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# contributors



## Byron Pitts

CBS News correspondent Byron Pitts served as the network's primary correspondent at Ground Zero immediately following the Sept. 11 attacks. In this issue of *Watch!*, Pitts recounts the event and its aftermath ("The Day That Changed the World").



## Deborah Norville

Host of the nation's top newsmagazine show, *Inside Edition*, Deborah Norville is no stranger to the behind-the-scenes chaos of TV. An author and former anchor of *Today*, Norville shares her own list of insider secrets ("10 Things You Don't Know About Television").



## Jonny Mendelsson

Illustrator Jonny Mendelsson shares his interpretation of a Hollywood star's most important accessory ("Celebrity Entourage"). The former Londoner now calls the British countryside home, working in the basement of what was once the village store.



## John Filo

Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer John Filo is the director of photo operations for CBS. He also has held editing positions at *Newsweek* and *Sports Illustrated*. *Watch!* enlisted Filo to capture this issue's heist-themed fashion spread ("To Catch a Thief").



## Jim Colucci

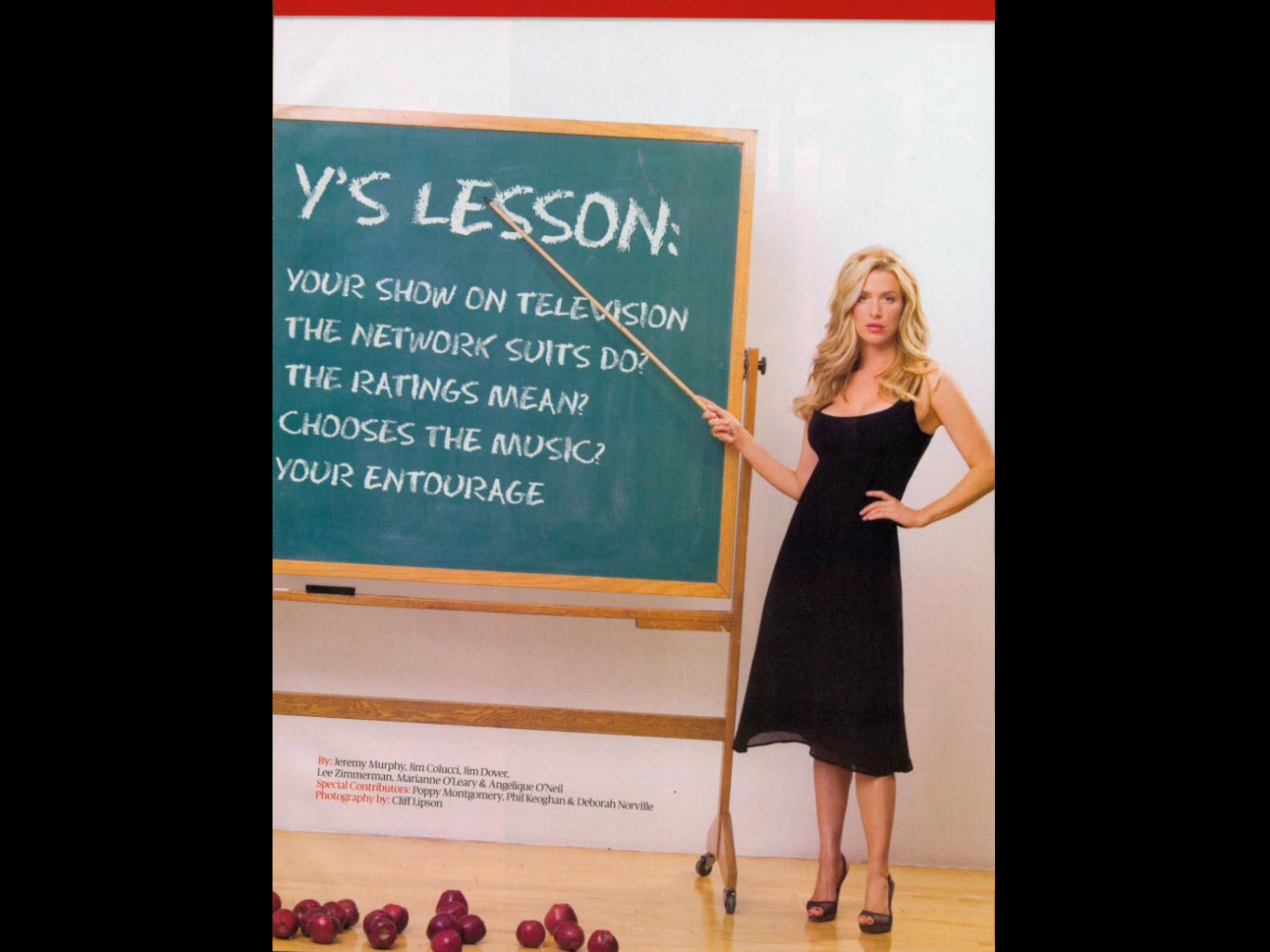
Contributing editor Jim Colucci is the author of the TV companion books *The Q Guide to The Golden Girls* and *Will & Grace: Fabulously Uncensored*. In this issue, he tackles TV's "Invasion from Down Under" and "A Day in the Life of a TV Executive."

