

12 Fantastic TV Characters Whose Portrayers Did Not Receive an Emmy Nomination (Part One)

by Joe Mulder

(Part One: The Men)

This list is by no means comprehensive; it is not a list of the all-time top 12 TV characters whose portrayers were not nominated for Emmys, nor is it a list of the all-time top 12 Emmy nomination snubs. It is simply a list of 12 fantastic TV characters whose portrayers did not receive an Emmy nomination for playing said fantastic TV character; these are the first 12 such TV characters that a) came to my mind, and b) stacked up favorably against the actors in the categories in which they would (and *should*) have been nominated. Also, I have provided you with an Emmy nomination that my choice could probably have replaced without the Earth spinning off its axis.

Oh, and most of these will be from the last ten or fifteen years, mainly because I don't know from old TV shows.

Let's begin...

Dr. Perry Cox, "Scrubs" (played by John C. McGinley)

When NBC first started running promos for "Scrubs," I thought it looked pretty lame; wacky antics and "mindscreen" humor that was played out when "Ally McBeal" did it to death several years before didn't strike me as my particular cup of tea. One evening, though, I happened to turn on my TV, which was sitting on NBC anyway because I'd taped (OMG, remember taping stuff?) an earlier show, and I started watching "Scrubs" by accident.

If memory serves, I turned on the TV just in time to see one of McGinley's patented Dr. Cox rants, and I was hooked. I haven't dreamed of missing an episode since, even if the show is no longer quite the revolutionary flash of genius it once was.

In any case, the idea for this list came from the announcement of the 2002 Emmy nominations, after which my then-girlfriend/now-wife and I decided that there was hardly any point to having the Emmys at all if a performance like McGinley's was to be ignored (I understand that we all realize by now that there is hardly any point to having the Emmys; give the two of us a break. We were young).

McGinley never fails to dazzle as Dr. Cox, a brilliant doctor-slash-misanthrope who battles addiction and keeps everyone at bay with his cutting put-downs; basically, he was House before House was House. It's not easy to do a character study like McGinley has done with Dr. Cox in the realm of half-hour comedy; it's just that McGinley makes it look that way.

A look at the list of Best Supporting Actor in a Comedy nominees this century reads like a veritable who's who, though, so it was tough to pick out somebody who obviously, clearly shouldn't have been nominated over McGinley. Until, that is, I remembered that "Two and a Half Men" – a show that I'd defend against charges of being offensively bad, but a show that on its best day is not fit to wash "Scrubs"'s worst-ever episode's feet – started getting nominated for Emmys a while ago.

Stay tuned, in fact; over the course of this list we'll effectively wipe out all three of Jon Cryer's "Two and a Half Men" nominations. And I've got nothing against Jon Cryer, I've seen him on talk shows and stuff and he seems nice, and it's always good to see a guy who'd been away for a while make a comeback, but, come on. They did an episode recently where he got tasered, and he milked the studio audience laughter by lying on the ground and continuing to "convulse" long after any reasonable person could be expected to believe a taser victim would. You just watched and thought to yourself, "that poor bastard must feel about those laughs the way a stripper feels about all of the sweaty dollar bills in her g-string."

Could very well have been nominated for an Emmy instead of: Jon Cryer, "Two and a Half Men" (2006)

Jim Halpert, "The Office" (played by John Krasinski)

First of all, John Krasinski is floppy-haired and adorable. Jon Cryer's Alan Harper is neither of those things, not by any stretch of the imagination.

Krasinski is not only frequently hilarious, he also expertly conveys the sense that Jim Halpert is overly cautious in life and is unfortunately comfortable with his own professional mediocrity, that this genuinely attractive and lively personality is tempered by a disappointment in himself that he didn't work harder earlier to make sure he did better, and by a sinking feeling that it might be too late for all that.

And that's just when he's looking directly into the camera with a bemused stare. When he's actually moving and/or talking, it's even better.

Could very well have been nominated for an Emmy instead of: Jon Cryer, "Two and a Half Men" (2007)

Emerson Cod, "Pushing Daisies" (played by Chi McBride)

Chi McBride might well get nominated for an Emmy for "Pushing Daisies" one day, but he hasn't yet (and, with ABC recently announcing the show's cancellation, he's not going to get a heck of a lot more chances). It's a shame. And not just because it meant that Jon Cryer got nominated again this year (and we're almost done dumping on Jon Cryer, I promise. I mean, the guy never did anything to me, so I feel

kind of bad).

This may be a bizarre comparison, and I make it not just because both men are somewhat wide of girth, but watching Chi McBride play Emerson Cod is a bit like watching Jack Black at his best, by which I mean that every line reading, every movement, every muscle twitch appears to be that of a man in complete and utter control of himself.

Put it this way: at any wedding reception, there are bound to be a bunch of people on the dance floor who are only out there because they're drunk enough not to care how silly they look (like, for example, me). Then there are people who can actually dance; they're out there not worried about looking silly, obviously. But then there's always that guy who can't technically dance, but dances anyway, and somehow manages to look fluid and smooth and just enough of the good kind of funny, in part because, wittingly or not, he makes no false or uncertain moves whatsoever. He's the guy who, in that situation, has no inhibitions not because he's drunk, but because he shouldn't have any inhibitions, because he's awesome.

That's what I'm trying to get at. That's Chi McBride as Emerson Cod.

