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Ballet 'golden boy' at gala

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"Ballet's Golden Boy" Joseph Phillips will be part of ballet tech cincinnati's Gala of International Ballet Stars at 8 p.m. Saturday at the Aronoff Center.

Phillips got to be "golden boy," he says, back in 2002 when, on the eve of his professional career, "I won a lot of gold medals – four in four months" in international competition.

This is Phillips' first appearance at ballet tech's annual fundraiser, and he's the dancer ballet tech's Marvel Gentry Davis was most eager to recruit. "I've been wanting him for a couple of years."

Phillips likes to dance in about one gala per month and for Cincinnati, he's a man with a plan.

After starting his career with San Francisco Ballet, this season Phillips moves on to Miami City Ballet, a company with a strong George Balanchine tradition, thanks to founding artistic director Edward Villella, a dance legend for his work with Balanchine beginning 50 years ago.

Phillips' choice of Balanchine's "Tarantella" for the Gala "is a great opportunity to work on a piece like this with Edward Villella," Phillips says in a rich South Carolina drawl. He's partnering for the first time with New York City Ballet's Ana Sophia Scheller. Phillips invited her to join him after seeing a City Ballet program and knowing he needed a partner steeped in Balanchine tradition.

They are spending this week working under Villella's tutelage and Phillips wouldn't mind if the sessions put ideas in Villella's mind about casting later this season.

At the beginning of his career, Phillips turned down an offer to join Miami City Ballet after Villella saw him in competition. Phillips chose San Francisco Ballet instead.

When he decided it was "a great ballet but not right for me," he called Villella and asked if he was still interested.

Phillips, freshly arrived in Miami, isn't thinking beyond the upcoming season. "I want them to get to know me. I just want to dance more and more and more and make my name known along with the company."

Ballet tech cincinnati gets its party rolling Thursday with a "Hard Hat Sneak Preview" of the arts, community development and renovation in progress along the Montgomery Corridor Arts District, from 6 to 8 p.m. at Kennedy Heights Arts Center, 6546 Montgomery Rd.

Several Gala dancers will be mingling as will HT Chen Dance Company members who are finishing a residency in Cincinnati. The evening will include entertainment by jazz artist Wilbert Longmire and The Hank Stephens Experience, dinner by-the-bite and hard hat tours of ballet tech's soon-to-be headquarters just across the street.

Gala of International Ballet Stars, 8 p.m., Aronoff Center for the Arts, 650 Walnut St., tickets \$38-\$58, 513-621-2787.

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