

# Childhood Dreams Inspire Making of Hits

Dungey's keen vision and passion for her work benefits ABC and other networks



By Jessica Walsten

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WHEN THEY WERE LITTLE, Channing Dungey and her sister Merrin would scour the fall preview issue of *TV Guide*

to plan the shows they wanted to watch for the season. Dungey would make a grid of favorites to help her negotiate with her sister and parents for time slots.

"It was a whole big deal," says Dungey, now executive VP, drama development, movies & miniseries at ABC Entertainment Group.

Her childhood pastime led to a successful career. Dungey, who was promoted in July to executive VP, has had a hand in developing popular shows for ABC and other networks, including *Grey's Anatomy*, *Private Practice*, *Army Wives* (Lifetime) and *Criminal Minds* (CBS), along with *Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, premiering Sept. 24. And her influence doesn't end at launch.

"She's always there to support the creative vision of our extraordinary showrunners," says Paul Lee, president of ABC Entertainment Group.

Growing up in Sacramento, Calif., Dungey didn't think she would have the chance to work in entertainment. But majoring in film at UCLA, it all began to come together. A professor told her about development, which set Dungey on the path to working with writers.

"She gives incredibly good, pithy notes that [show] she trusts the writer and knows they will be able to answer the questions she has," says Betsy Beers, executive producer of *Grey's Anatomy*.

"Channing is a friend of the writer," adds Shonda Rhimes, creator of *Grey's Anatomy* and *Scandal*.

Dungey got her start at ABC in 2004 when she met with Suzanne Patmore-



Channing Dungey

Gibbs—then senior VP of drama series at Touchstone Pictures (now ABC Studios) to discuss ideas for TV series. The meeting led to a job offer for Dungey in the drama department at Touchstone, developing *Grey's Anatomy*.

"From the very first time that I saw that pilot, I knew it was a show that I loved," Dungey says.

### Juggling Many Roles

This fall will be busy for Dungey, as she gears up for the debut of *Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, a drama based on the Marvel comics law enforcement

outfit. *S.H.I.E.L.D.*, from executive producer Joss Whedon, is the centerpiece of ABC's fall primetime schedule.

ABC, which has a predominately female audience and has struggled with male-targeted programming before, is trying to make *S.H.I.E.L.D.* appeal to the masses the way *Marvel's 2012 film The Avengers* did, Dungey says. "We have a rich array of characters and some really strong, empowered women front and center in the show," she adds.

The development process will also be different for Dungey, with ABC testing a split-season strategy that breaks up the traditional concept of 22 episodes throughout the year into a two-part season (fall and spring), along with the addition of limited series in midseason.

Her newly expanded role at ABC now includes miniseries and movies, and Dungey says she is particularly eager to work with Dustin Lance Black (*Milk* and *J. Edgar*) on a project that tracks the gay rights movement from the 1969 Stonewall riots to marriage equality.

The ABC executive also has her hands full at home. Dungey and her husband, Scott Power, last year adopted daughter Eden, 1, and the challenging role has made her see things differently. "It's so exciting to be a mom and to be kind of rediscovering the world through her eyes," Dungey says.

When she does have time to herself, Dungey enjoys Pilates, yoga, hiking and running. She is also an avid fan of *The X Files* and admits to knowing a few episodes word-for-word.

This fall, Dungey will resume teaching a graduate course at her alma mater, UCLA (about developing a drama series)—a task she regards as very rewarding and motivating. "I love being around people who are at that sort of nascent stage of their careers," she says. "There's such a fresh, exciting ebullience to that, and it really reinvigorates me in terms of my day-to-day." ❧

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—Shonda Rhimes, creator of *Grey's Anatomy* and *Scandal*.

## Channing Dungey

### Title:

Executive VP, drama development, movies and miniseries, ABC Entertainment Group

### Education:

BFA, theater, film and television, UCLA, 1991

### Employment Highlights:

Creative/production executive, Warner Bros Features, 1993-98

Senior VP, Material (film production company), 1998-2001

President, Material, 2001-03

Cofounder, Dexterity Pictures, 2003-04

VP, drama development, Touchstone Television, 2004-08

Senior VP, drama development, ABC Studios, 2008-09

Senior VP, drama development, ABC Entertainment Group, 2009-13

Current title since July 2013

### Personal:

Born March 14, 1969; married to Scott Power; daughter, Eden, 1

