

Queen's celebrates Nowruz

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Queen's students dance to contemporary Iranian music at the Nowruz celebration, held in Wallace Hall at the John Deutsch University Centre on March 27th.

Over 150 students, staff and faculty gathered in Wallace Hall recently to celebrate Nowruz, the Iranian New Year.

Observed from Albania and Turkey to Afghanistan and Kashmir, Nowruz marks the arrival of spring and the beginning of the New Year in Iran. A 3,000-year old religious holiday for Zoroastrians, it is observed as a secular holiday by Muslims, Jews, Christians and Hindus. Festivities culminate on the vernal equinox.

In 2009, the Parliament of Canada recognized the festival's cultural significance, naming March 21 Nowruz Day. The United Nations' General Assembly followed in 2010 by proclaiming March 21 International Nowruz Day, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization added Nowruz to its list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

"The Nowruz celebration is an excellent way to introduce the campus to the multi-religious heritage of the Middle East, Central and South Asia, and the Balkans," says Ariel Salzmann (History), who organized the event with three work-study students, Irfan Tahiri, Filza Naveed, and M. Ali Parsa. "The event encourages our students to explore one of the very prominent cultural events of the Muslim world that

draws from pre-Islamic customs that are shared by many religious and ethnic communities.”

The celebration began with a presentation by Dr. Salzmann on Nowruz as a living legacy of ancient Iran and Zoroastrianism. A graduate student from Iran provided an explanation of the Nowruz symbols, including the objects on the haft sîn table: a table setting featuring seven symbolic items, each beginning with the letter “s” in Farsi.



A haft sîn table was displayed at Wednesday evening's Nowruz event. Topped with seven items including food, books and plants, the table represents the renewal of spring and positive hopes for the Iranian New Year.

An Afghan Attan dance performance followed these presentations. Guests enjoyed food and beverages as they listened to contemporary Middle Eastern pop, hip-hop and rock music.

The Nowruz celebration at Queen's was hosted by the Muslim Societies and the Global Perspectives Initiative, an interdisciplinary initiative dedicated to connecting the cosmopolitan and pluralist legacy of Islamic communities with contemporary experiences of Muslims in multicultural societies like Canada.

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