

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**PRODUCERS AND CAST OF PEACOCK'S *BEL-AIR* TALK TACKLING BLACK IDENTITY IN FEBRUARY ISSUE OF EMMY MAGAZINE**

(LOS ANGELES, Calif. — Feb. 24, 2022) — It's been over 30 years since a 22-year-old Will Smith burst onto the scene as the protagonist of NBC's smash hit *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. In 2022, Smith steps behind the camera as an executive producer of *Bel-Air*, a dramatic reimagining of the classic '90s sitcom that premiered on Peacock Super Bowl Sunday. *Emmy* talks to the creators, producers and cast of the powerful new series with a wider view on Black identity and culture. The award-winning, official publication of the Television Academy hits newsstands Feb. 25.

Loosely based on the life of Hollywood music exec Benny Medina, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* was at its core a lighthearted comedy; but storylines often addressed the Black experience, including racial profiling and class divides. While *Bel-Air* pays homage to the original, the producers are quick to explain that it's not about nostalgia and it's not the same show; instead, the series is a complex portrait of a dynamic Black family.

The genesis of *Bel-Air* was a concept trailer by Kansas City filmmaker Morgan Cooper. In 2019 his viral video (with 7.4 million views on YouTube) caught the attention of Smith's Westbrook Studios. "It was so creative," says Smith. "My mind just exploded with possibility. All the episodes we couldn't do [back then], even the things as a cast we were experiencing day to day. Every once in a while you see an idea so basic, so simple, it's like a revelation. It was like, 'Of course.'"

In the *emmy* cover story "**A Change in the Air**," Cooper shares his inspiration for the series. "I want to tell the story of those who may not have a voice. That's the most important thing to me, making a difference—challenging the status quo through the art and how we represent people on screen, in our humanity. I hope to show through our show that excellence exists everywhere and is far-reaching within the Black community."

The search for the right actor to play "Will" took months and involved hundreds of auditions. "We were trying to find someone who wasn't doing an imitation of Will [Smith]," says co-showrunner Rasheed Newson. The answer was newcomer Jabari Banks, who studied musical theater at Philadelphia's University of the Arts. Turns out, he also raps and plays basketball. The similarities seemed like kismet, but it was ultimately Smith who picked the heir to the Fresh Prince throne. "I could not believe the dude was from West Philly!," Smith says. "God picked Jabari—I didn't have anything to do with it."

Peacock will stream new episodes of *Bel-Air* every Thursday.

Additional feature highlights from the new issue include:

- Elizabeth Holmes, the founder and chief executive officer of the now-defunct startup Theranos, bluffed the best of Silicon Valley. In "**Nobody's Fool**" *emmy* talks to Elizabeth Meriwether, showrunner and executive producer of *The Dropout*, Hulu's limited series based on Holmes' rise and fall.
- In "**Matters of Fact**," *emmy* talks to *PBS NewsHour* anchor and managing editor Judy Woodruff about the signature interviewing style that won her the first Peabody Award for Journalistic Integrity. "I don't pull punches," Woodruff says. "There's a way of being both respectful and being direct and asking for answers at the same time. And that's how I see my approach."
- Roku is the America's leading provider of streaming hardware and software, but it's also one of the most volatile companies in streaming. In "**Roku's Wild Ride**," *emmy* examines the company's past and future, including the Roku channel's January 2021 launch of original programming.

About *emmy*

Emmy, the official publication of the Television Academy, goes behind the scenes of the industry for a unique insider's view. It showcases the scope of television and profiles the people who make TV happen, from the stars of top shows to the pros behind the cameras, covering programming trends and advances in technology. Honored consistently for excellence, *emmy* is a six-time Maggie Award winner as Best Trade Publication in Communications or the Arts and has collected 52 Maggies from the Western Publishing Association. *Emmy* is published 12 times per year, and is available on selected newsstands and at [TelevisionAcademy.com](https://www.televisionacademy.com) for single print and digital copies as well as subscriptions.

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