



Staten Island

# Sunday Advance

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STATEN ISLAND SUNDAY ADVANCE

# ARTS & IDEAS

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## INSIDE

- MOVIES **E 3**
- WEEK IN ADVANCE **E 3**
- BOOKS **E 4**
- THE WAY IT WAS **E 5**
- WORD SEARCH **E 5**
- MEMORIES **E 6**

## Big decisions at age 17 for student dancer

Fresh from a stint at youngARTS Week, Casia Vengoechea is looking toward her future

By **MICHAEL J. FRESSOLA**  
STATEN ISLAND ADVANCE

Seventeen-year-old LaGuardia High School of Performing Arts senior Casia Vengoechea began to suspect she was obsessed with dancing when she realized how happy it made her.

Hard work at the barre was like "floating through a daydream of ecstasy."

Last month, the New Brighton resident spent six days ("youngARTS Week") in Miami, taking master classes and workshops in a highly selective (she was one of 142 participants culled from 8,000 applicants) program sponsored by the National Foundation for the Advancement of the Arts.

She finished the week at Level One, an awards category that carries a \$3,000 scholarship. She's in glamorous company as an NFAA alumna. Actors Raul Esparza and Vanessa Williams, American Ballet Theater director Rachell Moore and writer Allegra Goodman are all past awardees.



VENGOECHEA

With so much positive reinforcement, Ms. Vengoechea expects to be spending a lot of time in pointe shoes although she isn't clear on the context.

College is in the picture, naturally. She's auditioning for conservatories — Juilliard and New York University's Tisch School. She's also as applying to Vassar, Columbia and Harvard.

If she heads into a conservatory, "It'll improve my technique and I'll probably go to work in a dance company," Ms. Vengoechea said. She's interested in modern ballet and is particularly attracted to Complexions, the New York-based company founded by Desmond Richardson, and Alonzo King's Lines Ballet, based in San Francisco.

Still, she's developed alternative plans. However glamorous, professional dancing is a notoriously perilous and short-lived occupation.

The average retirement age of professional dancers is 29. At the tender age of 17, Ms. Vengoechea has already survived two types of crippling tendonitis and a bout of chipped foot bones.

In lieu of a dance degree, she'd head into "comparative lit or psychology or languages." Even then, she can't imagine not dancing.

"I definitely want to dance," she said during a rehearsal for a dance showcase at LaGuardia. "It has to be a part of my life, even if it is just classes."

She does not come from a dance household. "No one in my family dances," she said. Her mom is a bilingual editor. Her dad is an architect.

It was her dad who noticed her dancing around the house five or six years ago and suggested classes. Days later, she was enrolled at the Staten Island Ballet.

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