

LAST WORD

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How hard – or easy – was it to move to the UK and start working in the arts?

Where do I begin? Living and working as an actor in London is not easy. That's not to say it's all bleak and depressing. It's incredibly rewarding and challenging, but you have to be willing to work hard and make many sacrifices for it. At least that's my experience. The obstacles are endless, from managing money to finding work.

The first challenge was paying drama school fees. To be able to afford it, I spent a year-and-a-half saving money by doing a full-time office job and several part-time jobs at the same time. And I still needed a bank loan to help cover my expenses in London. Then, once you graduate, then things really get tough! You've got to really want it.

What were the highlights of working on stage and TV there?

Although I know that some jobs were more fun or prestigious than others, to my mind they're all highlights. I know that sounds cheesy, but it's true. It's a tremendous gift to be able to do what I do for a living.

I've worked with some renowned companies such as Birmingham Rep, Secret Cinema and the BBC, with famous names such as Philip Pullman and Linda Grey, in famous locations such as Kensington Gardens and Leicester Square Theatre and playing famous characters such as Malvolio and Iago and Gollum. I've helped adapt novels to stage as in the case of *I Was a Rat!* and I've performed in Spain and Norway.

I've seen almost every part of the UK, thanks to the many tours I've been on. I've shared my days with countless talented actors and creatives, I've directed circus shows, performed and directed at the Edinburgh Festival, and been on stages, walked down corridors and slept in dressing rooms that have previously hosted some of the world's most revered names in the acting profession. Believe me, when you get to do what I do, every day at work is a highlight.

Can you tell us a bit about the less attractive aspects of being a full-time performer?

Learning to deal with the lows – near constant rejection, unemployment, and serious money worries, to name the big ones. Then there are things like seeing your friends start to earn some good money, buy houses, start families and go on holidays whilst you're still eating baked beans out of a can because money is tight... and missing weddings, birthdays and other events because you can't afford to travel. I've done a lot of touring, so being away from home can also be tough. I'm making this sound horrible, but it's a life that I wouldn't give up for the world.

Is it true that making it big in the acting world is all down to what type of agent you have?

Having a good agent definitely helps, but it's not the full picture. You must be good at what you do, nice to work with and reliable. You and your agent are a team, and you must work in tandem, supporting each other. For example, my agent got me into the

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audition for a part in *Doctors* on the BBC, but then the audition was in my hands and I had to make sure I nailed it.

What made you return to Malta last year?

A change in career direction and personal circumstances. Over the last few years, I've been writing, producing and performing my own comedy material, and in 2015 some opportunities came up in Malta that allowed me to further develop my skills as a writer-performer. These included an offer to co-create the *Comedy Knights* TV shorts series as well as working on several film projects.

What have been the highlights since you came back?

I'm very proud of the *Comedy Knights*, which continues to grow in popularity each year. My one-man comedy *Bad Dad* premiered last November and will be playing in London in May, after another run in Malta. Shooting *13 Hours* with director Michael Bay was also a highlight.

Indeed, earlier this year we saw you play a significant role in *13 Hours*. Tell us a bit about the filming experience.

I thoroughly enjoyed the shoot. I played the role of Sean Smith, an American who died in the attacks on the American compound in Benghazi in 2012, which is what the movie is about. Although I've played historical figures in the past, this was my first time playing someone from recent history, whose memory is very much alive, and I felt the responsibility of that.

I only worked on it for about nine days. It was quite intense at times, especially shooting the action sequences in the villa. There were controlled explosions going off all around us and fires burning everywhere you looked. You didn't need to use much imagination to picture yourself in that situation.

What were the 'famous names' such as Michael Bay and John Krasinski like?

They're mostly just like you or me. They're people making a living, except that their work is seen and appreciated by millions across the globe.

Obviously, they're very talented and extremely good at what they do and working with them is an education. But talking to them, they're people with families and friends and hobbies, like all the rest of us.

Were you involved in any of the film's publicity or pre-launch activities?

I attended the film's premiere in Dallas, Texas. It was a huge event at the 80,000-seat AT&T Stadium, home of the Dallas Cowboys. They showed the movie on a massive screen, the world's fourth-largest high definition video screen, I'm told. It was great being reunited with the cast and crew to watch the movie with several thousand fans.

With the *13 Hours* screen time on your CV, have your chances of getting similar or more important parts increased?

I hope so! It's a big credit for me and I'm proud of the work we did on that movie.

When it comes to film acting, does it make more sense to be based in Malta with big movies shooting scenes here regularly, or do you need to be based somewhere like the UK or even the US to have chances of getting decent parts?

You can build a decent CV here in Malta, but you'll find it extremely difficult to be cast in a main role in any major production shooting on the island. Main roles are always cast overseas, so although you can end up with quite a large CV that features some big-name films, the roles always tend to be minor. I'm not saying it's impossible to get a decent part, that's clearly not the case, but I think one's chances are much reduced, at least for now.

Tell us a bit about working on the local film *20,000 Reasons*.

I shot this film at the same time as *13 Hours* and they could not be more different! This was also a blast to shoot. The script was incredibly funny, and it felt great to be creating something

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locally at this level. I'm proud to have been involved with the movie. Shooting the scenes wearing the priest's cassock and surplice were extremely uncomfortable because of the summer heat, but mostly it was a fun shoot. Shooting the scene in the confessional, one of the final scenes in the movie, was one of my favourite days last year.

We've seen, and heard you do a lot of comedy in Malta, but you've also done serious parts, particularly in the UK. Is it a fair question to ask what you are: a comedian or a serious actor, or can an actor be both?

I think an actor can be whatever he/she can possibly be. I trained in 'classical acting' and then spent a large amount of time touring in Shakespeare plays in the UK before moving into comedy. I suppose actors tend to be pigeonholed as one thing or the other, but from what I've seen, most actors can do both comedy and serious roles equally well. I'm lucky that I have the opportunity to do that, and to write material that gets performed and seen by so many people.

Is one born with a sense of the absurd or can one learn it?

I hate to say this but I think you can learn it. They say that great work is 10 per cent inspiration and 90 per cent perspiration and I've found that to be very accurate. That's not to say that my work is great, but anything I've ever written that was well-received came about through that ratio.

My comic inspiration comes from different sources, depending on the style of writing required. *Comedy Knights*, for example, is a satirical show. Most of the comedy comes from frustration. I write about things that annoy me and that make me want to say something, or make a point. *Bad Dad*, on the other hand, was almost therapeutic. I wrote about my fears about parenthood and tried to talk myself through them in a funny way.

How much of *Bad Dad* is a reflection of reality: struggling to cope with a tough career and a newborn baby?

It's entirely a reflection of reality! It's not real, there's definitely an element of the absurd to it, but it's all based on reality. The writing of the script came from a very honest and truthful place. I was terrified of becoming a father because I believed that some people are not cut out to be parents, and that I am one of those people. That's not to say that they are bad parents, just that they do not possess normal parenting instincts and must work extra hard to overcome that. This makes it sound really boring, but it's actually very funny!

Having lived in the UK for 10 years, and possibly eyeing a return there, what are your thoughts on the upcoming British EU referendum?

I honestly don't know. What I do know is that I had to wait until Malta joined the EU to be able to afford the drama school fees. Before Malta joined the EU, drama school training and a career as an actor overseas seemed impossible. I'd hate for the situation to revert to what it was, except this time with Britain on the outside. 🇵🇹

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