

THE VIENNESE BALL



Above, Anne Murphy has her makeup done by Sumitra Sasmal of MAC at The Bay in the St. Laurent Shopping Centre. Below, the night before the ball, dancers Lee Casterton and Carrie Wallace practise their routine in a dress rehearsal.



Dancers Anne Murphy and Marco Taucer share a smile as they twirl across the dance floor at the National Art Gallery last night.



After slipping into their dresses, the girls huddled in a circle like football players. The boys, who hadn't been as excited leading up to the event, were pumped last night in their shiny shoes and white gloves.



'I've never been this glammed up before'



ISABEL TEOTONIO

Sometimes dreams do come true. Just ask the troupe of teens who performed in the traditional opening ceremony of last night's Viennese Winter Ball at the National Gallery.

"The whole entire atmosphere — very surreal, very magical," said Carrie Wallace, struggling to find the right words. "It was everything and more than I imagined."

The six weeks of preparation that went into being Austrian debutantes and cavaliers, which included learning the polonaise and waltz, ended with one incredible high most won't soon forget, maybe ever. "It was so much fun, I had the best time," said Anne Murphy, who jokingly added "except for when my dancer stepped on my dress."

After the dancing, the gang was in full party mode, especially Aleana Young who was already planning a wrap party for next week at her place. But as they rode that high into the night, there was a tinge of sadness amongst those who wondered what they'd do on Sunday afternoons without their weekly lessons at Fred Astaire Dance Studios.

"I don't know what I'll do tomorrow," said Marielle McGovern. "I'm not really looking forward to it — I might have to do



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homework or something."

Twenty-six dancers had been selected from local schools in mid-December to perform last night, but a sudden illness Friday night dropped the number of couples dancing to 12. Despite the last-minute changes, the dancers pulled it off like the kind of pros they weren't sure they were. After their performance they ventured out into the crowd of about 450 of this city's glitterati to ask guests to waltz.

"It was so much fun," beamed Carrie, who danced with Otto Ditz, Austria's newest ambassador to Canada. "The ambassador gave me a kiss on the hand and thanked me for the dance — soooo cute."

It was the perfect ending for a very nervous girl who could-

n't keep from flubbing her introduction when she learned who she'd be dancing with: "Your Elegancy, may I have this ... I mean, Your Excellency."

Despite their jitters, the audience gave them a resounding wave of approval.

"It was just so powerful," said Olivia McNee, after the opening number. "It felt like it was over in a second."

While it may have been over in a flash, none will forget the preparation involved. And the girls certainly won't forget the thrill of dress-shopping and the slew of beauty appointments that went into being debutantes.

But most of all, few teens will forget the friendships and bonds they forged while learning to waltz. And few will for-

get the emotional roller-coaster ride they'd been on for weeks: nervousness, excitement, and more nervousness. But for most, the anxiety was largely replaced with sheer excitement yesterday.

"Omgosh, is it normal to be nervous about not being nervous?" asked Nadia Mostafa, who'd been a nervous wreck for weeks.

Regardless of what they felt, many described it as an unparalleled high, even those who've dreamed since they were little girls about attending a ball.

"I've never done this so I didn't know what to expect," said Sarah Argent. "But it's better than my expectations, for sure."

Mixed in with those childhood dreams was a dose of teen

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THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

angst, especially before the big performance. Before waltzing to Strauss in front of hundreds, they got the party started in the changeroom, dancing and singing to a mix of hip-hop tunes that blared from a ghetto blaster.

"This is such a contrast," laughed Andrea Innes, mimicking a DJ spinning records as a gaggle of girls in billowing white gowns hooted and hollered to a song by Outkast. Minutes earlier, they had been "ooing" and "ahing" each other after arriving at the gallery from hair and makeup appointments and a couple of emergency visits to seamstresses to get their dresses shortened.

"I've never been this glammed up before," said Anne. Nor had many of the other girls.

Even the boys, who hadn't been as excited leading up to the event, were pumped last night in their shiny shoes and white gloves. The vibe in the changeroom was electric, rivaling that of the dress rehearsal Friday night, when they all got decked out for the first time.

After slipping into their dresses the girls huddled in a circle like football players and squatted down to the floor sinking into a sea of tulle trying to determine whose dress was puffiest. The endless metres of fabric made it impossible to pick a winner.

It was a fitting start to a night in which dance instructor Melissa Krulick stood on top of

a chair in the corner of the dance studio watching dancers twirl out of sync, forget moves and occasionally collide into each other.

Looking like a nervous coach from the sidelines during the last minutes of a game, she muttered, "I hope it's just the jitters ... I've never seen them like this."

One fewer pair of dancers meant starting positions and partners had to be switched. It also meant throwing confusion into a cauldron of emotions already boiling over.

Adding to the chaos were the many snafus that only surface in dress rehearsals: long bows being torn off dresses by the clumsy feet of teenage boys, long trains that force dancers to slow their first steps, and even a glove getting caught on a necklace during a twirl stopping a girl mid-whirl.

"Listen to the music, be one with the music," shouted Ms. Krulick. That oneness eventually arrived — after an hour and a half of rehearsal — and was greeted by roaring applause.

But even the excitement of Friday night was just a dress rehearsal for the emotional high of last night. Before stepping into the Great Hall to perform, the dancers locked arms for one last cheer and began dancing.

The boys shouted "Opa," as some of the girls pretended to smash plates on the floor. "Let's Do it," one of them shouted. And they did.