

Dyslexia-friendly Transcript for Discover Central Series 3, Episode 6:
Central Outreach



Host: Victoria Edwards
Guest 1: Tim Chaundy
Guest 2: Maame Atuah

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[theme tune plays. VICTORIA starts speaking]

HOST – VICTORIA EDWARDS:

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]

VICTORIA

I'm your host, Victoria Edwards. I'm Central's Access and Participation Manager, and I'm thrilled to welcome you to the final episode of our third series of the podcast. Today we'll be talking about all things Central Outreach. Later, we'll be joined by Central alumna and Student Recruitment and Access Administrator at Maame Atuah to find out more about her work with Central, including the recent outreach project Small Axe: Big Talks. But first, I'm really pleased to introduce Tim Chaundy. Tim is the curriculum leader

in performing arts and music at City and Islington College, which is part of Capital City College Group, the biggest group of further education colleges in London. City and Islington College has four specialist centres across North London in Angel, Holloway Road, Finsbury Park, Camden Road, and with a satellite hub in Enfield. The College offers an extensive range of academic and vocational courses for all ages, including a range of courses in performing arts, music, art, design and fashion. City and Islington College - and Tim - were one of the Central's first outreach partners. And over the last five years, we've worked with their students through workshops, free auditions and tickets to Central's productions. Tim is also an alumnus of Central, having graduated from the BA Hons Drama, Applied Theatre and Education Course. A very warm welcome to you, Tim, and thanks for speaking with me today.

TIM CHAUNDY

Hello, Victoria. It's lovely to be here.

VICTORIA

So to get started, how did you get interested in a career in the arts?

TIM

Well, I was very lucky. I grew up in Wales, in Cardiff, or Caerdydd as the Welsh say. And in Wales, when you go to primary school, everyone sings, so I was in a primary school choir, and we did lots of competitions and things. Luckily, our head mistress, her husband was the lead violinist for the National Orchestra of Wales. So music was a big thing in our primary school, as it is in most primary schools in Wales. My dad was also really, really into music, classical music, and he used to kind of force us to listen to music when we were very young. But that kind of rubbed off on all of us. I'm one of three boys and my older brother is an opera singer, my younger brother is singer/songwriter, as well. So there was something about that kind of encouragement, if you like, from my dad. We then all got choral scholarships. My mum and dad wanted us to have a kind of decent

education, the schools in Cardiff weren't great at the time, we managed to all get choral scholarships, which meant that they could afford to send us to St. John's College School in Cardiff, which then led me on to choose my A Levels. And I actually initially thought of applying for, I actually applied, for Media Studies. But the Media Studies teacher was also the Theatre Studies teacher and Mr. T as we all knew him, when I was enrolling, said actually you've done a lot of singing and performing, why don't you try theatre studies out for a few weeks? At the time I was like, okay, I'll give it a go. That then kind of led me into theatre and I realised how much he was a great teacher really inspiring, really committed, slightly wacky, which you know, all drama teachers are and, but really engaged all of us, really taught us all the kind of fundamentals of acting technique and how to make theatre, which then kind of led me on to apply for drama school, I applied to drama school, initially. And through rejection, I realised maybe the acting pathway wasn't for me. And then a friend of mine, who I was studying my a levels with called me up, and she said, Tim, I am doing this course at Central, I think you'd really like it, why don't you come and visit. So I popped up and I was on my gap here, visited the place, and went to the Students Union, had a chat with some people, and then I applied that year and got an unconditional offer. And the rest is history, as they say.

VICTORIA

That's amazing, I didn't know that you're from a family of singers either, which is absolutely brilliant, and very Welsh, which I'm very happy about. Very amazing. So from that journey through to Central, how did that lead you to your current role at City and Islington College, and it'd be great to hear about more of your work there and what you're doing.

