

## **"HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL 2"**

The gang from East High is back for another wildly entertaining singing and dancing extravaganza in the Disney Channel Original Movie, "High School Musical 2." This highly anticipated sequel to the 2006 worldwide phenomenon, "High School Musical," once again finds star athlete Troy Bolton (Zac Efron) and A-student Gabriella Montez (Vanessa Anne Hudgens) sharing center stage in a teen musical adventure filled with drama, laughs and, of course, unforgettable songs. This time, the fun takes place over school vacation at the local country club where Troy and his pals are working. When diabolical diva Sharpay Evans (Ashley Tisdale) tries to use her dad's powerful connections at the club to lure Troy away from Gabriella and the rest of the Wildcats, Troy has to decide where his loyalties truly lie. "High School Musical 2" premieres **Friday, August 17** at **8 p.m.** on Disney Channel.

In addition to Efron (*Hairspray*), Hudgens ("The Suite Life of Zack & Cody," *Thirteen*) and Tisdale ("The Suite Life of Zack & Cody"), returning "High School Musical" alumni include Corbin Bleu ("Jump In," "Flight 29 Down"), Lucas Grabeel ("Alice," "Return to Halloweentown"), Monique Coleman ("The Suite Life of Zack & Cody," "Dancing with the Stars") and Alyson Reed ("The Agency," "Party of Five").

Troy is all set to spend his vacation goofing around with Gabriella and their friends until he gets a surprise summer job offer from the ritzy Lava Springs Country Club. What he doesn't know is that his newfound employment is part of club queen Sharpay's devious plot to steal him away from Gabriella. But Sharpay's plan begins to unravel when Troy scores a lifeguard position at the club for Gabriella, along with jobs for Zeke, Chad, Taylor, Kelsi and the rest of the Wildcats!

Incensed at the thought that these newcomers may upstage her and her brother Ryan at the club's annual talent show, forcing her to relive the humiliation of the school musical, Sharpay begins an all-out campaign to have Gabriella fired. When she learns Kelsi has written a killer duet for Troy and Gabriella, it only further galvanizes Sharpay's resolve to get her rival out of the picture.

Knowing Troy has high hopes of earning a college basketball scholarship, Sharpay arranges for him to meet her wealthy father, the country club president and a University of Albuquerque board member. Mr. Evans is so impressed with Troy he promotes him from waiter to assistant golf pro and holds out the possibility of a full ride at U of A. Of course, there's a catch:

Sharpay lets Troy know that in exchange for her “kindness,” she expects him to perform with her in the talent show – at the very least.

As Troy finds himself spending more time with Sharpay’s family and their influential friends, he starts neglecting his commitments to Gabriella and his high school buddies. Feeling both betrayed and a little envious, the Wildcats decide to make the best of their summer by working up their own musical number for the show. They even get some unexpected choreography help from Ryan, who has been cast aside as his sister’s singing partner. When Sharpay gets wind of this new potential musical threat, she persuades the club manager to prohibit the Wildcats (except Troy, of course) from participating in the show altogether. As Troy wakes up to what’s been going on, he’s forced to decide which is more important: being true to his real friends—and himself—or kissing up to the conniving Sharpay for a shot at free college tuition.

“High School Musical 2” was written by Peter Barsocchini (“High School Musical,” *Drop Zone*) and directed and choreographed by Kenny Ortega (“High School Musical,” “The Gilmore Girls”). Bill Borden (“High School Musical,” *End of Days*) is the producer and Barry Rosenbush (“High School Musical,” *Get on the Bus*) is the executive producer. “High School Musical 2” is from First Street Films.

Disney Channel is the first general entertainment network designed for kids and families. Currently available in 89 million homes in the U.S., Disney Channel is part of ABC Cable Networks Group, a division of the Walt Disney Company.

## **THE MAKING OF "HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL 2"**

When "High School Musical" premiered in January 2006, Disney Channel executives knew they had a fresh, fun, innovative comedy on their hands. What they didn't suspect was that they were about to unleash a worldwide phenomenon. The film, the highest rated for a Disney Channel Original Movie in the U.S. at the time, went on to become an international blockbuster when it aired on 26 Disney Channels and free-to-air broadcasters worldwide, reaching over 100 million viewers in more than 100 countries.

