

The Top Ten TV Shows of the 2007-2008 Season, Part 2

by Joe Mulder

5. "The Wire" (HBO)

The fifth and final season of "The Wire" was, it seems to me, generally regarded as not having been the show's best, but that's okay. The season's main story arc was a bit outlandish compared to what the show had done in the past (I won't spoil it entirely in case you haven't seen it yet and are planning to Netflix the DVDs, but it involved a fake serial killer), and a secondary storyline involving journalistic fraud seemed a bit forced. Still, Season 5 was a worthy final bow for "The Wire," a show that examined how and why urban America is rotting and why we shouldn't hold our collective breath if we expect anything to be done about it.

4. "The Office" (NBC)

I'm not sure what I can say about "The Office" at this point that I haven't already said. The original version of "The Office" was one of the best TV shows ever, and it was mad to try to remake it at all, but the Americans have produced a show that, in its own right, ranks as one of the best TV shows in years? I've already said that before. The skill with which the show has managed to avoid growing stale and repetitive has been remarkable? Said that, too. The fact that "The Office" is showing up this low on my list is a testament to the fact that we really are living in a golden age of television? Said that last year.

Maybe it's this (and, although I thought of this a while ago, I'm not sure I've written about it before, and if I have, I'm sorry, but, here goes): the conceit of "The Office" is, as anyone who has seen it is aware, that a documentary crew is following the lives of the employees at the Scranton, PA branch of paper and office supply company Dunder Mifflin. Though the plausibility of the documentary setup is sometimes stretched for storytelling purposes (almost always, it should be noted, to good effect), for the most part what we see are the characters' public lives, not their private ones.

As such, "The Office" operates under restrictions imposed not by network censors or FCC regulations but by the format itself, something of a self-imposed code not dissimilar to the production code of the early days of Hollywood. We as viewers can't go anywhere a documentary crew wouldn't; can't see anything a documentary crew couldn't. This makes "The Office" unique in that the behavior we see from the characters is chaste and reserved by today's standards, since these people are, for the most part, at work. As such, a shared glance between Dwight and Angela or a glimpse of hand-holding by Jim and Pam count for so much more.

And when someone on, say, "According to Jim" responds to another character's badgering by rhetorically asking, "Did I

stutter?," it's a throwaway line with a sweetened laugh, quickly forgotten even by the people who wrote and performed it. When Stanley says it to Michael on "The Office," it's the incident around which the entire episode is constructed. It's the title of the episode, in fact. The small stuff looms large in such an environment, which is a big part of what makes "The Office" resonate; because most of our day-to-day lives are made up of small stuff that looms fairly large to us.

3. "House" (FOX)

Maybe "House" shouldn't be quite this high this season, but this is the year I finally started watching it after several years of people who liked TV quite a bit saying how good "House" was. I plowed through the first three seasons on Netflix and joined Season 4 in progress (later catching up on all the reruns), so, fairly or unfairly, the entire run of "House" is responsible for the show landing in the #3 spot, which isn't quite how it's supposed to be, but, what are you going to do? If you don't like it, you can go start your own website where you make meaningless lists about nothing.

As far as Season 4 of "House" is concerned, I very much liked the way that the show – much like "The Office" before it, speaking of "The Office" – sort of shook things up a season or two before they really needed to, as sort of a preemptive strike against growing stale. In the case of "House," that meant hiring an all new team of underlings to help the titular doctor solve his medical mysteries, an amusing process that took about half the season and produced a different version of the same team (the white guy, the minority guy and the chick) and allowed the rest of the season to be different but the same, if that makes any sense. Rest assured, though, that if you haven't been watching "House" it's not too late to jump in, as each episode still presents a self-contained medical mystery of the week to confound and amaze.

2. "30 Rock" (NBC)

Last Christmas, I got Season 1 of "30 Rock" on DVD from my in-laws and then brought it along when we went back to have Christmas with my people. Over the course of a couple days, the extremely diverse group of TV watchers that makes up my family plowed through almost every episode, my step-brother asking me on more than one occasion when it was normally on TV. He's a guy who wouldn't necessarily be inclined to start watching a show like "30 Rock," but he couldn't have enjoyed it more.

Good old "30 Rock." If people would only start watching it, it would easily become one of the top TV comedies ever. Even if people don't start watching it, it has already carved out its place as one of the *best* TV comedies of all time, carrying the torch of quotable, rewatchable, smart-dumb silliness that was passed when "Arrested Development" was so cruelly taken from us.

POOP READING

Don't let the same thing happen to "30 Rock;" sit your loved ones down and make them watch it. If bribery doesn't work, try violence. Whatever it takes.

1. "Dexter" (Showtime)

You know what? I wrote a whole thing on "Dexter" just a couple of days ago; feel free to go and read that.
