

The Best Show On TV

by Joe Mulder

"The Office"(NBC) – 2/9/2006 - 4/2/2006
"Huff" (Showtime) – 4/2/2006 - 8/26/2006
"Big Brother" (CBS) – 8/26/2006 - 10/4/2006
"South Park" (Comedy Central) – 10/4/2006 - 11/30/2006
"The Office" (NBC) – 11/30/2006 - 1/14/2007
"24" (Fox) – 1/14/2007 - 4/5/2007
"30 Rock" (NBC) – 4/5/2007 - 4/10/2008
"House" (Fox) – 4/10/2008 - 10/5/2008
"Dexter" (Showtime) – 10/5/2008 - 11/18/2008
"The Shield" (FX) – 11/18/2008 - 11/24/2008
"How I Met Your Mother" (CBS) – 11/24/2008 - 1/8/2009
"30 Rock" (NBC) – 1/8/2009 - 9/9/2009
"Glee" (Fox) – 9/9/09 - present

It's as if the creators of "Glee" crawled inside my brain and made a TV show out of what they found in there. How can I evaluate such a show objectively?

It's quite simple: I can't. I can't and I won't.

I can only tell you what I love about "Glee," and why. Mild spoilers ahead, but only involving the two episodes they've already aired.

First and foremost, I love the show's premise. "Glee" is an ensemble piece, but if anyone is the main character it's Will Schuester (Matthew Morrison), a Spanish teacher from Lima, Ohio who takes over his high school's faltering glee club in an effort to restore it to its former glory. Mr. Schuester's salad days, you see, coincided with his membership in this very glee club, which he helped to win a national competition as a student at the school where he now teaches. Unfulfilled in life and in love – his high-school-sweetheart wife Terri (Jessalyn Gilsig) seems more devoted to her "craft room" than to him – he sees revitalizing the glee club as a way to recapture the passion and joy he hasn't felt in years.

In one sense, my own best days may have come in high school as well; I have as lovely a wife and children as any man dare dream of having, but I very much identify with the rest of the Will Schuester character...

"I knew before we were halfway through with that number that we were going to win," Will says during Episode 1, getting misty-eyed as he watches a video of his glee club performing at nationals in 1993. I recall thinking the same thing halfway through a performance in the final round of the only high school speech tournament at which I ever took first place.

"Being a part of that," Will says, "in that moment, I knew who I was in the world." I could say the same thing about being onstage during a performance of the school play, doing

a scene with Aaron, Emily and Rick, looking out into the audience and seeing, among other people, the basketball team's starting forward convulsed with laughter.

I don't share Will's marital frustrations, thank God, but I can identify with his disappointment in finding passion and a sense of belonging so difficult to come by in the real world if you were lucky enough to have experienced them both as a teenager.

I love Matthew Morrison as Will, specifically. Morrison is a Broadway veteran, a triple threat who can sing, dance and act about as well and anybody else can do any one of those things. And speaking of Broadway veterans who can sing, dance and act about as well as anyone else can do any of those things...

I love Lea Michele as Rachel Berry. Michele is already a seasoned Broadway star at 23, and it's going to be a rare treat to watch a performer of her caliber doing incredible musical numbers every week.

Rachel is the unrivaled star of the glee club, petite and pretty (if not conventionally so), supremely gifted artistically but socially tone deaf. Longing to be recognized as exceptional, her obsession with performance and artistic perfection isolates her from her classmates, which then causes her to strive even harder for acceptance and notoriety by way of artistic greatness, which further turns off her fellow students... it's a vicious cycle.

When hunky quarterback Finn Hudson (Cory Monteith) is coerced by Mr. Schuester into joining the glee club, Rachel practically rips his pants off of him at the first rehearsal. Finn is dating cheerleader Quinn (Dianna Agron), leader of the Celibacy Club, but no matter; Rachel's hopelessly in love.

Eventually Finn gets close enough to Rachel, though, that he can't help but fall under her spell. What is it that makes her so special? Here's what Finn tells her, after the two of them spend a little time rehearsing together after school:

When I first joined I thought you were kind of insane. I mean, you talk a lot more than you should, and to be honest with you I looked under the bed and made sure that you weren't hanging out under there... but then I heard you sing. I don't know how to say this, but, you touched something in me. Right here.

Then Finn puts his hand on his chest, where his heart would be if it were located on the right side of his body. Rachel moves his hand over to the left side of his chest and tells him that's where his heart actually is, because even when the boy she loves is essentially confessing his love for her, she can't

POOP READING

let somebody be wrong about something.

I love that "Glee" is, in the service of telling its stories, willing to push way, way past the boundaries of what I'd have thought was acceptable for primetime network TV. For instance, shortly after Finn tells Rachel how he felt when he heard her sing, the two of them kiss. Finn promptly ejaculates into his pants, gets embarrassed, and takes off, imploring Rachel not to say anything about it their encounter and leaving her to wonder what she did wrong.

Now, I can see how that might not be the sort of subject matter everybody might necessarily be looking for in a high school glee club show, and I can't say that I'd blame them. But daring to throw an "embarrassed by premature ejaculation" complication into a budding teenage romance, and daring to play that angle without making light of the emotions of either character involved, takes some balls.

But "Glee" is willing to do it. And not just for shock value; for story and character reasons, too. What is more central to the teen experience, after all, than romantic and sexual feelings caused by raging hormones, newly developed and completely untempered by either wisdom or experience? "Glee" understands this and doesn't shy away from it at all.

I love Jane Lynch as Sue Sylvester, the drill sergeant-like coach of the Cheerios, the school's nationally known cheerleading program that she worked tirelessly (and effectively) to build. Her character is a rather stock villain, preemptively jealous of Will and the glee club for any attention they might divert from her cheer squad, but Lynch makes you look forward to every scene she's in. Before Episode 2's opening credits are even through rolling she scores a laugh-out-loud line almost out of thin air:

WILL: I know you're used to being the cock of the walk around here...

SUE (matter of fact, almost under her breath): Offensive...

WILL: ...but it looks like your Cheerios are going to have some competition.

I mean, there's almost nothing there, that's hardly even a real joke, but thanks to Jane Lynch it's a moment worth TiVoing back to watch three or four times. Let's not take her for granted, folks.

Finally, I love musical numbers, and "Glee" delivers them in spades. The show has essentially the entire 50-year history of pop music to choose from, and so far they've given us parts

of Amy Winehouse's "Rehab;" Journey's "Don't Stop Believin';" "Sit Down, You're Rockin' the Boat" from *Guys and Dolls*; Kanye West's "Gold Digger;" Salt-n-Pepa's "Push It;" Dionne Warwick's "I Say a Little Prayer;" and Rihanna's "Take a Bow;" not to mention snippets of a few other things. It's almost not fair to compare "Glee" to other shows; much like, say, "The Sopranos" or "The Wire" had advantages such as no network censorship and hour-long commercial free running times, advantages that made it hard for traditional network shows to compare, "Glee" has the advantage of musical production numbers that can elevate it to a level above that which other programs are capable of achieving.

The mind boggles at the possibilities of what's to come, both in terms of the performances and of "Glee" itself. Personally, I expect continued greatness from this, The Best Show On TV.
