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Debbie Allen with DADA Alumni
(Photos courtesy of www.debbiealldanceacademy.com)

By: Grace Boateng

It was written in the stars that magical content would be headed to Netflix once Shonda Rhimes entered the chat. Shondaland and Netflix certainly delivered with “Dance Dreams: Hot Chocolate Nutcracker” a documentary that follows the Debbie Allen Dance Academy’s dancers as they prepare for the yearly showcase.

Houston native and dance extraordinaire Debbie Allen has been teaching students at her non-profit, Debbie Allen Dance Academy (DADA) that she runs with her husband Norm Nixon for over 20 years. The school offers world class instruction to primarily young people of color. The reason behind this is that dance is an expensive undertaking that often excludes people of color for a myriad of reasons. Allen was inspired to start her own dance academy after her daughter suffered racial discrimination at a “prestigious” dance school. DADA provides financial assistance to students that need it and expose them to incredible dancers like Lauren Anderson (former principal ballet dancer for Houston Ballet) and Savion Glover, the tap-dancing phenom.

New Debbie Allen Documentary on Netflix “Dance Dreams: Hot Chocolate Nutcracker”

April Watson, Debbie Allen, Savoy Bailey, and JoAnn Carrasco
(Photos courtesy of www.debbiealldanceacademy.com)



Debbie Allen
(Photos courtesy of www.debbiealldanceacademy.com)

The “Hot Chocolate Nutcracker” is DADA’s annual fundraiser. The production was written and directed by Allen herself and is an “Afrocentric,” modern, culturally-diverse take on the classic “Nutcracker” ballet.

“There are mountains to leap over for Black kids,” Allen explained. “We are built differently, and in the ballet world, you are wanted to be very skinny and fair, as in white. Misty Copeland and Lauren Anderson broke that mold. Desmond Richardson, amazing, but what role did they give him to play? Othello. Why couldn’t he be the prince in ‘Swan Lake’? Why couldn’t he be Romeo? So we still have a ways to go.”

The documentary is powerful, inspiring, and important.



Debbie Allen
Screen capture Dance Dreams: Hot Chocolate Nutcracker



DADA Alumn Kylie Jefferson
Screen capture Dance Dreams: Hot Chocolate Nutcracker

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- Debbie Allen
DACA Founder and Artistic Director
Dancer, Actress, Director, Producer

