

coverstory



Joe Mantegna (left) and Rick Glassman star in "As We See It," which begins streaming Friday on Amazon.

BY JAY BOBBIN

After his long run on "Criminal Minds," Joe Mantegna's new series is quite a switch for him ... and he brings part of his own family background to it.

A parent of an autistic daughter, the Tony Award-winning actor also addresses the subject in "As We See It," Amazon's adaptation of an Israeli drama series that begins streaming Friday, Jan. 21. Mantegna portrays the father of Jack (Rick Glassman), one of several young-adult roommates on the autism spectrum who are supported by their families and each other. Albert Rutecki and Sue Ann Pien play the other members of the central trio, with Sosie Bacon (daughter of Kevin Bacon and Kyra Sedgwick) as their main aide.

"I've been involved in it since its inception," Mantegna says of the show developed by Emmy-winning executive producer Jason Katims ("Friday Night Lights," "Parenthood"). "They came to me shortly after 'Criminal Minds' stopped, and when I read the (pilot) script, I was really knocked out by it ... for a lot of reasons. Jason is such a wonderful, beautiful writer, and it had a very personal impact on me."

Mantegna isn't sure whether his eldest daughter Gia's condition was known to Katims. "I never asked," he reveals. "Jason might have thought that might be

an interesting layer, but I know that it's also a personal thing for him. They really thought it out to the point where, besides that the three main actors were identified as being on the autism spectrum, they were going to hire 12 (autistic) people on the crew - which is really unheard of. You have to go through the unions and all that, and they did that. I hope it's a sign of the times, in terms of where we're going with inclusion."

In "As We See It," Mantegna's character Lou faces a health challenge of his own. "My watchword for a good part of my life has been, 'Everybody's got a story, and nobody gets a free ride,'" reflects Mantegna. "To me, this is an example of that. Each of us has a personal story, and some of those are things we would not have chosen. And so be it."

Gia Mantegna is a makeup artist who almost ended up working on "As We See It" along with her father, but ultimately didn't. However, her dad has enjoyed acting with Glassman as his on-screen son, deeming him "a wonderful young man. Most people in the world would think of him as just a smart, sunny, quirky guy, yet being sensitive to that world, I could tell there's a reason for that quiriness. He's a stand-up comic, so he has those certain savant abilities, just like my daughter has."

Joe Mantegna helps portray autism 'As We See It' in Amazon series

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