

Lana Kocharian Adrouni - Film Director

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Lana Kocharian Adrouni is a professional in the theatre who has rendered invaluable service to the Lebanese Armenian Youth and public over the past ten years. We admire her dedication to the theatre through which she has made a remarkable contribution towards the enrichment of the cultural life of our community. We appreciate the professionalism in her work and the high standards she tries to maintain in her production for children as well as adults. It is unusual for a woman to pursue one of the least feminine careers in the world and she does it with ability, seriousness of purpose and a solid conviction. She has paved the way for other women who are willing to pay the high price of the hard but enriching life of a woman director.



Lana Kocharian Adrouni is a well-know director and professional actress in the Beirut Community. Lana made her home in Lebanon in 1978 when she married Vatché Adrouni, a director and playwright from Lebanon who had studied at the Fine Arts and Theatre Institute of Erevan, Armenia.

She was born in a family of artists in Moscow, from an Armenian, father — a film director and a Russian mother — a pianist. The family atmosphere was conducive for Lana to pursue her interests in art, music, the cinema and the theatre. However, her main desire was to go into film directing but soon realized the enormous pressures that the profession would place upon her. She had to deal with a huge number of casts and physically it was hard for a woman to cope with such a profession. Therefore, she decided to go into the field of theatre production. She traveled to Erevan to study in the Theatre Institute where she had also trained in acting under the late Vartan Ajemian, a prominent director in Armenia. After graduating from the Institute as a director, she went to Moscow and worked with the famous Youri Zavatzki. Upon her return to Erevan, where she worked in the theatre for a while, she met her husband, got married and came to Lebanon.

October 1978 was a most terrible time in East Beirut. Lana stayed in the shelter with her husband in Bourj Hammoud for a whole week and had her first baptism of shelling. She saw the misery of the Lebanese children and decided to do something to help them. Coming from Armenia where children are the most privileged citizens and enjoy all the advantages that children normally enjoy in civilized countries, Lana was dismayed at the situation in which she found the youngsters in Lebanon. Together with her husband she founded the Keghart Fine Arts Theatre in 1981 and along with plays for the public she initiated the children's theatre. She began to produce such plays as "The Little Boy and Carlson who Lives on the Roof", "Cinderella", "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", "Once Upon a time" and others. These plays are accompanied with questionnaires to check the children's comprehension, thus an additional instructional and motivational factor reinforced the concepts communicated through the production.

These were like children's festivals that created much enthusiasm and interest, the best experience that any artist could provide the war-ridden children of Lebanon.

Speaking about the importance of plays for children, Lana says that the future playgoer is prepared during childhood years. We cannot delay a child's aesthetic development until he is older. To become fully developed and accomplished individuals, children need not only physical and mental stimulation but also artistic training and encouragement. She feels sorry for the Lebanese children who are deprived of their normal childhood experiences.

Commenting on the demanding nature of the children's theatre, Lana mentions the fact that it is a very expensive venture. Props, scenery, costumes, etc., have to be worked out in great precision and luxury to recreate a world of fantasy and fairy tales. The beautifully decorated stage, the colorful costumes communicate to the children the concepts that the play is trying to pass on to them. Only through such a rich experience can the child develop his powers of intellect and imagination and find a solution to his psychological problems. Lana considers it the responsibility of the community — parents, teachers, youth leaders — to see that every child has the opportunity to see these plays. Unfortunately some parents cannot afford to pay for the price of the tickets, others are indifferent, some schools do not make the effort to bring their pupils to these plays. She believes there is a lot of work to be done in this field if we want our future generations to become bright, imaginative and creative individuals.

Speaking about her career as a director, Lana says that few are the women directors all over the world. It really is a pioneering profession for women and involves all of a woman's time, energy, effort and her whole-hearted and complete devotion to it. It is an extremely demanding profession for a woman who may not be able to carry the responsibilities of a family besides her professional activities. Lana could do it only through the full cooperation of her husband, who being in the same field has helped a great deal. Commenting on the difficulties of working with actors and actresses, Lana says that young men are subjected to the ups and downs of the Lebanese economic and financial situation and often desert the theatre because of it. The young women they work with and spend so much time on, leave when they get engaged or married. Marriage puts an end to the career of most young women unlike the situation in Western countries or in the Soviet Union. The director has also to put up with the caprices and difficult characters of some of the actors. It is her responsibility to create an atmosphere of mutual love and respect among the members of the cast. The director also can and should help the actors and actresses to overcome weaknesses in their personality. The theatre helps these young people to develop the power of self-discipline.

Besides, there is a sense of responsibility towards the audience that each actor should have. No matter what their feelings are on a certain day: sad, happy, dejected, upset — they ought to face the audience with complete control and act as though nothing has happened. This is considered to be the best test for any actor who pursues his career with seriousness and professionalism. Sometimes there are surprises that are most disturbing when one of the leading actors or actresses is sick or has an accident just a few hours before the performance. Other actors need to improvise on the spot and do an honorable job. At other times heavy shelling spoils a gala or a regular performance and all the cast is frustrated. At such times, strength of character is needed by everybody concerned but the director has to be the first one to demonstrate courage in the face of such crises.

Lana regards her career as a director very rewarding in spite of these hardships. The audiences appreciate the director's efforts and admit that they have learnt a lot. The seven year old children who attended their plays in 1981 are regular playgoers — now at the age of fourteen. This she considers the crown of all her achievements in Lebanon. She has not regretted at all coming to Lebanon in the midst of war and destruction. She will have become stronger and determination firmer to contribute to her community through her profession. She feels we are all responsible to do something constructive for the younger people of the country. Children and youth in Lebanon have only experienced violence and destruction of all moral values. They need to be given the opportunity to come into contact with beautiful, noble and refined ways of existence through the arts, music, literature and the theatre.

A rewarding experience was the unprecedented success the group had at Erevan, Armenian after the performance of the play called "The Tree" written and produced by Vatché Adrouni. The play depicts the life experiences of stranded Armenians who have made their home in Aleppo, Syria. The audience was dead silent for quite a while after the curtain went down. The actors thought the Erevan public did not appreciate their performance. Great was the suspense behind stage when all of a sudden the audience gave a standing ovation for a long time. Tears of joy and exclamations of admiration were intermingled when flowers turned the stage into a colorful garden. Lana regards this experience the highlight in the life of their theatre group.
