

WE ALL KNOW BALLROOM dancing works best with a good partnership and Dancing Classrooms is no exception! As regular readers of this magazine are aware, Minnesota nonprofit Heart of Dance, cofounded by Ember Reichgott Junge and Andrea Miranda, has brought the powerful Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) dance residency of Mad Hot Ballroom fame to Twin Cities fifth graders for the first time this year.

The response from the dance and educational communities has been overwhelmingly positive. (In case you missed the last issue, a teacher from one of the first semester Dancing Classrooms schools shared a story in this magazine about the wonderful experiences her students had with the program.) As a result, Heart of Dance has been able to double capacity from the first semester to the second. An increase from four schools to eight for a total of 28 classrooms and more than 600 students in our inaugural year! We are also on track for the 2016-17 school year to double capacity again, with a goal of 50+ classrooms.

Fall semester schools from this year have all renewed and next fall is filling up fast! We are hiring three new Teaching Artists (TA) to accommodate the growth. So if you are available during the school day, love kids, love dancing and have lots of energy, please contact Creative Director Andrea Miranda at andream@heartofdancemn.org. And don't miss this semester's Colors of the Rainbow Team Match (CORTM) on Sunday, May 1 at 3 p.m., held in conjunction with the Costa Rica Ballroom's studio showcase at the Double Tree Hilton Bloomington South, (formerly the Radisson Hotel) at Hwys 494 and 100. (See the notice in this issue.)



Photo from MichComp by Joel Torgeson

Dancing Classrooms Partners

BY ANDREA MIRENA

That is a perfect example of the wonderful partnerships we have enjoyed with the dance community which have led to our success. The major Twin Cities studios all have been very supportive. Cinema Ballroom has chosen Heart of Dance as its designated charity for 2016 and will match all funds raised at their charity events this year. Dancers Studio also held a fundraising event for us as well as hosting the first CORTM in December.

We were caught off guard by the audience turnout for that event and wound up with standing room only. We began this semester by searching for a larger venue for spring, with easily accessible parking, and that was affordable within a nonprofit budget, not an easy task. We were beginning to despair when another studio

partner saved the day! Eliecer and Rebecca Ramirez, owners of the Costa Rica Ballroom in Hopkins, had been judges at the fall semester CORTM in December at Dancers Studio and knew what we were up against. They offered us a block of several hours during their showcase event at the hotel where we would have virtually unlimited seating and parking.

The two said they weren't sure what to expect at that first CORTM and were pleasantly surprised. Rebecca liked that it "gave the children a valid goal to work toward. You could definitely see the amount of effort they put forth to get to that day. Most adult students take much longer to learn what those kids did!" In the twice weekly sessions over 10 weeks, the students learn waltz, tango, foxtrot, rumba, swing

and merengue, as well as Polka and a few line dances.

Elicer was impressed with how many kids were there. "And I noticed how seriously they took it. They were not messing around, they were really into it!" "More than anything, it really joined the community together," Rebecca added. "It got the adults wanting to dance too. So it was a great educational thing not only for the kids but also to teach their parents." They both said, "We want to make this event, on May 15 very special for them!"

In addition to judging last semester's event, Elicer was one of eleven professional dancers who volunteered to visit a school this semester. One of the lessons in this highly structured program calls for a local dance professional to visit the classroom and demonstrate with the TA the dances students are learning, so they can see what the steps ultimately look like with technique and style. The "pro buddy" also watches the students dance and gives feedback, as well as

talking about their own career and answering students' questions.

This visit makes a big impression on the students. They begin to understand the larger dance world and some might see dancing as their future. Elicer visited Partnership Academy, a Spanish dual-language school in Richfield with a high Latino population. Being from Costa Rica and speaking fluent Spanish allowed him to connect with the fifth graders there in a unique way.

The visit gave him "a better sense of how much work the TAs are doing. It's not like in a studio where everyone who's there is completely ready to learn." He realized at first many of the students saw the class as "a punishment, instead of a joyful thing" so he explained to them how lucky they were to have this opportunity. "You can see their struggle, what's happening in their homes, the poverty, what they're trying to overcome." But as Rebecca noted, "The fact that the kids start something from the beginning and follow it through to the end," even

if they don't like all parts of it, teaches them an important life lesson.

Elicer said the experience taught him a lot too. "You go in with a plan and then you have to adjust. You don't always get what you expect!" He was impressed with the program's structure and the visit gave him a better understanding of the Dancing Classrooms mission. Seeing the end result at the CORTM was one thing, but to see where the students started and what they had to work through to get there inspired him. "It made me want to work with the kids more. It was a good feeling!"

If you'd like to support Heart of Dance directly or connect us to schools or other donors, contact Development Director Ember Reichgott Junge at emberrj@heartofdancemn.org. And please support our studio partners by letting them know you appreciate what they're doing for the larger dance community! We hope you'll attend Costa Rica Ballroom's showcase and stay to be inspired by the Colors of the Rainbow Team Match! **E**