

Dyslexia-friendly Transcript for Discover Central Ep5:

Laura McIvor and Lama Amine



Host: Scott Bellamy

Guest 1: Student Viviana Flores-Rayó

Guest 2: Laura McIvor

Guest 3: Lama Amine

Article and podcast links:

<https://www.cssd.ac.uk/discover-central-podcast>

<https://discovercentral.podbean.com/>

[theme tune plays. SCOTT starts speaking]

HOST - SCOTT BELLAMY:

Welcome to Discover Central, the podcast that gives you a behind the scenes look at the life of students, staff, and alumni at London's Royal Central School of Speech and Drama.

[theme tune fades out]

SCOTT:

I'm Scott, and in this episode we'll be catching up with Central alumni Lara McIvor and Lama Amine and discussing their work with Seenaryo, a charity based in Lebanon and Jordan, which runs a year round programme of high quality arts and education for refugees and the communities that host them. But first, let's hear from MA Creative Producing student Viviana with her top tip for looking after yourself in lockdown.

GUEST 1 - STUDENT VIVIANA

Hello everyone, my name is Viviana. I'm from Chile, and I'm an MA Creative Producing student. And my top tip for looking after yourself in lockdown is don't try to be productive all the time. It's ok if you want to take more breaks than usual, or if you need to lay down and rest your mind for a bit longer, you don't need to learn a new skill or have a new hobby if you don't want to. As long as you're safe and trying to cope with all of this, you're doing great.

SCOTT:

I'm back with alumni Lara McIvor and Lama Amine who work with Seenaryo, a charity which aims to transform the life chances of refugees and the communities that host them in Lebanon and Jordan. Using a participatory approach to education and the arts, Seenaryo allows refugees and host communities living in uncertainty not only to survive, but to thrive. Lara McIvor graduated from Central's MA Applied Theatre course and is Seenaryo's country director for Jordan. Lama Amine is a graduate of Central's MFA Movement: Directing and Teaching course and is an Arts Manager for Seenaryo based in Lebanon. Together, their team worked with 150 Seenaryo participants in Lebanon and Jordan to create and film a special music video during lockdown, which premiered in June as part of Refugee Week. Welcome, Lara and Lama. Thank you so much for being with us today.

GUEST 2 – LARA MCIVOR:

Thank you for having us.

GUEST 3 – LAMA AMINE:

Thank you. Thank you.

SCOTT:

So you're both alumnae, although from different courses, Lara from MA Applied Theatre and Lama from MFA Movement: Directing and Teaching. Tell us: what brought each of you to Central?

LARA:

Well, for me, before Central I was working in I suppose the development field and I'd done some teaching, I was working with different NGOs and I always done, kind of, theatre. Theatre has always been a passion of mine. And I guess I got to a stage when I wanted to combine that with my professional life. I wanted to find a way to combine my passion for theatre, directing and performing, something that I've done kind of my whole life, with my career, or where my career was going in the field of development and education and working in Jordan. So I didn't know there was a thing called Applied Theatre. I didn't know that existed. But then I discovered that it did, and that Central was one of the few places that did it. And it was, it was that course in particular that I felt would be really useful for me and I wanted to do the MA because I kind of wanted to use it as a launch pad to get into this field and, you know, make the connections. So, yeah, I applied to Central and moved my life to London. That was that

SCOTT:

And how about you, Lama?

LAMA:

Yeah, so before Central, I trained as an actress in, in University here in Lebanon. And then in 2015, like during my third year, I went to Dubai and I did a project with the Kevin Spacey Foundation. So I've met with theatre directors from the UK who are like specialists in movement and voice and I like the work, how they did this work, like

play with us. So I asked one of the directors and she introduced me to Central. And after that, like I apply to Central and, and I get accepted. I see myself as as an actress, but also, I love do some movement like, be like specialist in movement. And Central is one of the few schools in the world whose like specialist in movement. That's why I went.

SCOTT:

Fantastic. And then so after you graduated from the course itself, tell us a little bit about how you got involved with Seenaryo.

LAMA:

So, a mentor teacher who came to Central, Imogen Knight, who was really well known in the UK at the movement director and choreographer, she gave me like two or three classes, mentoring classes, and after that, like I went to observe her work at the National and she was in 2017 in New York, and she met with Victoria Lupton, one of the co-founders of Seenaryo. And she tell her about my work. And then Victoria dropped me an email. And in 2018, I went back to Lebanon for holiday for summer holiday. And then I sent them an email. And I've met with the team. And they offer me to be like, our operation manager. And now, I'm a Senior Arts Manager. So I'm glad like I'm working with Seenaryo you know, like for two years, and I'm doing like beautiful work with them.

SCOTT:

Amazing. Amazing. How about you, Lara?

