

entertainment > on stage

Creativity is boundless in teen talent showcase

> BY LUANNE J. HUNT

When director Steve Cisneros decided to bring 14 Southland teenagers together for an unusual type of theatrical workshop last month, he admits he was a bit nervous.

Cisneros, who founded the La Mirada-based Phantom Projects Educational Theater Group in 1997, said he wanted to provide an environment for young adults to create an unscripted show with no creative limits.

In the three-week workshop, the aspiring performers were encouraged to self-produce and direct a groundbreaking production utilizing their talents in acting, dance, spoken word, filmmaking, comedy and storytelling.

Until rehearsals began in mid-July, the teens had never met. And although they had been handpicked by Cisneros through online and telephone auditions, he said he wasn't sure if they would have any creative chemistry. To Cisneros' surprise, and relief, this diverse mix of artists blended better than he ever imagined.

"With so many people working together who didn't even know one another, the fear was that their collective talents wouldn't blend well," said Cisneros, who will present "Young Artists Workshop" at 7 p.m. Saturday at the La Mirada Theater for the Performing Arts.

"I addressed those concerns with everyone from the beginning and we all agreed that if something wasn't working, we'd just move on and try something else. That's just part of the creative process," he said.

"Overall, things have come together beautifully and I am so inspired by what these young performers have achieved. I think audiences are going to experience something that is both innovative and meaningful."

Cisneros' "Young Artists Workshop" was launched in conjunction with Phantom Projects' 10th anniversary. Since 1997, the organization has brought fully staged theatrical productions to the La Mirada Theater, as well as to middle schools and high schools in Los Angeles and Orange counties. The shows address issues pertinent to young adults, such as pregnancy, prejudice, self-image, eating disorders and substance abuse.

Cisneros, a La Mirada native, hoped the performers in "Young Artists Workshop" would also find a way to deliver a powerful message to their peers.

"There are so many wonderful pieces in this production that will speak to teens on many levels," said Cisneros. "A lot of them deal with things such as teen promiscuity and HIV. It's very deep and the last thing we wanted to do was be another talent show."

"The goal is to inspire other kids and make them see these performers are real people up there on stage who have something important to say."

June M. Kaewsih, a 20-year-old Cerritos resident who will perform in the production, said she believes this type of theater is the best way to speak out. The Cal State Long Beach student is scheduled to sing and play piano on an original composition about freeing one's mind and overcoming fear.

"I didn't want to sing about the usual



SCOTT SMELTZER/LA.COM

Choreographer and dancer Ebone' Saina, 16, of Long Beach rehearses "Contradictions," one of three pieces she'll perform in Saturday.

theater preview >

YOUNG ARTISTS WORKSHOP

> **Where:** La Mirada Theater for the Performing Arts, 14900 La Mirada Blvd., La Mirada

> **When:** 7 p.m., Saturday

> **Cost:** \$5-\$15

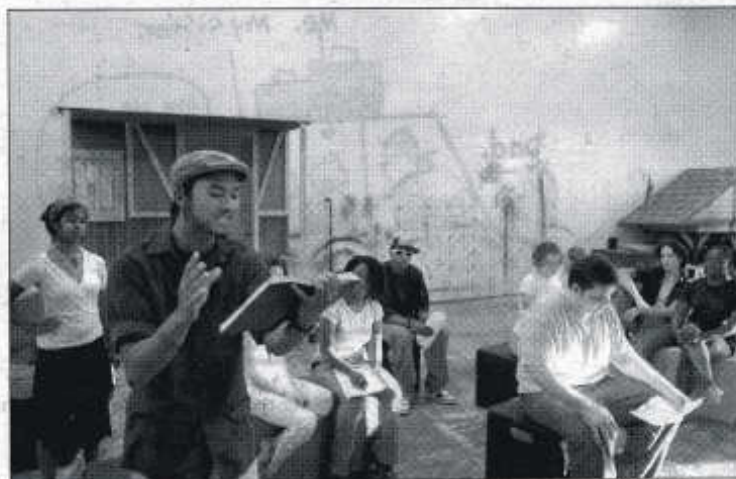
> **Information:** (714) 690-2900 or www.phantomprojects.com

teenage heartbreak. We're about so much more than the teen drama that's portrayed in the media. I wanted to do something that people don't talk about much. To me, this is an opportunity to inspire the masses," she said.

Like Kaewsih, dancer and choreographer Ebone' Saina also is confident the production has the potential to bring about positive change. The Long Beach resident said she is determined to enlighten youth about the importance of coming together in order to make the world a better place. In Saturday's show, she will dance in three pieces. She said one is a metaphor for unity.

"The chance to get my message out there is what drew me here," said Saina, 16. "I'm very concerned about this and I hope parents will get involved, too. Just because people are different doesn't mean they can't get together."

Other artists in the program include Pamela Bishop, 17, La Mirada; Mallory



Scott Smeltzer/LA.COM

John Guevarra, 19, of Carson will perform an original spoken-word piece about realizing one's potential as part of "Young Artists Workshop" Saturday.

Fehrensen, 19, Pomona; AVI, 20, West Covina; Caitlin Joyce, 17, Anaheim Hills; Dashawn King, 19, La Puente; Vivian Martinez, 21, Torrance; Adam Mesa, 17, West Covina; Johanna Middleton, 17, Los Angeles; Matt True, 17, Yorba Linda; Ryan Wade, 15, Anaheim; Jon Wayne, 17, La Habra; and John Guevarra, 19, Carson.

Guevarra, a spoken-word artist and musician, said this experience has given

him a clearer vision of his life's purpose.

"I think when you can offer a talent and have people accept and love it, it's the most beautiful thing," said Guevarra, who will perform an original spoken-word piece about realizing one's potential. "I really hope we will make a great impact on this community with what we're doing and they remember us forever."

Luanne J. Hunt is a Hesperia freelance writer.