

## Portraits of ChiArts

Volume 2 • April 2011

### The Music Freshman: Ruby



Born in Chicago, Ruby started playing music when she was 10 years old. She joined her school band and wanted to learn how to read music, but they put her in front of a drum set and told her to play. She's the only musical person in her family and they've been very supportive of her efforts.

At ChiArts, Ruby is a percussion major. "I have a lot of rhythm so I wanted to express that. I really didn't know anything about music and thought that drums were such a cool, unique instrument." At ChiArts, Ruby is also learning how to play other percussion instruments like the xylophone, the marimba, and the vibraphone.

"I absolutely love the teachers at ChiArts. At my old school, I felt that the teachers didn't care about me that much and here I can tell they really do. The kids are really cool too. They're all different from each other, which is nice. I love my conservatory and the academics, especially English and French. It's awesome."

Any advice for incoming students? "Get rid of your bad habits fast. In your conservatory, if your teacher says that your technique is wrong, you should change it right away. Bad habits could also mean not doing your homework. That can also catch up with you and bring your grades down."

### The Acting Freshman: Jalen

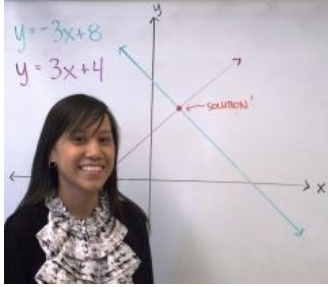


Fifteen year old Jalen didn't start thinking about acting until the fifth grade. The summer after sixth grade, he got involved with the Albany Park Theatre Project (ATPT). "I learned about ChiArts from my middle school but the reason I felt confident going for acting was because of this project."

"It may not seem like that now, but I was a very shy child. I had a very hard time talking to people. Now I'm only shy around food. I can talk to anybody, but when it comes to ordering food, it's like the worst thing in the world. If I can, I make somebody else order for me." Interestingly, Jalen had to talk a lot about food as part of the cast of *Feast*, a 2010 ATPT production. This show was well received by both audiences and critics, and Jalen was part of the 35 performances that took place at the project's Laura Wiley Theater and the Goodman Theatre.

Jalen auditioned and was put on the ChiArts waiting list so he was planning to go to the neighborhood school. "Then, I got accepted in July but started having second thoughts about coming here. I didn't think I was going to like the people but when we came to the Freshman Summer Institute, my advisory had the coolest people. My advisor Mr. Steger is the best advisor ever. And I slowly changed my mind and was happy about coming to ChiArts. Now I love the place."

## The Math Teacher: Suzanne Melecio



"I've always liked math, for as long as I can remember." However, when it came time to go to college, Suzanne didn't know what to do. A cousin told her that no matter what happened in the world of computers, math would always be there. Suzanne graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with a bachelor's degree in Math and a minor in Computer Science.

She knew she didn't want to teach right away and joined the corporate world for a couple of years. "I had a friend who worked at Huntington Learning Center and asked if I wanted to teach math. While working at a consulting firm, I began tutoring part-time and this was the job I liked going to. It was great seeing the kids go from apathetic to enthusiastic about the skills they were learning. It was much more rewarding than sitting in front of a computer for 8 hours a day."

After tutoring for 2 years, Suzanne went to DePaul University full-time to get a masters degree in Education. At ChiArts, she teaches Algebra I, College Prep and will also work as the new Advanced Placement (AP) Coordinator. This role will mean a lot of extra organization and research, particularly through the AP website.

At the moment, her biggest personal project is her July wedding. She met her fiancé Sean through her previous job. They worked closely together for 3 years and started dating after she left the company. Her sister's wedding in Costa Rica showed her what can happen even if you have the best of plans. "The wedding was outdoors and it took place in the middle of a tropical storm. Everyone ended up jumping into the pool and having a great time." This taught Suzanne how to laugh and not stress over every little nuance. "As long as we have each other, we're good. We'll get married and everything will work out."

## The Jazz Teacher: Kevin Korschgen



"I grew up in a farm in Northeast Missouri. My mother was a farm wife, but she learned music when she was young and played the saxophone. She made sure I was exposed to the arts from an early age and would bring me to Chicago to hear live music. That's how I got excited about becoming a musician."

Kevin went to the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and moved to Chicago after receiving a Music Education degree. His first teaching job was at Resurrection High School for Girls in the Northwest side. "During that time, I became friends with the band director at the Notre Dame High School for Boys in Niles, which had a really strong tradition in jazz education. Fortuitously, the band director position became open and I was hired."

After a few years, Kevin went back to school to get a Masters in Music Education at VanderCook College of Music. Back in Chicago, he worked at Lake View High School for 13 years. He moved to Santa Fe, working as Artistic Director of the Santa Fe Youth Symphony and teaching at Santa Fe High School. Back in Chicago, he started teaching at Harlan Community Academy High School and also took over the CPS All-City High School Jazz Ensemble.

He learned about ChiArts through a teacher at Harlan. "I looked on the website and there was a posting for a jazz teacher position. I love ChiArts and the people here, the students, the faculty. I like that arts teachers are treated like professionals."

"Many of the students at ChiArts come from CPS schools, and there are some challenges to get them focused and serious about being in a music conservatory. The kids are great but we have to nurture in them a stronger work ethic. I'm trying to get them excited about music and then gradually get them to work at the level we need to work."