(which is not to compare the rest of the cast of "Pushing Daisies" to drunk spastics at a wedding dance; they all do an incredible job as well. The cast of "Pushing Daisies," that is. Not the drunk spastics)

Could very well have been nominated for an Emmy instead of: John Cryer, "Two and a Half Men" (2008)

Ed Stevens, "Ed" (played by Tom Cavanagh)

Shame on everyone who owns a TV and didn't watch "Ed." The show premiered in 2000 and went off the air in 2004, and I think we can all agree that the failure of "Ed" to become a massive hit is by far the worst example of poor judgment by the American people that you could possibly find in either of those two years.

Cavanagh embodied the personification of the show's setting, Stuckeyville, Ohio, which was, refreshingly, an idealized small American town that wasn't whitewashed with a fresh coat of revisionist history but instead represented an attainable modern-day fantasy, a life lived in comfort and among friends in a small, nurturing community whose people remain there not because they lack other options, but because they've examined the other options and determined that this one is the best for them.

"Come along with me, to my little corner of the world," say the lyrics of a song that plays over a montage of Ed and Carol's wedding reception in the show's final episode. The most blessed of us find our own little corner of the world, and Tom Cavanagh was pitch-perfect as a man who was

aware, and thankful, that he found his.

(and by the way, for the purposes of this list, I'm considering "Ed" a drama, not a comedy, because it's an hour-long show. That's the way the Emmys used to do it, back before "Ally McBeal" and "Desperate Housewives" started cheating and submitting themselves for the comedy categories so they didn't have to go up against "The Sopranos" and stuff)

Could very well have been nominated for an Emmy instead of: Andre Braugher, "Gideon's Crossing" (2001)

[Andre Braugher is a fine actor, and I'm sure he was great in "Gideon's Crossing," which I'm sure was an actual show. Still, he already had an Emmy; he would have been okay]

Larry Appleton, "Perfect Strangers" (played by Mark Linn-Baker)

I have repeatedly (and vehemently) told anyone who will listen that "Perfect Strangers" was a work of comedic genius, nothing short of a latter-day "I Love Lucy." Yes, it was a dopey, silly show that featured characters who found themselves in unrealistic dilemmas that could have been remedied extremely easily had anyone, at any point, just stopped for a minute to assess the situation with a clear head. But guess what, Poindexter: that's why they call them *situation* comedies.

We forget now, because "Friends" effectively turned traditional half-hour studio audience sitcoms into soap operas (and I love "Friends"), but it used to be that you'd have a couple of characters – Lucy and Ricky, for example, or Ralph and Norton – and they'd get thrust into a situation they couldn't handle – working on a chocolate conveyor belt, trying to learn how to play golf – and hilarity would ensue.

That's exactly what "Perfect Strangers" was; the situation comedy form done almost to perfection. Why it's not considered one of the all-time great conventional modern sitcoms, up there with "Frasier," "Cheers" and "Everybody Loves Raymond," is beyond me.

Bronson Pinchot did a very capable job as Balki, in a role that consisted mostly of staring at things in wide-eyed wonderment and talking in a funny accent which he could technically never be accused of slipping out of because the island nation his character came from was fictional. But his role was probably the easier of the two, and besides, he got an Emmy nomination for "Perfect Strangers," so his case doesn't apply here.

His counterpart Mark Linn-Baker played the somewhat thankless role of Larry Appleton so well that, like a great major league umpire, you sometimes failed to notice that he was even there. "That was so funny when this happened, or when that happened," you'd think to yourself after watching an episode, seldom stopping to consider that the character to

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whom it happened – and his reaction – was most of what made it funny in the first place. No one, but no one, played beady-eyed panicky lower-middle-class white guy better than Mark Linn-Baker (with the possible exception of Bryan Cranston on "Malcolm in the Middle," who got three Emmy nominations for it).

We romanticize older entertainment like "Lucy" and "The Honeyymooners," tacitly understanding that they were created for audiences with much less sophisticated sensibilities than we have today (and who can blame those audiences; television had only been around for like three years when those shows came on. Nobody had had time to develop sophisticated sensibilities about it), but I think we unfairly penalize shows like "Perfect Strangers" that were created when sensibilities had changed. A sensibility that appreciates only the knowing, self-aware, self-consciously clever tone of a "30 Rock" or an "Arrested Development" (two of my favorite shows ever, it should be noted) and has no room for a wide-eyed immigrant and his put-upon cousin trying to fix a shower head and ending up causing water to shoot out of the toilet is quite a narrow sensibility indeed, just as narrow as one that only appreciates the lowbrow stuff.

Could very well have been nominated for an Emmy instead of: Dabney Coleman, "The Slap Maxwell Story" (1988)

Jack Arnold, "The Wonder Years" (played by Dan Lauria)

Is there anybody out there whose Dad, in one way or another, isn't at least a little bit like Jack Arnold? If so, you sort of have to feel bad for them. I could go on and on about the show and Dan Lauria's performance in it, but I'll just point out one moment from "Wonder Years" history in which Kevin shows his dad a test paper bearing a less-than-stellar grade. "It was hard," Kevin says, by way of explanation.

Dan Lauria just looks at him, gives him a "what kind of a thing is that to say?" look, and says, "Tests are *supposed* to be hard!" And then, with his eyes, not his lips, he adds, "you idiot."

There were probably six or seven moments in every show that were just as good, but that one sticks out in my mind.

Could very well have been nominated for an Emmy instead of: Peter Scolari, "Newhart," (1989)

[that was Peter Scolari's third straight nomination for "Newhart;" we probably could have lived without that]

Coming soon, Part Two: The Women.