

The Idol Production Notes

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Co-Creator, Executive Producer, Writer, and Director Sam Levinson and Executive Producer Ashley Levinson

When and how did you first conceive *The Idol*?

Sam Levinson “I was in the middle of prepping season two of *Euphoria*. I got an idea stuck in my head, to the point where I couldn’t sleep. I was up all night reading about music and poets and realized that I’d never be able to sleep again until I wrote a scratch draft and got it onto the page. (*Laughs*) I told Abel and Reza I wanted to explore the story of a pop star who falls in love with someone she shouldn’t— a guy who has ulterior motives, but she gravitates to him. I’ve always been fascinated with celebrity and fame, particularly the bubble that many people live in where it’s a totally fictional reality. They’re surrounded by myth-makers who are constantly curating a reality that isn’t true. I also wanted to explore a character who is an artist who’s stuck creatively. Writing music means something to her, and yet it all feels like a money-grab. In a way, it’s the story of a musician searching for inspiration amidst feeling paralyzed by wanting to please everybody around her, especially her fans. A lot of artists fear trying something new for that reason. For Jocelyn, that confusion creates a stasis in her artistically, which causes her to make bad decisions in her personal life, which then affects her music in an interesting way.”

How did you first meet and get to know Abel?

Ashley Levinson “We were going to work with him a few years ago on another project that didn’t work out, which I think only increased our desire to work with him. He’s a wonderful collaborator and just so creative. I think we were all fascinated by the prospect of examining celebrity. We wanted to shed light on the idea that certain people shouldn’t have as much power as we give them. We also felt this story needed a sense of humor too, so what could that look like? Who could play the star? So much about how the audience cares about the story sits on her shoulders. So knowing that, who would be great with Abel? And how could he be most challenged?”

Sam Levinson “I’ve gotta give credit to Ashley here. The moment that Lily-Rose read she said, ‘Have you seen her audition? You *have* to see this.’”

Ashley Levinson “We were on the *Euphoria* set and I played it for you on my phone. You had to watch it twice because you were in the middle of a take!”

Sam Levinson “She was sensational. And she could sing! There is something about Lily-Rose... when she tapped into this character, there was a fearlessness beyond anything I’ve ever seen. There’s no fear of embarrassment, no fear of how she looks; no holding back.”

Jocelyn is so exposed in every sense—professionally, emotionally and physically.

Ashley Levinson “Yes and it was Lily-Rose’s choice – in terms of clothing – to essentially be barely-clothed. Jocelyn *wants* people to underestimate her. She’s constantly pushing against preconceptions of

who she is. It's a fascinating choice that Lily-Rose made and ultimately the right one for the character; by adding depth and displaying just one of the ways Jocelyn exerts control over her own image."

It also makes us want to protect her, especially as we see how deeply she is still grieving the loss of her mother.

Sam Levinson "Yes. It's similar I think to how we feel about Rue in *Euphoria* — we feel helpless. It's a lot like parenthood. I often look at my son and think, 'I really wish you wouldn't do that.' But they have to find their own way. There's a constant tension in hoping and wishing that they make the right decision."

It's widely known that you filmed a version of *The Idol* starting in November 2021 that was eventually scrapped. What informed your decision to reshoot the series?

Sam Levinson "I had been tied up with *Euphoria* season two during the first shoot, so I didn't see footage until Abel and I watched a few early cuts together. This was after the season-two finale of *Euphoria* aired and Ashley had given birth to our son. As co-creators, we'd been so excited about *The Idol*, but felt the early iteration unfortunately wasn't delivering what we needed it to. Abel asked me, 'If we make a few tweaks, do you think it can be great?' I said, 'I think it'll be *good*. But I don't think it's going to be *great*.'

I have so much respect for Abel as an artist. I first saw him perform in 2011 at The Hollywood Bowl. I remember he stood behind the microphone the entire time and never moved an inch. He was so shy. Then ten years later, I went to Coachella with him, around when we were deciding to redo *The Idol*. For that performance, he knew he needed to work the audience. His charisma was phenomenal. He was smiling, dancing and I thought, 'If this guy can go from that night at the Hollywood Bowl to *this*, I think our show can be better.' We had to make some tough decisions about how to move forward and, with the support of HBO, we decided to take the show in a new direction; approach with fresh eyes. And I think the story we're telling is better for it."

What aspects of the series were you most eager to improve in the second version?

Ashley Levinson "I think Sam is exceptional at working with actors and bringing forward the most vulnerable parts of themselves. But I think the first version just didn't have the naturalism we needed. This is Abel's first leading role, so Sam opted to shoot him differently in order to create an environment where he could really become Tedros. Rather than using a single camera, which is how Sam usually does it, we used three cameras. The entire house where we filmed — which is Abel's real home as Sam will explain — was essentially a hot set because there were so many cameras floating around."

Sam Levinson "I shot it almost like a reality show to help him feel *less* aware of the cameras. In version one, he seemed to clench when he was filming, so it was amazing to see him relax and really become the character."

When did you start filming the new version and what other changes were made?

Ashley Levinson “Toward the end of May 2022. As Sam said, we made some changes to our cast and crew; Sam stepped in as director and we reconceptualized a lot of the story to fit our new direction. There isn’t a single frame from version one that’s in version two, but we did carry over some of the supporting cast.”

