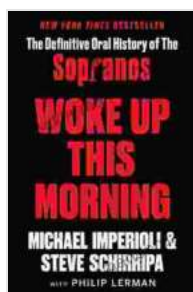


The Definitive Oral History of 'The Sopranos': How the HBO Mafia Drama Changed Television Forever

By Michael Imperioli and Steve Schirripa

The Sopranos, the groundbreaking HBO drama that revolutionized television and redefined the gangster genre, premiered 20 years ago today. To celebrate the anniversary, we spoke to the cast, crew, and creators of the show about its creation, its impact, and its enduring legacy.



Woke Up This Morning: The Definitive Oral History of The Sopranos by Michael Imperioli

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The Genesis

The idea for *The Sopranos* came to David Chase, the show's creator, in the early 1990s. Chase, a former writer for *The Rockford Files* and *Northern*

Exposure, had been working on a screenplay about a mobster who goes into therapy. But he couldn't quite get the story right.

"I was trying to write a movie about a gangster," Chase said. "But it wasn't working. It was too one-dimensional. Then I had the idea of making him a therapist. That's when the show really started to come together."

Chase pitched the show to HBO in 1997. The network was immediately interested. But they had one condition: Chase had to cast James Gandolfini as Tony Soprano.

Gandolfini, a veteran character actor, was initially reluctant to take the role. He didn't want to be typecast as a gangster. But Chase convinced him that the show was different. It wasn't a traditional mob drama. It was a character study of a complex and flawed man.

"David told me that this was going to be a show about the American dream," Gandolfini said. "It was going to be about a guy who was trying to balance his family life with his criminal life. That's something that I could relate to."

The Cast

In addition to Gandolfini, *The Sopranos* featured a stellar cast of character actors, including Lorraine Bracco as Tony's therapist, Dr. Jennifer Melfi; Edie Falco as his wife, Carmela; Michael Imperioli as his nephew, Christopher Moltisanti; and Steve Schirripa as his consigliere, Bobby Baccalieri.

The cast was drawn to *The Sopranos* because of its unique blend of humor, drama, and realism. They also appreciated the opportunity to work with Chase, a writer who was known for his intelligence and his attention to detail.

"David was a brilliant writer," Bracco said. "He knew how to create characters that were both believable and complex. He also knew how to write dialogue that was both funny and insightful."

The Impact

The Sopranos premiered on January 10, 1999, and it quickly became a critical and commercial success. The show won numerous awards, including 21 Emmy Awards and five Golden Globe Awards. It also helped to launch the careers of several of its cast members, including Gandolfini, Bracco, and Imperioli.

But *The Sopranos'* impact went beyond its ratings and awards. The show changed the way that television dramas were made. It showed that it was possible to create a complex and realistic drama about a taboo subject like organized crime. It also paved the way for other groundbreaking dramas, such as *The Wire*, *Breaking Bad*, and *Game of Thrones*.

"*The Sopranos* was a game-changer," said Alan Sepinwall, a television critic for *Rolling Stone*. "It showed that you could do a show about anything, as long as you had great writing, great acting, and a unique point of view."**

The Legacy

Twenty years after its premiere, *The Sopranos* remains one of the most influential and beloved television dramas of all time. The show has been praised for its realism, its humor, and its complex characters. It has also been credited with helping to change the way that we think about organized crime and the American dream.

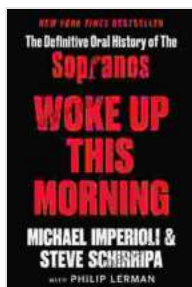
"*The Sopranos* is a timeless show," said Michael Imperioli. "It's a show that people will still be watching and talking about for years to come."**

Here are some of the most memorable quotes from *The Sopranos*:

- "I'm like a bird in a cage. I can see the world, but I can't fly." - Tony Soprano
- "I'm a businessman. I don't go around shooting people." - Tony Soprano
- "I'm not a criminal. I'm just a guy who does 'favors' for people." - Tony Soprano
- "We're not saints, but we're not murderers either." - Carmela Soprano
- "I'm not going to live my life in fear. I'm going to live it my way." - Christopher Moltisanti
- "You can't be a good guy and a gangster at the same time." - Dr. Jennifer Melfi
- "The truth is, you're nothing but a glorified crew." - Silvio Dante
- "You know what? I'm starting to think that this might be it for me. I might be at the end of my rope." - Tony Soprano

- "I'm not ashamed of who I am. I'm a gangster. And I'm good at it." - Tony Soprano
- "I'm not a rat. I'm a businessman." - Tony Soprano

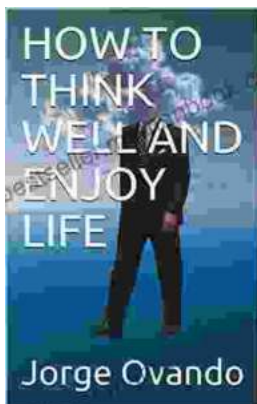
If you haven't seen *The Sopranos*, I highly recommend checking it out. It's a truly unique and unforgettable television experience.



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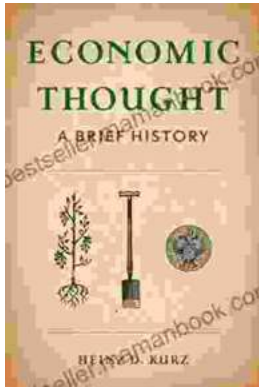
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