

Debbie Allen comes full circle at NCSA graduation

▲ Twenty-five years ago, the dancer/choreographer/director/producer was rejected by the NCSA. Saturday, she got her degree anyway

By YVETTE N. FREEMAN
Community News Editor

Twenty-five years ago, a young dancer by the name of Debbie Allen auditioned for admission at the North Carolina School of the Arts. The young 17-year-old from Houston, Texas was told she wasn't meant to be a dancer.

"I gave a great audition only to be told that I should go into something else; that my body was not right for dancing," Allen told the graduating class of the School of the Arts Saturday. She then strutted around the podium to prove to the audience that

nothing could be further from the truth. The audience wholeheartedly agreed with yells, screams, and applause of approval.

Allen was the keynote speaker at the ceremony held at the Stevens Center. She also received an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree. During her address, she told the crowd that she wanted so badly to be a graduate of NCSA. However, in the end, the rejection gave her the strength and motivation to keep striving for her dream.

"In that one day, I learned a lesson that molded and shaped and directed my entire career. I got off the plane. My mother met me at the airport; tears streaming down my face.

that if I was going to wallow in self-pity, meander in self-doubt and justify my anger and hurt because of what I thought was somebody else's bad decision, then it was totally over for me, like that. I had to deal with the truth that if I wanted a career, I had to learn how to be equal to the situation," she continued.

Allen challenged the graduates that they themselves will have to be "equal to the situation" and believe in themselves and their abilities. "The truth in your mind can become reality," she told them. "You can do it."

Allen herself indeed became "equal to the situation," and with a vengeance. After graduating from Howard University, she made her Broadway debut in the production of *Purlie* and later *Raisin*. In 1979, she starred in *West Side Story*, for which she received the prestigious Drama Desk Award, and the first of two Tony nominations.

During the 1980s, she starred on the hit television series *Fame*, as dance teacher, Lydia Grant, for which she received two Emmys and a Golden Globe Award.

Then, in 1988, Allen took the helm of *A Different World*, the spinoff of the *Cosby Show*. As the show's producer and director, she has helped the show to rank consistently in the top five by dealing with such issues as apartheid, racism, date rape, and AIDS.

Other shows in which Allen has directed include *Family Ties*, *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, and *Quantum Leap*. Most recently, Allen showcased her directorial talents in the television movie *Stompin' at the Savoy*, which aired this past April. In addition to her directing duties, Allen has continued her dancing and choreography career. She choreographed both the 1990 and 1991 Academy Awards shows, and received her third Emmy Award in 1991, for her choreography of *Motown 30: What's Goin' On!*

Today, she is one of the most sought after talents in the television industry. "I have become the top director, producer, choreographer in television. I said the top



Debbie Allen is one of the top television directors and producers, as well as choreographers, in the industry.

