

# Meet Rebecca

## Performing at her best

Rebecca Anne Withey attended Mary Hare School from 2002 to 2004. She studied English Literature, Psychology and Performing Arts in 6th Form, and accepted an unconditional offer from Wolverhampton University to study Professional Dance Practice. Rebecca has a successful career writing, performing and creating and is well known throughout the deaf community. Where did her talent come from? Is the world of performance as glamorous as it seems? How does she find her inspiration for her writing? We let Rebecca tell us a bit more.

“ anyone who is in a minority group of some sort experiences things differently to mainstream society.”



### **You have so many strings to your bow. How did these all come about?**

I love so many aspects of the arts and I'm really lucky to enjoy a very varied career! I've always written songs and stories and so the progression into writing as a career was inevitable. I started off writing as a hobby, then guest blogging and eventually landed writing jobs as well as moving onto more of a journalist role with The Limping Chicken.

I've also always been incredibly passionate about performing - whether that was through dancing, sign singing or acting. The training I've had growing up and the wonderful opportunities that come about have meant I've been able to dip in and out of so many 'creative pools,' so to speak!

I started dancing at the age of 3 in ballet, tap and disco and my formal dance training continued till I was 22 in Latin American and Jazz. I'd always enjoyed acting in school plays and exploring music at both home and school so although these were never 'formally honed' they've always been a part of my life.

I think with both writing and performing, there are those shared elements of

expression and communication that feel so important to me. By staying involved with all of my crafts, it's allowed me lots of options career wise (and admittedly lots of fun too!)

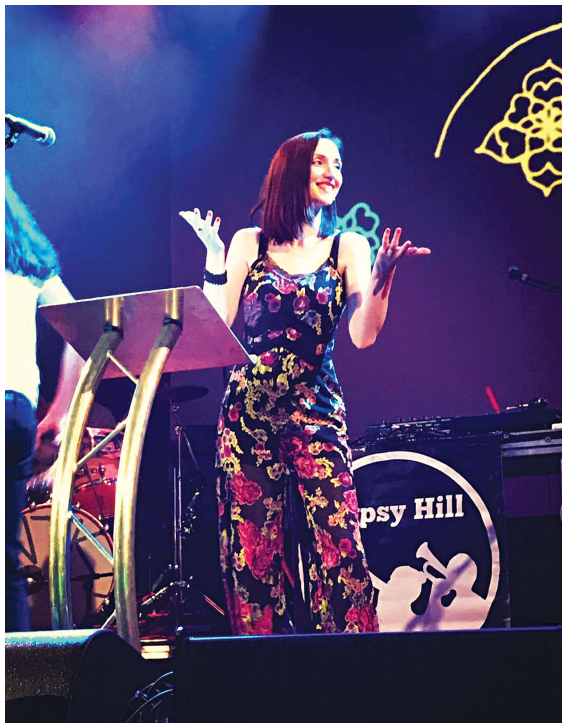
### **What influence did your time at Mary Hare school have on what you are doing now?**

I genuinely cannot thank Mary Hare enough for the opportunities I had while I was there. The staff were incredible and really nurtured my love of music and performance. Without Mary Hare I would never have learnt to play the drums, sing on stage nor have the confidence to start producing songs.

I was also able to work with professional actors and audition for (and get in) Newbury Contemporary Dance Company whilst I was studying. Mary Hare inspired me to dream big and opened doors for me.

I would also say that Mary Hare did so much for my confidence. I started Mary Hare as a quiet, bashful 16 year old. My time there really transformed my insecurity into confidence as I began to see my deafness as just a part of me, instead of viewing it as something that would hold me back.





When I joined Mary Hare I did (no exaggeration!) really think it was the place of dreams! I still felt that way when I left. I made lifelong friends and have many cherished memories.

**Did you, like many artists, have 'that lucky break'?**

As an actor, I was very fortunate to land a job with BBC1's Grange Hill not long after I left Mary Hare. Whilst I was at University I was asked to audition for the role and was then chosen to work as sixth former 'Holly Parsons' for two years.

