

## CITY

## Debutantes

Fifteen young ladies, in flowing gowns and carrying their newly taught dancing skills, will grace tonight's Viennese Ball



"If I do not fall, everything will be fine. I have this fabulous hairstyle — almost architectural."

**Ariane Belisle**



"I think all the people I convinced to come are great. I am not worried at all, more excited."

**Jacki Bird**



"I'm most looking forward to dancing with my father — but I should maybe give him waltz lessons."

**Kerstin Brauneder**



"My dad is ambassador from Austria, but I would have chosen to be here even if he wasn't. It is a lifetime experience."

**Charlotte Ditz**



"I have met the most wonderful people doing this and I'm looking forward to the ball like crazy."

**Sara Duplancic**



"I predict my favourite moment will be at midnight when I turn 18. There is no better way to spend your 18th birthday."

**Renée Farrell**



"It's been a great honour to participate in an event of such prestige. It will be such a wonderful thing to experience."

**Caroline Fulop**



"I've found it really interesting watching these macho guys trying to do spins, and gliding and stuff, it's been so much fun."

**Chantal Laberge**



"When you see people waltz in the movies, it looks like the easiest, most effortless thing. I was wrong!"

**Carolynn Roscoe-Lacasse**



"I did it last year, so I already have a dress and know what it is like. The night is an amazing experience."

**Marielle McGovern**



"I went to Vienna last year and adored it, so I can't wait for the Austrian food and all that."

**Eva Manole**



"I am so happy that I get to wear the white dress and dance all night. It's all about the dress."

**Alexandra Mierins**



"Dancing in a gown, you feel like royalty and all eyes are watching you. It's great to be part of the tradition."

**Marie-France Perrier**



"It is just a completely amazing experience to be with all these people and meeting all these people."

**Erin Taylor**



"I foresee the best moment of the dance being the entire group bowing on the last dance and getting lots of applause."

**Emily Vingerhoeds**

# A night to remember

## 15 Cinderellas select gowns, learn to waltz for the social event of the season

BY KIRSTIN ENDEMANN

Jacki Bird's teenaged face exploded in smiles the first time she tried on the dress, emerging from behind the dressing room draped in dazzling white satin and organza.

"Oh, mom," she said quietly, the normally talkative girl silenced as her eyes sparkled and took in every detail. "Oh, mom, this is the dress. I never want to take it off!"

The Nepean High School student laughed aloud as she gathered up the full ball skirt, swishing it back and forth to examine it fully in the shop's mirrors.

She had obviously already begun considering possible hair styles and jewelry to match the bodice, sequined delicately with branches and flowers.

"Look at her face," her mother, Cynthia, said. "She's so happy. I guess we'll be taking that one. But I must say this process is rather odd — sort of like a trial run for her wedding."

The gown Jacki chose was originally intended for a bride, but down to its ribbon-trimmed hem it precisely fits the criteria for a debutante at Ottawa's most glamorous event, the Viennese Winter Ball.

Jacki and 14 other teenage girls will be presented tonight in their white finery at the National Art Gallery to the strains of an orchestra. There, under the watchful gaze of the Austrian Ambassador, Ottawa luminaries and coupled with teenaged boys in tuxedos and white gloves, they will perform old Austrian court dances and reenact an aristocratic tradition.

"I am going to feel like a princess," said Jacki, 17. "I am going to BE a princess, at least for one night. Isn't that every girl's dream?"

It was a dream for the more than 50 girls who applied for the ball and underwent a two-interview process that measured their poise, dance skills and ability to maintain charming chatter with a partner during a seven-minute song.

The few chosen then embarked on two months of rehearsals to learn the polonaise, ländler and waltz. Beyond the time commitment, there is also a financial one. The debutantes do not need to pay for a ticket to the ball, but they are required to purchase their pure white ball gowns, shoes and elbow-length gloves.

Throw in a professional coiffure, makeup artist, suitably elegant jewelry and the cost can go past \$800 for the evening — most of that for a dress they will probably never wear again. Luckily, Jacki's parents volunteered to cover the costs (Jacki intends to never wear the dress again: "definitely" not for her own wedding and not for her high school graduation this year — that dress has already been bought.)

"She told us last year that she wanted to do this, so we were prepared," Mrs. Bird said. "And it is a once in a lifetime opportunity, something she will remember forever."

To her parents and herself, there is no adjunct between Jacki's athletic pursuits — she is a rugby player, competitive skier and gymnastics teacher — and her desire to dress up like Cinderella.

"I like to try everything," Jacki said. "And I do like to get dressed up, but also be extremely casual." In fact, Jacki used her position as popular Nepean High School co-president to "force" several people into trying out. Seven Nepean boys and two girls made the cut and are dancing this evening.

