

Transatlantic space drama on launch pad

The BBC is teaming up with Fox Television Studios and broadcasters in Canada and Germany to coproduce *Defying Gravity*, a 13-part space drama that starts shooting in January.

Filming in Canada for six months from January 19, the adventure series is being made in association with Omni Film Productions, Canuck broadcasters CTV and Space, and German broadcaster ProSiebenSat1. It will broadcast on UK terrestrial BBC2 later next year.

Set in the near future, *Defying Gravity* revolves around the exploits of eight astronauts from five countries who undertake a mysterious six-year international mission through the solar system.

The drama was inspired by the BBC docudrama series *Space Odyssey: Voyage To The Planets*, which was broadcast on BBC1 in 2004.

BBC2 controller Janice Hadlow said: "In 2009 it will be 40 years since man first landed on the moon and yet the subject of space remains as mysterious and fascinating as ever, making it a timely and compelling backdrop for this epic adventure."

The series will star Ron Livingston (*The Time Traveller's Wife*, *Sex And The City*), with James Parriott (*Grey's Anatomy*) serving as series creator and exec producer.

Michael Edelstein (*Desperate Housewives*) will serve as executive producer, with Brian Hamilton (*Robson Arms*) and Michael Chechik for Omni Films, and Tim Haines (*Primeval*) for Impossible Pictures.

The series was commissioned by Jane Tranter, the BBC's outgoing controller of fiction. "Although primarily a human drama, the landscape and context and genre of *Defying Gravity* give it a very different flavour from other dramas on the BBC," she said.

The announcement comes as the BBC today found itself under fire for spending more than £45,000 (US\$69,500) on a single party in London, to launch this year's big copro drama *Merlin*.

BBC chief operating officer Caroline Thomson defended the cost, revealed by Channel 4 News, by insisting the drama was promoted in "the most cost-effective way possible."

Channel 4 is currently calling for the BBC to provide it with some form of financial support, as C4 claims it faces a shortfall of £150m per year by 2012 under its current financial model.

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