

Abbott Northwestern Hospital Foundation Gala: Dance with the Stars

VENUE: Minneapolis Hilton

ATTENDEES: 600 philanthropists, doctors, community leaders, former patients, and volunteers

FLORAL: Floral Logic

GRAPHIC DESIGN: Sheba Concept & Design

TECHNICAL PRODUCTION: EventPro

RENTALS: Linen Effects

ENTERTAINMENT: Brasamba, Julia Tehven and Mariusz Olszewski, Will King, Casablanca Orchestra with Patty Peterson, and Robert Everest.

EVENT PLANNERS: Char Mason and Cookie Coleman, Coleman Mason Events

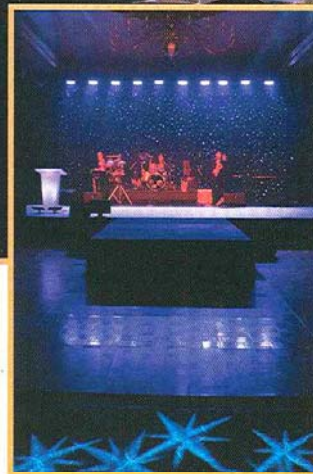
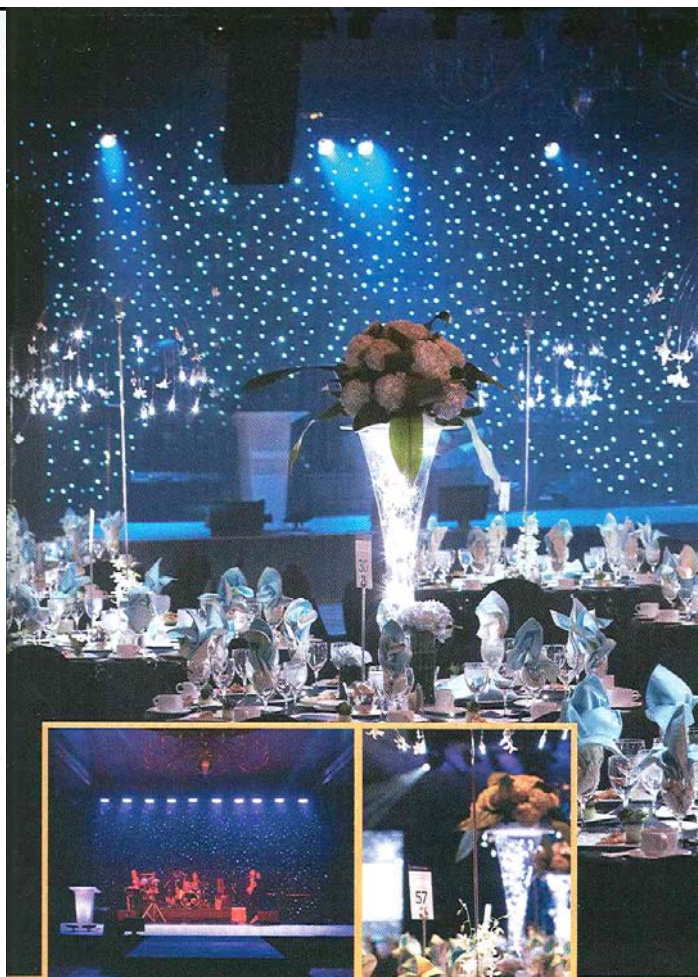


The experience of "Dance with the Stars: A Spirited Night" began with the arrival of the spangled black and silver invitation, promising "an evening of glitter . . . an evening of inspiration," the invitation urged guests to bring empty pockets in their black-tie attire: all fundraising had been completed before the event and the guests were encouraged to just come and have a good time. Char Mason notes that the dancing theme was chosen to highlight the joy of healthy bodies and a theme of sensual delights; "glittery stars of light with layers of entertainment for the eyes and ears."

At the cocktail reception in the Hilton symphony ballroom, guests noshed on Chef Julian Grainger's ahi tuna avocado bites on endive and roasted red pepper on cucumber and artichoke gratin croustade while enjoying Brazilian music and dance with Brasamba and choreographed

dances by Julia Tehven and Latin dance champion Mariusz Olszewski. In an event that features a cocktail reception and a ballroom dinner, crowd control can be difficult. People want to hang out and mingle over cocktails, not sit down and hear a presentation, and can be slow about getting from one phase of the evening to the next. Coleman and Mason very cannily put the bar on wheels, and moved it to the space where they wanted the guests to be. More playfully, they used a conga line to draw guests from the reception in the lobby to the dinner and program in the ballroom. Once the guests got to their destination, they exclaimed at the glittering décor, including programs with flashing LED lights set at their places.

During dinner, the program featured Chris Morrison as emcee with speeches by Richard Meyer, president of Abbott Northwestern Hospital



The gala's star theme was reflected everywhere in the decor, which included LED lighting, glowing centerpieces, star-shaped food and decorations, and even lit programs.

Foundation and Jeffrey Peterson, president of Abbott Northwestern Hospital. Chef Grainger's feast began with a course of grilled tiger shrimp with roasted beet and cucumber salad and sesame ginger roasted pineapple salsa. Diners had a choice of entrees: beef tournedos with hedge mushrooms in a red wine sauce, and Dauphinoise potatoes or a vegetarian tian with spinach, roasted peppers, and portabella. Desserts of apple crisp on caramel and crème Anglaise-painted plates were a feast for the eyes and the palate while Will King played music during the program. After dinner, guests danced to the

music of Casablanca Orchestra with Patty Peterson.

"These people go to a lot of galas, sometimes several times a week, so the challenge is to keep it fresh" Mason says. She and Cookie Coleman closely managed timing and production values—seemingly spontaneous effects are actually the result of rigorous planning and choreography. Guests waiting for the valets were offered star-shaped cookies while Robert Everest strolled in the lobby with his guitar. **tcb**

Lucy Vilankulu is a freelance writer living in Minneapolis.