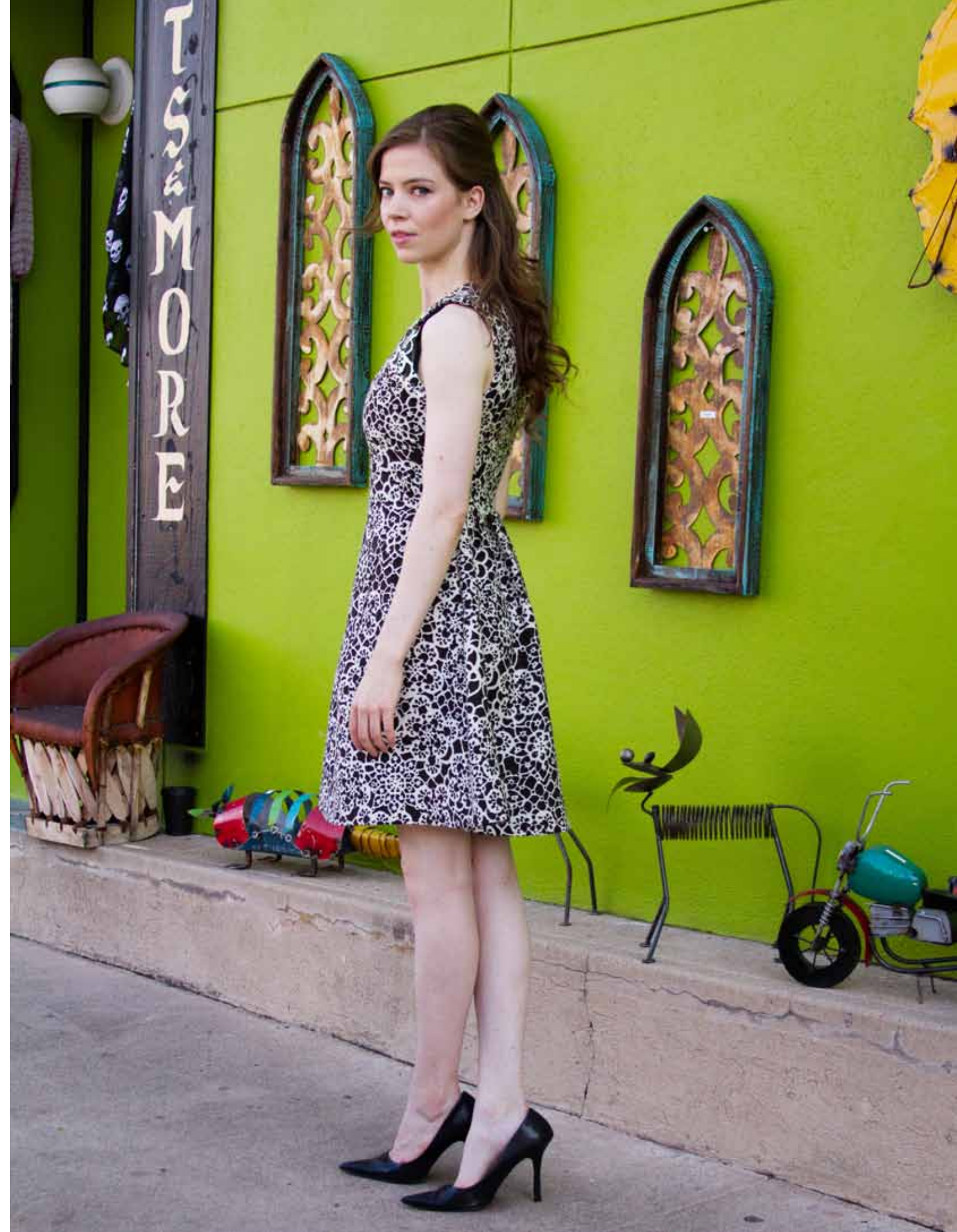


The Dual Forces of

ELENA SANCHEZ

The stunt woman and actress shows
her grit and class in
The Hunger Games: Catching Fire

Story by Sara Pintilie
Photos by JSR Photography



Iena Sanchez looked up at the creaky rafters of the abandoned burger stand.

"I really want to hang on these," she said but decided against the it. Instead, she posed for another photo in her Thakoon dress, leaning against the red slanted pillar. As the photographer directed her on leg placement, a man in a white truck rolled by, honking and catcalling at her.

She laughed. "Yeah, that's how you get a woman," she joked as she prepared for another shot.

Her smile was genuine, her blue eyes, still laughing at the truck and after the shot, she moved to where the photographer was pointing.

But not before a quick glance at the rafters.

