# Broadcasting Multichannel News Cable

TV bigwigs gather in and around Hollywood for Wonder Women of L.A., 40 Under 40 L.A., the Advanced Advertising Summit and the Next TV Summit

#### VOLUME 153 • NUMBER 4 • JUNE 2023 • \$6.95

\$92722000

TONE-SZ8

500082 50075023

#### 

#1482494 0# BCWV 1485494 ESIOT #DIABS494 0# BCWV 1485494 ESIOT

## 40 UNDER 40: L.A. PLAYERS ON THE RISE

J FUTURE

Picketers outside the Disney upfront in New York

PICKET, UPFRONT Show goes on

**AS WRITERS** 

IDD POWER PLAYERS



June 20, 2023 Sofitel Los Angeles

The Multichannel News Wonder Women Awards will honor an exceptional group of women in the Media and Entertainment industry on June 20 at the Sofitel in Los Angeles. The awards acknowledge the achievements and commitment from some of the most remarkable women in television, who continually show up to innovate, inspire, speak up for equality and lead their team and organization from the front.



Holly Henderson Hallmark Media Senior Vice President, Distribution



Warner Bros. Discovery President, Affiliate Distribution



Amazon Prime Video Head of Sports Talent



**EISA RICHARDSON** Fox Corporation Executive Vice President, Business & Legal Affairs and Associate General Counsel



BBC Studios Los Angeles Productions General Manager



LEFF-PRESSMAN Screen Engine/ASI Chief Client Engagement Officer



TelevisaUnivision Executive Vice President, Consumer & Corporate Marketing



**ESPN** Vice President, ESPN Creative Studio



Endemol Shine North America Chief Executive Officer



**Vubiquity** Senior Vice President, Studios



Cox Communications Assistant Vice President of Content Acquisition



Nickelodeon and Paramount President, Paramount Animation and Nickelodeon Animation



Hallmark Media EVP, Content Strategy and Research



FOX Sports Executive Vice President, Communications



KIRSTEN POLLEY WWE Senior Vice President, Operations



#### **SPONSORSHIPS, TABLES, TICKETS & ADS CONTACT:** Jessica Wolin | 212-685-4233 | wonderwomen@futurenet.com



WITH SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

@MCNWONDERWOMEN #MCNWonderWomen www.mcnwonderwomen.com



VOLUME 153 · ISSUE 4 · JUNE 2023

WWW BROADCASTINGCABLE COM WWW MULTICHANNEL COM

#### FOLLOW US

On Twitter: twitter.com/BCBeat or twitter.com/MultiNews On Facebook: facebook.com/BroadcastingandCable or facebook.com/MultichannelNewsMagazine

#### CONTENT

Content Director Kent Gibbons, kent.gibbons@futurenet.com Content Manager Michael Demenchuk michael.demenchuk@futurenet.com Senior Content Producer - Technology Daniel Frankel, daniel.frankel@futurenet.com Senior Content Producer - Business Jon Lafayette, jon.lafayette@futurenet.com Senior Content Producer - Programming Michael Malone, michael.malone@futurenet.com Senior Content Producer - Programming R. Thomas Umstead, thomas.umstead@futurenet.com Contributors Paige Albiniak, John S. Eggerton Production Manager Heather Tatrow Group Art Director Nicole Cobban Art Editor Cliff Newman

#### ADVERTISING SALES

Managing VP, Sales Dena G. Malouf, dena malouf@futurenet.com

#### SUBSCRIBER CUSTOMER SERVICE

To subscribe, change your address, or check on your current account status, go to www.broadcastingcable.com and click on About Us, email futurepic@computerfulfiliment.com, call 888-266-5828, or write P.O. Box 8688, Lowell, MA 01853.

#### LICENSING/REPRINTS/PERMISSIONS

Broadcasting+Cable is available for licensing. Contact the Licensing team to discuss partnership opportunities. Head of Print Licensing Rachel Shaw licensing@futurenet.com

#### MANAGEMENT

SVP, Wealth, B2B & Events Sarah Rees MD, B2B Tech & Entertainment Brands Carmel King Head of Production U.S. & U.K. Mark Constance Head of Design Rodney Dive

#### FUTURE US, INC.

130 West 42nd Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10036-8002

All contents 2023 Future US, Inc. or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permis imagazze into o te zec, second na instruction reproduced in any neg managazze production production of the publisher. Future Publishing Lamited (company number 2008B) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/ services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein

If you submit material to us, you warrant that you own the material and/or have the necessary rights/ permissions to supply the material and you automatically grant Future and its licensees a licence to publish your submission in whole or in part in any/all iscues and/or editions of publications, in any format published worldwide and on associated webcites, social media channels and associated products: Any material you submit is sent at your own risk and, although every care is taken, neither Future nor its employees, agents, subcontractors or licensees shall be liable for loss or damage. We assume all unsolicited material is for publication unless otherwise stated, and reserve the right to edit, amend, adapt all submissions



(pso, Regulated) Ve are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from responsibly managed, certified forestry and chlerine-free manufacture. The paper in this magazine was sourced and produced from sustainable managed forests, conforming to strict environmental and upprovident standards

Chief executive officer Jon Steinberg, Non-executive charman Fichard Huntingford and Chief financial and strategy officer 5 nny Ladkin Brand T 1 444 (01225 442 244

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol FUTR) www.futurepic.com

# **Multichannel News**

LOS ANGELES

#### FEATURES

6

#### 6 SPECIAL REPORT: WONDER WOMEN OF L.A.

Meet 15 women executives who are making their mark on TV's evolving landscape - and who will be honored at our gala L.A. TV Week breakfast event on June 20.

#### 4 LEAD-IN

Upfront Week was a time for networks to pivot, as the writers' strike saw key figures in different roles and scripted shows were downplayed. By Michael Malone

#### 33 SPECIAL REPORT: **40 UNDER 40**

There is no shortage of rising stars in the media and entertainment industry, especially on the West Coast. Learn about 40 we'll toast at an L.A. TV Week event on June 21.



#### DEPARTMENTS

- 42 L.A. TV WEEK PREVIEW
- **44 PROGRAMMING**
- **48 LOCAL NEWS**
- **50 SPECIAL REPORT:**
- **BEST OF SHOW 2023**
- **52 FATES & FORTUNES**
- **54 FREEZE FRAME 56 DATA MINE**
- **58 THE FIVE SPOT**

Vpl. 153 • No. 4 • June 2023. B&C Broadcasting & Cable (ISSN 1068-6827) (USPS 066-000) is published 6 times per year (Feb. March. April. June, Sept. Dec) by Future US. Inc., 130 West 42nd Street, 7th Floor, New York, NY 10036. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to Baoadcasting & Cable PO Box 848 Lowell MA 01853. Printed in U.S.A. @2023 Future US, Inc. All Rights Reserved



Hot Wheels Ultimate Challenge NBC, Stars on Mars Fox

This page

erg

iStock/Getty Images Plus, Writers' Strike Getty Images/Bl

Cover L A .

3

## Despite Writers' Strike, Upfront Show Goes On

Scripted programming takes a backseat amid pickets



By Michael Malone michael.malone@futurenet.com @BCMikeMalone

he networks had to go with Plan B, and perhaps even Plan C, for Upfront Week in New York, with the striking writers protesting outside the ballrooms where the networks showed off their new shows and

strategies. That meant executives, not star producers and performers, were talking up the scripted programming news from the stage. And the scripted shows — the main focus of upfront presentations for as long as they've gone on — were largely pushed to the end of the presentations.

NBCUniversal presented at Radio City Music Hall May 15, and NBC News talent introduced scripted programming, such as Willie Geist, host of Sunday Today, talking up the Saturday Night Live 50th anniversary special. Stephanie Ruhle of MSNBC's The 11th Hour even took a stab at likening scripted dramas to news, noting how a good drama "raises the curtain on the inner workings of other worlds."

#### **Executive Shifts at NBCU**

NBC also had the additional challenge of presenting without Jeff Shell, fired as CEO in late April, and Linda Yaccarino, former chairman, NBCU advertising and partnerships, whose move to Twitter broke when she was rehearsing for the upfront.

"What was more surprising today?" asked Mark Lazarus, chairman, NBCU television and streaming, who followed the video of teddy bear Ted that opened the NBCU show. "Seeing a foul-mouthed teddy bear or seeing me on stage?"

Ted is a Peacock series.

Every presenting media company



played up their streaming networks. Moments after stepping on stage, Marianne Gambelli, Fox president of advertising sales, marketing and brand partnerships, boasted about Tubi's 64 million active monthly users during a presentation at at the Manhattan Center May 15. Next out at Fox were Nicole Parlapiano, Tubi chief marketing officer, and Mark Rotblat, Tubi chief revenue officer, who spoke before Rob Wade, Fox Entertainment CEO, stepped on stage.

With unscripted stuff playing an expanded role on the networks' upcoming schedules, Wade introduced Allison Wallach, president of unscripted programming, who described the David Spade Shark Tank spoof Snake Oil and Jamie Foxx's music competition series We Are Family.

Michael Thorn, president of scripted, came out after Wallach was done.

Presenting May 16, TelevisaUnivision did not have picketers outside its Pier 36 venue, and could more freely talk up scripted fare, with shows made in Mexico. Those on display included telenovela adaptation El Extrano Retorno De Diana Salazar and Circo Gomez. Both are Writers Guild of America members and supporters picket outside Disney's May 16 upfront presentation at New York's Jacob K. Javits Convention Center. in the works for streamer Vix.

TelevisaUnivision also said its TUDN sports division will work with CBS Sports to produce a Spanish-language Super Bowl LVIII telecast next February.

Also on May 16 was The Walt Disney Co. at the Javits Center. Ryan Seacrest came out to talk up largely scripted stuff, including ABC's Abbott Elementary, Hulu's Only Murders in the Building and FX's The Bear; after the presentation featured sports, including Serena Williams and Damar Hamlin, news, unscripted, Marvel Studios, Lucasfilm and Pixar.

#### **Strike Prompted Pivots**

When Warner Bros. Discovery presented at the Theater at Madison Square Garden May 17, Jon Steinlauf, Discovery chief U.S. ad sales officer. shared that the shindig was not exactly the show the company planned to put in before the writers' strike. The executives talked up new streamer Max: CNN: an Ellen DeGeneres unscripted show and Jason Momoa hosting "Shark Week," before Kathleen Finch, chairman and chief content officer, U.S. networks group, spoke about TNT drama The Lazarus Project. Casey Bloys, chairman and CEO, HBO and HBO Max content, shared about HBO drama The Idol, True Detective and Robert Downey Jr. spy series The Sympathizer.

The CW, presenting May 18, showed off a number of series acquired overseas, including Canadian imports Run the Burbs, Sullivan's Crossing and Son of a Critch.

Paramount, which owns CBS, avoided its usual Carnegie Hall presentation for more intimate gatherings in April. Netflix presented its new stuff virtually on May 17.

The presentations were, for the most part, shorter than in previous years. NBCU went 90 minutes, down from its usual two hours. Fox finished up at a slim 52 minutes. When Luis Fonsi came out to perform at the end of the TelevisaUnivision presentation, only about an hour had passed. Disney, for its part, went close to two hours — and that was without Jimmy Kimmel's annual industry-skewing monologue at the end. Kimmel was on the sidelines due to the strike. ●

LEAD-IN

#### WATCH THIS ...



Vacation House Rules, with Scott McGillivray hosting, sees neglected vacation properties turned into stunning getaway homes. It's on HGTV June 3. In On June 4, *The Idol*, from Sam Levinson, begins on HBO. Lily-Rose Depp plays a pop star getting over a breakdown. Abel Tesfaye, aka The Weeknd, plays a nightclub impresario. Also on June 4, *Joe Pickett* starts season two on Paramount Plus. Michael Dorman portrays Wyoming game warden



Pickett, who discovers a hunter murdered in the mountains. Season 15 of *American Ninja Warrior* begins June 5 on NBC. Matt Iseman and Akbar Gbajabiamila host as the ninjas set their sights on the finals in Vegas. Season 16 of It's *Always Sunny in Philadelphia* turns up on FXX June 7. Rob McElhenney takes a break from *Wrexham* to play Mac, Charlie Day is Charlie, Glenn Howerton portrays Dennis, Kaitlin Olson is Dee and Danny DeVito is back as Frank.



#### THE WATCHMAN

Senior content producer Michael Malone's look at the programming scene

Hot Wheels:

Ultimate Chall

By Michael Malone michael.malone@futurenet.com @BCMikeMalone

#### Big Plans for Small Cars On 'Hot' NBC Show

Hot Wheels: Ultimate Challenge debuted on NBC May 30. The show sees Hot Wheels superfans turn a toy car from their past into the life-sized car of their dreams. The winner will see their creation become an official Hot Wheels die-cast car.

The show "builds on the success of Lego Masters," said executive producer D.J. Nurre, who also exec produces the Lego show, both on behalf of Endemol

Shine North America. Hot Wheels parent Mattel was keen to do an unscripted show and Ultimate Challenge was born.

The show isn't just for gearheads, Nurre said, but for "the kid in all of us" who can imagine what their boring, everyday ride might look like with, say, flames painted on the sides or a skull on the hood.

Some contestants are gearheads, he added, but most are not. "They don't have to have spent their entire life tinkering in the garage to participate in the show or enjoy the show," Nurre said.

The contestants are hardly all male. "It's really exciting to bring the female superfans on and allow them to bring the feminine point of view," Nurre said. That's not about flowers and butterflies, he added: "Some made their cars way more aggressive, more bad-ass, than the boys did."

Rutledge Wood, whose resume includes covering NASCAR, hosts Hot Wheels. Nurre said Wood is well suited for the role. "He was the biggest kid on the set," Nurre said. "He did not lose his enthusiasm even for one second."

#### **'Lazarus' Reborn on TNT**

TNT will premiere thriller drama The Lazarus Project oJune 4. The show, about a secret organization that has harnessed the ability to turn back time whenever the world faces the threat of extinction, aired in the U.K. late last year. There are eight episodes.

> The series follows George, the latest recruit to the secret project. When a freak accident harms someone close to George, Lazarus won't let him turn back time to undo it unless there is the threat of global extinction.

"At the end of the day, it's a crazy love story," Johnny Capps, executive producer, said. "It's a very original premise, to see a love story done in this way."

Paapa Essiedu, Anjli Mohindra, Tom Burke and Caroline Quentin are in the cast. The idea came from exec producer Joe Barton. Capps promised a "thriller jigsaw puzzle in every episode."

"It's very topical, it's very funny and it's got fantastic characters," he added.

Asked about influences, Capps mentioned Groundhog Day.

Scripted dramas on TNT are uncommon, but Capps believes the partnership looks strong. He said, "We're thrilled to work with American partners who are very like-minded." •



FXX

Sunny in Philadelphia:

HBO; It's Always

Idol:

The I

HGTV;

House Rules:

SPECIAL REPORT: WONDER WOMEN OF L.A.

## Multichannel News WONDER WOMEN LOS ANGELES

# Hollywood Power Players

Do breakfast with 15 women leaders driving TV innovation and excellence on June 20

> he editors of Multichannel News are pleased to recognize the 2023 Wonder Women of Los Angeles, our third class in the West Coast extension of our long-running Wonder Women event. The 15 industry executives in this exceptional group will be honored at a June 20 breakfast ceremony at the Sofitel Los Angeles, the kickoff to the L.A. TV Week of events sponsored by B+C, Multichannel News and Next TV.

For more than two decades, the Wonder Women program has celebrated the female leaders in media, entertainment and technology who are making a lasting impact on their businesses and the industry. These remarkable women executives continually show up to innovate, inspire, speak up for equality and lead their teams and organizations from the front.

Once again, we are proud to partner with The WICT Network: Southern California chapter on this event.

Read about this year's honorees on the following pages, then go to **mcnwonderwomen.com** to learn more about the June 20 morning event.

The Wonder Women of Los Angeles breakfast is just the start of the twoday L.A. TV Week program, which also includes the Advanced Advertising Summit (see page 42), the Next TV Summit (see page 43) and an event recognizing our L.A. 40 Under 40 (see page 33).

For more on all of the L.A. TV Week events, go to latvweekevents.com.

#### SPECIAL REPORT: WONDER WOMEN OF L.A.

## **Michele Barney**

President of Affiliate Distribution Warner Bros. Discovery

> By Kent Gibbons kent.gibbons@futurenet.com

> > ichele Barney spent two decades at DirecTV and then AT&T, one of the biggest pay TV

distributors in the country, negotiating deals with programmers. She loved it and earned a reputation for being a fair bargainer who wanted to solve problems for both parties at the table.

Trained as an accountant and then as a lawyer, she became an attorney for DirecTV doing programming deals. There, she fully embraced the business of TV. That's a good thing because, after it became clear that AT&T was planning to sell the pay TV business to private equity, she opened herself up to consider other opportunities. And an excellent one presented itself on the programmer side of the business.

Discovery Inc. hired her in early 2021 as president of affiliate distribution, managing Discovery networks' carriage with cable, satellite, telco and digital distributors across the U.S. and Canada.

After the merger that created Warner Bros. Discovery (WBD), Barney transitioned into a new role leading partnership management for WBD's affiliates, global platforms and retail partners and transactional businesses. At WBD, there have been relationships with distributors to maintain, keeping vital revenue coming in, and new things to help grow, such as Magnolia Network and streaming platforms Discovery Plus and HBO Max.

The next big challenge — which she embraces — is the new combination of Her positivity is infectious, but it's not positivity without regard to the reality of the situation. I think that's one of her real gifts."

**Gabe Sauerhoff**, senior VP, distribution, Warner Bros. Discovery

the two streaming entities into one, called Max and having launched May 23.

#### **Keeps Calm in Chaos**

WBD senior VP, marketing strategy Kelly Kane knew of Barney from her time at DirecTV before working for her at Discovery and then WBD. She's been impressed with how her boss has rolled with the changes.

"She left a job of 20 years," Kane noted. "She came to Discovery during the pandemic. She was so determined and hardworking. And then the Warner Bros. Discovery merger was announced, five to six months into her time with us, and never did it come across as anything like the sky is falling. It was always very even-keeled. She's very good at ensuring that people remain calm and keep doing what they love."

WBD senior VP, distribution Gabe Sauerhoff was impressed that, even though Barney came from the distributor side of the negotiation table, "how open-minded she was to seeing how the proverbial sausage gets made on the other side of it. And I think she incorporated the best of both perspectives into the way that she did her job here at Discovery." That helped in a short period of time to complete a number of strategic renewals and forge new relationships that "really put her stamp on her tenure at Discovery," he said. (He cited deals with Hulu Plus Live TV and Verizon.)

"Her positivity is infectious, but it's not positivity without regard to the reality of the situation," Sauerhoff said. "I think that's one of her real gifts."

Barney, a California native whose parents met when her Navy dad was stationed in Japan, leveraged her corporate transactional skills acquired at Latham & Watkins to get the DirecTV job, at a time when distributors were acquiring stakes in programmers as part of deals. "Even as a lawyer, I really liked it," she said.

Coming over to Discovery, what she really loved about it was "it was so small and nimble and decisions were made just more quickly" than at AT&T (where, she proudly notes, she was promoted to corporate officer). Then the WBD merger happened. "And so now we're a much bigger company again, not as big as AT&T though," she said. "But I really like it. I feel like I made the right decision because I've learned so much."

#### The Thrill of a Launch

Asked what she likes most about her job these days, Barney said: "We're getting ready to launch our new enhanced app, Max. It's really fun, doing all of the work to bring a new product to market. I love the product, and it's just a really exciting time for our company. And I'm still learning after 22 years in this business. I have a great team."

And what she likes least? "Maybe the uncertainty around what's happening with video and linear video in particular, and long term where's the business going," Barney said. So she is mindful of "just keeping people positive and focused on the opportunities ahead and not necessarily just worried about the potential negativity." ●

## Valerie Bruce

General Manager, L.A. Productions BBC Studios



By Michael Malone michael.malone@futurenet.com

alerie Bruce oversees a varied portfolio that includes both unscripted shows, such as Dancing With the Stars and Alaska

docuseries Life Below Zero, and scripted fare that includes CBS's breakout comedy Ghosts and Fox's offbeat comedy Welcome to Flatch. When season 32 of Dancing with the Stars begins in the fall, the show will be expanding its distribution. It moved from ABC to Disney Plus for season 31, and will be simulcast on both networks this fall.

ABC called it the first time a show has been simulcast on both platforms and Bruce sees it as a unique opportunity. "We're very excited to be able to tap into multiple audiences," she said. "ABC and Disney have been amazing partners all the years we've produced the show."

Traditional TV has its challenges in the streaming era, but Bruce mentioned seeing, at least anecdotally, a move back to more appointment viewing. More and more streaming shows are going with the weekly episode drop, she added, as opposed to the whole season coming out on premiere day.

