

'As dentists we are in some way artists'

Interview by Kate Quinlan

Abi Sampanthan, 32, is an associate dentist in London and a singer and songwriter who appeared in series 2 of TV talent show *The Voice UK*, progressing to the knockout rounds.



I currently work three days a week as a dentist, from 9–5. I live and work in London; I owned my own home three years after graduating: thank you BDS! The drive to work is 20 minutes in the school holidays and an hour when school is on. I dream of moving out of London into the countryside, or by the sea... one day.

For me, singing and music came before my interest in teeth. I've been singing and playing instruments since I was four years old. My dad saw that it was something that came naturally to me, so he threw me into seven days a week

of extra-curricular music. On Monday after school was Indian singing lessons; Tuesday dance lessons; Wednesday veena lessons (similar to a sitar); Thursday saxophone lessons; Friday piano lessons; and on weekends I took part in shows. I had no life in some ways, but I'm so grateful for it all now. It definitely made me who I am, and I love having skills outside of my work life that give me a bit of an escape.

By about age 13 or so I had 'graduated' in both Carnatic singing and Carnatic veena (Carnatic music is a type of Indian classical music, South Indian to be precise).

I studied dentistry at Barts and the Royal London, graduating in 2010. My mother had wanted me to become a doctor, but I never really liked hospitals much. A family friend told me that I should become a dentist as it had a lot of flexibility to follow other passions alongside it.

When I looked into it, I realised it might be quite fitting. It satisfied my mother's dreams of being 'medical' in some way, and also seemed to fit my personality a lot more in the way that I could work and create with my hands. To be honest I had never imagined it would give me as much flexibility as I do have. There are not many professions that reward you very well and allow you to essentially be your own boss so early on.

I like that as dentists we are in some ways sculptors or artists (in a very, very small space), so it still satisfies my creative side.

Right from my first year of university I got involved in shows. I loved that society shows allowed us to perform at such amazing venues too; we performed at The Barbican, Sadler's Wells and Hammersmith Apollo to name just a few.

After graduating in 2010, I completed my VT training and became an associate at a general practice. Three years into working as a dentist something was still missing, so I auditioned for series 2 of *The Voice UK* in 2013. There are many audition rounds before you actually get to the televised auditions. It was during this process that I started mixing my Western and Eastern styles of singing, which people seemed to really enjoy, so I guess it inspired me to think outside of the box and draw on different parts of myself.

I informed my boss that I was auditioning for the programme and she was happy ▶▶



« to help and allowed the TV crew to film me at work for my 'back story.' I even called my indemnity to check that I wouldn't have any sort of issue whilst being on the show (the constant fear of frivolous litigation in our profession never leaves us). As I work in a small general practice the team are like a family and everyone is happy to help each other out.

I continued working for two days a week while we were shooting *The Voice UK*. I still had bills to pay so it wasn't an option to stop completely. It was a great experience and I don't regret doing it at all; I probably wouldn't do it again as I didn't like the 'reality TV' element of it, but it gave me great exposure and insight into that world.

A year or so ago I decided maybe I should spend a little more time at work. To be honest I found it surprisingly difficult and far too stressful. Five and a half days of dentistry made me enjoy work far less; I also found I became quite anxious and felt like work was getting on top of me. When I worked 3–4 days, I never complained about work, I never felt stressed and I was far more productive. I could honestly say I loved my job. I realised that working full time also didn't give me as much time to do the things I loved, which was the reason I chose dentistry in the first place.

A year and a half of full time dentistry and I was burned out. It was nice to have the extra money, but I was so much more unhappy than I used to be that I realised I didn't want to feel that way anymore. I realise I might sound spoiled and most people have to work five days or more, but if you're lucky enough to have the choice, why not enjoy life a touch more!

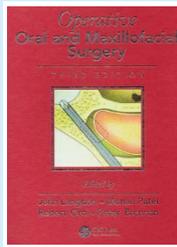
On days when I'm not working at the dental practice, I am still up early and either rehearsing for gigs or recording. It's the perfect balance for me, as I am genuinely happy to go back to work on the other days. I love my job as a dentist again, and it allows me to follow my passions too.

This year I hope to finish recording an EP which will be released on iTunes and Spotify.

I have also recently started sailing – it's something I always wanted to do. I've been sailing with Datchet Sailing Club, completed my level 1 and 2 in dinghy sailing and now want to move on to getting my qualifications to one day having a skipper's licence! Retirement dreams of sailing around the Caribbean don't happen overnight! ■

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BOOK REVIEW



OPERATIVE ORAL AND MAXILLOFACIAL SURGERY, THIRD EDITION

John Langdon, Mohan Patel, Robert Ord and Peter Brennan

CRC Press; 2017

price £249 pp. 927

ISBN: 9781482252040

Operative oral and maxillofacial surgery enters its third edition almost 20 years since it was first published. It is published by Taylor and Francis Group and edited by four very experienced and respected maxillofacial surgeons and authored by experts in their specific sub-speciality.

This edition of the book allows access to an e-book version. This useful feature transforms what is a heavy reference book to a useful portable aide-memoire that can be used in the operating theatre just before starting surgery.

This book covers the whole spectrum of operative oral and maxillofacial surgery in 85 chapters. The book is divided into sections covering dentoalveolar surgery including implant and surgical endodontics. Oral malignancy and reconstructive free flap surgery are covered in some depth. Maxillofacial trauma, temporomandibular joint surgery, cleft and craniofacial surgery and facial aesthetics are also featured at some length.

New chapters in the third edition include transoral robotics and facial transplantation. In comparison to previous editions, chapters have been

revised and updated and there is more clinical photography. As a word of caution the focus of this book is on operative surgery so further reading is required on more detailed nuances of maxillofacial pathology. Some aspects of the book venture into otolaryngology, such as skull base surgery and thyroid surgery which are better covered in more specialised textbooks.

This textbook will be of interest to colleagues in allied specialities, oral surgery and dental core trainees in their maxillofacial rotation; however, it will remain as the go-to textbook for higher surgical trainees in oral and maxillofacial surgery.

This well-written book is likely to become an instant classic among maxillofacial surgeons and a firm favourite of all trainee maxillofacial surgeons preparing for FRCS exit exams. It serves as an ideal introductory book on operative maxillofacial surgery and its coverage of the breadth of maxillofacial surgery is commendable. It deserves a place on the bookshelf of any self-respecting maxillofacial surgeon. I thoroughly recommend it!

Adil Aslam

Did you ever work with Maurice Porter?

The BDA Museum is trying to trace dentists who may have had professional contact with Mr Maurice Porter, a dentist in the 1960s who undertook a considerable amount of work treating wind-instrument players' deficient embouchures (lip-seals); having previously published the definitive paper on the subject in the *British Dental Journal*. An exhibition of Maurice Porter's pioneering work is to be displayed at the BDA later this year and we would like to acquire first-hand experiences from dentists and their patients, who may have been treated by him, to add a personal touch to the treatment undertaken. If you can help in any way please contact Rachel Bairsto, Head of Museum Services at rachel.bairsto@bda.org.

