

# Saint Joseph University brings art, culture festival to stairway hangout

**By Emma Gatten**  
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: Students may be more known for their partying than their cultural appreciation but Saint Joseph University is hoping to change that perception with new cultural event Daraj al-Yassouiyeh.

The initiative started when Pascal Watwat, the president of the student council for the economics faculty, decided to organize a fashion show at the university, and the idea captured the interests of other student council heads.

"We wanted to make it something bigger, something better," said Rachel Fiani, the president of the student council of the Speech Therapy Institute.

That fashion show became, five months later, the opening event of three days of arts and culture centered around the now officially named Yassouiyeh stairs, a popular hangout spot for the university's students.

The opening event Monday night was attended by around 800 people, including Culture Minister Gaby Layoun, a graduate of USJ.

"Usually the students are not interested in culture, but we had many that came and enjoyed it," Fiani said of the opening event. The inclusion of other elements such as the fashion show provided a lure for students, she said.

"The party that we had really added something to the event," she said. "It wasn't just cultural or artistic, it was also fun."

The three-day event has also incorporated the somewhat notorious talent show put on yearly by the university's medical students, which took place Tuesday evening, in front of a panel including musician Pascalle Saker and composer Osama Rahbani.

Chirine Atat, a fifth-year medical student and keyboardist in band the Big Band Theory who also played the medical talent show last year, said she welcomed the opportunity to play on a slightly bigger scale this year.

"It's fun. Last year we were already on TV so maybe this year someone will discover us," she joked.

Fiani and the rest of the team hope that this year's event will be the first of many. "We want it to become a tradition at USJ," she said. After some

initial teething problems, they believe next year's event will be an even greater success.

The hardest part, Fiani said, was persuading students to contribute. After trying to garner interest on social networks, they eventually resorted to sending text messages to all of USJ's 12,000 students to get their attention.

The tactic worked, and the festival has seen around 100 students contributing various artistic endeavors, including musical performances, dance and poetry. Around 20 students, from faculties as diverse as philosophy and dentistry contributed pieces of artwork that have been displayed throughout the event.

Second year economics student Yara Abou Dalha, part of the organizing committee said the event had brought students together.

"The most important thing has been the spirit between the students," she said. "They have been working together from all the political sides, and from all the school years."

The event closes Wednesday with an evening dedicated to the Olympics, including a sports quiz, and dance and musical performances.



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