...

I can say I've probably auditioned for every West End show out there. It's so hard and you are going to get so many more no's than you are yes's but you just have to wait for the one yes and when you do it will change your world! I really like auditions now and treat them like a free class, that way you are gaining something and you don't feel you have wasted your time. At the beginning every audition I went to I could see myself in the job and then it crushes you when you don't get it, but what I learned over time was to keep light-hearted about it, you can't invest your whole life and soul in it.

**Task 1: Auditions are a fundamental part of pursuing a career as a performer. Kiera tells the story of how she won the role of Ensemble in *Mrs. Doubtfire*. Read the story and highlight the attitudes and behaviours you think gave her the edge over the other performers she went up against for the role.**

### On the initial call...

A Casting Director will send a brief out on Spotlight, the performers portal, so for *Mrs. Doubtfire* they would state 'Ensemble' and details of anything specific they are looking for. Most performers have an agent and the agent or performer themselves will see that brief and if they think themselves or their client is correct for that job, they will send their CV and Headshot. The Casting Director will look at all the people they get and pick out who they think is correct for the job. Luckily enough I got called in for an audition. My agent sent me a brief for the first round of auditions which was a dance audition. What I always do is some background research on what the audition is... so I don't walk in blind and I know what to expect. I was familiar with the movie *Mrs. Doubtfire* but had no idea that the musical was coming out. I did see that they did the show in America and I found an audition routine on YouTube, a tap routine, and I thought I'm going to learn it to be more prepared!



### On the first audition...

So, I go down to London on the train, I live about an hour away, make sure I am nice and early. I was familiar with the audition place...and just sat in a park around the corner for a bit then went in and we all gathered in the studio. They briefly introduced us to the musical and what we would be doing in the role and then we did the dance audition. It was eight counts of eight and I did find it very difficult. A lot of the time I'm quite comfortable but I did find it challenging so I really had to push myself. They gave us a lot of choreography in a short amount of time. I think that is why it's good to keep going to classes because you can pick things up more quickly when you do. Then luckily enough they said get your tap shoes on. In my head I was thinking, "YES!" because I am quite good at tap. It was easier to pick up the steps there and then when I already had an idea of how it went. It was great! That was the end of the day and you go home and wait to hear from your agent whether they want to see you again or if that is all they need.



### On the call back...

That evening they asked my agent if I could come back in two days to sing and I was like 'Yay!' They asked if I could sing a pop song or contemporary musical theatre song and I sang 'I Will Survive' - it's my classic go to audition song. I feel very comfortable with it and feel like even if I'm nervous I could still push through it because I know the song so well. So, I went in and sang that song and Lisa, the UK Associate Choreographer said 'We'll have you in for the dance again tomorrow'. At first It didn't click and I didn't want to get too excited but I said 'that's great, thank you.'

### On another call back...

So, then my agent sent me the details for another dance round. This time they sent a video of more choreography to learn... Something clicked in my head and I thought 'I'm going to do everything in my power to get this' and thought I need to learn this choreography inside out. I went to a gym near me at 10pm in the evening to use a studio, when I knew it would be a bit quieter and practiced and practiced this dance. I could have done it in my living room but I wanted to do it in the proper space, there was loads of kicks and jumps, and really make sure I set myself up for success. I felt that if I didn't get it that was fair enough but at least I knew I had done everything I could to give myself the best chance. The next day at the audition they

were auditioning for specific parts...I was put forward for Donna Summer so I wore my hair big so they could envisage me in the role. [...] I researched and looked at the way she carries herself, her posture, mannerisms like her hair flicks, how she struts and holds herself. When characters are fictional you have to use your imagination but for this role, I was copying the physical and vocal traits that she had. She's such an icon! I was then dancing with my direct competition, which was quite daunting. We were all the same casting type and we're all up for this one part and I'd never been put in that situation before...

