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THE ARTS

First comes talent, now inspiration

Artistically minded students from across the country are gathered in Miami this week for a program that will help them follow their creative dreams.

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BY JORDAN LEVIN
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The 143 teenage artists gathered in Miami for Young-Arts Week are an impressive crew, with prodigies and beautifully trained talents.

But among the most startling is 17-year-old Nicholas Garza, from Harlingen, Texas. His rendition of *Il mio tesoro*, an aria from Mozart's opera *Don Giovanni* that Garza learned with the

help of YouTube and his public high school's choir director, got him selected as a Young-Arts finalist from 6,000 applicants from around the country. On Monday afternoon, Garza's soaring, expressive tenor left a roomful of other finalists in a workshop at the Marriott Miami Airport gaping.

"I'm one of those people who's never been afraid to just start singing," Garza said. "But where I live, there's this negativity that kids from the Rio Grande Valley can't succeed, that it's not something that happens to us, but to the ones from New York and L.A. and Chicago. I always felt I could do more and I could be someone. Now I believe I can."

Garza and the other YoungArts finalists -- 17- and 18-year-old music, theater, dance, film, writing, photography and visual artists -- can win cash awards of up to \$10,000, and scholarships to some of the country's most prestigious conservatories and colleges.

Twenty will go on to become Presidential Scholars in the Arts, honored at the White House.

All are in Miami for a week of workshops, performances, encouragement, camaraderie and inspiration that has been helping young people like them pursue their dreams since 1981.

"Within hours, the stimulation kicks in because they're speaking the same language," said Christina DePaul, president of Miami-based National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts, which runs YoungArts and was founded by Miami philanthropists Lin and Ted Arison. "For some of them, there's the realization for the first time that you are the best of the best."


For aspiring filmmaker Sheema Golbaba, an 18-year-old high school senior from the outskirts of Tulsa, Okla., Young-Arts has been the first recognition of her talent.

The daughter of Iranian immigrants, Golbaba applied with a film on the 1921 race riot in Tulsa, one of the worst in U.S. history, which she researched and made on her own.

The Miami Herald


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"In Tulsa they value athletics and football and material things," Golbaba said.

Artists who have come through YoungArts include actors Vanessa Williams and Adrian Grenier, singer Josh Groban and, from Miami, playwright Tarell Alvin McCraney and actor Raul Esparza.

Last year Opa-locka hip-hop dancer and YoungArts finalist Ernest Baker II became the first Presidential Scholar in hip-hop.

But DePaul says the program doesn't put emphasis on the possibility of stardom, but on teaching young artists to focus on their art and succeed on their own terms.

"The point is making your own choices about what you want to be," DePaul said. "You have to have ambition, drive, and a tough skin. You will get rejected, and you have to learn to handle that. It's not about money, but about the passion of creating."

YoungArts teachers are often famously accomplished. This week they include actress Liv Ullman, conductor Michael Tilson Thomas and dancer/choreographer Desmond Richardson.

The teachers go beyond teaching technique to push the students to create and think in new ways.

The interdisciplinary workshops are a new effort, aimed at preparing these kids for a world in which artists increasingly work in multiple media.

Marc Bamuthi Joseph, a celebrated theater artist, has his students, shy ballet dancers and awkward poets, flamboyant actors and mystified classical musicians, a boy who "loves to draw" from Johns Creek, Ga., and a potter from Dallas, racing through a dance sequence, writing poems and stories, creating quickly and without inhibitions.

Joseph's demands have David Harrison, an 18-year-old filmmaking student at Miami's Design and Architecture Senior High (15 finalists are from South Florida, including seven from DASH), enthused.

"He gives us a lot of respect and treats us like we're artists," Harrison said.

Next door, director Heidi Marshall, who is preparing her group for a performance at a Young-Arts fundraising gala on Saturday, says the finalists deserve respect.

"Their commitment and discipline is extremely impressive," said Marshall, whose credits include Baz Luhrmann's Broadway version of *La Boheme*.

"I can give them an assignment and they'll go above and beyond."

The students help each other rise, Marshall said.

"They get validated and their bar gets raised because they see how talented and how committed their peers are."

Said Kiera Daley, an Irish step dancer from Miami Shores:

"This is amazing. To be able to do all these art forms is so great."



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