Sam Levinson “Yes, Jane Adams, Suzanna Son and Troye Sivan were also in the original version. But we changed nearly all of the characters a little bit.”

Was it Abel’s idea to shoot in his home?

Sam Levinson “When we asked HBO if we could remake the show, we knew we’d have to do it for a lot less money. One night I was with Abel at his house in Bel Air. I’m looking around the place thinking, ‘This is a great set. HBO’s gonna want us to be really scrappy and thrifty. What do you think about us shooting here?’ And he was like, ‘Yeah, that works. You’ll have insurance, right?’ (*Laughs*) I went back to HBO and said ‘We got the main location for free.’ In total we have maybe four, five locations in the entire season, to fit the budget. After HBO agreed, we basically moved into his house the next week. I had about four weeks to write, prep and start shooting. I was upstairs in one room. We got Abel and cast member and record producer Mike Dean to set up a music studio downstairs. I called Ramsey –whose music I’d used on *Euphoria* – and asked if she’d write Jocelyn’s lyrics. ‘You want to basically move into The Weeknd’s house and write music every day?’ (*Laughs*)

She said yes so I put her and Lily together. Ramsey would write a piece, I’d take it to Abel and Mike, we’d work on it, then bring it back to her. Lily would then work with Ramsey to record her vocals. It was a really beautiful, collaborative process. And Suzanna Son— who acted in the original *Idol* but hadn’t been playing music— started sending me recordings she’d made on a little keyboard in her bathroom at home. She was like, ‘What about this?’ I’d given her some notes and decided, why not have her play the song ‘Crocodile Tears’ in a scene with [co-star] Da’Vine Joy Randolph, who I didn’t know at the time is a trained opera singer! So, she’s playing, Da’Vine is giving feedback about the vocals – this is in episode four - and next thing you know, her voice is really coming alive. Suzanna says, ‘I don’t know what happened, but that scene really opened me up. Now I can’t stop writing music.’”

Ashley Levinson “It was a beautiful thing to witness.”

Sam, when you were rewriting the scripts, what tonal or narrative changes were you hoping to make?

Sam Levinson “I wanted to bring more comedy to it. The industry is such a funny, strange world ... I wanted to get even more into the absurdities of it all.”

Ashley Levinson “Sam wasn’t as involved in the first version of the series because of *Euphoria*. He wasn’t giving notes and he wasn’t on set, which is good in a sense because he approached version two

with a fresh perspective. His goal was to answer: How do we make the most compelling story possible with the resources we have? Abel was an incredible asset in depicting the music industry and Sam spoke to a couple other musicians as well. It was fascinating to learn just how much determination it takes to succeed in this business.”

Sam Levinson “I think the work-ethic of a pop star is very different than that of an actor. An actor, even at the height of their powers, is still waiting for somebody to allow them to do their job.”

They essentially can’t work without a writer, director or producer. But a pop star, like Jocelyn, is theoretically creating her own content.

Sam Levinson “Yes. I also think it’s easier to get sucked into the world of stardom in music and totally lose objectivity. You end up with a lot of people in your life like Troye Sivan’s character, who’s Jocelyn’s best friend. Ten years go by, he’s still her ‘yes man’ and his own life has started to disappear. Also in the first version, Abel’s character Tedros was kind of mastermind-cult-leader. So I stripped that back a bit to create more mystery. And as the piece goes on, you start to see how insecure he is about his followers and about Jocelyn. You’ve got this guy who seems like he’s the villain. ‘Oh, he’s going to take advantage of this girl.’ Then you start to think, ‘Maybe he’s not the villain after all.’”

What most excites you about the character of Jocelyn and what she represents?

Sam Levinson “I’d say it’s how she informs the series’ larger theme of: Be careful who you idolize.”

Ashley Levinson “Personally I love her mischievousness. We’ve seen a lot of depictions of ‘powerful women,’ but along the way their complexities are often erased. I think it shortchanges a woman’s journey when we are made into angelic creatures and moral centers. What’s refreshing about this story is that it shows how we can be flawed, have humor and be sexy too.”

And ambitious. Jocelyn is ruthless in that regard.

Ashley Levinson “One million percent. She will succeed at any cost.”

Sam Levinson “Jocelyn has something to her that’s frightening and alluring. To have both inside of one character is very exciting. And Lily-Rose is such a gifted actor. Honestly, if it weren’t for Abel, Lily and their steadiness, I don’t think we would have had the guts to make the changes we did and reshoot.”

Ashley Levinson “And we respect HBO tremendously for giving us great notes.”

Sam Levinson “I count my lucky stars every day that I’m working with HBO. They have real respect for the individual storyteller. They took a huge leap making this show and letting me work alongside Abel— a pop star who’d never acted before! So, we didn’t want to let them down. And I hope people are excited to see what we’ve made because it feels like something that we haven’t quite seen before.”



Co-Creator, Executive Producer, Writer and Actor Abel “The Weeknd” Tesfaye (“Tedros”)

How would you describe the tone of *The Idol*? And what inspirations from your own life did you draw on in creating the character of Tedros?