**After yet another audition round, her agent rang to let her know she had been offered the part!**



### **On performing the role of Donna Summer...**

In 'Make Me a Woman' halfway through the number they think of Donna Summer as a source of inspiration for the disguise - the stage turns into a disco, the lights are strobing, I've got this massive wig on and sequined costume. So, I already look the part but the Choreographer said to me you really need to embody it when you make your entrance and hold your own because she is such a massive icon. It's the way that she holds herself. And even when you are not at the centre of the scene you need to continue to stay in that character and embody that role. She is a high-status character, she's confident, so when I'm walking around, I strut, I'm doing hair swishes. What makes the number is if you pointed to one performer at any time, they ARE that character and if you snap out of it its harder to get back into it. At the front, at the back of the stage space, from the moment you enter the stage to the moment you exit. Sometimes being in the persona can even take the nerves away.

**Task 2: Pairs discussion or self- reflection Discuss or consider what Kiera did to give herself the best chance of success at the audition?**

1.

2.

3.

**Task 3: Pair discussion or self-reflection**

If you intend to audition for Drama School or for a role in a production how will this approach help you?

Remember, having the resilience to pick yourself up after an unsuccessful audition is an important a skill too!

Good luck!



**2. Physical health:** The cast talked about the importance of setting up and maintaining good habits. As an actor your voice and body is your tool. Try and lead an active lifestyle. Everyone is different and you don't have to visit the gym every day but every little helps, such as walking rather driving on shorter journeys.

“Stay on top of your vocal and physical technique. That is never something you can let go. I go to singing lessons but there are so many resources even online.” – Carla Dixon-Hernandez, Lydia

**3. Sleep!** Research suggests that without enough sleep our mental and physical capacities are reduced.

“You need to get enough sleep – I always need 8 hours of sleep” – Lisa Mathieson, UK Associate Choreographer

“Your sleep schedule completely shifts. Everything is later. After you finish a show, your adrenaline is high so it's hard to get to sleep before 12am but you shouldn't be going to bed at 3am every night. It's important to be conscious of that. Turning your mobile off helps, which is something I struggle with!” – Carla Dixon-Hernandez, Lydia

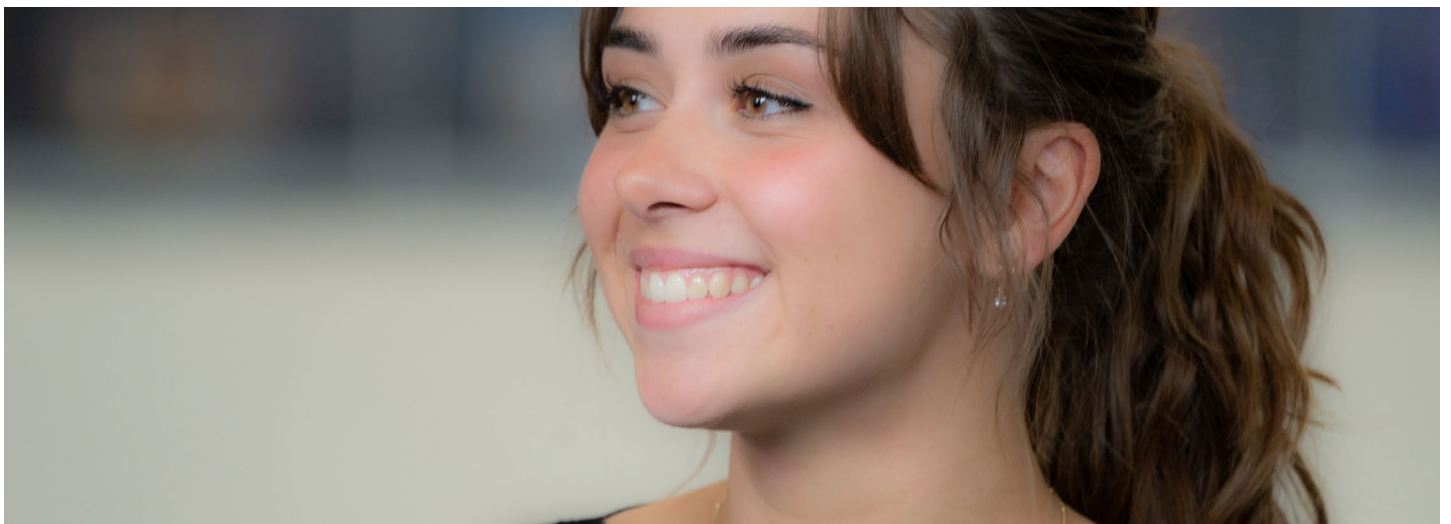
**4. Work life balance:** Planning time out, breaks and spending time outside of work with friends and family is the key to avoiding 'burn out.'

