

**"He'd say, 'the stars are there to guide us,
to inspire us, to remind us to believe in possibility.'
He'd take me out at night to dream."**

~Asha in Walt Disney Animation Studios' Wish

Walt Disney Animation Studios' all-new musical comedy *Wish* invites audiences to the magical kingdom of Rosas, where Asha, a sharp-witted idealist, makes a wish so powerful that it is answered by a cosmic force—a little ball of boundless energy called Star. Together, Asha and Star confront a most formidable foe—the ruler of Rosas, King Magnifico—to save her community and prove that when the will of one courageous human connects with the magic of the stars, wondrous things can happen.

Featuring the voices of Academy Award®-winning actress Ariana DeBose as Asha, Chris Pine as King Magnifico, and Alan Tudyk as Asha's pet goat Valentino, the epic animated musical *Wish* hits the big screen this November as the storied studio marks 100 years of moviemaking. Inspired by Walt Disney's magical, musical legacy, the movie features an original story and characters, with seven all-new songs penned by Grammy®-nominated singer/songwriter Julia Michaels and Grammy-winning producer/songwriter/musician Benjamin Rice. But perhaps this film's biggest nod to the Disney legacy is in the title itself: *Wish*.

Whether it's Geppetto looking up at the stars, wishing for his wooden Pinocchio to become a real boy; Tiana looking to the stars as she dreams of owning her own business; or Moana turning to the stars in her quest to save her island—so many of Disney's most beloved characters are defined by their dreams. *Wish* celebrates that kind of passion. "At the heart of our film is this: 'There is no greater power in the universe than someone with a true wish in their heart,'" says the film's writer/executive producer Jennifer Lee (*Frozen, Frozen 2*), who also serves as the studio's chief creative officer. "It really is a film about understanding that with great wishes often comes greater struggle. Hopefully, it's aspirational on how to persevere."

While the film pays homage to Disney's legacy, it is also a reflection of the present and future of the celebrated studio with its innovative visuals, the breadth of cultural inspirations, and its contemporary, engaging music. *Wish* is helmed by Chris Buck

(director, *Frozen, Frozen 2*) and Fawn Veerasunthorn (head of story, *Raya and the Last Dragon*)—a directing duo that reflects one of the cornerstones of Walt Disney Animation Studios: one generation collaborating with the next. Buck joined Disney as a hand-drawn animator under the tutelage of Eric Larson, one of the studio's famed Nine Old Men—Walt Disney's core group of animators. So, when the Oscar®-winning director began developing the idea, along with Lee, of a film that honored the storied 100-year history of Disney Animation, he was all in. "It was in my DNA," Buck said. "We wanted to make a film that embraced the legacy of what Walt created while making it relevant to today, which is what he would have done. He was always pushing the boundaries."

Veerasunthorn joined the studio in 2011 as a story artist—her first credit was as an artist for Buck and Lee's *Frozen*. She contributed to several hit films before serving as head of story for the Oscar-nominated *Raya and the Last Dragon*, coming to *Wish* with her own Disney-loving background and roots on the other side of the globe. "I grew up in Thailand watching Disney movies—seeing the wishing star throughout the Disney universe and wishing to be a part of it," says Veerasunthorn, leaning into the film's central theme.

According to Buck, the story explores what it means to make a wish. "When you make a wish and blow out the candles on your birthday cake, everyone says, 'Don't tell anyone!' But I think we should put our wishes out there—let people know. There are helpers out there who can point us in the right direction. In my own life, I always wanted to work at Disney, and I let that be known in high school. A friend's father worked at Disneyland and said, 'I can get you an interview at the studio; I know Eric Larson.' I got the interview, which led me to CalArts [founded by Walt Disney]. So, I say scream your wish out loud and let everybody know what it is you want."

Asha agrees, it seems, though she opts to sing her wish to the stars above. For the 17-year-old, wishes are everything—in fact, they're the foundation of her kingdom. "Asha loves Rosas," says Veerasunthorn. "She's grown up there—it's all she knows. And it is pretty magical. It's a place where dreams can literally and magically come true."

A fantastical island located off the Iberian Peninsula, Rosas is home to a tight-knit community led by King Magnifico. "People come from all around the world to give their wishes to this wonderful king who promises to keep their dreams safe," says Buck. "They don't have to worry about anything because he'll grant those wishes someday."

According to Veerasunthorn, once someone shares their wish with Magnifico, they forget all about it. "He believes that trying to pursue your dreams is a lot of work," she says. "It might keep you up at night. There's a lot of discipline and dedication involved, and a wish not fulfilled can cause pain. He wants to take that worry away."

