

TV Review: ABC's Comedy 'Happy Endings' Breaks Streak of Awful 'Friends' Rip-Offs

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on April 13, 2011 - 9:14am

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CHICAGO – ABC's new sitcom "Happy Endings" is undeniably yet another "Friends" rip-off, an attempt to make a pal-com about relationships, misunderstandings, and good buddies. I've seen enough of these things that I automatically get a bit defensive when they appear on my desk. If you sat through junk like "Traffic Light" and "Perfect Couples," you would too. So no one is more surprised than me to report that "Happy Endings" works. It isn't perfect but it's much closer to the quality level of its inspiration than anything we've seen in the last few years.



TV Rating: **3.5/5.0**

Remember how "Friends" opened with Ross being left at the altar by his wife? Guess what happens in the opening scene of "Happy Endings"? As if the 3-guys-3-girls parallel and general style of the show didn't make its inspiration clear enough, "Happy Endings" opens with the same conceit, although the runaway bride remains a major character in this version.

Dave (Zachary Knighton of "FlashForward") is the nice guy left with the ring in his hand as Alex (Elisha Cuthbert of "24") runs off with a rollerblading jerk who steals her on her wedding day. The two have four mutual friends — the married Jane (Eliza Coupe of "Scrubs") & Brad (Damon Wayans Jr. of "The Underground"), the gay Max (Adam Pally), and the neurotic Penny (Casey Wilson of "Saturday Night Live"). How will the quartet deal with the fact that there's been a split between a couple of mutual friends?



Happy Endings
Photo credit: ABC

That may be the set-up, but it barely lasts. It's not long at all before all six are just hanging out again with the fact that Dave and Alex were once engaged being referenced but not driving a wedge between the friends. There's no time for that amidst the wacky comedy. The wedding split starts the action of the show but it's barely a part of it by the time the fourth episode they sent for review has aired.



Happy Endings
Photo credit: ABC

Instead, "Happy Endings" focuses on the kind of wacky behavior that would have fit perfectly in the lives of Rachel and Chandler. In one episode, the guys realize that there's a dude living in their ceiling. In another, Max has to come out to his family after his friends generally fail at being his beard. A bit where Brad is forced to share with the annoying husband of one of his wife's friends is pretty stellar and when Penny discovers her dream man has the last name of Hitler, it may sound like sitcom hell but it's handled expertly.

And that's because of the pedigree behind the camera — directors Anthony and Joe Russo, who have directed numerous episodes of "Arrested Development" and "Community." These guys know comedy. They executive produce along with Jamie Tarses ("My Boys") and Jonathan Groff ("How I Met Your Mother") and they give the show a comic timing that allows it to stand above every other relationship comedy that has premiered this year.

There are times when it feels like the writing on "Happy Endings" is a bit to self-aware. You can tell that they're trying hard to be clever and really think that they are. In the second episode, when Brad coins the phrase "chicksand" for a girlfriend who sucks you into a relationship before you really know you're in it, it feels a bit too forced. I want the characters to settle down and become more three-dimensional, more likable and real instead of just ready with a clever quip at every minute.

And I think that's going to happen. The cast is remarkably talented. Wayans Jr. has spectacular comic timing, producing a laugh with almost every line, and Coupe and Wilson offer a wonderful variety of comic styles not unlike what Courteney Cox and Lisa Kudrow brought to "Friends."

And that's the ultimate difference between this "Friends" rip-off and others. While previous attempts to find that comedy gold again have only made us want to watch repeats of our favorite '90s show to see how it should be done, "Happy Endings" actually merits positive comparison. I'm very worried about its killer time slot (9pm after the already-struggling "Cougar Town" seems like a REALLY bad idea) but if it has time to find an audience, this could actually be "the next Friends" instead of another casualty on the road to finding it.

"Happy Endings" stars Eliza Coupe, Elisha Cuthbert, Zachary Knighton, Adam Pally, Damon Wayans Jr., and Casey Wilson. It was created by David Caspe, Jamie Tarses, and Anthony & Joe Russo. It premieres on ABC on Wednesday, April 13th, 2011 at 8:30pm CST with back-to-back episodes.



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