“I try and do Pilates 2 or 3 times a week because, for that hour, I think about nothing else because it's so difficult and it kills me pretty much. I like switching off and not thinking about anything else, just for a cheeky hour because my brain is always filled with so many things. Also, it's important to plan and schedule significant breaks and time out I think okay, I'm going to work solidly for 14 or 15 weeks and then I'm going to have a couple of days to do something nice. I love what I do, but it's nice to make sure that you're seeing friends and seeing family, and planning little things that are good for you.” – Lisa Mathieson, UK Associate Choreographer

**5. Get Talking!** A performer's life can be full of highs and lows. The cast feel it is very important to reach out for support and not to bottle up your feelings, especially if you are not feeling good.

**TASK 1: Pair discussion or self-reflection;**

How do you look after your mental and physical wellbeing? Is there anything more you could do to maintain good mental and physical wellbeing?





## 5. THE ROLE OF THE COSTUME SUPERVISOR: AN INTERVIEW WITH SABRINA CUNIBERTO

### On what the role involves...

The role of the Costume Supervisor is a bit of a hybrid. You are involved in design but not as much as the Designer. You are [...] the link between the Designer, the Costume Makers and all the processes that happen between having the design on paper and having it end up on stage exactly as the Designer wanted it to be.

I work alone quite a lot. It involves a lot of multi-tasking. If it is a big team like for *Mrs Doubtfire*, I do have an assistant who I have worked with for a number of years who will do fittings, take notes. We source, make, and purchase the costumes. Depending on how elaborate and constructed the costumes are there could be 3-4 makers to 30 costume makers, dyers, painters, shoe makers, hat milliners. A lot of costumes are purchased.



### On the key skills required for the role ...

Organisation skills are key, there is a lot of coordinating; someone will make the body padding and someone else will make the costumes that go on top. Problem-solving is an important skill and a lot of patience and mediation between Designers and Directors; Designers and Actors, and their expectations. It's a balancing act to make sure everyone is happy, without letting the design down. Sometimes it's more challenging than at other times. It really depends on the show. Some Designers are more headstrong than others and more involved. In the modern day it can be tricky because people think they know what they want to wear but ultimately, they are still playing a character and need to understand what's behind the design and sometimes that takes a little bit of convincing. i.e., you can't always just get away with saying 'you need to wear a Victorian corset because that is what they wore in Victorian times'. Actors can have their

input into it and it is about balance. We do listen and change and tweak the costume so they are comfortable with it. That is part of the process, not ignoring people but working together, it's a team effort all the time. It's not us and the actor. We work together. Every new cast brings its own challenges.

### **On her pathway into being a Costume Supervisor...**

I trained as a fashion designer but always wanted to do theatre design. I'm Italian and lived and studied in Italy. There were no strong costume courses so I did Fashion and Costume Design at high school, graduated in Fashion Design and worked in fashion in Milan. I moved to London with the aim of working in theatre, got a job as a Director and slowly became an assistant to a big Costume Supervisor and then made contacts and started meeting Designers. It takes a little bit of time to build relationships with Designers and to build a portfolio. I was very lucky and it happened quite quickly for me. I worked very hard. It does require hard work but equally it's exciting and thrilling getting to do different projects and meet with different people. You work with different Designers each time which makes it interesting.





