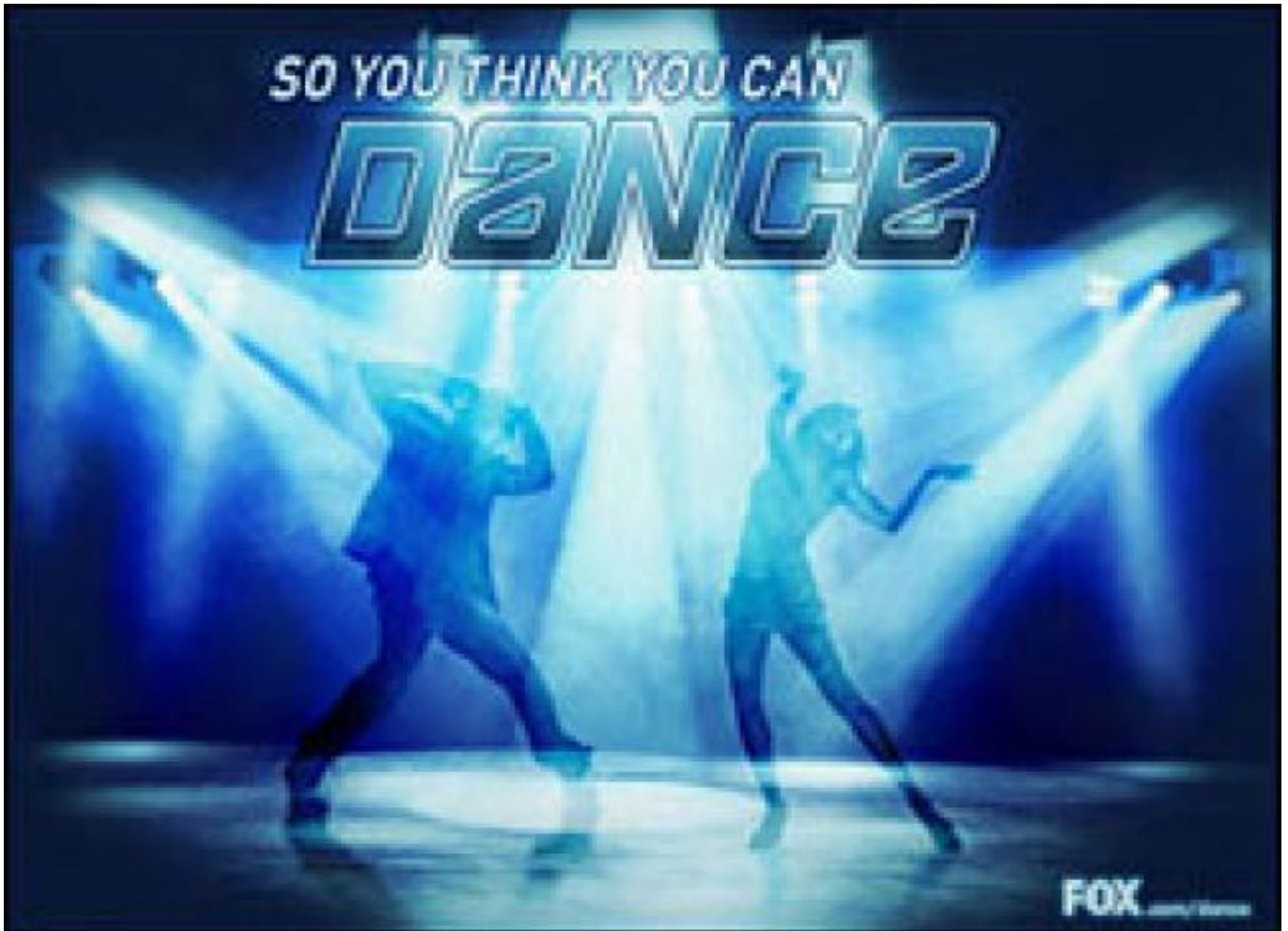




Fox unveils fall schedule



So Fox thinks it can "Dance" this fall. Network announced a fall sked Monday that looks a lot like its winter lineup — but with a new, in-season edition of "So You Think You Can Dance" warming the chair for "American Idol."

