

# SETTING THE STAGE FOR A NEW BALLERINA

by JEKIMA HIBBERT

“If you are white, tall, extremely slim, you fit the type of ballerina that could make it big,” said junior and dancer Ajophonie Goodwin.

Ballet has been known to be an artform dominated by thin, white females, but women of color like Misty Copeland are breaking down barriers for the next generation of dancers.

Copeland entered the dancer world at the late age of 13, but rose to stardom, overcoming home issues, financial troubles, and reminders that she was too short and muscular. In 2015, Copeland became the first principal African American dancer for American Ballet Theater.

Junior Semira Daniels, a Palmetto Center for the Arts (PCA) African American dancer, shares her opinion on Copeland and her influence.

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**NICOLE CZEKALSKI  
PCA DANCE TEACHER**

“Its super inspirational just because most people who are black and become professional dancers go to places like Alvin Ailey where everyone is black, instead of going to ABT where the majority of them are not,” Daniels said.

Daniels also feels that Copeland’s body shape was another obstacle she had to overcome in order to become a ballerina.

“She’s short and really muscular so she doesn’t look like a ballerina and then she’s black on top of that,” Daniels explained. “She had two things against her, but she still did it.”

PCA dancer teacher, Nicole Czekalski, feels like African American ballet dancers such as Copeland and Michaela DePrince, are inspiring girls of all races to try ballet.

“I think ballet is becoming a more accessible thing,” Czekalski explained. “Everyone is starting to realize that if she can do it, I can do it too.”

Czekalski also feels that the African American dancers at Richland Northeast inspire younger girls in the community to dance.

“Here at Northeast, we have quite a few African American ballet dancers who are strong dancers and also strong people as well so they are good role models for the dancers coming in and ones that don’t have as much ballet experience”

Daniels agrees.

“I think it hurts some kids because they can’t see themselves portrayed in ballet,” Daniels explained. “I know here at RNE we are trying to stop that. When we do stuff here, we always invite elementary school kids and they are always super amazed that most of the dancers here are black because that’s not something they get to see.”

Along with the increased amount of diversity in ballet has come diversity in brands like Barbie. Barbie has taken strides in expanding its brand by now offering dolls that come in various shapes, sizes, and colors. They even released a Misty Copeland doll on May 2.

Goodwin shares her opinion on the new dolls.

“I feel that they would help girls build their self-confidence because they will have support and they will know that everyone is different, and made different for a reason.”

Czekalski also feels that the dolls help build self-confidence.

“In dance, there is that stereotype of being really skinny to be able to be a dancer,” Czekalski explained. “I think the new Barbie dolls are wonderful as they are diversifying their brand and I hope they will continue in not just Barbie but in other fields as well like Disney and Mattel.”

Daniels believes that the dolls will be a major influence in young girls’ lives.

“When I was little, all the dolls were blonde with blue eyes, and I still played with them, but you think that that’s what pretty is supposed to be. But now that they



Misty Copeland attends “An Evening with Misty Copeland” at Smyth, a Thompson Hotel, on June 24, 2015, in New York.

Joe Schildhorn/BFA/Sipa USA/TNS

have short ones and tall ones and curvy ones and darker skinned ones, I think more girls can relate to them,” Daniels said.

“They probably made the dolls because of people like Misty Copeland and plus sized models, who are doing things that don’t really fit what people would think.”