

## actor

**ACTORS ON... CAREERS**  
"This job is feast or famine and you take the rough with the smooth, it's as simple as that. It sounds a bit 'luvvie', but every time a job finishes, you have to go out and find a new one, time and time again. You're always looking for work, which is exhausting - but it's also exciting. Because you don't know where that can lead. It could be *Meet the Braithwaites*, it could be theatre, it could be film. It could be the York Minster *Passion Plays*. And that's rather wonderful."  
- Ray Stevenson, Actor

**ON FAMILY & FRIENDS**  
"When I told my family that I wanted to be an actor, it came as a shock to them. It's moral support you need, more than anything else, and they gave me that. In the early days, I drove a mini cab and worked in a restaurant, but that aside I've always, touch wood, earned a living as an actor and never needed to do anything else."  
- Tony Osoba, Actor

**ON SALARIES**  
"I was having a curry the other night with some people who weren't actors, and they asked me what sort of money soap stars were on. Now, I'm guessing, but if you're a soap regular and you do three to four episodes a week, you probably land

**O**nce, a Beautiful Actress who was starring in a top-rated (now cancelled) TV drama, forked down a BBC hospitality lunch at a crowded press conference, and mused about how lucky she was. At the time, she was hot - in more ways than one. "Too many of my friends have gone to Hollywood in search of work," said the Beautiful Actress. "They sit beside swimming pools for two months, do an

**£60,000 a year. Say £100,000 a year if you're a long-timer, and you can bump that up with more episodes and appearance fees. Anyway, I quoted that figure, and the people I was with couldn't believe how low paid that was. They said: 'But they're household names, they don't have a private life and they've been doing it for donkeys years!'"**  
- Ken Bradshaw, Actor

**ON HELLRAISING**  
"I think that the actor-as-hellraiser is an urban myth. Fewer and fewer employers are willing to tolerate "hellraisers". Apart from anything else, if you are the leading man and you have a drink problem, you become an insurance liability. Actors are a convivial bunch and a certain amount of arm-bending is part of the game. But - in my experience - not at work... and not on the day before work, come to that."  
- Michael Parkhouse, Actor

**ON SEXUAL INFIDELITY**  
"I think actors are so tired at the end of a punishing rehearsal schedule that there just isn't the time or energy for that sort of thing. I have an actor-friend at the Royal Exchange in Manchester. He tells me that there is no bed-hopping going on whatsoever."  
- Michael Parkhouse, Actor

in the lucky (and unusual) position of writing and performing their own work. Other people's perceptions

don't tend to worry them.

"There is an attitude from people in the profession," says Unlimited's Chris Thorpe, "that we are not officially 'actors' at all. We don't put ourselves up to outside scrutiny by going for auditions, and therefore don't operate in the same way as other actors."

Whatever. Unlimited Theatre - Chris Thorpe, Jon Spooner, Liz Magree, Louisa Ashley and Clare Duffy - are still on a high after winning a prestigious Fringe First award at last year's Edinburgh Festival. Their notices have been consistently good. But, shock-horror, despite their perceived alternative credentials ("What does that mean? We aren't standing by some alternative banner!" says Liz Magree), they aren't luvvied up about themselves. At all.

"The thing is, ANYONE can act," says Louisa Ashley. There is a murmur of dissent over the pork scratchings. "What I mean is," she qualifies, "there's no mystery to it..." No-one said that an actor's life was easy. For every million-dollar Hollywood movie star, there are a thousand struggling rep regulars and TV extras staying in dodgy flock-wallpapered boarding houses up and down the land. Roles come and go, competition for work is soul-destroyingly competitive and pay (unless you are, say, playing the Captain of the Starship Enterprise) average, or worse.

As a jobber, you will schmooze, shake hands and audition with the rest of your peers - which is why, when you study your local theatre programme, most of the cast seem to have appeared in *The Bill* at one time or another. None of the Unlimited Theatre members have gone the 'traditional' stage school route, but met, instead, at university.

"I see drama schools as just a very expensive way of getting an agent," says Jon Spooner. "There are benefits to them. But all too often, I think, what the schools teach you is not, necessarily, how to act but how to present yourself in a way that part of the industry expects. Anyway, we have trained. We've trained by doing the work."

Ken Bradshaw is an actor based between Leeds and Manchester who finds a lot of roles in Yorkshire. He classes himself as a "jobbing actor", who is equally happy on the stage of the Crucible or the West Yorkshire Playhouse, or doing a walk-on part in *Coronation Street*. Ken "...owes everything to regional repertory theatre" and didn't go to drama school either.

"I chose not to, and kicked myself all the way along the line," he says. "But I learned my craft by working in the theatre and TV. Yet I have met graduates who have just left drama school and think that they know everything. They won't take direction because they think they're good enough already. Big mistake. They haven't even started their careers. Your first job outside drama school is where the work begins. Personally, I would say 'go to drama school', because it's a good back up. And you'll get a showcase and you might get an agent, too."