Net is looking to build a better bridge between its two seasons and, as a result, won't "have to completely reconstitute our schedule in January," Fox Entertainment prexy Kevin Reilly told reporters in a morning conference call.

The "Dance" move is actually tame compared with its riskiest gambit: moving sophomore skein "Fringe" to Thursday night, where it will face off with powerhouse dramas on ABC and CBS, as well as NBC's signature laffers.

The net will also take another stab at launching a live-action comedy block, this time on Friday. And it's holding much of its new series back until midseason, when the shows can launch behind the heft of NFL playoffs and "Idol."

"We're going to use our tentpole shows to platform new ones," Reilly said. "We're in a pretty strong position from a programming standpoint, and were able to be very selective with our pilots that we picked up. We had a good development season, so we got what we needed."

Fox made its pitch to advertisers Monday afternoon at New York's City Center theater. It repped the first upfront presentation for Fox Entertainment chairman Peter Rice, who was joined onstage by net entertainment prexy Kevin Reilly.

"We're No. 1, and we'll try to build on that and not be complacent," said Rice, citing Fox's fifth



consecutive season win among adults 18-49. "I love the idea of 'So You Think You Can Dance' in the fall."

As first reported by Daily Variety last week, Fox opted to bring the hit summer "Dance" competition into the fall in order to mirror its winter success with "American Idol."

After what's generally a sluggish fall performance, the network traditionally kicks into high gear come January — when "American Idol" and "24" return. Fox has seen its fall fortunes improve in recent years, now that it carries half as many Major League Baseball playoff games as it used to.

But three hours for "So You Think You Can Dance" is quite a chunk out of Fox's 15-hour-a-week sked. And the two-hour Tuesday night perf show will face off with ABC's "Dancing With the Stars" result show — not to mention one or two hours of NBC's hit "The Biggest Loser."

"Obviously, there's another dance show in the fall," Reilly said. "But ('So You Think You Can Dance') is a consistent time period winner for us and delivers a distinct and younger, harder-to-reach audience. We're pretty sure it's going to be a winner on Tuesday and an excellent platform on Wednesday."

"Dance" also bows its sixth season just weeks after its fifth season concludes, which may result in some viewer fatigue. But Reilly defended the scheduling, noting that several competition shows on the nets have only short rests between cycles.

"(Exec producer) Nigel Lythgoe has some interesting ideas up his sleeves to bridge the gap between the two seasons," he said.

Just as it uses "Dance" to help "Glee" on Wednesday nights, Fox will keep key drama players "House" and "Bones" in their respective Monday and Thursday 8 p.m. spots in order to help boost the sophomore prospects of "Lie to Me" (which, as expected, lands behind "House" on Mondays) and "Fringe."

Reilly said he thinks there's opportunity on the night, especially given how "Bones" came on and performed.

"The door is more open on Thursday night," he said, "than it has been in a long time; 8 p.m. is a soft time period, and at 9, those are still two terrific, appointment shows, but they're down. They're not consuming all the oxygen at 9."

Then there was the news that thrilled rabid fans of scribe Joss Whedon: the return of "Dollhouse" to Friday nights.

It's believed 20th Century Fox TV dramatically reduced the cost of the show in order to make it an attractive renewal. Reilly also quipped that he wanted to avoid an inbox stuffed with angry emails.

"This is a bet on Joss Whedon," he said.

On the flip side, Reilly said it was "time to move on" in canceling "Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles."

"We had to make some choices on the night, and (cost) was a factor," he said.

In building a new Friday comedy block in front of "Dollhouse" — making for one of the more unusual pairings on the schedule — Fox will run frosh sitcom "Brothers," starring ex-NFL star Michael Strahan, with returnee " 'Til Death," which had received an early 22-episode pickup.

As for the midseason shows, "Human Target" is set to get a plum launch on Sunday, Jan. 17, at 8 p.m., directly following the NFC divisional playoff game. Also that night, the new season of "24" will begin at 9 as part of a four-hour, two-night launch (similar to past years). "Target" will then segue to its normal slot Wednesdays at 9 p.m. behind the "American Idol" results show (while "Glee" takes a



break).

Also, frosh drama "Past Life" will get a strong boost, launching in January on Tuesday nights behind "American Idol."

