

# Misty Copeland Launches Her Own Foundation and Free After-School Program

By: Amy Brandt

*Adapted by Fishtank Staff*

- 1 This month, American Ballet Theatre principal Misty Copeland announced the launch of [The Misty Copeland Foundation](#), a new nonprofit organization focused on bringing greater diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) to ballet. At its center is a free after-school program called [BE BOLD](#), which aims to make ballet more accessible and fun for 8 to 10-year-old children in marginalized communities. The 12-week program offers classes in introductory ballet, health and wellness, and music for ballet, as well as tutoring and mentoring.
- 2 Copeland brought together an advisory council with leaders in ballet, dance education, DEI and child development to help design the program's framework. She then partnered with the Boys & Girls Clubs of America—where she took her very first ballet class as a child—and National Dance Institute Collaborative for Teaching and Learning, founded by late New York City ballet star Jacques d'Amboise, to bring her vision to life.
- 3 During an intimate launch event last Thursday at NDI headquarters in Harlem, Copeland beamed with pride as her team of teaching artists gave a demonstration of typical BE BOLD class exercises. They enthusiastically led their young students through simple ballet combinations while adding fun twists, like call-and-response counts, changes in direction and choosing a finishing pose. Dancers rotated between ballet barres named after historic dancers of color, such as Virginia Johnson and Maria Tallchief.
- 4 "I wanted to create something that I haven't seen before," Copeland said in an interview afterwards. "It wasn't just about bringing ballet to after-school programs, it was about changing the structure of class, making it accessible to communities it wasn't made for."
- 5 The teaching artists, trained by NDI, are the stars of BE BOLD, she says. "They are going to connect to these students in these communities, and be able to think and work on the fly," says Copeland. "How can we tie in different cultures and help the kids see themselves reflected? How can we tie in American ballet history? They'll be teaching ballet's European foundation, but also how the students fit into it."
- 6 Copeland, ABT's first Black female principal dancer, started developing her foundation two years ago after a conversation with Ford Foundation president Darren Walker. "A lot of people ask me, 'Do you want to teach or take over a company?' And that's never what I imagined myself doing," she says. "I wanted to continue to give back and find a way to use my platform in the best way.

After talking with Darren, it made sense to start my own foundation and create programs that I think are really going to, from the ground up, do that work."

- 7 BE BOLD will start off in six Boys and Girls Club sites in the Bronx, with the intention to expand. "We'll start small, get it right, fix whatever needs to be fixed," says Copeland. In the meantime, she is getting ready for the November release of her newest book, [The Wind at My Back](#), about her relationship with ballerina Raven Wilkinson, adjusting to life as [a new mom](#) of her 5-month-old son, and preparing for her return to the stage some time in fall or winter 2023. As for how she manages it all, her answer is simple: "When you want to make change, you find the time."