

From Child To Man In The Circus

By Kelly-Ann Brown

Special to the NNPA from Howard University News Service

WASHINGTON (NNPA) — Dressed sharply in a dazzling gold blazer and armed with a microphone and an infectious smile, Ringmaster Lucky Malatsi's job is to keep audiences of the UniverSoul Circus excited, engaged and enthusiastic between the numerous acts — and it is no small feat.

Malatsi is quick on his feet, incorporating humor, dancing and theatrics to keep the audiences recently at the National Harbor in southern Maryland entertained.

Though he makes it look effortless, Malatsi's

performance encompasses years of experience. He joined UniverSoul at only 11-years-old, an age when American children are still in elementary school.

But he didn't start there. Born in Johannesburg, South Africa, Malatsi began performing for audiences at age 4 as an accomplished performer and acrobat trained by his uncle.

At 6 years old, he traveled to Germany for the first time, performing in as an acrobat in festivals.

"For as long as I can remember it has always been my passion," Malatsi said. "It's always been second nature to me."

In 1999 he was recruited by UniverSoul Circus founder and CEO



Ringmaster Lucky Malatsi keeps audiences engaged.

Cedric Walker, and a year later he was performing in a duo

contortionist act. He has spent most of his young life growing up surrounded by circus performers from around the world.

He has been an acrobatic hip-hop dancer, a gymnast and a trapeze artist. He said the true skill in mastering these talents requires more than physical conditioning.

"It's more so mental than physical," he said. "You can strengthen your

body, but if [I] wasn't strong mentally I wouldn't have been able to achieve any of those skills."

He said being ringmaster has been his most challenging job at the circus. Being able to read your audience and keep them on a constant rollercoaster of emotions is essential, he said.

Though he has been with UniverSoul for 14 years, and has witnessed ringmasters before him, Malatsi said his greatest piece of advice came from Walker.

"He told me if I could make 2000 people feel like I'm talking to each of them individually, then I can become one of the greats," Malatsi said.

This skill becomes even more useful when dealing with an unresponsive crowd, an experience to which Malatsi is no stranger. He said the best way to remedy the situation is to continue to have fun with them.

"They are the best type of crowd, because they make you work harder," he said. "Always keep your energy level up and never

let them see you sweat."

At one moment he is asking the audience to participate in the latest dance trend or "New School" versus "Old School" dance battle, and the next he will have children stand and recite a pledge to reinforce their greatness and the idea that their lives matter, and ode to the Black Lives Matter movement.

"We have to keep up with the present, especially with what's going on in the world," he said. "Every year we adapt no matter what's going on."

A husband and father, Malatsi hopes that his children follow in his footsteps. But whatever they do, he said, he will support them, just as his family supported his him.

And for young performers hoping to pursue a career in entertainment, Malatsi has some words of wisdom.

"Chase your dreams to the fullest, have patience but always have a backup plan," he said. "Never lose who you are regardless of how successful you become."

Ballerina Misty Copeland Heading To Broadway

By Mark Kennedy

AP Drama Writer

New York (AP) — Ballerina Misty Copeland, who just became the first African-American woman to be a principal dancer at American Ballet Theatre, has another breakthrough planned — a debut on Broadway.

Producers of the high-energy revival of "On the Town" said that Copeland will join the show from Aug. 25 to Sept. 6, playing Miss Turnstiles, a love interest for one of three

sailors enjoying a few hours of shore leave in 1940s New York.

"I don't know if I know what I'm in for. It's going to be a huge challenge for me. It's quite a departure from what I'm used to. But I love a challenge and I think it's going to help me grow as an artist," Copeland said.

The role requires both acting and singing, in addition to plenty of dancing, including a 15-minute ballet at the end.

"I can carry a tune. We'll see what happens," she said. "I'm excited. I'm a Virgo and we're a little bit anal and we're definitely hard workers, so I'm going to put my all into this."

Copeland saw the show a few months ago with her boyfriend, knowing the

offer of replacing Fairchild was on the table. "It's probably the best show I've ever seen, I think," she said. "I was just blown away."

Copeland has been named by Time magazine one of the most influential figures of 2015, and written both a children's book, "Firebird," and a best-selling memoir, "Life in Motion: An Unlikely Ballerina." She was also featured in a popular online ad for Under Armour.

"Whether it's Broadway or ballet, that's always been my goal: to just bring more people into it," she said. "Because I think it's so special and I think the arts can do so much for a person, not just a child. It's completely changed and altered my life in so many amazing ways."

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