

## National Geographic Taps Suzan-Lori Parks (“Topdog/Underdog”) as Executive Producer and Showrunner for **GENIUS: ARETHA FRANKLIN**

National Geographic Global Television Networks President Courteney Monroe announced today at the network’s TCA presentation that Suzan-Lori Parks, Pulitzer Prize award-winning playwright of “Topdog/Underdog,” will be executive producer and showrunner for **GENIUS: ARETHA FRANKLIN**. This upcoming season will be the first-ever, definitive scripted miniseries on the life of the universally acclaimed Queen of Soul. Fox 21 Television Studios, the studio behind “The Assassination of Gianni Versace: American Crime Story,” “The Americans,” “Homeland,” “The People v. OJ: American Crime Story” and the two prior award-winning seasons of **GENIUS**, will also return to produce the next installment. Filming will start this summer for an early 2020 premiere on National Geographic Channels in 172 countries and 43 languages. National Geographic, the company behind the Academy Award-nominated **FREE SOLO**, premiered the first season of **GENIUS** in 2017, which starred Geoffrey Rush as the brilliant scientist Albert Einstein. Ken Biller was showrunner and creator for the multi-E Emmy award winning **GENIUS: PICASSO** and **GENIUS: EINSTEIN**. **GENIUS: EINSTEIN** earned 10 Emmy nominations, including Outstanding Limited Series, as well as Golden Globe and SAG Award nominations for Rush. The follow-up season, **GENIUS: PICASSO**, starred Antonio Banderas as the titular Spanish painter, and matched much of the success of its predecessor, earning seven Emmy nominations — and two wins — as well as Golden Globe and SAG Award nominations for Banderas. Legendary hit record producer Clive Davis and Atlantic Records Chairman and CEO Craig Kallman have also joined as executive producers. Imagine Entertainment has partnered with Warner Music Group for this third season, which will again be executive produced by Imagine’s Brian Grazer, Ron Howard and Francie Calfo; Gigi Pritzker and Rachel Shane (MWM Studios); and Sam Sokolow (EUE/Sokolow). Imagine’s Anna Culp will serve as producer alongside Peter Afterman. The production will feature many of Franklin’s biggest recordings and hit songs from the comprehensive Warner Music catalogue, including “I Never Loved a Man (The Way I Love You),” “Chain of Fools,” “Don’t Play That Song,” “Since You’ve Been Gone” and “Baby I Love You.” In addition, the series will feature Franklin’s performances of “I Knew You Were Waiting for Me,” “Freeway of Love” and “Sisters Are Doin’ It for Themselves.” “Aretha Franklin had the ability to empower generations through her iconic music, and I’m excited to finally be able to tell her story, a career passion of mine. All through her life she used her voice to elevate people and the causes she believed in, especially the women’s and civil rights movements,” said Grazer. “You can hear the hopes and sorrows of a divided nation in her soulful voice, penetrating and motivating people at their core in a deeply emotional way. She cut through the pain of Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination to help heal and unite America with her music and, in the process, ushered in the post-gospel era of rhythm and blues. We’re so grateful she shared her genius with the world.” “Aretha and I shared a 40-year friendship, ever since she cooked me dinner to talk about working together to reinvigorate her career,” said Davis. “I am forever grateful to have had the opportunity to collaborate with her and her incredible instrument. She was a gift to the world, one that will last for many generations. I am thrilled to be celebrating her genius with Brian Grazer, Ron Howard and Imagine.” “Since that day 52 years ago, when Aretha Franklin entered a recording studio in Muscle Shoals, Alabama, sat down at the piano, and recorded her first track for Atlantic Records, music was changed forever. She took the roots of gospel and R&B, and imbued them with

