NOVEMBER 12, 2026

The Music Center to Honor Trailblazing Ballet Icon Misty Copeland at 'Spotlight Grand Gala' on Saturday, May 22, 2027, in Downtown Los Angeles

The First African American Woman Named as Principal Dancer at American Ballet Theatre, Copeland's Rising Star Took Flight at L.A.'s Performing Arts Center as a Teen Grand Prize Finalist in 'The Music Center's Spotlight' Student Competition



The Music Center announced today that it will honor **Misty Copeland**, the groundbreaking ballet artist who made history as the first African American woman named principal dancer at **American Ballet Theatre (ABT)**, at *The Music Center's Spotlight Grand Gala* in Downtown Los Angeles on **Saturday, May 22, 2027**. The celebration will take place in The Music Center's historic Dorothy Chandler Pavilion following *The Music Center's Spotlight Grand Finale* performance in the Ahmanson Theatre, where the 2027 *Spotlight* Grand Prize Finalists--an extraordinary new generation of young dancers, musicians, vocalists and actors following in Misty's artistic footsteps--will take the stage.

For Copeland, the evening will mark a return to a place that helped set her remarkable career in motion. Nearly 30 years ago, at just 15 years old and only two years after taking her first ballet class, Copeland won first place in the *Spotlight* program's ballet category. She went on to break barriers in ballet and become a powerful inspiration to young artists of all backgrounds and identities who want to bring joy to audiences around the world.

"There is no more fitting and meaningful place to celebrate Misty's extraordinary journey than at The Music Center and with the program that helped launch her career," said **Rachel S. Moore**, president and CEO of The Music Center. "Misty changed the face of ballet through her artistry and perseverance, creating a path that many aspiring artists now follow. We are thrilled to honor her as we celebrate the next generation of artists who are beginning to write their own stories and who will themselves help change their art forms."

All net proceeds from *The Music Center's Spotlight Grand Gala* will support *Spotlight*, a nationally recognized performing arts competition, scholarship and artistic development program for Southern California high school students presented by TMC Arts, The Music Center's programming division. Now in its 39th year and led by *The Music Center's Spotlight* Fredric Roberts Senior Director Jeri Gaile, *Spotlight* is completely free, ensuring that students have access to artistic opportunities regardless of financial circumstances or experience level. Students receive personalized feedback from accomplished professionals, audition experience and opportunities to participate in mastery classes led by renowned artists and educators. Beyond artistic development, *Spotlight* uses the performing arts to help young people build confidence, discover their potential and develop skills that empower them in all aspects of their lives. Over 1,450 students from more than 280 high schools across Southern California have submitted applications to the program this year. Students participate by applying in one of seven categories: acting, ballet, dance, classical voice, non-classical voice, classical instrumental and contemporary instrumental. To date, *The Music Center's Spotlight* has awarded more than $3 million in scholarships.

Copeland joins a distinguished group of legendary artists and business leaders honored by L.A.'s performing arts center. The list includes EGOT winner Rita Moreno, Chairman and CEO of Entravision Communications Corporation Walter Ulloa, singer-songwriter Joni Mitchell and A&M Records Co-Founder Jerry Moss. Moss was honored with a special tribute concert in recognition of his historic $25 million donation to the performing arts organization.

Born in Kansas City, Mo., and raised in San Pedro, Calif., Copeland began her ballet studies at the late age of 13. She studied at the San Francisco Ballet School and American Ballet Theatre's Summer Intensive on full scholarship and was declared ABT's National Coca-Cola Scholar in 2000. Copeland joined ABT's Studio Company in September 2000, joined American Ballet Theatre as a member of the corps de ballet in April 2001 and, in August 2007, became the company's second African American female soloist, the first in two decades. In June 2015, Copeland was promoted to principal dancer, making her the first African American woman to ever be promoted to the position in the company's 75-year history.

Performing a variety of classical and contemporary roles, one of Copeland's most important roles was the title role in *Firebird*, created for her in 2012 with new choreography by much sought after choreographer Alexei Ratmansky. In December 2014, Copeland performed the lead role of Clara in American Ballet Theatre's production of *The Nutcracker*, also choreographed by Ratmansky. In the fall of 2014, Copeland made history as the first Black woman to perform the lead role of Odette/Odile in American Ballet Theatre's *Swan Lake* during the company's inaugural tour to Australia. She reprised the role during ABT's Metropolitan Opera House spring season in June 2015, as well as debuted as Juliet in *Romeo & Juliet*.

Copeland's passion is giving back. She has worked with many charitable organizations and is dedicated to giving her time to work with and mentor young girls and boys. In 2014, President Obama appointed Copeland to the President's Council on Fitness, Sports and Nutrition. In 2022, she founded the Misty Copeland Foundation, which works to increase diversity, equity and inclusion in dance, particularly ballet, through its signature BE BOLD program. She is a four-time *New York Times* bestselling author, with four of her nine books earning bestseller status, including *Life in Motion*, *Ballerina Body*, *Black Ballerinas* and *Bunheads*. Her 2014 memoir, *Life in Motion*, was co-written with award-winning journalist and author Charisse Jones. She also authored the award-winning 2014 picture book *Firebird*, in collaboration with award-winning illustrator and author Christopher Myers. Copeland has received three honorary doctorates in recognition of her contributions to the arts, including from the University of Hartford, New York University and the Manhattan School of Music.

"*Spotlight* changed my life and the course of my career," said **Misty Copeland**. "I had been dancing for less than two years, and this community embraced me with so much love and support. They saw my passion and potential before I had polished technique or was anywhere close to a finished artist. It was the first time I was challenged to make real artistic choices and trusted to find my own voice. That belief in me has stayed with me throughout my career. Returning to be honored by a community I love so deeply means more than I can express."

Music Center Board Member Teresita Notkin is the 2027 *Spotlight Grand Gala* Chair.

To purchase dinner tickets or sponsor a table at *The Music Center's Spotlight Grand Gala*, visit **musiccenter.org/spotlightgala** or contact Valeryee Jimenez at (213) 972-3315 or **specialevents@musiccenter.org**

For more information about *The Music Center's Spotlight* program, visit **musiccenter.org/spotlight** or follow **@musiccenterspotlight** and **@spotlightawards** on social media.

ABOUT THE MUSIC CENTER

The Music Center convenes artists, communities and ideas with the goal of deepening the cultural lives of every resident in Los Angeles County. The $80 million non-profit performing arts organization has two divisions: TMC Arts and TMC Ops. TMC Arts, The Music Center's programming engine, provides year-round programming inside The Music Center's four theatres, on Jerry Moss Plaza, outside at Gloria Molina Grand Park--a 12-acre adjacent green space--in schools and other locations all over Los Angeles County. TMC Arts presents world-class dance with *Glorya Kaufman Presents Dance at The Music Center*, free and low-cost public concerts and events, live and digital K-12 arts education programs, workshops, performances, interactive experiences and special events. TMC Ops manages the theatres, the

Plaza and Gloria Molina Grand Park, which comprise $3 billion in county assets, on behalf of the County of Los Angeles. The Music Center is also home to four renowned resident companies--Center Theatre Group, Los Angeles Master Chorale, LA Opera and LA Phil. For more information, visit **musiccenter.org**. Follow The Music Center on social media @MusicCenterLA.

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Misty Copeland photographed by Ottavia Giola.

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