



Celebrating The 20th Anniversary Of *The Sopranos*

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Last week, HBO celebrated the 20th Anniversary of *The Sopranos*, a show that undoubtedly changed the television landscape forever. Cast members reunited to reminisce about the good old days, and pay homage to the show's leading man, James Gandolfini, who sadly passed away in 2013. Even for a show rife with violence and tough guy antics, the love on the red carpet was palpable, and it was apparent the cast still shares a deep bond.

When *The Sopranos* first aired in January 1999, creator David Chase wasn't certain there would be a Season 2. In a pre-social media age, Season 1 aired without much fanfare. "I joined at the beginning of Season 2," said executive producer/writer Terence Winter, "but like so many Hollywood writers I was watching and was immediately hooked on Season 1—even if the masses hadn't clued in yet."

"By the time we started filming Season 2, we were on location in New Jersey, and Season 1 was being rerun for the first time," he recalled. "I remember I came out of a trailer with Michael Imperioli and Drea de Matteo, to a huge crowd and they just started applauding! Michael and Drea stopped in their tracks, looked at each other, and said "What the hell is happening?!?" It was the beginning of stardom for them. During Season 1 no one knew who they were, but by the time we got to Season 5 they couldn't go anywhere! We'd go to a boxing match at Madison Square Garden, and it would be like walking in with The Beatles. It was really amazing to watch that from the inside out."

With so much on-location filming in New Jersey and Brooklyn, fans clamored to meet the stars of the show, and they weren't shy about it either! When chatting with Vince Curatola aka Johnny "Sack" Sacramoni, we asked him if he remembered the exact moment when he realized the show was a hit. "Absolutely!" he said with a laugh, "It happened when I was washing one of my cars in my driveway, and the traffic stopped! That was *the* moment. Folks were getting out of their cars to say hello, and it was a bit scary. I ended up moving after that!" For Lorraine Bracco aka Dr. Melfi, she realized the show was a fan favorite when strangers started yelling "Hey Doc!" at her as she attempted to go about her daily life. "At first I didn't realize they were talking to me," said Bracco, "People would just shout at me how much they loved the show!"

On a more serious note, the cast remains proud of what *The Sopranos* did to cast light on the topic of mental health, particularly when it comes to men. "You're right," said Curatola, "the show really helped break down a barrier when it came to talking about mental health. People carry a lot of stress with them, and the same way you'd go to a doctor for a broken ankle, you go to a therapist for a broken soul. I'm a big believer in therapy, and I really do feel like the show helped to normalize it."

Bracco recounted how a young member of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) once told her that scenes between Tony and Dr. Melfi were being used in classrooms across the country. "Once the show caught on, the APA also saw a huge increase in men seeking therapy—it's just unbelievable! If Tony can go, I can go too," she said beaming. "Television and art can truly change culture."

Relieve it all from the beginning! Watch Season 1 FREE until 1/25 On Demand on Channel 1501.