

THE VIENNESE WINTER BALL



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'Princes and princesses for a day'

Ninth annual ball brings colour and elegance to Ottawa winter

BY CARRIE KRISTAL-SCHRODER

From diplomats to debutantes, 350 of Ottawa's beautiful people put their best faces — and feet — forward at the National Gallery last night to dance the night away at the ninth annual Viennese Winter Ball, which has established itself as one of the city's premier events.

"This is an event that brings joy, diversity, elegance and colour to Ottawa — which is such an important thing to do in the winter," said Otto Ditz, Austria's ambassador and patron of the event.

"In Austria, the winter ball was always a way to help us overcome the difficult times and celebrate the good times. It's a time when we all get to be princes and princesses for a day."

Ottawa's winter ball is one of only five international balls that are officially sanctioned by the Austrian ambassador.

And among the guests getting the royal treatment were 30 young dancers between the ages of 15 to 18 who successfully auditioned to be this year's debutantes and cavaliers performing two traditional Austrian dances: the polonaise and ländler.

"This is a very culturally driven event, and the debutantes and cavaliers are one of the highlights of the evening. It's a real character-builder and team builder for these youth," said David Wallace, who has been event chairman for the last nine years. "We get more and more kids applying every year — 49 young women and 27 young men this year — and they train every weekend for about three months."



PHOTOS BY NICKI CORRIGALL, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

This year, among the gorgeous, white-gowned debutantes, was Charlotte Ditz, daughter of the ambassador. Ms. Ditz said it had been great fun to learn the traditional dances of her homeland for the first time at Fred Astaire Dance Studio, along with the other young people.

"This is really exciting. It has been hard work, but it's also been a lot of fun — and it's gotten me interested in ballroom dancing," said Ms. Ditz, who asked to be the one to dance with her father as the young people fanned out and invited guests to take a whirl on the dance floor after their performance.

For Renée Farrell, another of the debutantes, besides feeling like Cinderella, the night was special for another reason as well.

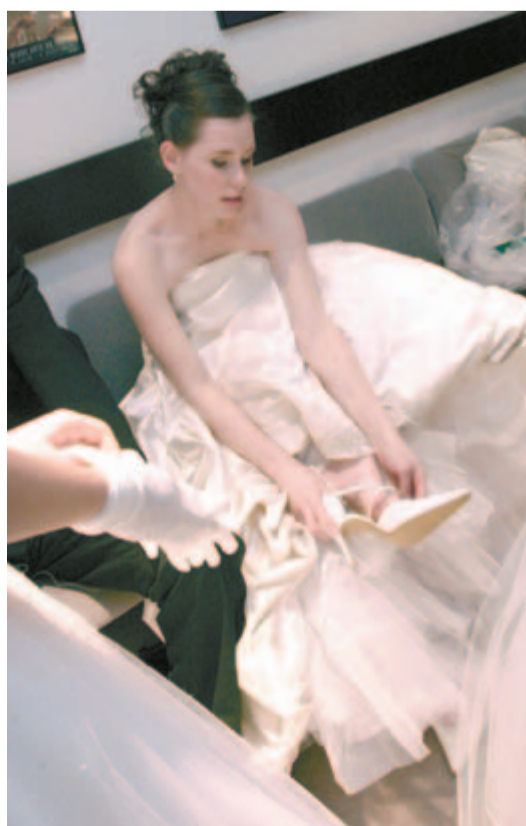
"At midnight, I'll turn 18, so this is a really special way to be introduced to adulthood," said Ms. Farrell, adding that the 30 young people had gotten close over the months of dance practice, resulting in a blossoming romance between one or two of the dance couples.

"The young people this year are particularly talented and, of course, exceptionally good-looking," jested their dance instructor, Melissa Krulick. "I really think this event has brought about a whole new appreciation for dancing."

And while tradition is a big part of the ball, the menu changes annually and this year's creation of Westin Ottawa Chef Philippe Wetzel was a big hit, said Anick Losier-Campbell, who was on the organizing committee.

She noted the main course of red deer loin with juniper berries and all the food was delicious. "And the presentation was amazing."

As with other years, Mr. Wallace said he expects the ball will allow the committee to contribute approximately \$50,000 split between the Champions for Children Foundation, (the fundraising arm of the Children's Aid Society) and the 13 Strings Junior Orchestra.



Renée Farrell, left, prepares to perform in the 9th Annual Viennese Ball at the National Art Gallery last night. Above, Caroline Fulop makes a last-minute adjustment to Andrew Kelly's bowtie, while Carolynn Lacasse, right, gives cavalier Simon Hart a quick shoulder rub before they hit the dance floor.