“The tone is: Dark, sexy and a commentary on the music industry. And I was inspired by how dark Hollywood can be if you run into the wrong types of people, especially in the music industry. What I can say about Tedros is that he is a complex and charismatic outsider. He’s manipulative and calculating. I had to disappear from myself in order to tap into his psychology. Fortunately, I’ve never let anyone like Tedros into my life.”

What are the main reasons you wanted to reshoot the series?

“HBO and the producers felt that, even though there was potential in version one, the show just didn’t land. I personally felt like it wasn’t true to our original concept. Lily worked so hard to bring our vision to life. She deserves this version of the show. She’s a fucking star.”

Sam mentioned that he filmed you using three cameras for a more naturalistic feel. Can you speak to how that affected your performance?

“Sam and I spent a lot of time together on set – my house! – before shooting. We really tapped into the psychology of Tedros. I got to live the character for so long that, once the cameras were rolling, we were tapped in. It was like there were no cameras at all.”

To what degree does *The Idol* feel like a real-world depiction of the industry? And how did you infuse original music into the show?

“It’s for sure a heightened, exaggerated version of reality. We set up the studio in the house and, after every shoot day, I’d get inspired and work on the music with Mike Dean.”

Tedros has a unique look and style. What do you think they say about him?

“Sam and I worked hard to not see The Weeknd in the show. We did our best to have the audience not be distracted by seeing me and, instead, be immersed in Tedros’ image. The durag on his head, his wearing women’s clothes, sketchy tattoos... they all speak to a mysterious past and a conflicted narrative he carries about himself. The Weeknd is a character that I had to strip away and then build up to Tedros in his place.”

What was it like acting opposite Lily-Rose Depp?

“It felt like learning a new dance and she was an incredible partner. I had to go to some very dark, vulnerable places and with her there with me I felt safe and protected. I definitely learned from Lily. I felt like we connected artistically on such a deep level, more than any collaborator I’ve ever worked with. I can’t wait for people to see her performance in this show and what we captured.”



Actor Lily-Rose Depp (“Jocelyn”)

What most informed your enthusiasm for this project and how did the opportunity come to you to read for it?

“I loved the sound of it from every angle. I am a huge fan of Sam’s work— of the producers’ as well— and of Abel’s. There’s something inherently very cinematic about his music career. So I knew Sam and Abel joining forces was going to be really special. As for the audition, it came to me in a classic audition email from my team. I knew everybody was going to throw their hat in the ring for it. So if my audition ended up being any good, it’s probably because I was pretty convinced I wasn’t going to get the part (*Laughs*) I’m not a singer by *any* means— I was sure they were going to hire somebody else. There are so many incredible singers now who are also actors. So I thought, ‘Well, at least maybe they’ll think of me for something else.’ I definitely wanted to at least give it a go.”

You’ve had no formal training as a singer at all?

“My mom is a singer and when I was younger, I wanted to do it too, but really just because I wanted to be like my mom (*Laughs*). I’ve always sung around the house and stuff, but no, no training at all. And I remember for the callback, I had to send a video of myself singing for 30 seconds. I was like, ‘Uh-oh.’ I sang “Fever” by Peggy Lee. I think my clip was exactly 30 seconds, the bare minimum (*Laughs*) So I sent that, we had a couple more Zooms, then a chemistry read with Abel. I got the part in September 2021 and we began shooting in November.”

After you started digging into Jocelyn, especially once the series was retooled in the spring of 2022, what aspects of her personality and innerworkings were most important to you to showcase? And in what ways were Abel, Sam and Ashley key resources to you in navigating this process?

“I’m excited by things that scare me. And there was an aspect to her from the beginning that was going to be challenging to the audience — in the way that most complex female characters are. There’s something very human about her, but also very unapologetic. She doesn’t try to simplify herself for anybody. As women, we spend a lot of time trying to simplify ourselves for people. And while Jocelyn is certainly not based on Abel or any specific musician, there are aspects of his career I was able to draw from. I don’t know what it’s like to be a pop star at all, certainly not on that scale! So being able to talk to someone who’s lived that life was really helpful in nourishing the parts of her that I have no idea about—going on tour, what it’s like to be in front of all of those people, that kind of stuff. Also, when I started working more closely with Sam and Ashley, I felt like I was given more agency to really craft the character. Sam really cared about my opinions, which is something he brings into in all of his work. He’s really inspired by the person who’s in front of him. I saw him do that not only with me and Abel, but everybody in the show. It really felt like a big family.”

Sam has said he wanted to infuse the second version of the show with more humor. Was this something you felt in the scripts as well?

“Yes. I think Jocelyn is really funny and Abel’s character Tedros is hilarious. That’s what I think makes the show breathe as much as it does. There are moments that are dark, sad and difficult. What makes the show feel so real and human are those moments of humor. In life, things are not always dark! Also, in the second version, I was able to delve deeply into Jocelyn and her psyche; we really crack her open and

explore the love story more, which for me is the heart of the show. They are my favorite TV couple. (*Laughs*) They're very imperfect, but we love imperfect people, you know?"

The second version of the show employed more of a multi-camera, handheld approach to the cinematography. How did this affect your work?

