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HS Insider

High school journalists, covering campus life

OCSA's YoungArts Creative Writing Winners

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Jade Matias-Bell performing poetry (Photo by Katherine Bollens)

For a school like Orange County School of the Arts, YoungArts is a program that students aim to make their niche. With ten disciplines that stretch across the literary, visual and performing arts, YoungArts nationally recognizes emerging artists ages 15-18. The National YoungArts Foundation receives over 11,000 applicants every year, and approximately 800 of those high-performing students are the chosen recipients of cash scholarships and workshops with renowned masters in the arts. That is about a seven percent acceptance rate, making the competition to win YoungArts even tougher than most colleges. This year, ten OCSA students were awarded as merit winners, honorable mentions, and finalists. Among them were four Creative Writing students—two chosen for poetry and two chosen for screenwriting.

The four attended a one-week Regional Program in Los Angeles. Professional writers came in on a daily basis and conducted writing exercises with students. For junior Kadija Moulton, YoungArts pushed her boundaries in terms of writing.

“I’d definitely say that I can push my boundaries as far as writing is concerned—not just limit myself to screenwriting but to reach out in the prose spectrum of fiction as well and find some ground there,” said Moulton, who was a Merit Winner.



Kadija Moulton reading her screenplay (Photo by Katherine Bollens)

The workshops varied from poetry, to novel writing, to sessions that involved physical movements and trust exercises. One particular workshop with Joan Scheckel, a writer, director, and actor, changed senior Isabella Shary’s perspective on screenwriting.

“After the two hours we had with her, after the acting exercises we did and connecting with the people around us, I felt like a changed person,” Merit winner Shary said. “It definitely affects how I write thinking with the actors in mind and how I want my characters to connect.”



Isabella Shary and Kadija Moulton performing Shary’s screenplay (Courtesy of YoungArts)

YoungArts participants had the opportunity to read, watch, and listen to other students' work. According to junior Blue Fay, who was awarded an Honorable Mention for poetry, everybody came from different backgrounds and had different visions for their writing. One girl from Palestine in particular inspired Fay with her perspective and voice in writing.

“She was a non-fiction writer,” Fay said. “She wrote about her experiences there and what’s it like to live in the middle of that conflict. She’s amazing. She had a really profound impact on me because I’d really like to be able to write more about my community and issues that are important to me. As a writer I have a hard time with that because my poetry is far more magical realism. But getting to interact with writers like that—who at such a young age already have such a grasp—and seeing that somebody my age could do that was almost as powerful as being able to talk to a famous writer.”



Blue Fay performing his poetry (Photo by Katherine Bollens)

At the end of the week in Los Angeles, the writers performed their pieces as the jazz musicians translated their words to music. It was a different experience for the writers, as they had never quite incorporated music into their written pieces. The writers also saw all the other disciplines perform. Fay’s favorite performances were the dancers, whom he described as “other-worldly.”

“Physically what the dancers can do is almost unfathomable because it’s just so artistic,” Fay said. “You’re literally bringing yourself to the stage. It’s not something you’ve written or a song that someone else wrote, it’s just your body, and the fact that you can make art out of that is amazing.”

Jade Matias-Bell, a senior in Creative Writing, was one of the 22 writing finalists chosen from the pool of applicants to be flown to Miami, Florida for a weeklong session in addition to the workshop in Los Angeles. She spoke about how both experiences changed her as a writer.

“Miami made me think a lot more about how my own life or experiences play into my work,” Matias-Bell said. “That sparked a lot of things I’m still thinking about in terms of what is my ethos as an artist. With LA it drove home how powerful writing can be because I saw a lot of emotionally powerful writing and art. When you’re an artist and you practice your craft a lot, you almost take it for granted because it’s always in your head and it’s always around you. Sometimes you forget that what you’re doing is really important and has a huge impact on people.”



Jade Matias-Bell and Blue Fay performing their poetry (Courtesy of YoungArts)

OCSA’s 2014-2015 YoungArts Winners are:

- Katie Ahmann (Classical Voice ‘15)
- Jade Matias-Bell (Creative Writing ‘15)
- Alyssa Allen (Commercial Dance ‘15)
- Isabel Bellino (Classical Voice ‘15)
- Isabella Shary (Creative Writing ‘15)
- Madeline Milligan (Acting ‘15)
- Blue Fay (Creative Writing ‘16)
- Kadija Moulton (Creative Writing ‘16)
- Alexis Rosenstrauch (Commercial Dance ‘16)
- Sydney Dardis (Classical Voice ‘17)

<http://orangecountyschoolofarts.latimes.com/post/112942531067/ocsas-youngarts-creative-writing-winners>