



Connie Fisher

My Big Break

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The head of development at Wildflame Productions in Wales discusses her journey from on-screen TV talent show fame to success off-camera as a creative executive. **By Neil Batey**

In 2006, gifted 23-year-old singer Connie Fisher was catapulted to celebrity status in the UK as the winner of BBC talent show *How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria?*

The programme was created by musical theatre impresario Andrew Lloyd Webber, with the aim of finding an undiscovered performer to play the role of Maria von Trapp in a stage production of *The Sound of Music*.

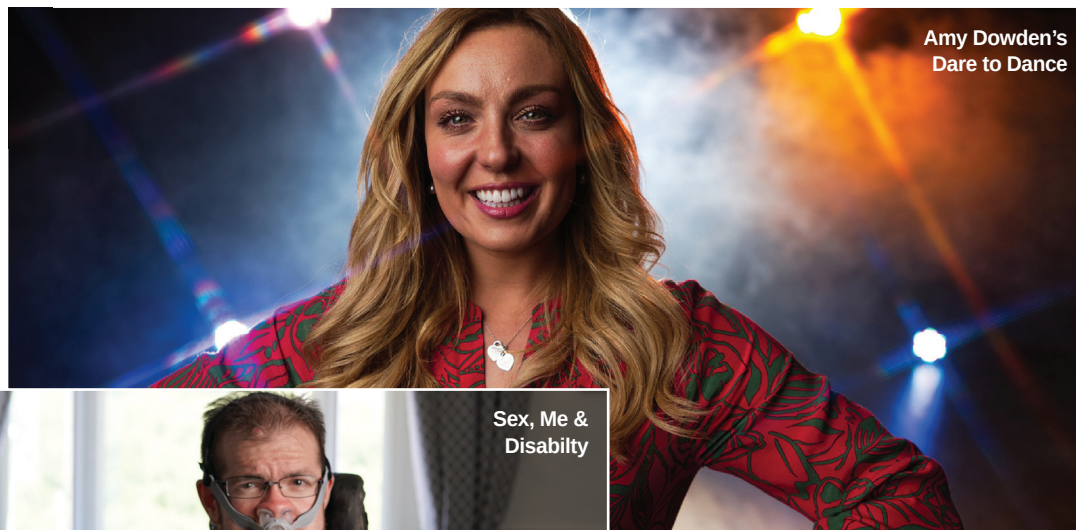
Fisher's victory instantly elevated her to leading-role status in London's West End, and led to her recording two solo albums and performing live at Wembley Stadium in front of 63,000 people at the Concert for Diana event in 2007.

However, Fisher's showbiz dreams were shattered in 2011 when she was diagnosed with holes in her vocal cords, which prematurely ended her career as a professional singer.

It was a heartbreaking turn of events for the performer, who had grown up on the stage. And although Fisher was able to pick up more TV work – presenting religious show *Songs of Praise* and acting in medical drama *Casualty* (both on the BBC) – she realised it was time to forge an alternative career path.

"I was still working as talent, but that's often short-lived and I needed to think of the future," Fisher says. "I wondered how I could transfer my theatre skills and realised that I knew how to tell a story every night to an audience – just like a TV creative."

In 2013 Fisher appeared in a documentary commissioned by Welsh pubcaster S4C. Titled *Gweiddiau: Connie (Roots: Connie)*, it told the emotional story of her twin brother Justin, who tragically died at birth. During the filming process, a development executive from the doc's producer, Avanti Media, asked Fisher if she had any good ideas for TV show concepts.



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"So I wrote a couple of top lines for them, and one idea for an undercover audition show got commissioned as a pilot for Channel 4," she says. "That led to being offered a job at Avanti as part of the development team. I worked there for three years, writing ideas, pitching them and travelling the world to TV markets to understand the formats space more. It was a great education for me.

"As a former stage girl, I often felt like an imposter in the production industry, so winning a Welsh Bafta in 2015 for *Jamie Baulch: Finding My Birth Mum* made me feel I'd earned my stripes."

One of the original team members who launched Welsh factual and formats label Wildflame Productions in 2016, Fisher quickly got to work using

her showbiz contacts to develop talent-led shows such as *Michael Ball's Wonderful Wales* (Channel 5), *Katherine Jenkins: Home for Christmas* and *Strictly Amy Dowden: Crohns & Me* (both BBC).

Upped to head of development in 2022, Fisher has been integral to developing a new slate of content for 2023. It includes such projects as feature-length doc *Frogmore: A Royal Residence Through Time* (Channel 5); 1x30' doc *The Island Keeper* (BBC One); 6x60' true crime series *Euog* (working title), presented by journalist Sian Lloyd (S4C); and a second season of 5x30' entertainment format *Amy Dowden's Dare to Dance* for BBC One Wales.

"We've done many single docs at Wildflame, but now we're really looking to develop ambitious primetime series and grow our relationships with broadcasters here in the UK," says Fisher. "I'm looking to develop that binge-worthy, incredible juggernaut of a series that every indie prodco wants.

"I also like talent-led specials in which celebrities reveal personal stories about themselves. *Strictly Amy Dowden: Crohns & Me* is a good example of that, as is *Sex, Me & Disability* featuring Rhys Bowler, which screened on S4C's *Drych* documentary strand in 2022.

"I sometimes felt like a commodity when I was on TV myself, so that experience has enabled me to treat the talent we work with as human beings and encourage them to open up. Aftercare once the show has been filmed is also important.

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