TIM

It was actually through, as part of what was, when I was studying, Drama and Education. It was just the BA honours in drama and education at that time. The applied theatre bit came in later on. As it is, still is now, you have to do two placements, I believe it's the same at the moment. My second placement was at City and Islington College. I think, full time for about eight, eight to 10 weeks, did a little project. And then when I graduated CANDI - City and Islington College - called me up and said, we've got some hourly paid lecturer hours, do you want to do them, which was fantastic. So really, the job grew from there. And at the time, I was doing the hourly paid lecturer hours, about 10 hours a week, and then I was doing kind of community directing projects, so it was great to be able to do that. And then eventually with what the job, sorry, grew more and more. And I became a full time member of staff. And it's wonderful to be with such a dedicated team of college lecturers who all had, some still do have, their foot in the industry. And they were very inspiring to work with. And then that kind of led on to the curriculum leader job came up. And I had kids. Well, I didn't have kids, my partner had kids, and I needed even more stability. And I managed to get the curriculum leader for performing arts and music job. The job itself is wonderful. It's very intense. I basically oversee, we have courses in, there all vocational courses. The main course we run is the level three course in performing and production arts. And we also run a level three in music performance and music production. What I should say is that at our centre, the Centre for Business Arts and Technology, we solely focus on vocational courses. So most people would know that to be B-techs. Although we run our qualification, our awarding body, is UAL, the University of the Arts, London. It's a wonderful qualification that really kind of entrusts the staff to make the qualification work for their community, their students. So we can be very creative, really empower staff to choose material that's very diverse, maybe quite cutting edge, quite innovative. So we do projects at the Tate Modern, we've done, we've had close workings with the National Theatre. So yes, it's wonderful to be able to oversee a curriculum that is so still in contact with the community, with the industry itself. Often a lot of our young people coming to

vocational qualifications had a tough time in school, often been told maybe they're not academic in the kind of traditional sense. So they're looking for something that's maybe a bit more practical. So yes, it's wonderful to have, to meet those young people and have them here. And there's just such a wealth of skill and talent they bring, and such a wealth of diversity. And that's really exciting for me, you know, I'd say between 80 to 90% of our students are BAME heritage, and that really kind of resonates with myself being, uh, being yes, Welsh, but also my, my mum's from the Philippines. So I very much very much, I'm very much aligned with a lot of our student's identity, I suppose and and who they are. And, yes, they're British, but also they have other cultural experiences. And I'm able to engage with that. And we often, pretty much all our projects in some way, are engaging with that cultural diversity question. So, yeah, so it's an exciting place to work

VICTORIA

It is absolutely fantastic. And the opportunities that your students have are incredible, sort of the projects that you mentioned with the Tate and with National Theatre. It's such brilliant experiences for them. Thinking about sort of the work that we do on the outreach programme, it would be great to hear a bit about how your students engage with Central, through what we do on outreach.

TIM

I must say it's an amazing part of what is becoming a partnership. We are developing this progression agreement, and it really does reinforce and support our curriculum. The partnership we have with Royal Central is really key to our students understanding what higher education, vocational training is, that, that Conservatoire word they hear that some of them, for some of them that word's quite difficult, they often come from backgrounds where their own families haven't been to university, I was one of those, neither my parents went to university. It can be very daunting. And you if you lack confidence, just some of those those concepts and those ideas,

understanding what higher education, especially performing arts training, is. So it's amazing to have practitioners and teachers come in from Royal Central. And what's great is that we're able to at times and say 'this is what we need', and it's tailored to our curriculum. So for example, if we're working on a contemporary performance, a contemporary play, we're able to say, right, we need a practitioner that can do some voice work or certain accents or whatnot. So it's really wonderful to have that relationship. And roughly, we have maybe maybe six to eight workshops. And then obviously our students are also invited to shows. That, that also is an experience, because just you know, for some of our young people just going into the building at Central is a big deal, and it always works out to be very inspiring, and it's great. Victoria itself, you've given students like an informal tour, and it's all those little touches that are really important to our, our partnership with Royal Central.

VICTORIA

And what sort of benefits do you think, sort of, your students get from working with us through the outreach side of things?

