

HBO's 'Gilded Age': Stars align for new drama from 'Downton Abbey' creator

By Michelle Rose

TV Media

HBO's 'Gilded Age': The '80s are coming back in a big way to HBO. That is, the 1880s.

HBO has tapped Emmy winners Christine Baranski ("The Good Fight") and Cynthia Nixon ("Sex and the City"), along with Amanda Peet ("Togetherness") and Morgan Spector ("Homeland"), to star in its upcoming period drama, "The Gilded Age."

What's interesting about this bit of casting news is that Baranski will be the lead in two high-profile series likely airing at the same time. Luckily, that doesn't mean all work and no play (and no sleep) for Baranski; per Deadline, production schedules were reportedly worked out to ensure her availability for both productions.

The fact that it is created, written and executive produced by "Downton Abbey" creator Julian Fellowes probably made it easy to attract big names in the first round of casting. And like "Downton Abbey," "The Gilded Age" is also centered on class relations. But this time, the story is set in America during a period marked by great excess and glaring inequality, as railroad tycoons amassed incredible wealth and power (there's a reason they were known as robber barons).

Back to the story. It begins in 1882, when the orphaned daughter of a southern general is sent to live with her aunts (Baranski and Nixon) in New York City. Accompanied by a woman who masquerades as her maid, the young Marian Brook gets caught up in the lives of the wealthy set — including a ruthless railroad tycoon (Spector) and his ambitious wife (Peet), who struggle to be accepted in the same social circle as the Vanderbilts and Astors.

"The Gilded Age" is a co-production between HBO and Universal TV and, surprisingly, it's been in the works since 2012. It got a series order from NBC just last year but moved to HBO in May, with a firm commitment for a 10-episode run.

New 'Mr. Ripley': You might know him as "Hot Priest" right



Christine Baranski star of "The Good Fight"

now, but "Fleabag" star Andrew Scott will soon play a character with an actual name, and a famous one at that: Tom Ripley.

The new Showtime series "Ripley" will be based on Patricia Highsmith's five novels, though you might also recognize the name from the 1999 film "The Talented Mr. Ripley," which starred Matt Damon in the title role.

The first eight episodes will be set in New York and Italy during the 1960s. The story follows Ripley (Scott) after he is hired by a wealthy man to bring his playboy son back to America. And if you've read the book or seen any of the movies — there have been a few film adaptations, including 1960's "Purple Noon" and 2002's "Ripley's Game" — you know

Ripley's life soon descends into a complex game of "deceit, fraud and murder" (per Showtime).

Screenplay writer-director Steven Zaillian ("Schindler's List," 1993) is setting the tone and direction for the first season. The idea has been in development for a while, with "Luther" creator Neil Cross attached to the project at one point. But Zaillian's pitch sparked the bidding frenzy that culminated with a straight-to-series order from Showtime.

And with Scott in the role of the charismatic (and murderous) grifter, everything appears to be coming together for a 2020 premiere. The Irish-born BAFTA winner is a veteran of British theater, film and television. He's quickly becoming a familiar face on this side of the pond, espe-

cially after his much-talked-about performance in the second season of Amazon's Emmy winner, "Fleabag."

Previously, Scott had a recurring role as Jim Moriarty in the BBC series "Sherlock," which aired on PBS and was made available on Netflix. Scott also had a leading role in "Black Mirror" Season 5 episode "Smithereens," and has a few more projects due out before "Ripley's" premiere, including a turn in HBO's "His Dark Materials."

Cannon's Show: After years of hosting prime-time TV gigs, Nick Cannon is making the move to daytime with a new talk show coming in 2020.

Earlier this year, Cannon filled in as host of "The Wendy Williams

Show" when Williams took some time off to focus on her well-being after her Graves' disease diagnosis (something Cannon can relate to given his own lupus diagnosis in 2012).

Cannon's temporary run earned rave reviews, and it looks as if he was a hit behind the scenes, too. He just secured a talk show deal with Lionsgate's Debmar-Mercury, the company that produces Williams' show. No news yet on the talk show's title or format, though Cannon will be the star and will produce it.

The rapper, comedian and author (and former husband of Mariah Carey) already has a long entertainment resume that mixes film roles ("Drumline," 2002) with TV acting gigs ("Brooklyn Nine-Nine"). But Cannon seems

to be more comfortable in the roles of producer off-camera and host on-camera.

Cannon became a household name during his seven seasons (2009 to 2016) as host of "America's Got Talent" but fell out with NBC executives over a racially charged joke in his standup special. Fast forward to the present and he's got two seasons under his belt as the entertaining emcee of Fox's wildly popular "The Masked Singer." He continues to be the creative force behind the MTV sketch show "Wild 'N Out", and in June, Cannon launched the daily radio show "Nick Cannon Mornings" on Power 106. So it remains to be seen if Cannon pulls a "Seacrest" by juggling multiple TV and radio gigs at the same time.