#### My Old Kentucky Home

Growing up in Louisville, Kentucky, Bruce graduated from the University of Kentucky and got her juris doctor at Brooklyn Law School. She credits Louisville with steering her toward a career in entertainment. Residents with a taste for ballet, theater or art museums have it all at their disposal, she said.

"It's something you're exposed to,"

Valerie is incredibly pragmatic and generally one of the most rational people, no matter what the predicament is. She's unbelievably adept at managing talent situations, networks, staff."

Ryan O'Dowd, executive VP, entertainment and music, L.A. Productions, BBC Studios

Bruce said, speaking just after getting home from a whirlwind trip to the Kentucky Derby. "People might not at first think about that when they think of Kentucky."

After law school, she landed an internship with a music attorney, and that started her career path in entertainment. Before Bruce ended up at BBC Studios, she held senior executive positions at IFC, Sundance Channel, MTV Networks and Broadway Video, among other entertainment outlets. She mentioned Susan Beckett, who was a consultant at Broadway Video when Bruce worked there, as a mentor, the seasoned veteran offering the young executive tips on the nuances of negotiations.

Bruce also learned from another boss at Broadway Video. That would be Lorne Michaels. "I got to observe how amazing he was with talent relations," she said. "I used that as a foundation in terms of how I would like to deal with talent."

Bruce arrived at BBC America as senior VP of business affairs in 2011. In 2016, she joined the production team as senior VP, commercial director of BBC Studios L.A. Productions and was later promoted to executive VP. She was named general manager of L.A. Productions in May 2020 and headed west.

Those in her BBC Los Angeles office credit Bruce with working hard to establish a positive culture, noting how the range of companies she's worked for has shown the benefits of a favorable workplace, and the challenges where the vibe is not as positive.

"Valerie is incredibly pragmatic and even-keeled, and generally one of the most rational people, no matter what the predicament is we may be facing on any given day of production," said Ryan O'Dowd, executive VP, entertainment and music, L.A. Productions, BBC Studios. "She's unbelievably adept at managing talent situations, networks, staff."

Bruce said she has an open door for any staffer facing a challenge. "Everybody on the team knows they can come talk to me about anything," she said. "I'm always happy to talk to anyone, give my opinion, guide them and help them in their careers."

#### Surf City

To unwind from her high-stress job, Bruce enjoys watching basketball, as one might expect from a Louisville native. She's picked up surfing since arriving in Los Angeles a couple of years ago, seeing it as something she can do with her teen son. Same goes for the concerts and music festivals they attend.

Bruce is also a fan of fashion, and put her passion and professional skills into an initiative where she linked up a friend from streetwear label Homme + Femme with Kentucky Derby organizers. The Derby and Homme + Femme partnered on letterman jackets that were a nod to the Black jockeys who competed in the race's earlier days. "I always love connecting people, thinking of ideas outside the box and finding ways to make them happen," Bruce said.

# 

General Manager BBC Studios Los Angeles Productions

and all of the Multichannel News 2023 Wonder Women Los Angeles honorees



## **Carrie Brzezinski-Hsu**

## ESPN Creative Studio



VP

By Paige Albiniak palbiniak@gmail.com

> hen Carrie Brzezinski-Hsu was a kid, she made commercials in her free time. "For some nerdy

reason, my idea of creating content wasn't like creating a makeup show or doing a dance performance, it was setting up a VHS camcorder in our basement and creating commercials," Brzezinski-Hsu said. "Growing up as an only child, I was like my dad's son. I knew I wanted to do something in sports and advertising."

By the time she was in fifth grade, she also knew she wanted to work at ESPN's SportsCenter, which she watched every morning with her dad. "I'm in the career of a lifetime — I'm at ESPN, I'm making commercials in sports and I'm taking that to the next level and running creative," she said. "That's beyond what I even dreamed."

After graduating from her beloved University of Michigan (where she was the commencement speaker for the School of Kinesiology in 2021), she moved to New York in 2000. Six jobs — at such places as Maxim, Blender, USA Today, Hachette Filipacchi Media and DoubleClick — and eight years later, she landed her dream gig at ESPN as senior director at ESPN's branded content studio, Creative Works. She was promoted to VP, Creative Works, in 2013.

"All of those jobs were the building blocks of my understanding of branded content," Brzezinski-Hsu said.

#### **Building the Creative Studio**

In 2020, she worked closely with Tina Thornton, head of content operations and creative surround at ESPN, to establish ESPN I'm in the career of a lifetime — I'm at ESPN, I'm making commercials in sports and I'm taking that to the next level and running creative. That's beyond what I even dreamed."

#### Carrie Brzezinski-Hsu

Creative Studio, which incorporates Creative Works but also includes everyone who works in ESPN's creative areas, such as editors, motion graphics designers, music producers and so forth. Creative Studio provides whatever is needed to make an ESPN story work. The team that she oversaw ballooned from 50 people to 450 people — and she made it her goal to meet every single one of those people in the following year.

"The way she's been able to bring those teams together as one and create an efficient approach to all of our content has been something that we didn't have in the past," Thornton said. "Now that it's all together, it has not only made us more efficient in the way we approach things, it has allowed people to grow in other areas. There are editors who are engaging with the branded content space, music people who are engaging with the visual storytelling team -whether they are in the linear or digital

space, they are all together and that allows us to do special things."

While Brzezinski-Hsu is overseeing an enormous team and has many responsibilities, she still makes time to mentor others even those who do not report to her. Several years ago, Terrell Bouza, now a coordinating producer at ESPN, observed Brzezinski-Hsu in the workplace and decided she was someone from whom he would like to learn.

"I reached out to her and asked if she had some time and she was very responsive and gracious. She connected with me for an hour," Bouza said. "From that first meeting, it evolved into a mentor/mentee relationship."

Since then, both Brzezinski-Hsu and Bouza have grown in their careers, but they continue to stay in touch.

"Carrie has always told me that as a leader, you have to lean into who you are," he said. "You have to tap into what makes you uniquely you and use that superpower to build your teams and set your culture."

#### An Authentic Leader

That philosophy is also reflected in the way Brzezinski-Hsu runs her teams, Ibelka Fernandez, VP of human resources at Walt Disney Studios, said. Fernandez was the HR leader "partnering with her on organizational design, transformation and leadership changes" as Brzezinksi-Hsu was building out the division.

"Carrie's gift is bringing her authenticity while inspiring others, and she probably doesn't even know she's doing that," Fernandez said. "She does it in a subtle way while she opens doors for others. She's an absolute rock star."

> Asked what advice she gives up-and-comers, Brzezinski-Hsu said: "Honor your values but also know that the company has values. If you stray too far from your values to support the company, you aren't going to like it, and vice versa. You need to find the intersection of your values and what the company needs. When you hit the sweet spot, a lot of synchronicity happens." •

## **CARRIE BRZEZINSKI-HSU** CHAMPION. ADVOCATE. SPONSOR.

Congratulations to all the Wonder Women and Carrie on this well-deserved recognition.



## **Kristen Cuffee-Brown**

Assistant VP, Content Acquisition



#### By Nancy Lombardi nancy.lombardi@gmail.com

eople first. That's the message put forth by Cox Communications and it's also a personal belief for Kristen Cuffee-Brown. It's what helps guide her successful career

— along with boundless energy, an inquisitive nature and a love of deadlines rooted in her journalism aspirations.

"Kristen has a contagious spirit," Cox executive VP and chief operations officer Colleen Langner said. "She has a passion for our business and people love to work with her."

After graduating from the University of North Carolina with a degree in journalism, this Southern California native took a job at a small newspaper while juggling additional work in sports broadcasting in an effort to pursue her dream of becoming a broadcast journalist. Cuffee-Brown's next role was with a startup during the dot-com era.

She then transitioned into marketing at Cox Communications in 2005, joining what at the time was Langner's team. The company has been Cuffee-Brown's home for 18 years. Currently an assistant VP of content acquisition, Cuffee-Brown began her tenure at Cox as a

> marketing specialist. Over the years, she grew within the company's divisions, moving up the ranks in marketing. She then transitioned to director of video product before joining the content acquisition team in 2019.

Her current role includes negotiating program agreements for genres such as Kristen has a contagious spirit. She has a passion for our business and people love to work with her."

**Colleen Langner**, executive VP and chief operations officer, Cox Communications

sports, international and faith-based. She also works on SVOD agreements, OTT apps and now FAST channels.

#### **Customer-Minded Mentality**

Cuffee-Brown mixes her "people-first" mindset with her marketing expertise to always keep her eye fixed on the customer. In her current role, she's tasked with working across a variety of groups within the organization gathering what's needed to complete deals, whether that's working with marketing, tech or product specialists.

Suzanne Fenwick, senior VP of content acquisition for Cox and Cuffee-Brown's boss, said that she has relationships across the company to successfully accomplish this.

Fenwick explained that Cuffee-Brown brings her product marketing experience to everything so she never forgets about the customer, always asking the hard questions and pushing for the information she needs.

The business landscape is evolving and changing so much that Cuffee-Brown said it's important to take a step back to make sure Cox continues to deliver for the customers and the business.

"Sports agreements have become extremely complex, so it always feels good getting one of those completed," Cuffee-Brown said. "I've enjoyed negotiating and onboarding diverse programming through SVOD and FAST services. It's been a great way to supplement our linear offering and provide value to our customers."

Cuffee-Brown is deeply involved in so many aspects of Cox because as she explains, "Cox is a culture that puts people first and our leadership embodies that."

She's had key mentors along the way that invited her to grow within her various roles and then move up every step of the way. In addition, she works tirelessly to mentor others.

My work style is to empower and serve those around me," Cuffee-Brown explained. "It starts with showing up and being present. It's also about being a good communicator and being adaptable given how fast things are changing in this space. It's about supporting a diverse and inclusive work environment."

Cuffee-Brown served as a Women in Cable Telecommunications (now The WICT Network) board member and a Cable Telecommunications Association for Marketing (CTAM) board member. She also informally mentors women and noted that an informal mentoring style has worked best in her career.

#### Family First: On and Off the Field

But the most important people in her world are her family. Cuffee-Brown lit up when talking about her husband and three children. She said they love to travel and Hawaii is a favorite destination. Most importantly, she proudly said, "We are a sports family."

Her husband, Omar Brown, played football with the National Football League's Atlanta Falcons and in college at North Carolina, where the couple met. Cuffee-Brown enjoys tennis. Her two daughters play soccer. Her 12-year-old son plays basketball and football.

"My daughter attends Princeton and plays Division I soccer," she said. "We live and breathe sports. We're at a field or a court every weekend."

Whether on or off the field, Cuffee-Brown emulates People First.

"She's an empathetic leader who mentors not only her team but she mentors other young women because she wants to see them succeed," Langner said. "She looks to pull out the best in people."●

#### SPECIAL REPORT: WONDER WOMEN OF L.A.

## **Holly Leff-Pressman**

Chief Client Engagement Officer Screen Engine/ASI



By R. Thomas Umstead thomas.umstead@futurenet.com

> olly Leff-Pressman has had her finger on the pulse of innovation in television's content distribution, marketing

and transactional business for most of her more than 30-year career.

Born and raised in Los Angeles, Leff-Pressman said her focus growing up was always on a career in the entertainment business. "I always knew I was going to be in the media business, but my mom said I was going to go to law school," she recalled.

After graduating from UCLA with a degree in international relations, Leff-Pressman would indeed earn her law degree from Loyola Marymount University in 1989, but she never strayed from her desire to land a gig in the entertainment industry. She would work at various entertainment-based companies while in school before landing a job as a litigation associate at entertainment law firm Cooper Epstein and Hurewitz in 1990.

"We represented some of the biggest names in the business including Larry Flynt and New World [Entertainment]," she said. "But I knew I didn't want to be a lawyer for the long haul."

In 1992, Leff-Pressman set her sights on Viewer's Choice, a company that was at the forefront of the thenemerging pay-per-view business. She would oversee the licensing and distribution of original and event pay-per-view and video-on-demand programming.

"It was exciting to be a part of an

Holly has effectively influenced the growth of the industry and demonstrates how a powerful woman can effectively lead in an authentic way."

Kevin Goetz, founder and CEO, Screen Engine/ASI

evolving business," she said. "I was able to work on incredible music concerts, and we actually greenlit the launch of the Ultimate Fighting Championship."

#### Wide-Ranging Roles at NBCU

Leff-Pressman in 1995 would move to NBCUniversal, eventually serving as its senior VP of worldwide PPV/SVOD and overseeing some of the company's biggest transactional and subscription video-on-demand deals domestically and internationally.

"Back in the day companies had a home-entertainment group, a TV group and a pay-per-view group, and I kept switching between the groups and learning the business from different perspectives," she said.

Leff-Pressman also said she met a number of female executives at NBCU who had a major influence in her career. She says one colleague in particular, Madeline Di Nonno, who is now CEO of The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, helped pave the way for Pressman to transition to her next position at Nielsen as its executive VP, business development and client service.

"They were looking for someone to start and grow their television media practice," Pressman said. "I wasn't a researcher, but I knew the television business and was able to develop data deals with such companies as Comcast and Charter."

In 2017, Leff-Pressman would take her talents to media research company Screen Engine/ASI, where she is currently chief client engagement officer, helping to build and expand its client base.

#### **An Authentic Influencer**

"Holly is an experienced market research expert whose insights are sought by power players in the media and the entertainment industry," Screen Engine/ASI founder and CEO Kevin Goetz said. "Holly has effectively influenced the growth of the industry and demonstrates how a powerful woman can effectively lead in an authentic way."

Indeed, Leff-Pressman hasn't been afraid to take on new challenges and has shown grace and strength in the face of adversity, particularly as a breast cancer survivor. A 2018 Cable TV Pioneers inductee, Leff-Pressman said she draws much of her strength and fortitude from her husband, two daughters and stepson.

As for the future, Leff-Pressman said she'd like to tap into her creative talents and develop original content and intellectual property. She's also focused on mentoring young women within the business.

> "I'm a strong believer in looking at your skills, focusing on your strengths and being able to take what you're good at and move toward greater goals," she said.

## Terri Hines

Executive VP, Communications Fox Sports



#### By Stuart Miller smiller@journalist.com

fter years in marketing at Kodak, Volkswagen and Nissan, Terri Hines was starting to feel "overqualified and a

little bored," she said. Her mentor at Nissan worked in public relations and communications and Hines had always found that intriguing. So she asked him to show her the ropes.

"He allowed me to shadow him for five months," Hines, now executive VP, communications at Fox Sports, said. "I found my aha moment. This is what I wanted to do."

Hines's mentor eventually helped her land a job on his side of Nissan, and later Hines, whose undergrad degree had been in business administration, earned a master's degree in communications from American University in her hometown of Washington, D.C. "I wanted to learn more and I knew graduate school would make me a more well-rounded communications professional and give me a leg up on my peers," she said.

Today, Hines is Fox Sports's chief spokesperson, responsible for communications, brand and social responsibility strategies. As a member of the senior management team, she leads strategic direction and corporate positioning and is a senior adviser on crisis, socialjustice and diversity, empowerment and inclusion (DE&I) matters.

"Terri's job is half 'comms' and half helping guide the company," Fox Sports CEO and executive producer Eric Shanks said. "She is strategic and always gives it

#### Terri's job is half 'comms' and half helping guide the company. She is strategic and always gives it to you straight."

**Eric Shanks**, CEO and executive producer, Fox Sports

to you straight. She's a real consigliere and a trusted voice as a leader."

Growing up, Hines said her parents required her to get good grades, pick a musical instrument (she's a classically trained pianist) and pick a sport. While she liked swimming, tennis, gymnastics and softball, she focused through high school on track as a sprinter. Hines wore Nikes, so the company became "the North Star" for her. "I dreamed about working for the Nike brand," she said.

After a decade at Nissan, in 2007 she fulfilled her dream, jumping to Nike — and not only to Nike but to the Jordan brand, helping lead the introduction of Air Jordan 23, the biggest launch in the company's history (and, incidentally, the subject of the current theatrical release Air, starring Ben Affleck and Matt Damon).

"Working on the Jordan brand was one of the highlights of my career," said Hines, who also worked on the Converse brand, acquired in 2003, during nearly a decade at Nike. "I had a great time there and got to find creative ways to tell the story and become a better storyteller around the brand."

Hines also wanted to work in television or film in some way, so when Fox Sports offered an opportunity in 2016 she made the leap.

"My personal journey has not been a straight line, but I've enjoyed the windy road," Hines said.

#### **Happily Hectic**

The job is hectic — in the last year, the network had the NFL, the men's World Cup, the Super Bowl and the Daytona 500 — and Hines said "there's no off button."

But that's the way she likes it. "I thrive on challenges," she said. "The more things I have to juggle, the better I am." In fact, since the pandemic, she has also been taking weekly vocal lessons to work on her singing.

While Hines is "maybe too good at multitasking" and falters with too much downtime, she has taught herself to delegate. "I used to worry about letting things go but now I trust my team and let go a lot," she said, adding that as a leader she also tries to be a good listener. "I don't always have it right and don't profess to know it all."

Beyond all her career success, Hines has another goal. "It's important that I give back, leaving a legacy around inclusion opportunities and creating seats at the table for women and people of color," she said.

At Fox she helped create the first inclusion council and became executive sponsor of its employee resource group, Fox BLK+. She also is involved in her community as a director of The LAGRANT Foundation and as a corporate adviser to the UCLA Center for Media, Entertainment and Sports.

"This is what I'm passionate about and it's integral to who I am," Hines said. "As a successful leader I want the people coming up behind me to get the opportunity to sit in my chair." ●



## CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2023 WONDER WOMAN

**Terri Hines** Executive Vice President, Communications FOX Sports

And all of the honorees paving the way for young women in the industry



## **Amina Hussein**

#### Head of Sports Talent Prime Video



By Stuart Miller smiller@journalist.com

mina Hussein was enough of a basketball star growing up in Oakland that she was interviewed by the local newspapers. One clipping saved by her mom was from when Hussein was in 10th grade, where young Amina proclaimed that she wanted to get into sports broadcasting.

On the court, Hussein liked defying expectations: At 6 feet 1 inch, she was expected to play close to the basket but "I had a mean jump shot and 3-pointers were my bread and butter," the captain of the Holy Names University (Oakland) basketball team said. When it came to her career game plan, though, Hussein, now Amazon's head of U.S. sports on-air talent and development for Prime Video, mostly stuck to the script.

The big change came early on, when she abandoned her plan to be a broadcaster after realizing she was happier behind the scenes. After college, she nabbed a job in sports radio in the San Francisco Bay Area, building up connections in the NFL and NBA. She had never really left the Bay Area but when the then-Oakland Raiders made the Super Bowl in 2003, she traveled to San Diego for the game and met folks from ESPN, which led to a job offer.

#### Culture Shock in Connecticut

"You can imagine that as someone who wanted to be in sports broadcasting, ESPN was the pinnacle," she said. "I couldn't turn the job down, although moving from Oakland to Bristol [Connecticut] was culture shock." Not only had she never owned a winter coat before, she went from living in one of the nation's more-diverse cities to being the only person of color on ESPN's radio side, she said.

#### I felt I was turning into a Flintstone at ESPN. I wanted to get into the tech space."

#### **Amina Hussein**

Still, Hussein loved ESPN. When she decided the "ceiling was too short in radio" she segued into TV, starting the network's booking department more or less from scratch. "I think I was called the talent producer manager," she recalled, adding that her social skills enabled her to flourish on the talent side. "That's my sweet spot. I'm just good at working with people. I can identify good people, I like to give feedback and I'm open and honest."

Brandon Lowe, who worked for Hussein at ESPN and now is a producer on her team at Prime Video, said her people skills extend to those she leads. "I remember my job interview. She was so personable and struck me as someone you'd want to work for and alongside."

Hussein liked her talent gig for another reason. "It allowed me to be in the control room and learn the ins and outs of live television production, which is what I wanted to do."

She ultimately became an Emmy-winning senior coordinating producer, working on shows such as NFL Live and Sunday NFL Countdown before getting out of Bristol for Los Angeles to work on basketball shows such as NBA Countdown.

Eventually, Hussein wanted a new challenge in a more modern arena. "I felt I was turning into a Flintstone at ESPN," she said. "I wanted to get into the tech space."

During the pandemic, she moved on to Peloton, the workout-bike maker, calling her brief six-month gig there "a 30-minute bike ride."

#### 'Thursday Night Football' Recruiting

She didn't want to move to New York and the logistics became convoluted, so she quickly took the opportunity to work at Prime Video, where she recruited talent for the new Thursday Night Football program there. "Building something from scratch was intriguing," she said.

In fact, she brought on the legendary Al Michaels for play-by-play duties and, to help create pre- and postgame shows that were "younger and cooler," hired recently retired players like Ryan Fitzpatrick and Richard Sherman, who went to Harvard and Stanford, respectively.

