

2009's Top 12 Break-Out Stars

Forget Lindsay Lohan and Shia LeBeouf: ABCNews.com Counts Down '09's Hot New Faces & a Few Fabulous Comebacks

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From "Twilight" heartthrob Robert Pattinson to Tina Fey, 2008 has been a very good year for some stars. But who's set to break out in 2009? ABCNews.com counts down the newest crop of boldfaced names – and a few already famous faces who are ripe for a comeback.

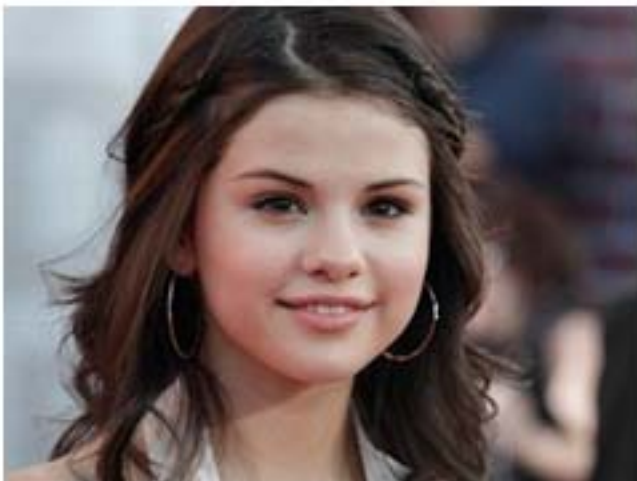


Sam Worthington



Americans may not recognize Aussie actor Sam Worthington, but in 2009, he's set to steal the spotlight in two major films. "What's interesting about Sam," said Entertainment Weekly writer Adam B. Vary, "is that he's a relative unknown, but in 'Terminator Salvation,' he'll get above-the-title billing alongside Christian Bale. That's very unusual for someone who's not already a brand name. It's saying a lot. So when the film comes out in May, they're expecting him to be huge. It's a showcase role for him." In December, Worthington is set to star in James Cameron's first film in more than 10 years. "It's James Cameron's first feature since 'Titanic,' it's 3-D, it's going to be huge. And a lot rests on Sam's shoulders. He's got a real chance at being huge."

Selena Gomez



There's long been buzz that 16-year-old Selena Gomez is going to follow in the footsteps of Miley Cyrus and this year's Disney break-out – and her BFF, by the way – Demi Lovato. With a hit Disney show, "The Wizards of Waverly Place" and a new album in the works for a summer 2009 debut, she's ripe for teen idol success. But perhaps the most important factor minting Gomez's break-out status is the fact that she's dating teen heartthrob du jour Nick Jonas, of the uber-hot Jonas Brothers.

Eliza Dushku



"You'd expect Eliza to be a lot more famous than she already is," said EW's Vary of the actress, who played the dark Faith on "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" and starred in Fox's short-lived drama series "Tru Calling." "She's got a cult following, but it hasn't translated yet to a mass appeal. But she's very smartly gone back to work with 'Buffy' creator Joss Whedon. Joss has a lot of faith in Eliza. And if there's anyone who knows how to make an actress look good, it's Joss. There were a lot of 'Buffy' fans who wanted to see a spin-off about Eliza's character Faith, so there's clearly something about her. She's beautiful, she can do comedy, she can do drama, she can go really dark. This could really be the break-out turn for her."

Laura Izibor



Irish singer-songwriter Laura Izibor drops her first disc, "Let the Truth Be Told," early next year, but the buzz around her has been building for a while. Her first single, "From My Heart to Yours" is already climbing Billboard's R&B airplay chart and the 21-year-old Dublin-native has opened for artists like Al Green, Angie Stone and Aretha Franklin. "Laura is a biracial singer from Ireland, so people are comparing her to Corinne Bailey Rae," said Essence entertainment director Cori Murray. "And she does fill the space left by Corinne to a certain degree, but there are differences. Corinne is sweet and soulful, Laura has bit more of an edge. And she does a lot of a capella, so she's definitely not afraid to bare it all. That's why she'll be a breakout this year."

Shenae Grimes



A sure sign that the "90210" actress Shenae Grimes is a rising star? She's already being plagued by tabloid rumors about eating disorders, hard partying, and a possible "feud" with her fellow CW stars from "Gossip Girls." "What these girls recognize is that it's not just about having a hit show," said Essence entertainment director Murray. "It's the amount of press you're getting. Going out and living it up is part of the job these days. Eating disorders, feuds. Whether it's true or not, it's getting Shenae's name out there. She's following in the footsteps of a Lindsay Lohan, of a Leighton Meester. We're so hungry for celebrity scoop now, and this is what makes a star."

