

First things *News and views from the world of dance*

RAD voices

How do you influence change? LauREN Beharie shares her experiences as a young black ballerina.

LauREN Beharie, 14, has achieved distinctions in all her RAD exams. Now she is keen to remove barriers and widen participation in classical ballet. 'I would like to change the stereotype of how a classical ballet dancer should look,' she says. 'Whatever their size or height, and especially their skin tone. Ballet should be for everyone who has the passion, commitment and love for dance,' she says.

'I think classical ballet lacks diversity because ballet has been around for so long. It is difficult to change the stereotype of what a ballet dancer should look like, to change what has been done for centuries.' These

stereotypes have made it difficult for Beharie to follow her dream – 'I think young dancers ignore ballet because it is hard to find dancers that look like them. But ballet is a beautiful art and should be open to everyone.'

Ballet means everything to Beharie. It gave her a stage 'to show that black girls can do ballet too! Wearing my brown tights and brown shoes has made me feel complete on the stage. When I dance, I feel that I am breaking down barriers in the dance world by just being there.' Changes such as different choices of dancewear colour 'make a real difference to people like me,' she says.

However, there is still more that could be done, and Beharie wants to see a ballet industry that develops leaders from all ethnic backgrounds – like RAD graduate Cassa Pancho, Artistic Director of Ballet Black, of which Beharie is a junior associate. She has future plans for inclusion campaigns, similar to those which aim to increase the number of boys in ballet. 'No matter where you are in the world, dance brings people together. Dance brings opportunities and freedom to be whoever you want to be.'

Jessica Wilson



Photo: courtesy of LauREN Beharie