

THE WELSH HILLS WELCOME CONNIE BACK

by Teresa Hennessy



For an avid *The Sound of Music* fanatic like myself, who better to interview than Connie Fisher, the musical theatre star who won the BBC programme *How do you solve a problem like Maria*?

Connie's is an inspiring story; one which will give hope to would-be singers and actors who may think that the chance for success and opportunity has passed them by.

Connie was born in Northern Ireland as her father was serving in the British army. As Belfast wasn't the safest city in which to live at that time (the turbulent mid-eighties), the family moved to Dorset. Not too long after the journey to England, her father moved to Harrogate, while Connie and her mother settled in Pembrokeshire near Connie's grandparents who arrived in Wales during the war.

Although Connie's parents are not Welsh she does consider herself Welsh

through and through. Her first school was a Welsh medium school and she had to learn quickly; as she said herself, if you wanted to visit the bathroom you had to ask in Welsh, so that particular phrase was one she learnt pretty quickly!

Afonia Evans, her first teacher in Fishguard, is an amazing woman and under her tutorage Connie made many appearances in the Eisteddfodau. The young Connie learnt to sing not in English but in Welsh. Marilyn Lewis, a respected and well-known singing

teacher from Pembrokeshire was Connie's first singing teacher. After leaving school, Connie studied at the Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts where she won the Gyearbuor Asante for acting in 2005. She returned to Pembrokeshire for her first professional job as Princess Amelia in The Torch Theatre's production of Aladdin in Milford Haven, where she had previously gained experience in the Youth Theatre, tutored by Andy Greenhouse.

Connie is a woman with a great competitive spirit

which is why she seemingly sailed through the competition to find the new 'Maria'. "It was terrifying", she said "but at least I didn't forget my lines!" And at that point in her career, she had nothing to lose. Her ever reasonable boss gave her three days off to audition for 'Maria' so she thought she'd audition in Cardiff assuming that there would be fewer people than in London waiting to audition. How wrong was she? There were thousands! Looking back she says, "Even if I hadn't won, they were the best six months of my life".

Even though an actor can have broad experience in musical theatre, they don't often get offered television roles. *Caught in a Trap*, was an ITV drama in which she played Gemma Perkins, a young woman who is obsessed with Elvis Presley. After that came a three month run of *They're Playing our Song* with Alistair McGowan. She was then offered the role of Mary Poppins in the National tour but was unable to accept due to other commitments.

A recording artist too, her latest album *Secret Love*

follows hot on the heels of her successful debut album *Favourite Things*.

Next year Connie will be moving back to Wales after meeting her fiancé Jeremy who is a local businessman from the area. Two days before press night, Jeremy proposed in their favourite restaurant in Barry. His support is clearly appreciated

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especially during the serious illness she endured last year.

One of her ambitions is to appear in Doctor Who. I don't know about you but I think she'd be a great Doctor. Why didn't I think of it before? Why didn't

they think of it before?

This is a young woman who is enjoying her success but someone who has a need and desire to help other actors who find themselves in the same position in which she herself found herself in. Connie will be moving back to Wales next year and unlike other actresses, who would be quite happy to ride on their success, wants to encourage others in musical theatre. Plans are under wraps at the moment, but this young woman has plenty of ideas and is showing initiative to develop others' talents.

We wish Connie every success in the future; I know opportunities will take her all over the world, but we look forward to welcoming her back next year when she and Jeremy continue their new life together. I'm also very pleased to say that Connie has accepted my invitation to become the newest Patron of the Drama Association of Wales and we look forward to working with her in the future.

Thank you Connie!