



*For her Hulu dramedy *Life & Beth*, Amy Schumer finds inspiration in her own childhood, motherhood and relationship with a neurodivergent man.*

True to Life

Amy Schumer has come a long way. She first gained wide acclaim fronting her own sketch comedy show (*Inside Amy Schumer*), then wrote and starred in a self-deprecating movie directed by Judd Apatow (*Trainwreck*). Now she's the creator, executive producer, star and a writer and director of Hulu's *Life & Beth*.

Told along two timelines, with Schumer playing adult Beth and Violet Young as teen Beth, the show uses comedy and tragedy in equal measure, examining the life of a woman dealing with her past as she tries to forge a better future. There's also a love story between Beth and her farmer boyfriend John (Michael Cera), who learns he has autism spectrum disorder.

The second season follows adult Beth as she and John decide to marry and start a family, while navigating John's diagnosis. Schumer spoke with *emmy* contributor **Neil Turitz** about the show, her previous work and how becoming a mother has changed everything.

Where did the idea for the show come from?

The idea came from looking at my old journals, which I kept pretty religiously from age 12 to around 21, and seeing Bo

Burnham's movie *Eighth Grade*. There's that scene where she's [Elsie Fisher's teen character] in the back of the car and the guy's going further than she's ready for. I just thought, "God, this is such an underrepresented time in women's lives." It really sets up your

DNA of who you're going to become and your relationship to trust and self-esteem. I was interested in that and was looking at my journals, and I was pregnant, so it was all these things coming together. I felt like I had a lot to say, and it scared me, so I thought I should try to do it. I still don't know how to write an episode of television, but I didn't let that stop me.

You don't know how to write an episode of television?

I feel like I know a little bit about how to write a movie, so I just kind of wrote a long movie, in that the episodes can't really stand alone. In episodic television, usually there's more of an arc within an episode, and I just never learned the format.

So, you envisioned each season as a film in parts?

Yeah, because I was paying attention to how I was watching

things. I wanted to make something that's long, that takes people into a world they will be comfortable in, because that's how I've been enjoying watching things. I was hoping people would just watch it in one or two sittings. I'm really glad Hulu released each season all at once.

Did becoming a mother change how you tell stories?

Definitely. Just the humanity it gives you. Yuval Harari, the historian, has a theory that there's no beginning. There's no starting point in history, and it's like that with ourselves. My mother and her choices didn't start with her. She's the product of how she was raised, and her mother and her traumas inside her, and that's me, too. So having a child made me way more forgiving. It changes how you see humanity. We all started out as somebody's baby, and I think that has an impact in terms of how to tell a story.

Some people may not be prepared for the depth of this show and some of the dark places you go.

You know, I'm 42. Earlier, I didn't have those sorts of realizations or thoughts to share, but becoming an adult and navigating life and a marriage and seeing your parents in a different way ... I've become more interested in all aspects of how to tell a story and how to make something.

Can you trace your own storytelling journey and your learning process from *Inside Amy Schumer* to *Life & Beth*?

It's funny to figure out how to communicate what I want to say and be efficient. With every moment, every shot, we're asking, "What are we saying?" I guess that's what directors do, and it's about becoming more confident. I got to study at NYU in their directing program while I was pregnant. I really wanted to be equipped. I went to the first production meeting of *Inside Amy Schumer* and they're like, "Okay, it says here, 'interior night,'" and I would say, "Oh, that doesn't have to be night. It can be outside. Whatever." I had to learn to become efficient with how to make something shootable. Understanding more about the practicality of things and specificity. Like when you don't need a character to say something because you can see it. Also, not trying to appeal to everyone — which, honestly, is not something I've ever really done.

You cocreated *Inside Amy Schumer* and directed some episodes, but now you're writing and directing a lot of this show. How did you prepare?

Ryan McFaul and I had together directed that [*Inside Amy Schumer* third season, third] episode I'm so proud of, the *12 Angry Men* remake, and it was happening naturally in *Trainwreck* — I would suggest some shots and be talking to actors. I did a two-year Meisner intensive at the William Esper Studio, so I had some vocabulary for it, but then I came up with my own way of directing, which the DGA probably doesn't love.

But Kevin Kane, Dan Powell, Ryan McFaul and I are always on set [for *Life & Beth*]. We're all producers, and we work together. What I've grown to love is meeting with the DP early on and as many departments as want to take part, and we'll just talk about what I want to communicate. The first season, I was saying "sorry" a lot before I would ask



The pandemic gave Amy Schumer (as Beth) and Michael Cera (as John) extra time to develop their roles.

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something, because I felt like I was stepping out of my lane. But the second season, I shed that apologetic vibe and felt empowered to communicate what I wanted from each shot.

