



STUDIO OCHENTA ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT

MIJA (ENGLISH) – 307: Omar

[0:05]

Hi, I'm Mija, or Binty, in Arabic, and this podcast is about my family, those who are alive, those long gone, and those still dreaming.

Here's what you need to know about Omar:

He's very kind,

[0:20]

He loves deeply,

and music is his life.

Omar is my brother.

So here goes, 10 minutes to tell his story.

[0:44]

We're in an empty room with a mirror.

There's a young man practicing a hip hop dance.

Sweat on his forehead.

[0:54]

Giving it his all.

The music stops and he breathes heavily

And smiles.

This is Omar. The oldest son of Mona and Abdou.

[1:10]

Every morning before school, Mona would pass incense over his head and say "Kol atho bi rab el falak."

Every day without fail: "Kol atho birab el falak."

It means "I seek refuge with Allah, the Lord of the daybreak."

[1:33]

And when I was born, and Omar was 8 years old, Mona would have him hold me, and do the same:

"Kol atho birab al falak."

[1:48]

Every day after school, Omar would run to Abdou's shop and keep his father company.

His favorite thing about it?

The music.

[2:05]

In fact, music was always a big part of his life.

The story goes that: The first time Omar heard Egyptian music, he was 2 weeks old.

Mona and Abdou were still adapting to their new life in London.

[2:18]

Abdou was working 3 jobs to cover Mona's maternity leave.

Mona was home with a newborn, all alone, thousands of miles from her parents and the community that could help her.

[2:30]

After an especially hard day,

She bursts into tears.

Abdou comes home to find her inconsolable.

Without a word

[2:42]

He drops everything

Grabs his oud and begins singing to her.

She looks up to see Abdou singing to her.

And she stops crying.

[2:55]

And Omar? The 2 week old in a crib beside her?

He smiles his very first smile.

Flash forward a few years,

[3:08]

And he'd do anything to spend time listening to Egyptian music, especially the Arabic radio in his dad's shop.

Anyway, now it's the early 2000s and Omar is obsessed with this music.

[3:28]

He watches Arabic TV with Mona during Ramadan and mimics dances in the living room.

And when we visit Gidda Dawlat and Giddo Marzouk in Egypt on holiday, he spends all his time going to see performances of local dancers.

So, Mona enrolls him in a dance class.

[3:50]

It's contemporary dance though.

Not *exactly* what he was expecting.

It's a lot slower than the high energy dancing he likes

[4:00]

There are sooo many rules.

But he enjoys it. Dancing makes him feel alive.

Unfortunately, it doesn't really last long.

[4:11]

He's the only Egyptian kid in the class, and sooner rather than later a classmate tells him to "go back where he came from". To which Omar says: "What you mean? Bethnal Green?"

Mona pulls him out of the class immediately

[4:24]

And never says another word about it.

But as he gets older, Omar can't just stop dancing.

After school, he starts to hangout around Covent Garden watching street performers dancing hip hop.

[4:53]

Becomes friends with an Egyptian, Saudi and Lebanese dance crew and soon enough joins them, performing at clubs and in squares across London.

[5:07]

At the same time, Abdou never liked his dancing hobby. He always worries he won't do serious work if he becomes a dancer.

One day, on his way home from work, Abdou's attention is drawn to a kind of Arabic hip hop beat playing in the street.

He walks over to the crowd and sees Omar.

[5:32]

Dancing with all his might.

Their eyes meet.

And Omar stops mid-dance.

[5:43]

He can see the disappointment in his father's eyes.

Omar rushes through the crowd and Abdou is on the verge of tears.

He tells him he should be ashamed for performing in the street
warning him what would happen to someone "like him"

[6:03]

how he could dare to become an artist after everything they sacrificed to emigrate to London.

how he couldn't become a musician himself because it wouldn't feed his family.

They parted ways that day and

didn't speak again for a long, long time.

[6:26]

Soon after, Omar went away to Uni.

In the summer he would return, but would stay out most days, avoiding Abdou.

Meanwhile, Omar's dance career flourished at Uni.

[6:38]

He became the star dancer of his dance troupe and competed in competitions in other countries.

Whenever he won an award he'd send a postcard.

Mona would prop it up on the fridge.

but when he called, the only one who wouldn't talk to him was Abdou....

[7:09]

And then... something huge happens!

After years of applying to a dance company in New York City

He is accepted.

[7:19]

The night before he leaves,
Mona makes his favorite dish, koshari.
And prepares a send off for him at the restaurant.

[7:30]

During the dinner, Abdou is still disappointed
that his son did not have a “real” job
He sits in the corner, drinking shai,
quietly.

[7:40]

Mona nudges Abdou to play some music,
“to make an effort, at least for her”
When Abdou finally concedes

[7:50]

He gets up and grabs his oud,
and begins playing a song for Mona.
Mona convinces Omar to start dancing too.

[7:58]

The whole restaurant is filled with their music.

Abdou remembers his times performing in Egypt
and is filled with excitement and joy in the moment.

[8:15]

Without thinking, he jumps on Omar for a long embrace
and speak their first words after years of silence

“Wahashtini.”

“I missed you.”

[8:34]

No stranger to travel,

Omar is excited to make his way to the Big Apple.

He tells Mona that he’s following in their footsteps,
bringing Egypt even further west.

[8:47]

At the door, she passes incense over his head one last time
and says “InshAllah Kheir” - Everything will be fine, God willing”.

He gets on the red eye and then he’s in New York!

[9:06]

Omar is given housing in Spanish Harlem.

Those first few nights are lonely.

He had seen all the movies about America, but actually being there is different.

[9:22]

Americans think his accent is funny,

He often felt they were surprised that his brown face was dancing and not serving.

But he got used to it, and even learned a bit of spanish to get by in his neighbourhood.

[9:39]

When he was especially homesick, he'd buy a phone card with minutes on it and call home.

Hearing Mona's voice reassured him.

[9:49]

She knew exactly what to say.

On the other end, I'd hear her say "Bahebak ya ibny, rabina ma3ak".

He'd tell me all about New York and how I should come visit.

And I did.

Twice.

[10:04]

The very first time I went to interview for uni.

He came to pick me up, with a woman, his girlfriend.

Her name was Danyeli.

She's Dominican.

Mona and Abdou had never heard of her.

[10:20]

Neither had I....

But we quickly became friends.

When I left that first time.

[10:26]

Omar tells me to keep it a secret.

He thinks Mona and Abdou won't understand his love for this woman so foreign to them.

I agree.

And then move to New York myself.

[10:46]

One night at dinner with friends at a restaurant in Little Egypt, the Egyptian neighbourhood where they now lived, Omar plays a song.

And asks Danyeli to marry him.

[11:04]

At this point, I tell him he HAS to tell them about her.

So then next time we all go back to Egypt,

we're having dinner.

[11:12]

And I shove Omar over the table to go ahead and tell him.

He says in Arabic: Dad, I'm in love.

Abdou says nothing.

[11:23]

Her name is Danyeli.

Abdou says nothing.

Gets up and goes to his room and closes the door. Still says nothing.

[11:34]

Mona, Omar and I put our ears to the door to hear what's happening.

We hear him calling Gidda...

And shouts:

"He's finally getting married!!"

FINAL DEL EPISODIO