



# Practical Tips for Making a Move to Hollywood

LA-based British performer Julia Farino shares five things you should know if you're thinking of taking your career Stateside.

By Julia Farino

*“ If it's your dream to work in the oldest and highest-grossing film industry in the world, then give yourself the best chance to realise your dream – do your research and prepare before you come. ”*

Have you always dreamt of working in Hollywood? Maybe during lockdown you had more time to think about how to make it happen. I decided to look into moving to Los Angeles back in February 2011. There was a lot of preparation involved but after 20 years of working in the UK, I felt it was the right time and I came out to LA in November that year.

In the nine years I've been here, I've found that Hollywood can offer amazing opportunities, but it can be overwhelming and difficult to navigate if you are unprepared, so here are a few useful things to know before you decide whether to make the move.

## 1. Get A Work Permit

The first thing you need is the correct working papers. Some actors might believe that they can fly into town, land a great audition and if a studio wants them badly enough, the paperwork will be sorted out for them. The chances of this happening are extremely slim so if you are serious about coming to Los Angeles, then give yourself the best chance you can - get your documents sorted out before you arrive.

You can't work in the US without an employment visa or a permanent resident card (also known as a Green Card) so talk to a good immigration lawyer. Most lawyers will give a free consultation and you can discuss what is best for you.

There are two main options:

- If you are married to an American citizen or your spouse has a Green Card, you will be able to apply for a Marriage Green Card,
- If not, you will need to prove that you have a high level of achievement and significant recognition within the entertainment industry and apply for an O1 work visa.

## 2. How Representation Works In America

Once you have your paperwork and come out to Hollywood, you'll find one of the biggest differences is representation.

A UK agent will generally have a small roster, usually between 40 and 50 clients. They'll help you with the direction of your career and build a relationship with you. In the US, the role of a UK agent is split into two.

- A US theatrical agent is likely to have up to 150 clients so they only have time to submit you for projects and handle contracts.
- For advice and guidance, you will need a manager. A manager should only look after a small number of actors and so have more time for each client.

Some actors just have an agent, some have an agent and a manager. Having both a manager and an agent, may increase your chances of getting a job but remember that you will pay commission on any work you book to both of these representatives.

## 3. Union V Non-union Work

Another big difference is union and non-union work. In the UK, a performer can work on both non-union and Equity (union) jobs without becoming a member of the union.

Things work differently in the US:

- There are separate unions for theatre ([AEA](#)) and film and TV ([SAG-AFTRA](#))
- Both require qualifying criteria in order to join and charge substantial fees upfront
- Only members of the union can work on a union contract and once you've joined the union, you can no longer work on non-union jobs.

The general advice is that you should work on non-union projects until you are experienced enough to compete alongside union actors for work, and then join the union.

## 4. Deciding What Accent To Use For Auditions

A question I'm often asked is whether an actor needs to master the American accent. The short answer is no, you don't, but learning it will open up many more opportunities.

Yes, your unique selling point is that you are a British actor but if I look back at the work I have booked over the past nine years, it splits roughly down the middle with 50% using my English accent and 50% using my US accent. If I wasn't able to offer a standard American accent, I would've worked half as much.

If you do learn the American accent, actors also ask, which accent should I lead with in the room?

When I first arrived in Los Angeles, I was advised to go in with my American accent and not to let casting know I was British until I'd finished the audition. The rationale behind this is that, if they know you are British before you read, they will listen out for flaws in your American accent.

I followed this advice for some time but hated every second of it. I could chat with the production team in an American accent, but 'American Julia' didn't have 'English Julia's' personality and I always felt like a fraud. After a while, I decided to trust that my US accent was good enough for them to scrutinise and now I just relax and chat with my own accent before reading a scene.

## 5. Budgeting Tips

Los Angeles is an expensive city. I moved here from London so I was used to, and prepared for, high rental costs. I'd budgeted for buying a car, furniture, taking classes, new headshots and paying for subscriptions to casting websites, but the one thing that threw my budget out completely, was the price of food and toiletries – these can be up to three or four times more expensive than even London prices!

Also be aware that the United States does not provide universal healthcare, unlike other industrialised countries, so you need to make sure you have money set aside for medical insurance. Just a trip to the hospital with a broken arm or an overnight stay can leave you with a debt of thousands of dollars if you are uninsured. The ER won't turn you away but they will hand you a fat bill when you leave.

If it's your dream to work in the oldest and highest-grossing film industry in the world, then give yourself the best chance to realise your dream – do your research and prepare before you come.

I wish you the best of luck and who knows? Maybe we'll bump into each other in a coffee shop queue one day in the not too distant future.

You can read more about Julia's personal account of working in LA in her book [Surviving Hollywood](#).



*British actress and author [Julia Farino](#) has been living in Los Angeles for the past nine years following 20 years working in the UK in London's West End, on tour and in film and television. Julia has worked with stars such as Sir John Gielgud and Sir Elton John and her credits include 'Veep' (HBO), 'Jane The Virgin' (The CW), 'The Gifted' (Fox) and 'The Wrong Neighbor' (Lifetime) with Michael Madsen. She can currently be seen playing President Margaret Robertson in the dystopian sci-fi series, 'Age of the Living Dead', on Amazon Prime.*

*Headshot by Elina Dmitrieva at ActorsEssential.*

*Main image by Marting Jernberg via Unsplash.*