



**Pady O'Connor is an actor, director and theatre teacher who specialises in particular types of theatre, including mask work and Commedia dell' arte.**

**He graduated from Northumbria University 15 years ago with a BA (hons) in drama. He trained in Commedia dell'attore comico in Italy with maestro Antonio Fava, at the Desmond Jones' School of Mime and Physical Theatre in London, and recently studied Clown with Philippe Gaulier in Paris.**

**He has taught and performed extensively in the UK and internationally.**

I specialise in working with young people and adults with learning difficulties, but I also work with mainstream young people and professional adults.

I've moulded a very particular way of teaching that people really enjoy.

I've built up a vast collection of masks, costumes, backdrops and visual props to create a world of wonder. The idea, the intention is for people to enter the worlds I create.

One of my most enjoyable projects was a seven-month programme working with 17 to 19-year-olds in Durham, taking the young people on a musical and theatrical journey on which they were given plenty of creative choices.

I brought in several collaborators who added hugely to the experience. We've just finished a large exhibition and installation completed by the young people.

My interest in the theatre started at school. I loved school, but I wasn't a high achiever and left school without any qualifications.

However, I had an inspiring English teacher who had covered his classroom walls in old theatre posters, which fascinated me. It was this teacher who pointed me in the direction of Stretford Youth Theatre, which I joined and I just loved it.

I had to audition to get in, but when I passed I didn't look back. I was just captured, loved everything about it, and stayed until the place was closed down when I was about 18.

I'd started working as a chef, but my heart was really in the world of theatre, and I was able to follow my dream when I went to university.

The range of work I do satisfies me, so I'm not desperate to try other art forms. I'd perhaps like to try my hand at set designs as I've always drawn, and I've also just started to play the accordion. I've always loved music, so thought it was time to learn how to play.

One project that I'm particularly proud of is the Clown Doctors, where we go into hospitals to entertain and bring smiles to the faces of seriously ill children and their families. It really is a beautiful project, I wasn't keen at first, but was blown away when I saw a presentation.

We're all professional artists who have been trained in the art of clowning and we all have special skills and stories to share. We use the performing arts on the wards to engage the children and help them to come to terms with their situation through humour and play.

It's a very humbling experience and I'm very proud of the work we do. Working with such brave kids during for some are the last days of their lives is a real privilege. We also work very closely with mums and dads and families, many of whom take the opportunity to tell us their fears and concerns.

I've worked on many different projects, a real variety and I've always been self-sufficient and hardworking.

And I've worked for many different organisations – from theatre companies, councils, schools, colleges and universities. Projects like the Clown Doctors were funded by The Children's Foundation.

I knew what sort of work I wanted to do early on, and my degree really helped – at the time my degree involved 75% practical and 25% theory and it was a very prestigious degree to have. It was easy for people on my course to find work experience and placements and those links were very helpful when we started looking for work.

I have been lucky in that I've studied with some incredibly inspirational teachers. Three people in particular stand out – Antonio Fava at the Commedia dell' Arte in Italy; Desmond Jones at his School of Mime and Physical Theatre in London, but especially Philippe Gaulier at Le 'jeu in Paris. He's worked with people like Sacha Baron Cohen and Emma Thompson, and is one of the best clown teachers in the world.

I made a decision very early in my career about what work I would take on and what I wouldn't, and I've always stood by that. It's important to me that I'm able to be true to myself.

I followed my own pathway into this work, and I would urge anyone wanting to do similar work to really research things carefully. I did lots of research and worked out who I wanted to work with and what courses I wanted to do, and then worked out how I was going to make these happen.

Now I run my own company, Della 'Mimi as well as working with others.