

Dance company names 1st African-American principal ballerina

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Misty Copeland appears in a documentary titled "A Ballerina's Tale," which is the story of her comeback from an injury to her leg. Copeland has just begun her first season as a principal ballerina with the American Ballet Theatre, and she's also a best-selling author and celebrity spokeswoman. Did we mention she's also been on Broadway? Oskar Landi/Sundance Selects via AP

NEW YORK, N.Y. — Misty Copeland is a ballerina who is becoming very famous. She has been on television and danced in a play. She is even the star of her own movie. Copeland has also just made history. She is the first African-American ballerina who has a lead part with a famous ballet company.

Copeland is 33 years old and has done all of those things just this year. She has even gone to dinner at the White House.

Copeland dances with a company called the American Ballet Theatre. She is starting her first season a principal ballerina. A star of a ballet company who dances in leading parts is a principal dancer.

First African-American Star For Ballet Company

She is an example to many people because she is the first African-American woman who is a principal dancer in the company. The dance company has been around for 75 years.

Right before she was given her new name, she starred in a show called "Swan Lake." It was really hard for Copeland because the world was watching.

The ballerina also had another problem. She had to dance in the show and not let the people watching know that she was in pain. Copeland had an operation three years ago to fix cracks in her leg bone. "It's been three years and I'm still not jumping fully," she says.

Copeland must keep dancing with her hurt leg. She also says that the people watching cannot know when her leg aches.

Movie Tells Dancer's Story After Injury

Nelson George is a man who makes movies. He saw Copeland dance when her leg was still hurt. He noticed that she was in pain. George suggested that they make a movie to tell her story.

They made a movie called "A Ballerina's Tale." The movie shows her first dance class after the operation. It also shows a dance that she performed by herself. Copeland says that she was not at her best. "It's so hard to watch! But it was just something I had to do," she says.

The movie shows that Copeland felt lonely. She was not sure of herself because many of the other ballet dancers were white. Copeland says in the movie that some people say she thinks too much about being a black ballerina. She says that is what makes her victory extra important. "I'm a black ballerina," she says.

Starring Part Means Less Time Dancing

She is excited to be a principal dancer. Copeland also says the big part means that she gets to dance less. There are many principals who want the starring parts.

She will try to dance as much as she can. And she may someday do more acting. She only had time to star in a Broadway play for two weeks. Many famous plays are shown in a part of New York City called Broadway.

Copeland says that she is only thinking about ballet now and that she cannot just show up to dance whenever she wants. "It just doesn't work that way. It's not a hard balance," she says. "The dance is always first."