

THE
GRADUATE
SCHOOL **PUBLIC**
LECTURES
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Misty Copeland
PUBLIC LECTURE TRANSCRIPT



BE BOUNDLESS

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INTRODUCTION

Valerie Curtis-Newton

Head of Performance at the UW School of Drama

Good evening my name is Valerie Curtis-Newton and I am the head of performance at the University of Washington School of Drama where I teach acting and directing. On behalf of the Graduate School here at the university, I'm happy to welcome so many of you. A university, at least, a good one, is intended to be an incubator for aspiration. As faculty members, we vow to empower every student with the skills and belief that their dreams are within reach. And here at the University of Washington, we pride ourselves on being boundless, unlimited in our pursuit of knowledge, information, experiences, life. We support one another's pursuits to be free of intimidation, or discouraged, discouragement by difficulty, danger or disappointment. We are undaunted, and tonight our guest, Misty Copeland, embodies all of these characteristics. Boundless was she, as she leapt through feelings of agony, hurt, desolation, hardship and rejection. At the age of 13, she pushed herself to go out on the limb far beyond her comfort zone. It was there that she found her calling, her place, her peace in a ballet studio. When she was only 17 years old, Debbie Allen called her a child who dances her soul, and stated that she couldn't imagine Misty doing anything else. Debbie Allen called it right, didn't she? On, in August 2015, Misty Copeland was promoted to principal dancer for the American Ballet Theatre, making her (applause), making her the first black woman to achieve that distinction in the theater's 25-year history. So tonight, on this stage, I am deeply honored to welcome Misty Copeland. Thank you.

FEATURED SPEAKER (2:46)

Misty Copeland

American ballet dancer

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Hi.

Misty Copeland: Hi

Valerie Curtis-Newton: So, I told you that I wasn't going to do the Wikipedia interview, because people they, they know who you are already. I would like to ask a question about the first, the first moment that you met ballet. What was that and what, what shifted in you in that moment?

Misty Copeland: So much. I mean, okay, so we're not gonna do the Wikipedia, but I'm gonna go back a little bit

Valerie Curtis-Newton: You do you!

Misty Copeland: Ok. You know, as a, as a child, I just lived my life in fear. One of six children growing up in a single-parent home. We were just constantly in motion and on the move and moving from this friend's house to this friend's house and sleeping with this cousins, at this cousin's house, this aunt's house and in this motel and I just became like this shell of a person and I was just hiding behind my siblings. Just the thought of going to school gave me anxiety and fear. I didn't want any attention on me. And, and I didn't know that I even had a voice that I wanted to share with anyone. So when I was pushed into, into ballet, because I was pushed. I'd never heard classical music. I'd never seen a ballet. I've never seen any formal dance in any way. I wasn't exposed to it growing up. That first time that I stepped into it, I mean, the first class was on the basketball court at the Boys & Girls Clubs, and I don't think I really got it then, I was like, what am I doing here, in my socks underneath this hoop and trying to do ballet. But once I was brought into the studio that I ended up attending on full scholarship, it was the first time that it literally, like, this confidence that I'd never experienced in my life was just like, it came out. I looked in the mirror and I was like, oh, I'm, I'm beautiful here in this space. Like, I'm good at this. I'm smart at this. And it all just like clicked. It became this incredible, beautiful fantasy escape for me, from what I'd only known as my life, which was a lot of chaos.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: But the, one of the interesting threads I think, in doing the research on you, is this, this balance between or this war between the confidence and the insecurity. Can you talk about how especially moving up into the profession, how the insecurity shows itself and then sort of what were the things that helped you to hold on to your confidence in the face of that other stuff

Misty Copeland: It's really difficult as, especially as a classical dancer, we are, we have to be open and vulnerable. To perform, to be like, to be a true artist, I think you have to have that side to you. And we're also, you know, we're just kind of like these blank canvases and our ballet masters and mistresses

and coaches and all of that, they're there to tell you what you're doing wrong. Like, that's how we get better. But there comes a point where I feel like it's, it's easy to get kind of caught up in, in too much of that negativity and then you become so hard on yourself and lose that confidence. For me, I feel like a lot of the insecurities started to come when I was a professional dancer. When I joined American Ballet Theatre, and my body started to change, I no longer was this ideal ballerina body, you know, and I hit puberty. Also, you know, being the only black woman in a company of 80 dancers for a decade, it just like wore on me and made me feel so insecure. But there was something that always happened when I went on stage. And it was like I always had confidence. It took me, like, a decade, probably before I really experienced what it was to feel like nervous on stage. But it is a hard balance. And for me, it's it's really about like the support system that I have in my life that allows me to keep that, that balance.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: So I want to talk about two things that come out of that. The first one is you had really great mentors at every stage. I mean, people who in the language of our young people, they were ride or die, for Misty. Right? I love the story of your first set of mentors, Elizabeth and Sandy? And then also, what happened when you got to ABT and they sort of made a team for you? Can you talk about having those, those people sort of, placed at the right place, at the right time

Misty Copeland: It's so vital and so important. And I don't think I even realized it because it was there, it was there for me. But it's something that I'm constantly speaking to like the youth about, and like, young dancers that I mentor, like the importance of having that. Elizabeth Cantine, who is now like my godmother, but she was a teacher of mine in my public school. She's the one that pushed me to go take this ballet class. And then Cynthia was my first ballet teacher and I lived with her for three years while I was trying to get caught up on all the training starting so late.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: At 13.

