

TV Review: Stunning Premiere of ‘Big Love’ Returns Show to Prime Form

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on January 15, 2011 - 11:33am

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CHICAGO – As the credits for the premiere of the fifth and final season of “Big Love” started, I wondered exactly what I wanted from this year. Like Chloe Sevigny and most fans of the show, I agreed that season four was a serious disappointment, especially after the spectacular third outing. Unlike the desire of most shows to go “over the top” in their last year, I realized that I wanted “Big Love” to come back down and focus on the central quartet of characters that make the show work. I am critically ecstatic to report that the season premiere of “Big Love” gave me everything I wanted and more.



Television Rating: **5.0/5.0**

Season four of “Big Love” was cluttered, in large part due to an abridged season that forced the pace of the show off its rhythm. The result was closer to a soap opera than an HBO drama as every other scene demanded a major revelation because there was no time to waste. The writers never figured out how to balance guest stars like Sissy Spacek with uninteresting plotlines like Native American casinos and 12 episodes of action in 9 hours left no room for subtext.

As Bill Henrickson (Bill Paxton) says in the premiere, “*It’s the moment we turn the corner.*” Naturally, the premiere is about the aftermath of Bill’s decision at the end of season four to reveal his lifestyle to the world after winning a Utah State Senate seat and introduce his constituency to his three wives. If you thought that decision might end in acceptance, think again. In fact, the revelation first sends the family on the road into tents to avoid the scorn of the public and the press inquisition into “*the infamous lying polygamists.*”



Big Love

Photo credit: HBO/Lacey Terrell

Once the tabloid storm blows over, Bill and his family return home to find anger turned to bitterness. Neighbors, business partners, and family members: No one seems happy about Bill's decision, including both fellow polygamists and colleagues at the Senate, where he can't be impeached or recalled but he sure can be ostracized and ignored. Life is a general mess for the Henricksons. The dramatic edge is that while most of us would probably write off a real-life Senator with three wives, we feel for Bill and his family and want them to find some sort of peace and happiness.

The three Henrickson wives respond to their new-found fame with different emotions. Barb (Jeanne Tripplehorn), always the rock of the family, seems resigned to deal with whatever may come but hides a secret desire to rebel and break out of her routine by doing things like (gasp) drinking red wine. Nicki (Chloe Sevigny) has arguably the most-fascinating response, falling to anger at her family's predicament, hysterically retaliating against a school bully who torments her son and throwing out wonderful lines like *"I'm a bigger person now and I won't go back to being small."*



Big Love
Photo credit: HBO/Lacey Terrell

Of course, the always-riveting Margene (Ginnifer Goodwin) emotionally falls apart. It starts with deep sorrow over losing everything she worked for in her sales career and eventually becomes something closer to manic depression. Even Bill has a predictable-but-rewarding response, continuing to drive forward, speaking of things like a “reservoir of goodwill” that clearly isn’t there. Unlike so many TV characters, Bill rarely wavers in his beliefs. You may not agree with him, but TV doesn’t often present characters with such confidence.

The season premiere of “Big Love” is a thing of beauty. It is simply spectacular in its pacing, writing, structure, and every single performance. The writers wisely focus on the four central characters and the actors rise to the challenge. Sevigny, so great in season three, seems reinvigorated after a lackluster season four. Her misguided attempts to parent her blossoming daughter are fascinating given that Nicki is something of a child herself. Sevigny could be on her way to an Emmy. And Tripplehorn clearly relishes getting more to do than manage a casino. She’s always been underrated and particularly shines in episode two opposite living legend Ellen Burstyn.

Sissy Spacek is one of our best actresses, but she wasn’t quite the right fit for “Big Love” last season and the guest stars like Grace Zabriskie, Bruce Dern, and Zeljko Ivanek often stole the show from the central cast. The balance has returned this year with fantastic supporting turns from the great Gregory Itzin (“24”), Ellen Burstyn (“Requiem For a Dream”), Robert Patrick (“T2: Judgment Day”), and from familiar faces like Zabriskie, Matt Ross and Mary Kay Place in the first few episodes.

Very few programs have returned from a season as disappointing as four. The quality of most programs can be graphed as a peak and a steady decline. The thought that “Big Love” has another peak before we say goodbye to the Henricksons forever is a TV fan’s greatest dream come true.

As much as I’ve expressed my disappointment in season four, you’ll now have to see it more than ever since season three is simply one of the best of the ’00s and this one looks so promising. You’ll need to see the connective tissue and it was just released on DVD from HBO Home Video and Warner Brothers.

The nine episodes are included on three discs with typical HBO video quality yet one still has to wonder why shows broadcast in HD are EVER not available on Blu-ray. Hopefully, HBO won’t make “Big Love” fans wait like those who still dream of “The Sopranos” on the format and release the inevitable Complete Series set on Blu-ray, maybe even by the end of the year. It could be a great one for “Big Love” fans.

‘Big Love,’ which airs on HBO, stars Bill Paxton, Jeanne Tripplehorn, Chloe Sevigny, Ginnifer Goodwin, Grace Zabriskie, Bruce Dern, Matt Ross, Mary Kay Place, Gregory Itzin, Ellen Burstyn, and Robert Patrick. Season five premieres on January 16th, 2011 at 9PM CST and reruns throughout the week.

‘Big Love: Season Four’ is released by HBO Home Video. The show was released on DVD on January 4th, 2011. It is not rated. It runs 516 minutes.



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By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [19]
Content Director
HollywoodChicago.com
brian@hollywoodchicago.com [18]

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