Sanchez had been in some of 2013's biggest films, though you wouldn't have seen her. If you did...well, then she isn't doing her job correctly. She was a stunt double for Ashley Judd in *Olympus Has Fallen*, Alice Englert in *Beautiful Creatures* and Emily Blunt in *Looper*. Sanchez also has done stunt work in *Oblivion*, *Texas Chainsaw 3D* and *Now You See Me*, among others. And along with her stunt schedule, she also has acted in various movies and TV shows.

But now she will be seen in the sequel of a blockbuster movie -- *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* as Cecelia.

The first *Hunger Games* made more than \$400 million and currently holds the title of being the "sixth-highest opening of all time," at more than \$152 million, according to www.boxofficemojo.com.

She talked a bit about her District 8 character, a mother and a victor from a previous *Hunger Games*. Cecelia, along with other previous victors, come back to fight in the new competition in the sequel.

"It was a mind-blowing experience," she said. "It's been incredible to be a part of something that speaks to so many people. The support from the fans has been amazing. They welcomed all of us newcomers with open arms. I think part of what makes *Catching Fire* so exciting is that the tributes entering the games are now adults, which makes it more relatable to a wider audience."

BEFORE DISTRICT 8

Sanchez decided to become a full-time actress about six years ago, when she needed to take an arts requirement for her hotel management education at Cornell University. She took an acting class and enjoyed it so much that even though she only had a semester left, she continued on to the next-level acting class.



"I thought that it would be so cool to work in movies and get to play all these different character and different roles, but I thought everyone thought that and it was something that wasn't realistic, I guess," she said, as she spoke fondly about taking those two classes. "I had no idea how to make it work as a career or what to do, but I knew that I enjoyed it so much that I wanted to find a way to make a career out of it."

She learned about the in-and-outs of movie/TV sets by being an extra in New York on shows including *Gossip Girl* and *Law and Order*.

"I was an extra on all the shows filming in New York at the time," she said with a hint of a laughter before turning serious. "But there came a point, where I was like, 'if I want to go to the next level and want to be an actor, and I want people to take me more seriously, then I have to get more training.'"

She turned to New York City's Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute for her training and then the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) in London last summer.

"I started doing so much stunt doubling and stunt work, that I wanted to remind

"I have been called to double Hispanic people, and I will have to get a spray tan," she said about her pale skin. **"It's funny, because people have this preconceived notion that Spanish people are darker-skinned."**



Elena is wearing the seamed waist flared dress by Thakoon, available at Mode-B.com.
Hair and makeup by Maggie George of Keith Kristofer Salon in Austin, TX.



myself, as much as other people, that I am an actor as well, and I can do both...and [the training from RADA] kinda cemented that fact."

When she was in drama school, she booked a Sony Ericsson commercial, where they needed a gymnast that hung on wires for a stunt. Sanchez, a seasoned gymnast, took the job and found that she missed having an athletic element to her life, and stunt work married the two aspects.

She did the research to start a career in stunt work, and booked jobs for the aforementioned movies by pounding the pavement and making herself known in the stunt world.

"If you are there as someone's stunt double, it's your job to make sure that they are safe. So, they are the most important thing for you to watch out for," she said, citing the differences between being a stunt woman and an actress. "As far as you doing your stunt or performing... I compared it to competing in a sport. If it is something very physical or a routine, I notice I get in the same mindset."

Stunts are very planned out and done as safely as they can. Everything is planned precisely, and as long as the stunt doubles follow that plan, they are most likely not going to get hurt.

"Which is why people that are crazy daredevils don't make good stunt people," she said, "because they are the ones that will end up getting hurt."

Most stunt doubles and/or workers usually have a specialty that they are trained in, Sanchez said. She has been doing gymnastics since she was 3. You can find evidence of her gymnastics skills on Instagram, where she has a fun habit of doing handstands on cars.

She continued to branch out with her stunt work, learning more martial arts and training to better her career. Then, she decided to go to RADA last summer.

"I felt like I was falling into the whole 'stunt people can't act,' which is kind of a stereotype out there," she said. "And a lot of them don't want to and don't think it is important... I wanted to prove to myself and prove to other people the fact I was adding to my resume and my training. And have them go, 'Oh, she has pretty serious training at these schools.'"

She wanted people in the industry to see her as not only a stunt woman but a working actress, who is also fluent in not only Spanish but German.

"Ideally, I want to act in a role that requires a lot of stunts and do my own stunts -- action acting basically," she said. "Because I do love both, and I want to continue to do both."

Her wish was granted. She has five films in post-production for 2013/2014 and a few more in earlier stages, mostly involving a combination of stunts and acting.

"You usually do start off with one main thing, but you branch off, and you try to learn as much as possible. The more skills you have, the more valuable it makes you." ●