Misty Copeland: Yeah. I mean, I only trained for four years before I became a professional, so I had a lot to do in that time. But it was, you know, these, these two women that were there like financially supporting me, you know, pointe shoes and, you know, it's a very expensive art form to be a part of and, and just being there for me, I think kind of rebuilding this broken girl that I don't even think my mother realized, you know, that she was raising this broken girl, you know not having someone there to tell me I was good enough or good at something or

beautiful and I feel like they kind of filled me in in that way. And then when I, when I got to American Ballet Theatre, Kevin McKenzie, who's the artistic director, has always been so incredibly supportive of me, which isn't always the case in a lot of companies and especially being a, you know, a minority and being the only one, he saw when I was kind of, you know, feeling, he was feeling that I was going down the wrong path. And he always told me that I had what it took to go all the way. But it's kind of like, okay, well now what do I do? What do I do with this? And he was really great in, in reaching out to, to a really special woman in my life, Susan Fales-Hill, who was on the board of directors and she's this incredibly strong, powerful, accomplished black woman. And it was the first time I had someone like her in my life that I was like, I'm you, like, I'm, I am like you and you are succeeding, and you are incredible. And it was the first time that I really felt like a true connection to a positive image of a black woman that I could like touch. And it did so much for me and my confidence.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: It's a, it's also sort of miraculous that Kevin recognized what you needed and knew that ABT didn't necessarily have it to give you, to reach out to get it for you. That's really powerful.

Misty Copeland: Yeah, yeah it is powerful, I mean, it was his idea, and he was like, you know, he told Susan like, take her under your wing, like, watch out for her, do what you need to do to you know, to be there for her and set an example.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: In talking about these mentors and, and what it is to be a black woman dancing, I wonder also about the element of class, and, you know, coming from a struggling working class family and needing that, these, these supports, as you moved into the professional ranks, is there a similar kind of divide between the people who grow up with a certain kind of privilege, and the people who find the resources to get themselves there?

Misty Copeland: You know, I think something that's so incredible about art is that it brings people together and it kind of puts you on even playing fields. And so I feel like, just my experience from, you know, being around professional dancers for as long as I have and being in American Ballet Theatre, it's like, once you get to that point, we're all the same, but, but during my training process, it was really difficult to feel that you fit in and you belong, you know, in, you know, the class thing and, you know, I'm, you know, going home to the motel on the weekends and my friends are going off, you know, to ski, you

know, in California somewhere in the mountains and it's, so it's, it's an interesting thing to to experience. Yeah.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: That's straddling two worlds, really.

Misty Copeland: Yes.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Was it hard? Was it hard for you.

Misty Copeland: In the beginning.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: In the beginning?

Misty Copeland: Yeah. Yeah, it was, it was difficult for me to feel that I'm a part of something that's finally like, this is my home. And then, you know, and, and I'd build these bonds with these dancers that you're with every day, but then you leave the studio and then it's like, we're not really the same anymore. You know, so it's, it's an interesting thing to experience as a child.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Then you would have the opposite side, which is you go home to a family that doesn't understand the ballet life.

Misty Copeland: Absolutely and that was hard. That was hard as well and it was a really difficult time. And, you know, I think I was 15 years old when my family went through the whole court case situation.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: You became like Entertainment Tonight TV famous.

Misty Copeland: No, it was not fun. And, yeah, it was difficult for my, for my family to really understand that, you know, this is normal in, you know, in the athletic world and in the arts, that, you know, dancers go off at a young age and they, they live with, you know, coaches or they go to boarding schools, and they focus on their training. And it was so far from the world that we all knew that it was like, you know, you're taking my sister away, you're taking my daughter away, this isn't right. And it just kind of grew up into this thing.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: And was there, for you, a longing for them as well? Like, how like, how did you process the letting go of that?

Misty Copeland: Right, it was, it was really difficult to process like, I think culturally, most of all, you know, I went from, from, you know, growing up in a black home, in always, in a black environment, black neighborhoods, and now all of a sudden I'm living in the suburbs with literally a white family. And we are no

longer listening to Anita Baker and Aretha Franklin. We, you know, it like, it was such a shift culturally for me. But I feel like because I associated this family with ballet, and it was like this, it was love, and it didn't matter what color they were. And I adapted really well because I felt that genuine love from ballet and from them.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Since we've talked a little bit about it, why don't we just take that question that we talked about earlier, which is, there are a lot of people who would prefer that you not actually talk about yourself as a black ballerina.

Misty Copeland: I thought you were going to say, what do you like to cook?

