

Music Enriches Refugee Camps

Building Multiple Skills through Music Education



By Nour
Abou Rayya

M

any Palestinians rarely have the opportunity to leave the West Bank and Gaza, and when they do, they face restrictions, complicated procedures, and uncomfortable travel

conditions. But Palestinians who live in the refugee camps in Lebanon cannot leave Lebanon, and even leaving the camps – while legally allowed – is complicated not only because the camp borders form strong psychological borders. In these camps, humanitarian misery, social deprivation, and urban chaos prevail among dilapidated and overcrowded residential buildings, unhealthy and difficult living conditions, and limited, low-quality basic services. Due to the financially deprived conditions, children barely have a chance to learn about music or how to play an instrument, as the main problems their parents tend to care about are



The girls of Shatila Camp performing a concert on the camp's Beit Atfal Assumoud stage.

basic needs such as shelter, food, medical care, and securing a livelihood. Here, the role of Al Kamandjâti music school and cultural association starts!

Al Kamandjâti Association therefore considers it particularly meaningful to reunify its students who live in places separated by physical and psychological borders in order to let them participate in a shared music project. It operates within these challenging conditions to provide children with the opportunity to access music education and develop their artistic skills through music by playing an instrument.



At the same time, the classes develop other skills that build their personalities by increasing their imagination, creativity, and self-confidence with the encouragement given by their teachers. A positive atmosphere provides the suitable space and opportunities for the students to play music and express themselves as young musicians, some of whom may become advanced enough to earn their living as professional musicians in the future.

Al Kamandjâti's curriculum paves the way for students to reach high academic levels and helps them find other opportunities if they choose to continue their

studies and wish to attend music colleges and institutions in Lebanon or abroad. The association's academic program encompasses music appreciation and a regular program. Music appreciation provides an introduction of music and aims to develop audio perception skills by teaching student to recognize natural sounds, the sounds of their surrounding environment, human voices, and the timbres of some



Violin student from Burj al-Barajneh Camp during her practice.



■ Orchestra class with Shatila Camp students.

musical instruments; it also teaches musical styles. This introductory training helps children discover their preferences and understand the basics of music while it prepares

them for choosing what instrument they want to learn.

The regular program involves students in two parallel courses in which they learn music theory and practical instrument skills. The theoretical classes teach students how to read and write musical notation and provides rhythmic training in order to familiarize the children with the language of music. Students are divided into groups according to age, level of proficiency, and the instrument of their choice. They can study the oud, qanun, ney, violin, cello, piano, percussion instruments, and individual voice classes, which they take once a week on Sundays. Throughout the school year, students receive theoretical classes for one hour per week. This requires commitment and follow-up because the theoretical classes are closely related to their practical classes in which they learn to play the instrument of their choice.

■ Orchestra class with Burj al-Barajneh Camp students.



Beyond teaching instrumental skills, music education in Lebanon's Palestinian refugee camps is important because it provides a positive, safe space. Children are invited to be creative and encouraged to discover their Palestinian culture and engage in dialogue with other cultures.

Since the beginning of its educational program in Lebanon, Al Kamandjati's goal of building a music-loving generation has been implemented with success. The association can boast with a group of advanced students, musicians,

among them the festivals held on the International Day of Music, Lebanese festivals, and others. Their weekly lessons and these concerts strengthen the students' ensemble skills and reinforce their confidence on stage, which can be challenging in front of an audience. Moreover, a number of advanced students now participate as teachers in specialized music programs and give music appreciation classes, following a number of training sessions offered by Al Kamandjati; others have become teachers and work in and



■ Ensemble class with Shatila Camp students and their teacher.

and singers who reflect the serious work that has been carried out during the last ten years. This group includes young men and women, three of whom play the oud, another three play the ney, and there are two percussionists, two singers, two violinists, and a cello player. In addition, the school currently trains a group of middle-level musicians and a group of young students.

The students have presented concerts and participated in major festivals in Lebanon,

outside of the camps in projects with local partners in Lebanon.

Music can unite different cultures and overcome differences. It does not understand any borders; the only limits it knows are the borders faced by its own players.

Nour Abu Raya is the coordinator of Al Kamandjati Association's music teaching program in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon.