

= Wheels (Glee) =

" Wheels " is the ninth episode of the American television series Glee . Written by series co @-@ creator Ryan Murphy and directed by Paris Barclay , the episode premiered on the Fox network on November 11 , 2009 . " Wheels " sees the glee club hold a bake sale to raise money for a handicap accessible bus , so that club member Artie (Kevin McHale) can travel with them to sectionals and Will (Matthew Morrison) challenges the students to experience life from a different point of view . Quinn (Dianna Agron) struggles with the medical expenses incurred by her pregnancy , and Puck (Mark Salling) renews his offer to support her . Sue (Jane Lynch) accepts a student with Down syndrome onto the cheerleading squad , and Kurt (Chris Colfer) and Rachel (Lea Michele) compete for a solo performance .

McHale called " Wheels " the " most serious " episode of Glee so far , while Murphy deemed it " the turning point for the show " . The episode introduces two new characters , Lauren Potter as Becky Jackson and Robin Trocki as Jean Sylvester . It features covers of Nouvelle Vague 's rendition of " Dancing with Myself " , " Defying Gravity " from Wicked and Ike & Tina Turner 's rendition of " Proud Mary " . " Dancing With Myself " is McHale 's first solo performance on the show . " Defying Gravity " was included as a reflection of Colfer 's own high school experience , which saw his drama teacher refuse to allow him to sing the song because of his sex . " Proud Mary " is staged entirely in wheelchairs , and was described by series choreographer Zach Woodlee as the " scariest " number produced to date .

" Wheels " was watched by 7 @.@ 35 million US viewers , and saw Barclay nominated for the Directors Guild of America Award for Outstanding Directing of a Comedy Series . It prompted criticism from a committee of performers with disabilities , who felt that it was inappropriate to cast an able @-@ bodied actor in a disabled role . The episode received generally positive reviews from critics , with Entertainment Weekly 's Tim Stack and Aly Semigran of MTV both writing that it brought them to tears . Reviewers Alan Sepinwall of The Star @-@ Ledger and Maureen Ryan of the Chicago Tribune both commented positively on the episode , despite formerly having given unfavorable reviews of the series as a whole . In contrast , The New York Times 's Mike Hale deemed the episode problematic , and Eric Goldman of IGN described it as " very afterschool special " .

= = Plot = =

Glee club director Will Schuester is informed that the school budget will not cover a handicap @-@ accessible bus to transport the glee club to sectionals , which means that Artie Abrams (Kevin McHale) will have to travel separately from the rest of the club . Will encourages the other club members to support Artie , not only by holding a bake sale to raise funds for a handicap bus , but also by spending time in wheelchairs to experience what life is like for him . Meanwhile , Quinn Fabray (Dianna Agron) is struggling to cover the medical expenses of her pregnancy , and threatens to break up with Finn Hudson (Cory Monteith) if he cannot pay her ultrasound bill . Puck (Mark Salling) fights with Finn , whom he feels is not doing enough to support Quinn . By including cannabis in the cupcakes , Puck ensures the bake sale is a success and offers Quinn the money raised . She apologizes for previously calling him a loser , but refuses to accept the money , and is relieved when Finn is able to find a job .

Rachel Berry (Lea Michele) and Kurt Hummel (Chris Colfer) compete for a solo on " Defying Gravity " . The part , normally performed by a female , is initially offered to Rachel , but when Kurt 's father Burt (Mike O 'Malley) complains to Principal Figgins (Iqbal Theba) that his son is being discriminated against , Kurt is allowed to audition along with Rachel . Burt receives an anonymous abusive phone call about his son 's sexual orientation , and Kurt deliberately sabotages his own audition to spare his father further harassment .

Artie reveals the origin of his disability to Tina Cohen @-@ Chang (Jenna Ushkowitz) , explaining that he was paralyzed in a car accident at the age of eight . He likens his wheelchair use to Tina 's speech impediment . The two go on a date and kiss , but part on bad terms when Tina confesses

that she has been faking her speech impediment since the sixth grade , in order to deflect attention from herself , but now feels she no longer needs to , having been given confidence by the glee club .

Having previously removed Quinn from the cheerleading squad due to her pregnancy , coach Sue Sylvester is forced to hold open auditions to find a replacement . She accepts Becky Jackson (Lauren Potter) , a sophomore with Down syndrome . Will is suspicious of her motives , increasingly so when Sue donates money to the school to fund three new handicap ramps for students with disabilities . Sue is later seen visiting her older sister , Jean (Robin Trocki) , who also has Down syndrome , and lives in a residential home for people with disabilities . In the end , the glee club performs " Proud Mary " , staging the entire routine in wheelchairs in support of Artie .

