

VARSIITY ARTS

Artist of the Year for dance: Isabelle Erlanson



Isabelle Erlanson of Crean Lutheran High School is the 2018 Artist of the Year in the discipline of dance. (Photo by Leonard Ortiz/Orange County Register/SCNG)

By **PAUL HODGINS** | phodgins@scng.com | Orange County Register
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An exceptionally strong group of finalists this year made the judges' work difficult, but after some discussion they achieved consensus. Isabelle Erlanson, 18, of San Clemente, a senior at Crean Lutheran High School in Irvine, entered in the specialty of commercial dance, but clearly her training includes some classical ballet.

What made Erlanson stand out for the panel was the compassion and intelligence behind her choreography and her dancing. "I can't dance for nothing; I have to dance for something, whether I find the reason myself or it's presented to me," she told the panel.

Erlanson's choreographic style is fiery, expressive and fluid yet full of unexpected interruptions and quick changes of direction, a style reminiscent of Twyla Tharp.

And the themes she chooses are weighty. The most moving work concerned women who are abused, and their tortuous path to healing and forgiveness. Erlanson's choreography isn't overt in its thematic depictions, but she is adept at bringing out difficult themes subtly, giving the audience the opportunity to interpret for itself.

Erlanson said the work was created for a benefit concert. "When my teacher announced it was for a charity called Casa Teresa, a shelter for abused women, I knew I had to tell a story that represented them. Listening to 'Praying' by Kesha, I knew my purpose was to communicate the hardships women in abusive relationships go through." Erlanson thinks her choreography demonstrates "how raw a dancer can be when put onto the stage for a purpose other than flaunting their own talents."



Isabelle Erlanson of Crean Lutheran High School is the 2018 Artist of the Year in the discipline of dance. (Photo by Leonard Ortiz/Orange County Register/SCNG)

Erlanson has been accepted as a choreography major at a prestigious dance school, Texas Christian University. She is refreshingly candid about her talents – and her limitations.

“I’m probably just an average dancer. I love dancing so much, but this past year reality hit me. I think that’s why I’m motivated to thrive as a choreographer. I stay up until 3 a.m. most nights choreographing. I probably spend an hour just listening to the same song on repeat. That’s my process.”

Surprisingly, choreography is a recently discovered passion for Erlanson. She didn’t always take to it.

“At my school, I was forced to choreograph for a long time and I thought, ‘This is so lame,’” she told the panel. “It was just last summer going into my senior year when I started to change my attitude.”

While dance is clearly her passion, Erlanson has left enough time in her life to excel academically. She is an honors AP student, and she is keenly aware of the issues of the world at large.

“Since the age of 11, when I started to dance, I always heard, ‘Dance training is life training,’ but it wasn’t until this summer when I fully realized the certainty of that expression,” Erlanson said to the committee. “Dance shaped me as a person and showed me how to handle myself, not only in my daily life, but also in a professional environment.”

The judges were most impressed by Erlanson’s clarity of thought and well-spoken yet unforced manner. “She has thought carefully about why she wants to be a choreographer and what she hopes to achieve, which is very impressive in someone her age,” said Dianne Howe of the Segerstrom Center for the Arts.

“There is strength and conviction in every moment of her choreography,” said Jodie Gates, vice dean and director of the University of Southern California’s Glorya Kaufman School of Dance.

COMMERCIAL DANCE ARTIST OF THE YEAR: Isabelle Erlanson, Crean Lutheran High School



Isabelle Erlanson of Crean Lutheran High School is a dance semifinalist in the specialty of commercial dance. (Photo by Leonard Ortiz/Orange County Register/SCNG)

A competent yet magnetic dancer, she is starting to find her voice as a choreographer. She finds inspiration in personal stories and wants to be an advocate for women through her work.