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Wausau native Lilly Riveron is one of the few chosen to attend the Royal Ballet School in London year round.

Wausau teen dances her way to world-class status

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Lilly Riveron was 6 years old when she made the most important decision of her young life — to give ballet another shot.

A year earlier, Riveron, a Wausau native, shunned the performance art because of its intense schedule and strict rules.

Now, she embraces those challenges and is ready to live a dream by spending at least a year in London attending the Royal Ballet School, one of the world's top training facilities for dancers.

And she's just 16 years old.

"At every step of the way, I have been so surprised," Riveron said. "I'll

work so hard for something, but there's always chance."

The road doesn't get any easier for Riveron, who has made a mark at every institution she's danced for over the past 10 years. If she does the same in London, she'll be guaranteed a spot in a professional ballet company after her third and final year with the school.

The trick is getting to that third year. Some students don't make it past the first year, and others get recruited to a ballet company before graduation.

"Even if you get to this level, the chances of getting into a company is still hard," Riveron said. "I don't know what's going to happen."

The pressure is nothing new to Riveron. At age 12, she joined the Milwaukee Ballet's summer program to fine-tune her skills before auditioning and making it into The Harid Conservatory, a prestigious dance school in Boca Raton, Fla., two years later.

The challenges continued as Riveron endured her academic classes in the morning, then danced from 12:45 p.m. to 6 p.m. Despite the long days, she constantly pushed herself.

"That is the kind of person she is," said Heidi Riveron, Lilly's mother. "You place a challenge in front of her and she gets excited."

Lilly Riveron flew to London about a month

ago to audition for the Royal Ballet School. She faced her toughest obstacle yet — making the cut among 120 dancers from across the world. She survived the first cut, an audition among 13 girls and 13 boys. When the final cuts were made, Riveron was one of three left standing.

"She's on the world stage," said Janne Dean, who taught Lilly for eight years at the Judy Peterson Dance Studio in Schofield. "(It's amazing) to see your student up with the best in the world."

Riveron, who leaves for London on Sept. 6, knows the push for her goal to be a principal dancer — ballet's highest honor — starts now.