"I *love* the way we shot the show. There were a lot of moments that were handheld, where neither we nor the cameraman knew what was going to happen. (*Laughs*) I think this contributed to an overall feeling of the set as a creative playground; the camera-work became a living, breathing aspect of the show. It makes it feel more human and clumsy. I love shooting with handheld more than anything. I love shooting the other way too, but it's really nice to not have to think about 'hitting your mark.' That was particularly freeing when we shot the music-video sequence in episode two, which was an incredible experience for me as an actor."

That sequence is particularly punishing for Jocelyn, both physically and emotionally.

"I've never experienced anything like that – it was a crazy few days. The scene was largely improvised. They kept cameras rolling, quietly reloaded and kept going. I think we did a take that was like 48 minutes long. It allowed me to be completely in the character, and in her headspace. I also realized throughout the process that I love dancing! I knew I liked dancing at parties and stuff, but Nina McNealy, our choreographer, is so incredible. I got to have one-on-one classes with her and work with some incredibly talented dancers. I felt so lucky. I kept telling them, 'Thank you for dancing with me. I'm such an amateur.' (*Laughs*)"

You weren't the only performer taking big risks in the series: This is Abel's first starring role. To what degree were you a support to each other during production?

"That's what was really nice: we were both doing something new. I feel like that leveled us out. He was able to have my back with the music and I was able to have his on the acting. I can't say enough about Abel. He's a true friend in a way you can only dream of for a scene partner. He knew I was nervous about the music, but really made sure that I felt comfortable with everything."

Hair, makeup and costumes are a huge piece of the storytelling in *The Idol*. Sam has said you had a lot of input in dressing Jocelyn, including a soon-to-be iconic bikini top she wears for the dance-rehearsal scene in episode one. What did you most enjoy about this part of the creative process?

"I love that outfit. (*Laughs*) And yes, that was my choice. I had so much fun with costumes, hair and makeup. We had such an amazing team in Kirsten Coleman, our head of makeup, and hair stylist Chris Fulton. I was so happy to see them at 5:00 AM every day. Natasha too, our costume designer, was incredible and has the best style. Jocelyn has an evolution in her style throughout the show that I think says a lot about who she is becoming. She starts out more girly but becomes more powerful. Generally, she leaves little to the imagination, which I find so funny. Who does a dance rehearsal wearing something that barely covers her nipples? (*Laughs*) But don't worry, they had me taped in!"

It seems like a lot of Jocelyn's power stems from her acute self-awareness; that she understands fully that she's a product.

“Yes she's been made aware of that her entire life. And I think we meet her at a point where she's ready to take more control. It's also not lost on her that she has the physical tools and sexuality to help her get what she wants. She's not scared to use them. And I think there's a lot of power in that.”

Intimacy coordinators were present during production in order to make you and your costars comfortable. What is the added value for you as an actor knowing they are part of the process, in a way that is only just now becoming routine in the industry?

“I already felt very comfortable because of Sam, Ashley and Abel, but yes, these coordinators are an essential part of any shoot that involves intimate scenes. It's so nice knowing there is someone there who focused only on that and making sure everybody feels comfortable. Ours knew when they needed to be there, when they didn't and left us the space we needed to create while also making sure, ‘Ok, everyone's covered. Great!’”

You come from a showbiz family and are now navigating the business as an artist on your own. To what degree do you relate to Jocelyn's journey?

“What she's going through, even if I haven't experienced it in a literal way, is very universal. She's struggling with feelings of self-doubt, being misunderstood and wanting to be seen in a different light. For any artist, showing your soul to people is a very vulnerable thing to do. Everyone is scared of being embarrassed and, now with social media, is constantly under a microscope being picked apart. And in a larger way, that's what the show is about: how we idolize people, put them on pedestals and then relish in taking them down. Anyone who is creative has had that feeling of ‘I just want to be taken seriously,’ so of course I relate to that too.”

It sounds like Sam and Abel saw something unexpected in you for this show, not unlike the recognition that Jocelyn is craving from those around her whom she sees as ‘real artists.’

“Absolutely. That was very much a mirrored feeling for me. I've been working for quite a while now and I don't know that I've ever felt so creatively fulfilled. Sam and Abel believed in me in a way that I hadn't in myself. That's why they were able to push me to places I was scared or nervous to go. They helped me feel like a real artist.”

Co-Creator, Executive Producer and Writer Reza Fahim

What was it about the concept of *The Idol* that felt most special to you?

“That fame can be like golden handcuffs. The bigger your platform, the more vulnerable you become. We wanted to explore the intersection of a pop star ‘handcuffed’ by fame and its expectations, and a mysterious figure who plays to that vulnerability.”

Why was Sam the ideal creative to lead the production?

“He has an incredibly beautiful way of mining emotion. There was a scene in the first season of *Euphoria* where all the actors are doing is sending text messages. And it struck me so honestly that it made me emotional. He’s such a creative force and a confident mind — it was inspiring to work alongside him.”

What most surprised you about working with Lily-Rose Depp and the cast in developing the story and characters?

“Lily-Rose is an artistic force. Her professionalism and commitment inspired everyone on the production.”

What would you say is most unique about Abel both as a singer and an actor?

