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Staatsballett Berlin and Dancer Reach Settlement Over Bias Allegations

The dancer, Chloé Lopes Gomes, spoke out about racism last year after her contract was not renewed, and she will stay on, after arbitration.

By Roslyn Sulcas

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“It is a wake-up call”: A news release, issued on Thursday by the Staatsballett Berlin, uses those words in bold in announcing that a settlement has been reached in the German Labor Court for stage employees with a Black corps de ballet member who brought complaints of racism against the company last year.

The dancer, Chloé Lopes Gomes, spoke out after her yearly contract was not renewed.

Ms. Lopes Gomes, the only Black female member of the company, will remain with the Staatsballett until the end of the 2021-22 season, and will receive financial compensation of 16,000 euros (about \$19,200) as part of the settlement reached during arbitration.

In an interview with The New York Times in December, Ms. Lopes Gomes said that she had experienced a number of racially insensitive incidents, but had been too afraid of losing her job to speak out. After being told in September that her contract would not be renewed, she made her accusations public. The incidents included being obliged to whiten her skin in corps de ballet roles, and being told during rehearsals that any mistakes she made were more noticeable because she was Black.

In the statement, the Staatsballett’s provisional artistic director, Christiane Theobald, said that she regretted Ms. Lopes Gomes’s experiences, which the company was “currently processing in depth.” She added, “A great opportunity to change lies in the current situation.”

In a telephone interview, Ms. Lopes Gomes said that she was happy to have reached a settlement. “It’s a small victory for me, but a big one for ballet, especially in Germany, because it’s quite rare that a company like this acknowledges there was mistreatment,” she said. “I can’t say I am thrilled to stay at the Staatsballett, but I am happy to have work, and to dance.”

The news release added that an ombudsman’s office had been established to enable all members of the Staatsballett to report any experience of discriminatory behavior.

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