

Top Ten TV Shows, 2007-08 Season

by Brandon Kruse

Welcome to this, the third entry in our Top Ten TV Shows from 2007-08 series. If you haven't already read the excellent lists of my fellow poopreading.com contributors, Joe Mulder and Jameson Simmons, you should; these columns are best enjoyed as a whole, as a sort of television stew. And as was previously established, here's the ground rules:

These are shows that have been airing new episodes in the last year, so no syndicated or old shows. It's open to reality shows, news programs, talk shows... any television show that is currently producing new content. And the rankings are based on how good or bad they were **this** season – career excellence is ignored.

For the sake of this list, I'm defining the 2007-08 season as the period starting September 2007, and ending August 2008. Most shows will fit an entire season during this period. Some shows (like *South Park*) will have the end of one season and the beginning of another fall into this window. And still others (like *Mad Men*) will start a season within the window and finish outside of it, but will have said season grandfathered in because a) I finished watching the whole thing, and b) what's the point of leaving out half the episodes of a highly-serialized drama??

As an added bonus, I will also give you what I thought was each show's best episode from this period. (And let's admit right off the bat that by "best" – both for the shows and the episodes – I mean a mix of critical assessment of quality and plain old personal opinion. There's no point in trying to convince you that I'm being objective here. I haven't watched every episode of every show on the air – and if someone out there has... sweet monkey in a bathtub, why?? – so for me to tout my rankings as a list of the objectively best shows on TV feels disingenuous. So I'm not gonna do that.)

10. *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*

The Daily Show is always at its best during an election year, simply because there's so much fodder to work with. And while Jon Stewart has grown a little undisciplined in his delivery during desk bits, his interviews remain among the best in the "talk show" genre. But for me, the real gem of this past year of TDS was the breakout of John Oliver. He has absolutely become the new go-to correspondent on the show, and frankly, I think he might be the best they've had since Stephen Colbert. (Not better, mind you; just best since. Let's be clear on that, shall we?)

BEST 2007-08 EPISODE: Obviously TDS doesn't have traditional "episodes," and there's far too many shows in a given year to be able to single out one for greatness. But in keeping with the John Oliver praise, I thought his [bit remembering "Britain's Fallen Soldiers"](#), complete with a list

of hilarious fake British names like Cecil Hardboner, was one of the funniest things they did all year.

9. *Pushing Daisies*

It's really unlike anything else on TV right now, with its mix of a dark central concept (reviving the dead) with a light, whimsical tone and style. Lee Pace and Anna Friel are adorable together, and the show gets awards for Best Use of Kristin Chenoweth Ever and Best Use of Chi McBride Ever. And regarding McBride: I now understand why *Boston Public* and *The Nine* had to get cancelled. He was fine in both, but Emerson Cod... this is the role he was destined for. And how satisfying must it be for him to have come all this way ten years after the debacle that was *The Secret Diary of Desmond Pfeiffer*? (Of course, Dann Florek – Who was Lincoln! Who knew?!? – made it out from those ashes to flourish in the *Law & Order* franchise, so perhaps that show was not the career death sentence it appeared to be at the time.)

BEST 2007-08 EPISODE: "Pie-Lette," which was, of course, the pilot. As far as I'm concerned, it was the best pilot of the '07-08 period, and probably one of the top pilot episodes of the last ten years. And frankly, that's one of the things that has *Pushing Daisies* lower on my list – the pilot was so damn brilliant, the rest of the series was a slight letdown. That's not to say it isn't great – it is – it's just that that first episode set the bar almost impossibly high.

8. *South Park*

We can all admit that *South Park* isn't quite what it used to be. There was a time when it was a Top 5 mainstay, and even a period where it was arguably the best show on TV, but it's a lot more hit and miss these days (the three-part "Imaginationland" series serving as a prime example of both). That said, when Trey Parker and Matt Stone can still bring you such glorious ideas as Randy Marsh (who has become arguably the funniest character on the show) battling Bono for the world's largest crap, a cat-urine-based homage to the 1981 cult film *Heavy Metal*, and a quest for internet porn wrapped up in a parody of *The Grapes of Wrath*, you can put up with the occasional off week. Their comedic voice remains blessedly unique.