## 6. THE ROLE OF THE UK ASSOCIATE CHOREOGRAPHER: AN INTERVIEW WITH LISA MATHIESON

**Lisa trained at the Arts Educational Schools London where she graduated with a BA(Hons) Degree in Musical Theatre.**

Theatre Credits Include: *What's New Pussycat?* (Original Cast, Birmingham Rep); *Merry Widow* (London Coliseum, West End); *Dusty the Musical* (Original Cast, UK Tour); *Groundhog Day* (Original Cast, Old Vic Theatre, London); *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels* (Original Cast, Savoy Theatre, West End and UK Tour); *Anything Goes* (Kilworth House Theatre); *Santa Claus The Musical* (Grand Theatre, Singapore); *Ultimate Broadway* (Culture Square Theatre, Shanghai); *Love Never Dies* (Adelphi Theatre, West End); *Gotta Sing Gotta Dance* (UK Tour); *Spamalot* (Musical Dome, Cologne); *We Will Rock You* (Musical Dome, Cologne); *Dancing Queen* (USA Tour); *Hold Tight It's 60's Night* (Holland Tour); *Twist and Shout* (UK Tour); *Pantoland* (London Palladium); *Jack in Jack and the Beanstalk* (Gordon Craig Theatre, Stevenage and Lighthouse Theatre, Kettering); Prince Charming in *Cinderella* (Palace Theatre, Kilmarnock) and Aladdin in *Aladdin* (Devonshire Park Theatre, Eastbourne).



**Other Credits include:**

Trixie Who in *The Grinch Live* (NBC and Sky); Aladdin in *A Tale To Tell* (Amazon Prime); *Matilda* Movie (Netflix); *Pennyworth* (Warner Brothers); Bonnie in *Bonnie and Clyde* (Original Recording); Vocalist in Monty Python's *Spamalot* (Original German Cast Recording); Vocalist in *Just So* (Original Cast Recording); Dancer in *42nd Street Gala* (London Palladium); Dancer on *The One Show* (BBC) and Choreographer for *Bittersweet Glee Group* on *Comic Relief Does Glee Club* (CBBC).

Instagram: @lisamathieson



### **On what the role involves...**

So, on *Mrs Doubtfire* there is a choreographer [Lorin Latarro], and then there is an Associate Choreographer, so we have Michealjon, who is Lorin's American Associate Choreographer, and I am the UK version of him. So, because this show was created in America, Michaeljon pretty much assisted Lorin in all of the choreography on the show. And now that it's come over to the UK, I have now learnt everything that went into the creation of the show in New York. So, in the UK I am in charge of keeping the show looking brilliant. I am in charge of all the auditions in the UK and casting the show. Once the show is running, I will rehearse [with] all the understudies to make sure the show is up to scratch. It's pretty much the day-to-day housekeeping of all the movement within the show. It's quite a big job, you have to be able to have a great memory, have a really good pick-up for choreography and need to be really organised. We have what I call a bible – it's basically a swing bible – and I have little colours for every single person who is in the show and it becomes a big map of craziness so I know where every single person goes in every number. So it's pretty complicated.



### **On her people management skills...**

...everyone learns a show in a different way. We've got people in our cast who are very like me – they see choreography and they pick it up straight away and that's it. And then we've got [people like] Gabriel who plays Daniel and *Mrs Doubtfire*, Gabriel is the most talented human being on the planet and he can do all of the things however we have a tap number in the show, so I had four sessions with Gabriel because *Mrs Doubtfire* does the whole tap number with the very talented ensemble. So, we had to break that down a bit slower for Gabriel because not only is he learning a tap number, he's [also] singing, he has full costume and heels on – he doesn't wear heels every day! Some people get a bit stressed, so you have to be able to talk them down from that a little bit.

### **On the rehearsal process...**

Every musical I have ever done has started the same, you always start learning the music first. So, we all sit around with scores, maybe for 2 or 3 days and learn as much as we can of the music, all the harmonies and things as well because that becomes complicated and it's very time consuming. Then we start to put numbers on their feet, we take little sections at a time. For *Mrs Doubtfire* in particular, there's a lot of speed with a lot of the numbers. Like the tap one I said is extremely fast, so we tend to do little sections rather than looking at a number as a whole, we do little bits. And then we put it on the set [and] because we're in a big old show, we're lucky enough to have bits of the set in rehearsals so when we go into tech we're ready to

go. So, then we put it on the set, and then we add vocals on top, then we start to speed it up and then we add character on top of that as well. [This] is obviously a big old character show so then we start to gradually put it together.

Once we, as an ensemble, have done the numbers together [that's] when we start getting the principles in. So, we pop Gabriel into that number, so we do it on our own first so that we are all sorted and then add our principles on top, nice and slow so we can work through. It's great for us so that we can get used to it and it's great to give them time so that they're comfortable to do all the things they have to do within that. There's lots of costume changes going on in the numbers, it's pretty stressful because everything is done to specific timing in this show. So, that's how it works, then we go into runs eventually.

