

Dyslexia-friendly Transcript for Discover Central Series 2, Episode 4:

Shaun Northover



Host: Scott Bellamy

Guest 1: Shaun Northover

Guest 2: Parker Hollants

Article and podcast links:

<https://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 your host, Scott, and on this special episode - the last of our second series - we're joined by Central's Alumni and Events Manager Shaun Northover, who will be chatting with us about some of the benefits, events and networking opportunities available to Central's graduates as part of his work with the Alumni Office. We'll also be speaking with Central's Students' Union President and recent Class of 2020 graduate Parker Hollants, who will tell us more about their work with the SU. But first: Shaun Northover is Central's

Alumni and Events Manager. Through his work in the Alumni Office, Shaun helps to run a variety of events throughout the year, from networking evenings and theatre outings to anniversary reunions for classes and year groups. For over 100 years, many of the most preeminent theatre practitioners and performers in the world have been Central alumni. We see our relationship with those we trained as lifelong, and all graduates of Central are part of this legacy and are warmly welcomed as a member of the Alumni Association. Hi, Shaun, welcome. It's great to have you with us.

GUEST 1 - SHAUN NORTHOVER

Thank you so much for having me on the podcast I'm honoured to have been asked.

SCOTT

It's our pleasure. So first, maybe tell us a little bit about yourself. Maybe start with how long you've been at Central and what brought you to the School.

SHAUN

I've been at Central for just over five years now. I always knew I wanted to work in the arts, and after graduating in 2012 from Oxford Brookes University with an English Literature degree, I spent two years working as an administrator in Oxford. Whilst in that role, I started to pick up some freelance work for theatre companies on the side, putting together show programmes and other print materials, and also just helping to manage their social media accounts. And in around 2015, I sort of had this epiphany that I really wanted to be working in a drama school, and also living in London. I was really lucky that this job at Central just came up at the right time for me. And I was really drawn towards the side of the work that involved Alumni Relations. And in 2017, the opportunity came up for me to step up into the role of Alumni and Events Manager. And in the Alumni Office, we now have Sophie Hussey

Central's Head of Development and Alumni Relations, and we also work alongside Meg Ryan, our Head of Individual Giving. So that's kind of the shape of our team.

SCOTT

That's great. And maybe you can tell us a little bit more detail about the work that the Alumni Office undertakes.

SHAUN

So, in everything we do, we're aiming to ensure our graduates are able to stay engaged with the School. Their relationship with Central doesn't end when they graduate, it's lifelong. And we really want to ensure that they feel that there's an alumni community at Central that they can remain tapped into. Our alumni are obviously at different stages of their lives, and so they need different things from us. They tap into the network in different ways. So for example, our more recent graduates, they're obviously more interested in career development and workshops that we can put on for them, networking events, ways that they can promote their new theatre companies... They're at the very beginning of their career, so their work is sort of coming off the ground. So they're looking for as much support and promotion as we can provide for them. They're using the alumni social media groups in different ways to reach out to experienced alumni. So they just need different things. Many of our more experienced alumni are more keen to give back as they become more established in their careers. And we're really lucky and grateful to them for doing so. They come in and talk to students and recent graduates provide advice and mentorship. And they're really very keen to nurture the next generation coming up in the industry. As the years go on, we have many alumni interested in coming back for reunions. They're nostalgic to revisit Central and reconnect with old friends. So it's our job in the alumni office to help facilitate all of these different needs. So Sophie and I are sending regular communications out to them to keep them involved and up

to date of goings on in the School and hosting events them to bring them back and to keep that relationship going. Another key part of my role is making sure to keep track of all the fantastic things our graduates go on to do and proudly share these across all of our different channels to both inspire current students and also to attract other people to consider coming to benefit from the training we provide.

SCOTT

Well, I mean, that sounds like really, really fulfilling work. I assume you get to interact with a lot of Central graduates as part of your role?

SHAUN

Yeah, absolutely. And I'm really lucky in that, as the first port of call for graduates getting back in touch with the school, I've had the chance to build really good relationships with many of our alumni. They're genuinely amazing, and they go on to do such incredibly exciting, innovative things across such a wide range of fields. It's an absolute privilege to do the work I'm doing.

