Members of the prize jury with the winners.

Lebanese poet Jawdat Haydar honored at AUB ceremony

Ghia Osseiran
Special to The Daily Star

BEIRUT: The Anis Makdisi Program in Literature at the American University of Beirut (AUB) hosted the second annual ceremony, commemorating Lebanese poet Jawdat Haydar at Assembly Hall earlier this month.

The December 4 ceremony celebrated Haydar's works through music, prose and verse. Master of ceremonies Amal Dibo representing the Makdisi Program, dwelled on the parallels between Anis Makdisi and Haydar, depicting them as "bridges" linking East and West.

Sahar Taha sang an elegy that Haydar had composed for his wife on the eve of her death. May Nasr sang "El Bahr" (the Sea), a piece Haydar had personally gifted to her, back when she worked with Save the Children in the Bekaa and used to frequently visit Haydar at his residence in Baalbek, sharing stories and songs.

"Haydar taught me to sing with my eyes open," Nasr recounts. The song is part of her first album, "lil Ghali" launched last month in Beirut.

The annual Jawdat Haydar Prizes for best essay were also distributed at the ceremony. The first prize went to Dima Matta, a bachelors student at Haigazian University. The second prize was given to Pamela Layoun, a masters student at the Holy Spirit University of Kaslik (USEK), while the third prize went to Lana Zantout, also a bachelors student at Haigazian.

The judging panel included faculty from leading Lebanese universities including AUB, Beirut Arab University, Haigazian, the Lebanese American University, the Lebanese University, USEK, and University Saint Joseph. It was chaired by Dr. Rouhi Baalbaki, a leading scholar and academic who also gave an eloquent speech, presenting Haydar and his works.

Students from AUB recited several of Haydar's poems including "The Temple in Baalbek," which has been incorporated into the official curriculum for the Lebanese national baccalaureate and currently hangs at the Museum of the Temple of Baalbek.

Haydar was instrumental in reviving the literary scene in the aftermath of 15 years of Civil War in Lebanon. He was the founder and president of Wahat al-Adab (Oasis of Literature) in the Bekaa, and a member of the Union of Lebanese Writers. Haydar has been honored with the Lebanese Order of the Cedars, the Gold Medal of Lebanese Merit and the Medal la Croix de Grand Officier of France. He has received other awards, including the papal medal from Pope John XXIII for humanitarian work.