GOOD FRIENDS

Auli'i Cravalho



Photo courtesy Walt Disney Studios

Voicing Moana was just the beginning.

From *Mean Girls* (2024) to her Broadway debut as the youngest actress and the first of Asian American and Pacific Islander descent to play nightclub singer Sally Bowles in *Cabaret at the Kit Kat Club*, Auli'i Cravalho's accomplishments continue to grow since gracing the cover of *MidWeek* (Nov. 23, 2016).

Now, she's looking forward to *Moana 2*, which releases in theaters this week.

In Moana's first journey, she reconnected with her people's past as voyagers. In this sequel, it's about connecting with the future.

"Three years have passed since the last time we saw Moana in our first film and she has truly grown," says Cravalho, 24. "She is now a tautai, a master navigator … She's really looking to connect the entirety of the Pacific, which I think is the coolest thing ever because if anyone knows about the Polynesian Voyaging Society, that is truly their Moananuiākea (the region of indigenous communities touched by the Pacific Ocean). They're traveling across the Pacific to meet our sisters and cousins across the sea — and that story being told on a larger screen means the world."

In the song *How Far I'll Go* from the first film, Moana is trying to find where she fits in with a question and desire of "how far can I go?" In *Moana 2*, its song *Beyond* responds in line with Moana's stronger sense of self: "I'll go beyond."

Cravalho has also gone "beyond," living in New York City, Los Angeles and as far as Capetown, South Africa.

"I don't feel like a 'Disney kid,'" she admits. "I can still go to Walmart and buy beans and not get recognized because my first character — as incredible as Moana is — was voiceover.

"Enjoying where I'm at now and not comparing myself to others in this industry is my challenge," she adds. "Just because I'm the youngest in a lineup, doesn't mean I'm not still overthinking and going through the challenges that anyone else would."

She stays connected to home through food — whether a suitcase or pantry stocked with Spam, vienna sausage and corned beef. She also has weekly calls with her mom, which resparks her pidgin.

"Wherever she (her mom) is, is home to me," Cravalho says. "So those phone conversations … as I drift further and further away from physical home, that makes my soul feel at least at home."

As for what's next, Cravalho has postponed attending Columbia University, but hopes to eventually pursue environmental science. For now, she hints at many upcoming projects, including serving as executive producer for the live-action *Moana*.

And, as for the *Moana*-verse, she says there are so many more characters across the Pacific, legends, demigods and even more stories about Maui to explore.

"How lucky are we to have so many different storylines in our bones (that) I can trace on my mom's side the Hawaiian lineage back to the kings and queens of Hawai'i? And my dad's side — he's half Puerto Rican, half Portuguese — he can track his family as well and when they came for the sugarcane plantations," she says, hoping to shed positive light around conversations of being mixed.

"Grounding yourself in identity is what's important, but what I love about Hawai'i is we are a melting pot and we are proud of it. Finding your chosen community and living that truth is what's most important," she says.

– Allyson Pang

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