"The big challenge was the unknown, especially because chemistry is really important in these pregame shows," Hussein said.

That it all came together smoothly should not be a surprise, according to

Lowe. "She's a great leader because she always has a plan and executes it, but she also empowers those around her," he said. "She gets to know you as a person, knows your strengths and puts you in a position to shine."

Hussein is now simultaneously focused on the new season and looking ahead to the future. "I hope we get the NBA, in part selfishly for me," she said. "And I'd like to get back into production, too." •

WR



## PROUDLY CONGRATULATES



## **AMINA HUSSEIN**

Amazon Prime Video, Head of Sports Talent

FOR BEING RECOGNIZED AS BROADCASTING & CABLE/MULTICHANNEL NEWS WONDER WOMEN LOS ANGELES

## **Sharon Levy**

#### CEO Endemol Shine North America



By Jon Lafayette jon.lafayette@futurenet.com

> hen there's a big job to do, people call on Sharon Levy, CEO of Endemol Shine North America.

In January, Endemol's parent company, Banijay, restructured and Levy was Banijay CEO Ben Samek's first choice to run Endemol.

As Endemol's chief creative officer, Levy had already been running the shows, Samek said. "That's the lifeblood of the company," he said. "You look at many creative executives and it's just about the shows. There's a balance of commerce and creativity that has to be reached to keep a company thriving. And that's one of Sharon's great attributes is looking at shows to be both."

Years ago, in a similar vein, when programming executive Doug Herzog returned to Viacom to run Spike, a cable network for men, the first person he hired was Levy to oversee original programming. "She's incredibly dynamic, she's got a great attitude," Herzog said, noting that some of the shows she launched are still running on what is now Paramount Network, like Ink Master and Bar Rescue. "She's super fun to work with and she's got great taste."

The first pitch Corrie Henson took after becoming executive VP of entertainment unscripted content at NBCUniversal was from Levy. When Henson was with WarnerMedia, she had bought the series Hot Wheels from Levy. That fell through when WarnerMedia was acquired by Discovery and cleaned house. Levy improved the series, giving it more heart, and Henson bought it again. Hot Wheels: Ultimate Challenge launched on NBC and Peacock on May 30. M There's a great personal connection that comes when you invite people into your home and cook for them. I think it says, 'Thanks for all you've done.'"

#### Sharon Levy

"She's a problem-solver. She's a big-picture thinker. She is able to keep her hands in all of the details without getting too in the weeds, the ultimate in quality control," Henson said. "When I'm talking to Sharon I feel like I'm the only person in the room, but I always know that she has a million balls in the air. I always look forward to Sharon. She's not a sister, but a really close, fun cousin I look forward to seeing at the holidays."

Levy got her start in the business as a publicist at Comedy Central, which was the first of three times she worked for Herzog. She was considering starting her own PR agency representing talent from the network when she had a meeting with David Stanley and Scott

Stone of Stone Stanley, who she'd met on the set of The Man Show.

> At first they asked if she was interested in running marketing for the production company. Then they mentioned an open job they had in development.

"I didn't really even know what that meant," Levy said. "They really took a shot with me and it really changed my career."

Now as a CEO of a production company, Levy says the focus is on the shows. "It almost sounds folksy, but I do believe that in order to grow a business the creative has to be great," she said. "The plan right now is to create, ideate, adapt the best content we can. And then make a concerted sales effort to all of our networks and platforms so they keep buying from us."

#### **Driven by Relationships**

At the same time, people matter. "This business is about relationships, it really doesn't matter what title you have. You are not in the business of building and nurturing and keeping and growing all those relationships from talent. I consider anyone who works with me talent," she said.

Allison Wallach, president of unscripted programming at Fox Entertainment, gives Levy props for convincing Will Arnett, the host of Fox's Lego Masters, which Endemol produces, to stick with the show when production moved from Los Angeles to Atlanta.

"She is fearless. She is thoughtful. She's a force of nature," said Wallach, who counts Levy as a friend.

Levy's touch is evident when she hosts business meals at her home instead of at a restaurant.

"There's a great personal connection that comes when you invite people into your home and cook for them," Levy said. "I think it says, 'Thanks for all you've done.'"

Levy not only hosts but cooks. Her go-to dish is a carrot souffle from Martha Stewart's Thanksgiving cookbook.

Cooking isn't Levy's only skill. She's an amateur floral arranger, and during the pandemic, she started making paper flowers that look like real ones. She scours antique markets, looking for items she can take apart to make jewelry.

Levy also packed a punch. Until recently, she worked out at CMC Boxing. She didn't just hit the speed bag. "I sparred with the best of them. I sparred with mostly men," she said. "And took a bunch of them down." A southpaw, she specialized in body shots.

Now, she's a big hiker and Pelotoner. "My Golden Gloves days are way behind me." •

## Banijay Americas & Endemol Shine North America Congratulate



# **Sharon Levy**

Chief Executive Officer Endemol Shine North America

## For Being Recognized As Multichannel News Wonder Woman Los Angeles





EndemolShine NorthAmerica

## **Ramsey Naito**

President Paramount Animation and Nickelodeon Animation



#### By Holly Stuart Hughes holshughes@gmail.com

hen Ramsey Naito began overseeing development and production at

Nickelodeon in 2018, she had a mandate: "To make Nickelodeon a world-class animation studio," she said.

Within two years, Naito had expanded the production pipeline from seven projects to more than 40 and was promoted to president. In September 2021, Naito was given the new title of president of Paramount Animation and Nickelodeon Animation, responsible for animation content in all formats, including theatrical films, streaming, linear, digital and TV movies.

Naito expanded the slate of content with book adaptations, including Big Nate; spinoffs and extensions of popular franchises, such as Kamp Koral: SpongeBob's Under Years and Paw Patrol: The Movie; as well as the projects Monster High: The Movie, produced in partnership with Mattel, and an original animated Transformers series produced with Hasbro's Entertainment One. She also hired 500 new employees, enticed by Naito's promise of a corporate culture that values creativity and "allows an outlet to play."

#### **Bringing a Spirit of Fun**

"What Ramsey brought was like opening the doors and windows and letting the spirit of Nickelodeon return," Eryk Casemiro, executive VP of global series content at Nickelodeon Animation, said. "She started assembling a 66 What Ramsey brought was like opening the doors and windows and letting the spirit of Nickelodeon return."

**Eryk Casemiro**, EVP of global series content, Nickelodeon Animation

new group of people who shared the Nickelodeon spirit that put the channel on the map in the 1990s. She told everyone, 'Come play in my playground.'"

Creatives see Naito as a kindred spirit, Casemiro said. The daughter of a sculptor and a painter, Naito attended Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, earned her master's degree at the California Institute of the Arts, then landed a job as production assistant on an animated film. After that, "I just continued working in animation because I loved the community," she said.

Gina Shay, a producer at Dreamworks Animation, first met Naito at Pratt, then reconnected with her when they were working in animation. When Shay was line producer on South Park: Bigger, Longer & Uncut, she hired Naito, who became the film's production manager. "I needed a fighter, and there's no one who fights better for your movie than Ramsey," Shay said.

In managing a film crew, Naito recalled, "I realized that my superpower was understanding the artistic process and explaining it in a way that was palatable to people who aren't artists." Naito gained more production credits and executive experience at Nickelodeon Movies, Blue Sky Studios, Cartoon Network and Dreamworks Animation, where she produced The Boss Baby, earning an Oscar nomination.

Her varied experience gives her confidence to oversee projects across multiple platforms. With streaming, she noted: "Kids can watch 20 episodes a night. That means your characters need to be strong, the comedic tone has got to be hilarious and you want to tell stories that keep your audience interested so they watch them over and over again."

Her audience is also diverse and global. "It's our responsibility as content creators to speak to those kids with stories that feel authentic and inclusive," Naito said. Again, she draws on her own experience: "When I was a young girl, there was very little for me to watch, as an Asian-American, where I could see myself reflected. I think of that little girl when I think about the audience."

#### **Eye Toward Diversity**

She cited The Casagrandes, Big Nate and Bossy Bear, whose title character explores a neighborhood modeled on Koreatowns around the U.S., as examples of shows that bring diverse characters and experiences to the screen. Finding and developing such content, she said, "starts with making sure our leaders over development, production and casting are diverse." Naito also launched the Intergalactic Shorts Program, encouraging creators from around the world to submit their ideas for evaluation by Nickelodeon executives.

Whether she's recruiting new talent or forging new production partnerships, "I search for people who are bringing a refreshing take on the work, stories and characters, and don't want to make work that looks like everything else that's been done," she said. Making work that's fresh is what keeps the artist in Naito motivated.

> "We're creating culture, stories and empowerment in a medium that's always pushing a new look," she said, adding, "Everything I do at work is exciting." ●

# nickelodeon Durante Du

President, Paramount Animation & Nickelodeon Animation

## MULTICHANNEL NEWS WONDER WOMEN LA CLASS OF 2023 CONGRATS TO ALL THE HONOREES

## Kirsten Polley Senior VP, Operations



By Nancy Lombardi nancy.lombardi@gmail.com

magine stepping into a role with a company known for its captivating live events at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. That's just what Kirsten Polley, senior VP of operations at WWE, did. The company, though, was able to create a successful opportunity out of an unusual situation with the launch of WWE ThunderDome, she said.

When Polley joined WWE in August 2020, fans weren't able to attend events. So WWE recreated the in-arena atmosphere synonymous with pro wrestling when it unveiled WWE ThunderDome.

"It's an immersive experience that welcomed fans back into the arena virtually via proprietary technology," Polley said. "I was truly amazed by the production of WWE ThunderDome and the company's ability to continue to be there for its staff, partners and fans."

With nearly 1 million registered fans, the creation of WWE ThunderDome delivered a new level of excitement and further solidified the company's leadership in technology, live events, and production. After seeing that project unfold, Polley knew she found a company focused on fan-first innovations where she'd have the opportunity to thrive.

#### **New Levels of Entertainment**

Polley noted that the excitement behind WWE is about to build even more. In April, WWE announced a landmark deal with Endeavor Group Holdings that will see WWE and mixed martial arts promoter UFC form a \$21 billion global live sports and entertainment company. Bringing the two iconic ring-sports entities together will be transformational for WWE's brand, fans and partners, according to Polley.

It also underscored what Polley shared

Her attention to detail and ability to execute under pressure have been instrumental to WWE delivering strong results 52 weeks a year."

Alex Varga, senior VP, head of corporate development, WWE

during this interview and that is: No two days at WWE are the same. WWE strives to provide the best elements of sports and entertainment 52 weeks a year, she said, whether that is through weekly flagship programming, premium live events or social media content.

Plus, Polley is bringing a new level of entertainment and excitement to WWE fans through her role. She leads operations for WWE's revenue strategy and development team, where she oversees new business ventures and identifies innovative and creative new lines of revenue to expand the company's footprint. Polley helps WWE reach untapped audiences through new integrations and collaborations with premier sports and media organizations.

"Kirsten has great instincts and a tireless work ethic," Alex Varga, senior VP, head of corporate development at WWE, said. "Her attention to detail and ability to execute under pressure have been instrumental to WWE delivering strong results 52 weeks a year."

Polley played a key role in the landmark licensing agreement with longstanding partner NBCUniversal that gives Peacock exclusive streaming rights to WWE Network content in the U.S. She also helped lead the strategy and development around the creation of WWE's first-ever NFT drop. The success of the initial drop resulted in a multiyear agreement with Blockchain Creative Labs to launch WWE's NFT platform, WWE Moonsault, showcasing the company's catalog of digital assets, including iconic moments, legendary Superstars and more.

As a team, Polley said WWE is always looking for new ways to identify revenue streams and monetize its intellectual property. There is talent branding for the Superstars, e-commerce and licensed merchandise, all reaching a global fan base.

#### **Exciting New Deals**

Prior to joining WWE, Polley was an agent at CAA where she worked alongside Nick Khan, then the agency's co-head of television and now WWE's CEO. At CAA, they helped WWE executive chairman Vince McMahon and team on the media-rights deal that brought Friday Night SmackDown to Fox in October 2019. Around that time CAA's client, heavyweight boxing champion Tyson Fury, also began an agreement with WWE that gave Polley a front row seat to the world of WWE's Superstars.

Her role at CAA, maximizing sports media rights and talent development, prepped her well for WWE. "At CAA, I was fortunate to work with some of the top agents in the sports media and entertainment world where we had the privilege to work alongside some of the most recognizable names in the industry, including Colin Cowherd, Skip Bayless and Charissa Thompson, and sports media properties such as WWE, SEC and Top Rank Boxing," Polley said.

While the assumption about WWE is its appeal is mainly among men, Polley said she is a member of WWE's Women's Affinity Group, a resource group focusing on leadership development, recruitment, mentorship and more.

> "It has allowed me to meet and learn from women across the entire organization," she said. "Mentorship has played a huge role in shaping me into the person I am today both personally and professionally." •

## CONGRATULATIONS TO KIRSTEN POLLEY

AND TO MULTICHANNEL NEWS WONDER WOMEN OF LOS ANGELES HONOREES



## **Lisa Richardson**

Executive VP, Business & Legal Affairs and Associate General Counsel Fox Corp.



By Nancy Lombardi nancy.lombardi@gmail.com

ocus. It's the key word in describing Lisa Richardson's journey. Focus is what led her from

high-school tennis star to college to law school to executive VP and associate general counsel at Fox.

And focus remains the key to her success. Her current role is a mix of intense attention to detail and a lot of hard work. The same can be said for her tennis game.

Richardson oversees the legal components of multiplatform content distribution for all of the company's brands. She also manages all legal aspects of distribution for the Foxaffiliated television stations in more than 200 markets.

As a Los Angeles native, Richardson always knew she wanted to work within the entertainment industry. After graduating from USC Gould School of Law, she worked at Latham & Watkins.

She interviewed at Fox in 2003. And while the stars didn't align for that specific role, she was recommended to the team at Gemstar-TV Guide International, which was part of then-Fox parent News Corp. at the time.

"I was at Gemstar for two years," Richardson said. "I started with distribution work. It was a steep learning curve and I really enjoyed it."

When a position in distribution opened up at Fox in 2005, Richardson was thrilled to join the team.

"It's complex work," she said. "You need a lot of attention to detail." That brings us, once again, back

#### Lisa is a warm person and cares very much about her team. She fosters good camaraderie."

Jessica Fang, EVP, network distribution and marketing, Fox

to the concept of focus.

Despite Richardson's attention to her own career, she's equally focused on the success of others. She spent much of an interview about her praising her team and the teams she works with at Fox. Others at Fox have noticed Richardson's commitment.

"Lisa is a warm person and cares very much about her team," Fox executive VP, network distribution and marketing Jessica Fang said. "She fosters good camaraderie."

Richardson described her team as collaborative. She said it's the key to staying on top of trends in this constantly evolving business — along with reading the trades, of course. Meeting regularly allows the group to discuss what they're facing and the best way to tackle it.

"When I first started, we were dealing with traditional cable companies and launching a network every year," she said. "Now it's FAST (free ad-supported TV) channels, virtual MVPDs and deals with CE (consumer electronics) manufacturers. Our content is distributed in so many ways and my team is the hub for all of that."

In the early part of her career, Richardson said, she was often the only woman in the room negotiating deals. She felt she wasn't always taken seriously as a female junior attorney, so she went out of her way to be more prepared than everyone else.

Now that Richardson and her team have conducted multibillion-dollar deals, she's solidified her reputation and proved she's a leader. She's now using that focus to help others rise.

"I make a huge effort to mentor my team and that's something I pride myself on," she said.

The Walt Disney Co. announced on December 14, 2017, that it would acquire 21st Century Fox. The deal was completed on March 20, 2019. After Fox merged with Disney, Richardson became head of the department and her team chose to stay with her. She said that many of these colleagues have now worked with her for 15 years.

#### All Work, No Play? Not for This Ace

With an incredibly demanding career, a husband and two children, it may seem impossible to carve out personal time once the daily routine takes hold. During the COVID-19 pandemic, though, Richardson had a bit more flexibility in her schedule and returned to her teenage passion for tennis.

"I love so much the amount of focus it takes when I'm playing," Richardson said. "My focus has to be 100% on tennis. It's the only time my mind isn't racing about work, my kids, my to-do list."

Richardson now competes regularly on a number of U.S. Tennis Association teams and said she's playing better now than in her teen years.

Stiff competition brings out her best. "Lisa is as conscientious as anyone I have ever had the pleasure of working with," Fox president of operations and distribution Michael Biard said. "She can retain a courteous and composed demeanor under the most extreme circumstances and she's a fierce competitor. Her ability to balance these seemingly opposing qualities makes her a formidable opponent in any arena." ●



Lisa Richardson EVP Business & Legal Affairs Associate General Counsel Fox Corporation

And all of the honorees paving the way for young women in the industry

## **Jennifer Rogers**

EVP, Consumer & Corporate Marketing for U.S. Networks Group TelevisaUnivision



#### By Robert Edelstein robedelstein22@gmail.com

hen you have a job as wide-ranging as Jennifer Rogers does, it helps to have a superpower. Rogers leads

marketing strategy and execution across linear, streaming, brand and product teams at TelevisaUnivision, the Hispanic-language multimedia content giant. She heads up all creative, branding, messaging and media planning on- and off-network for streaming and the conglomerate's portfolio of U.S. Networks. Good thing her superpower is empowerment.

#### Leader Who Listens

The ultimate team leader, Rogers likes to have all creative voices in the room from the start of a project, whether it's strategizing for one of the company's successful music awards shows or its recent rebranding of the news division. "I think the special sauce of teams is making sure there's a diversity of skill sets, a diversity of thinking," Rogers said. "What I really stress with my team is workflow process. People tend to work in linear order - they tend to do the next thing they have to. But when you change the workflow, everybody is] part of the process from the beginning, which makes a huge difference in terms of results. ... We let the experts do their work, and respect it."

The respect does not go unnoticed. "Relatable, transparent, straight-shooting, she leads with a solid moral compass and is one of the most empathetic leaders I've ever worked with," Erica Mesa, VP, media strategy and consumer marketing for TelevisaUnivision, said. "Jennifer deserves to be a Wonder Woman not because of her superhuman Yes, it's about ratings and share and metrics, but people really work here in service of the U.S. Hispanic community, and they never lose that focus."

#### **Jennifer Rogers**

skills, but rather her superbly human leadership style."

It helps to love the arena you get to play in every day, and for Rogers, that sensibility was born at the very start of college at the University of Pennsylvania. "My whole childhood, I wanted to be a pediatrician. I went to college, and I took a biology course and a marketing course in my first semester freshman year, and that was it," Rogers recalled. "From that first marketing class, I knew that I wanted to be a marketer. It was so challenging. There was so much to learn, so many goals to meet, and it was creative. I moved to that major immediately, and I haven't looked back."

It led her to a consumer marketing post at PrimeStar/DirecTV and, later, to a post heading up the Sales Marketing & Production department at NBC TV Network/ Telemundo/Mun2. Through myriad corporate shifts at NBC, "I kept being asked to do new and different things," Rogers said. The need to constantly adapt served her well. "We're in this business because of change, right? Not to be comfortable, but to constantly keep an external focus, and learn and grow and shift. I'm grateful that it really prepared me for the reality of now."

The "now" finds Rogers awash in the unique challenges of serving TelevisaUnivision's viewership and anticipating the flow of trends. "We've always been a mission-driven company," she said. "We serve our audience like no one else can, and it really gives the job a meaning behind the role. Yes, it's about ratings and share and metrics, but people really work here in service of the U.S. Hispanic community, and they never lose that focus."

#### **Representing at All Levels**

It helps to not only have access to the right data, but to embrace the whole process. "It's the backbone of everything we do," Rogers said. "And it's challenging. Consumer behavior shifts minute by minute. We're constantly testing and learning. My biggest challenge is making sure that the data is based on the proper measurement and truly representative."

The "truly representative" piece also applies to TelevisaUnivision itself, which is why Rogers is a founding member and current steering committee leader of the company's Women's Leadership Committee, which works to ensure a diverse next generation of executives. "Particularly for women and minorities, I continue to keep the focus on raising women up," Rogers said. "It's given them career skills, and it continues to allow us to give women a voice in the company."

Leading by example and empowerment, Rogers' voice continues to be a beacon of success at TelevisaUnivision. Ignacio Meyer, president, Univision Television Networks Group, specifically cites her contributions to the roll-out of the global streaming platform ViX last year, while also recalibrating the U.S.

