

Selah Flores is excited about her first trip to Carnegie Hall. The 14-year-old Schertz resident has been playing the piano since she was seven years old, and like most young musicians, she has dreamed of seeing the famous concert hall where so many of her idols have played. But Flores' first visit to Carnegie Hall is particularly exciting, as she will be visiting not as a tourist, but as a performer.

On September 14th, Flores will travel to New York City to join other young musicians from all over the world in a recital at Carnegie Hall featuring the winners of the Fryderyk Chopin Society of Texas Sonatina and Sonata International Youth Piano Competition. She participated in the competition this past April, taking first place in her age group with special honors, qualifying her not only for participation in the concert but for a scholarship that will partially cover her travel expenses for the event.

But long before her dream of playing in Carnegie Hall became a reality, Flores was a typical seven-year-old whose grandmother wanted her to take piano lessons. She began taking weekly lessons, but at first, she did not particularly enjoy practicing. Things changed as she was introduced to different genres of music, particularly jazz, which she really enjoyed.

Before long, Flores was practicing regularly and advancing so quickly that her parents made the decision to change studios for her to play competitively. She then began taking lessons with Dorothy Yan at the Musical Arts Center of San Antonio, where she still studies today. She performed in her first recitals at the studio and began looking for other recitals and competition opportunities on her own. She grew to love classical music, particularly the work of her favorite composer, Edvard Grieg, and began practicing up to two hours per day.

Flores' first competitive playing experience came when she was 12 years old. She entered the Rose Petroff competition at the Steinway Piano Gallery in San Antonio and discovered that competing was an entirely different experience than playing in a recital.

"I was more excited than nervous, but it was still pretty scary," she remembers. "I was used to being friendly and talking to other musicians, but many of the other students had been competing since they were six years old, and they really had their game face on. They were so serious, and they didn't talk to anyone."

Selah's parents, Fred and Lucinda Flores, agree that experiencing a competition for the first time was a big change from the recitals and practices that they were used to seeing. "The competition world was a transition for us," Lucinda says. "Balancing those nerves, seeing the intense drive of the competitors – it was a whole different realm."

Despite being new to this world, Flores took third place in her first competition, and was left with a desire to continue competing. Seeing other students being presented with awards for their accomplishments made her determined to earn more wins of her own.

Her first big win came in early 2018 at age 13, when she entered the J.K. Hodges Contemporary Piano Competition held at UTSA and took second place out of 15 performers in her age group.

“That was such a great experience for me,” she said. “I got to play on this beautiful Steinway grand piano and everything went exactly like I wanted it to. I remember it as my perfect performance.”

This past April, Flores had the opportunity to participate in an even bigger competition. The Fryderyk Chopin Society of Texas Sonatina and Sonata International Youth Piano Competition was held in Corpus Christi, featuring 400 performers from throughout Texas and all over the world. The audition process to win a spot in the competition was rigorous, including a video recording and letters of recommendation. Flores was the only student from Schertz selected to participate. She played Chopin’s Etude in F Minor, Op. 25 #2, taking first place in her age group with special honors, and winning her spot at the Carnegie Hall concert.

These days, Flores keeps up an ambitious competition and practice schedule. She currently enters six or seven competitions per year and is working on extending her daily practice time to four hours. She also loves teaching other musicians, and she has begun offering lessons to beginner and intermediate-level players in her home. Flores says that teaching has been an extremely rewarding experience, so much so that she is already considering it as a potential career.

“I really love teaching my students to connect with music and have fun with it,” she says. “I’m very interested in piano pedagogy and I’m considering studying that in college.”

Though she is just starting high school, Flores is already thinking about colleges and has a short list of schools with excellent music programs both close to home and across the country. She is currently considering Baylor, UTSA, The Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, and of course – Julliard. She hopes to pay a visit to the latter when she visits New York for the first time next month – just one more reason to be excited about the trip.

At the Carnegie Hall concert on September 14th, Flores will have six minutes to play a piece of her choosing, and she has selected Sonata Op.7, 1st movement by Edvard Grieg. When asked what excites her most about her upcoming performance, Flores cites the history of famous hall and the connection with so many great musicians past and present. “Just being able to be on that stage and realize that so many great musicians have played in that same place is pretty amazing,” she said.

Says her mother Lucinda, “My husband and I are just so amazed at Selah’s talent, and at the fact that she has found her passion so early in life. She has really driven her musical education, the competitions and the creation of her own teaching studio. I think that drive is really unusual and admirable in someone her age.”

It is this drive and determination that has served Selah Flores incredibly well so far in her young career, and it will surely bring out the best in her this September, when she steps onto one of the biggest stages in the world.