= = Production = =

Kevin McHale deemed " Wheels " the " most serious " episode of Glee so far . He enjoyed Artie 's character development in the episode , explaining that when he was cast in the role , he did not know Artie 's background and thus made up his own backstory for him . He believed that Artie became paralysed later in life , rather than being born that way , which was proven correct in " Wheels " . Of the burgeoning romance between Artie and Tina , McHale opined : " I think Tina and Artie will be together . I think they will be a couple for a long time . " He explained that from the beginning of the show 's production , creator Ryan Murphy expressed the belief that Artie and Tina should be together , and so he and Jenna Ushkowitz deliberately sat close to one another during filming , assuming that it would eventually happen . McHale was shocked by Artie 's reaction to Tina 's faked stutter , and was initially unsure " why he was being so dramatic " . He concluded however : " I really think Artie fell for Tina because they were set apart by their disabilities . They 're already kind of outcasts being in glee , but within that group they shared a connection . So he based their whole relationship on that and when it went away , Artie didn 't know what to do . " McHale and Ushkowitz hope that their characters will ultimately become a couple , as they are best friends in real life .

Murphy called " Wheels " " the turning point for the show " . He elaborated : " Certainly , after this , it remains a comedy , and it 's fun . But writing this made me feel the responsibility of showing the truth of the pain that outcasts go through . It 's not all razzle @-@ dazzle show business . It 's tough , and it 's painful , and it was for me growing up , and it is for most people . " Murphy commented that the episode caused him to realize that , as well as highlighting the " fun and glamour " of glee clubs , it is also occasionally " really great [...] to show the underbelly of what people who are different feel . "

Recurring characters who appear in the episode are Kurt 's father Burt Hummel (O 'Malley) , glee club members Brittany (Heather Morris) , Santana Lopez (Naya Rivera) , Mike Chang (Harry Shum , Jr .) and Matt Rutherford (Dijon Talton) , school reporter Jacob Ben Israel (Josh Sussman) , Principal Figgins (Theba) and former glee club director Sandy Ryerson (Stephen Tobolowsky) . " Wheels " guest stars Cheryl Francis Harrington and Jeff Lewis as a nurse and manager at a local residential facility , and also introduces two characters with Down syndrome , Robin Trocki as Sue 's sister Jean Sylvester , and Lauren Potter as Becky Jackson , a sophomore at William McKinley High School . Potter is a member of the Down 's Syndrome Association of Los Angeles , and was contacted about auditioning through the association 's in @-@ house talent agency , Hearts and Hands . Fourteen actresses auditioned for the role , which Potter deemed " a great experience " to perform .

= = Music and choreography = =

The episode features cover versions of Nouvelle Vague rendition of " Dancing with Myself " , " Defying Gravity " from Wicked and the Ike & Tina Turner rendition of " Proud Mary " . Glee cast versions of the songs , including both Michele and Colfer 's solo performances of " Defying Gravity " , were all released as singles available for digital download . While " Proud Mary " and " Dancing

With Myself " did not chart , " Defying Gravity " reached number 58 in Australia , 38 in Canada and 31 in America . A duet version of " Defying Gravity " appeared on the soundtrack album " Glee : The Music , Volume 1 " .

Murphy selected " Defying Gravity " for the episode after Colfer relayed a story from his own high school days , whereby his drama teacher refused to let him sing the song because of his sex . Murphy explained : " I found a way to write it into the show because that 's in a nutshell what this show is about : someone being told that they can 't do something because of what the perception of them is as opposed to what their real ability is . " Colfer stated that the opportunity to finally sing the song " really meant the world " to him , and that : " It 's absolutely terrifying to watch yourself do something you 've dreamed about for such a long time . I know I 'm definitely not the best singer , but I think the message , the story behind the song about defying limits and borders placed by others , hopefully all that gets across with the performance . Although I do some very ' Kurtsey ' things in the song , it 's probably one of the most honest and close @-@ to @-@ heart scenes I 've ever filmed or performed for that matter . "

" Dancing With Myself " is McHale 's first solo performance on the show . Murphy commented that the performance is Artie 's chance to " break away from being misunderstood by everyone " and express himself , explaining that although Artie is usually " a very secure guy " who does not care about others ' opinions of him , " Wheels " sees his friends take his disability for granted : " So this performance is all about him saying , ' Look , this is who I am , and this is who I want to be . ' " McHale has stated that performing as Artie has made him more aware of the challenges that people with disabilities face : " It 's a completely different side of life . More than ever , I realize how grateful I am to be able to get up between each take and walk around . I 'm glad that I can represent that kind of life on television so millions of people see it every week . And the whole point of it is to show that Artie can still do everything everyone else can that matters . "

Glee choreographer Zach Woodlee described " Proud Mary " as the " scariest " number produced to date , citing concerns with choreographing an entire routine in wheelchairs and problems building the correct staging . Woodlee explained the stage ramps were initially built too steeply , preventing the actors from ascending them in wheelchairs , and that the actors experienced problems learning to distribute their weight correctly , flipping the wheelchairs over backwards : " It was like roller derby . All of the actors would fall backwards and hit their heads ? particularly Lea Michele . You lose your balance really quick when you try to go up a ramp in a wheelchair . Amber Riley caught an edge going down a ramp and fell off completely . There were pile @-@ ups ; there were crashes . Basically , everything that could go wrong , did . " Murphy specified to Woodlee that cast members should not be able to leave their wheelchairs during the number , as : " Artie doesn 't get to get up ever , so I didn 't want anyone to get up . " Woodlee agreed : " If it looked too fun and easy , it wouldn 't read right . Ryan really wanted people to understand what Artie deals with . "

= = Reception = =

" Wheels " was watched by 7 @.@ 35 million US viewers , and attained a 3 @.@ 3 / 8 rating / share in the 18 ? 49 demographic . It was the twenty @-@ second most watched show in Canada for the week of broadcast , attaining 1 @.@ 69 million viewers . In the UK , the episode was watched by 1 @.@ 877 million viewers (1 @.@ 463 million on E4 , and 414 @,@ 000 on E4 + 1) , becoming the most @-@ watched show on E4 and E4 + 1 for the week , and the most @-@ watched show on cable for the week .