Valerie Curtis-Newton: I'm going to get there, we've got time, we've got time. That's number 8 on the list.

Misty Copeland: I have so much to say about that. It's, it's really difficult for me to, you know, because I'm in this position, in this amazing position and have this, these incredible platforms to be seen, for people to look at a black ballerina, and maybe not have any knowledge of ballet and say like, that's a ballerina, like that is huge. So just because I'm in this position, I can't just remove that from my title. Like, I wouldn't be me. I wouldn't be in this position if I weren't a black woman, if I weren't a black ballerina. And so it's, it's, it's difficult to explain to people who have never experienced what it is to be a minority or to be black in America, so it's hard to explain to them that that's not something you can just drop, like, I still have to live with this. This is still me. (Applause)

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Backstage, we were talking about what it is to be the only one in the room and that as you progress through your career, there are different rooms, but still very often you're the only one in the room. In, are people getting clearer because you're not, as I said to you earlier, you're not new. So do you, do you encounter more understanding? Or is it still people, still behind their preconceptions?

Misty Copeland: Yeah, I don't know that there's more understanding. I don't. I mean, I am not someone that's going to say like, oh, you know, President Obama changed, you know, the way people, you know, no one's racist anymore. Or like, I'm here, it doesn't exist, like that's just not reality. And so I feel like there's, people are familiar and comfortable with me. I don't know that they're definitely comfortable with a black woman. You know, so there are two other black women that are in ABT now and that is huge and I try to be there to support them. But you know, if people have questions which some people do that

don't understand what it is to, you know, to be the, the only one, like I will do and will gladly answer, you know, whatever curiosity and questions they have, like, I don't fault people for not understanding. But I think it's a dialogue that we need to keep open for people to grow and understand and to make change.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: There are some people who don't understand the discussion around body type and how essentially are code words for not white. Right? Because when people, when average people look at you, they see a ballerina, they don't really understand what the, what the dividing line was. And you talked about hitting puberty a little late. And all of a sudden you developed a woman's body. And they didn't quite know what to, what to do with that.

Misty Copeland: Yeah. You know, it's interesting, because when I started ballet, you know, I was considered a prodigy. And I was like, oh, you know, this perfect ideal. So it was a little easier to look past my skin color, I think. So as a child, you know, it was like, oh, you have this little peanut head and a long neck and big feet and long legs. And I was like, that's ugly. And they're like, no, it's beautiful. So that's why I was like, I am a ballerina, like, I look like a ballerina. And then, you know, I became a professional and my body changed and my and then I had boobs I had thighs and like, and I was no longer, you know that 13 year old, perfect little ballerina body. And I feel like people started to look at me in a different way.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Did you look at you in a different way? Or was it only when people sort of brought it to your attention? Or did you just feel like Misty ballerina?

Misty Copeland: I absolutely did. And I think it's also because I didn't grow up in the Ballet community and I didn't have those, like, those ideas in my head like I need to be thin. I need to be this, like it was like, I stepped into this world and I happened to be good at it and I just did it. And so I wasn't ever thinking that I needed to be anything else. But yes, it was people that brought to my attention, being told to lose weight by ABT, but —

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Can I ask a really personal question?

Misty Copeland: Yes.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: At your heaviest, how much did you weigh?

Misty Copeland: Maybe like 108 or one — (laughter) Yeah, I mean, I'm five-two. And, yeah. (Laughter) I mean, all of that to

say, you know, it's something that has taken me a long time to really clearly understand that language that's being used because I'm, I meet so many black dancers that it's like, we have the same exact stories and we're told the same thing the same words and, and you know, I'll look at a lot of them like how can you possibly be told you don't have a dancer's body, you know, and it's like, this is, this is their way of saying it without saying it, like you don't have the right skin color, you don't belong here, you don't fit in, you've never been a part of this. So you don't belong here.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: I want to talk a little bit more about, about the body. And you and I were talking backstage and I said, one of the things that for me is so remarkable about you is that you hit these sort of, you push yourself to these levels of achievement, and then the body breaks a little bit. Right? You get into ABT and you have a severe back injury that costs you a year of dancing. Then you, you build yourself up, and you danced Firebird, and then we discover these fractures that require surgery and then this sort of coming back. How, how did you mentally stay tough enough to come back after, what everyone would consider to be career-ending injuries, both of them, because you started dancing so late, the, the perception that each of these was career ending injuries, but you came back with a new kind of focus and fire. What, what was it? How did you do it?

