

## National Geographic and Double Oscar® Nominee Cynthia Erivo Reveal Highly Anticipated Premiere Date and New Trailer for the Emmy® Award-Winning Anthology Series, 'Genius: Aretha'

National Geographic and Cynthia Erivo ("Harriet," "The Color Purple") revealed today during the network's TCA session the highly anticipated premiere date and official series trailer for the multiple Emmy award-winning anthology series **GENIUS: ARETHA**. From 20th Television and Imagine Television, this new season will premiere in the U.S. on the channel with double-stacked episodes across four consecutive nights, beginning on Sunday, March 21, at 9/8c. The premiere episodes will be available the next day on Hulu, culminating in a celebration of Aretha Franklin's birthday, with all eight episodes available to stream by Thursday, March 25. Additionally, National Geographic's ongoing podcast series [THE MAKING OF](#) released the first of three **GENIUS: ARETHA** themed episodes, which features in-depth interviews with individuals who are both in front of the camera and also those behind the scenes. The latest episode features **GENIUS: ARETHA**'s cinematographer Kevin McKnight, costume designer Jennifer Bryan and choreographer Dondraico Johnson. They discuss the process of recreating and honoring key and iconic moments in Aretha Franklin's life that will be covered in **GENIUS: ARETHA. THE MAKING OF** podcast is hosted by the celebrated entertainment journalist Stacey Wilson Hunt and is available to stream on Apple, Spotify, Stitcher and other podcasting platforms. **GENIUS** is National Geographic's critically acclaimed anthology series that dramatizes the fascinating stories of the world's most brilliant innovators and their extraordinary achievements with their volatile, passionate and complex personal relationships. This third season will explore Aretha Franklin's musical genius and incomparable career, as well as the immeasurable impact and lasting influence she has had on music and culture around the world. Franklin was a gospel prodigy, an outspoken civil rights champion and widely considered the greatest singer of the past 50 years, receiving countless honors throughout her career. **GENIUS: ARETHA** will be the first-ever, definitive and only authorized scripted series on the life of the universally acclaimed Queen of



Aretha Franklin, played by Cynthia Erivo (foreground), rehearsing with backup singers played by (background L to R) Kameelah Williams, Patrice Covington (as Erma Franklin) and Erika Jerry, in National Geographic's GENIUS: ARETHA. (Credit: National Geographic/Richard DuCree)[/caption]

Without knowing how to read music, Franklin taught herself to play the piano; at the young age of 12, she began to record songs and sing on gospel tours with her father. She signed her first record deal at age 18 with Columbia Records. In 1966, she moved to Atlantic Records, where she recorded many of her most iconic songs. In 1979, she began a 40-year friendship and partnership with Clive Davis, which produced a number of hit songs, including the highest charting and bestselling song of her career, "I Knew You Were Waiting (For Me)," a duet with George Michael. The legendary singer is one of the world's bestselling 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. The previously announced cast includes triple threat Tony®, Emmy®- and GRAMMY® Award-winning **Erivo** as Aretha Franklin who will be performing many songs from Franklin's rich catalogue; the Emmy-winning **Courtney B. Vance** ("The People V. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story") as Aretha's father, C.L. Franklin; **Malcolm Barrett** ("Timeless," "Preacher") as Ted White, Franklin's first husband and business manager; **David Cross** ("Mr. Show," "Arrested Development") as legendary music producer Jerry Wexler, who guided Franklin as she developed into a confident singer and commercial success; **Patrice Covington** ("The Color Purple", "Ain't Misbehavin'") and **Rebecca Naomi Jones** ("Oklahoma!", "The Big Sick") portray Erma and Carolyn Franklin, respectively, as Aretha's sisters and frequent background singers, who supported and collaborated with their famous sibling; **Steven Norfleet** ("Watchmen," "Dynasty") as older brother Cecil Franklin, who stepped in as Aretha's manager following her divorce from Ted White; veteran actress **Pauletta Washington** ("Beloved," "She's Gotta Have It") as Aretha's nurturing and loving paternal grandmother, Rachel; **Omar J. Dorsey** ("Queen Sugar") as James Cleveland; **Marque Richardson** ("Dear White People") as King Curtis, **Kimberly Hébert Gregory** ("Vice Principals") as Ruth Bowen; and introducing **Shaian Jordan** as young Aretha Franklin, aka Little Re.