> network's promotional plan, which "yielded results met for ViX penetration, and a ratings turnaround on our primetime programming. She is able to synthesize the big picture and get granular enough to craft a rigorous on- and off-network plan," Meyer said. "This is rarefied air." ●

## Donna Thomas

#### Senior VP, Studios Vubiquity



By Kent Gibbons kent.gibbons@futurenet.com

> onna Thomas got her start in the TV business in cable programming, at Discovery Networks. She was working in an

Atlanta office as a temp and persuaded her boss, Kim Martin (later president of WE tv), to relocate her to Silver Spring, Maryland, when the Atlanta office was closing. Even though, as Martin pointed out, she didn't really work there.

"I just knew that I needed to go with them," Thomas recalled.

Hired as an administrative assistant, within six years she was a senior VP of affiliate marketing, "Meteoric," Thomas said. "I was there for like 10 years. So that's how I started."

These days she is helping to grow the Studio Post-Production Services business line for Vubiquity, the video-distribution services firm acquired by Amdocs in 2018 for \$224 million.

#### **Digital Media Know-How**

She's an expert in the digital media space and has worked in every aspect of the content supply chain, from creation through distribution, as stated by her colleague at Vubiquity, senior VP of strategic planning and business development Fred Handsman.

Handsman cited some of her accomplishments in nominating her to be a Wonder Woman. They include:

 She was in charge of the business when Discovery launched the first suite of digital channels, in the 1990s, and was even dubbed Discovery's Digital Diva in one trade article.

#### 66 Donna will always find a way to get it done right or to help us solve that problem."

Michael Trainotti, senior VP of technical services, worldwide technical operations, **Paramount Pictures** 

 She played a key role in transitioning from physical to digital media by executing the first digital library management deal between Ascent Media (her then-employer) and Paramount in 2010.

· She's helped grow Vubiquity's Studio Post-Production Services line of business from inception to over \$30 million annually.

Not bad for a girl from Warner Robins, Georgia, who grew up loving acting, performs her own one-woman show about her life and founded The Thomas Angel Foundation, which has given out more than \$150,000 in scholarships to women pursuing careers in media and entertainment.

One of the friends she made along the way is Michael Trainotti, senior VP of technical services, worldwide technical operations at Paramount Pictures. They worked together on that digital library management deal in 2010 which, as Thomas related, was a long exercise in solving technical problems. Since then they have worked together on many projects, professional and personal, Trainotti said, including making horror movies.

"Donna will always find a way to get it done right or to help us solve that problem," Trainotti said.

That might mean finding the

right other person to bring in to help, he said. "Because she's also a people person. Half of this industry is knowing people and having that network. She's really good at having a big pool of people that trust her and that she trusts to get the job done. She's really, really talented at what she does."

#### **Digital Segway Was Fruitful**

Thomas, who was interviewed shortly after traveling solo on a two-week vacation in South Korea, said she's very glad she transitioned away from the traditional cable business into digital media, and credits various bosses who helped her learn the acronyms and the technology because they knew she knew how to serve clients. Other mentors besides Martin who are well-known in the cable industry include Maggie Bellville, Rich Fickle, Peter Stern and Dave Watson. "Those are good ones to have," she said.

She gives kudos to Vubiquity CEO and Amdocs Media general manager Raman Abrol, who succeeded former CEO Darcy Antonellis. "He's on the East Coast, but he rolled up his sleeves, came out, really spent a lot of time trying to learn our side of the business and it shows," Thomas said. "He's very well-respected for that and just an all around great guy."

She said she enjoys broadening potential new customers' knowledge of Vubiquity, which had roots in TVN-Avail and video-on-demand services. "When I go in and pitch studios today, it's like, here's what we do. We don't do dailies, but we do color all the way through to distribution," Thomas said. "We hold the libraries of Warner Media, we hold MGM Library, that was my deal. We do everything from soup to nuts. We're not your grandfather's Vubiquity. We're backed by a \$4 billion company and we're able to operate as a boutique, a white-glove facility, which is so cool." •

## **Robin Thomas**

Executive VP, Content Strategy & Research Hallmark Media



#### By Paige Albiniak palbiniak@gmail.com

hile research is her forte, what makes Robin Thomas a Wonder Woman of Los Angeles is her ability to build

teams and grow people in their careers.

"She's an amazing leader," said Thomas's own leader, Wonya Lucas, CEO of Hallmark Media. "She has a great sense of team and how to get the most out of people."

"Teamwork is what's really helped drive what I've done here — teamwork and collaboration across my New York- and Los Angeles-based teams," Thomas said. "Ideas come from everywhere. We like to huddle and do a lot of thinking together to bring the best insights, not just report the ratings."

Thomas got her start in research and then grew her management and leadership skills as she grew her career.

After she graduated from the University of Georgia's Grady School with a bachelor's degree in journalism, she entered the world of research, starting her career at an advertising agency but quickly moving toward entertainment. Her first job in television was as a research assistant at Turner Broadcasting System starting in 1988, and she maintains many of the connections she made during the 20 years she worked there.

One of those connections was Lucas. When Thomas and Lucas first met, Thomas was in research while Lucas was a marketing manager.

"What I loved about Robin was she was the person I could go to to learn about the business," Lucas said. "I was coming from Coca-Cola and she taught me a lot about audience insights and how to turn insights into action in this medium." Robin not only knows how to source the best data and analytics, but she knows how to piece it together to make a clear picture.... She's not just someone who's handing you overnights."

Ken Schwab, consultant to Hallmark Media

Fast forward 20-plus years when Lucas, who had previously run Public Broadcasting Atlanta and TV One, was hired to run Hallmark (then Crown) Media. Her first hire in her new role was Thomas in October 2020.

#### **Reconnecting at Hallmark**

"Robin has helped us lean into our audience, not just women 18-49, 25-54 and 55-plus," Lucas said. "In terms of performance, we are looking at how you diversify the storytelling in ways that you can both reach the sales audience but also the audiences that we are looking to expand, which is a different psychographic."

One of the ways Hallmark is looking to expand is by turning some of its sub-brands — such as Christian card line Dayspring and Black culture line Mahogany — into original movies and other programming to reach new and potentially younger audiences. It's also offering subscription-based streaming service Hallmark Movies Now and making its channels available on such streaming platforms as Peacock, Philo, Hulu Plus Live TV, Vidgo, Sling TV, Fubo, DirecTV Stream and YouTube TV.

٠

Throughout her career and work at Turner, Disney-ABC Television Group and WGN America (where she was senior VP of research), Thomas has distinguished herself by her willingness to throw herself into any project, no matter how ambitious.

"Robin has a terrific work ethic," said E.W. Scripps chief research officer Jon Marks, for whom Thomas worked when Marks came to Turner to head research in 1999. "It's not that she's one of those people who will work until midnight, but when she's there she's superfocused and working at a very intense rate and pace. She's really committed to what she's doing and she gets her team focused and committed."

#### Making Data Work for Business

"Robin not only knows how to source the best data and analytics, but she knows how to piece it together to make a clear picture," said Ken Schwab, who consults for Hallmark Media and who Thomas also met while they were both at Turner. "I think she also understands the business implications of that picture. She's not just someone who's handing you overnights — she's optimizing key programming initiatives and building out long-term plans."

Thomas also understands the value that Hallmark's viewers place on it and works to protect that value.

"The amazing thing about Hallmark is that it is really a brand," Thomas said. "Hallmark really means a lot to the viewer and the consumer, it's not just a TV network. It's the way Hallmark makes them feel emotionally. They get carried away in a story that takes them somewhere they've never been before. Love is why our viewers love us. Connectivity is what they want to get out of watching us." •

## Hallmark Media 👑



our very own Wonder Woman

## Robin Thomas EVP Consumer Insights, Strategy and Analytics

on this exceptional honor.

Thank you, Robin, for your passion, integrity, and leadership.

Congratulations to this year's honorees!



## Erin Underhill President

## Universal Television



#### By Paige Albiniak palbiniak@gmail.com

niversal Television president Erin Underhill is partly responsible for at least one and probably many of your favorite

television shows.

Over the nearly three decades Underhill has worked at NBCUniversal, she has had a hand in some of the most iconic shows on television, including ER and The West Wing. She has shepherded such critically-acclaimed shows as American Dreams, Parenthood, Friday Night Lights, Good Girls and New Amsterdam. Right now on NBC, she oversees Dick Wolf's Law & Order and Chicago franchises and she's also responsible for production on non-NBC series such as CBS's FBI franchise, HBO's The Gilded Age and Max's Hacks.

And now, with Peacock to populate as well, she has championed such new series as The Best Man: The Final Chapters, Bel-Air and Girls5eva. All in all, she's currently caring for more than 50 primetime comedies and dramas for broadcast, cable and streaming platforms. Considering that each TV show is its own little business, that's quite a roster.

#### **Sticks to Basic Values**

Even with all of that to track, her approach to the business is simple.

"I entered the business 25-30 years ago and the same primary tenets guide me today that they did then: Lead with respect and kindness whether you're dealing with the showrunner, She has a way of getting to the heart of things without ever overhauling your original vision or intention."

#### Carla Banks Waddles, writer, NBC's 'The Good Girls'

coordinator or assistant," Underhill said. "Everyone needs to be treated equally with kindness and respect.

"Second, focus on teamwork and collaboration," she continued. "I believe we're better together. When you've got some challenging issues to solve — and there's never a shortfall of issues and challenges — when you can work with a team and brainstorm, we can find a solution and do our best work."

Underhill grew up in Los Angeles and graduated from UCLA with a degree in English literature. She's been at NBC — later NBCUniversal — for almost her entire career. For the past 11 years, she's worked with and for Universal Studios Group chairman Pearlena Igbokwe.

The two met when Igbokwe came to NBC from Showtime to head drama while Underhill was on the studio's drama team. When Igbokwe was named head of Universal Television four years later, she appointed Underhill to lead drama. And when Igbokwe was named chairman of Universal Studio Group in September 2020, she promoted Underhill to president of Universal Television. "We have a phenomenal working relationship and we talk a lot about the fact that we're very similar," Igbokwe said. "We get it done at work and we juggle work and motherhood. Erin is very calm, very warm and full of positive energy. There are so many people who bring a negative energy and can't-do attitude to things, but a big part of our jobs is overcoming obstacles."

.

Underhill is also known as a person who will step in, roll up her sleeves and help.

#### A Nurturer of Creativity

When Malcolm D. Lee was producing his first TV pilot for the studio, he was coming off of directing movies such as Girls' Trip and The Best Man and didn't feel familiar with the TV world.

"She was good about encouraging my creativity and my thought process and being supportive of that," Lee said. "Some executives you meet, they don't take the time, but something about her is very nurturing and professional and you just feel safe in her hands."

"Erin has always been a calming, grounded presence," said Carla Banks Waddles, who wrote on NBC's The Good Girls and also shot a drama pilot for NBC called At That Age. "She brings such a humanity, kindness and respect to her job. She has a high regard for writers and understands story. She has a way of getting to the heart of things without ever overhauling your original vision or intention."

But running a studio isn't just about being kind and supportive. Sometimes Underhill has to tell people things they do not want to hear.

> "What I appreciate about Erin is that she's comfortable having difficult conversations," Igbokwe said. "By the time she's having to have those conversations, she's earned their trust and respect. She does it with compassion, which is all you can ask." •

Hallmark Media

# Salutes

WICT SoCal's 2023 Career Catalyst

## **Holly Henderson**

SVP, Distribution (Linear/Ancillary)

Holly, we commend your continued dedication to mentorship and female career empowerment!



## Wonder Women Of Los Angeles: Honor Roll

#### CLASS OF 2022

#### WOMAN OF INFLUENCE

HOLLY ROBINSON PEETE Co-Founder, HollyRod Foundation Actress and Producer

SYLVIA BUGG Chief Programming Executive and General Manager, General Audience Programming, PBS

LISA HAMILTON DALY Executive VP, Crown Media

AYO DAVIS President, Disney Branded Television

TARA DEVEAUX Chief Marketing Officer Wild Card Creative Group

TARA DUNCAN President, Freeform & Onyx Collective Disney General Entertainment

MICHELE EDELMAN Head of Growth Premiere Digital

LISA KNUTSON President, Scripps Networks E.W. Scripps

NIKKI LOVE SVP, Development & Production AMC Networks

WENDY MCMAHON President, Co-Head CBS News and Stations TRICIA MELTON Chief Marketing Officer, Warner Bros. Global Kids, Young Adults and Classics Warner Bros. Discovery

KATHERINE POPE Senior VP, Head of Original Content Charter Communications

JULIE RAPAPORT Head of Movies, Amazon Studios

SHANNON RYAN President, Content Marketing, Hulu & General Entertainment Disney

JENNIFER TURNER EVP, TriStar Television Sony Pictures Television

SARAH WEIDMAN Head of Programming, Development and Multi-Platform Content, AXS TV

#### **CLASS OF 2021**

WOMAN OF INFLUENCE DEBORAH NORVILLE Anchor Inside Edition

LAUREN ANDERSON Co-Head of Content and Programming IMDb TV

ANDREA CLARKE-HALL VP of Business Development, Tubi ANGELA COURTIN VP of Brand Marketing YouTube

JACKIE DONALDSON VP, Global Product Strategy Disney

DEE HARRIS-LAWRENCE Showrunner/Executive Producer, David Makes Man OWN: Oprah Winfrey Network

JAYA KOLHATKAR EVP, DTC Data, Disney

AMY KUESSNER Senior VP of Content Strategy & Global Partnerships ViacomCBS Streaming

AUDREY LEE EVP and General Counsel Starz

ALISON LEVIN Head of Ad Revenue & Marketing Solutions Boku

SUSAN LEVISON Senior VP and Head of WWE Studios WWE

**POOJA MIDHA** Chief Growth Officer Comcast Advertising

CATHERINE OH VP, Global Head of Marketing & Analytics Samsung Ads

DUAN PENG SVP, Data & Al WarnerMedia

ROMINA ROSADO Senior VP, Digital Media NBCUniversal Telemundo Enterprises

MICHELLE WROAN Managing Partner KPMG LLP 2019 WONDER WOMEN IN STREAMING

ANNE AARON Director of Encoding Technologies Netflix

KELLY ABCARIAN General Manager, Advanced Video Advertising Group Nielsen

THEA ELLIS Head of Content Acquisition Sony Interactive Entertainment, PlayStation Vue

ALISON HOFFMAN Chief Marketing Officer Starz

LORI LEBAS Senior VP, Affiliate Partnership Development and Operations Disney and ESPN Media Networks

SARAH LYONS SVP, Product Experience WarnerMedia

JULIE MCNAMARA EVP, Original Programming CBS All Access

HEATHER MOOSNICK Senior VP and Head of Content Partnerships Hulu

DIANA PESSIN Senior VP, Digital Media & Growth Marketing, HBO

SOUMYA SRIRAMAN President, BritBox

JULIA VEALE Executive VP, Business, Product Development and Management Showtime Networks Inc.

DINA WEISBERGER Head of TV Partner Strategy & Development, Google



The 2022 *Multichannel News* Wonder Women of Los Angeles (top, I. to r.): Kent Gibbons, content director, *MCN/B+C/Next TV*; Holly Robinson Peete, Woman of Influence; event co-host Darla Miles; honorees Shannon Ryan, Wendy McMahon and Michele Edelman; Carmen Palmer, WICT Network: Southern California Catalyst Award winner; event co-host Pat Harvey; honoree Tricia Melton; and Carmel King, MD, B2B Tech & Entertainment, Future. Bottom row (I. to r.): Honorees Lisa Knutson, Sylvia Bugg, Sarah Weidman, Tara DeVeaux, Nikki Love and Jennifer Turner.

#### SPECIAL REPORT: 40 UNDER 40 L.A.

## Industry Stars Are Rising In the West



#### Raise a glass to '40 Under 40' honorees at L.A. TV Week event June 21

he media and entertainment industry has no shortage of rising stars and established veterans making their mark between their college years and when they turn 40. For more than a decade, Future plc's Multichannel News, along with Broadcasting+Cable and Next TV, have been shining a spotlight on a select cadre of these executives below a certain age across a range of content production, distribution and related businesses as the industry has evolved and expanded.

More recently, we have celebrated their accomplishments in the best way, with a party, and the next one will take place the evening of Wednesday, June 21, at the Sofitel Los Angeles, closing out L.A. TV Week. For more information about the 2023 honorees and the event on June 21, please visit **latvweekevents.com**.

Honorees were chosen after a nomination and judging process.

Representing a range of companies and responsibilities, these men and women are helping to lead media in new directions, wherever the viewers are.

Meet the 2023 "40 Under 40" in Los Angeles, in alphabetical order.



Alissa Bachner Executive VP, Development Tomorrow Studios

Since joining Tomorrow

Studios, an ITV Studios partner, Alissa Bachner has developed and produced compelling television dramas with storylines that tackle class warfare, climate change, female empowerment, body image, how far one would go for love and more. Plus, she's a champion for indie, female, voice and book-driven projects, bringing them to a broadly commercial company with globally recognized IP. Since 2016, she has been producing Snowpiercer, starring Jennifer Connelly and Daveed Diggs. Other series include Physical, starring Rose Byrne, and Let the Right One In, starring Demián Bichir. Known for her handson, calm style, Bachner continues to champion a wide array of voices and to produce series with global appeal. Before Tomorrow Studios, Bachner served as VP of TV development at Peter Berg's Film 44, where she oversaw the

development slate for deals at Fox and HBO. A graduate of Boston University, Bachner began her career at ICM before shifting to TV production, working on series including Scrubs and Detroit 1-8-7, both for ABC.



#### Fanny Baudry Managing Director Wheelhouse DNA

Fanny Baudry is managing director of

Wheelhouse's digital-first and influencer arm, Wheelhouse DNA, where she leads intellectual property development and production and oversees the company's day-to-day operations. Wheelhouse launched DNA in 2020 and CEO Brent Montgomery tapped Baudry, then Wheelhouse's VP of business development, to launch the division that serves as a home for emerging talent. DNA creates and produces content for all platforms from creators across the digital landscape. At DNA, Baudry has shepherded such series as Facebook Messenger's Cookin' with Brooklyn, starring Brooklyn Beckham; the podcasts Dark History with Bailey Sarian and Discovery's Curiosity Daily; and Viceland TV series Tumbleweeds with Killer Mike. Prior to Wheelhouse, Baudry was head of content and development at Scooter Braun's The Creative Studio. Before that, she served as VP of global acquisitions formats and programs at Banijay, responsible for building the acquisitions division and acquiring nonscripted formats for the company's subsidiaries including Bunim/Murray, Air Production and Nordisk Film TV.



Adam Bergman Group VP, Advertising & Data Sales Vizio

Adam Bergman is responsible for the go-to-market strategy for Vizio's Platform Plus Ads business, a platform with one of the largest connected-TV footprints in the U.S. His role includes building brand and agency partnership strategy, as well as informing product and marketing decisions. He helped launch YuMe's connected television suite, driving advertisers to consider the relationship between OTT and traditional TV investments. From there, he led partnerships and strategy at The Daily Beast. That path led him back into the data, measurement and OTT community via a leadership post at Samba TV. He helped launch Vizio Ads in 2019 with the company's chief revenue officer, Michael O'Donnell, and has helped scale platform revenue to over \$300 million in 2022. He also oversees Inscape, the ACR data division of Vizio. At NAB Show in April, Vizio was awarded with a Technology & Engineering Emmy Award for Extraction of Granular Census Level Behavioral Data using ACR.



#### Evan Bregman General Manager, Streaming Tastemade

Evan Bregman is responsible for driv-

ing viewership and growth of Tastemade's streaming business. Since joining the company in 2022, he has overseen a jump of 10% in viewership and 12% in revenue on Tastemade's

#### SPECIAL REPORT: 40 UNDER 40 L.A.

streaming channels. Tastemade's streaming business reaches viewers in four languages in more than 50 countries and is available in more than 140 million television homes worldwide. This year, he oversaw the launch of the company's fourth 24/7 streaming channel, Tastemade Home, on Samsung TV Plus, YouTube TV, Amazon Freevee, Tubi and Sling TV. He also oversaw the premiere of several original series, including Weekend Refresh starring Tia Mowry and The Curious Chef with Stephanie Izard. Tastemade streaming ended the year on a high note, setting new all-time highs in monthly revenue and watch time. Prior to joining Tastemade, Bregman was VP, head of business operations at Rooster Teeth, the gaming lifestyle brand, where he oversaw strategic operations for its direct-to-consumer business.



#### Michelle Byars Senior VP, Development ITV Entertainment

At ITV Entertainment,

part of ITV America, Michelle Byars oversees all stages of development — from paper to casting, presentation and pilots - across the company's slate of formats, series and specials for streaming, broadcast, cable and digital platforms. Most recently, Byars was instrumental in the development and sale of the Nikki and Brie Bella-hosted Twin Love for Amazon Studios, and currently has other projects set up with platforms including Netflix and Peacock. Other ITV Entertainment series include Love Island (Peacock), Queer Eye (Netflix), The Chase (ABC) and Hell's Kitchen (Fox). Prior to ITV Entertainment, Byars spent eight years at Turner Entertainment, most recently serving as senior director of unscripted, series and live events. She was part of the core team at TBS that relaunched its unscripted business with Drop the Mic (hosted by Method Man and Hailey Bieber), Snoop Dogg Presents the Joker's Wild, The Misery Index and Shaq Life. She also managed special events and awards properties including annual AFI Life Achievement Award tributes and the Screen Actors Guild Awards.