Magnifico, however, isn't entirely altruistic. He not only enjoys his role in granting wishes—he relishes the control. He alone decides whose wish will be granted and whose won't. Says Veerasunthorn, "Asha discovers that any wishes that are too big or ambitious or remotely threatening to Magnifico will not be granted. That means that

there's a really big portion of people in Rosas that will never see their dreams come true, and the saddest part is that they don't even know what they're missing. When Asha learns this harsh truth about Magnifico and everyone's wishes, she can't just sit around and do nothing. That's when she makes her wish upon a star."

Asha's extraordinary wish—delivered in song—inadvertently summons one single star known simply as Star. Says Buck, "It is this ball of energy that embodies hope, light, optimism, creativity and imagination—everything that Walt Disney represents to us here at the studio."

Producer Peter Del Vecho points out that, unlike King Magnifico, Asha's new friend does not grant wishes—at least not in the way one might think. "Star doesn't have all the answers," Del Vecho says. "It represents possibility and joy. It's not a character that comes down and solves things but rather inspires Asha to think differently."

Lee concurs. "Star represents the things that keep you going through hard times," she says. "Those things don't do the work for you. But that little bit of magic goes a long way. Star's there to remind Asha not to give up, and to help her out in a way that holding onto hope helps. Possibility leads you to imagine the answer."

Adds Veerasunthorn, "To me, Star is like her intuition. It's pure energy—the personification of her wish coming down to earth to push her out of her comfort zone. I believe that Star is in each of us."

The character promises to win many hearts. Says Lee, "Star is new to Earth, so there's a playfulness, a curiosity and mischief with no malice. It's this beautiful spirt that sees the good in things."

ORIGIN STORY

The idea for *Wish* began to take shape in 2018 shortly after Lee was named chief creative officer of the studio. "I mentioned it to Chris Buck while we were working *Frozen 2*—we were still pretty deep in story and production," says Lee. "And we couldn't help ourselves. Within a few days, he had images from every movie our studio has made on boards in the hallway, just to start thinking."

The team viewed the studio's productions throughout history with a special lens. Says Del Vecho, "The world events that were happening ranged from elation, like the landing on the moon, to devastation, with natural disasters and war," he says. "Through it all was the constant that Disney movies offered hope and inspiration. When you realise that these movies have survived through every climate was quite exciting."

Producer Juan Pablo Reyes Lancaster Jones was on the studio's creative development team in 2018, taking part in the blue-sky sessions with a group of directors and writers. "We did a ton of research on our own library of films and on Walt Disney himself, asking who he was, what inspired him, what kind of leader he was. We even looked into his

childhood on the farm in Marceline, Missouri. Some stories suggest baby animals on the farm occasionally were dressed up, which inspired our pyjama-wearing goat, Valentino."

At these early sessions, filmmakers also discussed the return of the classic Disney villain. "There are a few categories of villains," says Buck. "There are ones that want to gain power—like Jafar or Ursula. There are villains who want to retain the power they have—like Maleficent. We wanted that kind of villain—one the audience would recognise as a villain from early on, someone audiences would love to hate, someone like Magnifico."

A WHOLE NEW LOOK

Disney Animation's long-celebrated shorts program has been a place of innovation and experimentation for technologists, artists and filmmakers. Such innovation includes the creation of the CG/2D drawing system behind films like the Oscar®-winning shorts *Paperman* (2012) and *Feast* (2014). That system, called Meander, received an Academy Scientific & Technical Award in 2017. The efforts to combine the best of hand-drawn appeal and CG innovation evolved over the years—as evidenced in the acclaimed 2021 watercolor CG short *Far from the Tree*. These achievements and years of work within the walls of Disney Animation ultimately led to the unique, appealing watercolor look of *Wish*.

The innovative visual style, brought to life through CG, evokes watercolor paintings that inspired the studios' earliest films like 1937's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and 1940's *Pinocchio*. "I thought about those two films and their unique visual style," says production designer Michael Giaimo, who served in this same role for both *Frozen* films. "It's like a storybook opened up. We wondered why Walt Disney leaned into that particular style. Artists like Gustav Tenggren and Kay Nielsen, among others, really set the tone for those films.

"Tenggren was a Swedish-born illustrator who worked at the studio in those early days," continues Giaimo. "We found that there were several artists before him that established what one might call late 19th-century- and early 20th-century-storybook style. It was very popular and would be something Walt Disney was familiar with as a young boy. It made sense for this legacy picture to lean into this storybook style with a watercolor approach—watercolor with line work both on the characters and environment. It's a very distinctive look and highly decorative with a lot of detail on costuming, vegetation and architecture. It's a very romantic look."

