coverstory

BY JAY BOBBIN

Kaley Cuoco stars in "The Flight Attendant," premiering Thursday on HBO Max.

Kaley Cuoco is 'The Flight Attendant' in new HBO Max melodrama

It's been a while since "The Big Bang Theory" ended, and now, Kaley Cuoco's career is taking flight again.

Though she voiced the title character in an animated "Harley Quinn" show, the actress' main focus has been on the Chris Bohjalian bestseller "The Flight Attendant" as both star and executive producer. The limited HBO Max drama-with-humor starts streaming the first three of its eight episodes Thursday, Nov. 26, with Cuoco playing Cassie Bowden, a stewardess with no memory of what happened when she wakes up in a hotel room with a dead man near her.

"Over the past few years, I've been looking at books to maybe produce or different stories that kind of were interesting to me," Cuoco says, "but nothing excited me. And honestly, I read one little snippet (of this), a line of the book on Amazon. It just was one sentence and I got like this weird chill, and I called my team and said, 'Hey, I'd love to look at the rights to this book.' "

A bidding war ended with Cuoco winning the screen rights, "and I'm like, 'Now what do I do?' I didn't believe it. I brought it to Warner Bros. and I said, 'You know what? I think this is a great character. I think this could be a really great show.' " The studio then matched her with prolific producer Greg Berlanti – king of The CW's DC Universe, plus many other series – in making "The Flight Attendant."

Rosie Perez, Michiel Huisman ("Game of Thrones"), Zosia Mamet ("Girls") and "Grey's Anatomy" alum T.R. Knight are among additional stars. For all her television experience, dating back to "8 Simple Rules" and the original "Charmed," Cuoco notes she has learned a lot from "The Flight Attendant" providing her first major involvement behind the cameras.

"I thought if we could find the right team and bring some levity to such a dark book, it could be kind of cool," she reflects. "I laughed over the last few years working on this. I was like, 'I know too much!' Sometimes, you just don't want to know all the stuff that's going on ... but it's been totally career-changing for me just to see it from the beginning, and to kind of go with my gut on things and make my own decisions."

Work on "The Flight Attendant" was shut down for several months by the coronavirus pandemic, when production almost was completed. The tale has given Cuoco a new appreciation of the title profession, having kept closer watch on stewardesses while traveling.

"I can't help it," she confirms. "Now, after doing this project, I'll be noticing flight attendants probably for the rest of my life."

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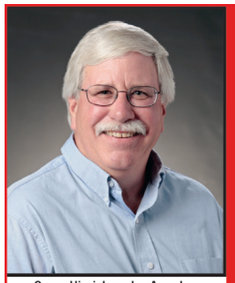
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