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## Angela Bassett on Returning to ‘American Horror Story’ Behind the Camera and Starring on ‘9-1-1’ (Exclusive)

**The former ‘American Horror Story’ star opens up about directing the Halloween episode and if she’ll helm an episode of her new Ryan Murphy series, ‘9-1-1.’**

By [Stacy Lambe](#)

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After four seasons in front of the camera as one of the recurring stars of Ryan Murphy and Brad Falchuk’s [American Horror Story](#), [Angela Bassett](#) has returned to the series -- only this time as director of the ninth episode (“Drink the Kool-Aid”) of *Cult*. And the actress tells ET that she was honored to helm her second episode of the anthology series, but happy that she had no idea it would be the coveted Halloween episode. “I wasn’t intimidated until last week,” says Bassett, who was pleased with her second opportunity to go behind the camera, adding that the success of the episode all started with the script. “It’s a script you can go buck wild with. I feel fortunate that I got a great script.”

On “Drink the Kool-Aid,” many storylines come to a head as Ally and Ivy (Sarah Paulson and Alison Pill, respectively) have an unexpected and deadly reunion, Oz’s (Cooper Dodson) paternity comes under question once more, and the women continue to look for a way to escape the cult. But the main focus of the episode was [Kai’s \(Evan Peters\) political ambitions](#), his place as cult leader and a look back on the many real-life ones to come before him.

The show once again goes back in time to explore the [history of cults](#), with Peters portraying Marshall Applewhite of Heaven’s Gate, David Koresh of Branch Davidians and Jim Jones of the Peoples Temple in a montage of

recreated found footage. “It was a little disturbing to have to go back to research that period and see the faces of those people, and to imagine who they were and what they needed and what got them there,” says Bassett, who hoped to understand them and honor their humanity on screen.

She commends Peters for fully embodying each leader. “He came ready, I have to say, he came prepared each day with those three figures,” Bassett says, adding that it was a pleasure to watch him get into the headspace of each man. His commitment led them to include a speech from Koresh that wasn’t originally in the script. With most of the flashback footage set to be used in a montage, there wasn’t any plan to include audio from what was shot of Peters as the cult leaders. However, he delivered it so well, she reveals, that they found a way to include it “because it helped to layer the story.”

But Bassett’s praise is not limited to Peters. She applauds the whole cast and crew, many of whom she was reunited with for the first time since leaving the series after [Roanoke](#), for bringing the story to life. “They’re so good and so diligent,” she says. “I loved working with them.”

And that camaraderie added to the stress-free environment for her second time behind the camera on the show. Not splitting her time acting on one episode and then directing the next, she was able to relax and focus on the task at hand. It also helped the show wasn’t shot on iPhones -- 18 to be exact -- like it was during *Roanoke*. “You can’t watch the footage across 18 different screens. You know, that was stressful in a lot of ways,” she says of the *Roanoke* experience. But how that episode (“Chapter 6”) compares to this one, she can’t say one is better than the other. “I’ve gotten positive feedback on both episodes. I’m always amazed that they turn out as well as they do.”

And Bassett, who earned an Emmy nomination for her appearance on [Master of None](#) and will be seen in [Marvel’s film adaptation of Black Panther](#) next year, is just grateful for the opportunity to expand her career -- 30 years in front of the camera -- into directing. In addition to the two episodes of *American Horror Story*, she also helmed [Lifetime’s Whitney Houston biopic](#), with the hope to direct more down the road. “It’s opened up a door for me,” Bassett says. But for now, she’s appreciative of the opportunity Murphy afforded her with his Half Initiative, which has increased the number of women and people of color behind the camera by over 50 percent across his shows. “I’m proud to be associated with someone who had that vision and did it in such a profound way,” she adds. “He’s truly committed to giving talented women and up-and-coming women directors an opportunity and a voice and a

path to the future and success. I'm benefiting myself because I'm learning and I'm growing."

While only directing an episode of *Cult* is a stark reminder that she's no longer acting on *American Horror Story* (she said that she fulfilled her contract after back-to-back roles on *Coven*, *Freak Show*, *Hotel* and *Roanoke*), Bassett is not gone from Murphy's world. She'll next be seen on the [FOX drama 9-1-1](#), which follows the lives of first responders and co-stars Peter Krause and a returning recurring Murphy favorite, Connie Britton.

"It's very satisfying to have the opportunity to work and also work with a company and a producer and writer who is putting out work that we as actors enjoy doing," Bassett says of Murphy bringing her *9-1-1*. "I didn't see it coming. I figured I'd do *American Horror* for a few seasons and then move on."

As for directing on the new show, it's too early for Bassett to consider. "Let me see what it is first," she says of the show, which is only three episodes into production. She hasn't seen anything outside of the first trailer, so she's looking forward to checking out the end product.

"I don't feel confident yet to step behind the camera of this yet. It's too huge, too big. I'm not there," Bassett says. "I'm going to watch from the sidelines for a little bit, taking notes. Then, maybe next year!"