unprecedented originality, spirit, and depth,” said Kallman. “Through her talent and her humanity, Aretha transformed people and cultures across the globe. Her Atlantic recordings form a phenomenal body of work that has entered the timeless musical canon, and we’re deeply proud to be a part of her extraordinary legacy. Warner Music Group is honored to be partnering with Ron, Brian, and the team at Imagine, along with Clive Davis, to tell the story of Aretha’s genius.” Tony award-winning Parks is the first African-American woman to receive a Pulitzer Prize in Drama, for the 2001 play “Topdog/Underdog.” The distinguished author was named among Time magazine’s “100 Innovators for the Next Wave” and is a MacArthur “Genius” Grant recipient. Her other work includes “In the Blood” (Pulitzer Prize finalist), “The Gershwin’s Porgy and Bess” (Tony Award winner), “Father Comes Home from the Wars, Parts 1, 2 and 3” (Pulitzer Prize finalist) and “Unchain My Heart: The Ray Charles Musical.” Most recently, she wrote the screenplay for the feature film “Native Son,” which was acquired by HBO in advance of its premiere at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival. The anthology series will explore Franklin’s musical genius, incomparable career and the immeasurable impact and lasting influence she had around the world. Grammy Award winner Franklin was a gospel prodigy and outspoken civil rights champion and is widely considered to be the greatest singer of her generation, receiving countless honors throughout her career. Without knowing how to read music, Franklin taught herself to play the piano, began to record songs and sang on gospel tours with her father. She signed her first record deal at age 18 with Columbia Records before moving to Atlantic Records and then Arista, where she was united with founder Davis and began a more than 40-year partnership with him. The legendary singer is one of the world’s best-selling musical artists of all time, with more than 75 million records sold globally during her career. Her voice was identified as a “natural resource” by her home state of Michigan. Imagine has a history of creating timeless and culturally impactful films, shows and documentaries in the world of music, including the Academy Award-winning film “8 Mile,” the Grammy Award-winning documentary “The Beatles: Eight Days a Week – The Touring Years” and Emmy-winning television drama “Empire.” The company also produced the film “Get On Up” about James Brown, and many documentaries, including “Jay Z’s Made in America,” “Katy Perry: Part of Me” and the upcoming “Pavarotti.” Imagine is currently in production on the Hulu series “Wu-Tang: An American Saga” and developing a film version of the musical “Tick,Tick...BOOM!” with Lin-Manuel Miranda directing. For more information, visit [www.natgeotv.com](http://www.natgeotv.com) or our press site [natgeotvpressroom.com](http://natgeotvpressroom.com), or follow us on Twitter using @NGC\_PR. **NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PARTNERS LLC** National Geographic Partners LLC (NGP), a joint venture between National Geographic and 21st Century Fox, is committed to bringing the world premium science, adventure and exploration content across an unrivaled portfolio of media assets. NGP combines the global National Geographic television channels (National Geographic Channel, Nat Geo WILD, Nat Geo MUNDO, Nat Geo PEOPLE) with National Geographic’s media and consumer-oriented assets, including National Geographic magazines; National Geographic studios; related digital and social media platforms; books; maps; children’s media; and ancillary activities that include travel, global experiences and events, archival sales, licensing and e-commerce businesses. Furthering knowledge and understanding of our world has been the core purpose of National Geographic for 131 years, and now we are committed to going deeper, pushing boundaries, going further for our consumers ... and reaching millions of people around the world in 172 countries and 43 languages every month as we do it. NGP returns 27 percent of our proceeds to the nonprofit National Geographic Society to fund work in the areas of science, exploration, conservation and education. For more information visit [natgeotv.com](http://natgeotv.com) or [nationalgeographic.com](http://nationalgeographic.com), or find us on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/natgeotv), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/natgeotv), [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/natgeotv), [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/natgeotv), [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/natgeotv) and [Pinterest](https://www.pinterest.com/natgeotv). **ABOUT IMAGINE TELEVISION:** Imagine Television was founded in 1986 by Brian Grazer and Ron Howard and is run by Imagine Television Group Chairman Francie Calfo. The company’s productions have been honored with 195 Emmy nominations and 30 Golden Globe nominations. Current programming includes Fox’s award-winning series “Empire,” Netflix’s “Arrested Development” and NatGeo’s **MARS** and **Breakthrough** series. Earlier productions include Fox’s Golden Globe-

and Emmy award-winning Best Drama Series “24”; NBC’s Peabody Award-winning series “Friday Night Lights”; Fox’s Emmy award-winning Best Comedy “Arrested Development”; Fox’s “Shots Fired”; Fox’s “Lie to Me”; CBS’s “Shark”; NBC’s “Miss Match”; WB’s “Felicity”; ABC’s “SportsNight”; and HBO’s “From the Earth to the Moon,” which won the Emmy for Outstanding Mini-Series. Currently, Imagine is working on “Why Women Kill,” from Marc Cherry; “Swagger,” from Kevin Durant and Reggie Rock Bythewood; “Wu-Tang: An American Saga,” from The RZA and Alex Tse; and “Filthy Rich,” with Tate Taylor. Howard and Grazer began their collaboration in 1985 with the hit film comedies “Night Shift” and “Splash,” and continue to run Imagine as executive chairmen. [www.imagine-entertainment.com](http://www.imagine-entertainment.com)

