

DEBRA SALEM graduated from Leicester Polytechnic with a First-Class Performing Arts Degree majoring in Music and Composition. Whilst there she started her jazz vocal career studying and singing with composer and also luckily for her jazz bass player Gavin Bryars. On returning to Belfast, she continued her singing career working with pianists Brian Connor and Jules Maxwell and became involved in some interesting vocal projects including singing the part of 'Jazz Singer' with the Ulster Orchestra in Terry Riley's 'In C'. At this time, she also was writing music for professional theatre and running a recording studio – Green Dolphin Studio which she set up with her husband. Between teaching music and performance from primary to third level; being vocal MD for show; theatre composition (she has written for over 64 shows) and performing on tour, radio, folk clubs and Belfast Festival at Queens at the Guinness Spot (the Jazz venue for the festival), leading community choir projects with her own arrangements, she was kept busy during this Belfast years.

In 2003, she moved to Scotland settling in Perthshire and since then her work – vocals and writing has been more project based. As a composer she carried on writing for theatre in Dublin, Belfast and Scotland ending up with being resident sound designer for Perth Theatre (2012-2014) and writing for The Traverse. In 2016, she was commissioned to write and perform in a piece for 4 vocals and double bass as part of a Margaret Morris celebration 'The Incredible Brightness of Being' – an intricate work with no actual words – just vocal sounds.

In Perth she started Craigie Community Choir – an acapella ensemble known for their classic rock song renditions and providing backing vocals at gigs such as with Runrig at Scone Palace and on tour and singing on their 50 Greatest Hits album with Debra's arrangement of 'In Search of Angels'. The choir also went down to London for the BBC's Last Choir Standing. She led the Scottish Police and Community choir from 2014-2018, started Horsecross Voices in Perth, has led and arranged vocals for all the Southern Fried project choirs that have accompanied some of the main acts during Southern Fried Festival (an Americana Festival); was MD and composer for a Clown Choir in Dublin and works a lot providing vocal workshops for participants with long-term health conditions. She leads vocal workshops and teaches jazz vocals privately. As a vocalist, Debra was a Celtic Connections Danny Kyle Stage winner in 2008 and her 'prize' gig found her on stage with RMJSC's Kenny Irons – they have gigged together many a time. She has also performed with Angus Lyon, Phil Alexander, Patsy Reid, Kevin MacKenzie and Paul Harrison to name but a few; and it was with Kevin and Paul that Debra was jointly commissioned to compose and perform 18 songs using the poems of Perth poet, William Soutar. 'In a Sma Room' – a real mix of jazz and folk genres and everything else in-between, was released as an album in 2021 and is touring in 2022 including a gig at Celtic Connections and various festivals up and down the country.

During lockdown she was also commissioned to write a 10 song-cycle project for The Civic in Dublin. 'Songs of Change' saw her work again with Irish writer and director Veronica Coburn who provided the lyrics for the songs. Debra performed and the others were performed by a myriad of Irish musicians. Her most recent project has been as a vocalist in a site-specific improvisation vocal work which is part of the Coventry City of Culture programme.