"It's amazing when you stumble upon a need nobody knew was there," says Michael Healy, Senior Vice President of Original Movies for Disney Channel. "It seems there was an aching need for a musical that kids could call their own. The show has been performed in 1,400 high schools and community theatres across the country. It has inspired kids to do just what they did in the movie: cross clique lines and try out for plays."

"High School Musical" mania also has inspired a bestselling junior novel, a popular themed show at Disneyland Parks and Resorts, a sold-out 42-date arena concert tour in North America and Latin America, and even a touring ice show premiering in late 2007. "High School Musical" was the #1 album of 2006 and the year's #1 TV movie on DVD. And in 2008, "High School Musical" hits the big screen with a planned feature film.

And it's not just young fans of the show's infectious music, charismatic cast and high-energy dancing who have found it irresistible. "High School Musical" has racked up a shelf full of honors including two Emmy<sup>®</sup> Awards, a DGA Award, a Television Critics Association Award, an Imagen Award, a Director's Guild of America Award and a Humanitas Prize nomination. Its soundtrack received a Billboard Music Award for Soundtrack of the Year and was nominated for an American Music Award in the Favorite Album (Pop/Rock) category.

With that substantial legacy to live up to, Disney Channel reassembled as many of the original filmmakers as possible for the sequel, starting with director Kenny Ortega. "Kenny Ortega's genius was a big part of the success of 'High School Musical,'" says Healy. "He transformed writer Peter Barsocchini's great script into this wonderful musical by putting amazing flourishes and style into the piece. It's been a privilege working with him."

Bonnie Storie and Charles Klapow, who shared an Emmy with Ortega for Best Choreography, also returned, as did screenwriter Barsocchini, music supervisor Steve Vincent and producer Don Shane. In fact, there was only

one major change to the creative lineup: Cinematographer Daniel Aranyó, who shot Ortega's "The Cheetah Girls 2," was brought in as director of photography. "The movie looks incredibly beautiful," says Healy. "He's a very gifted man."

The original cast has been reunited for "High School Musical 2," including Zac Efron and Vanessa Ann Hudgens, who play Troy and Gabriella. "They're the ideal contemporary couple," says Healy. "Both have an innocence and sweet appeal. They are kids trying to feel their way in a complicated world and other kids can identify with that."

Healy also notes that some of the supporting cast members who emerged as fan favorites have been given more prominent roles this time around. "Chad, played by Corbin Bleu, had a wonderful role in the first movie, but has a much bigger one here," says Healy. "That's both because he has a great presence and because he has broken out as a recording star and TV star in (Disney Channel Original Movie) 'Jump In.' He's a great booster of our ratings and we love him and think he's a great kid. We've also given Ryan, played by Lucas Grabeel, a good deal more to do. He comes out of the shadow of his sister Sharpay's great bat wings and becomes a man on his own."

The biggest challenge, agree the filmmakers, was fulfilling the expectations of the original film's vast and devoted public. It was clear from the beginning that staying true to the characters the audience has come to love and root for would be the key. "We came up with this notion that the seeds we sowed for Sharpay's plotting would come to fruition," says Healy. "When she decides that Troy is the A#1 catch of the school, she works hard to get him away from his true love, Gabriella. That story of temptation and conniving is at the core of the movie. Is Troy Bolton going to be tempted to go over to, if not the dark side exactly—maybe, the sequined side?"

Screenwriter Barsocchini says that he, Ortega and the producers agreed at the beginning of the development process that the sequel should not just be a remake of the first film. "From the initial conversation, we focused on the story. When creating a musical, people don't necessarily think of story, but the fact is you only care about the music if you care about the characters and what happens to them. You start with a simple premise – in 'High School Musical,' it was the love story between Gabriella and Troy. But we didn't want to go back and do the same love story."

They soon hit on the idea of moving the action from the high school to a country club, where Sharpay is the center of the universe. "We thought that,

as much as we love East High, we wanted to get to a different place and see how people react outside of school, see if the same class and clique differences exist even during the summer," Healy recalls. "Sharpay was always the primary antagonist, but it's much more apparent here that she's the person at the center of the plotting."

