



Baltimore Native, Ailey Dancer Receives Princess Grace Award

By Stacy Brown

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Baltimore native Courtney Celeste Spears is the recipient of the prestigious Princess Grace Foundation-USA Award, which provides more than \$1 million to artists in theater, dance performance, choreography and film. The annual awards continue the legacy of Princess Grace Kelly of Monaco, who helped emerging artists pursue their artistic goals during her lifetime. Spears, a graduate of the Baltimore School for the Arts and currently a senior in the Ailey/Fordham University BFA program in dance with a minor in communications studies was selected as one of two scholarship recipients for 2015. (Story on page 10)

Photo Credit: Kyle Rorman

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By Stacy M. Brown

She started dancing at the age of three after her mother went to a Target store and picked out a ballet outfit just to see how her toddler would look in it and for Courtney Celeste Spears, it's like she never took the leotard off.

"I freaked out and when I got the outfit, I was like, 'I want to do ballet' and my mom laughed and told me that I hadn't even started dancing yet," said Spears, a graduate of the Baltimore School for the Arts and currently a senior in the Ailey/Fordham University BFA program in dance with a minor in communications studies. "My mom then took me to ballet class and the rest is history."

History that now includes being the recipient of the prestigious Princess Grace Foundation-USA Award, which provides more than \$1 million to artists in theater, dance performance, choreography and film. The annual awards continue the legacy of Princess Grace Kelly of Monaco, who helped emerging artists pursue their artistic goals during her lifetime.

Spears was selected as one of two dance scholarship recipients for 2015.

"I started crying when I heard that I had gotten the scholarship," she said. "I was very dramatic and I had to apologize to the representative on other line because I just busted out in tears. It didn't hit me until I got an email from them and that's when I realized that I didn't dream it."

Spears says that she has enjoyed every moment of her dance experience. She also says she didn't realize when she was younger that dance was something she could do professionally.

"Then I went to a really small studio in Columbia, Maryland and that was the beginning of the transformation of my love of dance from a hobby to a passion," she said.

Ballet teacher Maureen Wheeler told Spears that she had a bright future and recommended that she attend the Baltimore School for the Performing Arts.

"It was there that I thought about dance as a career option and now things changed from love and passion to want-



Courtney Celeste Spears, a graduate of the Baltimore School for the Arts and currently a senior in the Ailey/Fordham University BFA program in dance with a minor in communications studies received the prestigious Princess Grace Foundation-USA Award. Spears was selected as one of two scholarship recipients for 2015. Photo Credit: Kyle Rorman

ing to make a career out of dance," Spears said.

In addition to Fordham and Ailey, Spears attended summer programs at Cedar Lake 360, the Juilliard School, and the American Ballet Theatre where she performed works by Matthew Rushing; Igal Perry; Francesca Harper; Nicholas Villeneuve; Christian von Howard; Hope Boykin; and George Balanchine.

She represented Fordham University

on the cover of Dance Spirit magazine's September 2013 "Higher Education" issue and was the 2014 recipient of the Denise Jefferson Memorial Scholarship.

"Fordham was the first school I auditioned for and the last one I found out about. I auditioned and knew I wanted to be in New York City," Spears said. "I could hop on a bus and come back home in three hours so I was thrilled and my school is a two second walk to Lincoln

Center, so I was beyond ecstatic."

Spears says she has plans to travel the world.

"I love culture, food and traveling and I truly love that this career allows me to see the world and see this dream that I have," she said. "I want to start a foundation too where I can help be a bridge for children who have natural talent because I was very fortunate to have a wonderful support system."