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Arts NGO Seenaryo creates lockdown music video



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Maghie Ghali | The Daily Star

BEIRUT: The past four months have presented arts and educational NGO Seenaryo some new challenges to navigate. The result is a lockdown music video titled "Little Bird," created by 150 people from marginalized communities in Lebanon and Jordan, crafted through instant messaging and Zoom.

"We had about seven different theater groups – including children, youth and women – writing lyrics, all of which took this strange period of international lockdown and isolation and economic collapse in Lebanon as a starting point," Seenaryo co-director Victoria Lupton told The Daily Star. "This project was a way for Seenaryo's participants to keep creating, performing and having their voices heard, even from the depths of isolation."

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"Then [Seenaryo co-director] Oscar Wood wrote a tune and produced a backing track for the song and Syrian singer Maria Hassan recorded herself singing the song to the backing track, again all from isolation," she added. "We sent the track to all our participants and trained them to sing into their mobile phones while recording. Then we put together all the voices into the final track ... A group of participants created choreography. When lockdown eased a little, I traveled around Lebanon with my colleague Lama filming our beneficiaries and our colleagues in Jordan did the same thing."

Founded in 2015, Seenaryo aims to build skills and improve well-being in marginalized communities, through artistic workshops and performances. At a time when Lebanon faces multiple crises and lockdown has affected the mental health of people worldwide, artistic projects like "Little Bird" have offered a reprieve from the monotony of being stuck at home.

"This project made me feel that we have the power to do something. It's easy to feel that everything's finished. We're sitting at home and not doing anything. But that's not the case. I can still enjoy making something with other people," Lebanese participant Samer Zaher told The Daily Star. "The best part was the dance, because [the Seenaryo team] came to my place and they filmed me dancing on the rooftop.

"I haven't been feeling good but in that moment I was able to try to express what's inside me, and I felt really happy," he added. "I felt that the whole group was with me, present, and that I was dancing for them, for me, for everyone. Those feelings were amazing."

Palestinian refugee Sally Idriss, currently living in the Shatila camp, found the regular group activity to be the most cathartic.

"My favorite bit was writing the song. We all got together over Zoom and each of us proposed different ideas. It came from everybody, not just from one particular person," Idriss said. "All of us collaborated to write the song. The project helped us to be able to express ourselves, which we haven't been doing during lockdown. We made this song. We let people hear it and we now realize that even if we're sitting at home, we can produce something."

The video shows scenes of the various camps and daily life at home, as the participants sing to their neighbors and friends about lockdown making them feel like trapped birds.

In normal times, Seenaryo would be running three theater programs in Lebanon and Jordan and five children's choirs, staging in two concerts a year. While Lupton laments their cancellation, the gap has allowed them to think about new ways to create.

"All our theater work has been happening online and we felt that creating a song and video was a good way to come together to create, without needing to be in the same room," Lupton said. "The challenges were huge. Many of our participants have patchy access to internet so lyric writing happened sometimes over Zoom, but sometimes over WhatsApp messages, which don't need a stable internet connection."



Pictures of the day

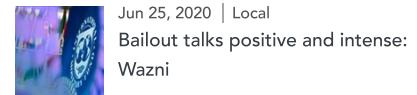
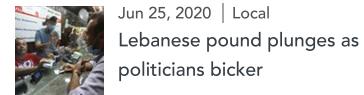
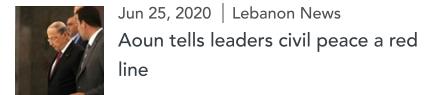
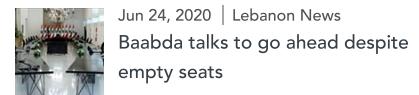
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"We thought that teaching participants the song and lyrics online over Zoom call would be a challenge, but in the end they picked it up immediately so we didn't even need to rehearse over Zoom, which I hope is a sign that it's a catchy song," she added. "But we then had to train participants to listen to the track with headphones, and record themselves singing at the same time on their phones, which was quite a technical process."

The "Little Bird" video can be seen at www.facebook.com/watch/?v=924200568095618



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