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## 2006 A YEAR OF EXPLOSIONS

YouTube, dancing stars and 'tween' fare like 'High School Musical' leap into the spotlight.

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An unassuming guy in an Orange Crush T-shirt and jeans busts out all his moves and a grainy video of his dance is viewed more than 37 million times on YouTube.com.

The Disney Channel identifies the sweet spot for entertainment consumption—and kids not yet old enough to drive end up steering their favorite vehicles to the top of the CD and TV charts.

A new golden age of network dramas is predicted as the fall season debuts, but it turns that most of us would rather watch B-listers try to ballroom dance, or regular Joes and Janes point at briefcases held by glossy-lipped models.

Here's another look at the year—and its scenes and sounds—that was.

### The Rise of the 'Tweens'

When the soundtrack to "High School Musical" hit No. 1 on the Billboard album charts back in March, you'd have been forgiven for scratching your head in puzzlement.

The Disney Channel musical about a basketball star who falls for a girl in the drama club had just debuted in January, and while it was an immediate and huge hit with tweens—kids roughly 9-14 years old—if you didn't have a tween in the house, you'd have had no reason to know any of that.

But by year's end, "High School Musical" had sold 3.6 million CDs (and moved 1.2 million DVDs in its first week of release) and launched a concert tour that comes to the Honda Center on Jan. 26.

Add to that the huge success of the Disney Channel's "Hannah Montana" soundtrack—debuting at No. 1 in October and selling 1.6 million copies since then, the same as the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Hinder sold this year. More than two months after its release, it's still holding strong at No. 2 on the Billboard album chart.

And note also that the soundtrack to the Disney Channel's "Cheetah Girls 2" also sold a million—the same as rapper Jay-Z and

country singer Keith Urban sold—and tweens look more and more like the dominant entertainment consumers of 2006.

"If you look at 2006, clearly the common denominator is the music," said Gary Marsh, Disney Channel president for entertainment, of the decision a few years earlier to make music an integral part of its future programming.

"I think the story in 2006 is that music has literally become the currency that kids are using in their world," Marsh said. "It's so clear to me that between 'High School Musical,' 'Hannah Montana' and 'Cheetah Girls,' we have created the soundtracks to kids' lives."

Screenwriter and USC professor Jack Epps said Disney, along with other tween specialists such as Nickelodeon and Cartoon Network, has been successful at identifying a niche audience and selling their programs and products to it.

"It's very smart—there's a lot of disposable income at that age, and they go and buy things," said Epps, acting chairman of the writing program at the USC School of Cinematic Arts.

"They buy the same CDs; they watch the same shows," he said. "It's what's in, and what gets talked about at lunch—the thing you have to watch in order to know what's going on."

Tweens also can make entertainment aimed at general audiences into even bigger hits if the movies, TV shows or music hit their target.

The No. 1 movie at the box office this year—"Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest"—pulled in \$423 million in part because it appealed to tweens as well as teens and adults.

The No. 1 show on television this year—"American Idol"—was on in 17 percent of the homes in the nation every Tuesday and Wednesday night, in large part because it reached down to pull the tween audience in, too.

Disney Channel and the other tween providers have a fresh slate of entertainment on tap for next year, too, Marsh said.

"High School Musical 2" is scheduled to air in August, he said. Before that comes, "Jump In," a movie about a boxer boy and a double-Dutch jump-roper girl, debuts Jan. 12.

Look for its soundtrack of all-new songs—music Marsh described as "hip-pop"—to top the album charts soon after.

### Mentos and Diet Coke and YouTube

Haven't seen or heard "High School Musical"?

Check YouTube.

Missed that funny bit on "Saturday Night Live"?

The Knicks-Nuggets brawl?

The latest episode of Lonelygirl15, the Internet video diary—or, as it turned out, drama?

The 313th different clip of some fool dumping a pack of Mentos into a jug of Diet Coke?

Check YouTube.

The online video Web site rose from cult fave to mainstream hit in 2006, thanks to the endless supply of video clips posted there by users.

Its popularity and diversity—everything from homemade videos to clips appropriated from mainstream Hollywood—made it the source of the videos we talked about around the virtual office watercooler.

