

# Family time

## New season of 'This Is Us' continues on NBC

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TV Media

Many of us need a good cry every now and then, which may be why "This is Us" has become one of the most popular prime-time soap operas since "Dallas" defined the genre in 1978. Showrunner Dan Fogelman (who also brought us "Galavant" and "Pitch") has created a beautiful, touching family drama that is as timeless as it is modern. You can watch it Tuesday, Oct. 29, on NBC.

In case you haven't managed to catch one of the 58 episodes that have aired since the series premiered in 2016, "This is Us" is a family drama rife with tragedy, romance and even some laughs to counteract the tears you will inevitably shed as you spend time with the Pearson "triplets," their parents and everyone else who comes into their lives. Since Season 4 of the series has just begun, I'll do my best to avoid any spoilers, and instead attempt to introduce "The Big Three" to anyone who may not know them yet.

The series opens in 1980, with Jack (Milo Ventimiglia, "Heroes") and Rebecca Pearson (Mandy Moore, "Tangled," 2010) celebrating Jack's 36th birthday. Rebecca's yearly rendition of "Happy Birthday Mr. President" is a little different this time — she's heavily pregnant with triplets, so a sexy dance isn't really in the cards. Though it opens with sweet comedy, I spent the last half of the first episode ugly-crying into my very confused dog's fur.

Jack and Rebecca lose one of their triplets during childbirth, but after an emotional talk about lemonade with the doctor (that made me cry), a chance encounter with a fireman (that made me cry) and Jack consoling his wife as she wakes up to the news (that *really* made me cry), the couple end up filling all three cribs they have waiting at home after all.

They are known as "The Big Three" and we are introduced to them on their 36th birthdays in 2016. Justin Hartley ("The Young and the Restless") plays Kevin, the eldest triplet, an oft-shirtless sitcom star teetering on the edge of a mental breakdown. Second-born Kate, played by Chrissy Metz ("Breakthrough," 2019), has issues with weight that have defined her since childhood. The final "triplet," played by Emmy winner Sterling K. Brown ("Black Panther," 2018), is Randall, who, after being abandoned on the steps of a fire station moments after his birth, was adopted by the Pearson family.

Their lives are messy and imperfect. Kevin and Randall aren't on speaking terms, and Kate resents their mother — but they are family, and this is them. "This is Us" also shows the changes in dynamic as spouses and significant others, like Randall's wife Beth (Susan Kelechi Watson, "Louie") and Kate's husband Toby (Chris Sullivan, "The Knick"), become part of the family. The show punches you right in the feelings and will make you contemplate your own family relationships, no matter how dysfunctional they may be. You, the viewer, have loved and lost and fought and feared, and over in the writer's room, they know that Jack's drinking problem or Toby's depression or Kate's insecurities or Rebecca's grief (or all of the above) will speak to you. Something in this series will remind you of your own life, and you will cry. But you will laugh, swoon, rage and cheer, too.

The ensemble cast of "This is Us" is so talented and diverse that I could easily have used all of my allotted words just mentioning them all, especially since the same characters are played by three or more different actors at different stages in their lives. Part of the reason the cast is so real is because Fogelman is committed to creating



Mandy Moore and Milo Ventimiglia in a scene from "This Is Us"

diversity behind the scenes as well. He ensured that directors, writers and consultants for the series were people who could understand the many issues that are important to the characters: blackness, womanhood, weight and more.

One of the most beautiful things about "This is Us" is the way it tells its story through time, weaving moments in the triplets' lives from before they were born to further on in the

future seamlessly within a single episode. You are never confused as to what time period you're watching, despite the show flip-flopping from decade to decade within moments. Effort has been taken to subtly date each scene, from a split-second shot of Kevin's G.I. Joe lunchbox (the cartoon ran until 1986), to the MacBook Air in Randall's office (which was first issued in 2008). "This is Us" stretches from the mid-1940s to years

into our future, and if you look hard enough, there are clues as to what the future holds for the Pearsons in each and every scene.

"This is Us" may be a soap opera, but it does soapy-drama in such a realistic, down-to-earth way that I didn't even get to say, "Hush! I'm watching my soaps!" because I didn't catch on until someone pointed it out. Still feeling iffy about getting into a series with a massive cast

and even longer timeline? Ask a friend who keeps up with the show and watch the expression on their face as they relive the moment Jack and Rebecca met, the death of Randall's biological father, Kate's wedding, Kevin's first crush and Jack's time in Vietnam.

Past seasons are binge-worthy and ready for you on Netflix if you need to catch up. The new season of "This is Us" airs Tuesday nights on NBC.