Misty Copeland: Well, I think that dancers have an incredible emotional and mental strength. So with that, I think before I started dancing, learning to survive in any way I could, as a child, I think has made me the strong person that I am when it, when it's in these situations, like, under pressure, or, or, you know, when I feel like something's going to be taken away from me, it's like, no, I'm going to fight for this. And I think that that was just instilled in me from a child that it was like, you know, just the mode I was in always, it was like, no, we're going to make it, and watching my mom, you know, like, no, we're not going to sleep on the street, we're going to, we're going to somehow find a way. And I think that that's just always been a part of me. You know, the most critical was definitely, you know, when I did the Firebird and there was a different motivation at that point, you know, I had been in the company for 12 years. And I'd been a soloist for like, seven, six or seven years at that time. So I was 29 years old. And I was given this opportunity to do the lead in a classical ballet and that's extremely late in a, in a dancer's career, to get an opportunity like that, most likely will never be a principal dancer at 29, if you're not given an opportunity before then, and something had shifted at that point, I had started working with my

manager and you know, the conversation of diversity was really starting to resonate with people and I remember doing the Firebird in Los Angeles. I did two shows and the audience was so diverse. It was really the first time that we saw such a diverse crowd and I knew I was injured at that point and I pushed through maybe half of the spring season, and then Firebird came. And it was just like, the black community was literally coming out to see, to see a black woman do this for the first time at the Metropolitan Opera House with American Ballet Theatre. And it was like I have to do this, like it doesn't matter if I go out there and I'm like limping, I'm like, I just gotta show up. I gotta show out, and I've got to be on that stage and I've got to show this, you know, generation that's never seen this that may never see it again, like show them this is possible. Show all those dancers that were never given an opportunity like, this is you, this is what you could have been and you still can be through me. And so that was the motivation to getting back from that injury, it was, it felt like life or death to me.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: And it sounds like some of the people in *A Ballerina's Tale*, the documentary that Nelson George did, one of your best friends says that, you know, you really cleaned up your act as a dancer when you discovered this higher calling that it made, that everything changed.

Misty Copeland: Yeah, it was, it was a different purpose and a different responsibility. It wasn't, it wasn't so singular and almost a selfish feeling, not that we're selfish as dancers. But you know, a lot of it is we spend so much time working on ourselves and doing this for ourselves even though we give so much of ourselves on the stage night after night. It's still like a very singular thing to experience and yeah, I guess I didn't have that same motivation in, that I had when I was 13 years old when you know you're being celebrated, now it was like, you're the odd-ball out, you're fat in our eyes and like, where do you belong? And so it definitely sparked something different in me when it was like, you can, you can help to change what ballet is.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: You, you did an interview with former President Barack Obama and one of the questions, one of the your answers to one of the questions, you said, when you have all of these expectations and goals to reach this point that 1 percent get to, you know, how do you, what do you do when you get there?

Misty Copeland: Yeah, I asked him that. What do you do?

Valerie Curtis-Newton: So I'm asking you, you know, you're in that place of being in the, having done all the work to be the 1

percent, to be in the 1 percent, what does it, what does it feel like to you and what's how are you navigating it?

Misty Copeland: Yeah, I have my like ups and downs and I think as dancers, we're very critical of ourselves. And I feel like it's just, it's a different responsibility and a different pressure. It's, it's such an honor. And I think that when I first was promoted, it took me like a year to accept it. You know, I was at a point where it was like, I'm doing *Romeo and Juliet*, I'm doing *Swan Lake*, I'm doing *Firebird*. This is incredible. It doesn't matter if I'm a principal dancer or not, like I'm doing what I've always wanted to do. I mean, I understood what that title meant for so many. So, you know, once I got there, it was like, do, am I as good as you know, all these incredible dancers that have come before me at American Ballet Theatre, you know.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: The title of principal dancer is a kind of validation.

Misty Copeland: It's a validation. But I mean, as a, as a black dancer, I mean, I understood what that title meant for me to have it, but once I got there, yeah, it was, it was interesting to just, I started to have these insecurities again. It's like, where's this coming from? You know, you start to think of, you know, become Mikhail Baryshnikov, Gelsey Kirkland and you know all of these incredible dancers that have come through ABT and you're like, am I really like, there? And you know and I think that it's about just accepting, accepting your journey and your path and not comparing it to anyone else's. And that's just kind of where I'm at right now is that I'm just trying to do me and not get caught up in there's always going to be negativity and things I read and I try not to read and it's difficult and I just have to you know, believe in myself, go up there and do my best every performance. (Applause)

Valerie Curtis-Newton: It's slowed a little but not a lot because this new book jumps it back up again. But for maybe 18 months, it was all Misty Copeland, all the time, *Under Armour*, *The New York Times*, all those, all of those things and a kind of celebrity gets attached. What is, what is that face? And, and how do you navigate what it is to be the celebrity, not just the black ballerina, but the celebrity, Misty Copeland.

Misty Copeland: I hate that word so much. I do, like, I just, it's amazing to be able to, like, represent this art form that has given everything, it's given me my life. And I'm so grateful for it. And I think it diminishes it when you put those words on it, you know, being famous or celebrity because dancers are so much more, first of all, and to single me out, like I understand why I'm in this position and why I'm getting this attention, it's a big deal,

you know, to be an African American and make it to this level, but I just feel like I want to represent all dancers in a really positive way and for it not to be about me, for it to be about bringing value with me on these, in these platforms. And so it's difficult, when I, when I hear that like, I don't want to be thought of as, as a Kim Kardashian like, I don't want to be attached to that. (Applause) I just, I have, I have so much respect for my art form, and for dancers and, and so that's what, that's what I want my legacy to be.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Can you, just since we're here, can you share with this audience what a, what a typical day for Misty Copeland is?