David Womersley, production designer, who is reteamed with Giaimo and Lisa Keene, points to Disney's 1959 classic tale, *Sleeping Beauty*, as a major source of inspiration in addition to *Snow White* and *Pinocchio*. "We loved Eyvind Earle's design sense on *Sleeping Beauty* and the atmospheric feel that the team achieved," says Womersley, who trained as an illustrator. "Those were our touchstones. Then we went a little deeper and looked at the inspirations of the people who did those films might have had—among them were Tenggren and Nielsen, of course, and perhaps people like Edmund Dulac and Arthur Rackham, who were classic illustrators I always loved."

Production designer Lisa Keane, whose own stunning painted-background work at the studio began in the late 1980s with films like *The Little Mermaid*, was deeply inspired by these artists whose work informed the ultimate look for *Wish*. “There’s a watercolor look and a paper texture—it’s a moving illustration,” Keane says. “We’ve long had the ability to do watercolor backgrounds, but we couldn’t quite achieve the same look on the character. We are now able to marry all those ideas in CG because of the tools that have been developed. It was exciting to watch it all come together.”

CUE THE MUSIC

At the heart of *Wish*—like so many of the Disney features that came before it—is the music. “So many of our beloved films are musicals,” Del Vecho says. “When you think of Disney, you think of a range of emotions. You want to feel like you’ve been on a rollercoaster and part of that emotion comes from music. These ultimately classic songs evoke deeper levels of emotion than we could convey with dialogue alone.”

When considering the songs and the songwriter for *Wish*, the filmmakers wanted to find someone who could deliver both a timeless and contemporary sound. Says Lee, “Julia Michaels is an extraordinary talent, and Julia, along with her writing partner Benjamin Rice, have created original songs that inspired all of us working on the film. Her collaborative process was so special, really sitting down with us and talking about the motivations of our characters.”

According to director Chris Buck, Michaels’ first challenge was to write a song that would showcase the moment Asha makes her wish on behalf of the people in the kingdom. “Julia came back with this incredible demo that had exactly what we’d been talking about,” he says. “It had this feeling of something classic but fresh because she brought her own contemporary ideas to it.”

That song would become “This Wish,” a song Asha sings when she is at her lowest and turns to the stars. Adds Buck, “Julia loves Disney films and grew up on them. She still has that passion for them. Julia and Ben [Rice] were able to infuse all of that passion into the songs for this film.” Michaels, who has written songs for Dua Lipa, P!nk and Selena Gomez, among others, and Rice have written seven original songs for the film.

Composer Dave Metzger was tapped to create a memorable score for the film. “He’s incredibly talented—we worked with him as the musical arranger on both *Frozen* features—and he’s a true pleasure to work with,” Del Vecho says.

Written by Jennifer Lee and Allison Moore, the film also features the voices of Angelique Cabral, Victor Garber, Natasha Rothwell, Jennifer Kumiyama, Harvey Guillén, Niko Vargas, Evan Peters, Ramy Youssef, Jon Rudnitsky and Della Saba. Walt Disney Animation Studios’ 62nd feature film opens only in cinemas on Nov. 24, 2023.

FULL OF CHARACTER
Who’s Who in *Wish*

Wish is set in the fictional kingdom of Rosas—its promise of wishes coming true has inspired people from around the world to call it home. Says director Fawn Veerasunthorn, “Rosas is an island at the southern tip of the Iberian Peninsula—it would logically have North African and Southern European influences. We also think that folks who traveled along the Silk Road might end up there.”

Adds director Chris Buck, “We were deeply inspired by influences from all over the world. For us, that affected everything from characters to costumes—including headwear and patterns—to architecture. It was pretty incredible.”

According to Veerasunthorn, filmmakers called on experts to ensure their references conveyed a feeling of authenticity. “We worked with cultural consultants on the clothing—what the fashion of the time might be, and we also worked with UCLA socio-cultural historical anthropologist, Professor Aomar Boum, to ensure the crossing of cultural influences that took place in the region during the Middle Ages was well represented.”

Led by 17-year-old Asha, the lineup of characters—from heroines and villains, to their family and friends, to a talking baby goat who, yes, wears pyjamas—required a talented and engaging cast. According to producer Peter Del Vecho, cast members brought to the table unique points of view and a lot of talent. “Everything starts with a story,” he says. “And obviously being a musical, it was important not only to get great actors but actors who could also perform and sing. We go through a pretty extensive casting process and when you land on someone that you feel is bringing that character to life, you can feel it in the room.”