BEST 2007-08 EPISODE: "Super Fun Time," about the field trip Mr. Garrison's class takes to an 1864 pioneer village, which made much-warranted fun of actors who refuse to break character under any circumstances, and managed to work in a nice *Die Hard* parody while it was at it. A classic SP episode.

7. *Mad Men*

I thought there were times that Season 1 of *Mad Men* was a little slow-paced and guilty of keeping a frustrating distance between you and the characters, but after seeing Season 2, it

now seems like that first season was spent putting story and character foundations into place, as they were paid off beautifully this season (particularly with Don Draper, the central character). Creator Matt Weiner seems to have a well thought out vision for the show, and when it comes to serialized shows, there is no better feeling than placing your trust in a show-runner with a long-term plan.

BEST 2007-08 EPISODE: "A Night to Remember." A showcase for two of the best characters on the show, Betty and Joan, as well as two of the best actresses (January Jones and Christina Hendricks), as Betty confronts Don about an affair, and Joan gets a shot at proofing TV scripts for ad buys. Both got memorable moments: the image of Betty sitting in the living room in her robe, hair wet, no makeup, almost ghostly white was haunting, and the reaction of Joan when she learns she'll be returning to her secretary job was heartbreaking. They both deserve recognition come Emmy time next year. (Really, you could nominate pretty much the entire cast, and I wouldn't make a fuss.)

6. *The Office*

I'm not crazy about the hourlong episodes. I realize this probably puts me in the minority. I can admit that there's nice things they're able to do with the background characters in the longer episodes, but that's overshadowed by the fact that the extra time leads to dead spots, and that just feels wrong for a show with such a phenomenal comedy-per-square-inch ratio. Of course, one of those hourlongs did give us a nice long trip to the Schrute Farms bed & breakfast (with extra Mose!), so I can't complain too much.

BEST 2007-08 EPISODE: "Branch Wars." I've got two words for you: fake mustaches. Oh yeah, and this: "Besides having sex with men, I'd say the Finer Things Club is the gayest thing about me."

5. *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*

That sound you just heard was the primal, horrified scream of fellow poopreading.com contributor Jameson Simmons as he declares me "dead to him" for ranking this show above *The Office*. I do think *The Office* is more consistently funny than *Sunny*, but when *Sunny* is on its game, it has higher peaks. (Okay, seriously, somebody send a crisis management team to Jameson's house – make sure they've got someone who specializes in post-traumatic stress disorder.) But what really pushes *Sunny* over the top is the unstoppably funny work of Charlie Day. I'll say this and be done (possibly because this website self-destructs after I post this): his character, Charlie Kelly, just might be the flat-out funniest TV character since Homer Simpson.

BEST 2007-08 EPISODE: While I simply could not get enough of Charlie's "Serpico" impression in "Bums: Making a Mess All Over the City" or his "Night Man/Day Man" songs from "Sweet Dee's Dating a Retarded Person," the

"The Gang Solves the North Korea Situation" episode was the year's best from beginning to end. ("Bony American is dirty, dirty whore. She bring much shame to herself and country.")

4. *Lost*

I'll admit that this is the show I have the least objectivity about. I drank the *Lost* Kool-Aid a long time ago. But I'm not alone in saying this was a great season. The first two episodes (since that's what most TV critics receive when they write start-of-season reviews) got an 87 out of 100 score on Metacritic.com. And the show ranked #1 in TelevisionWeek's Summer Critics Poll in July. Deciding on an end date for the show was the best decision they've ever made, it really refocused the show, and I have high hopes that these upcoming final two seasons of *Lost* will be its best.