Director Paris Barclay was nominated for the Directors Guild of America Award for Outstanding Directing of a Comedy Series for his work on " Wheels " , competing against Glee creator Ryan Murphy , who was nominated for his work on Glee 's pilot episode . The 62nd Primetime Emmy Awards again saw Barclay nominated for the " Outstanding Directing for a Comedy Series " award for " Wheels " against Murphy for " Pilot " . O 'Malley was also nominated for the " Outstanding Guest Actor in a Comedy Series " award for his role in the episode as Burt Hummel . Production mixer Phillip W. Palmer and re @-@ recording mixers Joseph H. Earle Jr. and Doug Andham were nominated for the " Outstanding Achievement in Sound Mixing for a Television Series " award at the

2009 Cinema Audio Society Awards for their work on " Wheels " . The episode was honored at the 2010 Television Academy Honors for exemplifying " Television with a Conscience " . The Academy of Television Arts & Sciences called it a " dynamic " episode , which " paint [s] a portrait of how we treat others ? and how we can do it better . "

= = = Critical reaction = = =

The episode attracted criticism from a committee of performers with disabilities , who felt that casting an able @-@ bodied actor to play a disabled student was inappropriate . CSI star Robert David Hall commented : " I think there 's a fear of litigation , that a person with disabilities might slow a production down , fear that viewers might be uncomfortable . " Glee 's executive producer Brad Falchuk responded that while he understood the concern and frustration of disability advocates , McHale had the singing and acting ability and charisma required for the role and : " it 's hard to say no to someone that talented " . McHale has stated that he is pleased to represent a character in a wheelchair , and that : " I think what 's great about it is just because he 's in a wheelchair , he can still do what everyone else does . " Kristin Dos Santos of E ! Online refuted criticism of the episode , opining that : " ' Wheels ' is all about empowering people with disabilities and sends out an uplifting message to the disabled community . " Gerrick Kennedy of the Los Angeles Times expressed a similar sentiment , stating : " Here we have an episode bluntly addressing the complexities of disability and doing so with so much respect and dignity , and there are complaints about Artie not being wheelchair @-@ bound in real life ? Cooooome on , guys . "

Tim Stack for Entertainment Weekly called " Wheels " a " great , great episode " , stating that it made him cry several times . MTV 's Aly Semigran also commented that the episode brought her to tears , suggesting that Lynch 's performance was Emmy @-@ worthy and deeming " Wheels " a truly standout hour of TV " . Raymund Flandez of The Wall Street Journal reviewed the episode positively , calling Artie 's rendition of " Dancing With Myself " " catchy " and " upbeat " and praising Rachel 's " Defying Gravity " audition , which he wrote : " leaves us wanting for more . " Kennedy described the episode as " sheer perfection " , and James Poniewozik of Time made the pun : " Glee 's always been a pleasure , but if it raises its storytelling ambitions this way , it can really defy gravity . "

Alan Sepinwall of The Star @-@ Ledger wrote that while he generally finds Glee to be " a show with a serious identity crisis " , he did not dislike " Wheels " as much as previous episodes . Sepinwall wrote that while Glee can be " broad and in @-@ your @-@ face and self @-@ congratulatory " , this episode was " much more human @-@ scaled [and] much more interesting . " Maureen Ryan of the Chicago Tribune similarly commented that while other episodes of Glee lack " coherence and narrative drive " , " Wheels " did not have this problem , describing it as " a case study of what Glee does right " and deeming Artie and Kurt 's storylines " provocative and thoughtfully handled . "

Mike Hale of The New York Times felt that the episode was problematic . He thought that having Kurt sabotage his own audition sent out a " mixed message " , and believed that actress Lauren Potter was " used as a prop in the continuing humanization of Sue Sylvester . " Hale wrote that the storyline felt " smarmy and artificial " , though praised Lynch for making the scene with Sue 's sister " warm and real " . Entertainment Weekly 's Dan Snierson felt that the revelation about Sue 's sister was " a little manipulative " , though wrote that he " didn 't care in that glorious moment . " He hoped that Glee 's writers would not humanize Sue too often , however , fearing that she would lose her " dictatorial swagger " . Eric Goldman for IGN rated the episode 7 @. 5 / 10 , commenting : " I really hope that episode was about getting a lot of ' issue ' storylines out of the way all at once , because that was a lot of overkill . " He felt that , although the episode contained " the usual strong humor , warm character moments and catchy musical performances " , overall it felt " very afterschool special " .