That's interesting, because there's a tonal shift in season two. So much of the first season is told in flashbacks, and there's less of that now. It's like you have more confidence in adult Beth.

Absolutely. Season one, I was figuring it all out, but I feel like the flashbacks' placement and purpose were a lot more defined in season two. With such a long time between seasons, there was time for me to grow and learn and watch a lot and see things I wanted to emulate or stay away from — and gain some confidence.

You cast a lot of comedians, like Colin Quinn, Tim Meadows, Gary Gulman, Maria Bamford and more. Why?

Comedians are so interesting on camera. When I see somebody talented and they're kind of up and coming, I'll be like, "Go to the Esper Studio. Study Meisner. I will pay your tuition. I will get you in a class." I've sent many comedians there, because if you're funny and talented, you think, "Oh, I just want to be a comedian. If I can make a living that way, that's the dream." But once you get there, you think you want to have a show or get cast in something. Then it's good to have that training as an actor. You can be the funniest comedian ever, but that doesn't mean you can act. It's like everything else — you have to work hard and get better.

I'm curious about how you came to cast Michael Cera as Beth's husband. Also, did you know from the beginning that John would be on the spectrum?

I did know John was on the spectrum, and I hoped that we'd get a season two because it didn't feel right to have him diagnosed in season one. As for Michael, I don't picture anyone when writing any role, but he was certainly the dream for it. He doesn't say yes to a lot of things, so I thought it was going to be a quick no. But I sent him all 10 episodes of the first season, and he was very interested right away. We would have long conversations, and because of the pandemic, it really stretched it out. We were talking about this show and his role for a full year.

Did that extended conversation period help your chemistry?

Probably. I think it was just growing to love each other and trust each other. A production is a place where you can be demoralized. I've certainly been through my own struggles, so to know that you're going to hold each other and that there won't be a moment where you turn on each other is everything. He was becoming a parent, I was becoming a parent, so yeah, that time definitely helped. Now we have such a great shorthand. You have to make yourself vulnerable to have chemistry with someone.

A great example is your fight in episode eight, where Beth and John are so raw with each other — no holds barred, no punches pulled — yet it ends with a moment of great tenderness.

So many people in the crew were like, "God, I really relate to this." When you're in a relationship, you have your own narratives, and communication is such a challenge. It's so hard being in a relationship and a marriage. The day before we shot it, I kept thinking about that scene in the movie *Short Cuts*, where Julianne Moore is bottomless, and Matthew Modine is asking if she cheated on him. They're never in

each other's coverage and it really separates them. So, we shot Michael's side and my side, and there's no coverage in that scene, so we were able to live it out. That last shot where he goes out to get me water and finds my phone and the way he puts it down, it's so perfect. When he came back in, he was walking by, and I just grabbed his hand. That wasn't scripted. He just reacted by sitting right down next to me and holding me. It was such a beautiful moment, and I think so relatable for couples.

It also typified Beth's journey in how we've seen her over two seasons trying harder to communicate, even if she's not as good at it as she'd like to be.

Yes. They're a neurodivergent couple but also just a man and a woman. Add in the hormones and how vulnerable you both feel. That's why the flashbacks are showing these old stories that are running through us every second. It's so hard to navigate. I don't think she's ever communicated like this with anybody — other than maybe her sister.

Beth gives birth in season two's 10th and final episode, which you wrote and directed. Was there some wish fulfillment for the birth of your own son — being able to do it again?

My son's birth was extremely traumatic. They had a really hard time putting me back together. It's supposed to maybe take 45 minutes to sew someone up, and mine took over three hours. I was lying there thinking that I maybe was going to die right after my son was born. It felt like a real possibility. In so many moments of this show I am interested in showing people how things can go. I wanted to show a C-section. I wanted to show a woman *choosing* to get a C-section. In terms of directing it, we just talked about it so much, we went through the shots, we storyboarded it, we were so ready to film that scene. Everybody in every department really brought their A-game and surpassed their own expectations.

In the last exchange of the episode, John asks Beth, "What now?" and she answers, "I don't know." That kind of goes for the show, too. Hulu hasn't ordered season three yet. If it does, where do you go from here?

I'd like to see young Beth in college, and for John and Beth, I'd love to see them navigate things I went through five years ago. I have a lot of thoughts about their life post-diagnosis, after having a baby, and — now that they're married — being parents and trying to stay married. Hopefully we'll get to tell that story. ☺

Life & Beth was created by executive producer and star Amy Schumer, who also serves as a writer and director. Kevin Kane, Daniel Powell and Ryan McFaul are also executive producers and directors on the series, which is produced by Fifth Season.