TIM

They get to understand vocational training and performing arts training. Firstly, as a lot of young people do, they say they want to be an actor. I said that myself, as I said earlier on, you know, and then you learn there are other routes. And Central has that wonderful Applied Theatre course, the production arts side, the Theatre Practice, you know, the wonderful courses there, and that's key to the partnership, is expanding their understanding of what's on offer in terms of performing arts training. Obviously, the free audition is really good, highly beneficial for students, that's, again, it's a barrier that's removed for a lot of our young people, because each drama school they apply to it could be up to £80 pounds an audition. So actually the fact that we have this relationship with Central where they don't have to pay is a really big thing. Getting the Royal Central teachers in gives them a flavour of the higher education and or industry experience that they need, that kind of language,

and the kind of training that they're going to be doing. So it's highly beneficial in that way.

VICTORIA

Absolutely. And I have to say, our work wouldn't be possible without the incredible tutors and freelance practitioners that we work with who are, like you say, all work in the industry at the moment and come back and run workshops for us. And they are absolutely invaluable. So yeah, we absolutely could not do our work without them.

TIM

Exactly. And I think it's such a wonderful partnership, because especially at this time, a lot of further education colleges are really fighting, having to fight the corner for the performing arts. So when we have the backing of a big institution as Royal Central, well, it's big-ish, I should say... It really does underpin and when I go to senior management and say 'listen, we've got this progression agreement, they're giving us support behind our shows and so on', they really do listen when you're able to say we've got this link.

VICTORIA

So do you think that this outreach work helps to encourage your students to go on to higher education?

TIM

Absolutely. Yeah, I think it's, the relationship helps to demystify what is possible after doing a performing arts degree. And what I think, we're quite good at doing this as a team as well, but Central's support definitely helps with that, is really talking about those transferable skills: teamwork, communication, resilience that you build through doing a performing arts course. So yeah, so I think it helps them to really think about it more deeply to choose the right course.

VICTORIA

And it is, it's about those creative careers. It's about the benefits of studying creative subjects, and I should say those transferable skills. And that's really important to us, particularly as an outreach team, is going out there and getting that message across, and also the different careers in the creative arts. And like you said, it's about diversifying the students that are going through to those subjects, as well. Thinking about your role as an alumnus, do you think your experience of having been a Central student impacts on your work with your current students at City and Islington?

TIM

Absolutely, I think I had such a wonderful experience Central. It was challenging at first, in first year it's, you know, you have an idea of what a course is going to be like, and then you start to train and study on the course and you realise it's very different to what your kind of idea is. But by, by the end of the first year, I remember going to Minack, it was a wonderful experience to be really performing in a very close knit community down in Cornwall, and to be devising work. And that's really, for me, where it kind of, the course kind of took off. Then the placements themselves are so important, that aspect of the course that's in the actual industry, as it were. So that, that really helped to shape my whole outlook. And then within, within the course itself, you have the voice training, the movement training, as well. There's a lot packed into it as a course, the Drama, Applied Theatre and Education course. As well as the academic side of it as well, those skills really, I really developed my skills of analysis and research. It totally underpins my work now. Every now and again, when I'm doing something, something pops up from the course that, maybe just a little thing, like, for example, Amanda when we were doing the rehearsal sessions and devising sessions for the Minack performance, she did some yoga at the beginning of every session. And that kind of rubbed off on me now, and I just recently did a Master's in traditions of yoga and meditation. I think the seeds were planted there with

Amanda. And that's in my work now. So I often do certain body mind practices, yoga and meditation, within my own practice as a theatre teacher. The training from Central totally set me up really for, for my career, and it kind of got me my first job, because... and the job that I'm still in. Well, as curriculum leader now, obviously, it's very different. But yeah, it kind of really worked for me as, of course,

VICTORIA

It's very true, actually, a number of our students who will go on placement, and then end up working where they've gone in placement is quite high. And I think, you know, we've seen a number of your students not only come on to our Acting courses over the years, but also come on to our Writing course, and the Applied Theatre courses. So we've seen that, that lovely progression from when we've come in to work with you, and then we've seen them apply and then get places on the courses and sort of go through their journey, their creative journey with us, which is, which has been absolutely fantastic. And I think it just, it strengthens our partnership with you, which has been really, really lovely. Well, that's all my questions. Thank you very much for joining us this afternoon.

