

## ***The Landings Performed by the Stacked Wonky Dance Company***

*'In 2016, more than 4,500 men, women and children drowned or disappeared as they tried to cross the central Mediterranean in unseaworthy and overcrowded boats. Many more lives have already been lost this year. Despite this, European governments have reduced boats patrolling the sea.*

'**The Landings**' by Stacked Wonky Dance Company is a performance project developed after the death of Alan Kurdi, a three-year old Syrian boy who drowned trying to reach Europe in September 2015. It is being performed along the coast between Blue Anchor and Minehead by a cast comprising 10 professional dancers, 8 children from local schools and 3 musicians. Performances take place towards dusk.

It was a perfect autumn afternoon for a walk. A walk with a difference. Separated from those I had come with at a farm gate, I waved, turned, and climbed steeply up a ploughed field with strangers, following three actors. No-one spoke. At the top a man, his wife and their daughter looked across the Bristol Channel. The little girl refused to move on, gazing across the water towards home. Eventually she was persuaded to turn and walk on. We entered woods where strange sounds wafted through the trees. A small boy, alone, wary, was coaxed by the man to join them, only to steal their blanket and run off.

After a long walk in silence along a track and a sunken path, attacked by brambles, we reached a huge metal barrier. A bell was rung by the actor leading us, signal that we had a choice: to stay, or walk back along the path. I stayed with three others, the rest of the group left. The mother managed to climb over the barrier, but a siren signalled that she was unable to return. Her husband and child were unable to join her, and walked away. She danced her exhaustion, grief and despair until the other half of our group, led by actors, arrived on her side of the barrier. Afraid of them, she managed to climb back over the barrier, and helped rescue some children. A small boy was separated from his mother.



More silent walking, back the way we had come, then across a field and to a "checkpoint" where both walking groups came together. We all walked, in silence, and in single file because of brambles, over a stile, over rocks down to the beach, over soft sand, up more rocks and to the mouth of the Avill. Here all the actors came together to perform a dance sequence showing a strange mixture of aggression and altruism. Musicians coaxed plangent sounds from their violins and a musical saw. Threatening thumps came from a drum.

Now we walked along the shoreline and looking back, saw a small boy a long way off. One of the actors – his mother – races towards him: they are reunited. The violin plays fragments of Silent Night. We walk on, turn again, and see in the distance the body of a child, face down, in green and yellow clothes: Alan Kurdi. A musician plays the Brahms lullaby.

Walking in silence with strangers as darkness fell, watching a dance interpretation of the trauma that refugees have to suffer, gave everyone who took part the opportunity to feel a part, however small, of the disorientation, fear, and hopelessness of those fleeing war and persecution.

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