SCOTT

What kind of events and opportunities would you say are available to alumni? You touched on them earlier, but for those alumni who are who are listening, what kind of events opportunities are available to them?

SHAUN

In a typical year, we'd host a number of events both on site Central and elsewhere. We're always keen to welcome graduates back to visit us. We have a number of ad hoc reunions throughout the year. We also host a 25 year reunion in the summer, which this year we moved online. We also host a number of networking events at Central for recent graduates and students. We've sort of just moved them and adapted them. So that they can now be hosted online, instead. So for example, this year, we hosted a BATP

networking event around the BATP online exhibition. And in a way, I mean, those those events worked really well because we were able to have the different breakout rooms online. And so it's just about adapting the tools we had at our disposal. We would also usually go further afield to connect with graduates. So each year we host a party in New York, which we invite graduates living and working out there to come to, to keep them engaged with the community but also to talk with prospective students who are holding offers to come to Central the following year. It can be quite daunting for them to consider studying abroad, and many aren't able to physically visit our campus. So in talking with alumni who have experience of doing so it can be really reassuring for them. And our alumni in New York are amazing at coming to that event and just having really great chats with those students and putting any concerns they might have had at ease. Another one of our key events in a normal year would be our central party in Edinburgh hosted during the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. It's a fantastic opportunity for us to catch up with students, alumni and staff out there for the Festival, again welcoming people who start to study with us in the summer, and supporting the shows that our graduates and students are involved in out there, too. We do a lot of social media promotion around them. We also produce a Central brochure showcasing many of those shows, and at the party, people are able to come along and promote their work out there, too. It's a great event because, again, many of those recent graduates are launching new theatre companies and it's potentially their first piece of work that they've produced outside of their studies. Us being able to support that in whatever way we can is a great way of launching them out into the next stage of their careers. Hopefully, we'll be able to meet with our alumni again in physical spaces very soon. But this year, all of our events have been moved online, mostly with the aim of supporting our recent graduates.

SCOTT

And as you say, Shaun, it's been a difficult year. And as you just mentioned, at the time that we're speaking Central's 2020 graduation ceremony has been postponed due to the Coronavirus restrictions. We will of course be having a celebration for the Class of 2020 next year when restrictions allow but, in the meantime, what advice can you give to these newest members of the alumni community?

SHAUN

Yeah, Scott, we're really conscious of how daunting it must be to graduate this year. It's been a year like no other, and our graduates couldn't have planned for this. We know that we need to be doing everything we can to reassure them that there is a network for them, that they're not alone and that we'll do everything we can to support them going forward. With that in mind, both Sophie and I have been working over the past few months on a special programme of support for the Class of 2020. And we've been calling out to our wider alumni community as part of our new Pay It Forward initiative to ask them about the ways that they might be able to help support emerging graduates. Whether this be in delivering workshops, speaking at networking events, providing feedback on things like business or marketing plans for CV's, for example. We've been overwhelmed by the many offers of support we've received from graduates. We have already kicked off on a number of events to take these offers forward and have a great many more in the works. For example, we had an online Contemporary Performance Practice networking event where students from the DATE, Performance Arts and Writing for Performance courses could speak with some of these graduates to benefit from the advice that they can share and develop relationships that they can then take forward to benefit them in their careers. It was a fantastic event. And you could see lots of contact details being shared, lots of people sharing messages of advice over the Zoom chat. We've gotten a lot of engagement and a lot of alumni just so keen to share their experience and, and help

support this class. We've also been working with the University of London's careers group to provide the Class of 2020 with a series of workshops and career sessions called Central Cafes. These have all been tailored for them in mind, so particular to the concerns and the issues that they're facing. They also give them an opportunity to speak with experienced careers consultants. And I also want to point out that these are also available to other recent graduates from over the last few years, as we realise they're facing a number of the same issues being still quite early on in their own careers, too. We've also been conscious of the fact that these are isolating times, and we want to create opportunities to bring everyone together. So although we've not been able to have a physical graduation ceremony for the Class of 2020 this year, and though we're still planning to do this next year, we did have a small online celebration for them to recognise their achievements over the course of their studies. More information about the programme of support and links to resources that we've been able to find to help our emerging graduates can be found on a series of web pages that we've launched for the Class of 2020 on Central's website. And these can be found on the alumni section of that site. Also, if you're a graduate interested in taking part in the Pay it Forward initiative, you can find details of this again on the alumni section of our website.