**ABOUT FOX 21 TELEVISION STUDIOS:** Fox 21 Television Studios is a production unit housed within Fox Television Group devoted to making creatively ambitious scripted and unscripted series for all distribution platforms. Fox 21 Television Studios is responsible for the Emmy- and Golden Globe-winning sensation from Ryan Murphy, Nina Jacobson and Brad Simpson “The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story” (with FX Productions) as well as its follow-up, “The Assassination of Gianni Versace”; the Emmy- and Golden Globe-winning “Homeland,” starring Claire Danes and Mandy Patinkin; the critically acclaimed “The Americans” (with FX Productions), starring Matthew Rhys and Keri Russell; the blockbuster “Sons of Anarchy” as well as its follow-up, “Mayans M.C.,” from co-creators Kurt Sutter and Elgin James; “Queen of the South,” executive produced by David T. Friendly; “Pose,” from Ryan Murphy, Brad Falchuk, Nina Jacobson, Brad Simpson, Alexis Martin Woodall and Sherry Marsh, with Steven Canals as co-executive producer and Janet Mock, Our Lady J and Erica Kay as producers; and the Emmy-nominated **Genius: Einstein** and its follow-up, **Genius: Picasso**. Additional upcoming projects include **The Hot Zone** based on Richard Preston’s international best-seller, and the untitled “Fosse/Verdon” limited series from Thomas Kail, Steven Levenson and Lin-Manuel Miranda. Fox 21 Television Studios shows have amassed a collective 95 Emmy nominations and 29 Emmy wins, as well as multiple Golden Globes, Humanitas Prizes and Peabody Awards.

**ABOUT MWM STUDIOS:** Founded in 2001 by producer Gigi Pritzker, MWM Studios (formerly OddLot Entertainment) is a film and television production company that develops, produces, finances and arranges distribution for quality commercial properties for the U.S. and international markets. MWM Studios teams with first-class filmmakers and provides them with resources that go far beyond equity investment to produce a range of high-quality films. Most recently, the company produced the first season of **Genius** for National Geographic, which went on to be nominated for 10 Emmy awards and a Golden Globe, as well as the Academy Award-nominated film “Hell or High Water,” written by Taylor Sheridan and starring Jeff Bridges, Chris Pine and Ben Foster, for CBS Films. MWM Studios’ past releases include the 2010 Academy Award-nominated drama “Rabbit Hole,” starring Nicole Kidman; “The Way Way Back,” starring Steve Carell; “Drive,” starring Ryan Gosling; the futuristic sci-fi film “Ender’s Game”; and Jon Stewart’s directorial debut, “Rosewater.” MWM Studios is a division of MWM, a diversified media and entertainment company empowering creators to cross-pollinate content between film, television, live event, digital video and AR/VR in order to grow brands in a more enriching, entertaining and engaging way.

**ABOUT EUE/SOKOLOW ENTERTAINMENT:** Founded in 2010 by producer/director Jeff Cooney and veteran television producer Sam Sokolow, EUE/Sokolow Entertainment is an independent television studio that develops, finances, produces and arranges the distribution of premium television shows and content. EUE/Sokolow Entertainment attracts high-end talent to develop television properties in a forward-thinking business model designed for today’s global television marketplace. EUE/Sokolow is currently developing AJ Lee’s New York Times best-seller “Crazy Is My Superpower” and Deepak Chopra’s novel “Lords of Light” for television and has recently independently produced pilot/presentations of “Diplomatic Immunity,” a comedy starring Australian comedy troupe The Peloton; “Shalom Y’all,” a comedy by showrunner Caryn Lucas based on the work of Julia Fowler; and “Win With Les,” starring Josh Lucas and created and written by Blair Singer; and is in development with Jaleel White and social media platform MiTu on an untitled original digital series. Since opening their doors, Cooney and Sokolow have set up shows at

HBO, ABC, NBC, Freeform, Nat Geo, TNT, E!, Lifetime Movie Network and OWN. EUE/Sokolow Entertainment is a subsidiary of EUE/Screen Gems, whose infrastructure includes studio complexes in Atlanta, Wilmington and Miami that have been home to productions such as “Stranger Things” (Netflix), “Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 1” (Lionsgate), “Sleepy Hollow” (Fox), “Iron Man 3” (Marvel Studios), “Six” (A&E/History Channel), “The Conjuring” (New Line Cinema), “Under the Dome” (CBS) and “East Bound and Down” (HBO). **MEDIA CONTACTS: For National Geographic:** Chris Albert 202-912-6526 Chris.Albert@natgeo.com Jennifer DeGuzman 212-656-0713 Jennifer.DeGuzman@natgeo.com **For Imagine:** Sage Shah 310-858-2176 sage@imagine-entertainment.com **For Fox 21 Television Studios:** Chris Alexander 310-369-1044 Chris.Alexander@fox.com