

Mike's Top Ten TV Shows of the 2009-2010 Season

by Mike Wagner

I'd say that about 85% of the nights at my house go like this: either my wife or I put our daughter to bed and return to the living room. If I put our daughter to bed, my wife is watching a DVR'd episode of *The Secret Life of the American Teenager* when I make it back to the living room. I look at the screen, look down, and shake my head in the exact same, disgusted way I always do and ask, "can we watch one of 'our' shows now?" If she is putting our daughter to bed, I am watching a sporting event when she returns. She looks at the screen, looks at me, and says, "Is this an important game or can we watch one of 'our' shows?" Below is a list of best ten of these shows. In other words, *Army Wives*, *Entourage*, and *The Biggest Loser*, which we watch, are not on the list. *Real Time with Bill Maher* narrowly misses.

But first, I should mention that I seriously considered attaching all of the e-mails that went into setting up the rules for this year's listing, the e-mails discussing posting order, formatting, and the like - but I deleted those fucking things from my inbox so goddamn fast that sharing them with you is a sad impossibility. I seriously considered putting *Ed*, *Seinfeld*, and *MASH* in the top ten just to see if it would make Jameson choke on his own vomit. But if he did choke on his own vomit, I may have to step up and learn some of the technical details that go into making poopreading.com the gloriously beautiful website that it is. Rest assured these e-mails were esoteric, needless and heedless. However, they were also jovial and full of ribald. Sigh, I must be softening.

A few notes. I saw the first few episodes and *Community*, was underwhelmed and stopped watching. I just saw "Modern Warfare" and the one in which Abed out-participates the faculty in a psychology experiment and am back in. Can't wait for the new season. Haven't seen *Party Down* (I'm probably why it got canceled), it sounds like it right in my wheelhouse. Ah well. I will start by agreeing with most of the others that it was an off-year for *The Office*. But the Sabre (Sah-BRAY!) welcome song on its own was nearly enough to get *The Office* on this year's list. But, yeah, it was uneven and even a little weird, which I imagine is something Brandon's wife might say about their unmentionable activity time (Pow! That just happened!). When did I become such a dick? When did Jim become so incompetent at his job? When did the writing on *The Office* get so sloppy? This year will be better as the Michael Scott send-off should unload opportunities for all kinds of funny.

10. *Curb Your Enthusiasm*

Holy lord was the *Seinfeld* reunion hilarious. I loved how everyone but Larry agreed that the original finale stunk and that they needed a new one. The device to use the reunion as a way to win back Cheryl was a good one and it gave us

some Elizabeth Shue, which is always a good thing as well. I did not like Jeff cheating on his wife with that crazy woman, though. Not one bit.

9. *Glee*

I think that the writing on this show is generally atrocious; save the lines they give Sue Sylvester and the scenes between Kurt and his dad. The plot points are mostly contrived and kinda dumb, though their occasional nailing of what high school is like makes up for it. The key, of course, is that the singing and dancing is so out of this world fabulous that I cannot wait for each episode to end and I grow wistful when we reach the last scenes. Most of the performers light up the screen and the major players make will they/won't they, uh oh - they are gonna cancel Glee club unless this contrived event happens, and Glee kids are nerds tropes interesting, fresh, and captivating. And Jane Lynch - sweet fancy Moses is she perfect.

8. *Charlie Rose*

The "Brain Series" contains some of the most fascinating hours of television I have ever seen. We know a helluva lot about how the brain works and yet we are just scratching the surface of being able to understand why we have the preferences we do, how they change, how we respond to stress, joy, fear, and the like. The "nerdy professor" part of me watches the "Brain Series" Charlie's been doing for research ideas. The "fancies himself as a man with a brilliant riposte at a *The New Yorker* party" likes the indulgent interviews with politicians, artists, architects, and writers. James Lipton preparation without the uncalled-for blanket, sappy praise.