Grimes, for her part, already has the party line down pat. "Nobody has the right to invade anybody's privacy or write false stories, even if the subject is a public figure," she said recently. "I know I have a good head on my shoulders. I think I've done pretty well for a Toronto girl who has moved to Hollywood alone. As long as I know I don't have an eating disorder and I'm not a diva on set, that's all that matters. If the people in America would rather believe otherwise, then my life will be proof enough."

Mickey Rourke



"Mickey's having a great year already, riding 'The Wrestler' wave," said Entertainment Weekly writer Adam B. Vary. "If he wins an Oscar, which he could, then he'll see a very strong 2009. There's the possibility he might score Sin City 2, which would be huge. And he's currently shooting 13, in which he'll play another hard-boiled, hard-scrambled type. But that's the thing with Mickey, he's got a very specific niche. Still, 'The Wrestler' did shoot him from back from relative obscurity to household name."

Jaden Smith



Will Smith and Jada Pinkett-Smith's 10-year-old son has had roles in "The Pursuit of Happyness" (alongside dad) and the current action flick "The Day the Earth Stood Still." But in 2009, he's set to star in a remake of the classic "The Karate Kid." "He's setting up his career to follow in his father's footsteps," said Essence entertainment director Cori Murray. But Murray notes that nepotism will only get you so far. "Will Smith sets the bar very high. He's producing his son's next film, and if he had any doubts that Jaden could do it, the kid would not be playing the lead. It's too risky in Hollywood right now. That said, Jaden definitely has the chops. He was really strong in 'Happyness,' and I have no doubt that he will bring home 'Karate Kid.'"

Cloris Leachman



Old school actress Cloris Leachman – best known for her Oscar-winning turn in "The Last Picture Show" and a nine-time Emmy winner ("Mary Tyler Moore," "Malcolm In the Middle") – made a triumphant return to TV this year on "Dancing With the Stars." "Baby boomers think of her fondly," says EW's Vary. "And she's having a nice resurgence, riding the 'Dancing' wave. It has jumpstarted careers for folks like Mario Lopez. But it depends on what she does next. She has a one-episode turn on 'the Office,' which has a nice pedigree. And she's up for 'Inglourious Basterds,' with Brad Pitt. It's a Quentin Tarantino film, and he's known for casting actors who he loves that are not

doing as they could. It worked for John Travolta. It could work for Cloris."

Amy Poehler



"Saturday Night Live" favorite Amy Poehler had a hit this year with bud Tina Fey in "Baby Mama," but will a new NBC show take this rising star to great new heights? "I don't know if the 'SNL' good will translate," said Entertainment Weekly staff writer Adam B. Vary. "Poehler certainly knows how to bring the funny, but comedy is a really hard sell right now."

Still, Essence entertainment director Cori Murray sees Poehler's new NBC show as a sure bet. "She broke out so much this year already," said Murray, "but post 'Saturday Night Live,' she'll

really come into her own. I love Tina Fey, but Amy brings her own brand of funny. And with the possibility of 'The Office' spin-off, I think she'll be able to ride that popularity and avoid the 'SNL' curse."

Chris Pine



If you have a teenage daughter, she'll remember Chris Pine as the guy who wooed Anne Hathaway in "Princess Diaries 2" or Lindsay Lohan in "Just My Luck."

"So far, he's always played the boyfriend, essentially arm candy," said Entertainment Weekly's Vary. "But he showed that he has chops in a really unrecognizable turn in 'Smoking Aces.' And now he's set to play Captain Kirk in JJ Abrams Star Trek remake, which is out May 9. If this movie hits, it will be in large part because people believe Chris as Captain Kirk. There's a lot of Shatner-ism to the part, but if he can shed that, this will be a career-defining role for Chris."

Dev Patel



"Slumdog Millionaire" leading man Dev Patel is set to go from an unknown playing bit parts on Brit TV to major Hollywood player – if he can ride the film's Oscar-buzz and sign the right projects. "He's got nothing else on his plate so far," said EW's Vary, "but if the film takes an Oscar for best picture – which it could – then his dance card will fill up very fast. This film will have such strong word-of-mouth in 2009, it certainly could launch his career. It all depends on smart career moves."

Essence's Murray agrees. "Mainstream America will get to see the movie and Dev Patel in 2009,"

she said. "He's a critics darling and ripe for mainstream success, which is really hard to do for an actor of color. With Obama in the White House, Americans are eager to see more people who look like them on screen. For Patel, it's just a matter of time before his agent calls him with the right follow-up script. But he really has to strike while the iron is hot."

Maxwell



R&B crooner Maxwell could make a strong showing this year, if he actually manages to release his long-awaited album. "Maxwell has been selling out everywhere he's played," said Essence editor Murray of the singer, who's wrapping up a cross-country tour and is scheduled for another one this summer. "R&B fans are chomping at the bit for new music from him. I think he'll come back big this year and he'll be even hotter than before. Any audience loves a great song, and I'm sure his audience has grown up a bit with him. They're just waiting on him, and this is the year he's going to deliver."