“Abel is always pulling inspiration from every corner of his mind. Whether as an actor or singer, he disappears completely into everything he creates. He doesn’t hold anything back. There were days on set that he says he doesn’t remember now because he was so deep into it. I think it’s his capacity to pour his heart into the things he creates – and the people he creates for – that makes him unique. You can see why his fans are so devoted to him.”

Executive Producer Sara E. White

How did you become involved with *The Idol* and what were your key responsibilities?

“The filmmakers and HBO invited me to be part of this show early on. I worked very closely with the director, all the producers, the cast and crew, and HBO to help facilitate the necessary logistics to get the creative vision on-screen within the financial parameters.”

After Sam came onboard to direct the second iteration of the series, what strategies did you employ to execute his vision within a more conservative budget?

“Sam came up with the idea of having most of the story take place in one location in order to reduce costs and increase flexibility. It then became a collaborative process where we, as a creative team, worked together to streamline the story as efficiently and creatively as possible so that we could maximize the production value in a very limited amount of time.”

How would you describe Sam’s shooting style and the way he works with actors?

“It’s fun to watch Sam direct. He has an organic approach to storytelling, he’s very collaborative with the actors, and his enthusiasm and love for the story is contagious.”

What do you think the show says about fame, creative agency and the challenges of navigating the music business?

“For me the show reflects how fame can be fragile, shallow and much easier to achieve than authenticity. Being authentic requires you to listen and hear your creative voice and act on it. This takes boldness and it’s not always the popular thing to do.”

What was the creative team’s general approach to executing the show’s more provocative and complex themes?

“Making sure the set was a safe place was a top priority for all of us. There was always an open dialogue and collaboration between Sam and the actors in exploring these themes, and a mutual respect.”

In producing this show, what moments made you feel the most creatively fulfilled?

“It’s always a thrill to see the words on the page come to life. It’s magic. It’s equally cool to work with such a talented cast and crew and see them be so invested and dedicated.”

“What are you most proud of and excited for audiences to experience when they watch *The Idol*?”

“I’m most proud of the passion and talent of the cast and crew who were so dedicated to *The Idol* from beginning to end. This series really showcases everyone’s talent.”



In Their Own Words: *The Idol*'s Supporting Cast Break Down Their Characters, Favorite Moments and What Most Excites Them About the Series



Troye Sivan (“Xander”)

“I play Xander, Jocelyn’s best friend and creative director. I really enjoyed the group morale amongst the cast. Watching this ensemble of insanely talented people perform was so inspiring and informative for me. I was challenged every day! This was my first time doing TV, so I was learning on the job and having to push myself in a myriad ways. I’m excited for the audience to see the show for the same reasons I’m selfishly excited to watch: L.A. is an unreal, crazy place where more often than not, reality is stranger than fiction.”



Da’Vine Joy Randolph (“Destiny”)

“My character’s name is Destiny. She shares responsibilities with Hank Azaria’s character Chaim in co-managing Jocelyn. Destiny is like an older sister or aunt to Jocelyn – one of few female voices in her ear.

She has a genuine, deep investment in Jocelyn’s career and well-being. When it comes to Tedros, Destiny can smell him a mile away! So Chaim puts her in charge to be his eyes and ears and keep a close watch on Tedros. She knows the type, and has his number. However she cleverly ‘plays the game’ in order to get as close as possible. What I loved most about this project was its genuine, collaborative spirit across the board, top to bottom. I think I am most excited for fans to see the fashion, as well as the dance and music numbers.”



Jane Adams (“Nikki Katz”)

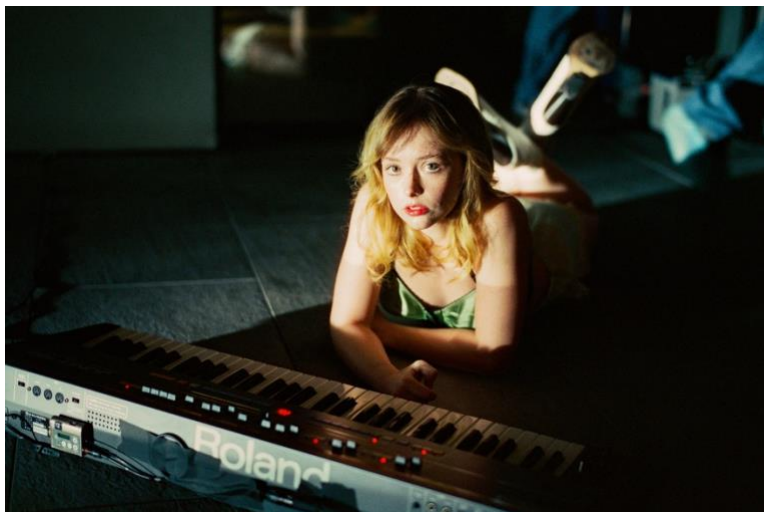
“I play Nikki Katz, a record-label executive who’s worked with Jocelyn for years. Nikki is close to Jocelyn and genuinely wants her to succeed, but she is – first and foremost – a businesswoman. If she perceives Jocelyn as being self-destructive, all bets are off. Tedros is seen by Nikki as a threat to Jocelyn but then - boom! - that perception changes completely and it’s a new playing field.