Casting director Grace Kim says the studio’s 100-year milestone figured into their criteria. “When first discussing this cast, we wanted to honour the legacy while not feeling like we were moving backwards in time,” she says. “We wanted to bring the legacy into the future and cast people and voices that felt timeless.”

ASHA is a sharp-witted idealist who treasures her family and community. As one of the island’s greeters, Asha’s is among the first faces people see when arriving in Rosas filled with hopes and dreams. Says Buck, “Asha is energetic—an enthusiastic member of her community who proudly shows off this incredible place where she’s grown up. She’s a believer. She’s driven to do what is right for Rosas, which really kicks in when she learns the king’s real plans for most of the wishes in his possession.”

Asha’s discovery puts her at odds with the charismatic king. “We meet Asha when she is completely accepting of the world she believes she lives in,” says writer/executive producer Jennifer Lee. “But what happens to you when you discover a truth that rocks your whole world? Do you ignore it? Do you try to live with it? Or do you recognize the responsibility you have to try to help your community? We get to watch her make that choice. We get to see her grow into the leader she probably never knew she was.”

Overwhelmed with an innate need to help her neighbours and friends and family, Asha turns to the sky and the stars. Her wish is so powerful, it summons an actual star from the sky.

Ariana DeBose lends her voice to Asha. “We’re very fortunate to have Ariana playing our lead character,” says Del Vecho. “She’d just been nominated for an Oscar for *West Side Story* at the time we were casting for Asha—she later won best supporting actress—so our timing was perfect. Ariana’s a huge fan of Disney and understood how we saw Asha as a contemporary heroine. Ariana’s strength and personality really helped shape the character.”

Veerasunthorn wholeheartedly agrees. “Ariana totally brings that energy of Asha,” she says. “We were inspired by her performance from the first recording, thinking ‘Oh my goodness, this is even more Asha than we thought!’ We started incorporating a lot of physicality into Asha’s voice—she wears her heart on her sleeve. Ariana is very sincere in a fun way. She's funny, too. We put all of that into the character.”

KING MAGNIFICO is the most powerful person in the kingdom of Rosas, where wishes really do come true. People come from everywhere to give their wishes to Magnifico, a charming and confident king who promises to grant their deepest desires—someday. Only he can decide which wishes will come true and when. According to writer Allison Moore, the king’s motivation is not exactly honourable. “Magnifico seems to think wishes are just ideas. But they are a part of your heart—the very best part of your heart! Yet he’s holding them inside these wish bubbles—hundreds of them—and most will remain there forever because that’s how he controls the kingdom—by giving false hope.”

According to producer Juan Pablo Reyes Lancaster Jones, casting the character called for a special combination. “Magnifico has that personality that makes people trust him, and the actor chosen to play him needed to deliver on the complexity of being both charming and ultimately a complex villain,” he says. “The moment Chris Pine came up as a possibility, the moment everyone heard his voice—it just matched that image and the complexity of the role.”

Adds Lee, “Chris is obviously charismatic, and we needed that. He’s also brilliant and so smart—Magnifico had to be brilliant. Chris holds that character accountable. He brought that truth into the character, and it comes through with such authenticity. He can sing, too—he has such fantastic songs. He’s just the perfect storm.”

STAR is a cosmic force—a little ball of boundless energy that inspires people to pursue their deepest wishes. According to director Chris Buck, the character went through many iterations before filmmakers found the perfect representation. “We wanted to convey the energy and hope and light in the simplest and purest way,” he says. “We decided that Star shouldn’t talk—it’s so much more effective as a pantomime character. This is something that Disney has done so well throughout its history. Audiences fall in

love with these visual characters—they can give them their own voice. We all need a little Star in our life."

Adds director Fawn Veerasunthorn, "For me personally, Star is like your inner voice. If you try to suppress that pure energy out of fear, Star is the personification of that drive that drags you along, stares you in the face and pushes you to do the thing you want to do."

VALENTINO is a confident and opinionated goat who follows Asha wherever she goes. The adorable pyjama-wearing little guy could teach humans a thing or two about perseverance—that is, once Star magically gives him the power of speech. "He carries a big theme in this movie," says Veerasunthorn. "He loves to climb but he's not very good at it—he keeps falling down. But he refuses to be discouraged, saying, 'With each fall I learn. I just keep going.'"