"It's easy to use, it's easy to share—it's cool," said Marian Salzman, a respected trend-spotter and executive vice president at advertising agency JWT.

Part of the reason Salzman thinks YouTube blew up into a mainstream hit this year is the way people and the culture have grown increasingly interactive: You can videotape your life and post it online for everyone to see—or ignore.

"Everyday people discovered that YouTube was the best place to share their creativity," she said.

That's a trend also spotlighted by Chris Swain, an assistant professor of interactive media at USC's School of Cinematic Arts.

"I think the big-picture reason for (Youtube's success) is we're going maybe from an information age to a participation age," Swain said.

"There's much more active involvement in media now.

"And I think YouTube—because you can post your own things there—it creates this culture," he said. "People like to be able to participate and post their own things, but it's also just very convenient to be able to go and get video on demand."

Some of it is original creative content, such as the Lonelygirl15 videos, a series of short confessionals purporting to be a teenage girl expressing her thoughts and feelings, but ultimately proving to be a fictional drama.

Much of what's available are legally shaky postings of copyrighted material: countless clips from network and cable television programs—Comedy Central fare is one of the biggest—and music videos from practically any artist you can think of. Need to see Mick Jagger and Peter Tosh dueting in Jamaica in the '70s?

## It's on YouTube.

"I don't think it's a fad," Swain said. "I think it's a new way that we get our media, and if anything, we'll get more video-enabled Internet in the future."

Already, he noted, the networks and cable channels are posting more and more of their programs on their own Web sites after they've aired.

"We're trending toward Internet delivery on demand," Swain said. "And that's a trend where there's almost no limit to it, in my opinion."

Dramas gone as reality kidnapped eyeballs

This was supposed to be the new golden age of television. New shows such as "Vanished," "Smith" and "Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip" had movie stars in lead roles and expensive production values.

And yet when the fall season debuted, it seemed like most of us changed the channel to watch "Dancing With the Stars," "Deal or No Deal" or the same old crime-and-science procedurals such as "CSI" and "Criminal Minds."

"I think it's a disappointing season, and ultimately viewers can't get enough of the crime show, and they can't get enough of the reality shows," said Marc Berman, a TV columnist at Media Week and editor of e-mail newsletter "Programming Insider."

The crime dramas fit an easier-to-view format—the mystery has a beginning, middle and end in each episode, he said. The reality or competition shows give viewers a chance to project themselves into the action being experienced by other more or less ordinary people.

"The bottom line is, viewers like watching shows with everyday people like themselves competing to win money, become the next big singer, to do this or that," Berman said.

Look at the top 10 shows for 2006 and the proof is plain to see:

Both nights of "American Idol" finished first and second, with the rest of the top five including both nights of "Dancing With the Stars" bracketing the original "CSI."

Part of the reason some of the splashy, well-reviewed new series flopped was that

many were serialized, forcing viewers to commit to watching the show from week to week to keep up, Berman said.

"I think the reason a show like 'Kidnapped' didn't work was that a lot of people didn't want to spend time with a show about a teenager who was kidnapped," he said. "It's a painful story, and to ask you to spend time with that each week is difficult to do."

The reality shows, meanwhile, are easier to plop down on the couch and enjoy, said Epps, the screenwriting USC professor.

"They don't take a lot of effort; you can come in and out of them," he said. "And the people are often so outrageous, sometimes those characters are more compelling than the creative series characters."

Epps and Berman pointed to "American Idol" as the perfected reality show. It gets the viewer invested—you can vote for your favorites. It's not oversaturated—January to May, and then it's off for seven months.

And it has that modern-day variety show feel, with singing, dancing, comedy.

"I don't think (the reality trend) says that dramatic and comedic television is going to disappear," Epps said. "You can only watch so much dancing on TV."

Berman—while pointing to new hits such as ABC's "Ugly Betty" and NBC's "Heroes" as proof that some scripted shows catch on with viewers—said he doesn't expect the reality trend to cease anytime soon.

Certainly not a perfectly formatted show such as "American Idol."

"It's not changing anywhere in the near future," Berman said. "If we're talking on the phone 10 years from now, 'American Idol' is going to still be a big show."