

KIDS 'HOT' TO FOX TROT

By **JAMI BERNARD**
DAILY NEWS MOVIE CRITIC

At last, the cure for depression! This winning documentary about fifth-graders who learn ballroom dancing is one of those movies that make the world a brighter place.

From Washington Heights to Bensonhurst, 68 public schools teach kids how to swing, fox trot, tango and more. With each new dance, they learn about the culture that spawned it — and as they learn the music, steps and appropriate dance-floor attitude, they receive an education so full of possibilities it makes the heart sing.

Director Marilyn Agrelo followed students from a few of these schools right up through a citywide competition where some of them are truly good and others make up for a lack of virtuosity with passion and a newfound sense of self.

The beauty of this inspiring documentary is how the

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MAD HOT BALLROOM

A documentary by Marilyn Agrelo (1:45). PG:

Thematic elements.

At Landmark Sunshine, City Cinemas.



ROCKIN' THE 'BALLROOM': Teamwork is the key to victory for "Mad Hot" dancers.

discipline and fun of dancing transforms the kids. A teacher breaks into proud tears while being interviewed: "I see them turning into these ladies and gentlemen!"

Through dancing and competing, the children get comfortable with their bodies and with the roller coaster of triumph, disappointment and sportsmanship. The short boy learns to smile as if he means it when he's

paired with a girl who towers above him thanks to one of those unfair juvenile growth spurts.

The structured contact of ballroom dancing, coupled with its social formalities (there are lessons in making eye contact and bowing graciously to partners), also fortifies the kids for the next stage of their lives, that dance of a different kind — puppy love.