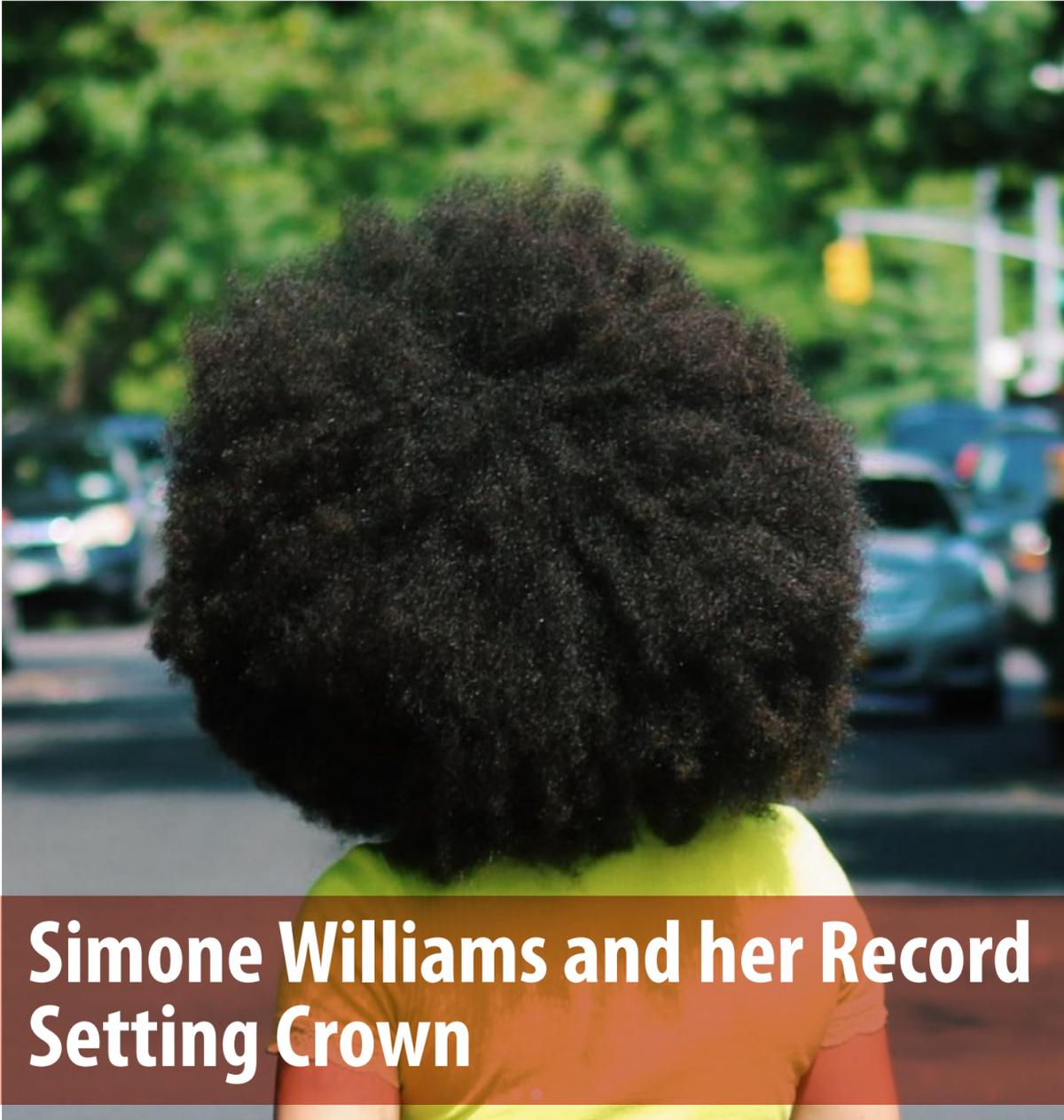


Debbie Allen (Middle) with DADA Alumni (L) Savoy Bailey, (R) April Watson, and (Floor) JoAnn Carrasco
(Photos courtesy of www.debbiealldanceacademy.com)

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Simone Williams and her Record Setting Crown



Simone Williams
(Photo courtesy of Simone Williams' IG @simonerellbess)

By: Grace Boateng

Simone Williams, a native of Brooklyn, set a new world record for having the largest afro in the women category. Her record was set with an afro height of 8.07 inches and a width of 8.85 inches. Williams broke the record of the previous title holder Aevin Dugas who reigned with her crown for 8 years.

Williams was inspired by Dugas and talked about it to Guinness World Records saying, "She inspired me to make the attempt. I googled 'world's largest afro' and when she came up I was in awe. At the time, I didn't think my hair was anywhere close to hers; she was goals! But I was so happy to see that she was recognized and there was a chance for others to be recognized too."

As is the journey with most black girls and women, her road to rocking her natural crown was a long, winding road. She shared that though the process was difficult for her in the beginning she eventually learned how to care for her crown.

"When my hair is fully styled and big and voluminous I get a lot of stares, a lot of comments, lots of compliments – I want to think that everything is positive, but there are some people who stare like they have no idea what's going on or what they're looking at," Williams shared.

Simone Williams
(Photo courtesy of Simone Imaani Williams' IG @simonerellbess)



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(Photo courtesy of Simone Williams' IG @simonerellbess)

“Not only do I get to post a pic of my fro but I love what this day represents. Today we place emphasis on normalizing the fro and accepting our hair as it grows from our heads. Believe it or not, I straightened my hair most of my transition (circa 2012) back to natural because I didn't quite consider my new do "normal". I had to be my own cheerleader and convince myself that big hair was OK, too. Glad there is a day that acknowledges afros and all their loveliness. So whether small or large, happy #worldafroday!”

- Simone Williams
Guinness World Record Holder
Statement on "World Afro Day"



Simone Williams
(Photo courtesy of Simone Williams' IG @simonerellbess)

She went on to say, "Rocking a natural 'fro is something that really symbolizes your pride in being Black. And I feel like whenever I wear my hair very big and beautiful, I just feel that pride within me."

In a world that loves to criticize the crown of black girls and black women it is refreshing to see a story about how powerful and beautiful we are just because we are who we are.

Congratulations to Simone!