

Clowns Without Borders

Al Awdah settlement



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The clowns returned once again to the Baekka valley, an agricultural plain with snow peaked mountains on either side. It is an average of 16km wide but it stretches the length of the country. Behind one group of mountains lies all of Lebanon, behind the other lies Syria, and in the middle, there is this fertile plain where many families escaping Syria have decided to make their temporary home. The landscape has become dotted with square shacks, reinforced with some of the old plastic advertising banners we've been seeing on billboards around. A few of them used the original image to create a unique facade to their abode. I saw one made out of a sensuous cadbury's chocolate bar with a velvety purple background and another out of a woman expensively done up, holding a violin, selling perfume.

This would be our second day working with the Amal schools, which provide primary education for refugee children. The teachers are also Syrian refugees who have fled from their original posts and have the opportunity to continue their work and aid the children's development.

Some of the camps are small and quite out in the open. This one, the largest in the region, was fenced in and we required special permission to get in. We arrived at our performance space, which was an open outdoor space in the middle of all the classrooms, and began sectioning off our stage. The kids filed in by about 10.30am and we got started early. Having learned from the previous day's show, they got all of the children to sit down. It got a little bit rowdy by the middle of the show, but things were kept under control. Zaza (Daniel) started appearing when called from out the window of some of the classrooms which formed the backdrop, to the surprise and delight of both his audience and colleagues. We performed to 200 children in the first show. By the second show, the teachers had worked out a solid system for dealing with the shows and got the children seated comfortably and well-spread out in front of our stage. the second show was for about 120 children, some of them younger (about 5) and some of them as old as 16.

After the show, upon asking the children what part of the show they liked the most, there was little hesitation. The weight-lifting, they chorused back gleefully.