LARA:

Yeah, well, it's funny actually, because Lama and I were at Central at the same time and started at Seenaryo at the same time. We

didn't know each other at Central. So it was a kind of strange stars aligning thing. But I after I graduated from Central I was freelancing as a facilitator and theatre maker in both London and in Northern Ireland where I'm from, but I really wanted to move back to Jordan because I'd been living in Jordan before I did my masters and my partner is in Jordan, and I really wanted to be working again in the region. So through a friend, I heard about Seenaryo, and at that stage, they were only working in Lebanon. But they had been thinking before they met me about potentially opening up in Jordan. So then when we were finally able to connect and meet again, I met with Oscar Wood and Victoria Luptin, who are the Co-Directors, and founders, and Naqiya, I met with them, and they decided that they would go for it that we would open up in Jordan, and that I would take on that role and start things in September 2018. So that's what happened, and Lama and I we had a kind of summer in Lebanon together and kind of training up and seeing some of their work in 2018. And then Lama stayed in Lebanon and I went off to Jordan by myself. I'm trying to try to start things off in Jordan.

SCOTT:

That must have been so lovely to reconnect as well. And yes absolutely, the stars very much sound like they aligned at the right time for both of you. Obviously, you're in different roles in different countries. Tell us a little bit more about those different roles and kind of what, I say a typical day, what does a day in your role look like for you maybe starting with Lara?

LARA:

Well, it completely varies depending on the time of year and what kind of projects we have running. So year round, we have weekly projects, depending on on funding situation, sometimes that's just

children, sometimes it's children and youth. Sometimes it's children, youth and theatre. At the beginning, I was doing quite a lot of the delivery of that. But now we have a team in Jordan, there's an artists manager, an education manager, and about 15 to 20 like wonderful freelancers. So mainly they're leading the activities and my role would be to mentor them, to plan with them and to do a lot of the strategy and thinking that comes with that. So working out who are the partners we want to be working with, which areas do we want to be going into? How can we get more funding? Which grants do we want to apply for? So both kind of internally with the Jordan team, and then also with the Lebanon team and the CO- Directors, thinking kind of like, more broadly about about our strategy, both in Jordan and beyond. So there's a there's a big mixture of kind of strategy, lots of like, day to day admin, things of you know, that an organisation needs to run, and then the content, which is really mentoring and training our facilitators and thinking about the creative side of all of our projects.

SCOTT:

And how about you, Lama, as a Senior Arts Manager, that sounds like a really exciting role. How does that look, kind of, day to day?

LAMA:

It's the same what Laura mentioned about art; In arts we do theatre with children, woman and youth and always trying to manage and mentoring some of the projects, and trying to find new partners to work with, find like a venue where we can also perform the play at the end. And also we have a choir. So we work with calling different schools in Beqaa Valley in Lebanon, and also in Beirut we have another project with youth. We do choir... As Laura said, like, sometimes we do admin things, mentoring, and also for my work I direct a play and and it's a physical theatre. I think it's really rare to see a physical theatre

play from community people, like, doing really professional work. And this is why I love my work, like I do my work and also I direct. So it's nice to combine things.

SCOTT:

Casting your mind back to your time at Central, how do you feel that your training at Central prepares you to undertake this kind of work?

LARA:

What Seenaryo does is participatory arts and education I guess before Central, that's kind of what I've wanted to do and what I love doing, but I didn't really have any of the vocabulary for it, or I didn't really know how to say what that was, I'd just always kind of been doing it. So Central really kind of gave, me gave me the vocabulary and made me understand that there's a whole pedagogy behind this, there's a whole body of practice behind this. And so I got a chance to really understand it, and then to try lots of different styles of facilitation and observe styles of facilitation which, it's very hard to just theoretically understand how to facilitate, you just need to try and try and try until you, you know, get your style and understand what works for you. Really learning how to, like, adjust your mindset so that everything you do is focused on the participants' experience. So thinking, you know, every decision you make as a facilitator or theatre maker, like looking at it from the perspective of the people that you're working with. That's really important in all of the work Seenaryo does. We're really thinking all the time about the participants' experience.

SCOTT:

Thinking about those participants, let's talk about one of the recent projects you've worked on 150 Seenaryo participants in

Lebanon and Jordan creating and filming a special music video during lockdown. Tell us how did the idea to film the music video for Little Bird Song first come about?

LAMA:

So, when is the lockdown in the whole world like shut down, we really put a plan for that, like how we can keep our world live with our participants. So the first thing is we thought like, why we don't do like a song, we'll bring all our participants together. And so at the beginning, we did like a survey to see how we can connect with them and we found Zoom and WhatsApp is the best ways. One of the projects we do in the summer is called Show Build, where we do like an exercise to write a song. So we start with really like random words. We give them like a minute to write anything without thinking. So as a team, we set all this exercise and we talked to our facilitators to help us to do it. And then each group, we had a Zoom or WhatsApp call with them, and we did the exercises. So some of them they write down on WhatsApp, some of them on Zoom. At the end, each one has a line, or like small paragraph. And as a team, we sat all together and trying to take from each participant something what they put and then we put it as a song. Do you want to, do you want to continue, Lara? (laughs)

LARA:

