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Alvin Ailey dancer returns home to O.C.

By **SAM DUNN**
 STAFF WRITER

All those years being driven by her grandmother back and forth on I-405 from her Huntington Beach home to dance practice in Santa Monica were worth it for Danica Paulos. She'll be among the principal dancers when Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater comes to Costa Mesa for six performances this month, plus a free Arts Plaza performance, "Revelations Celebration," aimed at introducing audiences to some of the most iconic choreography from the company's famed founder.

In 2010, Paulos left Huntington Beach High School in her senior year because her talent merited entrance to New York's Professional Performing Arts School, where she graduated with honors, and then trained on scholarship at The Ailey School. When she was selected to join the company last year, Dance Magazine named her one of the dance world's "25 to Watch," calling out her "rare blond of attack and willowy elegance." But what's this California girl really like? We get to know this home-grown talent:

Q. What made you want to be a dancer?

A. It was an innate love. Honestly, my grandma took me to see a "Nutcracker" at a local dance studio in O.C. when I was 5. During the intermission, the story goes, I was running up and down the aisle just dancing like a crazy little kid. She says that's when she realized something was going on with me and dance.

My mother struggles with addiction and other



ANDREW ECCLES

Danica Paulos will be performing with Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in Costa Mesa.

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

Where: Segerstrom Hall, Segerstrom Center for the Arts, 600 Town Center Drive, Costa Mesa

When: Regular performances 7:30 p.m. Thursday-Saturday, 2 p.m. Saturday, 1 p.m. Sunday; "Discover Ailey," a special 30-minute performance, will be 7:30 p.m. Wednesday

How much: \$29-\$129 for Thursday-Friday and Saturday matinee, \$29-\$139 for Saturday night and Sunday; all tickets for "Discover Ailey" are \$29

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issues, so grandma and my grandpa, Sandra and Terry Paulos, raised me. She will be at every single show in Costa Mesa! She knows everyone in the company by name.

Q. Fill in the blank: For a California girl, living in NYC is ...

A. Oh, my god ... horridical-

ly cold all the time. It is so crazy. Something I can't stand is that I can never see the sun. And oh, my goodness, never being near the beach!

It is a complete lifestyle change, but I do know that, even though it was so difficult, this is where I have to be to achieve what I want. Still, if I could do what I do in California, I would be so happy.

Q. Few dancers in Alvin Ailey II - made of younger dancers - graduate to the company.

What does dancing in such a famous company as Alvin Ailey mean to you?

A. My grandpa likes to say, "You are in the big leagues, the Olympics of dance." It is a lot of pressure. We have a lot to carry with the legacy of Alvin Ailey, the reason why he started the company. But when we get on that stage, we know we truly inspire people. It is about showing the audience their potential of what they can be, because we are dancers, yes, but we are just human bodies.

Q. What are some things you are looking forward to doing when you're home? Surely it can't be all work!

A. I am definitely going to be at Fiesta Grill and Chronic Taco to get my taco on! I'm going to take a bunch of dancers to the beach and give them the whole California experience. My roommate and I are going to stay at my house in Huntington Beach, and my grandparents will let me drive their car so we can go around and do stuff - look at cute surfers! My friends are all coming to the show! I think they'll be 60 people at one. To be performing 15 minutes from where I was born is incredible.