7. *The Late Show with David Letterman*

Dave is my TV friend and, like Brandon said, the episode in which he discussed his infidelity was outstanding television, even as it chipped away at some of my admiration for the guy. No matter how funny and bright you are, you shouldn't be banging your staff in your office with a bed (what?) while your girlfriend/wife is at home with your son. The desk chat and interviews with worthy guests are fabulous, but I'm a little sad that he is less inclined to go after folks who are banal. I like that he still goes after folks who are stupid or churlish.

6. *The Colbert Report*

Still the most talented performer on TV - his interviews with heavyweights are always so riveting because he's thinking in character, communicating in character, being ironically funny in character, and letting you know that he doesn't really think what he is saying in character even though he says it with such urgency and ferocity. Stunning television.

5. *Big Love*

Chloe Sevigny's character grew up this season and it was equal parts spellbinding and heartbreaking. She finally realized that her childhood on the compound seriously damaged her. She started to realize that she was bitter and angry about that and she began to search for herself. Ginnifer Goodwin's character grew up as well. She's now a savvy adult who is far more strategic than her husband gives her credit. Jeanne Tripplehorn's first wife character also came into her own. Watching the three wives grow while Bill Paxton's character revealed a truly hubristic belief in himself and God's plan for him made this season their best yet. Sissy Spacek's brilliant turn as a politically dangerous and somehow frighteningly under-the-surface sex-tensioned lobbyist amped this season up as well.

4. *30 Rock*

I agree that this season wasn't as even in terms of quality, but the litany of things Tracy Jordan saw when he was growing up, Elizabeth Banks's absolutely fabulous turn as Avery (especially knowing the code to Reagan's mausoleum), and Wesley Snipes's assertion that he looks much more like Wesley Snipes than the actual, so to speak, Wesley Snipes were hilarious. The same is true for the last few episodes of the season. Finally, Alec Baldwin's tour de awesome performance (i.e. admiring Lemon's "whole situation") contains a weekly entry into the funniest thing said on TV this year contest.

3. *Modern Family*

I missed the first few episodes in the fall but happily caught up after being introduced to these delightfully askew sitcom convention families thanks to Tenessa's prodding. Oddly, the least "realistic" character, Manny, is my favorite – which is saying something. I don't know that I've liked every cast member on a show with equal verve since *Seinfeld* or *Ed*. The laugh a minute quotient is high, but the guffaw-per-episode ratio is the highest on television (you know, except for ironically watching Glenn Beck).

2. *Parks & Recreation*

Just as there are tiny hintlings (sometimes in a winking way) of "will they or won't they" on the horizon with Jack and Liz on *30 Rock*, Ron and Leslie have a budding relationship on a variety of levels. I've really enjoyed how their relationship has grown and how Ron's respect for Leslie gets him to do all kinds of things that he absolutely hates. I love the growing romance between Andy and April and am more generally really impressed at how the show took a bunch of characters that just didn't have it in the first season to characters that are interesting and funny (a tough combination) in the second. On top of all that, the show is just consistently hilarious.

1. *Mad Men*

It is such a shame that Brandon stopped watching this show as the last two episodes of *Mad Men* have absolutely fucking brilliantly started to tell the redemption story of Don Draper/Dick Whitman. Season 2's conclusion which showed the end of the Draper marriage contained some of the most frightening, gripping television I've ever seen. It is so heartbreaking and touching to see Jon Hamm's Dick Whitman be himself in California only to struggle with Don Draper in New York. The beginning of season 3 has shown off Hamm's range even more as Don spiraled downward you saw glimpses of a weaker Dick Whitman, a fledgling Don Draper, and an out of control divorced dad who finally decided to try to get his shit together. I cannot wait for the rest of the season at Sterling Cooper Draper Pryce. Meanwhile, the rest of the ensemble turned in pitch perfect performances filled with empathy, chivalry, debauchery, avarice, ambition, fear, ambivalence, resignation, strength, riskiness, and sadness. Another show where every single character (even the ones we only meet once a season) are a delight to try and get to know. The writing in terms of character, plot, and story arc is exquisite – I consistently quote lines from last week's episode each and every week. The best show on television.
