



Friday, December 18, 2009

Nickelodeon inks deal with Cymphonique

Her name is Cymphonique, and she could be Nickelodeon's next teen star. The cable channel has inked a substantial talent development deal with the 13-year-old actor/singer/dancer to develop series for her or add her to existing projects. Additionally, Sony Music, which has a partnership with Nickelodeon, has signed Cymphonique to a record deal. Under the pacts, Cymphonique could star in a comedy/musical or a straight comedy series. "She is extraordinarily talented for somebody so young," Nickelodeon's executive vp talent Paula Kaplan said. "She has great comedic timing, an amazing voice and is very self-assured." Additionally, "we have had long history with this family," she added. Cymphonique is the daughter of Percy Miller, aka Master P, and the sister of actor-rapper Romeo. Romeo, then billed as Lil' Romeo, was 9 when his father brought him to Nickelodeon. He headlined his own series on the channel for four seasons. Nickelodeon is entering the comedy/musical series space with two upcoming shows: "Victorious," toplined by "Zoey 101" co-star Victoria Justice, and "Big Time Rush," about a boy band, which launches in January. Cymphonique, who has appeared in an episode of Nickelodeon's "Just Jordan," was a finalist on Disney Radio's "N.B.T. (Next Big Thing)." She is repped by Fortitude.

Taylor Lautner spends time in 'Cancun'

Summit is staying in the Taylor Lautner game. As the days tick down to the town closing for the holidays, the company has picked up "Cancun," an action spec by Eric Champnella and Grant Thompson. The project is acting as starring vehicle for Lautner and is the first project from the newly established production shingle he shares with his dad, Dan Lautner. Dan Lautner is in discussion to produce the movie with Temple Hill's Wyck Godfrey and Marty Bowen, who forged a relationship with the actor whom they worked on Summit's "Twilight Sage: New Moon." The story follows an out-of-place college kid who travels with a girl to Cancun on a break. While there, the girl and her friends are taken hostage by a drug cartel and he is forced to save them. The story is designed to take advantage of Lautner's martial arts skills, which he showed off when he hosted "Saturday Night Live" this past weekend. Summit's president of production Erik Feig and director of development Gillian Bohrer will oversee the project for the studio. Champnella, repped by ICM, Mosaic and attorney Dave Feldman, co-wrote Disney's "Mr. 3000" and worked on Warners' DC Comics project "Metal Men." Thompson, also repped by ICM, is an actor-turned-writer; this is his first sale. Lautner is repped by WME and Management 360.

Major executive shake-up at Discovery Communications

John Ford is stepping down as president and GM of Discovery Channel as part of a major shake-up that will reorganize the company's suite of cable networks under different department heads. The maneuvering will cluster similarly targeted networks into new business units in an effort to streamline operations, with small groups of channels reporting to a single top executive. Longtime Discovery veteran Clark Bunting will take over Discovery Channel and Science Channel, which are considered complementary genres. Debbie Myers will continue as Science Channel GM. Bunting has previously served as general manager and developed the network's

top-rated shows such as "Deadliest Catch" and "Dirty Jobs." "[Bunting] is steeped in the channel's talent, resources and heritage," said Discovery Communications president and CEO David Zaslav in a statement. "I am confident that Clark's operational rigor and brand history will build on Discovery Channel's success and that he will develop additional new breakout content during the channel's 25th anniversary year." -- Planet Green's Laura Michalchyshyn will lead female-skewing networks Planet Green, FitTV and Discovery Health (during its transition to OWN). Michalchyshyn joined the network in February from the Sundance Channel.

Nancy O'Dell leaving 'Access Hollywood'

Nancy O'Dell says she is leaving "Access Hollywood." The entertainment reporter said Thursday she will wrap up her 13-year run on the NBC show this week. Publicist Annie Jeeves said O'Dell is pursuing a new opportunity but did not elaborate. O'Dell has been a reporter on "Access Hollywood" since the show began in 1996. She has also played a reporter on several TV shows and appeared as a contestant on "Dancing With the Stars." O'Dell said she will still host NBC's coverage of the Tournament of Roses parade on New Year's Day.

NBC Universal starts Comcast transition

Two transition teams will meet weekly starting in January, charged with guiding the creation of a revamped NBC Universal jointly owned by Comcast and GE. Heading what is known as the "operational transition team" is Salil Mehta, NBC Uni's president of business operations, strategy and development; the "administrative transition team" is led by Bob Victor, Comcast's senior vp strategic and financial planning. "I will be overseeing their efforts, along with Comcast's COO Steve Burke and CFO Mike Angelakis," NBC Uni CEO Jeff Zucker wrote in a letter to employees. Comcast's lead representative on the Mehta-led team is Comcast Programming Group CFO Joe Donnelly. "This team will focus on planning all aspects of how the two programming and digital groups will operate together after the deal closes," Zucker wrote. "We will look to Salil and his team to develop an overall schedule, identify programming and marketing opportunities, recommend organizational structures, etc." Jeff Shell, president of the Comcast Programming Group, and Jeff Gaspin, chairman of NBC Uni TV Entertainment, will be heavily involved.