

Interview: Ryan Murphy Dances His Way to ‘Glee’ on FOX

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on May 12, 2009 - 8:11pm

- [Amber Riley](#) [2]
- [American Idol](#) [3]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [4]
- [Chris Colfer](#) [5]
- [FOX](#) [6]
- [Glee](#) [7]
- [High School Musical](#) [8]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [9]
- [Interview](#) [10]
- [Jane Lynch](#) [11]
- [Jenna Ushkowitz](#) [12]
- [Jessalyn Gilsig](#) [13]
- [Kevin McHale](#) [14]
- [Lea Michele](#) [15]
- [Nip/Tuck](#) [16]
- [Ryan Murphy](#) [17]
- [Television](#) [18]

CHICAGO – Ryan Murphy is not a TV writer who believes in following the rules. He reached nearly iconic status from the loyal followers of FX’s “Nip/Tuck” and is trying to create water-cooler TV yet again with FOX’s very unique “Glee,” a show that we’ll review later this week (but you can check out a [great clip](#) [19] here if you’re impatient).

“Glee” debuts on FOX...in the Fall? In an unusual move, the network is using the juggernaut of “American Idol” to introduce audiences to their new show next Tuesday, May 19th, 2009, but it won’t air again until the beginning of the 2009-10 season. Get your taste now and have the full meal in the fall. It’s an interesting idea.

Murphy took time out of his busy schedule for a conference about the new show and we have the highlights. Don’t miss our review on Friday and the preview of “Glee” on Tuesday, May 19th, 2009 at 8PM CST.



Glee: Members of the Glee Club rehearse in a special preview episode of Glee airing Tuesday, May 19 (9:00-10:00 PM ET/PT) on FOX. Pictured L-R: Jenna Ushkowitz, Chris Colfer, Kevin McHale, Amber Riley and Lea Michele.
Photo credit: Carin Baer/FOX

Ryan Murphy On How They Choose the Music For “Glee”

All the episodes, we’re writing them thematically. Obviously you don’t do that for a pilot because a pilot is just sort of an origins tale, but it really just comes down to stuff that I like and stuff that I think it’s the characters and moves the story along. And also, with every episode, we do between five and eight music numbers, and my goal is to really try and give the audience something for everybody. We have a hip-hop. We have an R&B. We have a top 40. We have country.

On If There Could Be “American Idol” and “Glee” Crossovers With the Winner Singing on the Show

You know, I get pitched stuff all the time, but shockingly that has not been something that I have been pitched. No. Also, I’ve sort of been very specific with the casting about if we are going to sort of guest cast or stunt cast. I want it to be with people who just are wildly talented like

Victor Garber and Kristin Chenoweth, so no, but they haven’t said that. I haven’t been pitched that.

On A Soundtrack For the Series

We’re sort of in the midst of dealing with a soundtrack, and the great thing about it is musically the show is really, really been supported wildly by Fox network and studios. We do between six to eight, between five and eight songs per episode, like I said, and it takes a long time to produce and to get all those songs ready, so what we’re doing is we’re – to make sure that the production value is wildly as high as the pilot, Fox has been so gracious as to give us sort of scheduled music hiatus where we can sort of take a couple days and catch up and produce the demos and have the kids come in and record them and do the choreography. That being said, one of the reasons why we’re doing that is because there’s going to be a series of albums where I think we’ll probably put out an album every couple of months because we will have so much material.

Then also, we’re going to have all of the songs, when you watch the show, available that night immediately on iTunes, so if you like something, you can go buy it. But the music part is obviously the most challenging, but also the most exciting and the soundtrack was bid on by seven different companies, so we’ve had a lot of luck with that, and that’s something that I’m really interested in. I’m glad that the network and the studio continue to support it in the manner that they have.



GLEE: Members of the Glee Club try to prepare for a performance in a special preview episode of GLEE airing Tuesday, May 19 (9:00-10:00 PM ET/PT) on FOX. Pictured L-R: Amber Riley, Chris Colfer, Jenna Ushkowitz and Kevin McHale.
Photo credit: Carin Baer/FOX

On Hesitation About Doing a Major Network Show

I’ve never had much luck with it just because I think my voice is pretty specific and a little bit subversive. And I told Kevin Riley when I pitched it that if I was going to do it, I wanted to do it in a very specific way, and Kevin was the person who bought Nip/Tuck in the room, so he kind of got my sensibility.

And to my surprise and udder pleasure, Fox network has really kept their word. In fact, they’re pushing me to make it much more in the vein of the pilot, and they’ve never once tried to take anything out because they thought it was too sort of nuts, but I’ve also been very conscious that I think the key to the show is to – it’s a show with a lot of heart, and it’s a show about underdogs, and you want it to have a certain kindness to it. But it also does have weird elements, like you said, but they’ve been very supportive of those knowing that that’s my tone, and that’s what keeps me interested, so I’ve been surprised, and it’s been a really great give and take so far, and I haven’t had any BSNP problems or anything like that.

But also, I want to do a show that appeals to everybody. I’ve done a cable show and that to me was a big challenge. I’ve done sort of eight years of darkness and really adult stuff, and I was like, okay, I want to try something different. I want to do a show that has a bigger heart and is kinder, but make no mistake. It still has an edge, and they’ve been supportive of that.

