



Fall Preview 2009



The Jay Leno Show

By Joe Rhodes

Jay Leno, for all his shrug-it-off persona, is intensely aware of the pressures that come with his new five-night-a-week prime-time show on NBC, the questions about whether he can compete with the likes of CSI whether the 10 p.m. “The Jay Leno Show” will be anything more than a warmed-over version of “The Tonight Show.”

So we asked what he wants from the new show, how he feels about the way NBC edged him out of late night and whether he takes any satisfaction from

knowing that, since he left “The Tonight Show” in May, its ratings have steadily dropped.

TVG: Is the new show turning out the way you envisioned it?

Leno: Yeah. It was never meant to be a prime-time version of “The Tonight Show.” This is more of a straight comedy show. I hate to use the word “variety,” cause that’s the kiss of death. But it’s really not going to be a talk show. We just want to make sure it has immediacy. If something happens that morning, we want to be able to joke about it that night. This is not a situation where we’re gonna tape 3 shows on Monday so we can have the rest of the week off.

TVG: When you agreed to give up “The Tonight Show,” five years ago, did you assume you’d be tired of tv. Or did you always think you’d do another show?

Leno: I didn’t assume anything. I thought, “I’ve been No. 1 for 15 years and they want me to leave?” I have no idea why, but fine, whatever you want. I was never one of those guys that when you go on a date and the girl says, “You know something, I don’t think we can see each other anymore,” and I go, “But why not? What if I change?” I’m just, “okay, thank you very much.” So when they came to me with this new show, I go, “Didn’t you guys just get rid of me?” And they said, “Well, we want you back.”

TVG: Do you think they did it just to keep you from jumping to another network’s late-night show?

Leno: I don't know. But here's the thing. The audience doesn't like it when you jump ship, for whatever reason. Rarely have I ever seen anyone leave a network, go to another network and be as successful. It never really works.

TVG: You were never tempted to tell them, "just shove it, I'm leaving."?

Leno: I'm not the type of person who would go to another network just to say, "Screw you." Having somebody else fail doesn't make me a success.

TVG: But there's not just a little part of you that looks at how the ratings have gone down since you left and goes, "See? I guess it's not so easy after all?"

Leno: Well, sure. I like to say I'm a great believer in low self esteem but you have to have some self esteem or you wouldn't get in the business at all. If I walk into a room I like to assume I'm the dumbest person here and I have to work a little bit harder than everybody else to achieve the same thing, So you like to think things worked because you did them a certain way. But Conan will turn it around. He'll be fine.

TVG: If for some reason this show doesn't work out and NBC says, "Thanks for your service, Mr. Leno, but we're going another direction," would that be okay with you?

Leno: You really think I'd get "Thanks for your service?" If I got that, I'd be thrilled.

But, I'd be fine. I'll find something else. It's why I never stopped working on the road. If someone wants me to work, I'll work. If this show is not successful, I

wouldn't want the network to carry it. I'm not an egomaniac. I enjoy making people laugh. If people aren't laughing, then you go, "guys, this isn't working." And you move on. If it's a success, we'll ride it out. If it's not, well, that's just the way it goes."

Joe Rhodes is a Los Angeles-based freelance writer.

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