Securing this job meant I was suddenly much more visible to the deaf community as well as the mainstream. So I suppose Grange Hill was my 'lucky break' as it enabled me to leap straight into other creative projects, comedy series', music videos and live performances off the back of it. Music wise, I think my 'pinch me' moment happened when I was working on Sky 1's show Sing It:Ultimate A Capella. I was hired to sign songs for all of the contestants on the show as well as the guest stars.

Signing live next to musical icons such as Midge Ure, Imelda May, The Vamps, Gregory Porter was mind blowing. I had flashbacks of my time in my Mary Hare dorm when I used to sign along to CD's with my friends. And now I was signing along NEXT TO MUSICAL STARS! That job made me realise that sign singing is absolutely a valid art form and not just a bit of 'fun.' Look where it took me!

**Where do you get your inspiration from?**

As a writer, there is no bigger inspiration than life itself! I find writing very cathartic and the process of writing - whether its for a poem or an article - is soothing to me. When I interview people for the Limping Chicken, I'm often inspired by individual journeys or the stories that people want to share.

Performance wise, most of my sign songs are inspired by events or song lyrics. Touching lyrics, tragic tales, feel-good stories - inspiration really is abundant. I receive a lot of requests to sign particular songs yet I only tend to perform the ones that really 'speak to me.' It's a feeling I get - it's not logical at all.

**Is there part of your work that your prefer to another and why?**

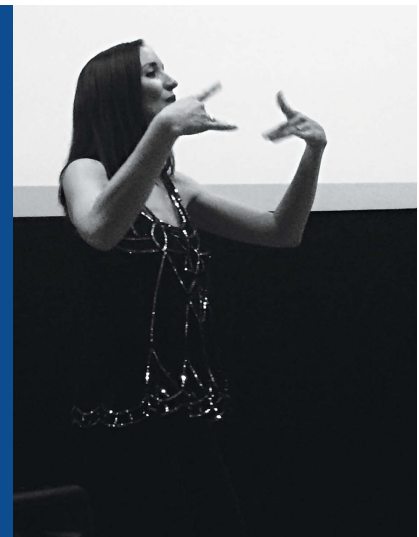
I do thrive on variety so having so many different aspects to my work really works well for me. Working part time as a writer allows me creative freedom to take on roles consulting or performing and this balance is perfect for me. I couldn't choose one over the other.

Being able to mix things up has also proved so useful through the pandemic. Whilst my live performance work and in-person teaching has had to take a back seat, I've been able to write more and deliver work virtually. I've also learnt so many skills such as editing and captioning videos! More strings to my bow ;)

**Does being deaf influence how and what you write?**

Being deaf definitely provides me with lots of interesting writing material! I would say that anyone who is in a minority group of some sort experiences things differently to mainstream society. This makes for a wealth of topics to write about. When I first started out, I used to write a lot about experiences of prejudice and discrimination and the process of doing so was rather therapeutic.

**“ I started Mary Hare as a quiet, bashful 16 year old. My time there really transformed my insecurity into confidence... ”**



I used to think that perhaps being deaf was the reason I enjoyed writing so much - as it is an easy way for me to express myself. But I'm more inclined now to think writing is just part of my nature. I'm an introvert at heart, very introspective and thus love to analyse and make sense of things using thoughts and ideas. Despite being a performer, I'm more comfortable people-watching rather than being the centre of attention and I think this tendency to stand back and observe really works well as a writer. You soak up experiences and can therefore translate them into words easier.

**If you could describe your typical day, how would it be?**

Most days I spend 2-3 hours in the morning writing or completing ongoing jobs before moving onto any short term creative projects in the afternoon. This could involve attending Zoom rehearsals, translating lyrics into BSL, filming and editing short videos or interviewing someone via video call.

I also spend lots of time outdoors with our lovely Labrador, Luna in the surrounding countryside. And then, the glorious weekends are all about quality time with my husband and our two children!



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