TIM

Not at all. Not at all.

VICTORIA

I'm now pleased to be joined by Maame Atuah. Maame is a graduate of Central's BA Hons Applied Theatre and Education course. She now works at Central in our Student Recruitment and Outreach team as Student Recruitment and Access Administrator. As part of her role, Maame works closely with me to deliver our outreach programme. She also recently helped to run the Outreach project Small Axe: Big Talks, which encouraged

participants to critically explore themes from Steve McQueen's Small Axe films 'Lovers Rock' and 'Education' through their participation in movement, creative writing, and devising workshops. Outside of Central, Maame is also the co-founder of Diversity School Initiative, a nonprofit organisation that was set up to tackle under representation and diversity in UK drama schools. And if that's not enough, she's also currently learning Japanese. Welcome, Maame, and thank you so much for joining us.

MAAME ATUAH

Thanks for having me.

VICTORIA

Lovely to see you today! So, as a Central graduate, what led you back to Central to work in the Outreach team?

MAAME

So after graduating, I knew that I wanted to work with young people. And I knew that I wanted to spread the word about drama school. I started to work at a drama school and worked with hundreds of young people on various different projects. And it was so much fun. The joy that they had creating and thinking in those spaces that we created, brought me loads of joy. And I wanted the opportunity to produce projects that I felt connected with, and that would be attractive to my younger self, who had no idea what drama school was. So I came to Central.

VICTORIA

And we're very happy you did! Thinking about Outreach, obviously, it's something that we, it's our job and we know the ins and outs of it, but it'd be great to explain to our audience what outreach is and what makes Central's outreach programme so unique.

MAAME

So whenever I'm explaining to someone who doesn't know what Outreach is, I kind of just say 'reaching out'. So, going into communities and connecting with people, building relationships with loads of different types of people, making them feel welcome, supported, comfortable, and safe in our spaces. So if one day they decide they want to know more information about the arts, we're a friendly and familiar face that they can come to. And also if they just want to come and experience a workshop, that's completely fine, too. It's about making sure that people are aware that central is an option for them if they want to.

VICTORIA

And that's so important to us. It's about raising awareness of Central, but also drama schools and the creative arts. So I think it's really important to say that it's not just about raising awareness of Central, it's about getting the message out about creative subjects and creative careers.

MAAME

Yeah, exactly. Central offers loads and loads of different projects for young people and schools to be a part of. There's definitely something for everyone. I think last year there was a Greek mythology class that happened. I mean, it's just great. There are so many programmes that people can get involved with. I think something that makes Central's outreach programme really unique is the range of visiting practitioners and teachers. There are writers, actors, directors, community makers, costume designers, and all of their expertise is what makes our workshops great.

VICTORIA

Absolutely. We could not do our job without our incredible visiting professionals that we work with. And I don't know about you, but I don't think I could deliver a Greek mythology workshop.

MAAME

Definitely not.

VICTORIA

Definitely not. Thinking about the programme that we've, that we've run this year, COVID-19 has obviously had an impact on all of our work. It's had an impact for everyone. How has it changed what we've done this year, and what do you think are the benefits and the challenges?

MAAME

So everything's online, online, online, online. So usually, the programmes that Central offers are in person workshops, but because of COVID that's completely changed. So we've really had to rethink and force ourselves to be more creative and think outside of the box. I think the main challenge has been getting young people to sit in front of a computer for an extra two hours after a long day of school being online, as well. But from the work that we've done, it's clear that the young people are still wanting to be involved and be creative and explore things, which has been great. And the benefits of working online for us have been reaching young people across the UK. So because we're based in London, a lot of the people that take part in our London workshops on site, are usually from around London. So having online programmes mean that we can reach young people in Liverpool, Grimsby, Preston, Bristol, all of these amazing places that we might not be able to otherwise.