"It is usually harder to get the guys interested," said Melissa Krulick, manager of Fred Astaire

studios and dance instructor for the ball. "So we will often take anyone who shows up — and can move a bit. Often the girls will drag them in."

Jacki is anything but nervous about the gala night. "I'm school co-president, so I speak in front of people all the time, so I don't think dancing in front of people will be a problem," said the girl who admits to giggling incessantly. "Unless I trip, of course. But my partner, Nick, will help me and we have the steps down pat now."

Somehow, she is convinced the practice will enable her to deal with her pointy shoes, full skirts and the hundreds of eyes watching her as she engages in the dances she barely knew existed mere weeks ago.

Jacki was so unperturbed by the preparations that her mother finally had to force her to go shopping for the dress, a mere three weeks before the event. "I was the one who got stressed," Mrs. Bird said, mocking strangling her daughter.

"I finally had to pick her up after school and force her to go. I hadn't even thought about alterations, but luckily everything has fallen easily into place."

They found the "dream" dress 10 minutes after entering the second store at an extremely reasonable price, along with a dressmaker who kindly met the tight deadline.

And tonight, Jackie finally gets to parade in her finery on what she predicts will be "the most magical night ever."

"It will be so beautiful and elegant and utterly romantic," she said, grinning broadly and sighing.

"Yes, I admit I am a sap. But how could you not be? With the lighting and dinner and live orchestra? Every part of the evening will be romantic. I cannot wait! I just can't wait."



Partners Jacki Bird and Nick Miragliotta take to the dance studio floor as they practise for the big day.

## And 40 years ago in Vienna there was a girl...

BY JENNI LEE CAMPBELL

They are people who love to dress up and dance. They embrace a culture where staying up late to celebrate is, well, celebrated.

She's been in Canada for five years, but the influences of Gabi Kaindl's Austrian upbringing are still with her.

The Kanata mother of four and part-time German instructor made her "debut" at a ball in Vienna as a 17-year-old. That thrill will return tonight when she walks through the doors at the National Gallery for her first Viennese Winter Ball in Ottawa.

The chance for people to dress in all their finery and waltz the night away comes only once a year to our snowy capital, but the balls Mrs. Kaindl attended as a young woman were anything but few and far between.

During ball season in Vienna there are more than 300 balls in the city, some of them drawing as many as 5,000 people. Performing the polonaise is practically a rite of passage for many teens, who start taking ballroom dancing lessons at 15 or 16.

Mrs. Kaindl can recall the excitement of her first ball, a black tie event to which she wore a chiffon and taffeta dress with a full skirt. Her older sister, who studied fashion design, made it for her.

She had passed her dancing test and knew all the steps, and now it was her first time being allowed to stay up all night with her friends. North American balls usually last only until midnight, but Viennese balls go until 5 or 6 a.m.

As a debutante, Mrs. Kaindl performed quadrilles, waltzes and, of course, the polonaise, seven or eight times more that year at various other balls.

On a November day several years later, she met her husband in a small town outside Vienna. She was 24 and running

youth groups for the Catholic Church. He was a few years younger, and a great dancer. By ball season a month later, they were inseparable and attended balls together every weekend for the whole winter.

The frigid months between Christmas and Lent — called Carnival — are when almost all Viennese balls take place, Mrs. Kaindl says. It stems from a long tradition of preparing for the austerity of Lent, so it's no surprise that the revelry goes late, the champagne flows and the food is rich.

Balls were historically a way for aristocrats and nobility to introduce their sheltered daughters into society. The tradition, if not the intention behind it, lives on at Ottawa's Viennese Winter Ball.

Two of Mrs. Kaindl's sons are partnered with debutantes who will wear white ballgowns and together perform the first dance of the night. Though normally more interested in Metallica than Strauss, her sons are enjoying the experience. Her young daughters have heard all the stories and can't wait until they're old enough to go.

Mrs. Kaindl is proud her children are carrying on a long tradition. Born on a farm in Baden-Vienna, she can remember playing dress-up with her mother's ballgowns and high heels. In the post-war years, money for fabric was scarce, so her mother once attended a ball in a dress made out of curtains — visions of *The Sound of Music* and the Von Trapp children.

At school, Mrs. Kaindl is excited about planning a Carnival celebration for her young students. She plays accordion and will teach them some basic dances.

She has also planned a buffet with a mixture of Canadian and traditional Austrian foods, including *fischingskrappfen*, an indulgent jelly doughnut popular during Carnival.



Gabi Kaindl, mother of five now living in Ottawa, wears a traditional special-occasion Austrian dirndl-style dress. As a young woman, she attended balls in Vienna wearing similar dresses.