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Zy'Naii Prentice is St. Croix's New Princess, Je'Talia Hanley New Duchess Following Stiff Competition During High Quality Pageant Show

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From left to right, 2022-2023 Princess Zy'Naii Prentice, and 2022-2023 Duchess Je'Talia Hanley. By. ERNICE GILBERT/ V.I. CONSORTIUM

Let's get one thing out of the way: all competitors in this year's Princess and Duchess Show were exceptional in their execution and brought a level of performance not seen in a long time. But the winner of the Princess competition shone so bright in every segment that by the end of the night there was no doubt who would come out on top.

Meet your new princess, crowned Sunday night at the Alfredo Andrews Elementary School following roughly 7 hours of competition, contestant number 2, Zy'Naii Prentice.

The new Duchess, also crowned on Sunday night is contestant number 1, Je'Talia Hanley. First runner-up for the Duchess show is O'Nae Milligan. Only two girls participated in the Duchess show this year.

The Princess show featured three girls ages 9 and under, while the Duchess show featured two contestants who were even younger, between 6 and 7. In fact contestant number 1 and first runner-up in the Princess competition, Avanae Kau'i Esme Hurtault, is 7 years old and competed against girls two years older — a huge difference in terms of middle childhood development. Second runner-up in the Princess show is Anya' Ettienne.

Collectively, they brought show-stopping, prodigious presentations that put on notice the Queen Show — which takes place on Dec. 18 — that pageants on St. Croix have elevated to a level and quality not witnessed in a very long time and represented an epochal moment for such events.

From their stunning cultural wear with designs emblematic of the best and highest quality in Crucian ethnical attire, to grandiloquent evening gowns that awed audiences watching in-person and thousands virtually. The talent segment further brought to the fore the capabilities of the contestants, with none displaying diffidence during their extraordinary performances.

The new princess, Zy'Naii Prentice, performed exceedingly well in all categories. Her talent, for example, featured multiple set pieces seamlessly weaved into one performance while showcasing her many talents. The performance started with Zy'Naii as a vendor welcoming new cruise ship tourists to St. Croix, which is a nod to the thousands of new guests coming to the Big Island as part of a [new Port Authority agreement with Royal Caribbean International](#). It pivoted into singing when Zy'Naii spoke about coconut water to a tourist, then to her baton twirling and steel plan performances.

She also came out on top in the question and answer segment, delivering her response with no hesitation or pauses, while staying true to the question. Zy'Naii was asked which Virgin Islander would she honor, and three reasons why she chose this person.

Zy'Naii paid special tribute to her late father during the cultural wear segment, she celebrated professional jockey Euclyn “Pede” Prentice Jr., who [died during a car accident in May 2019](#). Zy'Naii came on stage donning madras complete with a jockey skull cap and a crop (whip). At one point, Zy'Naii postured herself to emulate a jockey riding a horse as if she were in a race, which resulted in deafening cheers and rounds of applause from the audience.

By the time the show was finished, and though all the girls brought their A game, Zy'Naii completed her assignment with an A+, putting her over the edge for the tightly competed Princess crown.

According to Shamari Haynes, asst. director of the V.I. Dept. of Tourism's Division of Festivals, the event was at capacity, with roughly 700 tickets being sold. So far, the live streams on the V.I. Consortium have received a total of 45,300 views and 7,200 comments

There were a total of seven judges from varying backgrounds, two of whom were males, and two individuals responsible for tallying the results. Merlisa George chaired this year's show, which Mr. Haynes said was one of the best Princess and Duchess pageants on St. Croix in a long time.