#### Kimberly Caraig Account Executive Fox Corp.

Kimberly Caraig joined the Fox Ad Sales division in 2017 as one of

the organization's first integrated linear and digital account executives, focusing on clients and agencies in Los Angeles. Her strong internal and external relationships yield opportunities to maximize linear and streaming revenue across Fox Entertainment and Fox Sports. Prior to joining Fox, Caraig was an account executive at CBS, first at CBS Sports Network and then segueing to CBS Interactive. She previously served in sales planning roles at Discovery Communications and FX. She started her career in ad sales at Comedy Central and Spike TV. Caraig serves as a mentor to account managers and associates across the Fox Ad Sales division, and also supports various organizations, including Project Sunshine at Children's Hospital L.A., Walk on Water - Surf Therapy for children with special needs and GRLSWIRL Skate Boarding mentorship for youth in underserved communities.



#### Colin Davis Executive VP of Comedy

Development Sony Pictures Television Studios

Colin Davis oversees development of comedies for all platforms for Sony Pictures Television Studios. He recently joined Sony from Roku, where he was head of scripted originals for The Roku Channel, its free ad-supported streaming service. In that role, he led a team of creatives building and launching Roku's move into original programming and spearheaded the production and rollout of successful series including the reboot of Reno 911! and Die Hart 2: Die Harter starring Kevin Hart. Notably, he greenlighted and shepherded the feature film Weird: The Al Yankovic Story, starring Daniel Radcliffe. Before joining Roku, Davis led scripted programming for the short-form streaming service Quibi and spent four years in comedy development at Turner, where he most notably championed Search Party. Davis started his television career at Fox Broadcasting. He is based at the Sony Pictures Studios lot in Culver City.

Alessandra Donadelli VP, Business Development Warner Bros. Discovery

At Warner Bros. Discovery, Alessandra Donadelli is responsible for overseeing growth partnerships for HBO Max and Discovery Plus. In this role, she leads a fast-paced, cross-divisional team focused on launching growth initiatives that drive subscribers and revenue within the OTT space. She is also responsible for cultivating relationships with marketing, finance, legal, product and established processes to integrate Discovery Plus into ad sales partner outreach. Prior to this role, Donadelli was director of partnership strategy at Disney Plus, where she established guidelines and frameworks to evaluate and prioritize partnership initiatives, resulting in enterprise wholesale deals and co-marketing programs. Donadelli has also held roles at Fox Networks Group and Fox International Channels. She sits on the board of FEME (Female Executives in Media and Entertainment) and is actively involved in the mentorship and development of young professionals both within and outside of Warner Bros. Discovery.



#### Rebecca Evans Executive VP, Nonfiction Content Campfire Studios

Rebecca Evans has pro-

duced across all genres of nonfiction television, from shiny-floor shows to reality TV and premium documentaries. Recent credits include Hulu's WeWork: Or the Making and Breaking of a \$47 Billion Unicorn, named Outstanding Business and Economic Documentary at the 2022 News & Documentary Emmy Awards; HBO Max's Low Country: The Murdaugh Dynasty, The Way Down: God, Greed and the Cult of Gwen Shamblin and Heaven's Gate: The Cult of Cults, as well as FX's Hysterical and CNN's The Lost Sons. While at Campfire Studios, a premium scripted and nonfiction production company run by film producer and CEO Ross Dinerstein, Evans's work has led to the sale of more than 20 series and films, all of which she's overseen creatively. As of late last year, she had

projects in production for platforms including HBO Max, Netflix and Hulu. Her expertise spans development and production, and Campfire's yearly unscripted output has more than tripled during her tenure at the company.



#### Daniel Farkas VP, Distribution Strategy and Content Planning Sony Pictures Television

Daniel Farkas works cross-functionally to maximize the domestic financial performance of Sony Pictures Entertainment's features and TV series following their initial theatrical or firstrun exhibition. This includes valuing demand for Sony's content across transactional retail platforms and licensing partners, determining windows and pricing, and advising on key deals. He leads SPE's efforts to redefine the studio's theatrical windowing strategy. He was part of the team that negotiated SPE's pay-one and pay-two deals in the U.S. and is outlining its presence in the premium video-on-demand space, working with the Motion Picture Group to test and evaluate new approaches to the at-home offering. Since the merger of SPE's Home Entertainment and licensing divisions, he has established an integrated approach to catalog management that optimizes returns across the digital, SVOD and AVOD businesses. After joining SPE in 2013, Farkas advanced within its Home Entertainment division, focused on structuring and executing SPHE's go-to-market approach. Farkas began his career as a management consultant with The Monitor Group (now Monitor Deloitte).



#### Falon Fatemi CEO and Co-Founder Fireside

Falon Fatemi co-founded Fireside, an interactive

entertainment app, with fellow serial entrepreneur Mark Cuban in 2021. Fireside "is the first interactive web free streaming platform that really puts the power of a production studio in the palm of your hand," Fatemi said alongside Cuban last August at the Podcast Movement conference in Dallas. She cited a cooking show where you not only watch, but cook along in real time with the chef, ask for substitute ingredients and then turn your camera around and appear on the stage to show off your end product as an example of what Fireside aims to provide. Fireside hopes to gain access to smart TVs, Fire TV, Apple TV and Roku via its acquisition of technology provider Stremium, as TechCrunch recently reported. Fatemi previously was the founder and CEO of Node Inc., an artificial intelligence platform that was sold to SugarCRM in 2020. She reportedly was the youngest employee ever hired by Google (at 19) when she joined the company in 2019.



Mike Fazzino Principal, Content

Acquisition, WW Major Studio Licensing Strategy Amazon

At Amazon Studios, Mike Fazzino is responsible for much of Prime Video's worldwide licensing of third-party content, having closed more than \$1 billion in licensing deals with Warner Bros. Discovery, Paramount Global, BBC, MGM and more for iconic series and movies including The Lord of the Rings, the James Bond franchise, The Big Bang Theory, Supernatural and Two and a Half Men. He also helped build and manage Prime Video Direct, Prime Video's distribution service for independent films, helping thousands of filmmakers find distribution opportunities for their projects on SVOD, TVOD and AVOD. He is a member of the Television Academy and holds an MBA from Cornell's Johnson School of Management (where he was editor of the Cornell Business Journal) and a bachelor's degree from Sacred Heart University. While he's based in Los Angeles, he has also traveled for Amazon frequently and has spoken at film festivals including Sundance, SXSW and TIFF.



#### **Laura Foster** VP, Product Marketing

Innovid

Innovid's Laura Foster has shown she is one to

watch in the advertising technology industry. She leads all of Innovid's product-marketing efforts, spearheading an agile team that

develops and executes internal and external product positioning. In early 2022, she played a key role in crafting go-to-market positioning and a sales enablement approach of Innovid's acquisition of TVSquared — which, renamed InnovidXP, pushed Innovid to the forefront of the converged TV measurement landscape. In late 2021, she executed the launch and positioning of Innovid Key, the company's "identity as infrastructure" approach to identity resolution, and she also named the product. In 2019, she developed and led the go-to-market positioning and sales enablement approach for Innovid's acquisition of Herolens, the dynamic creative personalization (DCO) tool. In 2021, Innovid began trading on the New York Stock Exchange under the ticker symbol "CTV." Before Joining Innovid, Foster held increasingly senior roles at Sizmek. The Product Marketing Alliance recognized her as a Top 100 Product Marketing Influencer in 2021.



Katherine Gallagher Programming Manager Sinclair Broadcast Group

Katherine Gallagher has more than 10 years of comprehensive experience in various areas with a recent focus on and passion for digital content planning, specifically developing and implementing strategies to promote company or brand growth and progress. She is programming manager for STIRR, Sinclair Broadcast Group's ad-supported OTT streaming service. During her time with STIRR, she has actively implemented the successful launch of multiple revenue-generating initiatives and has overseeen the National STIRR City Channel. These initiatives include The National Desk on 87 Sinclair-owned stations (including all of the compay's MyNetworkTV and The CW affiliates), STIRR High School Football, which has live-streamed 1,000-plus local games since the channel's launch, and multiple specials with local, specialty programming. Previously, she worked for a decade in digital media and advertising for companies including NBCUniversal, ESPN and Grey Global Group. Highlights include supporting Olympics coverage, managing NBC show syndication for all brands and breaking major news stories.



#### **Nick Carvin** Chief Operating Officer & Managing Partner **Mobile TV Group**

Nick Garvin oversees

all of Mobile TV Group's operations, which includes over half of all NBA, MLB and NHL broadcasts across the country and over 4,000 live events annually. Based in Denver, MTVG has offered high-quality broadcast engineering for nearly 30 years. In 2020, the company introduced Cloud Control, the first managed service for fully remote production, in response to the evolving industry and its needs. Following Cloud Control, MTVG launched MTVG Edge, a new edge-computing product delivering MTVG's live production solutions for small and midsized productions anywhere with a minimal on-site equipment footprint and for a much lower cost. Garvin also expanded MTVG's expertise to the Los Angeles community with the launch of its newest mobile unit. He is on the board of Armstrong Capital Development (ACD) and served as a development committee member at Teach for America. Earlier, he founded and developed Stackup, an education technology company that was acquired by Global Grid for Learning in 2021.



#### Samuel Harowitz VP, Content Acquisitions & Partnerships Tubi

Samuel Harowitz leads

all third-party licensed programming acquisitions with indie partners and major studios and brands for Tubi, including international content acquisitions, sports and FAST channels. On the heels of a banner content year for Fox Entertainment's streaming service, Harowitz is instrumental in helming the expansion of Tubi's content library of more than 50,000 titles. Harowitz most recently oversaw TV content acquisitions at Freevee, Amazon's AVOD service formerly known as IMDb TV, where he led third-party licensed programming and optimized its first-run licensing program. Previously, Harowitz served as VP, digital content licensing at A+E Networks, where he was charged with licensing programming to SVOD and AVOD platforms and led partner management of digital and OTT platforms. Prior to that, he held roles as senior VP, development and production at Lisa Kudrow and Dan Bucatinsky's Is or Isn't Entertainment and VP, acquisitions and co-productions at FremantleMedia.



#### Stephen Hodge CEO OTTera

With his technology background, Stephen Hodge spearheaded

companies like Toon Goggles, Digital Media Interactive, Anywhere Artists and now OTTera. Hodge leads OTTera's overall strategies for content licensing, business development, monetization and ensuring OTTera and its related companies stay ahead of their competition. OTTera's team launched the company in 2017 after working in the industry for more than seven years, forging successful partnerships with Roku, Vizio, Sony, Samsung and Hisense. OTTera provides a fully managed suite of OTT applications and FAST channels worldwide. Recent partnerships include ones with LAFIG Belgium and IMPS, the worldwide licensors for The Smurfs, to bring two 2D-animated linear FAST channels to kids and families around the world. OTTera also made an investment deal in AfroLandTV, a Black-centered streaming service aimed at bringing pan-African stories to global audiences. AfroLandTV also is backed by players such as Comcast NBCUniversal and Techstars. Hodge also joined AfroLandTV's executive board.



Kate Hoenigsberg Senior VP, Drama Development Universal

Television

Kate Hoenigsberg oversees a slate of more than 50 drama series in development at Universal Television, a division of Universal Studio Group. Hoenigsberg also works closely with the studio's talent roster, which includes Jenna Bans, Jenna Bush Hager, Jessica Goldberg, Jordan Peele, Julie Plec, Amy Poehler and more. Projects under Hoenigsberg's purview have successfully sold to a variety of broadcast and streaming platforms, including NBCUniversal's NBC and Peacock, as well as external buyers such as Netflix and Prime Video. Such series include We Were Liars (Prime Video), Murder by the Book (NBC), Freeman (Peacock) and Confessions (Netflix). Prior to joining Universal Television, Hoenigsberg was the senior content executive and scripted programming lead at Quibi, where she oversaw series including Veena Sud's The Stranger and When the Streetlights Go On. Before that, she spent more than 10 years at NBCUniversal, most recently as VP of the scripted cable group.



#### Fernando Hurtado Manager, Digital Video NBCUniversal Local

Fernando Hurtado is an award-winning bilingual journalist and content producer with experience producing engaging editorial segments for TV, digital, OTT and emerging platforms. In his role as a manager of digital video for NBCUniversal Local's Digital Innovation Team, he produces digital video for the division's NBC- and Telemundo-owned stations, regional sports networks and LX News, the TV network for millennial and Gen Z audiences. At NBCUniversal Local, Hurtado has covered major events including the Beijing and Tokyo Olympics, presidential elections, the Las Vegas massacre and the 2016 Democratic National Convention. He also serves as an adjunct instructor at the University of Southern California. He worked as supervising producer on LX News's My New Favorite Olympian podcast, which earned two Webby Signal Awards in the categories of Best Limited Sports Series and Best LGBTQ+ Episode. Hurtado wrote the podcast's LGBTQ+ episode and oversaw the entire series. Prior to NBC, Hurtado worked at ATTN: and Circa, Sinclair Broadcast Group's digital video news outlet. His work has appeared on Fusion, USA Today, The Huffington Post and Variety Latino.
#### SPECIAL REPORT: 40 UNDER 40 L.A.



RJ Larese VP of Talent and Development and Brand Partnerships Paramount Global

RJ Larese's commitment to shepherding great talent into Nickelodeon and AwesomenessTV has transformed casting for both brands' unscripted and digital content and has paved the way for a new, diverse slate of young BIPOC and LGBTQ+ talent. His strong relationships with up-and-coming digital creators and TikTok talent have greatly contributed to building a representative talent pool across both brands, turning breakthrough influencers into spinoff projects including The Sorta Scary Show with Matt Taylor and Ace B. King, former contestants on the Paramount Plus reality competition series Next Influencer. Larese works with digital creators and unscripted talent for both brands, finding them opportunities within Paramount for scripted and unscripted content, brand partnerships, consumer marketing, events and more. Prior to joining Paramount he was a talent, casting and development executive with more than a decade of experience at networks, production companies, and publishers, including ABC, ATTN:, Endemol, ITV America and PopSugar. He has also cast and developed shows for Bravo, E!, Lifetime, MTV, NBC, TLC, truTV and VH1.



Christian Linke Co-Creator, Showrunner and Executive Producer, Arcane Riot Games

Christian Linke is the Emmy-winning co-creator, showrunner and executive producer of Riot Games's Netflix series Arcane: League of Legends, the game-making company's first animated series. Arcane tells the origin story of two iconic League champions, set in the utopian Piltover and the oppressed underground of Zaun. The show held Netflix's No. 1 global spot for three weeks in a row, also hitting the top 10 in over 87 countries. He and fellow Arcane co-creator and executive producer Alex Yee are working on the show's second season, which is in production now. Linke won a Primetime Emmy in 2022 for Outstanding Animated Program for Arcane. Enemy, the song by Imagine Dragons from the original soundtrack, reached No. 1 on the Billboard Mainstream Top 40 and Adult Top 40 charts. A former musician himself, Linke has also used his skills to create Riot's music division from the ground up. Upon joining Riot 11 years ago, he used his talents as a composer to produce music for *League of Legends*, including its events, cinematics, albums and in-game music.



#### Betsy Lippitt VP, U.S. TV Distribution Sony Pictures Television

Betsy Lippitt leads Sony Pictures Entertainment's library and new content film and television sales across the U.S. TV networks and streaming platforms of The Walt Disney Co., Warner Bros. Discovery and Paramount Global. In her role, she leads complex, multiyear content distribution deal negotiations in all media (basic cable, pay TV, SVOD, AVOD, FVOD). In 2022 alone, Lippitt generated nine figures of revenue for SPE. Having previously been an SPE client, Lippitt drives sales for the studio through her client-focused, results-driven strategy of addressing the rapidly evolving demands of the TV and streaming market. Lippitt joined SPE from the AVOD streaming startup Tubi (now owned by Fox) in 2018, where she struck the platform's initial deals with every major Hollywood studio. Throughout her time at Tubi, Lippitt reported to the chief content officer and grew her role to oversee three global divisions: content acquisition, content planning and strategy and content partnerships. Prior to Tubi, Lippitt managed AVOD, home entertainment and worldwide nontheatrical sales for Miramax. She received her bachelor of fine arts degree from New York University.



#### Helen Lum Executive VP App Science

Helen Lum oversees all business and growth strategies for measure-

ment and attribution platform App Science, a division of global advertising technology company

Sabio Holdings. She has more than 10 years of experience in digital media, campaign management expertise and scaling business operations. Prior to her role as EVP, she helped build and manage Sabio's global account management team and assisted in spearheading the first mobile retargeting campaign in the industry. Helen's favorite apps are LinkedIn and Yelp. Prior to joining Sabio, she spearheaded the first mobile retargeting campaign in the industry and led campaign management teams at Opera Mediaworks (AdColony) and Conversant. Then, as one of the first employees hired at Sabio, she rose through the ranks from associate director of account management to senior VP of operations. She helped build and manage Sabio's global account and campaign management team, where she integrated teams, created efficiencies, and improved how the company delivers proposals, services and insights for its diverse client base.



#### Andrew Matero VP, Platform Ampersand

Andrew Matero is responsible for taking Ampersand's AND

Platform to market. His passion for data allows him to take a consultative approach to supporting clients through advanced measurement and insights within the platform. He is charged with driving buy-side adoption of the platform, a buy-side TV interface that supports both national and local TV investment strategies. He partners closely with Ampersand's Media Sales Product and Research teams to effectively scale adoption. Even in a challenging macroeconomic year, per Ampersand, advertisers who use the platform are increasing their investments with the company by an average of 20% or more year-to-date. In one particular instance, the platform's role in working with a leading auto brand drove a nearly 40% increase in investment year-over-year. Matero joined Ampersand in 2019 as VP of client partnerships, with a focus on data, analytics and addressable TV buying. Before joining Ampersand, he worked at Comcast in advanced advertising and at NBCUniversal in a variety of broadcast, local and digitally focused roles.

WR



#### Kelly Miller Senior VP, Global Partnerships BBC Studios

Kelly Miller is responsible for driving BBC

Studios's global original opportunities business and bringing the best of new U.K. scripted content to U.S. audiences while accelerating activities across genres with world-class television and digital clients. Since joining BBC Studios in 2021, Miller has strengthened existing and established new relationships with production companies in the U.K. such as Various Artists Limited, Sid Gentle, Clerkenwell, Lookout Point and the BBC Studios in-house production team to develop a robust content pipeline consisting of diverse voices and appealing storylines for U.S. audiences. Through these efforts, in a little under two years Miller has secured prominent partnerships stateside for several BBC Studios titles led by deals with Hulu for Am I Being Unreasonable, AMC Networks for Happy Valley, HBO for Rain Dogs and BBC America for Mood. Before joining BBC Studios, Miller was senior VP, international strategy at Endeavor Content. Prior to that, she led international co-productions and originals for Vimeo and was part of the content acquisitions team at Hulu. Previously, Miller held roles in the comedy department at 20th Century Fox Television.



#### Paul O'Malley Independent Executive Producer Formerly of 3 Ball Media

Paul O'Malley shepherded long-running hits for 3 Ball Media while helping develop new series and formats for top streamers and broadcasters, including CBS's family dance competition format Come Dance With Me and Prime Video's LGBTQ+ docusoap Tampa Baes, the platform's first-ever docuseries. He also developed and served as a consulting producer on Netflix hit My Unorthodox Life. One of O'Malley and 3 Ball's projects, Sampled, debuted in December 2022 on Paramount Plus, and he also was behind Amazon's LGBTQ+ docuseries starring Hispanic pop icons Callé y Poche set to debut this summer. Now an independent producer, he recently had a show premiere on HGTV, Selling Dubai, that he developed. Prior to his time at 3 Ball, O'Malley was VP of development at Authentic Entertainment, where he helped develop unscripted hits including TLC's Trading Spaces and Toddlers and Tiaras as well as Esquire Network's White Collar Brawlers and Knife Fight. His other credits include RuPaul's Drag Race, American Gladiators, Parental Control and Tabitha's Takeover.