Sam is a genius director. He’s always after the truth, so the challenge became finding and showing that while the cameras were rolling. Sam makes this easy because he puts all this insane talent together – the very best cast and crew – to capture the most golden moments. It’s like we were all on a dive together in the deepest part of the ocean, finding treasures; a kind of spiritual experience for sure! It was such a great experience that, looking back now, it has almost a dream-like quality. I am excited for fans to have their minds blown by the gorgeous, dark and very funny moments Sam has captured. When announcing that *The Idol* would be part of the Cannes Film Festival this year, I don’t think it was a mistake that [festival director] Thierry Fremaux accidentally called *The Idol* ‘a movie that could become a series,’ as that is exactly what *The Idol* is: an epic film. And for the audience’s sake, I hope it never ends!”



Rachel Sennott (“Leia”)

“I play Leia, Jocelyn’s assistant and best friend, or at least that’s how she sees herself! They have an interesting relationship because, while they’re super close, Leia does work for Jocelyn and this creates a certain dynamic. Leia definitely looks up to Jocelyn and is her ‘number one fan’ in a little-sister way. Leia’s relationship to Tedros is that she is scared of him, thinks he’s a creep and she may be the only one who can see his true nature. I loved working with Sam to create an arc for this character— completely pushed to her limit and steamrolled until she’s finally had enough. I also loved becoming close with this cast of amazing actors and crew. There are some incredible, ensemble scenes when everyone is at their most crazy-version of themselves and working together in an insane dynamic. I also think people are going to be blown away by Lily-Rose’s performance.”



Suzanna Son (“Chloe”)

“I play Chloe, whose relationship with Jocelyn and Tedros changes throughout the show. I don’t want to spoil anything, but I can say that Chloe sees Jocelyn and Tedros as her idols. I really enjoyed the freedom

we had while we were shooting; Sam was so giving and let the cameras roll while we improvised and tried new things. I also found that to be the most challenging part! You don't have a script giving you the answers; you have to find them yourself. I'm probably most excited for fans to experience the world Sam has created and how masterfully Lily-Rose walks the tightrope of Jocelyn."



Hank Azaria ("Chaim")

"I play Chaim Altchek, who is like an uncle and father figure to Jocelyn. He discovered her when she was 11 performing in a mall, then signed her and got her a job on a Disney show— similar to how Britney Spears became an enormous pop-idol. Chaim is very protective of Jocelyn as she's had a lot of problems – psychological, emotional and otherwise – so he is always trying to nurture and protect her. He also has to make sure that she continues to put out her multi-million dollar musical product. This is not the easiest needle to thread.

I found this to be one of the most, if not the most, creative jobs I have ever had. It was a combination of scripted and improvised lines; we were working with people who work in music and overall just great actors, musicians and producers. Half of the time I didn't know who was an actual producer or someone playing a producer; an actual makeup person or someone playing a makeup person. It all felt so real to us and I think that comes through on the screen. I'm excited for people to see a really intimate, voyeuristic view from inside the music business and celebrity; not just the innerworkings, but of these peoples' minds, hearts and raw emotions. Anyone who works in entertainment knows it can be very chaotic, passionate and scary. I think all of this is captured perfectly in *The Idol*. Lily-Rose and Abel's performances are extraordinary. I'm thrilled to be a part of it."

Get to Know Artists Behind *The Idol*

Cinematographer Marcell Rev

At what point in the process did you join this creative team?

“It was for the second version and it was a very rushed, last-minute process for me. I told Sam, ‘I wouldn’t do this for anyone else but for you.’ (*Laughs*) But to be honest, it all made it feel a little lighter and, in a way, gave us more freedom to experiment. ‘Ok this isn’t prepped the way we’d normally would have it, but let’s not worry about being technically perfect.’ And I think this led to some very interesting results and less pressure. Hopefully you can feel this in this show; certain moments are looser. Normally I’d spend three months just collecting references and figuring out what Sam wanted to do. For this, I was trying to tap into it as quickly as possible.”

How much time *did* you have?

“None. (*Laughs*) I was shooting another show at the time, and was on the phone with Sam when he started to shoot *The Idol*. He explained what he wanted it to feel like and I had some thoughts from seeing a few dailies. I flew to L.A. and the next day I was shooting. And of course I’d read the scripts.”

What did Sam’s writing evoke for you visually?

“The first things that came to mind were renaissance paintings; I remember sending a bunch of Italian-masters’ work to Sam to review. I’m not saying we went that route totally, but that was my first thought. Then of course we wanted it to feel very Hollywood. We filmed in the spring and summer, so you want to take advantage of that low California sun. And obviously Abel’s house defined the aesthetic and we had a lot of available light there, too. We wanted to show some of that Hollywood glamour, but in almost a grotesque way— wider lenses come in and there’s almost a thriller, horror aspect to the lighting.”

You also used numerous cameras during filming. How many did you have going at once?

“Three, and then maybe four for stadium scenes in the final episode; definitely more of a multicamera style than we’d use on *Euphoria*. We tried to embrace the chaos and make sense of it. And the whole thing was filmed on 35mm. Why? Well, I can try and be polite, but simply: 35 is better than digital. That’s the truth. It’s looks better. I like it better. I’m not saying that you can’t make a good movie on digital; it’s been proven that you can. But if there’s a choice, I’ll always choose film. Why not embrace it and make something cinematic for television?”