"Sons of Tucson" will also debut in January behind "The Simpsons," as "Cleveland" moves to 9:30 and "American Dad" jumps down to 7:30.

In latenight, Fox announced that Saturday night gabber "The Wanda Sykes Show" bows at 11 p.m. (replacing "MadTV") on Nov. 7. Fox will fill the midnight slot vacated by "Talkshow With Spike Feresten" with animation series repeats for now.

Meanwhile, the network announced an advertising initiative, "Alive Air," in which original interstitials will be added to commercial pods in order to keep viewers watching during the break.

According to Reilly, the spots are created by the actual show producers and will come in several different forms. Fox is already experimenting with "Alive Air" this spring.

On Nov. 8, net will promote its three Seth MacFarlane animated series by adding in interstitials from MacFarlane's "Family Guy Live" stage show.

Also in November, Fox is creating an interactive, on-air and online "Simpsons" scavenger hunt. And it will air the special "Gordon Ramsay Cook Along Live."

Fox opted to retool its big advertiser initiative from last year, "Remote Free TV."

Sales chief Jon Nesvig said the campaign, in which the net sold fewer ads at a higher rate in shows such as "Fringe" (which then added several minutes of content), wasn't completely going away.

But instead of focusing on one or two shows, Nesvig said the net will "use it strategically and potentially on a number of different shows over the course of the season."

Nesvig admitted the upfront environment is challenging for everybody.

"The main issue has really not been revenue for us; it has been the competitive viewing environment," he said.

Later, speaking at the upfront presentation, Nesvig took a strong stance against networks cutting their upfront pricing — telling the media buyers gathered that "categorically, Fox Broadcasting has not rolled back any CPMs (cost-per-thousand units) for deals in the upfront."

Rice followed that up by taking a stab at Turner's attempts at stealing away broadcast money (including via an ad in Monday's New York Times).

The exec pointed out that Turner's top-rated scripted series, "The Closer," is still beat by 75 broadcast shows among total viewers.

The Fox upfront ended with the cast of "Glee" performing Queen's "Somebody to Love."

Advertisers gave decent marks to the presentation and were particularly impressed with "Glee."

Media buyers traditionally prefer scripted fare over nonscripted, however, and expressed some concern over the three-hour reliance on "Dance" during the week.

"That is a lot of stuff," said Initiative's Chris Neel, who heads up national broadcast in Los Angeles. "The show's a hit in the summer, but I don't know if it can work in the fall or work around baseball. But it's collapsible, and that's good."

The Fox fall 2009 schedule:



Monday - 8 p.m., "House"; 9 p.m., "Lie to Me"

Tuesday - 8 p.m., "So You Think You Can Dance" (two hours)

Wednesday - 8 p.m., "So You Think You Can Dance" results show; 9 p.m., "Glee"

Thursday - 8 p.m., "Bones"; 9 p.m., "Fringe"

Friday - 8 p.m. "Brothers" (new comedy); 8:30 p.m., "Til Death"; 9 p.m., "Dollhouse"

Saturday - 8 p.m., "Cops"; 9 p.m., "America's Most Wanted"

Sunday - 7 p.m., Football OT; 8 p.m., "The Simpsons"; 8:30 p.m., "The Cleveland Show"; 9 p.m., "Family Guy"; 9:30 p.m., "American Dad"

The Fox winter 2010 schedule:

Monday - 8 p.m., "House"; 9 p.m., "24"

Tuesday - 8 p.m., "American Idol"; 9 p.m., "Past Life" (new drama)

Wednesday - 8 p.m., "American Idol" results show; 9 p.m., "Human Target" (new drama)/ "Glee" (returns in spring)

Thursday - 8 p.m., "Bones"; 9 p.m., "Fringe"

Friday - 8 p.m. "Brothers" (new comedy); 8:30 p.m., "Til Death"; 9 p.m., "Dollhouse"

Saturday - 8 p.m., "Cops"; 9 p.m., "America's Most Wanted"

Sunday - 7 p.m., Animation repeats; 7:30 p.m., "American Dad"; 8 p.m., "The Simpsons"; 8:30 p.m., "Sons of Tucson" (new comedy); 9 p.m., "Family Guy"; 9:30 p.m., "Cleveland Show"

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