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How Did ‘9-1-1’ Make It to 100 Episodes? “It’s Characters That You Want in Your Living Room”

Angela Bassett and co-creator Tim Minear say relatable people in wholly unrelatable situations were the secret sauce behind ABC’s popular first-responders procedural.

By Brande Victorian April 4, 2024 9:45am

When [9-1-1](#) co-creator [Tim Minear](#) signed up on Twitter (now known as X), he chose a telling handle to denote his legacy as a screenwriter and director: @Cancelledagain. “I was sort of infamous for all of my thundering failures over the years,” explains Minear. “*Firefly* lasted one season, *Terriers* one season, *The Inside* one season, *Drive* went for six episodes. Everything was canceled, so I just called myself ‘cancelled again,’ which actually worked out for me because these are all beloved little cult shows now.”

With the seventh season of *9-1-1*, which he created with [Ryan Murphy](#) and [Brad Falchuk](#), underway and a milestone 100th episode premiering April 4, Minear now has a big, long-running show on his hands, plus a successful spinoff in *9-1-1: Lone Star*, which will debut its fifth season in the fall. So much so that he’s considering a name change if he returns to the social media platform. “Maybe ‘renewed again,’” he jokes, “Or ‘more of that,’ because it’s like, ‘Really, I have to come up with more?’ It’s hard on this show because sometimes we’ll have four cases in an episode, so you’ve got to come up with four insane things every week, and with *Lone Star*, I now have eight insane things that I have to figure out per week. It’s tricky,” he says with more of an “a” than a “y.”

Since the series debut on Jan. 3, 2018, the procedural drama about L.A. first responders starring [Angela Bassett](#) and Peter Krause has built a reputation for taking

natural catastrophes and emergency scenarios to the next level. “I can’t name another show on television that has tackled tsunamis, earthquakes, blackouts, a blimp stadium crash, a train derailment, a Hollywood dam collapse and landslide, sharks on a freeway, escaped zoo animals, an airplane crash into the ocean, a guy falling off a roller coaster, a bus crash into a side of a building, a fire truck hanging off a cliff, and now, in your season opener, a honeymoon cruise disaster complete with pirates, explosions and a capsized ship — spanning three episodes,” Karey Burke, president of 20th Television, said March 5 at *9-1-1*’s 100th episode celebration that took place in between filming at the Bel-Air Bay Club.

As outlandish as the circumstances L.A.’s finest might find themselves in, Minear admits that the “craziest cases on the show are generally the ones that come from real life.” There are episodes based on incidents that occurred far from Los Angeles. “It’s pretty much China and Florida,” he adds with a laugh. “The episode with the baby being pulled out of that pipe, that happened in China. The bug-eating contest in season two was based on a man in Florida who ate too many bugs and died.”

It’s the believability of the characters in these stories and the visual execution of cataclysmic disasters — a testament to the creators’ philosophy of using practical effects as much as possible — that made *9-1-1* ripe for pickup when Fox failed to renew it in May after six seasons. The decision was reported to be financial, as the show remained the network’s most watched series overall and top-rated scripted series with adults 18-49 until the end. This was what Murphy set out to achieve when he first pitched the series — which draws inspiration from the 1970s NBC medical drama *Emergency!* — to then Fox executive and now Disney entertainment co-chairman Dana Walden. “Ryan really wanted to give her a network hit. He’s literally the only showrunner or creator that I know who can go, ‘You know what, I think it’s time to create a hit for Dana for Fox’ and do it,” says Minear.

Burke tells *THR* of the show’s network transition this year: “Bringing *9-1-1* to ABC ahead of the show’s seventh season felt like an incredibly organic move. We all felt that *9-1-1* seamlessly fit into the network’s lineup of high-stakes dramas and sophisticated storytelling, and we have every indication that viewers didn’t just follow but that the audience is growing.”

The March 14 season seven premiere, a nod to *The Poseidon Adventure*, brought in 4.93 million viewers, up from season six's 4.8 million. After three days of viewing across ABC, Hulu and other Disney digital platforms, the episode garnered a total of 8.85 million viewers, setting a streaming record for Disney.

Having cemented audiences' interest with the high-stakes cruise ship fiasco as the season opener, Minear chose to focus on the other element of *9-1-1* that makes it a win among viewers for its 100th episode, which was directed by *Lone Star's* Chad Lowe: its cast. The story will center on the LAFD crew at Station 118 who rescues a woman intent on receiving a rose at an iconic mansion. "After doing a giant three-episode arc of a disaster for the first three episodes, when I got to episode 100, it was important that it be a regular episode," says Minear. "You just need to say, this is what the show is. It's character stories."

That's what's made portraying LAPD patrol sergeant Athena Grant-Nash for seven seasons most rewarding for Bassett. It's the longest role she's ever played. "It's very interesting to have a character that's so beloved keep finding stories to tell, important stories to tell, and fun stories to tell," she says.

When the series began, Grant-Nash was married to Michael Grant (portrayed by Rockmond Dunbar), with whom she has two children. The pair divorced in season two, when, after 14 years of marriage, Grant revealed that he's gay. She's now married to LAFD Capt. Bobby Nash (Krause), also a father of two, and they navigate new-marriage waters following their disaster-ridden honeymoon cruise.

"I enjoy the idea of blended family and exploring the changing dynamics between a husband and wife, and divorce," Bassett adds. "I think that's important because when people grow apart, families don't have to break up, even after so much trauma."

The close friendship between "Thena" and "Hen" (Aisha Hinds' Henrietta Wilson), an openly gay firefighter paramedic — they bond over being Black women in white, male-dominated fields — is adored by viewers. "These are people who get misunderstood themselves," says Bassett. "The most important thing I wanted people to see in portraying a Black female police officer is the compassion and the understanding that the job says that we are here to protect and to serve."

The bromance between Evan Buckley (Oliver Stark) and Eddie Diaz (Ryan Guzman), known as “Buddie,” is another fan favorite. Audiences have been trying to ship the duo since they first met in the season two premiere, with Minear jokingly adding fuel to the fire in the 2019 midseason finale when he allowed the pair to be mistaken for a couple. But it’s the story arc of Jennifer Love Hewitt’s Maddie Buckley, a trained nurse who works as a 9-1-1 operator, that he’s most enjoyed carrying out onscreen.

“I really enjoyed the way her story with her ex, Doug, played out in season two. We know she’s running from an abusive relationship, and we teased that throughout the season until we finally got to the episode “Fight or Flight,” which was written by Kristen Reidel, where he has abducted her and it sort of becomes a Lifetime movie,” says Minear. “I say that admiringly. That is a genre, and if you do it well, it can be a very moving. And I love the romance now between Maddie and Chimney [Howard Han, played by Kenneth Choi]. They’re going to get married this year, which is going to be a lot of fun.”

These storylines, Minear says, are what ultimately has led *9-1-1* to 100 episodes and counting. “It’s characters that you want in your living room, a found family of heroes, people that run toward danger,” he says. “We’re coming off of this incredible age of *Breaking Bad* and *The Shield* and these kind of morally compromised heroes, but there’s nothing morally compromised about our heroes. They are heroes. They are there to save you, whether they like you or not.”