# THE 101



TODAY

- + GETTING
- + WHAT DO
- + WHAT DO
- + SO WHO
- + PICKING

A woman with long blonde hair, wearing a black sleeveless dress and high heels, stands next to a green chalkboard. She is holding a wooden pointer stick that points to the text on the board. The chalkboard contains several lines of text in white chalk. The floor is light-colored wood, and there are several red apples scattered on it in the foreground.

Y'S LESSON:  
YOUR SHOW ON TELEVISION  
THE NETWORK SUITS DO?  
THE RATINGS MEAN?  
CHOOSES THE MUSIC?  
YOUR ENTOURAGE

By: Jeremy Murphy, Jim Colucci, Jim Dover,  
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Photography by: Cliff Lipson

# From PITCH to HIT

Getting a new TV show on the air is no easy feat. Follow a year in the life of CBS' development teams as they create the fall lineup

By Jim Colucci



CSI: Miami's David Caruso and Nina Tassler, president, CBS Entertainment.



The cast of Cane greets advertisers on stage at CBS' fall preview: (left to right) Michael Trevino, Lina Esco, Hector Elizondo, Rita Moreno, Jimmy Smits, Paola Turbay, Nestor Carbonell and Eddie Matos.

For most people, the turning of leaves and the Labor Day holiday signal the end of summer. But for network executives, the seasons don't change until suddenly in the third week of September, Premiere Week. As the broadcast networks all march their new, prized programs into bloody time-slot competition, it's a race to see which shows break out.

For a fledgling network series, Premiere Week represents only the latest in a series of life-or-death challenges, because any show to have gotten this far has already won a series of battles just to make it to the airwaves. Over the course of a year, new show concepts compete for development dollars. Scripts are scrutinized. Precious few pilots are eventually picked. And then, on the third Wednesday in May, those contenders that do make the final cut for fall find themselves splashed on the big screen in New York's Carnegie Hall, where advertisers,

Caruso: John Frio; Cane: Jeffrey R. Stubb

{ Number of U.S. homes with a TV: **111,400,000** Percent of U.S. homes with two or more TV sets: **81** }

ad agency executives, Wall Street analysts and reporters gather as CBS unveils its upcoming prime-time lineup. For the actors and writers summoned on stage that May day, the presentation—called the Upfront because it allows ad buyers an early, upfront chance to evaluate programming and grab commercial time—signals the beginning of an often feverish work schedule in order to live up to CBS CEO Les Moonves' promises of top-quality programming. And for the network's execs, the star-studded upfront is no walk in Central Park; when the last limo pulls away from the curb, it's time to start the whole, sometimes brutal process all over again.

