

coverstory

BY JAY BOBBIN



Skylar Astin
and Jane Levy

'Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist' is all in her head

If you've ever had music in your head when a song isn't actually playing, you're not alone: Meet Zoey.

She's the heroine of "Zoey's Extraordinary Playlist," an NBC series that has a preview showing Tuesday, Jan. 7, before its weekly Sunday run starts Feb. 16. Played by Jane Levy ("Suburgatory," "Don't Breathe"), the San Francisco computer-business worker begins hearing songs whose lyrics mirror the thoughts of friends and colleagues as well as strangers. Initially alarmed by her new gift, she soon realizes it could work to her advantage, particularly in dealing with her ill father.

Dad is portrayed by Peter Gallagher, who has musical experience from Broadway and such movies as "The Idolmaker," and other cast members whose song-and-dance backgrounds come in handy include Skylar Astin ("Pitch Perfect") and Alex Newell ("Glee"). Mary Steenburgen and "special guest star" Lauren Graham also are featured in the show, which includes Paul Feig ("Bridesmaids") among its executive producers.

"I do like unique stories," title star Levy confirms, "and when I read the script, I thought it was an opportunity to do so many things as an actor. At times, it's a comedy though it's rooted in real family drama, and it's also a musical. It's a high-concept story, and I'm so grateful to be a part of it. And I'm also impressed with NBC for taking on something so ambitious."

Levy's most recent television work has been for streaming services (Hulu's "Castle Rock," the former Seeso's "There's ... Johnny!"), and she declares this a "golden age of television. I think this possibly might be the best show on network TV in 2020, and that's a bold statement, coming from me."

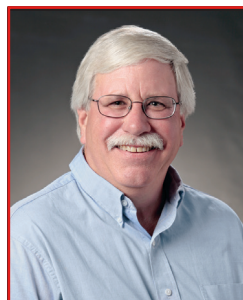
Though "Glee" and "Crazy Ex-Girlfriend" notably folded musical sequences into their dramatics, too, Levy admits she is "not that well-versed in television, so when people talk about other shows, I just have a blank stare. I know that those were two beloved shows, but I think what makes ours different is that the songs come out of the characters' needs and desires. And there's the conceit that Zoey can read people's minds and hearts through music."

In a case of art apparently imitating life, Oscar winner Steenburgen – who plays Zoey's mother – recently revealed that in the aftermath of surgery on her arm a decade ago, everything she thought or heard translated into music for her.

"Isn't that spectacular?," Levy reflects. "Supposedly, that's why she wanted to take on this part. She had that surgery and started writing music afterward, and she is a real inspiration for me. She is a woman who continues to be curious in her career, and she's so brave. I feel lucky to be working with her."

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