

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

by Tenessa Gemelke

Before we began this enterprise, I warned the others that my television viewing habits are fairly wonky. There are plenty of shows I know are brilliant, but I've never seen: *Party Down*, *Breaking Bad*, *Mad Men*. And then there are shows I've tried watching repeatedly because people keep insisting I'll like them, but I don't: *Glee*, *The Big Bang Theory*. And there are shows I genuinely love and often record but don't always seem to watch: *The Colbert Report*, *Late Night with David Letterman*, *The Tonight Show with Conan O'Brien*. (Yes, I take personal responsibility for Jay Leno's evil reign in the late night wars.) And what about *The Office*? When I see those last few unwatched episodes still littering the DVR in August, I feel as if I'm bumping into an ex-boyfriend at the grocery store. I wish it well, but I just don't love it anymore.

Having said all of that, these are the ten shows that brought me the most joy in the last season:

10. *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* This was the hardest choice I made in my list. I love Dave Letterman with my whole heart, and I find Stephen Colbert funnier, but Jon Stewart and *The Daily Show* make me feel more ways about more stuff.

Many of us bemoan the partisan standoff that plagues our nation. Some of us threaten to move to Canada, and some of us wait for the Rapture, but few of us use our brains and our behaviors to try to make the country better. Whether you agree with the liberal flavor or not, I think it's fair to say that, unlike most shows in this category, *The Daily Show* makes you think. It is unapologetically left-wing without letting Democrats off the hook. It is scathingly critical of conservative groups without condemning all Republicans. The show treats people like people, treats issues like issues, and treats America like it belongs to all of us and not only to some of us.

See? Ways about stuff.

9. *Community* I hated this show at the beginning of the season. I have a lot of love in my heart for Joel McHale, but I was thoroughly unimpressed by the first few episodes. The characters were the weakest kinds of clichés, and the romance was annoying and bumbling, and the premise was so dumb that it made me angry. I wanted to like the show, but I was sure I could not.

Having learned from the example of *Parks & Recreation* (see below), I decided to give the show a little time. I am so glad I did. Highlights include a heartfelt John Hughes tribute, a spot-on *Goodfellas* spoof involving chicken tenders, and possibly my favorite 30 minutes of post-apocalyptic warfare in television history.

8. *The New Adventures of Old Christine* I am so mad at you for not watching this show. I mean, this cancellation is not a travesty on the same level as *Freaks and Geeks*, but you people allowed a really excellent comedy to get away while *Jersey Shore* stays on the air. What do you have to say for yourselves?

The least you can do is go back to watch it on DVD. The stellar ensemble cast was even more fun this season with the addition of Eric McCormack. A pox upon you for terminating his character arc so soon. A POX UPON YOU, I SAY!

7. *How I Met Your Mother* This season flirted dangerously with some pretty sappy plot threads, but I am amazed by the show's ability to rebound time and again from cutesy couple moments and excessive Mosbyism. Barney Stinson should be an embarrassingly tired cliché by now, but the writers continue to give him just enough heart to make him endearing and just enough underwater diving suits to make him surprising. I still love this show.

6. 24 I have a complicated psychological relationship with 24. As someone who lived in New York City on September 11, 2001, I found it very comforting when Kiefer Sutherland showed up on TV two months later, kicking terrorists' asses. The show is all a bunch of crazy baloney, but I was at the perfect place in my life to say, "Sure, sign me up."

There were some really, *really* bad seasons of 24, but somehow I could never fully give up on the show. I went into this final season with pretty low expectations. I was just seeing it through to the end because I was seeing it through to the end. So I can't tell you how pleasantly surprised I was when the show was so genuinely enjoyable. Jack Bauer was smart and badass and actually attracted to an intelligent woman for once, and Chloe O'Brien was finally allowed to completely steal the show, and somehow it didn't even matter that the writers did such a horse-shit job with Katee Sackoff's character and story line. I just freakin' loved the final season anyway.

5. *Louie* Upon writing this, I have only seen seven of the thirteen episodes that have aired. Because I have seen only seven episodes—and *only because I have only seen only seven episodes*—I hesitate to call this the best show in the whole history of the whole universe of entertainment. So I'm hedging my bets at #5. But, seriously, this is probably the best show in the whole history of the whole universe of entertainment.

Since I'm obviously too stunned by the awesomeness of the show to write anything intelligent about it, I will simply say this: Louie good. TV good. *Louie* on TV good.

4. *30 Rock* Is there anything I can tell you about *30 Rock* that you don't already know? I guess I could tell you I want to make sweet love to Elizabeth Banks, but I'm not sure that's

a helpful endorsement.

3. *Parks & Recreation* There is a pretty good chance you watched *Parks & Recreation* during the first season and felt disappointed. We all did. Something about the show just didn't gel as quickly as *30 Rock*, and the mockumentary style didn't work as well as it did in early seasons of *The Office*. It was hard to care about characters that were awkward and abrasive without being terribly funny.

The shift from the first season to the second season was stunning. Instead of being mired in the limits of the characters, the cast and writers finally seemed to develop affection for them. Previously exaggerated traits were mellowed a bit, making room for us to root for the civil servants of Pawnee. And the show has taught me that there is nothing more hilarious than a blanket hatred of librarians

2. *Modern Family* If you aren't watching *Modern Family* by now, you must be one of those wackjobs who only watches British mysteries on PBS. Seriously, people. When something is as good and right as this show, ignoring it is simply irresponsible viewer behavior. (NOTE: I wrote this before the Emmys. I swear.)

Ostensibly filled with some pretty schlocky diversity stereotypes (the Gay Couple, the Sassy Latina, the Hot-Wife-Dorky-Husband formula), this show rises above the potentially low bar set by the premise. It reminds me a little of the way I felt when I first watched *The Sopranos*: they set the hook with the predictable character types, but they reel us in with surprisingly endearing moments of familiarity and vulnerability. And how can you *not* love a show with a story line about a comb sheath?

1. *LOST* As I raptly watched an early episode of the first season of *LOST*, my husband disdainfully looked across the room at me and declared, "I don't think this show is as good as you think it is." I heard public echoes of that first accusation throughout the run of the show, but never more than in this final season. (For the record, my husband soon recanted and now loves the show almost as much as I do.)

While I can't defend this as the best season of the show, I can absolutely say that it remained my favorite show up to the very end. I was genuinely excited to watch every episode, and I'm sure no other show inspired nearly as much next-day chatter in offices, on Twitter, or in the comments section of Doc Jensen's bat-shit crazy *Entertainment Weekly* recaps. And I still insist that [spoiler alert] this year's Richard Alpert episode totally made up for Allison Janney's Glowing Vagina Metaphor Cave.