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Acclaimed Ballet Dancer Misty Copeland Receives 2023 Jacob's Pillow Dance Award

Copeland will be honored at the Season Opening Gala on June 24

March 22, 2023 (BECKET, Mass.)—Jacob's Pillow today announced Misty Copeland as the recipient of the 2023 Jacob's Pillow Dance Award. Copeland will accept this award at Jacob's Pillow's Season Opening Gala in the Berkshires on Saturday, June 24.

The Jacob's Pillow Dance Award is presented each year to an artist of exceptional vision and achievement and carries a cash prize which the artist can use in any way they wish. Copeland has made history as a changemaker and phenomenon in the art of ballet; in 2015, she was the first African American woman promoted to the level of principal dancer at American Ballet Theatre. Copeland has also performed on Broadway and was appointed to the President's Council on Fitness, Sports, and Nutrition in 2014 by former President Barack Obama. She has been recognized for her philanthropic efforts and dedication of her time to mentoring children and is a *New York Times* bestselling author, having published several books for adults and children.

The New York Times has called Copeland "one of the most famous ballerinas in the United States" and *Times* reviews have noted her "courage and grandeur" when performing starring roles, describing her dancing as "scrupulous... all of her shapes were beautifully lucid, with a softness borne of strength."

"We are honoring Misty for her immense artistry and achievement as one of this country's premier ballerinas," said Pamela Tatge, Executive and Artistic Director. "We are also recognizing her work as an activist and change-maker. As the Pillow and our field as a whole seeks to address systemic racism and the need for greater equity, inclusion and access in all aspects of our work, we are excited to honor one of this country's greatest champions of expanding the ranks of who belongs in ballet on both sides of the footlights. Misty persevered when many would have given up. She has been such an astonishing role model for young dancers around the world, and it is truly thrilling to announce her as the Jacob's Pillow Dance Award recipient this year."

"I'm honored to be recognized by Jacob's Pillow," Copeland said. "This treasured team's longstanding

commitment to the arts and dance are perfectly aligned with my desire to bring this art form to as many people as possible. I look forward to celebrating with everyone at the Gala.”

In addition to the presentation of the Award, performances at the Jacob’s Pillow Season Opening Gala will include The School at Jacob’s Pillow Contemporary Ballet Performance Ensemble in a world premiere by Annabelle Lopez Ochoa, and other performers to be announced. In addition to in-person event tickets for the one-night only performance, dinner and dancing, the Gala performance will be livestreamed and accessible through a “choose what you pay” model. To learn more about the Gala, visit www.jacobspillow.org/events/gala.

Copeland joins a list of Jacob’s Pillow Dance Award honorees that include Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, Dormeshia, Ronald K. Brown, Annie-B Parson and Paul Lazar, Bill T. Jones, Merce Cunningham, Kyle Abraham, Michelle Dorrance, Camille A. Brown, Liz Lerman, and Faye Driscoll, among others. The Jacob’s Pillow Dance Award was established in 2007 and is philanthropically supported by an anonymous donor.

Born in Kansas City and raised in San Pedro, Calif., Copeland began her ballet studies at the late age of 13 when she enrolled in a free ballet class at her local Boys & Girls Club. At 15, she won first place in the Music Center Spotlight Awards. She studied at the San Francisco Ballet School and American Ballet Theatre’s Summer Intensive on full scholarship and was declared American Ballet Theatre’s (ABT) 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 and the first in two decades. In June 2015, Copeland was promoted to principal dancer, making her the first African American woman to ever hold that position in the company’s 75-year history.

In 2008, Copeland was honored with the Leonore Annenberg Fellowship in the Arts, a two-year fellowship awarded to young artists who exhibit extraordinary talent, providing them additional resources in order to attain their full potential. Performing in a variety of classical and contemporary ballets, one of Copeland’s most important achievements was performing the title role in *Firebird*, created for her in 2012 with new choreography by 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, she 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. Copeland reprised the role during ABT’s Metropolitan Opera House spring season in June 2015, and debuted as “Juliet” in *Romeo & Juliet*.

Copeland has been featured in numerous publications and television programs. She was honored with an induction into the Boys & Girls Club National Hall of Fame in May 2012 and received the “Breakthrough Award” from the Council of Urban Professionals in April 2012. She was named National Youth of the Year Ambassador for the Boys & Girls Clubs of America in June 2013. She received the Young, Gifted & Black honor at the 2013 Black Girls Rock! Awards and was named one of *Glamour’s*

Women of the Year in 2015, *Time Magazine's* list of 100 most influential people in 2015, and the NAACP's Spingarn Medal in 2021, the organization's highest honor.

