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## Matlin Shows World What Local Deaf Community Already Knows

By Claudia Vargas, *Democrat and Chronicle* - April 8, 2008

Though most of the hearing world has been amazed by actress Marlee Matlin's performance on the TV reality show *Dancing with the Stars*, music and dancing is something that has long been a part of the deaf world.

Those who are hearing impaired say they can do anything someone who has regular hearing can do, except hear.

Sarah Clark, 28, a student at Rochester Institute of Technology, has been dancing since she was 8 years old and says that the deaf can be as good as anyone else when it comes to the performing arts, citing composer Ludwig van Beethoven as an example.

Clark, who has been part of RIT's National Technical Institute for the Deaf Dance Company for five years, has been closely following Matlin's performance on *Dancing with the Stars* and says she hopes the show can bring awareness to the hearing community and be a positive influence to the deaf community.

"It gives (the deaf) something to realize - that they are just as good as anyone else out there," she said.

Matlin, who is hearing impaired, is one of a dozen celebrities who was chosen to be on the sixth season of the ABC series. The show consists of 12 celebrities - six men and six women - who are matched up with professional ballroom dancers and compete to stay on the show, as one couple is eliminated each week.

So far, Oscar-winner Matlin and her partner Fabian Sanchez have survived three elimination rounds. The couple will try to survive the fourth-round cutdown tonight.

"I find it very interesting that she follows him for the tempo," Clark said about the way



NTID students Quinn Cruise and Jeret Hackbarth rehearse for a production of "Bell in Hell." By Democrat and Chronicle photographer Carlos Ortiz. [See full-size photo](#)

Matlin and Sanchez dance with each other in the competition. "Each dancer has his own rhythm."

Medical research has shown that dancing is particularly rhythm-based, therefore hearing is not needed to be a good dancer.

"Pitch perception and timbre perception do not need to be accurate in order for one to dance well, though it may help somewhat," said Dr. Charles J. Limb, an assistant professor at Johns Hopkins Hospital department of otolaryngology and a faculty member at Johns Hopkins University's Peabody Conservatory of Music, which has held seminars on music and deafness.

He added that rhythm perception appears to be "quite robust" in individuals with hearing loss.

"This is a very favorable feature of dancing that makes it something that deaf individuals should consider a definite possibility," Limb said.

The NTID Dance Company, established in 1984, is open to the entire RIT community whether the person is deaf or can hear. It consists of 20 to 25 dancers who practice together about six days per week in the weeks leading up to a show, Clark said. The last show was in February.

"We turn up the volume to feel vibration on the floor or sometimes our instructor gives us counts," she said about the way they practice. "We all watch out for each other."

At a recent rehearsal for an NTID Performing Arts Program play *Bell in Hell*, several students were dancing a waltz. The students wanted to incorporate dancing as part of the play because most of them enjoy it.

"I grew up dancing and I'm addicted to dancing," said student Kevin Reyes, 21, of Guam. "If you can't hear music, that's OK."

Reyes said he knows of younger deaf children who have been avidly watching *Dancing with the Stars* and have designated Matlin as their new role model.

"They said 'I want to become a professional dancer,'" Reyes said. "I think it's very cool to see that."

However, for some people, such as RIT/NTID student Nicole Hood, Matlin has been a role model because of her role in *Children of a Lesser God* in 1986, for which she won an Academy Award for best actress.

Hood, 20, of New Hampshire, said she had never cared for *Dancing with the Stars*, but she became addicted to the show when she found out Matlin would be competing.

"She's not bad. I'm rather impressed," Hood, who has been dancing since age 3, said about

Matlin's dance moves. Hood added that she hoped Matlin would win the competition.

"She has a great personality, great stage presence ... and a great partner."

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