

## **Decision time: Being a hyphenated creative and finding balance**

Andi Osho

The moment I realised it was time to change careers is as clear to me today as when I made the decision eighteen years ago. Until then, I'd worked in post-production and broadcast technology – operational jobs where I facilitated other people's creativity while having no outlet, professionally or personally, for my own. Not that I was aware I wanted or even needed that; I was a nine-to-fiver, living for the weekend with no passions to throw my energy at.

But then I got a job on a TV programme where the whole operation was based on one site. There I mixed with the show's stars and became aware of a long-dormant and unacknowledged desire to be an actor. Though I tried to ignore it, eventually the internal clamour became so loud I had no choice but to make the terrifying jump into the performing arts even though I had no training and absolutely no idea.

For the first few years, I floundered around getting a mixture of lucky breaks and tough lessons. Having been on staff my whole working life, I had no sense of hustle – i.e. putting in the extra hours to build the career I wanted and create opportunities. Working on my work. Naively, I'd hoped acting would garner instant success. When that didn't materialise, I had to learn fast. I looked at what additional skills I could acquire to make myself a more viable proposition. Born out of necessity rather than design, this is what led me to becoming a hyphenated artist.

The first extra string added to my bow was writing. As with acting, I had no clue where to begin so started with what I knew – which at that time

was theatre. I wrote plays and had rehearsed readings of my work. But as I did more TV acting, I became more interested in writing for the screen. After many attempts and doors knocked upon, I finally got my first option with BBC Comedy, a year-long commitment from them to develop one of my series ideas. Though it was for a very modest fee, I was thrilled to get a foot in the door. I continued to write and pitch series while learning screen-writing structure and technique but, despite that early yet modest success, most of my offerings were met with a barrage of 'no's. This was tough, as now rejection was coming at me on two fronts – acting *and* writing.

Those 'no's made me want to do two things, well, three actually: the first was to give up but, once I got over that, the second was to improve. The third, which galvanised my status as a hyphenated artist, was to learn other crafts that would open doors writing and acting couldn't. This is how I became a comedian.

Aside from a love of the craft, it was a dearth of acting auditions or writing opportunities and the need for some control over my path, that led me into stand-up.

Quickly, my comedy career took off with panel show appearances and stand-up slots on TV. Furthermore, my success as a comedian caused producers, hungry for fresh talent and new ideas, to pay more attention to my written work – where once I wouldn't have even got a meeting. This all culminated with me landing a pilot commission for a major US network. I was thrilled, ready to pick out my Hollywood Hills mansion. However, despite these positive movements, things didn't play out as I'd hoped. In the end, none of my options and pilots were produced; comedy was eclipsing my acting, so I was rarely invited in to audition and I was starting to sense the glass ceiling that women in comedy often encounter.

Perhaps out of fear, ambition or a sense of time running out, I went into hyphenate-overdrive, trying everything to move my career along. Over the

period of a few years, I tried being a YouTuber, blogger, vlogger, filmmaker, poet, influencer – all while still juggling stand-up comedy, acting and writing. I even ended up co-hosting a consumer affairs TV show, but eventually it all became too much.

2017, and I was in a theatre production of Molière's *The Miser*. It was my West End debut and should have been an incredible experience. However, because I was also shooting the third series of the consumer affairs programme during the day then performing on stage at night, I was exhausted and feeling as though my career was headed in completely the wrong direction.

One evening, an acting and career coach I'd worked with came to see the show. Afterwards, he asked me how everything was going, knowing what a huge opportunity it was for me to appear in the West End, and with such a stellar cast. I sighed, voicing my concerns. 'Tell you what,' he smiled, 'I'll give you a freebie session.'

Previously, I'd only worked with him as an acting coach but after just one initial career consultation, I immediately signed up for three months. He set me assignments, had lengthy conversations on Zoom and in person, and after twelve weeks, I could see what a tangled mess I'd got myself into. Whilst it was great to be busy and I was grateful for the opportunities, I had failed to exercise care in choosing what I put my energy into. My career wasn't going in the wrong direction, it was going in too many directions.