Trixie Pacis Director of Acquisitions & Original Programming Development ChimeTV

Trixie Pacis curates and develops programming at ChimeTV, a newly launched Asian American and Pacific Islander cable network delivered in English that highlights the diverse stories, issues and culture of the AAPI community. A Filipina-Canadian with more than a decade of film-industry experience, her perspective on programming stems from heading script development at Drive Films as well as screenwriting, producing and directing in North America and Asia. Pacis is a go-to executive on every facet of programming, from acquisitions to scheduling to finding the best original content. She also pinch-hits on marketing and design. Pacis came up in the industry step by step as a writer at Los Angeles magazine, an assistant at Trisko Talent Agency and a script development coordinator at Drive Films before embarking on independent roles in those areas, plus photography and social media. She's won awards for films she's written, recieved promotions and accolades and has wound up in L.A. with Chime TV, on the verge of launching a network with female and Asian-American ownership.



Joy Phillips Senior VP, Publicity AMC Networks

With more than 15 years of public-relations expe-

rience in the entertainment field, Joy Phillips oversees consumer publicity campaigns for several series across the AMC Networks linear and curated streaming platforms. Recent highlights include AMC's Dark Winds and Kevin Can F Himself, AMC Plus's This Is Going to Hurt and Gangs of London, BBC America's Killing Eve Season 4, Acorn TV's My Life Is Murder and Harry Wild and Sundance Now's State of the Union. Her upcoming series include Dark Winds Seaseon 2, Happy Valley Season 3, Monsieur Spade and Parish. She also oversees public relations strategy for WE tv and ALLBLK, brands that feature popular and targeted programming such as Brat Loves Judy, the Love After Lockup franchise, MC Lyte's Partners In Rhyme, Á La Carte and more. She has been with AMC Networks since 2019 and oversees the L.A.-based PR team. Phillips started at Rubenstein in 2015, and prior to Starz, she worked at Fifteen Minutes Public Relations. She began her career in personal publicity at Wolf-Kasteler **Public Relations.** 



Michael Rycyzyn Director, Digital Licensing A+E Networks

Michael Rycyzyn has worked for

A+E Networks for eight years in both ad sales and global content sales. He began his career in ad sales before becoming a sales planner and then moving to the global content sales team, where he was promoted twice. He is at the forefront of business development and industry growth. His work ensures A+E programming placement on platforms such as Apple TV, Amazon, Google/YouTube, Vudu-Fandango, Xbox, Comcast, Verizon **Communications and Frontier Communica**tions, resulting in a significant growth in brand awareness and revenue for the company. Rycyzyn has led A+E's electronic sell-through and TV video-on-demand business to garner some of the largest revenuegenerating EST content premieres in the history of the company, as shown through Lifetime's Surviving R. Kelly, Girl in the Basement and History's Alone and The Curse of Oak Island, A+E said. He also successfully expanded the A+E EST business in Japan and other countries, expanding global partnerships and presence.

Multichannel.com

#### SPECIAL REPORT: 40 UNDER 40 L.A.



Shaheen Sayani Head of Content Partnerships, Samsung TV Plus Samsung Electronics America

Shaheen Sayani is an accomplished professional with 10-plus years of experience at the intersection of technology and entertainment. She partners with the industry's leading content companies to cater to the rapidly expanding digital audience, leading her team to be subjectmatter experts on diverse viewership habits. Her entrepreneurial spirit has inspired her to work on the leading edge of tech and entertainment, seeking to build the TV experience of the future. With keen business acumen, Sayani has developed complex content strategy, managed high-value acquisitions and built internal systems that adapt to the ebbs and flows of the streaming world. Her prior tenures at Netflix, VideoElephant and Caffeine have leveraged her prowess over distribution across several commercial models, and with many years as a film festival programmer under her belt, curation of content categories is second nature to her. Sayani is a Southern California native.



#### Ahmadou Seck VP, Scripted TV Macro

Ahmadou Seck is an innovative executive who is passionate

about working with diverse creatives to amplify their stories. As VP of scripted programming at the multiplatform media company Macro, he produces projects in the scripted and unscripted spaces. He has worked on the Emmy-nominated show Raising Dion and as an executive producer on Apple TV's dark comedy Government Cheese and FX's The Scent of Burnt Flowers. His professional journey includes experience in the agency world (Creative Artists Agency), at a television network (Participant Media-owned Pivot) and with Will Smith's production company, Overbrook Entertainment. At Overbrook, he was an associate producer on the critically acclaimed show Cobra Kai. Raised by Senegalese parents in Seattle, Seck was taught the importance of being an active member of the community. Since moving to Los Angeles, he has brought that same spirit to the entertainment industry and has held leadership positions with the CAA Multicultural Committee, Colour Entertainment and AfroBrunch. He has a bachelor's degree from St. Martin's University.



Executive VP, Development The Intellectual Property Corp. (IPC), a part of Sony Pictures Television

**Matt Shanfield** 

Matt Shanfield is the creative executive behind the development of original concepts, unique formats and breaking new talent. Within the last year-plus, he has shepherded or executive produced titles such as Secrets of Playboy (A&E), The D'Amelio Show (Hulu), The Curse of Von Dutch (Hulu), Restaurant Rivals (Discovery Plus), The Climb (HBO Max) and Jewish Matchmaking (Netflix). He joined IPC after heading development for Asylum Entertainment. Prior to Asylum, Shanfield served as the VP of development at Oxygen, VP of development at Irwin Entertainment and director of development at Shed Media US. He also developed and produced for Mark Burnett Productions where he was a producer on series such as Shark Tank, The Apprentice and Trust Me, I'm a Game Show Host. He began his career at The William Morris Agency.



#### Kyle Simon Partner Perkins Coie LLP

Kyle Simon is a partner and member of Perkins Coie LLP's M&A

practice and the Digital Media & Entertainment, Gaming, and Sports industry group. He represents public and private companies and private equity funds in complex business transactions, including mergers, acquisitions, leveraged buyouts, carve-outs, minority investments, secondary investments and joint ventures. He has additional industry expertise with media and entertainment company M&A transactions, including the purchase and sale of broadcast television and radio stations (including Big Four network affiliates in major markets), broadcast and digital ad representation companies, programming enterprises and programming joint ventures. He has been involved in a range of TV-related transactions, including representing Fox Corp. in its acquisition of TMZ; representing Estrella Media in its innovative deal to sell its Dallas station to Tegna and enter into a longterm affiliation agreement with Tegna; and helping Cox Media Group to acquire Fox affiliate KLSR Eugene, Oregon.



#### **Evan Statton**

Senior Principal Architect, Media and Entertainment **Amazon Web** Services

Evan Statton has spent the last 20 years inventing the future of media technology with some of the largest media companies in the world. He leads a worldwide team of Solutions Architects at Amazon Web Services whose work impacts thousands of customers in all facets of media and entertainment. His work includes leading technology roadmap sessions within AWS, as well as visioning and education sessions with media and entertainment customers around the globe. He has influenced more than 40 AWS features including the ability to manipulate fully uncompressed 4K video in the cloud. He has earned seven patents in video processing and transmission, and recently earned a Hollywood Professional Association Award for Engineering Excellence. Before joining AWS, he deployed the first national HD IP transmission system for MLB.com at a time when many in the industry were saying internet-protocol transport was not possible. He then spent four years at NBCUniversal leading the design and implementation of over 200 transmission and playout channels.



#### Adam Sussman VP of Development Furry Prawn

Development Furry Prawn Productions (NBCUniversal)

Adam Sussman is a veteran television executive and has worked in the NBCUniversal family since 2011. As VP of development for Jason Raff's Furry Prawn Productions, a network overall deal with the America's Got Talent showrunner, he creates, develops and sells original unscripted formats across broadcast, cable and streaming platforms. In 2020, he conceptualized the special, Sit Down Comedy Sessions with Howie Mandel (for Just for Laughs), where the star host sat down with the late Bob Saget, Ms. Pat and Bobby Lee for candid conversations about how they turned tragedy into comedy gold. His proudest talent-driven projects center on pro-social issues including mental health, inclusion and representation, gender equity, LGBT stories, women in STEM, and activism. Earlier, he was director of development for Steele Mill Productions. He climbed the entertainment ladder at Zodiak USA (formerly RDF USA), where he was manager of development. He started his career working in comedy for veteran producers Pat Tourk Lee and John Moffitt at Moffitt-Lee Productions and HBO's The Comedy Festival.



#### Brian Tannenbaum Head of Originals, The Roku Channel Roku

Brian Tannenbaum

leads all aspects of original programming for The Roku Channel, including scripted series, unscripted series and feature films. A key member of the team behind the launch of the Roku Originals banner, he manages Roku's content strategy across all original series commissions and development. Roku Originals programs include scripted programs, like Weird: The Al Yankovic Story and Die Hart, and unscripted fare like The Great American Baking Show and Meet Me in Paris. Tannenbaum (who was promoted on the departure of Colin Davis to Sony) was part of the original Roku Originals team. Prior to joining Roku, Tannenbaum led alternative and unscripted programming for the short-form streaming service Quibi, managing a slate of more than 50 television titles. He got his start in the entertainment industry at Lionsgate, where he last served as senior VP of creative and business affairs, alternative programming. During his tenure, he guided the development and production of series for Lionsgate's alternative television business, including Kevin Hart: What the Fit (YouTube) and Selling Sunset (Netflix).



#### **Brendon Thomas**

SVP, Distribution and Business Development Paramount Streaming

Brendon Thomas is responsible for Paramount Plus and Pluto TV's rapid audience growth via partnerships with original equipment makers (OEMs), platforms and other strategic partners for the streaming services. Prior to joining Paramount Streaming, Thomas co-founded and served as CEO of Shindig, a crowdfunding platform. Shindig was acquired by content monetization platform provider Okanjo, where he then served as president until joining Pluto TV. Thomas and his 10-member team are tasked with growing global streaming distribution through dealmaking, renewals and partnerships across the Paramount Streaming portfolio of offerings, including and especially Pluto TV and Paramount Plus. His efforts have helped secure and retain Pluto TV's spot as a leading FAST service, and accelerated distribution of Paramount Plus beyond all other SVODs: Paramount Plus was the fastest-growing SVOD in the last year.



Kim Wendt Senior Solutions Architect Amazon Web Services (AWS)

sible for helping global media and entertainment companies on their journey to the cloud at Amazon Web Services. She also leads the engagement between AWS and Motion Picture Laboratories Inc. (MovieLabs) to drive the industry towards the MovieLabs 2030 Vision. In addition to her day-to-day responsibilities, Wendt participates in the Amazon Future Engineer Class Chats program to encourage future generations to pursue careers in STEM, mentors early-career talent Amazonians and raises the hiring bar at Amazon through interviewing. She holds a master's degree from Georgia Tech in computer science with a machine learning specialization. As creator of technical architectures for workflows such as Dailies in the Cloud, VFX Plate migration and archival migrations, she has had tremendous impact within media and entertainment businesses in Los Angeles and beyond. Wendt has also mentored multiple women in the industry, participating in high-school coaching sessions across the U.S. and running training initiatives at industry events.



Alex Yee Co-Creator, Writer and Executive Producer, Arcane Riot Games

Alex Yee began

his journey with Riot 12 years ago as a player support specialist. Since then, he has helped guide League of Legends in his role as creative designer, leading the team through preproduction, including story development, writing scripts and concept design. He is the co-creator, writer and executive producer of Riot's hit Netflix series Arcane, the company's first animated series, now in production on its second season. Arcane was nominated for five Primetime Emmy Awards and took home four, including Outstanding Animated Program. He and fellow co-creator and executive producer Christian Linke are currently working on the show's second season, which is in production. Yee prides himself on the lore and world-building he has done for League of Legends, but notes his favorite contributions are some of the champions he's contributed to, including Riven, Thresh, Draven, Leona, Graves and Lulu.



# Advanced Advertising Summit Reveals Secrets to Better Campaigns

Meet pioneers and trendsetters in data and technology



By Jon Lafayette jon.lafayette@futurenet.com @jlafayette

hineup of top executives will share insights and best practices for making television advertising more effective at the Advanced Advertising Summit. The summit is being held Wednesday, June 21, at the Sofitel Los Angeles as part of L.A. TV Week, an event produced by Future plc, which publishes Broadcasting+Cable, Multichannel News and Next TV.

Speakers from media buying giant GroupM and smart-TV data innovator Vizio will deliver keynote sessions.

Opening the event will be **Mike Fisher**, executive director of investment innovation at GroupM. Fisher leads a new GroupM team responsible for working closely with clients and partners in areas such advanced TV, cross-channel integrations, new ad formats and models and measurement and research capabilities.

In his role at GroupM, Fisher has helped push the agency's clients to test and scale advanced advertising approaches and work with ground-breaking providers like iSpot and OpenAP.

Fisher will let attendees know what buyers are looking for when choosing media partners.

Another keynote speaker is **Charbel Makhoul**, general manager, VP of product, data science and analytics at Vizio, one of the first TV set makers to harness and license automated content recognition data.

At Vizio, Makhoul guides the ACR technology roadmap for Vizio's Inscape data unit and is responsible



for evolving and maintaining currency-grade TV viewing data. In his segment, Makhoul will talk about new ways smart TV data can be used to make TV advertising more efficient and effective and the critical role it is playing in the evolution of measurement.

#### **Awards Program Returns**

Makhoul will also accept on behalf of Vizio an Advanced Advertising Innovation Award. The awards are being given to companies and products leading the way in encouraging the adoption of new technology and pioneering ways of improving the effectiveness and accountability of television advertising.

In what is expected to be a fun and interactive segment, attendees will help use technology from PadSquad to customize creative executions for specific audience segments and devices. The segment, titled "Let's Build A Remarkable Campaign: A Creative Improv," is designed to get people out of the chairs while also illustrating how its possible to efficiently iterate content for targeted advanced advertising campaigns.

The session will be led by **Cathy Collette**, regional VP for the West Coast at PadSquad.

The event will also feature panels that will discuss issues of interset to the advertising industry.

"Hitting The Target" will look at how identity systems, clean rooms and







Advanced Advertising Summit panelists include (from top): Mike Fisher of GroupM, Cathy Collette of PadSquad and Charbel Makhoul of Vizio. contextual data are all being used to assure that the right message reaches the right consumer.

"Measuring Up" looks at the growth of the number of companies offering TV measurement based on big-data solutions, and addresses the question of which data is really important in planning, buying, measuring and evaluating advanced advertising campaigns.

There will be a panel on addressable advertising, a technology that is gaining scale and sophistication. Linear TV is becoming more addressable thanks to new alliances among distributors, while streaming services and FAST channels offer their own flavors of targeting and addressability.

#### Local TV Is in the Mix

Local television won't be left out of the discussion. A panel will look at how local advertisers can reach their customers via TV and digital channels and the tools and technology needed to build and sell multiplatform ad campaigns.

Confirmed panels come from companies including Comcast's Effectv, Sinclair Broadcast Group's Compulse and research company 605.

"Anyone interested in the latest development in data and technology, and the best ways to put them to use, should be attending this year's Advanced Advertising Summit in Los Angeles," Jon Lafayette, business editor of Broadcasting+Cable, said. "Attendees will also get a chance to rub shoulders with some of the most innovative and accomplished leaders in the industry and learn tricks of the trade that can help them advance their careers." ●

# Next TV Summit Rings in Streaming's 'Postwar' Era

Top-level media tech executives converge June 20 to make sense of an industry being recreated before our eyes



By Daniel Frankel daniel.frankel@futurenet.com @dannyfrankel

he three-dimensional chessboard of the media-technology business has never been more complex for decision-makers, who are caught between fasteroding linear channels and next-genera-

tion digital platforms that need time to grow into their revenue potential.

On June 20 at the Sofitel Los Angeles in Beverly Hills, the Next TV Summit L.A. will dive headfirst into the pain points and opportunities that await, with an afternoon full of panel and keynote sessions featuring some of the most influential thought leaders in the TMT industry.

The afternoon event is part of the two-day L.A. TV Week conference produced by Future plc, publisher of Next TV, Broadcasting+Cable and Multichannel News.

At press time, producers were still actively booking speakers. But here's who's confirmed so far.

**Craig Erwich**, president of the Disney Television Group, will kick off the Tuesday-afternoon Next TV Summit portion of L.A. TV Week with a fireside keynote, discussing his perspective across two decades on the TV business' leading edge, serving an instrumental role in building powerful platforms including Hulu.

Following Erwich's keynote, a panel including Reny Díaz, VP of audience strategy and content development, Hispanic streaming for NBCUniversal Telemundo Enterprises; Will Gurman, VP, global partnerships and content strategy for Paramount; and William Morris Endeavor partner Chelsea Radler will discuss the seemingly never settled debate between traditional weekly series releasing vs. binge-minded bulk distribution.

Then, with Netflix and The Walt Disney Co. integrating ad-supported mechanisms into their subscription streaming businesses, the Next TV Summit will veer into a discussion on hybrid



**Kevnoters** 

monetization models, led by Kevin Cross, distribution executive for Condista; Scott Ehrlich, chief innovation officer for Sinclair Broadcast Group; and Laura Florence, senior VP and GM of Redbox.

The afternoon fireside keynote will be delivered by longtime MGM distribution executive **Chris Ottinger**, recently put in charge by Amazon of the newly formed MGM Studios Distribution unit, the group responsible for the global proliferation of such landmark shows as The Handmaid's Tale and The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel.

Late-afternoon panels will include a high-level discussion about streaming consumer behavior trends featuring Samuel Harowitz, Tubi VP of acquisitions and partnerships, and Tania

Missad, head of global corporate research data and insights for Warner Bros. Discovery. Also, Next TV lead editor Daniel Frankel will lead a discourse on the unbundling and rebuilding of the video business, amid rapid decay of the incumbent pay TV infrastructure.

The event will wrap with the presentation of the "FAST Five," honoring executives and creatives developing the most innovative, cost-efficient original programming in the ad-supported streaming ecosystem.

"This might be the most volatile period in television history, with new delivery and consumption patterns emerging every week," Next TV's Frankel said. "Those who wish to survive and thrive in the video entertainment industry must find ways to expose themselves to the latest ideas and strategies, and Next TV L.A. provides an excellent forum to do just that."

#### HOLLY HENDERSON TO RECEIVE WICT 'CATALYST AWARD' AT WONDER WOMEN OF L.A.

THE WICT NETWORK: Southern California has named Holly Henderson, senior VP of distribution at Hallmark Media, as this year's recipient of the chapter's Catalyst Award, to be presented at the Wonder Women of Los Angeles gala breakfast on Tuesday, June 20.

The award salutes a WICT Southern California chapter member who has positively impacted the industry through mentorship, leadership, and dedication to female career empowerment through involvement with WICT Network programs.

"Holly is the epitome of the Catalyst award," chapter president Jennifer Miles said. "Not only have I known Holly through her time on the WICT board, but through our business dealings as well. She is always looking for ways to lift up those around her and is an inspiration to many. I'm so pleased to honor her with this award."

As senior VP of distribution at Hallmark Media, Henderson is responsible for the distribution of Hallmark Media's original content across multiple platforms. Hallmark Media is home to Hallmark Channel, Hallmark Movies & Mysteries and Hallmark Drama, and SVOD streaming service Hallmark Movies Now. She is based in Los Angeles and reports to Stefanie Nimick, senior VP, portfolio distribution and growth marketing.

The WICT Network: Southern California is the event partner for the Multichannel News Wonder Women of Los Angeles awards, part of L.A. TV Week. For more information, visit mcnwonderwomen.com or latyweekevents.com.



# William Shatner Ventures to 'Mars'

### Actor was out in space on 'Star Trek' and again in a Blue Origin capsule a couple of years ago



By Michael Malone michael.malone@futurenet.com @BCMikeMalone

tars on Mars, an unscripted show that sees a group of celebrities try to survive in a setting that looks and feels like the red planet, debuts on Fox Monday, June 5. The "celebronauts," in Fox's words, live, eat, sleep and strategize together in the same space station. William Shatner is the host.

"Watching celebrities take giant leaps out of their comfort zone and step into the unexpected will no doubt be truly transformational and comical," Allison Wallach, president of unscripted programming, Fox Entertainment, said when the show was announced. "Throughout, we will learn a lot about these stars, and when you factor in William Shatner leading the charge from Mission Control, we have the makings of a show that's ready to blast off."

The contestants deal with simulated life on Mars, and use their brains, brawn and social skills to tackle challenging missions. One of the celebronauts is sent back to Earth each week, and one will remain standing at the end.

The contestants include Lance Armstrong, Ronda Rousey and Christoper Mintz-Plasse.

Shatner spoke with B+C Multichannel News about Stars on Mars, his own trip into space and what keeps him working at 92. An edited transcript follows.

# B+C: What drew you to Stars on Mars?

William Shatner: Imagine if somebody came to you and said, 'How would you like



to do a show called Stars on Mars? Would you say no or would you say yes?' Stars on Mars, what a great idea!

# B+C: Was it the title that drew you initially, or the concept?

WS: The title indicates the concept. Interestingly enough, the location the production company chose is in Australia, a desert area known as Coober Pedy, where they have opal mines. I had visited Coober Pedy many, many years ago. It's so hot that people live underground. I crawled around the tunnels where they were excavating. They had strung light bulbs. The way to get around the terrible heat is to live inside the ground like animals.