Disney Animation's good luck charm Alan Tudyk provides the voice of Valentino—a voice decidedly different than one might expect of a pyjama-clad baby animal. "He's brilliant," says Buck. "We'll give him a line and maybe an alt or two and he'll give us things we never thought of—Valentino's low voice was unexpected to say the least."

Adds casting director Grace Kim, "Alan is always on our minds! He can do it all so we're very lucky that he's in our world!"

QUEEN AMAYA is the wife and sounding board of King Magnifico. The kind and confident queen champions Asha in her pursuit of the one of the most coveted roles in the kingdom: the King's apprentice. She is loving and devoted to her husband, but she's not afraid to share her opinion with the ruler of Rosas. Filmmakers saw Amaya and Magnifico as a power couple—both in personality and appearance. "We looked at real-life power couples—people who are total winners," says Bill Schwab, art director, characters. "Amaya and Magnifico look great together. They're aspirational—larger than life. They command a room."

Angelique Cabral lends her voice to Queen Amaya. "She has a comedy background and such warmth to her voice," says Kim. "When we cut Angelique's voice with Chris Pine's, everyone felt they paired so well together."

SABINO is Asha's 100-year-old grandfather. He is kind and loving and Asha adores him. "Once a month, one lucky person in Rosas gets their wish granted," says head of story Mark Kennedy. "At 100, Sabino is still waiting. Patiently. But Asha isn't as patient. She really wants Magnifico to grant Sabino's wish. That's one thing about Disney heroines—they tend to care a lot about other people and Asha is no exception."

Victor Garber provides Sabino's voice. "We want audiences to root for Sabino to get his wish—finally!" says director Chris Buck. "Victor Garber does that from the moment we meet Sabino. He lends his own likability and charm to the character and makes the sweet relationship between Asha and her grandfather really shine."

SAKINA is Asha's loving and supportive mom. She recognises and celebrates her daughter's passion—but, like all mothers, she still worries about her only child, especially as Asha begins to question their king's motives. Head of story Mark Kennedy says Sakina is also a skilled and creative seamstress. "She's the one who makes Valentino's pyjamas," he says. Natasha Rothwell helps bring Sakina to life.

THE TEENS are Asha's confidants, protectors and forever friends. They're also a nod to the Disney legacy, according to writer Allison Moore. "They're inspired by the seven dwarfs," she says. "Each teen is inspired by a dwarf—they're costumed in the same colour pallete as their respective dwarf with whom they share a fun personality trait or two. Their names even begin with the same letter."

- **DAHLIA**, Asha's dearest friend, is an accomplished baker who creates her own kind of magic of the culinary variety, including cookies in the image of the king himself. "She's inspired by Doc," says Kennedy. "She's the unofficial leader of the teens." Jennifer Kumiyama lends her voice to Dahlia.
- **GABO** is quick with a comeback and has his eye on everything. He has a cynical side, to be sure, which makes sense considering he was inspired by Grumpy. But Gabo has a heart of gold—just don't tell anyone. Says Moore, "He is the realist of the bunch. He's the one who's willing to tell his friends the hard truth about life." Harvey Guillén provides the voice of Gabo.
- **HAL** is Asha's beaming buddy who manages to bring a little joy to most every situation. Inspired by Happy, Hal has the admirable ability of always looking on the bright side. "Even when she's really nervous or scared she smiles," says Moore. Niko Vargas voices Hal.
- **SIMON** is a buff guy with a big heart and bigger yawn. Inspired by Sleepy, Simon longs to be a warrior but is in a perpetual dreamy state. "He's a bit of a gentle giant," says Moore. Evan Peters voices Simon.
- **SAFI** and his perpetually pink nose are inspired by Sneezy. Plagued by allergies and other nose-tickling elements, he is a stupendous sneezer. "It's hard not to love Safi," says Kennedy. Ramy Youssef lends his voice to sweet, sniffling character.
- **DARIO** is a kind, rosy-cheeked young man who's easy to love. Says Kennedy, "Dario has a great heart but he lives in his own world. Every now and then, however, he'll say something unexpectedly brilliant and everybody's like, 'what's going on?'" Dario is inspired by Dopey, and he's got a good head on his shoulders—one flanked by an iconic detail: the character's wiggly ears. Jon Rudnitsky lends his voice to Dario.
- **BAZEEMA** might seem shy at first, but she's full of surprises. Based on Bashful, Bazeema keeps tabs on everyone from a safe distance—unless she has something important to offer. "She wears several layers to reinforce her shyness," says associate production designer Griselda Sastrawinata-Lemay. Della Saba provides the voice of Bazeema.