

## Andy Cotton

The founder of TAO Productions and MD of production company Try Anything Once, Andy Cotton oversees event and production management as well as safety, fire and medical services. His clients range from Peter Brightman's CEG with shows such as Beyoncé at Egypt's Port Ghalib, The Deaflympics opening ceremonies in Taiwan and The Big Gig Weekend in Somerset.

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### What are your earliest musical memories?

"As a teenager, I can remember having an Olivia Newton-John poster on my bedroom wall and having to save up for the latest ELO albums.

"By the age of 18 I was working at a Warners Holiday Camp and being taught to play poker by '50s/'60s group The Dallas Boys. I lost £300 in the first season, which was a lot of money in those days.

"I was intrigued by their show, watching how they were able to give the audience so much pleasure with their performance. I think this was the first live concert, albeit cabaret, that made me think about the music business."

### How did you get into the business?

"I became a police officer, where I got another glimpse of the industry by being part of the team policing the Reading Festival, around 1984.

"I remember standing on a traffic point in Richfield Avenue, waving my arms around and thinking, 'if I do some searches for drugs and a quick arrest, then its back to the station for a cup of tea'.

"My first job in the music sector was in security on shows such as Michael Jackson and Bruce Springsteen at Wembley Stadium in 1988. After a while, I decided to take a degree course at Loughborough in Security Management, to extend my career prospects."

### How did your career develop?

"Then I briefly got into promoting, my debut event being a charity show at Bath Pavilion for a friend who had leukemia. I booked The Dallas Boys, The Kaye Sisters and Craig Douglas and it drew about 250 people, making a small profit.

"TAO Productions started as a trading name in 1988 and I promoted shows with Dr Hook, Marmalade, Showaddywaddy, The Christians and The Commitments in venues like the Link Centre in Swindon, Bath Pavilion and Whitchurch Sports Centre in Bristol, pulling around 300-500 a night.

"It made a bit of money but not enough to to cover the mortgage.

"Then The Commitments asked me to manage them just after the release of the blockbuster movie in 1991 and I did that for six years, touring all over the place - from the Faroe Islands to Brazil, Israel to India and across Europe and the US.



"I first worked with Charlotte Church in 1999, a relationship which continued for three years. She even described me in her autobiography as 'a close family friend'.

"In 1995 I took over event/production management for The Wiltshire Festival, where I stayed until 2004, taking it from a Joan Armatrading-headlined show with 3,000 people to its height in 2001, headlined by Steps with a crowd of 30,000."

### What have been your highs and lows?

"One great high was the Oxford Party in the Park, 10 years ago. It was a free show which we took over after it had been running for five years. All the meetings and advice from emergency services, council, radio station promoters was to expect 30,000 people, so we planned for 40,000 to be on the safe side.

"But there were Top 10 artistes on stage - Blue, Gareth Gates, Will Young - and it was a sunny day. In the end, 85,000 turned up and I was so proud of all the team when the event went off OK."

"Another great moment was around 15 years ago when I was with Sam Moore at The Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, and Olivia Newton-John was performing. I told Sam that she was my boyhood pin-up, so he introduced me. I thought I was being so cool, then Sam looked at me and said, 'Andy take your foot off your tongue'. I so wanted to give a funny retort, but I was speechless.

"My greatest disillusionment is when I have taken people under my wing to train them for the future of the company and themselves, but after a couple of years they start up on their own, and try to steal my clients and suppliers."

### How do you wind down?

"I am divorced, but have a great family through my sister Dawn; the oldest boy Ben has started working with us and her daughter and two other sons explain who the younger bands are, as I'm losing touch.

"I have two young nephews, who I enjoy spending a cold wet Sunday morning with, as they play football for the local team.

"I work in an exciting industry, travel the world and have a great family and friends and, although I whinge from time to time, I'm a lucky lad from a small Wiltshire town called Malmesbury, famous for Jamie Cullum, Elmer the Flying Monk ... and one day, maybe me."