Misty Copeland: I'm going to start crying again, it's so hard.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: When you talk about, you know, not being Kim Kardashian, I think that when people understand what it is to get through the week, you know, in, in season, you know, that that's a big thing.

Misty Copeland: Yeah, yeah it's, it's a ton of work. And so, let's see, when I'm, when I'm in season with ABT, like this is an off-week for me so I can do these things. But when I'm, when I'm in-season, I'm in ballet class at 10:15, it goes until 11:45. I'm in rehearsal from noon until seven, five days a week, sometimes no break at all in between. And so I get Sundays and Mondays off and that's usually when I'm doing, like, photoshoots and filming commercials and doing interviews and book events and then if I have like a week off then I'll, right now I'm on a book tour, so I'm in a different city, like state, every day, doing events and things. But you know, it's, it's incredible that I have these opportunities and I want to take advantage of them while I, while I can and, and again, like it's amazing to be able to have an Under Armour deal as a dancer, like I want that to be the new norm. Like why aren't dancers getting these opportunities that athletes are, we work harder. (Applause)

Valerie Curtis-Newton: So shall we talk about this book?

Misty Copeland: Okay.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Ballerina Body is Misty's new book and it is a combination of health and fitness and food. Yeah? Can you talk about what the, what the seed was like? Did you just wake up one day and said, aha!

Misty Copeland: I'm going to write Ballerina Body. No, there were so many things, that, you know, throughout the course of my career I've been asked a lot of the same questions. What do

you eat? What do you do to crosstrain outside of, outside of ballet? Like how do you stay mentally strong and prepared, emotionally present? So it made sense just to do something like this. And I think also, as a dancer, like, I want to show people kind of like, what it really is to be a dancer, you know, we eat, we're not anorexic, you know, we're athletes, we, we work really hard we, we have to constantly be thinking and taking care of our bodies because it's our instrument. This is how we do what we need to do, is through our body. And so I thought like, this is a beautiful way for people to connect to and feel that it's possible for them to do, whether they're a dancer or not. That word, ballerina body, it's not you know, like, oh, here, take this book and do this and you're going to be me or you're going to be a ballerina. But you know, it's, it's, has been this long journey of me creating my own version of a ballerina's body. And I want women to look at this as creating their own version of a healthy body, of their, their own ballerina body.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: When did you fall in love with cooking?

Misty Copeland: Well, my mom did not cook at all. So like, you know, I was eating Cup of Noodles and like, you know, string beans out of a can and hot dogs. And so I had no knowledge of nutrition growing up at all, and, and wasn't exposed to cooking really. So when I moved to New York when I was 17, it was like, well, you better figure something out. So I kind of just taught myself like, I would watch the Food Network. I started buying cookbooks and, and I, and I literally started teaching myself and I fell in love with it. It became this another escape for me when I was in the kitchen and I put on music and I felt like I was being creative, but it was very calming at the same time.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: How, have any of you seen Misty as a judge on Chopped Junior on Food Network?

Misty Copeland: That was so fun.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Well I'm sort of curious about it, like, do they, how did they prepare you to do this?

Misty Copeland: You know, I —

Valerie Curtis-Newton: They just throw food at you?

Misty Copeland: You know, it's, it's, I feel like I never say yes or agree to do something or be a part of something that I don't feel comfortable or I'm not passionate about, you know, with every opportunity that I have. It's not like I'm just like, oh, yeah, sure, like, give me that check and I'll do, I'll pretend to like this or do this, you know, it's, that's just not what I want in my life.

Like, I have very little time. And it's going to be done doing something that I love doing. So when it came to, you know, I don't know how they deal with their celebrity judges on that show, because I don't know if like, some of them probably don't cook. And they're, no really, and so it felt very easy for me. They were just like, you know, these are the kids, this is what they're going to be making, and I was like, great. Let's taste the food and I'll tell them what I think, and you know, not be so hard on them because their children, but —

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Not like a dance master.

Misty Copeland: No, yeah it felt very easy.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Do you have a favorite thing to cook?

Misty Copeland: I, well, one of my go-tos just because my husband loves it is this citrus salmon that I like make the marinade myself, it's like white wine vinegar, orange juice, soy sauce, brown sugar, scallions and then you let the salmon like sit in that for like maybe 15 minutes, put it in the refrigerator and then you take some of the remaining marinade and you like bring it to a simmer and let it get thick and then you put the salmon in the broiler and you pour it on top and it's so good. (Applause)

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Thinking about the, the next phase for Misty Copeland, there's more dance, that's a given, there's more dance. Do you, are you beginning to have a vision of what life down the road might be? Are the books a thing, you know, is it, or is it just you'll know it when you get to it?