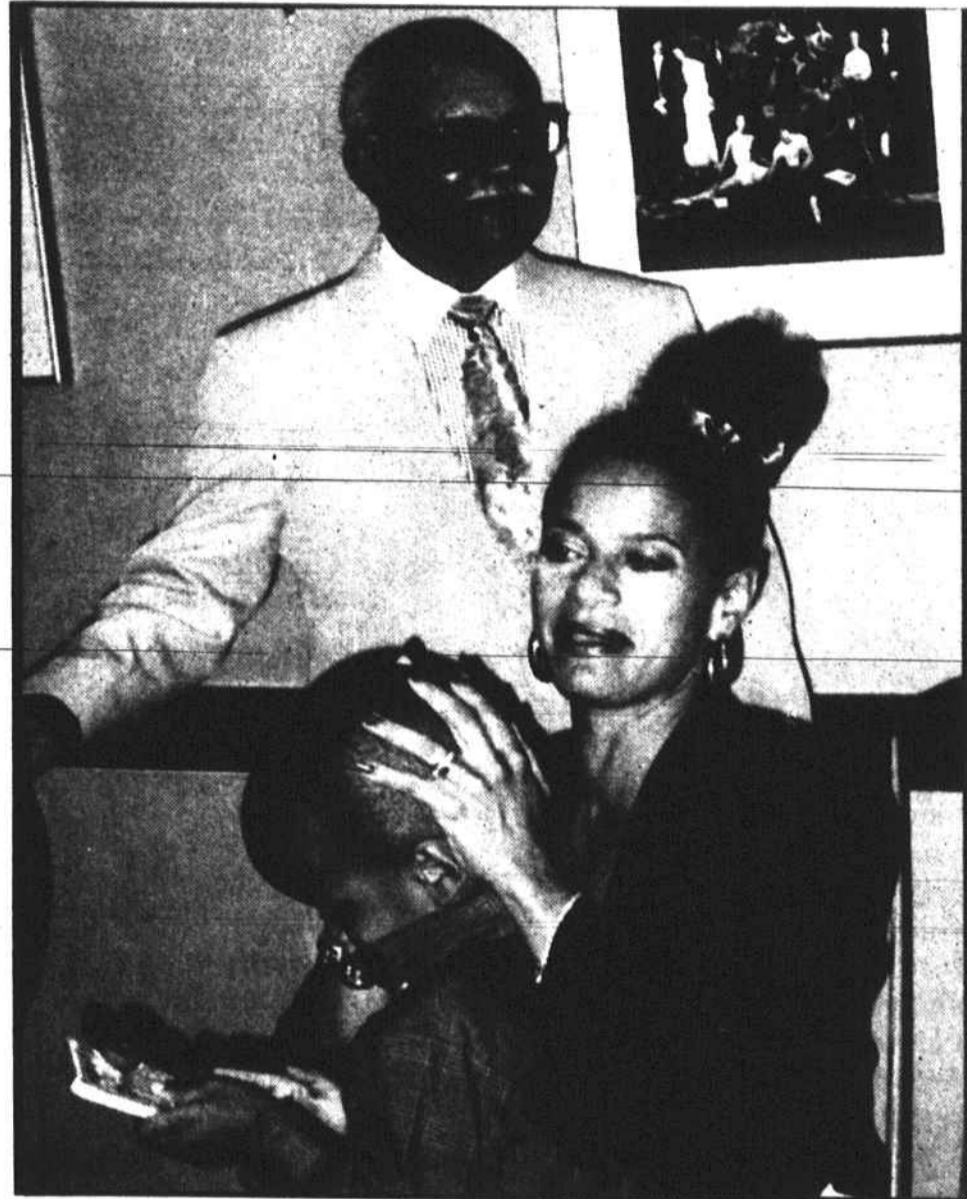
choreographer, director, producer. I did not say woman. I did not say black," Allen said with conviction and pride. "I have gone full circle. It may have taken me 25 years, but that's okay because here I am back at the North Carolina School of the Arts."

During an interview following the ceremony, Allen stated that she harbors no ill-will towards the school and felt no hesitation to return as the commencement speaker. "When they called me, I said 'Honey, when is it? What time? Darling, I'll

wear my best dress. When am I coming?," she said laughing.

She also admitted that she chose to attend the ceremony rather than being home for her daughter's birthday. "She said 'Mommy, can't you tell them you don't feel good?' I said 'No, baby, I have to go because it's something I have to do,'" Allen explained.

Allen is married to NBA All-Star guard Norman Nixon, and they have one daughter and one son.



Debbie Allen gets to know one of her North Carolina relatives following the graduation ceremony.

COMMUNITY EVENTS CALENDAR

June

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How to Schedule Your Event: Send your information, concisely and neatly printed or typed, to the *Chronicle* Calendar, 617 N. Liberty St., Winston-Salem, N.C. 27101, before 5:30 p.m. the Monday preceding the week in which your event will occur. Our FAX number is (919) 723-9173.



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JUNE 4 TO JUNE 10

THURSDAY, JUNE 4

6 p.m. — The WS/FC Board of Education meeting scheduled for tonight has been cancelled.

— There will be a Fire Prevention Festival at the Family Outreach Center, 1125 Highland Ave. For more information, call Mary Johnson at 773-7965.

7 p.m. — The WS chapter of Self Help for the Hard of Hearing will hold its monthly meeting in room 211 of the American Red Cross building, 690 Coliseum Dr. For more information, contact Bonnie Richardson at 969-9878, or Danielle Malbasa at 777-1354.

