



Misty Copeland

Beginning ballet at 13 is considered late. However, there are some dancers who will defy the odds. Such is the case with Misty Copeland.

Misty Danielle Copeland was born on September 10, 1982 in Kansas City, Missouri and raised in San Pedro, California. She lived with her single mother, along with her five siblings. Her childhood was unstable. At times, her mom fell on hard financial times and lived in a motel. Misty's talents were first realized when she participated on the drill team in Middle school. Her coach recognized Misty's raw talents. She was encouraged to take ballet classes at the local Boys & Girls club. Misty's gift of dance captured the attention of dance instructor, Cynthia Bradley. She was then enrolled in an intensive dance program at the San Pedro Ballet School. Due to an intense schedule, Misty would be given permission by her mom to live with the Bradley family. This move would allow Misty to be trained at a higher level. At 15, Misty won the Los Angeles Music Center's Spotlight Award. During that summer, she accepted a full scholarship into the intensive summer program at the San Francisco Ballet. A custody dispute between the Bradley's and her mom had Misty returning home.

In 2000, Misty won a full scholarship to American Ballet Theater's (ABT) intensive summer program. In the same year, she was named ABT's National Coca-Cola Scholar. She was invited to join the ABT studio in New York City. During this time, she would find herself immersed in a new world of cattiness, highly competitive, emaciated white dancers. The latter would thrust her into questioning her own full-figure body as a Black dancer. This would bring about its own set of challenges and struggles.

Misty was a perfectionist. She successfully climbed to the top due to her tenacity and excellent ballet skills. In 2001, she became a member of ABT's corps de ballet. She was the only African American woman out of 80 dancers. She became the first black dancer in two decades to lead in two major ABT's pieces. Her stellar performance in "Firebird" garnered her many accolades. After the performance, she suffered six fractures in her left shin. The injury was thought to be career ending for Misty. However, in 2015 Misty Copeland became ABT's first African American female principal ballerina in their 75 year history. At age 39, Misty continues to dance defying all odds.