Barsocchini describes Sharpay as a great fighter who, after getting knocked on the canvas, gets up and declares: "I'm making a comeback." "She says, 'I deserve Troy Bolton, I know how to get him, and I'm going to have the perfect summer,'" Barsocchini adds. "The twist is, he gets jobs for all his friends, too."

At the center of the story is Troy's dilemma after Sharpay uses her connections to dangle a college scholarship in front of him—for a price. "It brings up the question: 'To be a success, do I have to give up my friends and the things I love?'" says Healy. "Troy has to decide what he will do for the sake of the next step in his life."

Director Ortega and writer Barsocchini collaborated closely on creating a script and developing ideas for the songs as the story fell into place. "Before the songwriters ever got involved, we would agree on where the songs should be and what they should be about," says Barsocchini. "For example, we knew that at the beginning of the movie we wanted to reintroduce our characters. So once the school bell rings on the last day, we have a song about what it feels like to start your first day of summer and what they each have in mind."

On the surface, "High School Musical 2" may seem like a traditionally structured musical comedy, but technology and its impact on popular culture inspired Ortega and Barsocchini to take a slightly different approach when envisioning the songs. "We approached the music the way you'd approach creating a playlist for an iPod," Barsocchini says. "When I was a kid, we would listen to 'Sgt. Pepper' from beginning to end. Kids today experience music in a totally different way. They make playlists and experience a story involving music as if it were a playlist."

"Kenny comes out of a traditional Broadway background, but he's very forward thinking. We agreed that we might be able to reinvent the musical by approaching it from this more contemporary perspective. We wanted it to be in sync with the way kids think about music."

Like its predecessor, "High School Musical 2" uses songs to tell much of its story. During the development period, the songs gradually evolved until every word and note filled the needs of the film, says music supervisor Steve

Vincent. "All of the songs went through multiple lyrical rewrites and melodic restructuring. First drafts were written before the script was finalized, and because the stories we were telling changed, we had to adjust the lyrics accordingly. Then, when Kenny started thinking about the choreography, the structures had to change because we added dance breaks."

"For example, the song 'Bet on It' starts with Troy on the golf course," Vincent continues. "When it was originally written, it was kind of like *Footloose*, with him taking his frustrations out on the ball. As the script evolved, it became more about him taking responsibility and seeing that it wasn't his friends that had turned on him but rather that he had let them down. It became a much more powerful song and a more powerful character turn for Troy."

The movie features music by many of the same songwriters who contributed to the original film, including Jamie Huston, Matthew Gerrard & Robbie Nevil, Andy Dodd & Adam Watts, Randy Peterson & Kevin Quinn, and David Lawrence & Fay Greenberg, as well as the work of some new composers such as Tim James and Antonina Armato.

According to Healy, the filmmakers wanted to avoid too closely duplicating the sound of the first film. "The soundtrack is still firmly in the realm of pop music, but it extends some of the edges out, especially in numbers like 'I Don't Dance' and 'Huma Huma.' They are more ambitious than we were in the first one. That said, a lot of what made the first album great was the strong, uplifting power ballads and we certainly have those this time around."

Underlying all the fun of "High School Musical 2" are some serious themes, notes Barsocchini. "Here are some kids who are going to face some new choices: Troy's saving money for college in case he doesn't get a scholarship. Chad's saving money for a new car. They've got some real issues to deal with underneath all the goofing around."

Like the movie itself, the characters are facing a second act that requires them to redefine themselves. "At Disney Channel, a lot of our movies are about identity," Healy says. "'Can I do what my parents want me to do and still be true to what I am? Can I live for today or do I have to twist myself into something different to grow up?' I don't think we answer those questions, but we pose them and those are questions that are posed in kid's lives all the time today. And we do it with great songs!"

"People ask me if I think 'High School Musical 2' will be as successful as the first one," Healy continues. "And I always tell them I didn't know the first

would be that successful. I just knew we all loved it. And once again, I believe we have a terrific piece of work.”

# # #