

Genius: Aretha; the next instalment in Emmy award-winning anthology series to premiere on Wednesday, 30 June

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The third season of the limited series starring Cynthia Erivo as the Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin, and Courtney B Vance as CL Franklin will premiere on National Geographic across Africa

The next instalment in the highly anticipated, multiple Emmy® award-winning anthology series, **Genius**, this time honouring the Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin, will premiere exclusively on National Geographic across Africa from Wednesday, 30 June 2021 at 9pm (CAT). Starring double Oscar®-nominee Cynthia Erivo (*Harriet*, *The Color Purple*) in the title role, **Genius: Aretha**, will start with a special double episode event across the continent, with one episode per week thereafter. Additionally, each episode will be available on DSTV CatchUp after the linear broadcast.

Genius is National Geographic's critically-acclaimed anthology series that dramatises 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 honours throughout her career.

Genius: Aretha will be the first-ever, definitive and only authorised scripted series on the life of the universally acclaimed Queen of Soul.



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 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.

Episodes include:

"Respect"

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, CL Franklin, church.



“Until the Real Thing Comes Along”

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 CL Franklin and meets her idol, Clara Ward.

“Do Right Woman”

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”

Aretha is featured on the cover of *Time* Magazine in 1968, but she is devastated when the article focuses on the scandalous details of her personal life. Barbara Franklin and Young CL Franklin struggle to establish themselves in Memphis in 1941, before Little Re is born.

“Young, Gifted and Black”

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”

Aretha records her best-selling live gospel album *Amazing Grace* in 1972 at New Temple Missionary Baptist Church, ignoring her siblings pleas to record instead at New Bethel with their father, CL Franklin. Little Re discovers that she is 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”

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”

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 features 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.” The series also features 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.

“National Geographic is committed to going deeper, pushing boundaries and going further, and does exactly that in the next instalment of the award-winning **Genius** series – which showcases the remarkable life and work of the undisputed Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin. This series highlights not only how brilliant she was, but also the many complex aspects of her life,” said Evert van der Veer, vice president, media networks, The Walt Disney Company Africa. “Aretha Franklin’s voice is merely one aspect of her awe-inspiring legacy, adding to her civil rights advocacy, her true musical genius and so much

more,” he added.

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