That's part of what we do on Stars on Mars.

#### B+C: I know you've hosted various shows over the years. Have you ever hosted a game show or a competition series?

WS: I did. [ABC's Show Me the Money] was

William Shatner will host competition show Stars on Mars, where celebrities will live together in a Mars-like environment. a wondrous show with lots of girls and money. Everything was perfect except for one thing we only discovered after the show was canceled after a short period of time. That was, there was no jeopardy [for contestants] — the contestants had to stay on, they couldn't get off.

For Stars on Mars, people are voted off, and the last one remaining is the greatest star in the universe. You have to have jeopardy, somebody has to lose.

#### B+C: Do you have influences or even role models in terms of gameshow hosts?

**WS:** We can't think of this as a game show. It enters into a kind of category that's out there — people who compete, and if they lose they leave. The whole idea is to stay on as long as possible. What do you call a show where the celebs one-byone are voted off, and gradually the number declines to one? Is that a game show?

**B+C: I would say a competition series. WS:** Competition series, perfect! This is a competition series.

# B+C: What makes *Stars on Mars* right for 2023?

WS: Sooner or later — with the latest explosion of a giant rocket it may be a little later than sooner — we're gonna send astronauts to Mars and have them live there for a while and bring them back. I'm struck by the fact that the Webb Telescope [on Mars] unfurled its mirrors and solar panels, and almost instantly one of those solar panels was struck by a meteorite. That's how much jeopardy there is in going to Mars, living on Mars. You're being pelted all the time. It just takes one of those things to make a bad day.

I'm told by astronauts that they'll have shielding, but it's very dangerous to go there.

In the competition show there's an element of danger, but not as much as actually going to Mars.

B+C: Your trip to space in 2021 did it turn out to be what you hoped it would?

Fox

WS: It was a very profound experience. On that trip, everybody was toasting themselves with champagne, but I emerged from the spaceship weeping. I didn't know why I was crying but I couldn't stop. I was embarrassed and had to go sit down someplace.

What I finally analyzed was, I was in grief for the world.

That led to the whole entertaining experience at the Kennedy Center, where I sang the song that I and another guy wrote, "So Fragile So Blue," because I had become aware. We're told how fragile [Earth] is, but you have to see for yourself how incredibly small this little rock that we live on is.

When I was a pilot, we were admonished all the time, you can't go above 12,500 feet without additional oxygen. You have about two miles of usable air. Above two miles and you're gonna die! You have this little rock with two miles of usable air. We're all living on it. We went from a few million human beings to 8 billion and moving up. We're crowding each other, we're elbowing each other off the earth. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the land we live on, it is polluted beyond belief. All that becomes abundantly clear.

## B+C: On a lighter note, what are you watching for fun?

**WS:** Last night I found myself watching a documentary on chimpanzees. The camera work was unbelievable. The chimps themselves are wild. How they behave, their almost humanlike expressions, is astonishing.

The natural world has dazzled me for the longest time.

# B+C: Do you watch any of the current Star Trek shows?

**WS:** I have not. I don't know why I haven't.

# B+C: What keeps you working at your age?

WS: I'm really well. I'm healthy. My mind works as well as it ever has, which is somewhat limited. [Laughs.] I'm having great fun!●



Duncan Campbell, LL Cool J and Chris O'Donnell in "New Beginnings," the series finale of NCIS: Los Angeles.

#### DEPARTURES

### **'NCIS: LOS ANGELES' SIGNS OFF AFTER 14 SEASONS ON CBS**

NCIS: Los Angeles has wrapped on CBS after 14 seasons. The two-part finale started May 14 and concluded May 21. Titled "New Beginnings," it saw an ATF agent go missing and the bureau seek help from the NCIS team to locate the agent and investigate stolen military-grade weapons. On a lighter note, Callen, played by Chris O'Donnell, and Anna, played by Bar Paly, plot their wedding; the sister of Rountree (Caleb Castille) interviews for medical school; and LL Cool J's Sam encourages his father to take part in a drug trial.

"The only thing harder than a pilot is the finale," R. Scott Gemmill, *NCIS: Los Angeles* showrunner and executive producer, said. "And the longer a show is on the air, the more difficult it gets to tie it up."

Gemmill likens a finale for a 14-season show to a short obituary for a long life well-lived – there's simply not enough time or space to tell the story thoroughly.

"We want the end to be a celebration of our characters and their lives, and hopefully leave them in a place where the audience feels content and can extrapolate what the characters do in the future," he said.

Gemmill, an alumnus of JAG and ER, has been at NCIS: Los Angeles "right from day one," he said. The show was initially envisioned as one about an NCIS agent who conducted long-term, undercover missions. "It's a very different show now," he said, describing it as "a buddy cop show" with lively personalities and fun moments.

Asked to single out an unsung member of the cast, crew or production team, Gemmill mentioned assistant producer Hillary Cohen, who served as the *NCIS: Los Angeles* "COVID czar" during the pandemic, overseeing testing and keeping detailed records. "None of us had ever seen a global pandemic," he said. "It's not in the showrunner's handbook."

NCIS: Los Angeles reached episode No. 300 at the end of last season, and averaged more than 6 million viewers in season 14.

Gemmill called a show lasting 14 seasons "a rarity" in 2023. He was reluctant to note how NCIS: Los Angeles may leave its mark on television, but said it consistently served up a big dose of escapism to viewers. While anti-heroes became vogue during the peak-TV era, NCIS: Los Angeles is more about the good guys doing the right thing. "Hopefully it's a show people enjoy tuning into for an hour of fun," he said, "to take their minds off whatever problems are going on in their lives."

Gemmill is not the only *NCIS: Los Angeles* figure to remain with the show from the beginning. O'Donnell, LL Cool J, Daniela Ruah, Linda Hunt and Eric Christian Olsen have been in the cast for the run of the show, an extraordinary display of continuity.

"That I was there the whole time is testimony to how enjoyable it was," Gemmill said. – MM



# Black Women Artists Hit The Right Notes for TV

As Black Music Month gets underway, female performers show their small-screen appeal



Lizzo's Watch Out for the Big Grrfs: Amazon Prime Video; The Equalizer: CBS

By R. Thomas Umstead thomas.umstead@futurenet.com @rtumstead30

inger-songwriter Lizzo in February won the Grammy Award for Record of the Year for her multiplatinum hit "About Damn Time," the fourth statuette she's taken home in her successful career.

Arguably just as meaningful and impressive was Lizzo's first Emmy Award win five months earlier for Prime Video reality competition series Lizzo's Watch Out for the Big Grrrls, which firmly established the hip-hop artist as a bonafide television star.

As the entertainment industry celebrates Black Music Month this June, Black female music performers continue to hit the right notes on the small screen, successfully bringing their performing talents and massive fan bases to TV. Grammy-winning performers such as Lizzo, Toni Braxton, Mary J. Blige, Stephanie Mills and Queen Latifah are quickly becoming just as well-known for their acting chops as they are for their vocal stylings.

"It used to be that everyone was isolated in one lane — actors were actors, directors were directors and musicians were musicians," Lifetime executive VP of movie, limited series and original movie acquisitions Tanya Lopez said. "Now, this migration of artists into other fields is continuing to provide opportunities for talent to really expand their horizons."

#### **Star Power Sells**

For decades, African-American artists from Diana Ross to Whitney Houston

Above, Lizzo in Prime Video's *Lizzo's Watch Out for the Big Grrrls.* Below, Queen Latifah in CBS action series The Equalizer. to Jennifer Hudson have successfully transitioned from the stage to the big and small screen. More recently, TV shows featuring Black women music performers have garnered strong critical acclaim. Emmy, Tony and Grammywinning singer/actress Cynthia Erivo was nominated for a 2021 Emmy for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Limited Series or Movie for her performance in Nat Geo's Genius: Aretha series about the life of the legendary Queen of Soul.

Singer Andra Day was nominated for a 2021 Academy Award and won a 2021 Golden Globe for Best Actress in a Motion Picture for her portrayal of Billie Holiday in Hulu's The United States vs. Billie Holiday.

Lizzo's Emmy win for Watch Out for the Big Grrrls was a surprise to industry observers, but Bunim/Murray Productions president Julie Pizzi said the artist's huge star power and her commitment to working with the various dancers competing for a position on her concert tour contributed heavily to the show's success.

"It's always helpful to have a big name ... it draws viewers in and that certainly helps for promotion and marketing, but the core of all of these shows are regular people that are extraordinary," she said. "You can look at it as a dance competition show, but Lizzo was intimately involved with the dancers and what they were doing and really cared about them — you don't always see that in reality shows. That magic came from her and what she really gave to the project, and



it translated on the screen."

As TV's competition for eyeballs gets more and more crowded, industry observers said, Black female music performers can both appeal to a broad audience and attract the key demographic of African-American women, who historically watch more TV than other groups.

#### **Key Demographic Appeal**

"They are stars that speak to Black female audiences," National Public Radio TV critic Eric Deggans said. "Black women are increasingly a key component for traditional TV viewership, and having a show starring a strong, Black woman increases the chances that Black women will watch the show."

Lifetime has worked with several Black female performers over the past decade including Queen Latifah, whose 2011 Lifetime film Steel Magnolias preceded her Emmy-winning portrayal of Bessie Smith in HBO's 2015 film Bessie and her current starring role in The Equalizer on CBS. The network has also worked with Braxton, who last month reached a multi-project production deal with Lifetime and A&E under Braxton's Braxtoni Productions banner. Braxton has appeared in previous Lifetime movies, including 2018's Faith Under Fire and 2022's Fallen Angels Murder Club.

"My team and I are looking forward to continued success with the network as we bring projects to life for the audience that has so graciously welcomed us into their homes over the years," Braxton said of the production with Lifetime.

Lifetime's Lopez said television projects featuring popular and established music stars benefit from the crossover audience appeal the star brings from their music brand. Lifetime's biopic The Clark Sisters: First Ladies of Gospel, starring popular gospel singer Kierra Sheard, drew nearly 3 million viewers in its 2020 debut, at the time Lifetime's most-watched original movie since Braxton's 2016 biopic Toni Braxton: Unbreak My Heart, which drew more than 3 million viewers.



"Most of these musicians have a brand so they bring an audience that's different from our typical viewer," Lopez said. "They are also talking to their audience all the time, so that has a lot of benefits to it that someone who's just acting and doesn't have that legacy of fans."

Musicians approach working on television projects from a different perspective than traditional actors and directors, she added. "One thing I will say about artists with one foot in the music business and one foot in other businesses is that they are very detail-oriented," Lopez said. "They come at it with a different point of view."

Indeed, R&B star Stephanie Mills who starred last month in Lifetime's original movie Pride: A Seven Deadly Sins Story — said that the schedule transition from touring and producing music to acting was challenging but ultimately rewarding, as it gave the star of the 1970s Broadway hit musical The Wiz an opportunity to stretch her talents.

"My only thought was just to let me remember my lines, and I did," Mills said. "I have no expectations [on future acting roles] but I would love to do another movie at some point."

Other performers are continuing the beat of Black female music stars in starring television and movie roles. Hip-hop artist MC Lyte just finished her second season starring in Above, Stephanie Mills (l.) in Lifetime's Pride: A Seven Deadly Sins Story. Below, Mary J. Blige in Starz's Power Book II: Ghost. sitcom Partners in Rhyme on the AMC Networks-owned streaming service ALLBLK. Grammy Award-winning gospel music performer Yolanda Adams, leads sophomore drama series Kingdom Business on BET Plus. And Blige headlines Starz's Power Book II: Ghost, the first spinoff in the network's successful Power franchise, now heading into its third season.

"For artists like Mary J. Blige, acting seems like a natural extension of their storytelling as singers," Starz president of original programming Kathryn Busby said. "The craft and artistry it takes to write a song or headline a concert lends itself to losing yourself in a film or television role."

#### Spinning Songs Into Shows

This month, Lifetime will feature two original movies based on Blige's songs, "Real Love" and "Strength of a Woman." The films are part of its monthly "Voices of a Lifetime" programming block on Saturday nights, which also includes documentary specials on artists like Keyshia Cole and TLC.

"Turning those songs into movies is a very interesting genre that I'm hoping will be successful," Lopez said. "I think there is an audience that's eager for that type of storytelling."

Deggans, author of Race-Baiter: How the Media Wields Dangerous Words to Divide a Nation, said today's evolving entertainment landscape will continue to create more opportunities — and in some cases more of a need — for artists to spread their wings beyond their original vocation.

"Today, it's much harder to be an artist that only does one thing," Deggans said. "Even successful artists will

> have to do some different things to make the same amount of money. For artists, fame and an [audience] following is currency in media, and once you have that, there's a natural tendency to exploit that across a number of different platforms."



# Nashville Newsrooms Catch Their Breath

Relentless rash of breaking news in Tennessee boomtown



#### By Michael Malone michael.malone@futurenet.com @BCMikeMalone

t has been an exceptional spate of major news in Nashville of late, including the Covenant School shooting on March 27, the nine Fort Campbell soldiers killed in a helicopter crash March 29 and the two Democratic lawmakers ousted from the State Capitol by GOP colleagues April 6 amidst their push for stricter gun control.

Nashville had a bit of severe weather to boot. The incidents have been difficult for everyone in Nashville and perhaps even worse for those who need to cover the stories. "The news departments deserve recognition for what they've done," said Jasmine Hardin, Gray Television regional VP, and general manager of WSMV-WTNX.

Clips of WSMV anchors Holly Thompson and Amanda Hara becoming emotional while reporting on the school shootings were viewed around the globe, Hara dealing with text messages at the anchor desk about her own children being under lockdown in a nearby school.

News gatherers' mental health has been top of mind. Stations brought in counselors, had

training sessions for managers to help them recognize stress in staffers and offered pet therapy. Hardin got suggestions from a Gray Television colleague who was general manager during the Sandy Hook tragedy in Connecticut. WTVF offered anxious staffers massages and WKRN had a cookout for the employees --burgers, hot dogs, casual conversations.

"Everyone could talk a little bit," said Tracey Rogers, WKRN VP and general manager, "but not a thing about what's the next story, what's the next story, what's the next story."

Nashville also got some therapy from an unlikely source. Taylor Swift, who moved to the Music City with her family as a teen, did three shows at Nashville's Nissan Stadium May 5-7. "It's been a lift to this community," said Lyn Plantinga, VP and general manager, WTVF.

E.W. Scripps owns market leader WTVF, a CBS affiliate known as NewsChannel 5. Nexstar Media Group has ABC outlet WKRN. Gray Television has NBC affiliate WSMV and Telemundo affiliate WTNX. Sinclair owns Fox station WZTV and MyNetworkTV-aligned WUXP, while managing Nashville Broadcasting's The CW affiliate WNAB. JKB Associates owns Univision station WLLC.

WNPT is the local PBS station. Comcast is the primary pay TV operator in DMA No. 27.

#### **Early Risers**

The news stations start their day with 4 a.m. weekday newscasts. WTVF is a beast. In February, the station won the 6 a.m. Comscore race in both households and viewers 25-54, and won 5 and 6 p.m too, with WKRN just off the pace at 6 p.m. At 10 p.m. in February, WTVF averaged 60,599 households and 35,749 viewers 25-54. WKRN and WSMV were virtually tied at 10 p.m. in households, at 39,215 and 39,212, respectively, and in the demo too, with WKRN at 23,378 and WSMN at 23,104. WZTV had 19,083 households at 10, and 11,777 in the demo.

WTVF thrives on deep staffer experience on both sides of the camera. The station seeks out "a very specific kind of person" to work there, Plantinga said: "Somebody who is highly competitive, who loses sleep when the person across the street gets the jump on them. But a good person, a nice person. We don't have big egos."

WTVF focuses on capital J journalism. Chief investigative reporter Phil Williams won a duPont Columbia this year for his statehouse

#### LOCAL NEWS

investigation titled "Revealed," one of five duPont prizes going to a broadcast station, and he claimed the Toner Prize from Syracuse University for the same report.

When The Ellen DeGeneres Show ended in 2022, WTVF moved The Kelly Clarkson Show from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., and launched 9 a.m. news.

WTVF reporter Levi Ismail is finding new users with his "Nashville News" reports on TikTok, which have over 81,000 followers. "He's really building a nice following there," said Plantinga.

Plantinga got her start at WTVF as an unpaid intern in 1988, and never left. "I've worked here every day of my adult life," she said.

#### **Battling the Beast**

Nashville climbed from DMA No. 30 to 27 in the past year. Rogers said WKRN's growth comes from the new residents, drawn to its colorful, bright look, as well as the rich context the station provides in its news stories. "We spend a lot of time on story development," said Rogers, a news director in Memphis and Huntsville, Alabama, before becoming general manager. "That sets us apart."

WKRN premiered lifestyle show Local on 2 in September. It's on 2-3 p.m. weekdays. "For Nashville, it makes a lot of sense," said Rogers. "The music, the bars, the bachelorette parties, the restaurants — all these things lend themselves to a show like this."

Gray Television "has poured a lot of money into the station" since it acquired WSMV from Meredith, Hardin said. That means both technology and staffers; Hardin said headcount is up 10%-15% since the acquisition closed in late 2021.

WSMV has zero syndicated shows. In September, the station expanded both an 11 a.m. and 12 p.m. weekday newscast to an hour. A 3 p.m. newscast took the place of People (The TV Show!).

"Gray has really gotten behind this station," said Hardin, who also oversees stations in Bowling Green, Kentucky, and Evansville, Indiana.

WTNX bills itself as Telemundo Tennessee, also serving Hispanic viewers in Memphis and Knoxville. The station does a statewide 5 p.m. newscast, and may add more news in 2024.

Univision station WLLC has 5 and 10 p.m. weekday news. Jim Baumann, acting general manager, said a "major upgrade" is coming to the station — not just gear, but a new GM and a new news director.

The station offers "Metro Minute" news briefs to keep viewers informed. "We definitely consider ourselves to be public-service oriented," Baumann said.

#### **How Nashville TV Stands Out**

Nashville is a unique TV market in that all of the general managers are women. The station chiefs use the word "supportive" to describe the vibe between them. "We all know each other and work well together, if the need arises," Rogers said.

Plantinga called it a friendly relationship amidst the general managers. "It's very, very competitive, but there's mutual respect," she said.

As befits a growing market, the Nashville economy is booming. Besides being the country music capital of the world, Nashville is home base for Bridgestone Americas and Nissan North America, among other corporations. Vanderbilt University is a Nashville draw, too.

Buildings keep going up around town, providing new places for all the fresh arrivals to live and work. "I think the state bird should be the crane," said Baumann. "Nashville is growing by leaps and bounds."

The general managers describe Nashville as a big small town — plenty of stuff going on, but a very good chance you'll run into a friend

> when you check out a concert, a restaurant, a Titans game. "There's the feel of a small town," Plantinga said, "but there's also an incredible amount of things to offer." •

> > Bob Mueller, Hayley Wielgus and Danielle Breezy deliver the news at WKRN, known as News 2.



# OPRAH STOPS BY WTVF TO CHRISTEN CONFERENCE ROOM

OPRAH WINFREY visited WTVF May 5, when the station dedicated a conference room to the TV icon who got her start there decades ago. Winfrey began at the station (then WLAC) around 1972, when she was a teenager studying at Tennessee State University. She was in Nashville to do the commencement speech at Tennessee State.

Winfrey spent around two hours at WTVF. "The interest in others, the curiosity, the compassion – you see it on TV, but one-onone, she has every bit of that," Lyn Plantinga, WTVF VP and general manager, said.

The Winfrey is the largest of WTVF's four conference rooms. Others are named for Nashville-reared women's suffrage activist Anne Dallas Dudley, for architect Earl Swensson, who designed the WTVF building, and for Jimi Hendrix, who played guitar on the WTVF show *Night Train* in 1965, in the backup band for an act called Buddy & Stacey when he was a soldier stationed at Fort Campbell.

Plantinga called Winfrey "the perfect person" to be honored at NewsChannel 5. "She makes an impact and leads with her compassion for others," she said, "and that's absolutely the mission of NewsChannel 5 as well." – MM

49

WTVF

# Best of Show Awards 2023: Meet the Winners

Annual awards recognize innovation and excellence in Media & Entertainment technology

+C and Next TV have named the winners for the Best of Show Awards for this year's NAB Show in Las Vegas. A panel of industry experts judged these exhibited products on the criteria of innovation, feature set, cost efficiency and performance in serving the industry. Winners were chosen from companies that exhibited at the 2023 NAB Show and submitted nominations.

