



Froebel Trust Autumn Lecture, Friday 2nd October 2020
6pm-7.30pm

Baroness Floella Benjamin DBE DL

Floella is quite unique and is perhaps the only woman in the UK to not only have been an actress, a presenter, writer, author, independent producer, but a regulator and a policy maker in government as well. She holds the record for appearing multiple times on television on the same day in different programmes. In her extensive career she has appeared in almost every genre!

Floella started off her career in television 48 years ago in situation comedies such as 'Love thy Neighbour' 'Mind Your Language' and 'Mixed Blessings'. Her first major role was as a regular character in 'Within These Walls'. After that she worked with some of the country's top drama directors, such as: Richard Eyre, Tony Wharmby, Bill Brayne, Brian Farnham, Stephen Butcher, Allan Grint, Saul Dibb, Martin Friend, Horace Ové.... Appearing in numerous dramas, Play for Today and Play of the Month, such as; Waterloo Sunset, Angels, Gentle Touch, Bergerac, Kids, Crown Court, Hole in Babylon, Send in the Girls and Line of Beauty.

Floella first appeared in children's television programmes 43 years ago in the iconic programmes Playschool and Play Away and became a household name. Other programmes include Fast Forward, Lay on Five, What's Inside, Mama Mirabelle's Home Movies, Chuggington, Sarah Jane Adventures and she still appears regularly on CBeebies Bedtime Stories. She starred in the 1977 British Cannes entry film Black Joy and was critically acclaimed. She also appeared in the feature films, Run Fat Boy Run and Rendition. These films are often shown on television.

In 1987 she founded her own television production company and her first production was Treehouse for Channel 4. She was the pre-school provider for BSB before it was taken over by BSkyB, making over 200 programmes. Hullabaloo was created for Channel 4 and was the first British children's production to be sold worldwide including to the USA where it won the USA Parent Choice Award, beating even Disney. Other children's productions include Jamboree, PlayAbout and the RTS award winning BBC Children's drama, based on her book, Coming to England. Her production company also produced many lifestyle and cookery programmes such as; Taste of the Caribbean, Africa on a Plate, A Taste of Cuba, Caribbean Kitchen and Statues and Monuments.

Floella spent three years as a regulator, as a member of the Ofcom Content Board and was a board member of the National Film and Television School for 17 years. Almost 25 years ago she was Chair of BAFTA - Television and created the Children's BAFTA Awards which are now in their 25th year.

Since 1973 she has campaigned for diversity both in front and behind the camera and now advises the BBC and other media organisations on their diversity policies.

As a Peer in the House of Lords she passionately promotes and defends children's television. She persuaded the Chancellor, George Osborne to give tax credit for UK Kids productions and animation and also secured changes to law for Child Performance Regulations, which were welcomed by all the broadcasters and independent production companies. She changed the law to allow Ofcom to compel all the commercial PSB's to start commissioning children's programmes and secured the £60m Contestable Fund for PSB Children's productions which will benefit many UK independent producers and programme makers.

She has received numerous awards including, an OBE for her contribution to children's broadcasting, a Special Lifetime BAFTA an RTS Award, a BKSTS Fellowship, an Honorary Fellowship of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and the ACA-JM Barrie Award for her lasting legacy to children.

She has also recently been made a Vice-President of the Royal Horticultural Society.

In 2019 she was awarded the Women in Film & Television Lifetime Achievement Award and in the 2020 New Years Honours she was made a Dame of the British Empire.

She has been appointed by the Government to Chair the Windrush Commemoration Committee with the aim of commissioning a significant and lasting monument to the Windrush Generation.