Misty Copeland: I'm hoping that's what happens. I, of course, you know, I think that I will, I will continue writing. It's been something that I've done since I was like 15 years old and really enjoyed doing it. But I will be connected to dance and involved in dance and diversity and dance forever. But I feel like it's hard for me to really be present and focused in what I'm doing and think about that. Like, I feel like I'm like, I need to just do me and what's happening right now and enjoy it and be present.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: And there's a lot of conversation out these days about that, that centers around the word resilience. Can you talk just a little bit about, about your, the key to your resilience, and maybe, when, describe a time when you sort of feel like you were maybe your most resilient self.

Misty Copeland: Okay. It, I feel like it just keeps coming back to the mentors. Like I feel like that's what has shaped me and protected me and prepared me to be resilient is having that

support system and and people that are there to like, push away all the negativity. It's so easy these days on social media, it's so easy to just like, read a comment and, you know, you push aside every positive thing you see, and you see that one negative thing and you're like, that's true. That's, like that must be true, this one person I don't even know said it about me and I think that you know, I have an amazing husband that's there by me that's like wake up, like, do you even know these people and they don't know you? And, and I feel like when you just have a true understanding of who you are, like who you are inside, that it allows you to like, have, you know, have all that negative negativity just bounce off of you.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: What is it about, about New York? We were talking about your loving New York. You're, you're a California, born and raised, but New York is your, is your, your place? What is it about the energy of that place that —

Misty Copeland: I cannot imagine myself living anywhere else. Even like thinking about kids, I'm like, what are we, how are we going to do this? Because I want to stay in New York. It's, it's alive. It's, I feel like it's brought me out of my shell, it's made me, it's helped to make me the woman that I am, like, just feeling like you're a part of the people. You're not removed. You're not in a car, like you're out there, you're in it with people whether you like it or not.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Do you walk the streets? Do you take the subway?

Misty Copeland: I don't take the subway as much anymore. But, yes, I walk the streets and even the crazies like, it just makes it New York, you know, they like, people that literally would just come up to me like they know me and they'll put me in a headlock and be like, let's take a selfie. And I'm like, who are you, but it's like, it's New York, and I don't think I would get that anywhere else.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: It's, it's probably good preparation for the kind of energy that comes now. Absolutely. Being, being a relatively famous, I won't use the C word, being a relatively famous, but people, there's a kind of energy that comes with, and it's got to be overwhelming. Do you find yourself someone who leans into that energy or do you, does your shy girl come out?

Misty Copeland: Yeah, I've always been that way, like, if I'm in a group of people and there's that one person that likes, wants to be the center of attention and is loud I literally am like, eh, like I just, I mean but in general I think that I prefer to wait till

I'm on stage to have the focus on me, like it's, it's exhausting to me and I'd rather just like reserve my, my energy for performing.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Well, and you definitely put out way more energy than we could ever possibly give to you when you're dancing. I'm wondering if, in your, in your work as a dancer, in kicking open the door, to make space for others, what is it that you, that you hope that dance does in the world as a result of being transformed by this new, this new energy.

Misty Copeland: I mean, I just feel like it can unite so many people, like I was sent by the president to Cuba to speak about this, like to speak about, you know, bringing different cultures together through art and through dance and, and it's, it's just an incredible opportunity, I think, especially right now with what's happening in the world and so I feel like we hold that power and responsibility to bring people together and, and to stop all this craziness and separation and racism, like, and I think that we can do that as artists and so I hope that that's what I can continue to do by being a black ballerina.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: That's beautiful. (Applause). Just a follow-up on this point, can you talk about, maybe, one of the experiences, the cross-cultural experiences that you had that have made a big, lasting impression? I mean, you've been all over the world. But what might be one of those times where something happened, and it just lands in your spirit differently than just performing for the people?

Misty Copeland: Right, I think probably spending time in Rwanda with this incredible program that brings in these street kids, they're called, I mean, because they literally are, they live on the street, and a lot of their family they lost to HIV and it was just eye-opening to see, first of all to see the way these kids are living, but to see the way they were brought into this environment and this program that's using dance. It's like the first thing they learned. A lot of these kids are between the ages of like 6 and 19. And they've never been to school, they're illiterate. They don't even know how to begin to learn, let alone communicate and talk to someone. So they're starting them out with a basic dance class, like get their body moving, it gets their cognitive skills going, and then they, when they graduate to the next level, they introduce them to language, they start teaching them English, they start learning to write, they start to learn to work on a computer, and it was just like, the power of dance is so strong and incredible, and it's like I want to, I don't want to say out loud, but I want Trump to see this.

Q&A SESSION (44:38)

Valerie Curtis-Newton: So, I'm going to take a few questions here from the audience. I have a magic iPad and they're gonna tell you where to ask a question. Folks have been asking questions since yesterday. And you just answered a question because you talked about your work in Rwanda. Misty, a lot of discussion of being black has been framed as a disadvantage. How has growing up black living in a black neighborhood being a black girl and now woman informed your craft and enabled you to be a success? Has it ever been perceived from you on the inside, as a negative, did you ever buy that?

