



# BUSTING A MOVE IN COLOGNE



Instructor Drew Anderson of Heart of Dance led the fifth-graders over the course of 10 weeks, teaching dances including the merengue, foxtrot, rumba, tango, swing, waltz and more in preparation for the presentation. (Cole White/NYA Times)

## Cologne Academy showcases dance class for family

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The fifth-graders at Cologne Academy had a chance to show their moves in a dance exhibition on Friday, April 27, in partnership with Minneapolis non-profit Heart of Dance.

In the hour-long presentation, which featured the students from the three fifth grade classes, students and dance instructor Drew Anderson showed off the

merengue, foxtrot, rumba, tango, swing, waltz and more to a crowd of parents and family members.

Before the show, Cologne Academy Executive Director Lynn Peterson addressed the audience.

“We’re excited and proud of our fifth graders for completing 10 weeks of ballroom dancing with Heart of Dance. They have grown immensely as dancers and as students and as fellow classmates.” Peterson said. “It’s amazing to see them not be

as allergic to others as they once started. And for them to have the skill that very few people in this audience have and just a great lifetime opportunity.”

Following her brief talk, she introduced Andrea Mirenda, the creative director and co-founder of Heart of Dance, who explained the background of the program which was founded four years ago.

“Our goal, our mission is to bring the



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mental, physical, emotional methods of partner dance to communities that otherwise might not experience them," Mirenda said.

She explained the program began 20 years ago in New York, and became so successful that a documentary, called Mad Hot Ballroom, was made about it. Following that, a model was made to replicate the program across the nation. In the four years since the program started in Minneapolis it has involved 4,100 fifth- and eighth-graders across the state, she added.

"The thing I want to emphasize is that it is not just a dance class. Yes, it's going to be adorable for you to see your fifth graders doing swing and waltz, but this is a social and emotional learning program," Mirenda said. "It's very high structured, and it uses partner dance as the vehicle to teach essential life skills."

Mirenda went on to describe the details of the program, stating that the focus is on respect, elegance and teamwork. In class, the students practice courtesy and escort position. Every student rotates partners in an effort to facilitate teamwork among them all.

"What you see today is not what you see on day one. They were all quite resistant as some of you parents probably heard at the beginning, but they come around and have a lot of fun," Mirenda said.

Her statement was echoed in the short essays

written by students that were read in between demonstrations. Many alluded to building confidence as well as getting over the fear of touching girls or boys, respectively. The program, Mirenda said, helps build gender respect and cultural respect.

With that note, she pointed to the back of the room at poster boards and other displays. The students not only learned the dance, but also dance backgrounds, their cultural significance and countries of origin.

Mirenda noted that the dance group intends to return yearly. To make that happen, the non-profit is seeking local business sponsors to help fund the program.

Following introductions, the dances began to the delight of the audience, with an animated Anderson engaging both students and crowd while the young dancers showed of what weeks of practice can do.



Cologne Academy fifth-graders showed off their dance moves to a crowd of parents and family. (Cole White/NYA Times)

