

Zendaya, The "Shake It Up!"

By Kam Williams
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Born in Oakland, Ca., on Sept. 1, 1996, Zendaya grew up around the California Shakespeare Theater in nearby Orinda, where her mother worked as the house manager. In addition to training at the theater company's student conservatory program, and later performing in numerous stage productions, she helped her mom seat patrons and sell raffle tickets to benefit the organization.

While attending the Oakland School for the Arts, Zendaya starred as a young Ti Moune in "Once on This Island" at the Berkeley Playhouse before enjoying her breakout role as the male character Joe in "Caroline, or Change" at Palo Alto's TheatreWorks. She subsequently honed her craft at both the California Shakespeare Conservatory program and the American Conservatory Theater, adding such classics by the Bard of Avon as "Richard III," "Twelfth Night" and "As You Like It" to her stage credits. Zendaya, by the way, means "to give thanks" in Shona, a Bantu language native to Zimbabwe. Besides acting, the versatile young talent has served as a fashion model for Macy's, Mervyns and Old Navy, and as one of the

back-up dancers in a Sears commercial featuring Selena Gomez.

Zendaya currently resides in Los Angeles with her family and Midnight, her pet Giant Schnauzer, and her interests include singing, dancing and clothes designing. Here, she talks about "Shake It Up!" her hit Disney Channel sitcom where she co-stars opposite Bella Thorne as Raquel "Rocky" Blue, half of a comedic duo trying to dance their way to superstardom.

Kam Williams: Hi Zendaya, thanks for the interview.

Zendaya: No, thank you, Kam. It is my pleasure.

KW: What interested you in Shake It Up?

Z: Well, I would say that Shake It Up was a chance for me to do two things I really love: acting and dancing.

KW: Tell me a little about the show?

Z: It's a buddy comedy based around dance. It's about two best friends Rocky and CeCe who live out their dream as background dancers on a show called Shake It Up Chicago. They have to navigate life as young teens going to school and dancing on the show.

KW: How would you describe your character, Rocky?

Z: Rocky is such a sweet girl. She really cares for people and always wants to help her

friends. She is a very good student who really works hard, and she is a dedicated friend to CeCe who often talks her into doing things they shouldn't. Rocky is a bit more shy and unsure of herself, and sometimes does more following than she should.

KW: What message would you say the show is trying to deliver?

Z: Shake It Up definitely teaches kids about the importance of reaching for your dreams and setting high goals. It also teaches great lessons about friendship and family.

KW: What do you enjoy the most: acting, singing, dancing or modeling?

Z: Wow! I couldn't choose between all of those things! I loooooove acting and dancing on Shake It Up, and I am currently in the recording studio working on my music. And one of my dreams is to walk down the runway during fashion week!

KW: When is your debut album being released, and what type of music is on it?

Z: Well, I am not sure of when my album will be released but my music has a lot of different sounds. I'm a hip-hop/R&B girl

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at heart, but I love pop music as well, and I even have an affinity for country music. So I would say my music might have something for everyone.

KW: Is there any question no one ever asks you, that you wish someone would?

Z: I'm never asked what I love to

do outside of the arts. My answer would be sports. I was actually supposed to be a basketball player, not an actress. My parents had me playing basketball on competitive teams when I was in kindergarten. Even though my heart belongs to the arts, I'm a tomboy at heart, too.

KW: The Tasha Smith question: Are you ever afraid?

Z: Yes! I am scared of spiders! And I still get a little afraid every time I have to do something new or have to get out in front of a big crowd. The first time I sang "Swag It Out" live, I was really scared.

KW: The Columbus Short question: Are you happy?

Z: Yes, I am. This is my dream, truly. I grew up watching "That's So Raven" and "Lizzie McGuire," and I said to myself that I could do that one day, and here I am. This is a dream come true and I am just ecstatic to be here living out my childhood dreams.

KW: The Teri Emerson question: When was the last time you had a good laugh?

Z: Just yesterday I was dying laughing with my niece who is staying with me this summer. We have so much fun together!

KW: What is your guiltiest pleasure?

Z: Oh, it's Haagen Dasz ice cream, coffee flavor. It makes me feel so much better when I am upset and even happier when I am perfectly happy already.

KW: The bookworm Troy Johnson question: What was the last book you read?

Z: I am reading the book that I just did a book trailer for...it's called "From Bad to Cursed." It's really creepy and good.

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