#### Backlight Wildmoka Digital Media Platform wildmoka.com

Wildmoka's Digital Media Platform allows leading sports broadcasters and rightsholders to create and distribute unlimited amounts of content such as near-live clips, highlight reels, and live streams across web, mobile, OTT, and social networks (including Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and TikTok). It enables content creation and distribution from any source to any destination, in any format, at speed and scale. The cloud-native platform offers a set of easy-to-use, web-based tools for fast and efficient creation and repurposing of near-

live clips, highlight reels and live streams. It is ideal for working with live sports and breaking news content that has a higher value now than it will five minutes later.



#### Homatics and THX Ltd.

Homatics X THX Home Click Smart-Home Theater Speaker System thx.com/blog/thx-homatics-sei-roboticsspeakers

The Homatics X THX Home Click Smart-Home Theater instantly turns your TV into a cinematic experience that is "tuned by THX." Users will access



clear images with Dolby Vision and immersive panoramic surround sound through the powerful Dolby Atmos 5.1.4 channels surround sound AI (Artificial Intelligence) enhancement technology. The easy-to-use design is plug-in and play through seamless wireless connections so users can enjoy theater-quality entertainment in a snap, all through voice or RCU control. Additionally, the Homatics' Humming EQ feature adds to a personalized audio-visual experience that is truly one of a kind.

#### Matrox Video

Matrox Origin video.matrox.com/en/products/ broadcast-media/origin-series

matrox

aws

Tier-1 live production in the cloud requires frameaccurate, deterministic, low-latency, redundant and responsive interconnected systems at large scale. So far, there have been no cloud solutions that satisfy those requirements without compromising quality, latency and reliability. Instead of simply shifting on-premises workflows to the cloud — thereby giving up some quality and latency — Matrox ORIGIN tackles the problem at the infrastructure level. This disruptive technology is a software-only, vendorneutral, asynchronous framework that runs on IT infrastructure. It can achieve highly scalable, responsive, low-latency, easy-to-control and frame-accurate broadcast media facilities for both on-premises and cloud deployments.

#### Amazon Web Services (AWS)

AWS Studio in the Cloud aws.amazon.com/getting-started/ hands-on/studio-in-the-cloud

The AWS Studio-in-the-Cloud solution includes media applications running on virtual machines for creative production workflows. The pipeline can run at 12 bits with color-accurate monitoring. Content providers can employ various creative applications and partner solutions. The cloud is already widely used for storage of media files, file transfers, lightweight proxy editorial, and for large compute jobs. However, AWS is filling gaps to create more effective, efficient cloud-based workflows. With new cloud-enabled tools, open APIs and an expanded ISV partner ecosystem, a holistic production workflow with shared storage is now a reality.

#### **Cobalt Digital**

SafeLink-8TS-VM (Virtual Machine) cobaltdigital.com/products/4966/ safelink-gateway

The Cobalt Reliable Internet Stream Transport (RIST) product line includes the SafeLink Gateway, an openGear card that can provide eight channels of conversion between RIST and plain UDP/RTP. SafeLink is compression-agnostic and can protect any type of transport stream. Each input channel can support independent/unrelated primary/backup streams, or SMPTE ST 2022-7 seamless switching or bonding. The Safe-Link Gateway is designed to provide RIST functionality to legacy devices.

#### **Backlight**

Zype Playout zype.com/product/playout



quickplay

Zype Playout enables content owners to transform live and on-demand video into

digital linear channels for millions of viewers. Built for broadcasters. digital publishers, consumer brands and developers, Zype Playout's intuitive tools make operating playout a breeze. The user-friendly interface features drag-and-drop scheduling, dynamic ad-break setup and insertion capabilities, and flexible distribution to FAST or owned-and-operated destinations.

#### **Quickplay and VionLabs**

Quickplay-VionLabs Preview Clips vionlabs.com/visual-discovery

Quickplay and VionLabs are bringing together Quickplay's cloudnative CMS and VionLabs's AINAR Visual Discovery solution to create AI Automated Thumbnails and Preview Clips. AI-derived metadata for content moods, micro-genres, story descriptors, keywords and more are leveraged by advanced personalization algorithms from Quickplay to find all the main characters through presence and importance to story, pinpoint exactly where in the frame to feature main characters for thumbnails and find the best scenes using energy and emotion tracking across the story arc.

#### QUANTEEC QUANTEEC

quanteec.com

QUANTEEC is a French startup offering the streaming sector an innovative technology capable of solving

video-streaming scaling issues, while enabling users to significantly save costs and reduce their energy footprint. The QUANTEEC motto

Zixi Software Defined Video Platform 5G zixi.com/zixi-for-5g-delivery



Zixi is the architect of the Software-Defined Video Platform (SDVP), the industry's most complete live IP video-workflow solution. Zixi has integrated support for managing 4K video streams on 5G networks within multi-access edge compute (MEC) infrastructure. 5G networks and MEC infrastructure unlock exciting new opportunities, including ultra-low latency live remote production, satellite rationalization for distribution and new fan experiences both in and outside the venue.

#### Evertz

**REFLEKTOR** Reflektor On-Premise & Cloud

Signal Processor evertz.com/resources/press/NAB2023%20100%20 Celebrations.pdf

Reflektor, Evertz's SaaS IP distribution platform, is ideal for providers of live/linear services, cloud applications or OTT. Reflektor is a microservice-based signal processor for onboarding and normalizing video transport streams, transcoding and replication. It addresses the challenges of today's cloud workflows: handling multiple transport formats and codecs while delivering incoming feeds to different software instances.

#### **Vizrt Group** Viz Vectar Plus viz-vectar-plus

vizrt.com/products/



Viz Vectar Plus, a software-based live

production system, enables broadcast and media organizations to quickly adopt an IT- and IP-friendly solution as a software plan, it's a system that can be deployed in different ways depending on organizational needs. Viz Vectar Plus provides multisource live video mixing of up 44 source channels, each supporting key and fill and multidestination delivery including eight high-definition mix outputs over internet protocol.

is "more with less," and to achieve that, the technology relies on three core fundamental optimization principles: performance, costs savings

> and energy reduction. Its Web3-inspired technology shifts the current generalized paradigm and turns each single viewer into a "smart and virtuous restreamer." In doing so, it allows the audience to

scale up almost infinitely without the need to rely on deployment of additional servers.

QUANTEEC

#### FATES & FORTUNES

# People

### Notable executives on the move



**ABC NEWS** 

**ABC News promoted** Mary Bruce to chief White House correspondent, succeeding Cecilia Vega who departed for CBS News and 60 Minutes. The ABC News veteran had served as senior White House correspondent since 2021, and had covered Congress and President Joe Biden's 2020 campaign.



#### AMC NETWORKS

Kim Granito was elevated to head of marketing at AMC Networks, succeeding president, marketing Len Fogge, who is retiring. Granito had been AMC Networks's executive VP. integrated marketing and head of its branded entertainment unit, The Content Room.



#### **BLUEPEAK**

Kevin Schenck has joined Bluepeak as VP of market expansion. He comes from Cox Communications. where he was assistant VP of commercial and wireless construction program management and has worked for AT&T. Bechtel. Black & Veatch and Nortel Networks.



#### **ALLEN MEDIA** GROUP

Princell Hair has joined Allen Media Group as president, Allen Media Broadcasting, consisting of 27 network-affiliated TV stations in 21 markets. Most recently president of Black News Channel, he previously worked at NBC Sports Boston and NBC Sports Group.



#### BLUEPEAK

Bluepeak has also tapped Sean Murray as VP of residential sales. A 28-year telecommunications veteran, he was most recently executive VP of sales at Windstream Communications and has served in executive roles at Deltacom. Birch Telecom and EarthLink.



#### **ATELIERE**

Heather Wells has ioined Ateliere Creative Technologies as senior VP of global customer support. The 20-year digital video supply chain veteran has worked with Disney Plus. Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, StarzPlay, Redbox and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.



#### COMCAST

Comcast tapped Chris Smith as senior VP of its Greater Chicago Region, comprising Central and Northern Illinois. Northwest Indiana and Southwest Michigan. The 20-year telecom veteran was most recently the region's VP of sales and marketing.



#### ATELIERE

Ateliere Creative Technologies also tapped Sonny Sandel as senior VP of global professional services. He had been a senior director at Cognizant, leading a team of more than 200 technology consultants implementing enterprise content management systems.



#### COMCAST

Sophia Marshall was promoted to senior VP of communications for Comcast's Atlanta-based Central Division. Formerly VP. she will continue to drive internal and external communications strategy for the division of 21,000 employees in 12 states.



Breezeline.

BCAP

The Broadband

**Cable Association** 

of Pennsylvania has

re-elected J. Francis

Bradley as chairman.

A member of the cable

board of directors since

1990, he works as director

of government affairs at

trade organization's

#### **FATES & FORTUNES**



#### COMMON SENSE NETWORKS

Common Sense Networks has named Farhad Fozounmayeh to the newly created post of sales director, West. The 25-year ad-sales veteran was most recently sales director at The Guardian and has worked for brands such as Time, DraftKings and CNBC.



DISNEY

GRAY

**Gray Television has** 

named Eric Walters

as general manager

of KMVT-KSVT Twin

Falls, Idaho, its CBS-Fox

duopoly in that market.

succeeding the retiring

Kathy Silk. He was news

director of WDBJ-WZBJ

effective June 12 and

Roanoke, Virginia.

The Walt Disney Co. has named **Asad Ayaz** as its chief brand officer, a new post. Ayaz, who had been president of marketing at The Walt Disney Studios since 2018, is responsible for stewarding the Disney brand globally across company touchpoints and consumer experiences.



FOX

Diana Ruiz has joined Fox Entertainment as executive VP, experiences and design, leading the company's global events team and working crossfunctionally across all Fox businesses. She comes from Amazon Ads, where she was global head of strategic events.



#### MEMNON

Global media preservation and migration services provider Memnon has named **Simon Clark as** business development manager, Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA), based in the U.K. He most recently was VP, marketing and business development at Prasad Corp.



#### GRAHAM MEDIA GROUP

Jane Marshall was elevated to VP, co-general counsel at Graham Media Holdings, providing counsel on such issues as employment, defamation, privacy, media and intellectual property law, litigation and regulatory matters. Marshall had been deputy general counsel.



#### SCRIPPS

The E.W. Scripps Co. named **Dean Littleton** as senior VP of local media, responsible for directing operations at the company's television stations. He had been VP and general manager of Scripps-owned ABC affiliate KMGH Denver since 2017.

# BRIEFLY

Other industry execs making moves

Charter Communications has elevated Paul Woelk to senior VP, business planning for cable operations. He had been group VP, cable operations business planning. .. Ashlee Conner joined Common Sense Networks in the new post of Sales Director, East. She had been East Coast director of ad sales at Future Today. ... E.W. Scripps tapped Brian Joyce as VP and general manager of KMGH Denver. He was VP and general manager at KPAX in Missoula, Montana. ... **Rick McLaughlin** was named news director at Tegna-owned WBNS Columbus. Ohio. He had been news director at WAPT in Jackson, Mississippi. ... Satellite firm Viasat named K. Guru Gowrappan as president. He had been CEO of Verizon Media Group, responsible for brands such as Yahoo, HuffPost and TechCrunch. ... Streaming and OTT tech provider ViewLift added Jeff Douglas as chief customer officer. He had been senior product manager at Amazon Prime Video.



#### GRAHAM MEDIA GROUP

Graham Media Group tapped **Aaron King** as VP and general manager of Social News Desk, its social-media management platform for news organizations. He had been SND's chief technology officer since 2015.

#### FREEZE FRAME: 31ST ANNUAL B+C HALL OF FAME



On stage at the Ziegfeld Ballroom May 3 for the 31st Annual B+C Hall of Fame (I. to r.): Kent Gibbons, content director, *B+C*, *Multichannel News* and *NextTV*; Carmel King, MD, B2B Tech & Entertainment, Future; Bill McGorry, chair, B+C Hall of Fame; honorees Caroline Beasley, Matt Bond, Frank Comerford, Jim Nantz, Ray Hopkins, Rachael Ray and Wonya Lucas; Kristin Dolan, CEO, AMC Networks; Cathy Thompson, wife of the late Jim Thompson; and honorees Soledad O'Brien and Ray Cole.



Honorees Rachael Ray and Al Roker share a moment at the opening reception.





(From I.): Jordan Wertlieb, EVP and chief operating officer, Hearst; Bob Bakish, CEO, Paramount Global; honoree Ray Hopkins, president, U.S. Networks Distribution, Paramount Global; and Bill McGorry, chairman, B+C Hall of Fame.

Honoree Soledad O'Brien is interviewed on the red carpet.



Lifetime Achievement Award winner Jim Nantz on the red carpet with CBS Sports chairman Sean McManus.

#### FREEZE FRAME: WONDER WOMEN OF NEW YORK



The 2023 class of *Multichannel News* Wonder Women of New York was honored at a March 23 New York luncheon (From I.): Event host Natasha Verma; Wonder Women honorees Samira Bakhtiar and Michelle Strong; Zillah Byng-Thorne, former CEO, Future PLC; honorees Kate O'Brien, Annie Howell, Margaret Brennan, Sharon Peters, Rori Peters, Pola Changnon, Melody Smalls, Suzanne Sullivan, Marnie Black, Monica Williams and Amy Campbell; Shenan Reed, representing Empowerment Award winner L'Oreal USA; honoree Karen Barroeta; Carmel King, managing director, B2B Tech & Entertainment, Future; and event co-hosts Kaitlan Collins and Kimberly A. Martin.



Event co-host Kaitlan Collins (I.), anchor of CNN This Morning and chief correspondent, CNN, with former White House colleague and 2023 Woman of Influence Margaret Brennan, Face the Nation moderator and chief foreign affairs correspondent, CBS News.



Michelle Strong (I.), SVP, distribution, A+E Networks and Rori Peters, SVP, content distribution & marketing, TV One and Cleo TV.



Co-host Natasha Verma (l.), weekday evening anchor at WNYW New York, with honoree Suzanne Sullivan, EVP, ad sales, Fox Entertainment.



Event co-host Kimberley A. Martin (I.), NFL reporter at ESPN, with Samira Bakhtiar, director, Global Media & Entertainment, Amazon Web Services.

#### DATA MINE

# Ad Meter

Who's spending what where

## YEAR-TO-DATE TV ADVERTISING RECAP

The most-seen brands and industries on TV, and more



#### **Impressions Spotlight**

Highlighted below are looks at top programs and networks ranked by household TV ad impressions delivered January 1 through May 7

Total household TV ad impressions: **2.28 trillion** (+1.29% YoY)

Big Four (ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC) primetime TV ad impressions: **170 billion** (+ 2.04% YoY)

Key takeaway: iSpot's 2023 year-to-date recap showcases the dominance of live programming — specifically sports and news — when it comes to reaching large, engaged audiences. NBA games in particular are seeing a surge year-overyear, with a 128.89% increase in ad airings and a 27.24% impressions increase compared to the same period in 2022. Good Morning America and Today have also seen year-over-year airing and impression increases.

#### TOP 5 PROGRAMS, JAN. 1 - MAY 7, 2023

By share of household TV ad impressions – new program airings only

1. NFL Share of impressions: 4.73%

2. NBA Share of impressions: 4.61% Top advertiser: State Farm (2.25%)

**3. Men's College** Basketball Share of impressions: 4.05% Top advertiser: AT&T Wireless (5.22%)

4. Good Morning America Share of impressions: 2.01% Top advertiser: CarMax (1.69%)

5. Today TODAY Share of impressions: 1.63% Top advertiser: Citi Credit Card (3.23%)

### TOP ADVERTISERS

By share of household TV ad impressions (Jan. 1 - May 7, 2023)

### PROGRESSIVE

Share of impressions: 0.97% Top network: CBS (10.02%) Top program: NFL (4.51%)

### 2 🤣 Domino's

Share of impressions: 0.75% Top network: Ion (6.63%) Top program: Law & Order: Special Victims Unit (3.31%)

### Liberty Mutual.

Share of impressions: 0.54% Top network: Fox News (8.78%)

Top program: NBC Nightly News (3.03%)

3



Share of impressions: 0.48% Top network: CBS (11.05%) Top program: NFL (11.76%)



Share of impressions: 0.46% Top network: Fox (6.82%) Top program: NFL (5.62%)

# MOST-SEEN

By share of household TV ad impressions (Jan. 1 - May 7, 2023)

1) Quick Service Restaurants (4.35%)
2) Automakers (3.78%)
3) Auto & General Insurance (2.98%)
4) Wireless Services (2.18%)
4) Streaming Services (2.18%)
6) Vitamins & Supplements (1.99%)
7) Skin & Foot Care (1.94%)
8) OTC: Allergies, Cold & Flu (1.59%)
9) Department Stores (1.52%)
10) Pizza (1.49%)

### TOP NETWORKS

By share of household TV ad impressions – new program airings only (Jan. 1 - May 7, 2023)

1) CBS (15.31%)
2) ABC (13.52%)
3) NBC (10.16%)
4) Fox News (8.87%)
5) ESPN (6.12%)
6) Fox (4.86%)
7) CNN (4.58%)
8) Univision (4.23%)
9) MSNBC (3.84%)
10) TNT (2.75%



WR

# **Kathryn Busby** President of Original Programming, Starz Studio veteran keeps busy riding herd over a growing roster of diverse originals

athryn Busby has been busy constructing Starz's original programming lineup since coming

on board from Sony's TriStar Television in 2021.

Busby has overseen the continued expansion of the network's successful Power franchise and has presided over shows like comedy series Run the World, now in its second season, and the return earlier this year of comedy series Party Down after a 13-year hiatus.

The former Gemstone Studios, New Line Cinema and Universal Television executive also green-lit Blood of My Blood, the first spinoff series for the network's fantasy drama Outlander.

Busby recently spoke to B+C Multichannel News senior content producer, programming R. Thomas Umstead about the Lionsgate-owned network's criteria for developing shows, its commitment to offering diverse stories and images on screen and her thoughts on the future of the industry. An edited transcript follows.

What characteristics do you look for when greenlighting a Starz original series? First and foremost, it's about the creative. We need to love the story and the specificity of voice, but also need to assess how it works within our slate at a particular moment. We want to make sure that the series will be both premium and populist, with iconic characters and a propulsive narrative. We consider if it's something we haven't seen on TV before, the producibility of it and our faith in the show creators.

How have long-running, successful franchises like Power and Outlander helped define the Starz brand for audiences? We are so fortunate to have those two incredible franchises on Starz that have passionate fans, amazing creative partners and characters and stories that continue to thrive and expand. While these shows may seem different from each other, they feature compelling characters that viewers become deeply invested in, they are female-leaning — although there is a lot more co-viewing than people realize — and offer diverse perspectives and stories we haven't seen before. Both the Outlander and Power universes have been vital Starz foundational blocks for other incredible series to build on, such as P-Valley, The Serpent Queen and BMF.

Starz has been very proactive in fostering diversity both in front of and behind the camera. How important is inclusion to you as part of Starz's overall programming strategy? It's truly an honor to work at a place that walks the walk when it comes to diversity and inclusion. We know this has been a talking point for many media companies, but at Starz it's gratifying to look at our team and see so many people of color who are incredible at the work they do and the perspective they bring to the company. In addition to being the right thing to do, it's a very smart

#### **BONUS** FIVE

What shows are you bingewatching? [Netflix's] Beef, [Prime Video's] Swarm; [HBO's] The Last of Us

Books on your nightstand? Wow, No Thank You by Samantha Irby, Happy-Go-Lucky by David Sedaris and A Farewell to Gabo and Mercedes by Rodrigo Garcia

Favorite TV show of all time? The Wire

Favorite podcast? This American Life

Bucket-list vacation spots? Cape Town, Marrakesh and Cinque Terre business decision to focus on underrepresented audiences (women and people of color) and we've changed television for the better because of that. We have many series in development that speak to our continuing commitment to diversity and inclusion.

How does Starz remain viable and successful in a crowded and shifting television distribution marketplace? The television landscape is constantly evolving and we've been nimble enough to navigate the shifting tides, for example with the Starz app and bundling opportunities. We are fortunate to have a unique foothold within the marketplace and will continue to bring series that serve and expand our subscriber base. We strive to be a place creators want to call home.

What projects can we expect to see in the near future? We previously announced several new series in development [including Blood of My Blood] so we are excited to see how that process goes and where things net out.



THE WICT NETWORK LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

# **CO-CREATE THE FUTURE**

■ ■ ○ ○
● WICTHQ
#LC2023

## SEPTEMBER 18-19, 2023

**New York Marriott Marguis** 



THE WICT NETWORK GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES THE TOP SPONSORS OF THE 2023 LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE







SILVER



The Own Disnep Company

GOLD



# WHERE THE ENTERTAINMENT AND TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY REUNITE

Register your interest at show.ibc.org

**IBC2023** 



BACK AT THE RAI AMSTERDAM | **15-18 SEPTEMBER 2023**