Misty Copeland: Um, yeah. Yeah. I mean, it was just difficult. It was hard. I mean, I thought like, there were times when I was like, what am I doing here? Like, this isn't gonna happen for me. Like, why am I wasting my time? I think something that was positive that I feel like sets me apart as an individual and as an artist is just the, the music I grew up around, like the environments I think shaped me in a different, in a different way and not your typical way that most dancers experience coming into the ballet world. Like you know, starting at a late age and like you know, I started choreographing when I was like seven years old to like soul music and that was like where I first got my like, movement.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Are we ever going to see a Misty Copeland choreographed dance piece?

Misty Copeland: No.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: I had to ask.

Misty Copeland: No. (Laughter)

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Do you have a favorite role?

Misty Copeland: Yes. At the moment. Well, it's hard. I haven't performed Giselle yet. And I love it. But, Juliet for sure. Oh, I love it so much. I do.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: What is it about though?

Misty Copeland: I think it's, I realized, like, as I was doing my first Juliet, like, I think this is what I'm good at. Like the theater, the theatrical, the acting side of dance, like, there, it brought me this power where you can just like forget about the

technique and let that take over. And it's, it's such an amazing experience to just be that character on stage.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: See, we've answered that question. Do you ever feel objectified in performance as a dancer or are you just received as just a body up there?

Misty Copeland: No, I don't. I was very interested, I've never talked about this outloud, no it's interesting I've never ever felt that way. Like I, I completely understand and appreciate art and I, and I feel like people that maybe don't always get it, they can remove themselves and look at it in that way. But it's interesting because I know Prince gets it but Prince once said to me, I was doing this role in Alexei Ratmansky's Bright Stream, and I was the milkmaid. So I literally had to, like, get down on my knees, and like milk, this imaginary cow, and he was like, you shouldn't be doing that. You're a ballerina. You're a woman, get off your knees. And I was like, um, like, I get what you're saying. But I don't know that this is the right like, that this is the platform. You know?

Valerie Curtis-Newton: What's the most played song on your iPad, iPod?

Misty Copeland: Oh, I'm constantly just like changing albums. Before I was here, I was just listening to Frank Ocean's new album.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: This is a question I'm sure you get all the time. But if you could go back in time, what would you tell your young, your younger self?

Misty Copeland: I think that I would just like, assure her that everything's gonna be okay. I mean, I was such a nervous child and I just like everything I did. It was like, I just thought my world was going to fall apart. You know, if I did something wrong, I think I would just like, calm down, breathe, be patient and believe in yourself.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: You can actually fail and get better at the same time.

Misty Copeland: Yes, and I know.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: You talked a little bit about your, the mentors in terms of support system before you got to ABT. When you first got to the company were there any people inside the company who sort of took you under their wing? Or was it more like bonding with your peers to survive the onslaught?

Misty Copeland: I feel like I connected with the black men in the company, like a lot. I wouldn't say they took me under their wing, like, we were supporting each other. Eric Underwood, he's a soloist with the Royal Ballet. He was like a, he was like my brother in the company. And like, it's nice to have someone who gets it with you, like that has experienced the things that you've experienced. And you can come together and like, have a moment during the day where you're like, yeah, that happened. And we get it. You know, and it's, it's nice to have that. And I think that that's like everyday things that a lot of people don't understand, you know, when you're the only one that you can't do.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: There's a whole slew of questions about stretches and work at the bar.

Misty Copeland: Okay, um, one of the girls was asking me this, or we talked about it a little bit backstage earlier, so I'll talk about it. Being hyper extended has been like, it's been like a beautiful thing and part of my body in line that, you know, is good for ballet but at the same time, it's caused a lot of my injuries and it's really difficult to work that way and, and just something that I've learned like so much like coming back from especially this most recent surgery, is how how much you can do with your feet to take the pressure off of like your bones. And I would never recommend it and I'm sure so many dancers here do it but standing with your heels apart and just your knees touching is like the worst thing you can do for yourself. You'll never work that way in like real life. Like if you stand in first position, you know, in center with your knees that way like and then you try and do a Tendu, like, where's your weight? It's going to be on your heel. So, you know, it's, I think important to like, understand how to like really, okay (applause), so like if I tried to stand this way, and then I tried to do a Tendu, like I know where to go. So like just understanding how to like, pull up the fronts of your knees and using your feet almost like suctions, and even when you release the leg, that it doesn't lock back, that it's still straight. And I don't know, that's just something that I work on every day.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: This question says, as a mom who never danced and can feel overwhelmed by the ballet world, my mom, I have an aspiring dancer who's only 11 and already facing tough decisions. What is the best advice you can give for a parent to support a ballet dancer, hopefully both for a healthy, mind, spirit and for physical well-being?