On Similarities Between “Glee” And His Short-Lived (But Now Beloved) “Popular”

To me, it’s a completely different tone. It’s a completely different show. The thing with Popular was Popular was a satire that made fun of everything else on that network at the time, which they never apparently got, and they wanted me to do some sort of Dawson’s Creek-esque thing, and I didn’t want to, and that show was about ambition. That was show was a very specific one. It was about as seen through the microcosm of these girls. It was sort of Heathers-esque, but they never really got and I think the show was really ahead of its time, and it’s had quite an amazing life on DVD, which I always find surprising and rewarding. People liked the show. They were fans of the show. But I always thought that that was sort of a culty, sort of darker thing that had a very cynical tone to it, and I don’t think this show does at all, and I’ve been very careful not to really try and cross-pollinate the ideas of that show with this.





GLEE: The new one-hour comedy musical series about a group of aspiring underdogs will special preview Tuesday, May 19 (9:00-10:00 PM ET/PT) on FOX. Pictured Top row L-R: Cory Monteith, Chris Colfer and Lea Michele. Bottom L-R: Jayma Mays, Jessalyn Gilsig, Matthew Morrison, Kevin McHale, Amber Riley, Jenna Ushkowitz, Mark Salling, Dianna Agron and Jane Lynch.
Photo credit: Patrick Ecclesine/FOX

On the “American Idol” Lead-In And Unusual Premiere Structure

It was an interesting thing where they called me up and they proposed it, and I was sort of hesitant because I said, well, I like that you believe in it so much, and I like the support that you want to put behind it. But it does bother me that it would be off the air for four months, like you would think that – or three months. But as Kevin explained it to me, this is really just a great – it’s a preview. It’s what they’re calling it. It is a preview. And I keep saying it’s like having a movie trailer before the movie Titanic.

It’s just a great way to get as many eyeballs to sample your show as possible, and the thing that sold me with it is that it’s airing after the ultimate episode of American Idol this summer, but then it’s immediately going to be made all available to people all summer long. You can buy it and download it off the Internet, the pilot episode, and also we’re going to be, throughout the summer, not only can you get it, and I think if people get it, I will love that, renting it and buying it. But also we’re going to have music available starting in August. We’re going to be teasing some big numbers that we have coming up in the show.

To me, it also seemed very brave and like nothing that had ever been done on network television, and I think it’s a really big night of television. We’re up against some great, classic shows. To me, it’s – and it’s Kevin and Fox. It’s not necessarily about popping a number. It’s just about slowly getting people to be aware of the show in a way that I think is very original, and I like it because there’s no other fall show that will have that. It’s just, they’re spending a lot of time and money on marketing it in May for one night only and then selling it all summer, and slowly teasing stuff out before it comes in the fall, so I think it’s a really good idea.



Glee: The new one-hour comedy musical series about a group of aspiring underdogs will special preview Tuesday, May 19 (9:00-10:00 PM ET/PT) on FOX. Pictured clockwise from L: Chris Colfer, Amber Riley, Lea Michele (C), Jenna Ushkowitz, Cory Monteith and Kevin McHale.
Photo credit: Matthias Clamer/FOX

On If He Was Involved in Musical Theater When He Was Younger

Yes, I was. There was three writers, and two of us were, and one of us wasn't. What I like about that is sort of the one that wasn't is always like, wait, this really happens? We were like, yes. He's like, well, nobody will believe that, so it is through the prism of, for the most part, the writer's experience. What I love – you know, what I remember about that time when I was doing all those shows and stuff is that I grew up in Indiana. But when you do get the lead in something or you're performing, you sort of feel that the world is suddenly available to you, and you have so much optimism about what you can become, and it doesn't even have to be about being a performer. It's just about a belief in yourself, and I remember that feeling, and it was very important to me. And that's what I wanted the show to be about, so I do sort of draw on that experience that I had.

On If the Show Came About Because of the Success of “American Idol” and “High School Musical”

No. It wasn't because of that. Basically, for me, I had sort of been doing Nip/Tuck for many, many years, and when I got this overall deal at Fox, one of the first things I said to them was I want to do something that's very different that's completely the opposite of that because if you have success in one genre, they want you to keep doing it over and over again, and I didn't want to do something dark again, although ironically my next thing will be dark.

I said, I kind of want to do a musical, but I don't know what that would be. And they said, well, we've been wanting to do a musical forever, and we can't figure out how to crack it. I said, give me some time. We'll think about it, and then literally like two days later I was approached by Mike Novak, who is a producer on the pilot, and he said, I had this idea. A friend of mine wrote something that I think is a great movie that we want you to produce. I read it, and I said, well, I don't think this is a movie for me, but I love the title, and I love the idea. Let's just do that, and maybe we can turn that into a TV show, so we threw sort of the script away. Then Ian, who wrote it, and myself and Brad sort of sat in a room and came up with what you see in the pilot. We went and pitched it. Shockingly, they said yes, and we wrote it, and they picked it up the day we turned it in. So it happened very, very quickly, as sometimes good things do.

But I have never seen High School Musical. I know the conceit of it, and I know kind of what it's about. I certainly know the cast, but I've never watched it. But I admire it. I think that what they've done is fantastic, but we were never sort of, you know, trying to do anything like that. I was trying to do something that was much more like a musical version of just sort of movies that I loved that were a little bit sort of high school is the metaphor. High school is not actually what it's about, if that makes any sense.

On the Building Buzz Before the Show Has Even Aired

It's so funny to me about the life that this thing already has. I already have an offer to turn it into a movie, and there's somebody who already wants to turn it into a Broadway show, and also there's somebody who wants to turn it into an ice-skating show before it's even aired, so all those things, I keep saying, well, that's very kind and wonderful, but let's get it on the air first, you know.

“Glee” will be on the air on Tuesday, May 19th, 2009 at 8pm CST.



[20]

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