

# Busking for a living

**When a street performer manages to capture the attention of passers-by and convinces them to interrupt their walk and stay even just for a few minutes, they create a special moment out of nothing. A real feeling of togetherness is achieved between complete strangers.**

After the college Ross O'Brien earned a living as a street performer. Juggling, musical performances, clowning, sword swallowing, fire skills, for years he brings in every place something magic.

## *"A new experience, a new city I enjoy"*

**What does travelling mean to you?**

"Travelling means experiencing new places, travelling means meeting new people, travelling means having fun, but also travelling means my shows. It means like a new place to work. It means learning new things, meeting new street performers. Free performers lifestyle, I suppose."

**What about street performer lifestyle, what are the hardest aspects?**

"One of the hardest things is that you don't have a regular guaranteed account. You can't really make plans with money. The weather is difficult. The season aspect can be quite difficult, you have to make sure to do a lot of money in summertime. In wintertime, you can leave off a little bit."

"Another hard aspect to be a street performer is to get ready. It is difficult to do, to learn juggle with seven balls or to juggle with nine. It's difficult. But that is just practice. As long as you are dedicated, you can learn. One of the hardest things is just having the tenacity to go around the street and said I'm going to do this, and just start doing it and hope that it works and keep doing it until it works. There is not really a school where you go to learn how to be a street performer. You just have to go and really want to do that, and just work very hard."

"The pressure before every show it's also really terrifying, you are always scared. Yeah, that is all the hard parts."

**What are the best things that you have experienced thanks to this work?**

"The best thing is the travelling part. Going to every place, that's very cool. Getting to say, yeah, I am a sword swallower. Getting to say "yeah, I can juggle chainsaws", it's nice to be able to say it. People are very interested in it. Because obviously they never met someone like that before. They have so many questions. You can see people's eyes light up when you say what you're doing. Like, I am a swallower! Oh, what a fuck is that? They get very interested in it. It's like being able to show magic tricks, it's really nice."



"I also like to be able to do little shows for my family, any time my cousins or my sisters get married or if there's like a 30th or 50th birthday. I always do little things for people, that's quite nice."

"You know the rest of my family, they are all nurses or engineers. They have quite normal jobs so it's a bit of escapism for people getting to hear about like this bizarre job. So that's cool. And seeing kids laugh, hearing them say "wow that's amazing, thank you very much" is gratifying."



## **What about your last travel, was it for work or for holidays?**

"A bit of both. The last trip I did was last year. I made a road trip. From Ireland I got a ferry to France and then I drove through France, through Spain I went to Madrid, I also stayed in Malaga for a while. Malaga is just a beautiful city, fantastic. Then I got the ferry to Morocco. I drove to Casablanca. Casablanca is a horrible city, don't go there.

People are so bad at driving. It's like there is no real road, it's just a space between the buildings and where the cars drive. Everything's broken, it's bad, it's mad, it's crazy. After that, I drove to a city call Fes, it's more like a classical Moroccan city. There are magic landscapes. After I went to a city called Chefchaouen that was absolutely beautiful, all the city is painted in blue and it's just an amazing place to walk around. The only problem of a trip there, it's that everybody is constantly trying to sell you hash. I climbed to a mountain, up there, there was nobody except for one guy who was selling hash on the top of the mountain. It was insane. Then, after Morocco I drove to Italy and stayed with a friend of mine. I did a few shows in Torino and some music busking."

"Italy was very nice, the cities are beautiful, big squares, a lot of people they really want to seeing shows. I went to Slovenia, I stopped to the capital I was busking there. After that I was in Croatia. Croatia is really nice, I drove through Serbia, Serbia is so weird. The country had a revolution against the Ottoman empire. The Ottoman empire won, and the leaders of the rebellion cut their heads off and put their skulls into the stones of a tower, and they built a tower with their skulls facing out of it. It's creepy. After I went in Bulgaria and I went to Turkey."

"One of the best things for me, I guess, is meeting people in the street and they are like. "Hey I saw you! You are like that guy!" It's cool. When I meet people of 20 years old and they come up and say, "I saw you doing the show when I was 7 years old and I've always come into town to watch you". And then, they meet me, that's quite exciting."

## **How did you decide to become a street performer, what's inspired you?**

"I became a street performer because I saw some street performers, I found that pretty cool and I wanted to do that. I dropped out of college for a while. I didn't know what to do, I just didn't want to be in school for a while. And when I was going back to college for the summer holidays, I went juggle on the street just to make money. Then I met a guy who taught me how to be a better performer and how to make more money, it kind of rolled on from there. After that, I started meeting other people naturally. I started to make money by performing. I think that's the best way for me.

And then I worked with a company in Edinburgh, they taught me a lot of what I know. It made me learn different things from different performers.

There is a kind of peace from all together. At the beginning, it was very hard when I was in Edinburgh. I was living on the people's sofa and I was homeless but I was kind of living for free. I always enjoy myself, I practiced every day."

## **What is the best place to perform?**

"Dublin is a really good city for street performer I like to work there. I always get two show a day, if I want them. People have money here, it's quite an influence city. Yeah, Dublin is nice, people are friendly enough."

By Samantha Robinet