



Making Dreams Come True

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE'S **MISTY COPELAND** AND **CALVIN ROYAL III** JOINED FORCES WITH OPEN WORLD DANCE FOUNDATION TO PERFORM WITH OVER 100 CHILDREN.

By **Nancy Wozny**

Photography by **Amitava Sarkar**

Imagine having your first show with Misty Copeland inches away from you onstage.

Copeland and her prince, American Ballet Theatre corps member Calvin Royal III, swooped into Houston, Texas, in November to dance in Open World Dance Foundation's new, full-length production of *Cinderella*. Choreographed by OWDF directors Ekaterina Shchelkanova and Anton Boytsov, the community project showcased 123 local children of various backgrounds at The Hobby Center for the Performing Arts. Some had no previous dance experience.

Copeland and Royal run through their pas de deux.

The backdrops were designed by Vasilisa Marova, an orphan who participated in OWDF's outreach program in St. Petersburg, Russia. She has since been accepted to art school.

"I felt the power in hearing from an aspiring dancer that seeing a Cinderella and Prince that look like me makes me work harder and gives me hope that I can reach that level one day too."

—CALVIN ROYAL III



"I realized that this wasn't going to draw the Houston Ballet crowd, which excited me. This was an opportunity to bring in a new audience."

—MISTY COPELAND



While it was Copeland and Royal's role debuts as Cinderella and the Prince, the goal of the production was educational: to show children all aspects of a ballet performance. OWDF, an international nonprofit organization that provides dance education and outreach for disadvantaged youth, opened the auditions to all, regardless of technical level. "It's not just about the steps, but about music and sets," says Shchelkanova, a former Mariinsky Ballet and ABT soloist who initially started OWDF as a program for Russian orphans. "It's about how ballet actually works." She gave lectures on dance as part of the experience, in addition to free Sunday ballet classes for the cast over the course of several weeks.

Copeland, who often uses her off-time to advocate for youth organizations like The Boys & Girls Clubs of America and MindLeaps, was invited by Shchelkanova to perform in *Cinderella* as plans for the Houston performance were coming together. She agreed to star in it. "This was a chance for a community, some experienced with dance and others not, to expand and explore their minds, bodies, creativity and possibly tap into something within themselves they didn't know was possible," says Copeland.

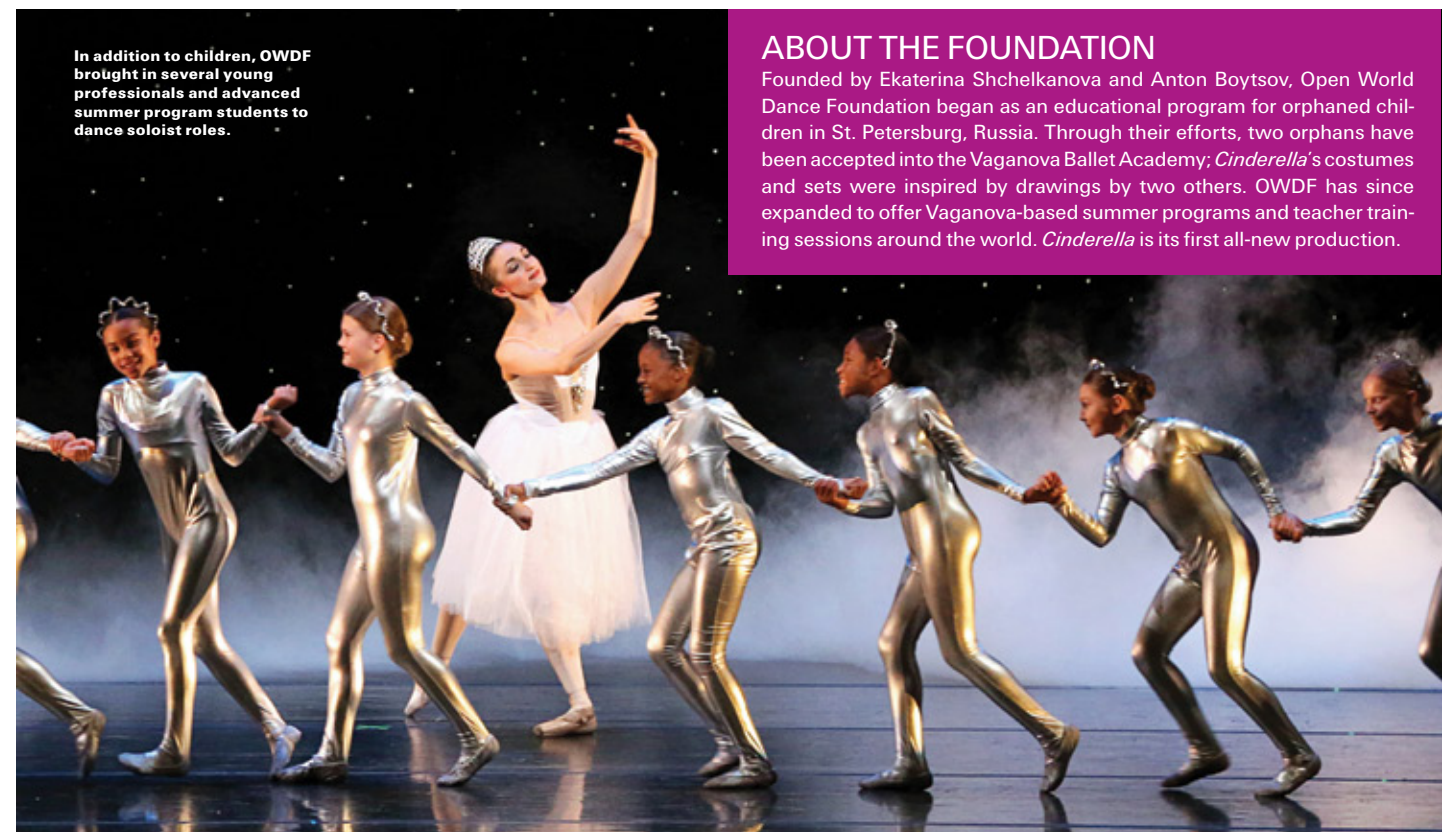
Royal was on board soon afterwards, noting that his first experience with dance was through a similar community project called *The Chocolate Nutcracker*. "It opened my eyes to possibilities of wanting to be a professional dancer," he says. "Knowing what that did for me made me want to get involved."

For three months, the pair squeezed coaching sessions with Shchelkanova and Boytsov in between ABT rehearsals before flying to Houston for performance week. "The highlight of the trip was realizing how symbolic it was for Misty and I to be there," says Royal. "The cards, letters and support we received from the community and kids made it all worth it."



Copeland's costume is based on a design sketch by Anna Osipenkova, an 11-year-old Russian orphan.

In addition to children, OWDF brought in several young professionals and advanced summer program students to dance soloist roles.



ABOUT THE FOUNDATION

Founded by Ekaterina Shchelkanova and Anton Boytsov, Open World Dance Foundation began as an educational program for orphaned children in St. Petersburg, Russia. Through their efforts, two orphans have been accepted into the Vaganova Ballet Academy; *Cinderella's* costumes and sets were inspired by drawings by two others. OWDF has since expanded to offer Vaganova-based summer programs and teacher training sessions around the world. *Cinderella* is its first all-new production.