CHICAGO – The head-on collision with “The Jay Leno Show” has decimated nearly everything on NBC and it’s going to be a long, uphill climb for it to return to ratings respectability. Even relatively acclaimed new shows like “Parenthood” are struggling as viewers left the peacock net and seem unwilling to return. The already ratings-challenged “Trauma” returns tonight, March 15th, 2010, in an effort to stop the bleeding.

Television Rating: 2.0/5.0

As a part of the anemic Monday nights, “Trauma” has basically already been cancelled once but was shocked back to life after the Leno debacle when the net suddenly found itself with five more hours to fill. Before Leno was cancelled, “Trauma” had finished fourth in its timeslot in every single airing and had plummeted to a series-low of under 5 million viewers for its last airing.

Last Fall, NBC had announced that they weren’t ordering any more episodes but the original order of 13 was extended to 20 when “The Jay Leno Show” was cancelled. It’s unlikely that “Trauma” will survive the current atmosphere at the net as it’s going to really need to impress between now and its May 10th finale to stay on life support to a second season.
“Trauma” is a character-driven, ensemble drama not unlike the net’s classics “Hill Street Blues” and “ER” or their recent abandoned child “Southland” but it is also a program that has remarkably spun its wheels, not really going much of anywhere and viewers have understandably jumped ship. The problem is in the relatively lackluster character writing, the overly familiar set-up, and the melodrama. I actually thought that “Trauma” started as one of the more promising shows of the season but that promise has gone nowhere.

Like all great cop shows or medical dramas, “Trauma” is at its best when it sticks with the reason these shows work - watching people who go above and beyond but also have everyday problems and insecurities like you and me. We need to see oursevles in these superhuman characters and “Trauma” has become such an over-the-top experience that this becomes impossible to do.

Take the newest episode, “Protocol”. By the halfway point, a man has been impaled by a deer while driving and cell-phone talking, another has watched his daughter go into shock which sparked his own heart attack, and a third has jumped out of a moving ambulance and been hit by a car. The “action” of “Trauma” has gotten so brazen in its attempt to shock that it doesn’t have any emotional power. It’s amazing to me that NBC thought this ensemble drama would work better than the great “Southland,” a similar-but-far-superior ensemble crisis show that they let go.

Far more interesting than the action are the actual characters of the San Francisco City Hospital trauma unit as actors like Derek Luke, Cliff Curtis, Aimee Garcia, and Kevin Rankin do their best to turn the melodramatic material into something that feels genuine. But they’re fighting a losing battle. Every time a character on “Trauma” starts to get interesting, the show reverts back to another crazy action scene designed to top the one that came before.

The fact is that “Trauma” would have been a tough sell even in the days when audiences were turning to NBC for quality drama. The fact that the network hasn’t developed a new dramatic hit in years makes it even more difficult to see this being the first. Something will eventually shake the cobwebs off this network and bring it back to life in the post-Leno era. It won’t be “Trauma”.

‘Trauma,’ which airs on NBC, stars McCliff Curtis, Derek Luke, Anastasia Griffith, Aimee Garcia, Taylor Kinney, and Jamey Sheridan. It was created by Dario Scardapane. The show returns on Monday, March 15th, 2010 at 8PM CST.

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