### **On all the different dance style in the show...**

- **Musical Theatre Jazz**
- **Tap**
- **Hip Hop**
- **Irish Dancing**
- **Flamenco**
- **Crumping**
- **Vogueing**
- **One number is inspired by a K-Pop music video, so it's got that sort of vibe**
- **Disco**
- **Hustle**
- **Break Dancing**
- **Puppeteering**

I'm actually in the show as well, [in the ensemble] I'm the Flamenco Singer. So, me and two of our boys, Adam and Tom, had to learn Flamenco – [we'd] never done Flamenco before. I'm a tapper, the two boys are tappers [too], but they're not strong tappers, but actually flamenco is tap, but a different flavour. So that was a strong rehearsal day for us, but very cool. But it's the same as the rehearsal process, we learn everything slowly, we learn the steps, we add a bit of glitter on, we add the style, and then we add the character, it all happens in stages. Start slow, build it up, put the character on top and have fun that's kind of where we go with the Mrs Doubtfire stuff.



### **On the most challenging choreography in the show...**

I think if you asked any of the ensemble, they would probably say the tap number. We've got great tappers in the cast, some [are] more experienced than others because we needed people that could do everything so we made some exceptions for a few little things, but now they're all fantastic. It's the most difficult because it's tricky steps, it's so fast, I still can't believe how fast it is. There's a lot of things happening on stage, they're all tap-dancing chefs, you have people coming out of fridges [and] cupboards. There's pallets on stage so that's where our kitchen counter is, it's on a pallet so there's a little bump on the stage, so it's quite challenging. We have a sofa on the pallet as well, so we're very aware of what's going on there. There are kitchen utensils flying everywhere. I've got the script and [I've written] 'salt shaker on desk', on the next word 'put pepper on desk', on the next word 'put spoon to the right'. On every word something happens, and there's about 8, 9, 10 things happening [at once], so I would say it's probably the most stressful number. There's a lot of throwing and catching going on as well, the amount of times we had to rehearse butter-tossing and catching with Gabriel, with a mask on, it's almost comedy for us that number!

### **On when it goes wrong...**

The lighting on the show is so bright, [and] the first time we went onstage we couldn't really open our eyes. In the wing, there's two beams of light, so when you're throwing stuff, you can't actually see where you're throwing. It takes a couple of weeks [for] your eyes to start to adjust. But it's very difficult and I know the ensemble stress about that number every night. We love it, because it's fun, and we get to be really silly but it is quite stressful because you want to get it right, we don't want things to be flying all over the stage. For that number we went at less than half speed [in rehearsals] for a very long time, we did everything so slow, and once we got the number looking good, we went to half show tempo and we kept cranking it up.



### **On her pathway into the role...**

...I danced since I was young, like 4 or 5 and then when I was 12 I went to a musical theatre school up in Glasgow and when I was 18 I went to London, to Arts Ed, and I've got a degree, a BA Honours in Musical Theatre from Arts Ed. We did our shows in third year and I got an agent and I love working with him.

### **On advice for aspiring performers...**

You really need to want to do it, I think people think 'I'm going to give this a go because it's

quite fun' and it is fun, it's really fun however it's really hard. It's difficult, the highs are extremely high and the lows are really low. I've seen people come out of college and walk into a West End show and then never work again because their expectations are 'this is easy, I can do this' and then they get 3 or 4 knockbacks and that's them done.

I feel like mentally, I'm quite a competitive person with myself and I don't like people telling me that I can't do something, and in the nicest way possible, my family said 'we don't want you to do that, you should get a real job' and it's only now, 15 years on that they're like 'oh she's fine'. It's really difficult, you have to be really focused, you have to be really reliable and if you're not it comes across really quickly and it gets around really quickly. It sounds ridiculous but you must have really good timekeeping, we're constantly on a schedule and you can't be rocking up 10-15 minutes late.

You have to be very brave, the amount of situations you have to put yourself in to get a job are terrifying, some auditions are terrifying and even in a rehearsal you're asked to do something that you're like 'oh god this is horrible' but you have to get up and do it. You have to be very vulnerable as well, to put yourself in very vulnerable positions to get the best of you.

