

NEWS

Misty Copeland to be immortalized in vibrant San Pedro Ballet School mural

By [MEGAN BARNES](#) | mbarnes@scng.com | Long Beach Press-Telegram
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Renowned prima ballerina Misty Copeland isn't just getting [an intersection named after her](#) in San Pedro next week — now she's getting a vibrant, four-panel mural on the side of her alma mater, the San Pedro Ballet School.

The mural to be painted on the former Norwegian bakery building on the corner of 13th Street and Pacific Avenue by artist Kelcey Fisher — or [KFISH](#) — will serve as the backdrop for the ballerina's homecoming Dec. 21, when officials will gather in the school's parking lot to dedicate the intersection as Misty Copeland Square.

The 16-foot-tall panels will feature four giant black-and-white photo cutouts of Copeland in powerful poses against Fisher's signature colorful patterns.

Copeland [made history in June](#) when she became the first African-American woman to be promoted to the highest rank of principal dancer in American Ballet



She discovered ballet at 13 during a free class taught by San Pedro City Ballet Artistic Director Cindy Bradley at the Boys and Girls Club on Cabrillo Avenue and was quickly recognized as a late-blooming prodigy, remarkably joining American Ballet Theatre after only a few years of training.

Los Angeles City Councilman Joe Buscaino's office decided to commission the mural as a way to go above and beyond simply installing a sign at the intersection, like those at DiCarlo Square at Gaffey Street and Capitol Drive, and Papadakis Square at Sixth and Centre Streets.

It was paid for with funding from the district office, the nonprofit Sharefest, Boys & Girls Club Trustee John Ek and Fisher himself, since he offered a major discount, said Buscaino's communications director, Branimir Kvartuc.

"This mural will become an iconic location in San Pedro," Kvartuc said.

Bradley said she has always wanted to have art on the side of the building.

"I am so grateful and thankful to have such a great artist do this," she said, adding that she is pleased Copeland will be fittingly featured in ballet school attire, wearing a leotard and pointe shoes.

Fisher, who has painted more than 30 murals — mostly in Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco and San Diego — called the side of the studio "the perfect canvas."

"I want this to be loud," he said. "I want people to want to stop and take an Instagram picture."

Painting a mural of Copeland at a time when she is breaking barriers and her fame is skyrocketing, Fisher said, is "such an inspiration."

"I think for any artist — whether it be a painter, a dancer, actress or actor — it's really cool to see a story like that take off and see what your potential could possibly be," he said. "I'm very thankful and honored to be part of Misty's inspirational story and to put it into paint."

Fisher, known for his murals on the corner of Brooks and Pacific avenues in Venice Beach, Justice Urban Tavern in downtown Los Angeles and Guisados in Echo Park, among others, said he drew inspiration from [a documentary profiling Copeland](#).

In an appearance on “Jimmy Kimmel Live!” on Monday, Copeland joked that her older sister, who lives down the street from the ballet studio, will have to see her image every day.

For Monday’s square dedication, 13th Street will be partially blocked off for the 3:30 p.m. ceremony, and Copeland will be surrounded by 80 dancers from the ballet school in front of the mural. Bradley’s son, Wolf, who grew close with Copeland as a child, will give a musical performance.

An hour-and-a-half later, Copeland will teach [a sold-out master class](#) at the Warner Grand Theatre, which will benefit a new after-school program she partly inspired.

The San Pedro Ballet School aims to raise \$50,000 to \$100,000 to expand its DancEd Steps Up outreach program, which offers schoolchildren free dance classes like the one that brought Copeland to the barre.

Next year, the school plans to bring exceptionally talented and dedicated students from throughout Los Angeles to train at the studio in San Pedro after school on scholarship.

The school needs to purchase a van to transport students as well as hire a coordinator and instructors. The program also would provide tutoring and snacks.

Copeland almost quit ballet because her family didn’t have a car and the ballet studio was too far from the Gardena motel where they were living, but she moved in with Bradley to train rigorously.

Kvartuc said Buscaino’s office will be promoting a [GoFundMe page](#) created to support the program.

“If fans want to have a hand in creating more future Mistys, they should donate,” he said.

Although 50 coveted spots in Copeland’s master class sold out in less than two days, Bradley is auctioning off one more at a starting bid of \$1,500.

Tickets to watch the class from the 1,500-seat art deco theater are still available, as are tickets to meet Copeland after the class at a VIP reception.

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Megan Barnes covers crime and public safety for the Press-Telegram. She was previously a city reporter at the Daily Breeze, where she covered the South Bay beach cities and the Palos Verdes Peninsula. Before that, she was a freelancer writing about LGBT news and her hometown of San Pedro, where she probably made your latte at Starbucks. She loves iced Americanos and Radiohead and finally got to see them live on the A Moon Shaped Pool tour. It was magical.

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