

The Top 51 TV Shows By State, Part One

by Joe Mulder

Welcome to the first in a series.

A while ago, I wondered: what's the top TV show to have been set in each of the 50 states (plus DC)? Well, the research has been done, and here they are.

These are not my favorite shows, mind you, or even necessarily the best shows... these are the "top" shows. We have to consider everything: longevity, acclaim, cultural relevance and, yes, the quality of the show. But we're not here to play favorites, and we're not here to make friends (the last item on today's list should make that clear); we're here to determine the top TV show by state in a methodical, clinical, analytical, scientific, completely non-fun way.

But don't worry; it'll be a lot of fun.

We're only talking fictional series here, by the way; no mini-series, talk shows or reality. On we go...

ALABAMA

"Any Day Now" (Lifetime) – 1998 - 2002

I vaguely remember this show existing, since it starred Annie Potts and I tend to keep an eye on anything that anybody from the cast of *Who's Harry Crumb?* does (you think I'm kidding). I'm not sure it made much of a splash beyond the typical "Lifetime" demographic, but it did have a relatively successful four-season run on that network.

It told the story of two women from Birmingham, one white and one black, who were friends in the '60s and reconnected later life. The show was split between flashbacks, in which younger actresses played the two main characters, and scenes from the women's adult lives, making it sort of a "Wonder Years" to *Now and Then's Stand By Me* (anyone who understands what I mean by that gets a cookie).

I'm sure it was a pleasant show, and according to one source it could have run for more than four seasons but Annie Potts chose not to come back. I can only assume that, rather than continue with Season 5 of "Any Day Now," she opted to sit by the phone and wait for a call to do the *Who's Harry Crumb* sequel. If only that call would come, what a better world it would be for all of us.

ALASKA

"Northern Exposure" (CBS) – 1990 - 1995

We've got a pretty heavy hitter here – an Emmy winner for Outstanding Drama Series – in a state with essentially no other competition. I didn't watch "Northern Exposure," even though I always heard how great it was; maybe somehow I

knew, even though I wouldn't meet my wife until six years after it went off the air, that watching it – and, by extension, watching costar John Corbett on it – would violate my rule of automatically hating anything to do with any other man that my wife finds hot (this is also why I don't like "Lost" or the Alabama Crimson Tide, although the fact that I don't find "Lost" interesting, and the fact that Alabama head coach – and, evidently, late-'90s Michigan State campus heartthrob – Nick Saban was at LSU when they won the first of their two fake national championships without having to play USC, certainly contribute to the dislike).

We all pretty much understand the gist of "Northern Exposure," though, right? A self-consciously quirky show about a town full of weirdoes, its fish-out-of-water doctor, and the sexual tension he has with a chick who looks like an altar boy? Is that about the size of it?

Not to suggest it wasn't great, but, again, I didn't really watch it. What little I did see led me to believe it was as good as they say it was.

ARIZONA

"Alice" (CBS) – 1976 - 1985

"Alice" the sitcom, as you may know, was based on the 1974 Martin Scorsese film *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, for which Ellen Burstyn won a Best Actress Oscar.

I'm not remotely ready to discuss why or how anybody could have possibly ever thought to do that, nor how or why such an idea could possibly spawn a hit show that would run for nine seasons, produce a world-famous catchphrase ("kiss my grits") and be nominated for several major Emmy Awards. All I can do is look at any picture of anyone from the mid-'70s, assume that everybody was either stoned or coked out of his or her gourd, and just move on.

ARKANSAS

"Evening Shade" (CBS) – 1990 - 1994

You might think we're slumming it here in Arkansas, but "Evening Shade," in its four seasons, won a Best Actor Emmy for Burt Reynolds and a Best Supporting Actor Emmy for Michael Jeter (otherwise known as "the Mr. Noodle who isn't as good as Bill Irwin's Mr. Noodle on 'Elmo's World.'" Or maybe he's only known as that if you have a two-year-old).

And, lest we forget, Reynolds may have been a bit of a pioneer as one of the first major movie stars to "slum it" on his own TV series. He came back strong, too, scoring his first ever Oscar nomination only four years after "Evening Shade" came to an end. Also, his TV work may well have paved the way for other stars to jump from the silver screen to the small one; stars like Bette Midler, Geena Davis, Nathan

POOP READING

Lane, Whoopi Goldberg, Christian Slater...

Well, maybe that way could have used a bit more paving.

Ooooo, wait: Glenn Close and Kiefer Sutherland. They're on good TV shows.

Anyway, let's move on to the one that's going to start more fistfights than all the other 49 states (plus the District of Columbia) combined:

CALIFORNIA

"L.A. Law" (NBC) – 1986 - 1994

I know. I know. I wasn't happy about it either. But it ran for eight seasons and won the Emmy for Outstanding Drama Series four times (no other show except "Frasier" has won Outstanding Drama and/or Comedy Series more often). What else can one possibly choose?

"Arrested Development?" Three seasons, one Emmy win for Best Comedy. I realize that *you* watched it, and that *I* watched it, and that everyone we know who's both really smart and really, really into television watched it, but unfortunately *that's not very many people*.

"Curb Your Enthusiasm?" One could certainly make the argument, but it has never had nearly the mainstream appeal "L.A. Law" did. Plus, it's only won one Emmy (for directing). And if you can't definitively argue that it should beat out "Arrested Development" for the title – and I'm pretty sure you can't – then I'm afraid we've got to move on.

"The Larry Sanders Show?" Of all the California shows eligible for this list, it ranked highest on TV Guide's list of the 50 Best TV Shows of All Time – in 2002. It made the list at #38, but this was before "Curb Your Enthusiasm" had run off six top-notch seasons and before "Arrested Development" was even on.

The next California show TV Guide's list, right below "Larry Sanders," was "The Rockford Files," which doesn't seem to me like it belongs in the discussion even though it has an Outstanding Drama Series win to its credit. The only other California show on TV Guide's list? "Buffy the Vampire Slayer."

"Buffy the Vampire Slayer?" Personally, I happen to consider "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" to be the best – or second-best – TV series of all time (depending on how heavily you factor in the latter years of "The Simpsons"), and if I wasn't so determined to act as an impartial judge this would be my choice, edging out "Arrested Development" because it was able to stay on the air more than twice as long. Unfortunately, though, "Buffy" never quite made the leap out of the genre show realm, and no matter how much "Entertainment Weekly" begged people to watch it, it was

pretty much always just a show for geeks. That wasn't "Buffy's" fault, it was people's fault, but, it's a fact nonetheless.

I'm not sure what other shows even belong in the discussion ("Three's Company?" "Veronica Mars?" "Alias?"), and that leaves us with "L.A. Law." Which was, let's not forget, a great show and, for at least the first several years of its run, a ratings success. It never cracked the Top 10 for a full season, but it was more widely watched than any other show we've mentioned (with the possible exception of the pre-cable "Rockford Files"). Plus it was like catnip to Emmy voters; in 1989, *nine* members of the cast were nominated for acting. I'm not sure how I'd go about proving it, but that's got to be a record. And it launched the career of David E. Kelley, for which TV fans can be endlessly grateful.

"L.A. Law" was a water-cooler buzz show, it was a ratings success, it won a buttload (defined by my friends and I in high school as "more than seven") of awards, and it even got bloated and silly in the last few seasons like a truly great show ought to do. Like it or not, it's the choice – and a fitting one – for California.

Up next: Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia. Stay tuned!
