

Under the (AB)C: Live TV version of 'The Little Mermaid' coming soon

By Michelle Rose
TV Media

Under the (AB)C: The Disney-owned ABC Television Network has announced it's dipping a toe in the well-charted waters of live TV musicals with "The Little Mermaid Live!," coming Tuesday, Nov. 5.

That's big news for fans of Ariel and her underwater friends, and anyone wishing to be part of that world.

But keep in mind that ABC's "live" version won't be 100 per cent live. Instead, expect to see the classic animated film mixed with all-new live musical performances, complete with lavish costumes and sets, plus a few songs from the Tony Award-nominated Broadway musical.

You know her best as the voice of "Moana" (2016), but this time Hawaiian-born Auli'i Cravalho will be performing as Ariel. Queen Latifah will play the part of villainous Ursula, while reggae star Shaggy has signed on to perform as Ariel's crab sidekick, Sebastian.

Not to be confused with the planned live-action movie remake (that one will star Halle Bailey), the idea of a "Little Mermaid" TV event has been simmering on the back burner since 2017, when ABC first announced the project then shelved it just a few months later. This time, the concept — which will fall under the "Wonderful World of Disney" banner — was fast-tracked to coincide with the 30th anniversary of the film's original release in 1989.

And there are high hopes it will drum up additional interest for the Disney Plus streaming platform, which will launch the following week (Nov. 12) and is already expected to be a serious Netflix challenger.

'Platform' Pilot: B.J. Novak — a.k.a. Ryan "The Temp" Howard on NBC's "The Office" — recently celebrated his 40th birthday. So what kind of birthday gift do you give a person who is already an accomplished author, director and TV producer? A pilot order, according to FX.



Auli'i Cravalho is set to star in "The Little Mermaid Live!"

FX Networks gave Novak the green light to produce a pilot for a new half-hour anthology series titled "Platform." And if the series is picked up, count on Novak to continue wearing multiple hats as writer, director and executive producer.

Per the official release from FX, "Platform" uses "the boldest issues of our times as a jumping-off point to tell singular, character-driven stories about the world we live in today."

Technically, this initial pilot order is for two episodes (more on that later), with each episode serving as a one-off story featuring different cast members (think "Black Mirror"-style casting). Few details are known about

these episodes, except that the first will feature a dramatic storyline about a sensitive subject while the other has a lighter tone and includes a short animation element.

Production is already underway, with Lucas Hedges ("Lady Bird," 2017), Kaitlyn Dever ("Booksmart," 2019), Jon Bernthal ("The Punisher"), Ed Asner ("The Mary Tyler Moore Show") and more starring in the first episodes.

But back to Novak. The TV funnyman and littérateur (he's a bestselling author, too) can easily draw on past TV experiences to ensure future success. And many fans are hoping his latest project will get a full series order.

During his time on "The Office," Novak penned a total of 15 episodes, including the very funny "Diversity Day," and he directed a number of episodes between 2009 and 2012. He also served as executive producer, writer and director (and had a recurring role) on the Fox/Hulu series "The Mindy Project," which starred fellow "Office" co-star/best friend/ex-girlfriend Mindy Kaling.

'Power' Out: The sixth and final season of Starz's most-watched series has been given its own title ("The Final Betrayal"), an extended run (15 episodes instead of 10) and a premiere date (Sunday, Aug. 25). So is this truly the end of "Power"? Not exactly.

Rumors of "Power" spinoffs have persisted since last fall, when it was revealed show creator Courtney Kemp had signed a new development and production deal with Lionsgate (Starz's parent company). In May, executive producer Curtis Jackson, a.k.a. 50 Cent, announced the series' end on social media and revealed spinoffs were coming down the pipeline, "so don't trip."

Even Starz president of programming Carmi Zlotnik is thinking franchise: "As one chapter comes to an end, another will begin. Courtney Kemp and 50 Cent have created a world rich with complex and dynamic characters, and there are a number of stories

we plan to tell as we continue to explore and expand the 'Power' universe."

And what universe is that? The one inhabited by members of the glitzy Manhattan elite and the gritty underworld of drug dealing. The two-time NAACP Image Award-winning drama is about, well, power. In last season's finale, Tommy (Joseph Sikora, "Jack Reacher," 2012) went from a brother-in-arms to top-of-the-hit-list after shooting Angela (Lela Loren, "Gang Related"). We can expect Ghost (Omari Hardwick, "Nobody's Fool," 2018) to seek vengeance this season, and you better believe he's going to be ruthless. Tune in Sunday to watch the action unfold.