

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER SUNDAY

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VARSITY ARTS

The Orange County Register

ARTIST OF THE WEEK

LESLIE MATEO

Leslie Mateo was invited to speak on behalf of her class at a breakfast hosted by The Wooden Floor to honor its recent graduates. A senior at Samueli Academy, Mateo, holds a 4.0 grade point average and will be the first person in her family to attend college. She has been accepted into USC to study mathematics and Chinese.

LESLIE MATEO

Samueli Academy

Grade: 12
Hometown: Santa Ana

Tell us about your involvement with The Wooden Floor.

I have been dancing at The Wooden Floor for nine years as well as participating in the annual concert for seven years. I have also had the opportunity to take an SAT course through the school, which greatly helped me improve my SAT score, and I had assistance with college preparation.

How did you get started in dance?

I got started in dance when I was 4 and at Salgado Center taking ballet classes. When I was 8, I auditioned for The Wooden Floor, and I would say it is a place that became my second home. It's a place that is always welcoming and provides someone always available to talk to about anything and give advice.

What is your favorite dance/piece of choreography?

My favorite type of dance is modern dance. It is a way to break away from tradition and really express my individual self through the movement. It also allows me to express my emotions, whether they be sad, angry or happy.

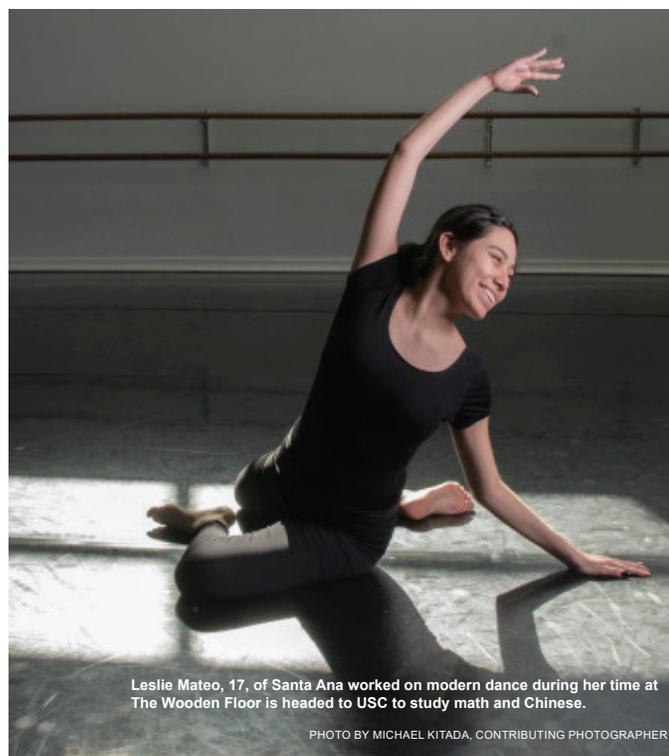
The Wooden Floor offers long-term exploratory dance education, as well as academic assistance, to students in low-income communities. Says Mateo of her time at The Wooden Floor: "Now I have developed a voice, not only in dance but as well in school. I'm not afraid to speak up if I don't understand something or when I need help. It's something that I am proud of myself, that now I can finally become and express who I am."

Who have been your influences? Did you have a mentor in your development as an artist/performer? If so, how did they help you?

The faculty at The Wooden Floor have been my mentors, especially Rebeca Ramos-O'Reilly and Jennifer Bassage Bonfil. They've always seen great potential in me. It helped build my confidence and made it so that I'm never afraid to be myself. They both have also been there to listen to me and provide me with guidance.

What inspires you?

My two siblings also inspire me and push me into becoming a better person, because I really wish to make them feel proud of me.



Leslie Mateo, 17, of Santa Ana worked on modern dance during her time at The Wooden Floor is headed to USC to study math and Chinese.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL KITADA, CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

The next challenge I want to take on is ... pursuing a degree in mathematics as well as challenging myself by pursuing a minor in Chinese.

Other than dance, are you involved in any other activities? If yes, what are they?

I recently have been selected to be an alumni ambassador at my high school for the many years to come after graduating high school in two months. The alumni ambassadors are a group of students who each have an individual voice and interest to help mentor other students and plan events.

How do the arts figure in to your long-term goals?

The arts will always remain a part of me. Although I may not be pursuing a major

in it, I do wish to continue dancing at other dance studios. Dance ultimately has become a part of me that I can't let go of.

What is the best advice you have received?

The best advice I ever received is that if we fall, we just brush it off and keep moving. Mistakes are going to happen, both in dance and in real life, but it's a matter of if we're willing to push ourselves past that, and learn from it and keep moving forward.

I hope my legacy as an artist will be ... to inspire those around me so that they will never doubt themselves or be intimidated by those around them, because we all have the capability and dedication to be great and have strength in anything and be unique.