### July-October

The program development process "takes a year, door to door, July to July," explains CBS Entertainment President Nina Tassler. And so, as the summer heats up, Tassler and her development teams are ready to receive pitches for the next crop of potential CBS hits. As they solicit concepts from Hollywood's top writers and relative newcomers alike, Tassler says, "Our biggest mandate is 'don't censor.' Don't say, 'This is or isn't a CBS show.' Let us decide."

Over this time frame, the network's comedy, drama and reality teams annually hear up to 400 show pitches. Some are fleshed out and fancy, with a big star already attached; some ideas still have wet paint.

"There are no hard-and-fast rules for what writers bring in," Tassler says, noting that the best efforts stand out by being both exciting and concise. "The irony is, the moment somebody walks in the door, we want to buy it," Tassler explains. "And basically, as time goes on, they talk us out of it."

### November-December

By Halloween, the chance has passed to pitch a new drama, the genre that takes the longest time to write and produce. And in the sweeps month that follows, it's the witching hour for newly debuted series; any new fall show that hasn't yet gotten an order for additional episodes probably won't. With those shows fading out, Senior Executive Vice President of Programming Operations Kelly Kahl alerts the development execs of the resulting holes to keep in mind as scripts begin to pour in. Because, of those 400 earlier pitches, about 50 or 60 have been given the green light to proceed to script; now, between Thanksgiving and Christmas, first drafts of dramas are due.

### January

Comedy first drafts are now due. And the pile of scripts is soon whittled down further, because only about 10 comedies, 10 dramas and even fewer reality concepts are given permission to spend the millions it takes to shoot a series pilot. Meanwhile, as the casting process also begins, actors flock to Los Angeles. And it's usually the early bird pilots that nab the best stars and directors.

### March

As rough footage from production starts coming in, Tassler's team keeps a close eye to ensure that their pilots are staying on the right creative track. This is make-or-break time for a new show; some scripts that showed promise suddenly poop out while others surprise by springing to life on the small screen. Late in the month, and throughout April, multicamera comedies shoot their pilots in front of live studio audiences. With all this product now coming in, the network starts to solicit outside opinions. On the business side, Tassler and Sales

President Jo Ann Ross conduct a series of roundtable discussions with New York ad execs to show Madison Avenue an early peek of what's in development.

### April

When it comes to the rest of CBS registering any opinions about the pilots, Tassler explains that it's generally hands-off until internal screenings in April. Only then does a wider pool of non-development executives get the chance to view pilots and to complete surveys. "I'm fanatical about creating the right environment for screenings, because we've spent a lot of time, money and creative energy to get to this moment," Tassler says.

Meanwhile, CBS' research gurus simultaneously take it to the people, showing footage to recruits at the network's testing facility at Las Vegas' MGM Grand hotel.

### May

From their flights east on Mother's Day until the very moment the lights go down at Carnegie Hall, reps from the many departments at CBS gather at the network's New York headquarters in meetings so known for their secrecy that the press has dubbed the process the CBS "cone of silence." Each constituency—from sales to press, from research to marketing—brings in its own dream schedule, prepared to defend its choices as to which new shows should get pickups, which marginally successful shows should live and which should be axed.

And Moonves moderates the whole slugfest in a way that allows everyone to make his or her case. "He's totally neutral, and you really don't know what he's thinking," Ross says. "You can't tell if he's just playing devil's advocate."



Over the course of a year, new show concepts compete for development dollars. Scripts are scrutinized. Precious few pilots are eventually picked.

Participants toss around projections of ratings and dozens of other factors for deciding in which time slots the new shows picked up will fit best. And decisions can come right down to the wire. It's often not until two days before the upfront that actors and producers on newly picked-up shows can be told to hop on planes to New York.

With each network competing simultaneously, make-or-break decisions have to be made quickly. "I would like to have more time to shoot, to breathe, and to step back for some objectivity," Tassler says. "And yet, sometimes when you are left with too much time, you overthink things. And sometimes, the decisions you have to make in a split second are the best ones." ■

{ Average number of hours of TV watched daily by U.S. households: **8.23** Percent of homes with cable: **66** }