

‘Millionaire Matchmaker’ Hits 100 Episodes: What’s the Future of Reality Dating TV?



MARCH 15, 2015 | 08:20AM PT

JAMIE MCCARTHY/WIREIMAGE

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“[Millionaire Matchmaker](http://variety.com/t/millionaire-matchmaker/) (<http://variety.com/t/millionaire-matchmaker/>),”

[Bravo](http://variety.com/t/bravo/) (<http://variety.com/t/bravo/>)’s flagship dating series now in its eighth season, hits its 100th episode on March 15.

Expert matchmaker and host [Patti Stanger](http://variety.com/t/patti-stanger/) (<http://variety.com/t/patti-stanger/>) says the milestone is something she could have never imagined.

“I didn’t even know if we’d make it to season two,” she tells *Variety*. “This thing just blew up bigger than I ever anticipated.”

Stanger attributes “Matchmaker’s” success to changes between seasons such as bringing on celebrity clientele (for the latest round of episodes) and moving the location from Los Angeles to the East Coast (Season 4), but more importantly, she says the real-life dating landscape has created a greater need for reality love shows during the series’ run.

“Divorce rates were increasing and marriage was down,” the television personality says of the time when the show premiered. However, despite the statistics, Stanger recalls the early days of series when Bravo’s Frances Berwick (<http://variety.com/2014/tv/news/bravos-frances-berwick-to-oversee-e-and-esquire-adam-stotsky-adds-e-duties-1201317328/>), now president, lifestyle networks, NBCUniversal Cable Entertainment, questioned if viewers would ever believe you could actually find love on TV.

“You had ‘Blind Date,’ and then it went away pretty much the year I came on, and then ‘The Bachelor’ obviously paved the way for us. We’re forever grateful to that show. But there weren’t any other shows on the air, and no one really took it seriously,” Stanger admits, adding that her show has now acquired famous fans like Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Hudson.

“Patti was the first to help people find love in their real lives without any gimmicks,” Shari Levine, exec vice president of current production, Bravo Media, tells *Variety*. “It is a very different concept to have an expert matchmaker talk to singles about what they’re looking for in a partner and handpick the ideal mate. It is a much more organic setting compared to a competition show with challenges and contestants.”

Stanger acknowledges that the mainstream status of reality TV dating enables many contestants to apply for dating shows for the wrong reasons (fame, exposure, cash prizes), but points out her show has resulted in a number of off-camera (<http://variety411.com/us/new-york/camera-sound-equipment/>) marriages and engagements. “I think people believe in it more,” she says of finding love on camera.

“Now, you have every app on the planet,” she adds. “There is everything for someone now, and if you’re not online or you’re not dating through a matchmaker, you’re basically a loser these days. The tables have turned.”

Stanger recognizes that it’s not just the new, changing world of dating that has lent to her show’s success — it’s also the TV landscape.

“The fastest growing audience is couples,” she says. “Couples like to remember what it was like to date horribly and thank the lord that they’re not single anymore.”

However, she also recognizes the challenge to keep those audiences interested.

“I’m fascinated that this is really a scripted time,” Stanger says, alluding to “[Girlfriend’s Guide to Divorce](http://variety.com/2015/tv/news/girlfriends-guide-to-divorce-season-2-renewal-bravo-1201423865/)” and the upcoming “[Odd Mom Out](http://variety.com/2015/tv/news/bravo-odd-mom-out-premiere-date-1201406397/)” on Bravo. “I think the stakes are higher in reality. Now, the audience is too wise. Now, you really have to show reality. It’s not easy to launch a show these days.”

So what is the future of reality dating TV?

“I think you’re going to see a lot of niche dating shows now,” she projects, drawing the comparison to specialized dating sites and apps such as JDate, Christian Mingle or Grinder. “My audience is very diverse. We have to feed everyone. I’m amazed with what they’re coming up with now. They could have never done this 10 years ago.”

Levine agrees that the market for dating shows is still out there. “Whether it’s boy meets girl, boy meets boy or girl meets girl, finding love and falling in love resonates with everyone. It’s the most relatable and heart-strong story that exists,” she says. “As long as there continues to be shows about the heart that feel real, viewers will want to watch.”

And as for the future of “Millionaire Matchmaker?” Stanger sees no end in sight.

“I think we need some more love shows on the air. I hope to keep evolving, and I hope to do more spinoffs. I like to stay current,” she says, adding that she loves chatting with millennials to see what they need to date effectively. “They used to call me the Simon Cowell of dating and there’s a reason for that — he’s very on trend.”

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