**And... you have to be a good person!**





## 7. THE ROLE OF THE WRITER: AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN O'FARRELL



**John O'Farrell is renowned for his satirical writing on TV shows like *Spitting Image* and *Have I Got News for You*.**

### On finding his way into writing musicals...

Well, I never set out with any ambition to be a writer of musicals - I was a comedy writer working in the UK, then I morphed into books and I wrote comic memoirs, comic novels and a funny history of Britain. I had an American friend who wanted to adapt one of my novels - I went to Los Angeles with him, and we were writing this screenplay. He pitched a musical to me, and I said "well that's a good idea" - and I started to say some things about the structure of it, and the characters, and he said "would you like to write it with me?" I was like "Well, where for? Where would we put that on?" And he went, big American,

"Broadway!" And I was like "well that's not going to happen..." But it did happen! It went out on Broadway, it ran for two years and that was called *Something Rotten!* It was off the back of that that we were asked to do *Mrs Doubtfire*.

### On the creative adaptation process...

So, we sat down and [asked ourselves] what are the moments that should be sung? Daniel in the movie says "I have to be with my kids" to the courtroom - that's a song. That's an "I want" song - the protagonist sets out his desire in the beginning of the story. The moment where Daniel's brother transforms him into Mrs Doubtfire - we knew from the outset that that's a big number. [It's a] challenging number because, to do the makeup on stage, you can't cut to different characters. The other challenge you've got is you have an ensemble on stage - you have 15-20 people to give parts to. Sometimes you just think 'how do we make the most of this wonderful opportunity?' So, we had the idea of, while they're discussing what sort of woman this nanny could be, we populate the stage with lots of different women. We see Mrs. Thatcher, we see Princess Diana. We see starlets - Grace Kelly, Donna Summer, all these iconic women. [...] We thought that [would] fill the stage, that will be lots of voices, lots of images, and that's an exciting big moment [...] in the story. When a man is singing his ballad about [wanting his kids], you want an empty stage [with] a spotlight on him. When you've got an idea like

transforming this actor into this elderly Scottish nanny, you think ‘that’s a great big production number’. So really, short answer: [we asked ourselves] which moments are the songs? How do we make those interesting? How do we give voice to all the different characters in the piece? ‘...how do we go from one character to another in terms of giving them voice?’

### On writing for comedy...

I’m not going to be fake-modest and say ‘anyone can write a load of jokes any day’. I can’t write songs like my collaborators [can]. I can’t paint or draw - I look at people who can draw [and think] that’s magic! But I can look at something and find the funny in it, some days better than others, but I’ve found that [humour] is my natural place to go. By doing it all my life, I’ve presumably gotten better at it. Even at school I wrote funny pieces for the school magazine - I wrote funny pieces at university and started sending in sketches to comedy shows. The more you do it, the better you get - you get access to producers and hear about new shows that are coming along. Once you’re on the inside, if you’re any good, doors start to open for you. That took a few years - it took about 3-4 years after university to start doing it professionally. There was a lot of feeling lost and wondering if I’d ever make it. But because I have this slight bend towards comedy and always had done, I knew that’s [where I wanted to be]. Somebody said to me “why don’t you write a serious book?” - it’s like saying to a jazz musician “why don’t you write an opera?”. Well, because it’s not what I do! I’m good at writing comedy, and wouldn’t be good at writing a big serious drama. I’ll do what I think I do best!



I’ve got a certain amount of ability but I also try and make myself someone who is easy to work with. Don’t be a difficult, precious writer. Don’t be an argumentative, arrogant writer. Do your re-writes, turn up on time, be constructive always, be someone that people would want to work with twice.

