

# PASCHAL'S PHILLIPS HEADED TO PRESTIGIOUS JULLIARD PROGRAM

It's not every day that a two-year-old child discovers his life's passion, but Tyler Phillips watched his older sister's dance recital and was smitten. His mother quickly realized that Tyler was not going to leave her alone until she allowed him to start taking dance lessons. "He wanted to know when he could go to dance class," she says. "By the summer, I had a two-and-a-half-year-old who was absolutely livid that he couldn't start dance class because they didn't begin until September."

Years of modern dance and ballet lessons followed, with Tyler eventually landing a role in Debbie Allen's "Pepito's Story" through Imagination Celebration Fort Worth. One of the youngest members of the cast, Tyler was able to work with professional male dancers and see the

possibility of a career in dance. "That was huge... that he got to see guys who danced. And [some of the lead dancers in "Pepito's Story"] came out to Alice Carlson to visit his second grade class, so he was pretty cool that week," she says with a laugh.

Other prominent dance roles came afterward, including performances in "The Nutcracker" and for the Metropolitan Classical Ballet in Arlington at Bass Hall. Since middle school, Tyler has gone to Los Angeles periodically to attend the EDGE Performing Arts Center dance program to train with industry professionals. The program's class calendar interrupted Tyler's school schedule, but his mother says school administrators at each of his schools in Fort Worth ISD have been willing to work with the family to help Tyler continue to develop his talent over the years.

In his sophomore year, Tyler began studying at the Dance Continuum studio in Hurst. "The studio introduced me to concert dance," he says. "I had always thought I would move out to L.A. and pursue commercial work. But after learning about the concert dance world and the countless opportunities, I fell in love."

He makes the commute to Dance Continuum, more than 40 miles round-trip from his Fort Worth home, to train in the evenings at least four days a week. Apparently, his dedication is paying off. Now a senior at Paschal High School, Tyler is preparing to move to New York in the fall to enter The Juilliard School's prestigious dance program.

While he had always dreamt of Juilliard as an option for the future, he wasn't entirely sure that he would make the cut – the rigorous four-year B.F.A. dance program admits only 12 males and 12 females each year. "I knew I had my work cut out for me," he says. "But I wanted to go there more than I had wanted anything in my life so far. So of course, I decided to audition."

More than 400 people auditioned for the program this year in cities including Chicago, New York, Miami, Houston and San Francisco. The four-step audition process, which Tyler attended in Houston in February, includes modern dance and ballet classes, a solo performance, a coached repertory sequence, and an informal interview. Cuts are made after each round, and those who remain after the interview are typically considered finalists for entrance into the program. "After my interview, I was done," says Tyler. "There was absolutely nothing I could do but wait."

Finalists were told that Juilliard would notify students of its decision via email between March 15th and April 1st. Once the 15th passed, Tyler anxiously checked his mail every day awaiting word from the school. By March 23rd, Tyler was looking for a distraction and opted to go shopping with his parents for a washing machine. In the aisles of Home Depot, his cell phone rang – it was Juilliard's admissions counselor.

"She said that I had been accepted into the program," he says. "I've never felt anything like it in my entire life. To this day, I still have little sparks of realization." Of the two dozen students entering the

program in the fall, Tyler is one of the only public school students.

The group has been communicating informally via Facebook to get to know each other before classes begin, and the impending start of the new school year is a source of excitement for the rising freshman. "I'm determined to soak up every last piece of wisdom offered at Juilliard and use it to make my professional dreams come true," says Tyler. "There are so many amazing opportunities offered at the school and I believe it will open so many doors for me." That singular passion is something his mother remembers well. "The only thing that Tyler ever wanted to do was dance. That's what he wanted to do then, and he's never lost focus."



BY HOLLY PRESTON