8 p.m. — The Little Theatre of WS will present *The Little Foxes* at the Arts Council Theatre, Hanes Community Center, 610 Coliseum Drive, today, Friday, and Saturday and at 2 p.m. Sunday. Tickets prices Thursday through Saturday are \$9 for adults, \$7.50 for students and senior citizens, and \$6 for children 12 and under. Tickets for Sunday's performance are available at a \$2 discount. For more information, call 725-4001.

SATURDAY, JUNE 6

8 a.m. — The American Red Cross will hold a blood drive at the WS Convalescent Center, 1900 W. First Street, until 12:30 p.m.

9 a.m. — The Forsyth County Public Library's Annual Book Sale will be held in the auditorium of the main library, 660 W. 5th St., until 1 p.m. The price for all books is still \$.50. Some sets, records, and audiovisual materials may be priced separately. For more information, call 727-2556.

— A free Community Networking, Capacity Building, and Empowerment Workshop will be held until 3 p.m. at the Winston Lake Family YMCA, 901 Waterworks Rd. A continental breakfast and lunch will be served. All youth

ages six and up are encouraged to attend along with parents, community leaders, and residents. Transportation to and from this event will be provided to public housing residents by the Housing Authority of WS. For more information on the workshop, contact Veronica Biting at 723-1783. For transportation information, call Lucille Ransby at 727-8500.

SUNDAY, JUNE 7

5 p.m. — The Daughters of Isis of Sethos Court #105 will hold their annual musical recognition program at Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church, 795 NW Crawford Place. The public is invited.

6 p.m. — The African-American student body of the class of 1973 of R.J. Reynolds High School will hold an organizational meeting to plan its 20 year reunion to be held in the summer of 1993. The meeting will be held at the American Legion Post, 526 Woughtown St. For more information, call Fernandez at 777-8150, or Wanda at 765-7383, or mail your name, address and phone number to Class of '73, PO Box 13177, Winston-Salem, NC, 27110.

MONDAY, JUNE 8

9:30 a.m. — The YWCA, 1201 Glade St., is offering a one-hour "Fit and Trim" class for mothers and children, beginning today. Mother's must be members of the YWCA, but children can attend at no cost. For more information, contact Heather Moricle at 722-5138.

7 p.m. — The Women's Center at Forsyth Memorial Hospital is offering a free three-session series on the benefits of nursing your baby and on the fundamentals of breastfeeding for expectant mothers and their families. The class will meet in the main lobby. To register, call 760-0122.

7:45 p.m. — The YWCA, 1201 Glade St., will offer a snorkeling class beginning tonight. The cost is \$36 for nine lessons. For more informa-

tion, call Jane Robinson at 722-5138.

TUESDAY, JUNE 9

4:30 p.m. — The Board of Directors of the Legal Aid Society of Northwest North Carolina, Inc. will meet at the Legal Aid offices, 216 W. 4th St. The public is invited. For more information, contact Kay House at 725-9166.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10

10:30 a.m. — First Line: Beyond the Phone will present a free community forum on Substance Abuse Services will be held until 12 noon at the Miller Park Recreation Center, 400 Leisure Lane in meeting rooms A-B.

12 p.m. — The Triad Minority Supplier Development Council will hold its monthly meeting at the Howard Johnson Plaza Hotel, I-40 and Guilford Jamestown Rd. in Greensboro. For more information, call Janet Rumley at 373-2192.

7 p.m. — The Forsyth County Genealogical Society will meet in the auditorium of the main library, 660 W. 5th St. The program topic will be "Warts and All" by Nelson Weller. Visitors are welcome.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS

• The WS Braves Beepball team needs volunteer umpires and coaches. All practices are held at Hine Park on Home Rd. Mondays and Wednesdays from 6-8 p.m. For more information, call 727-2505.

• Herbalist and author Steven Foster will teach a workshop at the Sawtooth Center for Visual Art on macro-photography with an emphasis on herbs as food, medicine, and flowers. The workshop will meet Thursday and Friday, June 11 and 12, from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. The fee is \$66. Pre-registration is required. For information and registration, call 723-7395.

Please see page B5

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