

Martha Hannah - Biography

A Troubadour's Life

Nationally Acclaimed Comedic Character Actor, Author, Speaker, Educator and Arts-In-Education Advocate Martha Hannah has story



performance and joke telling in her blood. "I come from a long line of characters that were long-winded and funny," she says. Martha's deep, rich heritage is from a large Scotch-Irish clan that came to America in the early 1700's and settled in Tennessee. "I was blessed with my grandmother, Mama Roxie, who had a grand sense of the lyrical and dramatic telling of an event. She was a natural comedienne. My father has always had a delicious compulsion to tease and tell jokes. His mother, Nanny, early on introduced me to a fascination with ghost stories and a belief in the unseen."

When, as a five year old, Martha drew three-dimensionally, created songs on her xylophone and gave speeches to trees to rehearse her defense when she got in trouble, her parents knew that their youngest child was 'different'. By age eight she proclaimed things like, "I won't stand for it!" and with equal fortitude, as an early teen, she was determined to overcome an innate shyness.



She began to write and, despite visible shaking and a quivering voice, deliver speeches, adapt performance pieces and travel to compete in acting competitions.

In high school Martha became a published newspaper columnist. Early on, in performances, she was so strong on stage that she became known for the ability to move audiences to tears or laughter. Many regional acting awards followed and Martha found her shyness overshadowed by an abounding love and addiction to working with a live audience. So, by sixteen, Martha Hannah was hooked and found writing, theatre and the arts synonymous to breathing. And, in doing so, she firmly began her speaking, writing and performance career.

A performance scholarship led Martha to college and to earn a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Art and Theatre with a teaching certificate. She taught art and theatre, became a published illustrator and freelanced graphic design. Her extensive professional theatre career has covered years of performing on stage, in dinner theatre, improv, standup, radio and industrials and film with many commercials to her credit.

Gracious and charming, Martha brings her wry sense of humor and special brand of wit to conversations, her writing and on stage. When



asked if her shyness is a thing of the past, Martha says, “It is always there. It’s like arm wrestling with the devil. And, the devil is that now I’m such an extravert.”

For almost twenty years, as a touring performance artist, artist-in-residence, speaker and avid arts-in-education advocate, Martha has worked with many state and regional arts organizations performing and teaching action-packed, multi-media oriented and participation-based learning, theatre, workshops and motivational and creativity seminars. She has performed on touring rosters for the Kentucky Center for the Arts, South Carolina Arts Commission, Leonard-Bernstein Center-Nashville Institute of the Arts and North Carolina’s Spirit Square. Currently Martha is a performing and teaching artist on touring rosters with the Texas Commission on the Arts, the Tennessee Arts Commission’s Arts in Education Roster and Mid-America Arts Alliance which covers a six-state region including Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma and Texas. In addition, she is a member of the



Writers League of Texas, Society of Children’s Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) and American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA).

In her journey as a speaker, author, educator and performer, Martha has written and developed a myriad of workshops and performances and performed for and taught tens of thousands of students and educators. “Long ago a seasoned arts-in-ed performer told me, ‘If you can just reach one. If you can just reach ‘one’ student, then you have made a difference.’ And, that is what I strive for.”

As an author, Martha has continued to write plays, monologues, one-woman shows and short stories. She has presented her work on stage, in dinner theatre, on radio and television and at endless events and venues. She has a semi-autobiographical novel in progress that ties in her college theatre life and ghosts. She also is developing the publishing and production of her various children’s stories and songs including the next in the ‘Maid Martha Tells It All’ series.

It was Martha’s lifelong fascination with ghost stories and the “unseen” that took her and her author/illustrator husband, Larry Dowell, down many dimly lit back streets in England during evening ghost tours. They have traveled across Europe through castles and cathedrals from Edinburgh to Venice, collecting ghost stories and what she calls “a head full of medieval trivia.” This led Martha to develop her hilarious character, ‘Maid Martha, Medieval Comedienne’, which she uses on stage and in her workshops to bring the Middle Ages and Renaissance to life for countless enthusiastic audiences.



As a creative husband wife team, Martha and Larry now own and manage the independent publishing company, CicadaSun, and have recently released their first title, “The Ghost of Hampton Court”. This wonderful, richly illustrated book is the first of the ‘Maid Martha Tells It All’ series. Authored by Martha and illustrated by Larry, it is a historical fiction ghost story about Henry VIII and his fifth wife, Catharine Howard. Martha’s stage character, ‘Maid Martha’ in this book and throughout the series, tells the story as it unfolds, adding an element of delight and humor. ‘Gods and Other Odd Creatures’, by renowned Classics author Rose Williams, will be published by CicadaSun at the end of this year.

Martha and Larry present creative writing / book design seminars and workshops for students and adults at schools, libraries and universities. Workshops included ‘From Idea to Print- The Making of ‘The Ghost of Hampton Court’’, that teaches the process of creating and producing a book, and ‘E-Books- Bringing a Story to Life’, an exciting workshop that teaches how to use technology to add a new dimension to writing, creating and presenting a book.

Martha Hannah enjoys now living in Austin, Texas with Larry and their cherished golden lab mix Goldie, who knows well how to do a one-eyed wink.

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