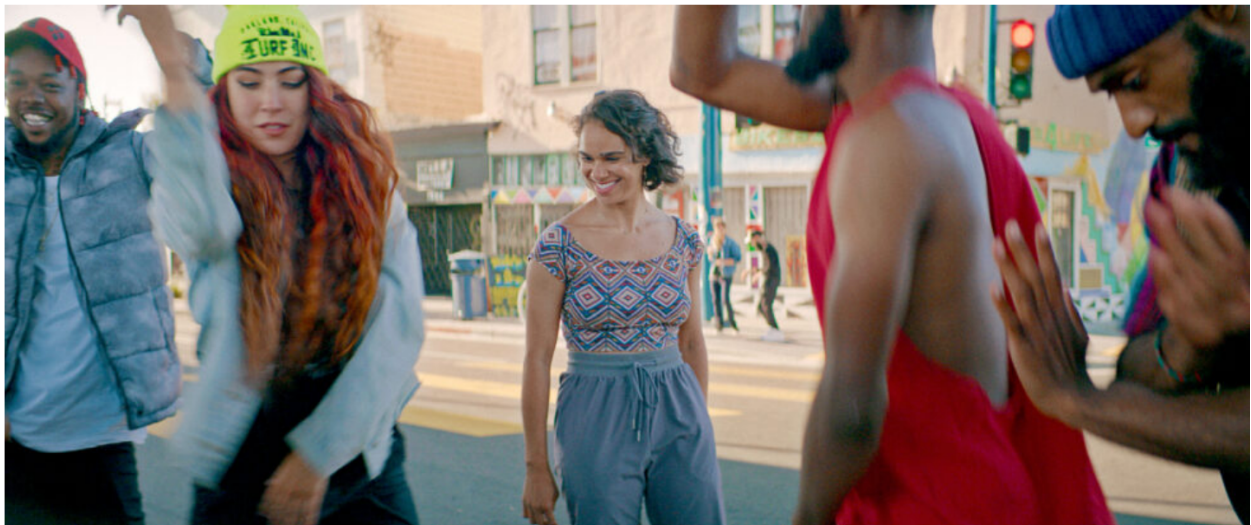


THE DO LIST

## Ballerina Misty Copeland to Premiere 'Flower' in Oakland

By Ariana Proehl  
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Misty Copeland watches turf dancers perform in a scene from the short film 'Flower.' (Courtesy of Life in Motion Productions)

The only voices heard in *Flower*, a 28-minute film produced by world-renowned ballet dancer Misty Copeland, belong to three unhoused residents of an RV encampment in West Oakland.

The choice was very much intentional — Copeland herself experienced housing and food insecurity for much of her childhood. “It can happen to anyone,” she says in an interview. “So many Americans are one paycheck away from losing their home.”

A film about a woman struggling to hang on to the family home she shares with her dementia-stricken mother, *Flower* screens on Friday, Sept. 29, as part of Oakland Ballet’s season opener at the Paramount Theatre. Copeland will be on stage to present.

Copeland hopes *Flower* not only highlights the housing affordability crisis, but challenges the tropes of what homelessness looks like.

The film is the first for Copeland's production company, Life in Motion, which she co-founded with ballerina Leyla Fayyaz, an Emmy-winning producer. Also behind the scenes of *Flower* is a who's-who of Bay Area-bred stars. Grammy-winning artist Raphael Saadiq composed the score, with a stirring, repeated refrain of "I'm heeeere now" that won't soon leave the viewer's memory.

Street dancers-turned-choreographers to the stars Rich and Tone Talauega, aka Rich + Tone, contribute their moves. Raised in Richmond, the brothers were discovered by one of Michael Jackson's choreographers while freestyling at an Oakland club in the early '90s. And Alonzo King (of San Francisco's Alonzo King LINES Ballet), who's known Copeland since she was a teen, also choreographs.

Local talent shines on screen, as well. Bay Area dancer Babtunji Johnson co-stars with Copeland; turf dancers – including Algerion "Krow" Bryant – perform in the film; and Oakland Ballet youth appear as students in a scene where Copeland's character teaches a ballet class.

"It was important that we had people [who] are from the community," says Copeland, whose husband, Olu Evans, was born and raised in Oakland. "Not necessarily for the world, but for that community to say, 'we know that person,' [or] 'there's that place – Mama's Royal Café.' That's our community. That's really us. It's not this Hollywood facade."

That same intention also went into incorporating the real experiences of the three unhoused community members in the West Oakland RV encampment.

"It made sense to use that one opportunity where people speak, to give that opportunity to people who are often voiceless or overlooked," Copeland says. "I feel like it really is the glue that brings the story together in a powerful way."

The Sept. 29 event at the Paramount Theatre also features live dance performances by Johnson, Krow, turf dancers, Destiny Arts youth and ballerina Angela Watson from Oakland. Highlights from the Oakland Ballet Company shows *Luna Mexicana*, *Dancing Moons Festival* and *The Nutcracker* round out the program.

"It's super exciting," Copeland says of the long-awaited Oakland premiere. "We hope that we did the community justice."



*'Flower,' starring Misty Copeland, premieres at the Paramount Theatre in Oakland on Sept. 29 at 7 p.m. The film premiere is accompanied by live performances by Oakland Ballet and others. [Details here.](#)*