

coverstory

BY JAY BOBBIN



Jessie Mueller (left)
and Megan Hilty

Megan Hilty is Patsy Cline in Lifetime's 'Patsy & Loretta'

To become Patsy Cline for a cable movie, Megan Hilty made a deep dive into the country-music icon's life, times and songs.

Debuting Saturday, Oct. 19, Lifetime's made-in-Nashville "Patsy & Loretta" recounts the friendship between Cline and Loretta Lynn (played by Hilty's fellow Broadway veteran Jessie Mueller, of "Waitress" and "Beautiful: The Carole King Musical"). They were at very different career stages when they met, with Cline well-established and Lynn just starting out ... and after Cline's tragic death in a 1963 plane crash, Lynn carried the mantle of accomplished women in country for both of them.

"I normally have a really hard time watching myself," friendly "Smash" alum Hilty says, "but with this, I think because I look so different, I was able to sit back and enjoy it. When they first approached me about it, I said, 'How much hair is going into the wigs?' I feel like no matter how good the script and everything else is, if you don't have a good wig, people are going to be focused on that the entire time. And they told me that was a massive priority."

Still, Hilty understood there was more to the part than the look and "Crazy," "I Fall to Pieces" and "Walkin' After Midnight" are among the Cline classics she renders. "I didn't really know about her life," she admits, "and the more research I did, the more madly in love I fell with her. I read two different books, and I did not like one of them very much because it seemed like a lot of gossip. Then I read another biography on her that made sense, and I watched anything of her that I could get my hands on; it's mostly of her performances and not much patter, so the personal stuff was a lot of guesswork."

Reuniting Hilty with "Smash" executive producer Neil Meron (in his first solo effort after the passing of his longtime producing colleague Craig Zadan), "Patsy & Loretta" was directed by someone who knew its background: Callie Khouri, the Oscar-winning "Thelma & Louise" writer who created and produced the drama series "Nashville." The result, Hilty maintains, was "the most pleasant working experience I've ever had. Everybody on that set was legitimately upset that it was ending, and you dream of having that kind of environment."

Cline and Lynn's daughters – respectively, Julie Fudge and Patsy Lynn Russell – are co-producers of "Patsy & Loretta," which made Hilty even more determined to get her task on the film right. Cline was "a real person, with a real legacy to uphold, and I wanted to be extremely respectful of that," Hilty reflects. "I think the script does her justice."

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