

Katlyn Addison Becomes Third Black Ballerina in American History to Dance as Sugar Plum Fairy

December 26, 2015 | Posted by N.R. Alexander



“When I was really little, seeing *the Nutcracker* and seeing *the Sugar Plum Fairy* come on stage, I told my mom ... I wanted to do that when I grow up,” said Katlyn Addison. Now, Addison is holding true on that dream. The young Black ballerina will perform as the Sugar Plum Fairy for Ballet West, a dance theatre in Salt Lake City. She is the third Black woman in history to ever dance the role.

Formerly a dancer for the Houston Ballet, Addison joined Ballet West after an audition in New York in 2011. Her talent was quickly noticed by Ballet West’s artistic director Adam Sklute.

“I saw a beautiful young dancer in her teens who had such a mastery over technique for her age, as well as an elegant, statuesque creature,” said Sklute. “And I thought, ‘Oh my gosh, she would be perfect for Ballet West!’”

The opportunity was synchronistic for the Ontario, Canada native.

“I think it was after the second exercise, (Adam) scooped me up and pulled me aside and spoke with me about his company,” said Addison. “And I knew they were a taller company and I am a taller dancer, so I was attracted to that. And I knew their repertoire was very similar to what I was doing with Houston Ballet.”

Addison has danced many roles for Ballet West. She even served as an understudy for previous Sugar Plum Fairy ballerinas. Only two other Black ballerinas in major American companies have danced the role of the Sugar Plum Fairy — Lauren Anderson of the Houston Ballet, whom Addison saw perform the role before Anderson retired, and Misty Copeland, currently a principal dancer at American Ballet Theatre.

Anderson was the first Black Ballerina in American history to become a principal dancer for a major dance company in 1990. Likewise, Copeland has also broken dance barriers by becoming the first Black principal

ballerina for the American Ballet Theatre. The impression left by both Anderson and Copeland has gone on to pave the way for much-needed discussion on Black ballerinas in American ballet.

Addison now joins history as the Sugar Plum Fairy, but she's just handling the new experience with sheer grace. "I feel a little bit of pressure but, honestly, I just hope that I relax and enjoy it because I feel like it's an opportunity to dance the role I've always wanted to do," Addison said.

Sklute believes that a Black ballerina dancing lead roles in major ballet productions is the shift in diversity that ballet needs.

"Ballet is an art form for everyone, and it is up to us as artistic directors to create the world on the stage that mirrors the world around us," he said. Ballet West will celebrate its diamond anniversary — 60 years, with Addison's debut as the Sugar Plum Fairy adding a new element to the show. [The Nutcracker performances](#) continue at the Capitol Theatre in downtown Salt Lake through Dec. 27.