

GENIUS: ARETHA

Inside

What is genius? Production perspectives

Cast members, crew, producers and others involved with “Genius: Aretha” weigh in on what the word means to them, and how Aretha Franklin demonstrated it. **20**

Natural looks don’t just happen by chance

The show’s hair and makeup artists had to be historians, knowing what was available, where and when, and what things the singer did herself (like her brows). **22**

Identifying with Aretha Franklin’s journey

“Respect” is an anthem for all women. Her struggles and triumphs resonate especially with Black women. Hear it from three who worked on the series. **24**

Parks knows genius when she sees it

Showrunner, executive producer and head writer is a “genius grant” recipient as well as the first Black woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. **30**

King Curtis’ sax appeal not easy to capture

Marque Richardson took up music lessons in order to inhabit the role of Aretha Franklin’s music director. He concedes: “I wasn’t good” at the saxophone. **32**

Prop master has a recipe for authenticity

Kevin Ladson is so dedicated to getting it right that he even found and prepared Aretha’s chicken recipe just to get a sense of what her kitchen would be like. **34**

Not a stitch out of place, or out of time

Costume designer Jennifer Bryan and her team had to pull together period-appropriate clothing for hundreds of people across decades’ worth of fashion. **36**



Genius shined brighter than any spotlight

A huge innovator with lasting impact, Aretha Franklin is perfect for the third season of National Geographic’s anthology series.

Cynthia Erivo stars in “Genius: Aretha,” which premieres Sunday, March 21, and runs nightly through Wednesday, March 24. RICHARD DUCREE/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC



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Powerful voice fills nation’s soundtrack

Her music has been a fixture in our lives for more than half a century. Above, singing “America (My Country ’Tis of Thee)” at Barack Obama’s first inauguration in 2009. **9**



Erivo has known Aretha all her life

In the home where the “Genius: Aretha” star grew up, Franklin’s music “would always be playing. ... And I fell in love with her voice and how she would tell the story.” **13**



‘The Look’ has this series right on time

From the items on the sets — like C.L. Franklin’s piano, above — to the color of the light, production design ensures that viewers remain properly immersed in the story. **16**



Vance has a feel for C.L. Franklin

Though he boasts dozens of onscreen credits, plus Tony and Emmy awards, “I’m a simple boy from Detroit,” where he grew up well aware of the Franklin family legacy. **27**



Newcomer hits right notes as Little Re

Shaia Jordan plays the Queen of Soul when she was still just the princess performing in her father’s church. It’s her first major role, but she’s already a consummate pro. **38**



About the cover

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Image: Cynthia Erivo as Aretha Franklin.
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