### On his pathway into the writing profession...

From a very young age, I watched TV comedies and wrote down the plots in my diary. I always cared about the script and not the actors, not the directing. My dad was a frustrated writer - he once bought me a book when I was 14 called “Writing for the BBC” so he knew that’s what I aspired to do. I never thought that I’d be able to do it - I never imagined that I’d be allowed, or that those doors would open. I did look at some of the stuff on telly and thought “well that’s not

very good, I wouldn't have given that in..." Having a high standard privately is a factor! I read scripts and I did buy the collective scripts of my favourite comedy shows if they were on sale in the book shop – I read them over and over again. I chose to do English and Drama at university. Back in the 80s, it was much easier for me as a white man to walk through open doors – lights turned green for a young middle-class white man back then. It wouldn't have been as easy for women or people of colour – it's slightly better now [but] not good enough. Living in London is a big advantage – I could turn up to those meetings at the BBC and give my script to the producer, look him in the eye and say "I've written this." Anything I posted in never got put on when I was trying to be a comedy writer, and things that I handed the producer did, so I think that's another big advantage. I don't think that my Drama degree was that helpful – it was very serious, and comedy was frowned upon. The thing I say to young people now is you've just got to keep producing stuff. It's no good writing a sketch and putting it in your drawer, or having an idea and thinking "I don't feel inspired". You've got to keep turning up to that blank page, produce material and get that stuff in front of people so they can see it, whether you put on your own little play or send it off, or try and get an agent. Produce stuff and get it out there.

### On collaborating...

Sometimes it can be pretty lonely, writing. The other thing you can do is collaborate – I had a co-writer for 10 years and we wrote comedy together. That was a great help to get going – you had one person you could bounce ideas off, and when I wasn't feeling funny he was, and vice versa. It can be lonely and it can be challenging, but there's nothing better than hearing a crowd of people laugh at your joke that you wrote on your own. There's a joke I wrote in *Mrs Doubtfire* in the New York Public Library – [there was a moment in the script] that wasn't funny enough. I wrote 5 jokes and then my co-writers went "that one!" – it gets a big laugh every night, and that's really satisfying when you hear the Broadway audience laughing at that.

### On his favourite line in the musical...

This isn't in the movie, and I think this shows us thinking a bit harder because we've got the space. But I think it's when Lydia says to her dad "I can see how this is good for you – you get to see your kids, but we just get to see a character. How is that good for us?" [...] [There's this idea of the dad wanting to be with his kids], but it's sort of a one-way street because the kids don't get to be with their father role-model – they get to be with this funny nanny. So, it's actually slightly selfish of Daniel to do it that way even though it's just a comic premise. For Lydia to be that smart and analytical, I felt so delighted when I wrote that. Eventually, I had this line afterwards where Daniel says "You grew up fast" and she says "Well one of us had to." But just making her a more developed, smarter character who is prepared to criticise her dad and go "this isn't good enough" makes it a stronger piece. It's not particularly funny, but it's got some depth to it which I'm proud of.

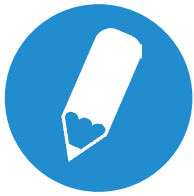




## 8. ADVICE ON PURSUING A CAREER AS A PERFORMER FROM THE CAST OF *MRS. DOUBTFIRE, THE MUSICAL*



**1) Go and see live theatre:** This will provide you with inspiration about the kind of work you would like to perform and you will see professionals in action to raise your aspirations. There are offers available that can make this more affordable through some venues and organisations, such as Go Live Theatre Projects. Check these out and take advantage, where possible! There are also platforms to watch recorded performances you could explore.



**2) Learn your craft:** Join a stage school, dance class, youth theatre and or get involved in after school clubs and school productions if you can. Consider choosing options to study drama at school and college. Think about investing in specialist training at a university, drama school or conservatoire. Develop as wide a skill set as possible to make you as versatile to cast as possible. Use books and online resources to further develop your knowledge and skills and work hard at doing so.



**3) Practice makes perfect:** Take advantage of opportunities to work with others to make theatre and perform for an audience. The more you do it, the more you will learn about the process and the better you will become. This will also boost your confidence. Work hard to make the most of these opportunities and take on board constructive feedback from people whose role it is to support you.



**4) Develop professional behaviours.** Learn as much as you can about how the performing arts industry works. Become someone other people want to work with. Respect others, be inclusive and hone your collaborative skills, such as listening and effective negotiation.



**5) Become the best version of yourself.** Take care of yourself and look after your own mental and physical wellbeing. Accept and reach out for support from others. Make and follow plans for personal growth; work on developing self-awareness and being as authentic as possible. Develop resilience to bounce back when things do not go your way.