Choreographer Nina McNeely and Costume Designer Natasha Newman Thomas

What was your journey to working on *The Idol*?

Natasha Newman-Thomas “Heidi Bivens, the costume designer on *Euphoria*, reached out to me then I got looped in with Sam and Ashley. I’ve also been working with Abel for about 10 years, so it seemed like a great fit.”

Nina McNeely “I’ve also worked with Abel on music videos and other projects previously.”

How did the series’ reshooting impact or improve the work you were able to do?

McNeely “The first time around was pretty quick. I didn’t really get to know Lily-Rose very well and how she moved. It was a little rushed. For the second round, we had private lessons for a few weeks, every day, so we could learn what was going to work best for the character. That made a world of difference in both the choreography, and Lily-Rose’s confidence and fearlessness. Aesthetically it all got much grittier and more primal.”

Newman-Thomas “I hadn’t worked on the first version, so we were able to start completely fresh and build the characters from zero in terms of costumes.”

There's a scene in the first episode in which a reporter refers to Jocelyn's choreography as 'referential.' Nina, what were your inspirations?

McNeely "I did a lot of research on the most sensual and erotic dance scenes ever on-screen. I got really inspired by Fosse's *All That Jazz*; the video for "Cold Hearted Snake" by Paula Abdul; the movie *Showgirls*; "Slave For You" by Britney Spears. The common theme among all of these was the character of the 'enigmatic, sought-after woman.' I wanted to explore the idea of the power-play and her ultimately surrendering to the dancers – that push-pull. I also wanted it to feel timeless, too. What's sexy today maybe wasn't, say, ten years ago."

Natasha, how did Nina's vision for choreography inform yours for costumes, and vice versa?

Newman-Thomas "She'd send me videos of rehearsals and that really helped inform what restrictions might exist for the costumes and movement—like, for example, whether we needed gussets [pieces of material sewn into garments to strengthen or enlarge a parts of them]; how many backup dancers there were, all of that. We had a lot of fittings with Lily-Rose prior to shooting. There were a few looks that were kind of her go-to's for rehearsals. They were all pretty minimal in terms of fabric. (*Laughs*) It all helped to bring us into the character's world and her harnessed, sexual power."

McNeely "For episode two, the music-video shoot, Sam asked me to make a list of the worst things that can go down on a shoot—and costume issues are always a thing. Also, the shoes; like, if they rehearsed in a sneaker, all of a sudden they're in heels for filming and in agony. So we definitely had Lily-Rose rehearse in heels. (*Laughs*) She's getting lifted, pulled and pushed by all of the dancers and on top of it, in this crazy outfit. It gets to a point of being overwhelming. I thought it was really cool that Sam leaned into all of these issues and made it part of the story because it's very real."

Newman-Thomas "It also totally fed into the narrative struggle of the costumes, too. It was such a challenge for Lily-Rose to move in that outfit, but we wanted to play on the idea of an artist suffering for her craft; the ultimate pop star. But Lily-Rose nailed it and pushed through in full Jocelyn mode. Actually, Lily-Rose mode." (*Laughs*)

Nina, what was most important to you in assembling a crew of backup dancers for these scenes?

McNeely "In the first version of the show, the dancers were more of a mix of women and men; Sam said he wanted the new version to be mostly men, leaning into those classic pop-tropes even more. Generally I try to hire dancers I've worked with before; people I know who are going to bring it and be really positive. There's also a big difference between a dance-company dancer and a music-video dancer; the latter is expected to make something small look like something huge on-camera. So I made sure to grab those types of dancers too; generally the most outstanding male dancers in L.A."

What is most intriguing to you about what *The Idol* has to say about fame?

Newman-Thomas “I love how the series explores myths about fame and stardom, specifically that they bring happiness. I’ve worked with many musicians over the years who are on crazy schedules—I don’t think I could do it. You’re waking up in Tokyo, playing three shows, sleeping on the plane, barely resting. It’s insane. It’s superhuman.”

McNeely “I love how the series shows the *actual* struggles of a pop star. I don’t think I’ve ever seen such things represented on television in a meaningful way— the sacrifices they make, what they endure in finding themselves, and often not on the healthiest path.”

Supervising Editor Julio Perez

Who or what most inspired your approach to editing *The Idol*?

“It was most closely related to episodes seven and eight of season two of *Euphoria* – the episodes with the high-school play and the crazy shootout. They had a looser approach in capturing the dramatics. The central challenge here was the sheer volume of footage, which I think is something that maybe non-post-oriented people take for granted like, ‘Oh so more footage means you have more time.’ No.” (*Laughs*)

So there’s an even bigger premium placed on judiciousness in your selects.

“Yes— judiciousness, attention to detail, all the while keeping track of overarching character-arcs and story turns, all before you start to pore over a million and a half feet of 35mm. (*Laughs*) So it wasn’t dissimilar to that, just more amplified.”

How did Sam shifting his shooting style to include more cameras impact your process? Lily-Rose has said it helped her stay in Jocelyn’s headspace more easily.