(laughs) Sure. So we've got, we've got the words, and then Oscar created the tune. And then we got a professional singer in Lebanon that we work with to record the song. And we were then able to share it with our participants, and they then recorded their voices for each part of the song, so we kind of identify those, are or they self selected people who, who felt they had a singing voice and wanted to contribute for individual lines, individuals recorded themselves. And then for bits of the chorus, we can merge lots of people together. So we

have the recording of the participants and then when lock down ease, Naqiya, who I mentioned earlier, who's our Chief Operating Officer and does a million things. She's always had a dream that Seenaryo has a music video. So then we were like, okay, we have the song, we have the lyrics, let's go and film participants so that we can create this music video. So then Lama and Victoria and I worked together to kind of think of a plan for the shoot, and Lama choreographed the dance moves, and then when lock down eased we were able to go and film in small groups. We had a really wonderful music producer who worked with us to help put all the songs together, and in Lebanon some brilliant video editors who helped us put everything together. And then we had a music video written by the participants and it was a really joyful thing. And as Lama said, our participants have a range of different needs and obviously lock down was another pressure. But what we wanted the song to do was just remind them that they're connected to Seenaryo and they can be connected to each other and really just bring some joy in a time that was difficult for lots of reasons, for lots of people.

LAMA:

And also, it's nice when we went to their houses, because we always go to the centre where we do rehearsals but we never went to their houses and filmed there, we do the shooting. So it was really nice to meet them there with their kids. And they were like very open to dance, even like very old woman wants to dance with her children because also have children was part of Seenaryo Childrens Theatre. So it's nice to see all this beautiful things and their eyes like shining the whole time, like 'we're waiting for, we want to see ourselves in the music video' and after that like, we released it, they we're like, very, very, very happy. Because this is the first time that they see themselves in a video clip on social media, it was really important for them.

LARA:

Like Lama said, like that was really important. And it's something in all of Seenaryo's work, the quality of the product at the end is really important to us. The process, of course, is important. But equally, the product is important because of exactly what Lama explained, that feeling of pride, and sense of, you know, achievement in a quality piece of work, which is why we really wanted to ensure the music video was well mixed and well produced, because quality we feel is a really important part of participation.

SCOTT:

It sounds like such a beautiful collaboration. I guess from your point of view, it must bring so much joy to see how well the participants react to that opportunity to do something so collaborative during what is such unusual times.

LARA:

Yeah, absolutely. And we love working with participants, our participants, but of course our projects are always you know, time limited, or we do a cycle and then it finishes and we wait for another session. So, for us, it's a really joyful thing to be able to do something that included so many of the people that we work with in a short space of time and connect them with each other. I think there was, you know, one Zoom call when we had like, some youth from Jordan with some women from Lebanon with some children from Jordan and Lebanon, kind of all on the same Zoom call, which is really unusual. So um, yeah, it was it was joyful for them, and also very joyful for us.

SCOTT:

It sounds like you made what is a such an uncertain situation into a wonderful opportunity. And the final product sounds really, really exciting. So, looking forward, what would you say is next for you both?

LAMA:

Ah, yeah, nice question. So, I'm very happy with my work with Seenaryo. And I think in the Middle East, we need some work like Seenaryo in the region. So hopefully we will grow the team, and I hope to get the opportunity to spread our work in different countries who need art and education to help the people to express themselves and through art, and hopefully we'll do that. And as well, for me, like I hope to do more directing plays and with big productions. So hopefully we'll do that.

LARA:

Yeah, I'm similar. It's hard to think beyond Seenaryo. But I am, I'm just really passionate about Seenaryo Jordan establishing its roots here and having, you know, a really wide pool of freelancers and trainers who can carry on this work and do it in other regions. Obviously, the dream you know, is that we have an amount of core funding, that we don't always need to look for funding for each project. So I would love to see that happen. I would love us to connect with more local professional directors and theatres, and I'm really invigorated some of the theatre spaces that are here in Jordan, some of which aren't being used so much at the moment. So there's lots of kind of work goals and there will come a time maybe when I won't be living in Jordan anymore. Maybe in a few years and at that stage, I'd really love to see some of the team that we're currently working with, in the role of of leading Jordan... leading, leading... Jordan? (laughs) Leading Seenaryo.

LAMA:

Why not? (laughs)

LARA:

(laughs) So we're always thinking about the capacity building, and I'm sure there will be a time when I move on from Seenaryo but hopefully not for a few years.

SCOTT:

Well, it certainly sounds like Seenaryo is doing some incredible work and really enriching the lives of the participants and the communities around them. So just incredible to hear about that. Thank you ever so much for taking the time to speak with us today, Lara and Lama, and all the best of luck to you both and of course to everyone at Seenaryo both working and of course to all the participants who have had the opportunities to take part in these projects.

[theme tune starts, crescendo at Scott starts talking]

SCOTT:

Thank you as well to MA Creative Producing student Viviana, and we hope you'll join us next week as we explore more stories of creativity and ingenuity from the Central community. For now, though, take care, stay safe and we'll see you next time.

[theme tune ends, diminuendo]