



A cross-border theatre production created and performed over video link by a company of refugee women living in London and Lebanon

What's Far Is Near

PRESS PACK

Press Enquiries

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About *What's Far Is Near*

A live-streamed devised theatre show that will be performed simultaneously at major theatre venues in London and Beirut on June 23rd during International Refugee Week 2019.

When Marsel goes into labour, there's only one person she wants to talk to. Her best friend, who is thousands of miles away. But what happens when they can't get through? A story of crossed wires, gossip and unlikely connections.

What's Far Is Near is a **theatre production, an experiment in solidarity, an attempt at and an exploration of communication across borders**. Devised over Skype over 3 months, the show is written and performed by Staging Sisterhood: an ensemble of refugee women brought together by Seenaryo. Half of the members of Staging Sisterhood live in London and half in Lebanon.

Part of Refugee Week, the three-month project culminates in a public performance happening simultaneously over live video link at Southbank Centre's Purcell Room (London) and Hamra's The Palace Beirut (Beirut).





Can we create theatre across borders? Where sharing physical space is impossible, *What's Far Is Near* uses technology to create a shared creative space.



London Performance Details:
Sunday 23 June, 2.30pm
Purcell Room, Southbank Centre



Beirut Performance Details:
Sunday 23 June, 4.30pm
The Palace Theatre, Hamra, Beirut





ABOUT THE ENSEMBLE

Staging Sisterhood is an ensemble of non-professional actors brought together by the arts and education organisation Seenaryo. Half of the members of Staging Sisterhood live in London and half in Lebanon; all are from a refugee or asylum-seeking background.

The London-based participants were selected with the support of UK organisation Women for Refugee Women, and are originally from five different countries in Africa. The Lebanon-based participants are mostly Syrian and were selected in partnership with local civil society organisation Women Now.

LEAD PARTNER: SEENARYO

Using a participatory approach to the performing arts and education, Seenaryo facilitates the creation of powerful, imaginative and challenging performances. We support non-professionals to create theatre of a professional standard, working with refugee and host communities in Lebanon and Jordan, with exchange projects in the UK.

Seenaryo's vision is a world in which all people are able to express themselves in order to reach their full potential. Our work – including devising theatre and leading choirs with children, young adults and women, as well as training schoolteachers to use the arts – aims to equip refugee communities living in uncertainty with the tools not only to survive, but to thrive.

www.seenaryo.org



Partners



WOMEN NOW FOR DEVELOPMENT (LEBANON)

Women Now for Development is a feminist, women-led, rights-based civil society organisation that implements programmes specifically for women and adolescent girls from Syrian and host communities. Seenaryo and Women Now partner on a variety of theatre and choir programmes in Women Now's two centres for women's empowerment in Lebanon's Bekaa Valley.

www.women-now.org



SOUTHBANK CENTRE (UK)

Southbank Centre is the UK's largest arts centre and one of the UK's top five visitor attractions. Southbank Centre provides a space for artists to create and present their best work, where as many people as possible can come together to experience bold, unusual and eye-opening work. The UK venue for *What's Far Is Near* is Southbank Centre's legendary Purcell Room.

www.southbankcentre.co.uk

COUNTERPOINTS.

COUNTERPOINTS ARTS (UK)

Counterpoints Arts is a leading UK organisation in the field of arts, migration and cultural change. Their mission is to support and produce the arts by and about migrants and refugees, seeking to ensure that their contributions are recognized and welcomed within British arts, history and culture.

www.counterpointsarts.org.uk





“I’m proud of the integration between the two groups of refugee women living in two different countries, despite different language and traditions. **We're working as a family, not as strangers.** Communication between two teams from two different countries is **difficult, but not impossible.**”

Staging Sisterhood company member

Press Quotes

ON OTHER SEENARYO PROJECTS



"Seenaryo focuses on bringing good quality theatre and music teaching to refugees in Lebanon. Singing familiar music can be a way of **viscerally connecting with what it is like to be at home...**

Although Seenaryo's music programmes aren't intended as therapy, it is perhaps inevitable that people—both children and adults—in a traumatic and stressful situation will explore that trauma when they have the opportunity to do so. And there have been unexpected benefits."

[PROSPECT MAGAZINE](#)



"Through music and arts, [Seenaryo aims to] **transform the drama of war** that a whole generation is living through, into dramas facilitated by theatre professionals with the power to safeguard a generation from loss."

[ASHARQ AL AWSAT NEWSPAPER](#)



"Who does not remember the deleterious and anxious atmosphere of *The Metamorphosis*, immersed in Gregor Samsa's disillusionment, despair, and wounds? In Seenaryo's version... **the play is also transformed, offering unlimited possibilities, infinite readings.** With the schizophrenic and fragmented Lebanese realities, **Kafka takes on a new flavor. It becomes a mirror of the worldview of these young people and their feelings.** This adaptation could of course be read from the angle of the trials and transformations of the young actors themselves."

[L'ORIENT LE JOUR NEWSPAPER](#)



"All [the actors] are refugees: six Syrians and one Palestinian. They move, shout, sing, encouraged by the laughter of the children. They **play with their memories, tell of their exile, find the humour in their darkest trauma.**"

[SUD OUEST NEWSPAPER](#)



**These women
are creating a
shared creative
space**

[Please click here to watch a short video](#) about the project





The Creative Team

LEBANON CAST

Abir Abed Al Ghani, Amani Abed Al Rahman, Nahida Dabbas, Ghaitha Eizeddin, Alaa Eizeddin, Marwa Harba, Walaa Haswa, Jihan Hmaydi, Najah Jomaa, Sarah Kharouf, Abir Al Khatib, Asia Matar, Faten Nakshbandi

LONDON CAST

Some names abbreviated for privacy

E.E., Cynthia Pearl, Thelma Victorine, Bimpe Bello, Latifat Jimoh, Jade Jackson, Debbie Karem, Maria Obi, Becky Ayeni, Joy Mukendi, Omoh Ehizoje, Confidence Enyi, Juliet Iguodala, Theresa Ajagu, Chinyere C., Abiodun Akinola, Patricia Akpapuna

DIRECTORS

Jo Tyabji, Lama Amine, Brenda Nassali-Liston, Victoria Lupton

PROJECT FACILITATOR

Varshini Pichemuthu

DIGITAL PRODUCER

Heather Pasfield

SOUND DESIGNER

Tim Bamber

With creative support from Rebecca Laughton



COUNTERPOINTS.



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