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VARSITY ARTS

The Orange County Register

ARTIST OF THE WEEK

CRISTINA GARCIA

High school senior Cristina Garcia of Middle College High School in Santa Ana has been named valedictorian of her class and received a full scholarship to UCLA to study nursing. Garcia attributes her success to the opportunities available through The Wooden Floor, where she started dancing at age 9, including college tours and fairs, career nights and free SAT prep courses.

CRISTINA GARCIA

Middle College High School

Grade: 12
Hometown: Santa Ana

How did you get involved in dance? I got involved in dance ever since I was 7 years old. I started off with folkloric dance, and once I found out about The Wooden Floor, I quickly auditioned and began dancing there when I was 9.

What is your favorite type of dance to perform? Do you have a particular role you'd like to one day dance and/or choreographer that you'd like to work with? Modern dance has always been my favorite because as my dance teacher says, "Ballet is defying gravity, but modern is giving in to gravity." I don't need to worry about having a perfect posture, but rather expressing my inner feelings to create a work of art. I was awe-inspired by watching one of Alvin Ailey's popular (pieces), "Revelations," and it would be a great to one day dance with the company.

Who have been your influences? Did you have a mentor in your development as a dancer? If so, how did they help you? Of course, my devoted dance teachers, Grete

THE WOODEN FLOOR

The Wooden Floor uses intensive dance education to help guide low-income students into a successful adulthood. Students are accepted into the program during yearly auditions and may begin attending classes at The Wooden Floor at age 9. They attend dance classes and receive academic and family support services until they graduate from high school. Most students attend the program tuition-free.

Since 2005, every senior in the program has graduated from high school on time and been accepted into a post-secondary education program.

"Through dance, our students develop confidence and learn how to innovate, communicate and collaborate – necessary 21st-century skills for school, work and life," says Dawn S. Reese, executive director and co-CEO of The Wooden Floor. "The long-term investment we are making in these young people ... is empowering them to pursue higher education at a rate three times that of their peers."

Gryzwana, Jenn Bassage Bonfil and Rebecca Ramos-O'Reilly, have impacted my life in dancing. Not only do they correct my technique, but they teach me to have self-confidence and not be afraid to fail. The great thing about them is that they always want me to become a better dancer and they motivate me to try new things by going farther than I can imagine. Sometimes, they believe in me more than I believe in myself, which is what I love about them.

What inspires you? I get to grow as a person and obtain a sense of passion, dedication and self-confidence in my life because of dance. Dance inspires me to persevere and to not let fear hold me back from new opportunities.

Other than dance, are you involved in any other activities? It was just confirmed that I am the valedictorian of the class of 2016 at my school. In addition, I serve as vice president of the Stand Up to Cancer club at my school, which I have been a part of for three years. When I was in my junior year, I led the Teens for Jeans campaign, in which the entire school contributed 244 pairs of new or gently used jeans for homeless youth and teens. I have also been on the Student Leadership Council at The Wooden Floor and have volunteered for CHOC in the past.

What do you get out of dancing? I get most of the things I need to know about being successful in life. I get the chance to build relationships, and even more importantly, the chance

to discover who I really am. I always doubted myself and thought I wasn't good enough. Fortunately, dancing was my oasis and it was a place to find myself and lose parts of myself at the same time.

How do the arts figure into your long-term goals? The arts will play a pivotal role in college because even though I will be studying nursing, I am willing to dedicate time to dancing. It is what makes me feel alive, and I need it to become the best I can by believing in myself and working hard. I will never let go of what makes me feel well-balanced.

What is the best advice you have received? Sometimes we are our own worst enemies. We have to love ourselves, so that we can share and create love for others.



Artist of the Week Cristina Garcia says she will continue with dance in college: "It is what makes me feel alive."

LEONARD ORTIZ, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER