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News, Analysis and Comment

Cello Diva feels right at home

by **Sally Maer**

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Cellist Sally Maer relates her unusual musical evolution from Royal Academy student to Cello Diva.

Seeing the 'Bed of Roses' album in the shops is a like having an out-of-body experience. It's something I've been working towards for a long time so to see it come to fruition is so exciting and it reaffirms my belief in visualising your goals.

Because I started playing the cello at age five, it's always been in my life and I don't know life without it. Having said that, I've always been careful to live a full and normal life. A lot of children I grew up with were at special music schools all week and music seemed to be the only thing in their lives. I always practised hard and was dedicated to all my music rehearsals and concerts which took up a lot of my time, but being a born and bred Londoner, there was far too much going on in the city for me to not take full advantage of it. Especially as a teen-ager when I can remember exploring all the different cultures that were around me and listening to all kinds of music and eating all kinds of food. I'd hang out at the National Gallery or the British Museum for hours and then go to Notting Hill to visit my grandmother, always stopping at the Portobello markets and listening to all the hip-hop music wafting through the stalls. I went to school in Camden Town too so there was no shortage of new things to do after school.

My father was an artist and a jeweller and had a huge influence on my artistic outlook. He founded the Designer Jewellers' Group in England with some friends soon after I was born. As he witnessed my ever-growing passion for the cello, he encouraged me by saying things like: "You can change the world by playing music." His faith in me continued right up until one of the last times I saw him, when I went home for a visit and played him some of the Bach Unaccompanied Cello Suites in the living room where I had practised each day as a child. I expressed my gratitude to him for driving me all over London with the cello for all those years when I was growing up. He said: "It was all worth it just to hear you play that Bach so beautifully right now."

I know that this sort of natural inner beauty in a person is rare and important and it has had a direct effect on my playing. The music I really love to play – my Cello Diva music – is the type of thing that



Sally Maer's rich and varied career have culminated in her debut album as Cello Diva
[photo courtesy tjc]

makes you put your hands to your heart when you hear it.
I'd like to think that it almost has a healing quality.

A few years ago I hit a bit of a low patch. I'd played in various orchestras and played with pop stars and done all kinds of things, but had lost my satisfaction and drive. I loved all the work I had done, but needed something that suited my personality (a bit of a show-off to be honest... that's the "Diva" part) but that still provided the opportunity of playing beautiful, peaceful music, which the cello is so well suited to. This was when the concept and the name "Cello Diva" began, although it had been brewing since the days of busking in Covent Garden and in arcades around London as a student.

I spoke to my dad about my Cello Diva idea. At first I thought that people might think it was a waste, or in some way shallow – that I'd had some of the best training in the world, yet didn't want the seriousness of the orchestral platform week in, week out. Dad thought Cello Diva was very me and gave his blessing and this gave me confidence to un-leash it. I wish he was still around to see the end results, but I always have him with me in my heart, egging me on.

The busking was equally as nerve-wracking although at the same time a welcome relief from studying at The Royal Academy of Music. I see quite clearly now that I needed both these things and everything in between – all the diverse musical experiences I've had – to culminate into Cello Diva.

I'm really excited about doing the Fremantle Street Arts Festival on the Easter weekend as I haven't busked for years. Hopefully I've still got my touch! Someone sent me a sad email the other day about Covent Garden culling 50% of the performing there. I signed the petitions and urge others to do the same. There's a classical musicians' one and a street performers' one:

www.PetitionOnline.com/cov2008/

www.PetitionOnline.com/soscovnt/

If I could give anyone in the arts advice, it would be to say yes to every opportunity, especially while you're studying. Being a good Artist is about exploring all sorts of influences. Be careful not to close the door on something because you feel it's not what you want. It could be the thing that leads you to what you dream of. Don't worry about taking on jobs just to help with the rent – taking other work doesn't make you any less of an artist. I think it just opens up your "I'm open to work" door a bit wider. I think if you make and take opportunities, other ones come to you. For instance, some of the best gigs I've had were in between working as a fairy at children's birthday parties! One week, I did some fairy parties and then flew to Melbourne to headline my own show at the Spiegel tent. I found the fairy job on Arts Hub actually, and I really loved it, partly because it helped my performing. As a classical musician, I didn't have much training in talking to audiences. I'm learning as I go. I have another gig in Melbourne coming up at The Quiet Music Festival. I'm looking forward to playing and also checking out the other performers there too. That's the fun of festivals – playing and listening. I played at Womadelaide with Sarah Blasko recently and then danced all night to Sharon Jones and the Dap-Kings. There's just so much music out there!

Upcoming performances are listed on the website: www.celldiva.com

CD purchases can also be made from this site.



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