**EPISODES INCLUDE:**

**RESPECT** *Sunday, March 21, at 9/8c* Desperate for a hit, Aretha travels to Muscle Shoals in 1967 to record her first album with Atlantic Records. After suffering the loss of her surrogate mother, Little Re braves her first solo in 1953, in her father's, C.L. Franklin, church.

**UNTIL THE REAL THING COMES ALONG** *Sunday, March 21, at 10/9c* Struggling to find her sound, Aretha catches the attention of Jerry Wexler at Atlantic Records in 1966. Meanwhile, Little Re has her first touring experience on the Gospel Circuit in 1954 with C.L. Franklin and meets her idol, Clara Ward.

**DO RIGHT WOMAN** *Monday, March 22, at 9/8c* Aretha juggles her music career and her commitment to the civil rights movement, led by Martin Luther King Jr., in 1967 and 1968. Meanwhile, Little Re leaves behind her newborn child to return to the Gospel Circuit in 1955, meeting with music legends James Cleveland and Little Sammie Bryant.

**UNFORGETTABLE** *Monday, March 22, at 10/9c* Aretha is featured on the cover of Time Magazine in 1968, but she's devastated when the article focuses on the scandalous details of her personal life. Barbara Franklin and Young C.L. Franklin struggle to establish themselves in Memphis in 1941, before Little Re is born.

**YOUNG, GIFTED AND BLACK** *Tuesday, March 23, at 9/8c* Aretha, inspired by Angela Davis and the Soledad Brothers, records her protest album "Young, Gifted and Black" in 1970. Despite Jerry Wexler's

uncertainty, the album is a success. Barbara Franklin makes a decision that has a devastating effect on Little Re in 1951. **AMAZING GRACE** *Tuesday, March 23, at 10/9c* Aretha records her best-selling live Gospel album “Amazing Grace” in 1972 at New Temple Missionary Baptist Church, ignoring her sibling’s pleas to record instead at New Bethel with their father, C.L. Franklin. Little Re discovers that she’s pregnant with her second child, forcing her to leave school. While pregnant, she records her first album at New Bethel in 1956. **CHAIN OF FOOLS** *Wednesday, March 24, at 9/8c* As the Queen of Soul enters the age of disco, Aretha will do anything to remain relevant—including stealing an opportunity from her sister Carolyn. She receives a GRAMMY nomination but is ultimately snubbed from winning the award. While at the ceremony, she meets with Arista founder Clive Davis. Meanwhile, Jerry Wexler leaves Atlantic Records, and he and Aretha part ways. **NO ONE SLEEPS** *Wednesday, March 24, at 10/9c* Despite significant emotional losses, including a second divorce and the death of her father in 1984, Aretha pushes herself artistically and triumphs. She begins a successful career at Arista, with the help of Clive Davis, and in an unforgettable GRAMMY performance in 1998, she solidifies her eternal reign as the Queen of Soul. The series 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” and “Save Me.” 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.”