BEST 2007-08 EPISODE: "The Constant." To me, the Desmond-Penny story has been the emotional core of the show since Season 2, and the writers used that to full advantage here, delivering an A+ episode that had something for the head (a mythology-advancing exploration of time travel) and something for the heart (Desmond's desperate quest to reconnect with Penny). More like this, please.

3. *Curb Your Enthusiasm*

We're six seasons into *C Your E* now, and Larry David has the show running at a level of quality that rivals the best work of *Seinfeld*. The infusion of Vivica A. Fox and J.B. Smoove (oh lordy, J.B. Smoove) gave Season 6 a renewed energy, and it was a delight to watch it unfold. And the show's use of Ted Danson remains consistently hilarious.

BEST 2007-08 EPISODE: "The Ida Funkhauser Roadside Memorial." Free sample abusers. A sweaty 50-dollar bill that no one wants. A roadside memorial for Marty Funkhauser's recently-deceased mom. A school admissions officer that Larry has offended, and Cheryl, Jeff and Susie are trying to impress. Larry's desperate attempts to get Cheryl in an "intimate" mood. If this doesn't sound like the perfect recipe for comedy, you don't know Larry David. When I first saw this episode on September 2007, I called it the early leader for funniest TV episode for 2007-08; now that the dust has settled, it's still on top.

2. *The Wire*

The final season of *The Wire* was easily its weakest, but subpar *Wire* is still some of the best television money can buy. The Baltimore Sun/media storyline that dominated much of the season was badly flawed, likely because creator David Simon was too close to the subject (he was a former Sun reporter) and had some personal axes to grind. That said, that storyline did give us Sun city editor Guy Haynes, who was a standout character on a show that seems to consist of

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nothing but standout characters. And any shakiness in Season 5 did nothing to detract from this: *The Wire* goes down as the best show in the history of HBO (sorry, *Sopranos*, but it's true), and quite possibly the history of television.

BEST 2007-08 EPISODE: "Late Editions." Haynes continuing to fight the battle for truth in reporting. Kim doing the right thing, the impossibly difficult thing, by telling what she knows to her superiors in the police department. Bubbles breaking down as he finally told the story of the death of his friend Sherrod. Snoop asking if her hair looks good before accepting her fate. Michael being forced to abandon his friend Dukie. If these things didn't move you, didn't fill you with the giddy, emotional thrill that comes from investing yourself in truly well-written, beautifully-acted characters over a multiple season story arc, then you might as well just give up on TV drama, because there's nothing here for you.

1. *30 Rock*

After two seasons, I'm going to make it official: *30 Rock* is the new *Simpsons*. Here's why... 1) It has achieved that rare mix of goofy humor and cutting satire that *The Simpsons* perfected during its glory years; 2) it has developed a cast of recurring supporting characters that now runs at least twenty deep; 3) it has mastered the art of guest casting, using the "good period" *Simpsons* model of having guest stars play a fictional character within the show's world, not the "bad period" *Simpsons* model of having a guest star play themselves; and 4) it has that same densely layered mix of verbal and visual gags, along with pop culture parodies, catchphrases and callbacks, the type of jokes that reward multiple viewings. If you were a *Simpsons* fan (I say "were" meaning prior to about Season 12 or so), there is no reason you should not be a *30 Rock* fan.

BEST 2007-08 EPISODE: "Sandwich Day." This was a tough call. "Cooter," with its pitch perfect guest spot by Matthew Broderick and recording of Tracy Jordan's porn video game, was worthy of the writing Emmy it received. But I thought "Sandwich Day," with its focus on the breakup of Liz Lemon's relationship with Floyd, was even better, in no small part because it gave us this exchange, my favorite from all of 2007-08:

LIZ: I came to the airport, didn't I? And I wolfed my teamster sub for you!

FLOYD: (Smiles and nods, then looks confused) Wait, no... is that a saying?

It is now.