Misty Copeland: I think support them, be there for them, but don't try and act like you know, like you know, I think that it's

important to be like a support system, but, but not to give them like specific advice or things you know about what they're doing. I think that it's best to like, separate yourself and not you know get, have them thinking that like, you're trying to be their coach or too much of a, you know, too much of a stage mom or parent and be there for them. Like, if they want to come to you, they will, but be that support and kind of, I think maybe not get too overbearing.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Sort of grow the confidence that it's going to take to, to weather the world. Someone wants to know if there was only one ballet performance to see in New York this year, what should they, what, what, what would it be?

Misty Copeland: Like, from ABT?

Valerie Curtis-Newton: We'll go with ABT.

Misty Copeland: Um, huh, maybe the new Alexei Ratmansky ballet, Whipped Cream.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Write it down.

Misty Copeland: I love him so much.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: What is it, or how does ballet prepare a person for life?

Misty Copeland: It really does. No, and that's, you know, so much the structure of Ballerina Body. I feel like I've, I've used what I've learned from being a dancer and I try and apply that to my life every day. The discipline, the sacrifice, you know, being a part of a team, really, when you're in a company, working together, and I just, having, you know, even the ritual of this meditation I feel when I do ballet class every morning. It's like having that consistency in your life of a time where you're finding yourself, you're getting balanced and I think it's important for people to find that in their lives in some form, you know, not necessarily being so literal in like getting a yoga mat and like, you know, doing meditation in that way, but finding something for you in your life that calms you and brings you back when there's so much chaos, but there's just so much beauty in, in the ballet worlds that I feel like anyone can benefit from being a part of even if you don't go on to be a professional dancer.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Do you find as you're watching younger dancers come behind you, are they as resilient as, as, in terms of, accepting critique?

Misty Copeland: They seem so resilient and confident and incredibly, for me, like if I want to work, I go and like, take a class with like the school or the studio company because it's like the crazy stuff they can do now, you know, it's on another level. But the one thing that, and I say this out loud, like if I teach a class or something that like, the first thing it's like, one of the things that you really have to be aware of when you're in a company and in the corps de ballet is like, just being aware of the space around you and being respectful of other people. You know, I feel like so many young dancers are so caught up in the mirror, they literally run into other people. And I just want to be like, wake up and stand on the side if you're not dancing and stop looking at yourself in the mirror. But overall, they seem much, they seem very confident and resilient in a way, like, I don't know, that things don't faze them.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: It's interesting, you know, I train actors and, and there is a lot of, such a desire for perfection, that the smallest note can send some people, you know, off. Do you find that with some of young dancers?

Misty Copeland: Yeah, yeah, I do, I do, and I feel like my generation, it was like we wanted corrections. And if we didn't get a move like, what's wrong? Why am I not? I want to like grow.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Is there a contemporary choreographer that you dream of working with?

Misty Copeland: Who haven't I worked with? (Laughter). No, Wayne McGregor. Yeah.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: And this one, I think we talked a little bit back, do you ever see yourself starting a studio?

Misty Copeland: No. I can say that in all honesty.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Can you talk about that and talk about why not?

Misty Copeland: I think it takes such a special and, like certain type of person to be a teacher and to open a studio, and I just don't think I have it in me. Like I really don't. It is so much hard work. And I mean, you really have to commit everything to it and I can't see myself, like, doing that I can't see myself just like dropping everything that I love and want to still be doing in the future. Because I'd have to, like I wouldn't just attach my name to a studio or something and then like have someone running it, like I like to be in control of everything.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Well this is also why your cook wouldn't have a restaurant, right? Same reason, right?

Misty Copeland: Yeah, yeah.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: There's, there is a question about the Under Armour. After Kevin Plank's, Pro-Trump comments how do you plan to move forward with your relationship with Under Armour?

Misty Copeland: Yeah, it's, it's, it's been difficult to put myself in the position of, like, people that are looking at this. And I don't, I don't want to speak for Kevin Plank, but I know him and I know him as a person really well. And, and I know what Under Armour represents and Under Armour is diverse inside and out. And I am proud to be an Under Armour athlete and they would not have a black woman, you know, standing up there next to their male athletes representing Under Armour if they didn't stand for the same things that I do. And I feel like at this point, we're just going to have to keep proving that with Under Armour and I believe in them and, and I know they have the same beliefs as me.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: Great. (Applause) We've talked about food, would you do a Food Network show?

Misty Copeland: I don't know. Maybe?

Valerie Curtis-Newton: It's not a restaurant, but,

Misty Copeland: Maybe, I don't know.

Valerie Curtis-Newton: I think that we are starting to repeat some of these questions. So, I think that one of the things that, that has been sort of incredibly inspirational in doing all the research on you, over this last month that I've been reading and viewing all things Misty Copeland, I think that I have been so impressed by your drive, your passion, your commitment to your art form, your incredible heart. And I think that that's what makes all of these people come out to see you. It's, it's maybe the defining elements of your blackness, as a black ballerina, is the full humanity that you bring to everything you do. And so we are so grateful to have had time with you today. Ladies and gentlemen, Misty Copeland.

Misty Copeland: Thank you.