During our sessions, the coach encouraged me to look at what my big picture was. I'd so busily had my head down grafting, I'd given little thought to what that might be and therefore what the road map to get there might look like. But once I gave myself the space to reflect, I saw that acting and writing were my true passions – most of the other things I was pursuing

were not only superfluous but a distraction, a misuse of my time that was slowing my progress.

While it was fun to try other creative disciplines, those that were not feeding my goals were leading me into a creative cul-de-sac. Had I no particular outcome in mind or passion to realise, my creative journey could have been a sensorial odyssey to relish, but because there was a place I wanted to get to, or at least a path I wanted to be on, the meandering was elongating my time on the road.

I had to retrain my brain not to grab at every idea that came and to take a moment to decide if a project was right for me. I learned to ask myself, why am I doing this? And will it take me further away or closer to my goals? That didn't mean I was single-minded in my career choices, but rather that I tried to bring conscious thought to every decision I made. Whether I embarked on a project for fun, growth, connections or simply the financial reward, the most important thing was that I did it intentionally.

This distinction brought me huge relief as I began to let go of pursuits and plans that weren't right for me. I resisted always saying 'yes' to opportunities, and cluttering up my space out of a fear of not being occupied, and instead allowed room for the gifts that awaited me. It was a profound shift that opened up a world of possibility for things I was truly passionate about.

Given the risk I'd already taken to become a creative, stepping into the unknown, I owed it to myself to ensure that risk was worthwhile – working on what made me happy, satisfied me, filled me up and paid me what I'm worth – spiritually, emotionally, educationally and, of course, financially. And it's belief in that debt to myself that led me to my most recent venture, writing my first novel. Creatively, it felt like a natural next step and whilst, as always, I embarked on it with little but my experience in other fields to guide

me, it has been an amazing journey.

Becoming a multi-disciplined artist has been hugely enjoyable and given me access to so much, but I've also learned it isn't for everyone. For a while, I badgered many of my actor friends to write, to create work that put them front and centre. I was evangelical about it and probably somewhat annoying. But, from my friends' reserved responses, I started to see that embarking on a new discipline when it's not a passion can become a burden rather than a blessing, in the same way TV presenting, YouTubing and all the other things I'd involved myself in had become burdens for me. We must, as artists, do what we love. If we have a singular passion, we focus on that. And if we have several, then equally, that's what we must pursue. But whatever one's ethos, there is a place for every expression of artistry and the art we create.

### **Andi Osho**

As an award-winning comedian, Andi has featured on *Live At the Apollo*, *Mock The Week*, *Room 101*, *The Late, Late Show* and more and created and toured three sell-out Edinburgh shows. As an actor, her credits include *I May Destroy You* (BBC/HBO), *Line of Duty* (BBC), *Death in Paradise* (BBC), *Curfew* (Sky), *Kiri* (Channel 4), *Uncle* (BBC), *Psychoville* (BBC) and *Holby City* (BBC) and feature films *Shazam!* (Warner Bros), *Lights Out* (New Line) and *Swinging With The Finkels* (Kintop Pictures).

Andi has also written and starred in her own E4 sketch pilot, *The Andi O Show*, Sky comedy short, *Twin Thing* and produced and performed content for numerous shows across TV and radio including *Tonightly* (Channel 4), *The Now Show* (BBC R4) and *Hot Gossip* (BBC R2). She has written for FOX

US, BBC Comedy, BBC R4 and BBC R4Xtra. Andi's shorts have screened at film festivals around the world. Her debut novel, *Asking For A Friend* (HarperCollins) will be published in Feb 2021.

Andi is also a regular blogger and will soon launch her new podcast, *Creative Sauce with Andi Osho* in which she discusses all aspects of the creative process and shares advice from industry professionals on topics such as criticism, success, mental health, failure and authenticity.

A recording of this talk can be found on the WritersMosaic website at **writersmosaic.org.uk**

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