SCOTT

Brilliant. Well, I mean, it sounds like there's been a lot of work, a very, very busy year in, obviously, what is a challenging time for graduates and for the wider industry as well. You mentioned there a number of events and activities that you're running, but looking forward as well, now, can you give us a little teaser, if you will, about what you've got coming up for 2021?

SHAUN

Yeah, absolutely. So we'll be looking to expand on our programme of support for the Class of 2020 and other emerging graduates in January. We're

planning two Central Cafe sessions, one on the 19th of January called Adapting Work to a Physical Space which will include a number of alumni working at the National Theatre coming online to talk to our Class of 2020 about how they've been creating work in theatres in line with these new Covid regulations, the effect this has had on them, what they've learned, and how this might impact on working in theatres kind of going forward into the future. The other one on the 26th of January that we'll be hosting is called Adapting Work to Digital Space, which will include graduates from companies like Dante or Die, Phosphorous Theatre, and Darkfield, again, coming online to talk to the Class of 2020 about the amazing work that they've carried out this year digitally, and offering their advice on how our recent graduates might think to do the same. Because obviously, this is something that is a skill that people are really interested in learning more about, a lot of work now is going to be moved online going forward into the future. And so getting to grips with producing work for digital spaces is something that a lot of our graduates are going to be keen to do. We're also keen on expanding on our networking events. We've got a number of these in the works. One particularly in the early part of the year is going to be for our Black and Global Majority graduates, students and staff. We're also of course, hoping that at some point in the not too distant future, we might be again able to meet in physical spaces. Of course, we can't say when, but we hold out hope.

SCOTT

Certainly sounds like 2021 is going to be a very busy but exciting year and, as you say, hopefully we can get back to seeing people face to face. Thank you so much for joining us, Shaun. Just to reiterate the point you made, if people want to find out more information about the work that you do in Central's alumni office, then they should head to the website: www.cssd.ac.uk/alumni. Shaun, thank you so much for your time today. And now I'm pleased to welcome Central's Student's Union President and Class of

2020 graduate from the Stage Management course Parker Hollants, who has more information about their work with the SU.

GUEST 2 - PARKER HOLLANTS

Hiya, my name is Parker. I'm the current SU President and I graduated last year from the BA Stage Management course. In my role as the SU President, I represent student matters on a variety of committees and in a variety of groups, but I also aim to provide a space for all students within Central's community. I work alongside a team of 23 volunteer officers who work in a variety of operational and liberational roles. From graduating in the midst of a pandemic to organising and entirely online Freshers, I can say this has been one of the weirdest years of my life. I have seen so much incredible work from students and from graduates going into a very difficult industry and a very difficult time. Central students always have been and always will be really driven and tenacious people. And I think it's what makes us such an incredible asset in the industry. I just wanted to say a little thing to my fellow graduates: I know we've missed our graduation. And I think we could all do with seeing each other in person again soon. But happy graduation to the Class of 2020, and hopefully I'll see you out there in industry soon.

SCOTT

Thank you, Parker, and thank you to the entire Class of 2020. Congratulations on your exceptional achievement. Please do keep in touch with us as you embark on this next stage of your journey.

[theme tune starts, crescendo as Scott continues talking]

SCOTT:

We look forward to hearing about and celebrating your successes. And if you're listening to us at home, thank you for joining us for the second series of Discover Central. We'll be back again in the New Year with more interviews

with our students, staff, and alumni. Do tune in then, but for now, take care, stay safe and we'll see you in 2021.

[theme tune ends, diminuendo]