Dance Marathon Raises AIDS Funds, Awareness

BY ZOE GALLAND

The star-studded, endurance-demanding 28-hour event came to Roone Arledge Auditorium this weekend.

About three hours into the Columbia University Dance Marathon, hundreds of dancers and “moralers,” watched celebrities express their support for the Dance Marathon and the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation on the wide-screen in the Roone Arledge Auditorium. After Sylvester Stallone finished offering his words of encouragement, he received moderate applause, as did Andy Garcia who followed him. But when Kenny G. came on screen, he really lit the place up: the dancers erupted into enormous applause and shouting. Now they were inspired.

The second-ever CUDM took place this weekend, from 12 p.m. Saturday to 4 p.m. Sunday. At the end of the Marathon, $144,445.67 had been raised for the Glaser Foundation, which was founded in 1988 to study and treat children with HIV. The foundation uses all but a six percent overhead cost to
advance pediatric AIDS research and awareness. Last year, CUDM raised $103,747.00 for the Foundation.

The dancers were required to remain on their feet for 28 hours, and throughout the marathon they were surprisingly energetic. Amy Greenstein, CC '03, had been dancing for six hours when she was interviewed, but showed little sign of fatigue. “I feel fine,” she said. “If I don’t stand still too long, I’m okay.”

The marathon was a celebrity-studded affair. Eric Nies of MTV’s The Grind and The Real World and former Miss America Kate Shindle showed up at different points during the evening. Party of Five’s Scott Wolf, who was present at last year’s marathon, was unable to come due to a medical emergency. Other guests included a Michael Jackson impersonator, a drag queen, and the rapper Choobakka.

DJ Chip Duckett, as well as var-
arious deejays from the Roxy, spun
tunes ranging from to “Shake,
Senora” to “Lady Marmalade.”

Another celebrity who played a
prominent part in the Marathon
was Kim Webster, from NBC’s *The
West Wing*. Webster’s 12-year-old
brother, Ricky, is HIV positive, and
both were present for the early part
of the Marathon.

Ricky had been in Roone
Arledge for three hours when he
spoke about the Marathon. “I feel
good,” he said, “I like dancing.”
Like many 12-year-olds, his
answers were to the point. “It’s
cool,” he summed up.

As the brief interview conclud-
ed, Ricky suddenly said, “Oh, I
want to add something.” He
paused. “Never give up.”

Dance Marathon Public
Relations Manager Kate Thursby,
CC ’02, said this year’s Dance
Marathon differed somewhat from
last year’s, mainly because of two
things: the Sept. 11 terrorist
attacks, and the fact that last year
was the first Marathon.

“Things are running more
smoothly this year,” Thursby said.
But, “with [Sept. 11], it was difficult
to secure large donations,” which
are essential for Marathon funds.
“Around early September we sent
out contacts—but it was a bad time
to look for funding. And a lot of
celebrities were nervous about
coming to New York.”

Dance Marathon Chair Will
Hunter, CC ’02, stressed that
“things settled down, and we put in
a concerted effort [to raise funds].”
For Hunter, another difference between the two marathons is the participation from student groups on campus. “There was a lot of involvement from fraternities and sororities last year, but other student groups weren’t as involved as they are this year,” Hunter said. He added that there has been more administration involvement as well, and the dancers themselves represent the many schools and affiliations of Columbia University: Columbia College, Barnard, General Studies, the Business School, and Teachers College.

The Dance Marathon committee planned different themes for the marathon, and made sure there were plenty of activities and resources for the dancers.

“Moralers,” the students supporting the dancers, were present to provide snacks and drinks, as well as dance themselves. There were two kinds of “moralers.” Members of the Dance Marathon’s Morale Subcommittee were dressed in bright orange and worked in shifts, dancing and passing out drinks and energy bars. The other moralers were friends of the dancers, and they wore blue shirts.

Time passed, but the dancers
were relatively unaware of its passing because no watches were allowed in Roone Arledge. “We didn’t want the dancers to think, for example, ‘oh, it’s 8 p.m. ... I still have 22 hours left,’” said Thursby.

As the hour approached 7 p.m., hundreds of dancers and moralers practiced their moves and sang along to the music, but other activities were also taking place. A few dancers were tossing a football, some girls were throwing an enormous inflatable kickball around, and a game of four-square was taking place across the room. A few dancers looked tired, but there was a surprising amount of liveliness in the air.

“I feel fine,” dancer Aviva Walls, BC ’02, said. “Being here is physically meaningful, just knowing what you’re dancing for.”

Leticia Gonzalez, a first-year student at Teachers College, praised the marathon coordinators. “It’s gone by really fast,” she said, “and they’ve had a lot of things going on.”

Twelve hours later, however, the vibe in Roone Arledge was a bit different. The dancers looked very worn down, but surprisingly, most were still dancing and participating in activities. Twenty hours of dancing had not stopped them.

Shelly Mittal, CC ‘03, commented on the organization. “From around 3:00 to 8:00 [a.m.],” she said, “there were some contests and other activities, but things kind of stopped. We wanted upbeat music.” But her complaints ended there. “It’s been great,” she said.
'Being here is meaningful, just knowing what you're dancing for.'

—Letitia Gonzalez, TC first-year student

Johanna Quinn and Forrest Lensing, both CC '03, groove in Saturday and Sunday's Dance Marathon.