“I can definitely see how that would help an actor be more fully absorbed in the character’s experience. For editing, it’s still always about the selects, but one thing that was kind of fun here were the stretches of footage almost felt like ‘docu-reality;’ part reality show, part documentary. The most conspicuous example of this would be the music video in episode two. Events were happening and they were just running the video as choreographed; cameras were rolling documentary style. They’d just reload and keep going.”

While this series and season two of *Euphoria* were shot on 35mm, can you put in perspective just how unique it is to shoot a series in this format? For *The Idol*, 35mm adds something anachronistic visually; that the story is taking place in an almost indeterminate era.

“I love that observation. It is extremely rare to shoot on 35mm in a series format. I never used it in independent film, which was always on video to save money. The first time I worked with 35mm was *Euphoria* season one for a flashback scene, then entirely for season two. As for 35mm feeling timeless, I

think there was an interest in *The Idol* feeling like an interplay of dreamed realities. When I first saw the footage I was like, ‘Damn, this *is* different.’ Aesthetically, I’m much more molded as a filmmaker, which is what you see more of in *The Idol*: a diverging from the montage-ist mode of *Euphoria* to into more side stories—overall more of a marriage of aesthetic and tone, with all of their thrills and challenges.”

Makeup Department Head Kirsten Coleman and Hair Department Head Christopher Fulton

Kirsten, you have worked with Sam on *Euphoria*. What do you recall about your early conversations about *The Idol* and his vision for how hair and makeup would help tell this story?

Kristen Coleman “He wanted this world to feel separate from *Euphoria* and have more an adult feeling. Some of the words he used were ‘sexy, gritty, natural texture, shine’ and seeing this pop-star in ‘her natural habitat.’ There needed to be differences between her on-and-off-stage. He also wanted it to be noir, sensual and always about the characters in this kind of dirty love story. Overall I’d say there’s definitely more of an adult/rich person’s vibe in this show.”

Christopher, how did you get attached to the project?

Christopher Fulton “They reached out after the first iteration of *Idol* had been filmed. They wanted the new version to be more lux, edgy and aspirational— basically like a huge vision board of [creative director of Yves Saint Laurent] Anthony Vaccarello. (*Laughs*) So my process was to take these inspirations, deconstruct them and making it all look real; like high-fashion editorial, but broken-down. Nothing too done. That’s the style now.”

The Coachella aesthetic.

Fulton “Yes! The dirtier your hair, the more you are on-trend. (*Laughs*) We never wanted anything to look perfect; rather, effortlessly cool, which I think encapsulates L.A. too.”

What were your approaches to Lily-Rose’s makeup and hair as they relate to her character arc?

Coleman “We wanted to create a contrast between her day-to-day mode and pop-star mode. When she’s on-stage and completely done up, she’s almost unidentifiable. This is meant to reinforce the idea that her true self can’t shine through when she’s performing. Throughout the series, her makeup becomes more intense; more contrasted. We increasingly used darker and lighter colors instead of softer, warmer colors. She’s like a prized horse to her team and never really has a moment to be herself.”

Fulton “Her hair was based on 1990’s Kate Moss— effortlessly textured, not blown out and, for most of the show, no hair pieces. Sam didn’t want that because Jocelyn wouldn’t really care enough to wear extensions. I think Lily-Rose maybe washed her hair a couple of times total in order to keep that grit and texture. I used tons of dry shampoo, and constantly sprayed and texturized between scenes.”

Let's talk about crafting Abel's look as Tedros, which is sure to be a key talking point.

Coleman “He has an amazing personal makeup and hair stylist named Kya Bilal, who we worked very closely with. When we all discussed makeup, it was about being natural—the signature Sam Levinson skin. He likes to see texture and natural facial hair. There are moments when Tedros is distressed, so Kya made his eyes look red, like he hadn't slept. Or when he's having a breakdown, she added darkness under his eyes. She also made him look a bit pale with red eyes if he's been crying. But overall for makeup, it was pretty much about keeping his skin looking natural.”

Fulton “For the second iteration of *The Idol*, Sam brought in Kim Kimble, who'd worked on *Euphoria* season two, to work with Abel and Kya and design a look for Tedros. Kya tried a few things, then Sam and Abel proposed a 'rat-tail,' then a ponytail. It was this really sleazy, gelled, shellacked thing. (*Laughs*) Everybody was like, 'Yes!' Abel and Sam were inspired by the idea that Tedros was a guy from Michigan who wore a leather trench coat and had been in prison. So this was the perfect hair look for him.”

What is distinct to you about how hair and makeup are used to tell this particular story?

Coleman “That question means so much to me because audiences often don't notice these details. I look at it as subliminal messaging to viewers; more of a feeling you get when you're watching. A character may start to feel self-confident, so her eyeliner is a little longer, darker and her lashes are noticeable. But the audience isn't thinking, 'Oh, her lipliner's a little darker in this scene, so it must mean that.' They aren't doing that math, but we've done it for them. So all they have to do is experience the emotions we're putting onscreen.”

Fulton “What's amazing about this show is that we never tried to look cool or create a trend. Everything happened organically and it feels really authentic. Every hairstyle. Every look. Every person looks like an individual. One of my favorite hairstyles in the show is Jane Adams' razor-bitch bob. (*Laughs*) We worked a lot with real music people so we had exclusive access to their aesthetic. With all of these inspirations, you kind of can't lose.”