

Kim Chandler

The know how in performing arts education

Session Singer

A member of Equity



In the job since 1990

Kim's job involves:

a mixture of studio singing and live gigs.

Studio work: radio and TV jingles, station idents (this is where you sing the name of the station and it's played several times a day. lead vocals on tracks for release (e.g. feature vocals on dance tracks), backing vocals on tracks and albums for artists, TV theme tunes, film scores, demo songs for songwriters etc.

Live work: the session end of this area is anything that you do live where you're not a permanent member of the line-up or it's a one-off event. Live backing vocals for artists (including for television and DVDs), tours, also lead and backing vocals in function band work as a 'dep' singer (which is like a 'temp') etc.

My career has included work with a large variety of artists to date (in various capacities): Westlife, P Diddy, Michael Jackson, Björk, Michael McDonald, Natalie Cole, Michael Bolton, Rick Astley, Jocelyn Brown, Neil Diamond, Thelma Houston, Barry Manilow.

How long did it take you to be recognised for your work?

Fortunately I got studio work straight away, at the first place I gave my 'demo tape' to (that's how it was in those days!). Once I was 'discovered' by one of the leading jingle production companies, recording sessions came in regularly from then on and continued to grow steadily over the years.

What was your most recent gig?

I've just got back from some nice gigs in Moscow. I was also part of the recent choir recording for the latest *'Pirates of the Caribbean'* movie soundtrack, and you can hear me singing the latest station jingles for Capital Radio in London

What was your first job?

My first session was back in the 80's and I was part of a group vocal for a TV commercial for a bacon company. This gave me a taste of it (excuse the pun!) and made me wish to pursue it more. This session was so long ago that I have absolutely no idea what I was paid and no easy way of finding out - I'm sure it wouldn't have been very much though!

How much can you expect to earn now?

Session work can literally vary from a minimum fee of around £150 per standard 3-hour 'call' (for a gig or recording session) through to several thousand for a TV commercial 'buy-out' fee, and anything in between!

You absolutely need to promote yourself in this line of work
Having your own website with your CV, photos and showreel on it is useful, but a My Space page would be the absolute minimum.

Having agency representation is also good but often difficult to get.

As a session singer you need to be
patient, punctual, hard working, well-prepared, well-organised, easy to get on with, fun to work with, tactful & reliable

1984 -87
Uni

1988 - 92
Secondary Music Teacher

1990 - now
Session Singer

1995 - now
Vocal Coach

'Due to the freelance nature of session work, I have completely different working hours each day, each week, each month and each year. There's no set pattern and I love the unpredictable nature of it all – I never know what the next phone call is going to bring!'

What was your training?

80's: 4-year Bachelor of Music Education degree in Australia

2001: Masters degree (MMus) in performance at the London College of Music.

These sorts of courses are great for general music education but don't help specifically towards the goal of getting session work as such. Session work is learnt 'on the job', not via academic qualifications. There are many successful session singers who have great session careers with no formal qualifications, however, the more musically educated you are, it certainly helps (e.g. to understand the 'grammar' and 'vocabulary' of music, to use and understand the correct musical terminology etc), and it's essential for getting reading gigs if that's something you want to do.

Do you have an agent?

I'm with a few session agencies and they generally get me some bigger budget work. The standard percentage they take is from 15-16.5%. That said, the vast majority of my work comes to me direct by word-of-mouth. A good reputation is vital to keep steady work flowing in.

How do your working hours impact on your life?

It's difficult to schedule in appointments in advance – doctor's appointments, hair appointments etc. Even booking holidays can be a nightmare! I've literally lost hundreds of pounds in holidays I couldn't go on, where I've booked a holiday and a fantastic, un-missable gig or session with a big artist comes in for exactly the same time and so I can't go or get any money back ☹

Do you have to be away from home for long periods of time?

If you're a session singer who does a lot of touring then yes, you can be away from home for long stretches of time. It doesn't impact on me because I don't do long tours myself, as a conscious choice.

Kim's highlight...

Singing the Australian National Anthem live for the "Rugby League World Cup" final for over 40,000 people at Old Trafford Stadium in Manchester. The event was also world-televised so my family & friends back in Australia got to watch it live on TV at 1.30am, because of the time difference! It was absolutely exhilarating and terrifying to sing for that many people, and know that you can't afford to make a mistake .

*There's no job security – you're only as good as your last gig!
There's also no holiday pay or sick pay*

Kim's websites: www.kimchandler.net
www.myspace.com/kimchandersinger
www.virtualvocals.com
www.funkynfun.com

ADVICE

You will need a great voice with a reliable & robust vocal technique, a great ear (for singing in tune, learning parts quickly & accurately and for harmonising & blending), physical /mental stamina for long sessions & gigs, high level of musicianship and musical understanding, versatility both musically and personally, a head for running your voice as a business and an ego that's in control!