Actor Tony Osoba has worked steadily since leaving drama school, 30-odd years ago, in theatre, TV and film. He's done a vast amount of different work but will always be remembered by a certain generation as McLaren, the black Scotsman from TV sitcom *Porridge*. So is typecasting a problem?

"No, not really," he says. "*Porridge* opened up a lot of

Article by Tony Greenway. Photograph by Dominic Ibbotson







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avenues for me, especially in comedy. The more opportunities there are as an actor to keep working, the better. To most actors, this is a job. And you have to be professional about it. So, no; McLaren was a good thing. As an actor, after all, you want to get parts."

And, anyway, Unlimited's Clare Duffy points out that, if – for example – you are female, of middle-height and under 30, you won't be asked to play a tall, 50 year old bald man.

**ACTORS ON... AGENTS**  
 "Without wanting to upset agents, I'd say that an agent is someone who can set you up with an interview with a casting director. But once you're there, you're on your own."  
 – Michael Parkhouse, Actor

**ON STAGE v TV WORK**  
 "I used to think they were two different jobs entirely, but I've revised that opinion now. On TV, if you hone down your performance, the camera might not pick up what you're doing. So, as an actor, you have to be well-acquainted with lens sizes and close-ups, and adjust your performance accordingly."  
 – Ken Bradshaw, Actor

**ON TYPECASTING**  
 "I thought – after doing *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* – that I'd 'made it'. I was a leading man. But when the work finally came in again, all the characters on offer were composites of Bob. So I sat there and turned them all down because the last thing I wanted to do was establish a career playing seedy lechers."  
 – George Costigan, Actor

and whenever that is. "I don't mean to be snobby about stage acting 'versus' film and TV acting," says Unlimited Theatre's Jon Spooner. "But they are different things. Take Vinnie Jones.

"He's well-directed, well-filmed and well-edited, so he looks good in a movie. But put him on stage, and it would be a different scenario."

Of course, another difference between Vinnie and the performers in Unlimited Theatre is that Vinnie almost certainly has a beach house in Malibu and more than one car.

"When we first started," says Liz Magree, "I would say

"And," says Liz Magree, "that's not necessarily a bad thing. OK, as an actor there's an expectation that you should be able to play a range of roles. But you do have to be realistic, too."

Ken Bradshaw points to Jude Law's career. "He's a beautiful, beautiful man. Now that's a look I will never achieve – because, for your readers' information – I have a receding hairline and my ears stick out. So I know that I'll never play romantic leads in films, and probably for that reason."

But John Malkovich – who has been repeatedly hit with the ugly stick – doesn't have that problem, *Artscene* argues.

"Hmmm. Different kind of acting, different kind of actor. He'll stick a wig on and play a rake and a roué. On looks alone, I'm telling you, I wouldn't get Jude Law's roles. I'll get dodgy coppers and drug dealers."

Whether these parts are on TV or stage doesn't really matter to Ken. Like most actors, he wants to do good work, wherever



Tony Osoba in the WYP's *Comedy of Errors* (pic: Robert Day)

*"The thing is, ANYONE can act," says Louisa Ashley. There is a murmur of dissent over the pork scratchings. "What I mean is," she qualifies, "there's no mystery to it..."*

the money we earned was so little, it was almost comical. Now, I would say, the money we earn is practical for us as individuals to live on; but attach a dependent onto that – ie, a building or a small child – and we would be seeking alternative employment."

"It's at this point that companies begin to talk about how under-funded they are," grumbles Jon. "But let's not go down that route."

The average actor, then, is always hunting for a job, always looking for the next thing and never really sure where it's coming from. It's a paranoid or exciting profession, depending on your emotional make-up.

"Now, I see unemployment as an opportunity," reckons Ken Bradshaw.

Nevertheless, acting must also be like being in freefall.

"I don't like that analogy," says Unlimited's Chris Thorpe. "With freefall, you only go in one direction. No, it's more like manning a ship in the dark with a fucked rudder."

Oh. Yes. That's *much* better..

Unlimited Theatre will be performing a double bill **Clean and Static** at Harrogate Theatre on Friday 27 & Saturday 28 April. [www.unlimited.org.uk](http://www.unlimited.org.uk)  
 Tony Osoba appears in **Comedy of Errors** at the West Yorkshire Playhouse until April 7

**EMPLOYMENT**  
 A 1999 Equity survey asked its members: "How many weeks have you been employed as an actor in the last 12 months?" 29% said none. Of those that said they did some work: 40% said they had worked less than 11 weeks.

**UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT**  
 The same survey asked Equity members: "Have you claimed Job Seekers' Allowance in the last 12 months?" 22% said Yes; 78% said No "This suggests," says Martin Brown of Equity, "that most actors have a second career to fall back on, like teaching or writing."

**EARNINGS**  
 The survey also asked Equity members about their earnings over a 12 month period. 3% earned over £100,000; 2% earned between £50,000-£100,000; 6% earned between £20,000-£50,000; 9% earned between £10,000-£20,000; 15% earned between £5,000-£10,000; 43% earned under £5000; 21% earned nothing. This adds up to 99%, but the figures, according to Equity, have been rounded.