

My Alternative Biography: Rebecca Toal, trumpet

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“Rebecca Toal is a versatile and accomplished freelance trumpet player, based in London.”

Rebecca feels very lucky to be based in London but isn't sure if she'd live there if she didn't feel she had to, in case of potential work. On the one hand, it feels very 'cool' to be based in London but on the other, it leaves her feeling constantly burned out and financially vulnerable. Rebecca feels that she has only achieved so-called 'versatility' because she's afraid of committing to one thing and subsequently failing at it. She certainly doesn't consider herself “accomplished” enough to describe herself as such, but the word seems to instill a sense of self-assuredness that Rebecca wishes she had.

“She has recently enjoyed opportunities to perform with the likes of the Lucerne Festival Contemporary Orchestra, the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, the LSO Discovery programme, the London Sinfonietta Academy, the Academy of Ancient Music, and with the Britten-Pears brass ensemble and orchestra.”

In every one of these experiences, Rebecca felt like she shouldn't have been there. From the moment the email came through, to the first rehearsal, to the dressing room after the gig, she felt like maybe they'd accidentally sent the invite to the wrong person and the 'right one' would be turning up at any moment, angry that Rebecca was in their seat. She certainly didn't play perfectly on any one of these gigs/courses, and has never really felt like a passionate performer.

“Rebecca graduated with a first class Master of Arts degree from the Royal Academy of Music.”

Rebecca thought that she was over her mental health issues when she started at RAM, and she was looking forward to studying unhindered by depression or anxiety...Well hindsight is 20/20 isn't it? Even though Rebecca achieved a first class degree, she spread herself extremely thinly with her commitments because she needed to earn money through teaching, and also wanted to say yes to absolutely

everything because she still hadn't shaken off her need to people-please. By the time it came to her last few but credit-heavy months of the course, COVID had arrived and cancelled all her exams except the final recital, meaning that her degree classification depended almost entirely on this recital. Rebecca found it increasingly hard to practise for this, partly because she had to take on work as a waitress to overcome the pandemic's financial obstacles, but also because she was low in mood, motivation and desire to lock herself away in isolation to practice in what felt like an already isolated time. She had not built up enough stamina or performance practice by the time her recital came and went, and ultimately it felt like a disappointing end to the degree. She got the first, but it felt completely empty and unmerited.

“Alongside performing, Rebecca holds a passion for teaching brass, piano, music theory and aural.”

Although Rebecca does love some of her teaching, some of it is purely for financial means so that she can keep pursuing her dream of music performance. She would consider herself a good teacher, but there are times where she still gives bad lessons. She also bluffed her way into several teaching jobs.

“Rebecca also works tirelessly to help destigmatise mental health through her work on the Things Musicians Don't Talk About podcast and platform.”

Rebecca would like to emphasise that even though she loves to talk about mental health and encourage others to do so, she would never consider herself to be 'fully-healed' from her own issues, and sometimes this leads to her feeling 'unqualified' to be in a position of promoting these conversations. It means an incredible amount to her that people are listening and joining the discussions though, and this often gives her a purpose on days where she feels rubbish. However, she sometimes just needs to be alone under the duvet and needs to put her hopes of making the world a better place on hold.