Additionally, the third season of the acclaimed anthology series features a number of well-known personalities who crossed paths with Franklin, including Dinah Washington, King Curtis, Clara Ward, Art Tatum, Reverend James Cleveland, Sydney Pollack, Angela Davis, Martin Luther King Jr., Curtis Mayfield and George Michael. The series is produced by 20th Television and Imagine Entertainment. Imagine has partnered with Warner Music Entertainment for this third season, which will again be executive produced by Imagine’s Brian Grazer and Ron Howard. Pulitzer Prize recipient, MacArthur “Genius” grant receiver and Tony Award winner Suzan-Lori Parks (“Topdog/Underdog”) is showrunner, executive producer and lead writer. Emmy, Golden Globe and BAFTA TV Award winner Anthony Hemingway (“The People v. O.J. Simpson: American Crime Story”) will also executive produce and serve as director. Legendary hit-record producer Clive Davis and Atlantic Records chairman and CEO Craig Kallman are executive producers. Imagine’s Anna Culp also serves as executive producer, and Peter Afterman is producer. Returning executive producers include Francie Calfo (**GENIUS: EINSTEIN, GENIUS: PICASSO**, “Empire”), Ken Biller (**GENIUS: EINSTEIN, GENIUS: PICASSO**), Gigi Pritzker and Rachel Shane (MWM Studios), and Sam Sokolow (EUE/Sokolow). For more information, visit [www.natgeotv.com](http://www.natgeotv.com) or our press site [www.foxflash.com](http://www.foxflash.com), or follow us on Twitter using @NGC\_PR. **About National Geographic Partners LLC:** National Geographic Partners LLC (NGP), a joint venture between The Walt Disney Company and the National Geographic Society, 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 133 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](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Pinterest](#). **About Imagine Television Group** Imagine Television Group is comprised of Imagine Television and Imagine Television Studios.

Imagine Television was founded in 1986 by Brian Grazer and Ron Howard and is run by Imagine Television President Samie Kim Falvey. The company's productions have been honored with 195 Emmy nominations and 30 Golden Globe nominations. Last year, the company formed Imagine Television Studios to produce and finance a slate of projects that currently includes the series "Why Women Kill" for CBS All Access from Marc Cherry; "Swagger" for Apple with Kevin Durant and Reggie Rock Bythewood; "Wu-Tang: An American Saga" for Hulu from The RZA and Alex Tse; and "68 Whiskey." Imagine Television is also producing "Filthy Rich" with Tate Taylor for Fox. Current programming includes Fox's award-winning series "Empire," Netflix's "Arrested Development" and Nat Geo's Emmy®-winning **GENIUS** anthology series. Earlier productions include Fox's Golden Globe- and Emmy®-winning Best Drama Series "24"; NBC's Peabody Award-winning series "Friday Night Lights"; Fox's Emmy®-winning Best Comedy "Arrested Development"; Fox's "Shots Fired" and "Lie To Me"; WB's "Felicity"; ABC's "SportsNight"; and HBO's "From the Earth to the Moon," which won the Emmy® for Outstanding Mini-Series. 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.

**ABOUT 20TH TELEVISION:** A part of Disney Television Studios, 20th Television is one of the industry's most prolific suppliers of entertainment programming, including the No. 1. Series on all of broadcast, NBC's THIS IS US from Dan Fogelman; Fox's No. 1 drama, 9-1-1 and its spinoff 9-1-1: Lone Star from Ryan Murphy, Brad Falchuk and Tim Minear, its No. 1 comedy LAST MAN STANDING starring Tim Allen; Hulu's recent smash hits SOLAR OPPOSITES from Justin Roiland and Mike McMahan and LOVE, VICTOR from Isaac Aptaker, Elizabeth Berger and Brian Tanen; FX's No. 1 series AMERICAN HORROR STORY from Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk; TBS' No. 1 series AMERICAN DAD created by Mike Barker, Matt Weitzman and Seth MacFarlane; and the longest-running primetime scripted series in the history of television, THE SIMPSONS, in addition to dozens of others. 20th Television shows have amassed a collective 2000 Emmy nominations and 263 Emmy wins, as well as multiple Golden Globes, Humanitas Prizes and Peabody Awards. The studio's landmark series from its 70 year library include such classics as BATMAN, M\*A\*S\*H, GLEE, HOW I MET YOUR MOTHER, BONES, BOB'S BURGERS, EMPIRE, FAMILY GUY, 24, BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER, FUTURAMA, KING OF THE HILL, NEW GIRL and THE X-FILES.

**National Geographic Media Contacts:** Fowzia Iranpur, 562-900-0632, [Fowzia.Iranpur@natgeo.com](mailto:Fowzia.Iranpur@natgeo.com) Madison Bell, 818-802-1495, [Madison.Bell@natgeo.com](mailto:Madison.Bell@natgeo.com) **20th Television Studios Media Contact:** Nicole Crawford, 310-369-1044, [nicole.crawford@disney.com](mailto:nicole.crawford@disney.com)