

UZO ADUBA has emerged as one of the most innately talented performers of her generation

by JENNIFER FERRISE

Since Uzo Aduba arrived in L.A. to film the highly anticipated reboot of HBO's *In Treatment*, she has spent almost all her waking hours on set. The series, which starred Gabriel Byrne from 2008 to 2010, returns in its fourth season with Aduba as the new head therapist. Her character, Dr. Brooke Taylor, will also mark Aduba's first-ever lead role in a TV series, so it's pretty safe to say she is OK with her office hours running a little bit over.

"Oh, I'm loving it," she says between rehearsals. "It's exciting to see the show explored through a female lens now, specifically a Black female lens. And since I'm playing a therapist, I'm also learning a lot about myself as an artist and a lead in the process. I'm grateful—even if this is the first time I've actually been outside in a few days."

As much as she's been in a bubble of late, we've been in hers too. Since her breakout role as Suzanne "Crazy Eyes" Warren in the Netflix original series *Orange Is the New Black*, Aduba has approached each of her characters with a fearless spirit and unwavering dedication. And in turn, the awards just keep on coming. In 2015 she became the first actress in history to win Emmys in both the drama and the comedy categories for her role on *OITNB*. And last September she took home her third Emmy (and second win for best supporting actress) for her powerful portrayal of congresswoman and feminist Shirley Chisholm in the FX limited series *Mrs. America*.

Playing Chisholm, she says, helped shape her idea of ambition. But perhaps more than anything else, Aduba credits another trailblazer in her life: her mother, Nonyem, a Nigerian immigrant, who instilled in her the drive that's taken her from her hometown of Boston to Broadway to Hollywood. "She's the strongest person I know," Aduba says. "She survived polio and a war, and when she moved to America, she encouraged me to always keep reaching. My entire life I've had a front-row seat at what it looks like to have discipline and focus. I always say she's the optimal optimist, and that's something I now pride myself on too."

Even the actress's full name, Uzoamaka Nwanneka Aduba, symbolizes her family's glass-half-full mentality. "It translates to 'the road is good,' which means you went through a journey and getting to the other side may have been hard, but it was worth it," she says. "It can still be a good road, even if it has bumps, you know?"

Now Aduba hopes to lift up as many other women as she can, using her voice, and often her social-media presence, to shine a light on everything from social issues to pay equity. (Last year she also became a co-owner of the female-founded women's soccer team Angel City Football Club, alongside pals like Eva Longoria and Natalie Portman.) Her Instagram bio, perhaps, explains her philosophy best. "Growing up, I never thought there was a seat for me," it reads. "So I've decided to build my own table. Come. Pull up a chair." So what's it like to now have a big ol' table with lots of people clamoring to sit at it? "Oh, it's turned into a fabulous dinner party at this point," she says, laughing.

Speaking of celebrations, there is one milestone coming up that may persuade Aduba to take a much-deserved break. "I'm turning 40 in February," she says. "And I kid you not, my whole life I've been waiting for this decade. I mean, I also loved running around New York in my 20s, and I appreciate all that I've accomplished in my 30s. But I always felt like I was just ramping up to 40. To me, 40 feels settled. It feels lighter. And it definitely feels strong." ■