VICTORIA

Absolutely. And we've also been able to deliver a teacher CPD programme online, which has been absolutely fantastic. And then we've been able to connect with teachers all over the country, which has been really lovely this year, as well. And we'll continue to do that as we look ahead. Talking about Small Axe, our Small Axe: Big Talks, we worked with a number of people to deliver that project, including some of your fellow

graduates. I would love to hear a bit more about this project, what we did, and the people that we worked with.

MAAME

Yeah, so Small Axe: Big Talks was an online half-term project that we did last term. And it was focused on Central's Contemporary Performance Practice courses, which are Drama, Applied Theatre and Education, Writing for Performance and Performance Arts. So I watched the Small Axe series and thought it was amazing. I thought that the themes were really important, and I thought the young people would find it really interesting. We had visiting professionals come and take workshops on devising with kindness, and protest as performance, and dramaturgy, which they loved. And as a graduate, I thought it would be a fab opportunity to connect with other grads. So we brought in Kaleya Baxe, who is a Drama, Applied Theatre and Education grad, who is also an incredible writer, director, producer and all around super talented woman. So she really brought together this programme and introduced us to loads of really interesting practitioners. It was great to connect with graduates that came before me as well. So we were connected with Emma Dennis-Edwards, who is an award winning writer and actor. And she led our Writing for Performance sessions. I think, overall, it was lovely to have a programme where young people were able to relate to themes of such inspiring stories. And were able to connect and have a really good fun exploring.

VICTORIA

But I think it's fair to say that both you and I were really worried going into it that it wouldn't work, that the young people wouldn't connect on Zoom. I think we were both a bit fed up and had a bit of Zoom fatigue at that point in the middle of the lockdown. And then we were both blown away at how brilliant it was. It was just as good as an in person project that we could have run.

MAAME

Yeah, they were all so positive and really getting into it and shaking the bodies and really having amazing conversations. It was great.

VICTORIA

Yeah, it was fantastic. And, and definitely why we want to run it again, a similar project next year. Yeah. And so thinking about the projects that we run, the last year has really highlighted issues surrounding inequality and income disparity. Do you think the role of Outreach is even more important now in the current climate?

MAAME

Yes! This is the time to do it. Outreach is the future of the arts. And there are so many voices and stories that haven't been told, yet. And one way to share those stories is by reaching out to those communities and reaching out to those, those people and giving them the platform to do that.

VICTORIA

So thinking about those projects that we're working on and creating, I know you and I were lucky enough to actually meet in person a few weeks ago and sit down and have a good old planning session for what we want to do over the next 12 months. And it would be really lovely to share with everyone what our plans are.

MAAME

Yeah, so we've got two summer schools coming up. One in costume and one in prop making. We also have an incredible Leicester project that happens in collaboration with the Curve Theatre, that Victoria runs. And we work with our third year Musical Theatre and Theatre Practice students there. We're also looking at running a young people's technical theatre programme. And another Big Talk. So we're looking at lots of different shows, series and plays that we can draw themes from for our next Big Talks. And

that will be a mixture of online and in person, because online work has been really beneficial for us, widening our reach. So lots of really exciting things coming.

VICTORIA

Loads of exciting things. And alongside those sort of standalone projects, we will continue to run the free workshops in schools and colleges that we work with. So working with City and Islington College, in particular, but other schools and colleges in London in the local area, as well as offering, continuing to offer free auditions, which is something that's really important to us, as well. And free tickets to shows at Central to come and see our students' work. I think it's fair to say we're really excited about next year and the programme that we're going to be running.

MAAME

Yeah, loads of really cool in person, in person stuff!

VICTORIA

Cannot wait for in person!

MAAME

Yeah!

VICTORIA

Thanks so much for taking the time to speak with us Maame, and thanks for all of your work with Central's outreach programme. Thanks as well to Tim Chaundy.

[theme tune starts, crescendo as Victoria continues talking]

VICTORIA:

And thank you for joining us for our third series of the Discover Central podcast. We'll be back later this year with series four and with more

interviews with members of Central's community. In the meantime, you can catch up with all of our episodes on our website, or by subscribing to Discover Central wherever you normally get your podcasts. For now, thanks for joining us. Take care and we'll see you

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