

Disney unveils toy line for its first African-American princess

By **DEMETRIA IRWIN**

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Over 70 years after the first Disney princess graced the big screen (Snow White in 1937), little Black girls finally have a Disney princess who looks like them. Princess Tiana, voiced by Tony Award-winner Anika Noni Rose, is the title royalty in "The Princess and the Frog," a cartoon musical set for release during the 2009 holiday season. The American International Toy Fair at the Jacob Javits Center served as the launching pad for Disney's newest toy line.

To the surprise of Rose herself, Disney unveiled not only the usual rollout of toys for a new movie, but also a special one-of-a-kind Princess Tiana doll just for Ms. Rose. The unexpected gift brought the "Dream-girls" actress to tears. "I had no idea about this. I feel so silly crying about it, but it is just so spe-

cial because this is my princess!" she said, laughing at her inability to stop her tears. The doll, with long elegant arms, brown skin and large doe eyes strikes a statuesque pose in a green and yellow ball gown.

Rose—as stunning, charming and demure in real life as any Disney princess on screen—politely answered questions after a special screening of select portions of "The Princess and the Frog," a delightful feature filled with heart-warming references to the deep and rich nuances of African-American culture. Oprah Winfrey and Terrence Howard (who co-starred with Rose in director Debbie Allen's all-Black version of "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof") are the voices of Princess Tiana's parents. Unlike other Disney features, Princess Tiana comes from a very loving family, but must overcome other obstacles to

reach her dreams.

In an interview with the *AmNews*, Rose explained what she felt would be the impact on children of finally having an African-American princess. "It would teach all little girls that they are worthy of being princesses. That doesn't mean wearing a scepter and a crown, but just being worthy of being cared for in a respectful and loving manner. It means recognizing the respect due to little girls because they grow up to be magnificent women when they are treated the right way," said Rose with a warm smile.

In addition to the toys, Disney Stores all over the country will also carry a line of costumes (perfect for dress-up tea parties), home décor and other accessories associated with "The Princess and the Frog" movie.



Anika Noni Rose, who voices the title character in Disney's "The Princess and the Frog," pictured with the one-of-a-kind Princess Tiana doll presented to her at the American International Toy Fair at the Jacob Javits Center

(Demetria Irwin photo)