In 2014, Copeland participated in a PillowTalk at Jacob's Pillow along with the Dance Theatre of Harlem's Virginia Johnson; an excerpt from that talk is available on [YouTube](#). Also in 2014, Copeland received an honorary doctorate from the University of Hartford for her contributions to classical ballet and helping to diversify the art form.

Copeland's passion is giving back. She has worked with many charitable organizations and is dedicated to giving of her time to work with and mentor young girls and boys. In 2022, she founded the Misty Copeland Foundation, a nonprofit organization that aims to bring greater diversity, equity, and inclusion to dance, especially ballet, by making ballet affordable, accessible, and fun.

Copeland is the author of the *New York Times* bestselling memoir *Life in Motion: An Unlikely Ballerina*, co-written with award-winning journalist and author Charisse Jones, published in March 2014. She has a picture book titled *Firebird* in collaboration with award-winning illustrator and author Christopher Myers, published in September 2014. In 2022, she published another memoir, *The Wind at My Back: Resilience, Grace, and Other Gifts from My Mentor, Raven Wilkinson* to rave reviews.

ABOUT THE JACOB'S PILLOW DANCE AWARD

The Jacob's Pillow Dance Award was created in 2007 by an anonymous donor whose commitment to an ongoing annual gift to Jacob's Pillow is generous and far-reaching in support of the Jacob's Pillow Dance Award as well as research and development funds for the creation of new work.

The Award, presented each year to an artist of exceptional vision and achievement, carries a cash prize of \$25,000 which the artist can use in any way they wish. Past honorees include Annabelle Lopez Ochoa, Faye Driscoll, Liz Lerman, Camille A. Brown, Kyle Abraham, and Michelle Dorrance. In commemoration, the honoree also receives a custom-designed glass award sculpture by Berkshire-based artist Tom Patti, whose work is in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum and other major arts institutions around the world.

The remaining funds support the Pillow's commitment to the research and development of new work in the recently launched Pillow Lab. Year-round residencies at the Pillow Lab offer free housing, unlimited use of studio space, and access to the Pillow's rare and extensive Archives and resources.

ABOUT JACOB'S PILLOW:

Jacob's Pillow is a National Historic Landmark, recipient of the National Medal of Arts, and home to America's longest-running international dance festival. It is with gratitude and humility that Jacob's Pillow acknowledges that it rests on the ancestral homelands of the Muh-he-con-ne-ok or Mohican people, who are the Indigenous peoples of this land. Despite tremendous hardship in being forced from here, today, their community resides in Wisconsin and is known as the Stockbridge-Munsee Community. We pay honor and respect to their ancestors past and present as we commit to building a more inclusive and equitable space for all. Each Festival includes national and international dance companies and free and ticketed performances, talks, tours, classes, exhibits, events, and community programs.

The School at Jacob's Pillow, one of the field's most prestigious professional dance training centers, encompasses the diverse disciplines of Contemporary Ballet, Contemporary, Tap, Photography, Choreography, and an annual rotating program. The Pillow also provides professional advancement opportunities across disciplines of arts administration, design, video, and production through seasonal internships and a year-round Administrative Fellows program. With growing community engagement programs, the Pillow serves as a partner and active citizen in its local community. The Pillow's extensive Archives, open year-round to the public and online at danceinteractive.jacobspillow.org, chronicle more than a century of dance in photographs, programs, books, costumes, audiotapes, and videos. Notable artists who have created or premiered dances at the Pillow include choreographers Antony Tudor, Agnes de Mille, Alvin Ailey, Donald McKayle, Kevin McKenzie, Twyla Tharp, Ralph Lemon, Susan Marshall, Trisha Brown, Ronald K. Brown, Wally Cardona, Andrea Miller, and Trey McIntyre; performed by artists such as Mikhail Baryshnikov, Carmen de Lavallade, Mark Morris, Dame Margot Fonteyn, Edward Villella, Rasta Thomas, and hundreds of others. On March 2, 2011, President Barack Obama honored Jacob's Pillow with a National Medal of Arts, the highest arts award given by the United States Government, making the Pillow the first dance presenting organization to receive this award. The Pillow's Executive and Artistic Director since 2016 is Pamela Tatge. www.jacobspillow.org.

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