

TV Review: 'The Paul Reiser Show' Diminishes Legacy of Sitcom Star

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on April 14, 2011 - 9:10am

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CHICAGO – Tonight's premiere of "The Paul Reiser Show" is awkward in the way that television is when the viewer can tell that not only is it not quite working for you but that the cast can tell its problematic too. Have you ever seen bad improvisational comedy? You know that moment when you can see in the performer's eyes that it's not going well? It makes you uncomfortable. Be prepared to feel that tonight and if you somehow make it to next week's even-worse episode, be prepared to feel your skin crawl as you lunge for the remote.



TV Rating: **1.0/5.0**

"The Paul Reiser Show" so blatantly steals the model of HBO's "Curb Your Enthusiasm" that Larry David guest stars on the series premiere as himself. Just making clear that you know that you're copying a superior show doesn't make it okay. And the fact is that what David and his team have accomplished on "Curb" is a rarity and the kind of material that just doesn't fit on NBC with Paul Reiser. Don't get me wrong — I think the star of "Mad About You" is a pretty talented guy but he just doesn't have the same rhythm as David. He needs to play a character and it needs to be one more interesting than himself.



The Paul Reiser Show
Photo credit: NBC

As if to make up for the lack of character at the center, the writers turn Reiser's friends into cartoons. Reiser plays a version of himself — an actor looking for work, dealing with kids, and becoming "friends" with the parents of his children's friends, as so many suburbanites do. The

conceit — that these aren't really Reiser's traditional friends as much as they are guys that Paul has to hang out with on play dates — allows the writers to cast a variety of unique personalities in the four supporting male roles. The quartet of sitcom cliches that make up the supporting cast range from mildly annoying to downright offensive.



The Paul Reiser Show
Photo credit: NBC

On the most positive end of that scale is the second lead of the sitcom, Ben Shenkman's ("Damages") neurotic Jonathan. Shenkman is a talented actor reduced to sitcom plot device but he comes off smelling like roses compared to the shameful trio of Omid Djalili, Duane Martin, and Andrew Daly. The embarrassment I feel for these actors as they argue over childhood school projects, glue themselves to cars, and get attacked by stray cats is hard to convey in words. The writing is so bad that it almost feels abusive to its actors.

The actor playing himself surrounded by a cast of fictional characters would be enough to warrant the "Curb Your Enthusiasm" comparison but they go a step further and copy the real-life guest star model as well (a la Ted Danson and Richard Lewis) with David appearing as himself in the premiere and, believe it or not, Henry Rollins in the second episode. Seeing the legendary rock star involved in a ridiculous plot where he's upset at Paul for not thinking he's funny will be a strong frontrunner for my least favorite sitcom moment of 2011.

Through all the horrendous writing, one can still sense that Paul Reiser still has the comic timing that made him a household name. He's always been a talented, likable guy, but he seems to have lost touch with what audiences want to see in a sitcom. Perhaps he's been too insulated from reality and, as other former sitcom stars like Bob Saget and Kelsey Grammar have proven recently, forgotten what works about comedy.

With television as smart as "Community" on before it and a program as well-paced as "The Office" after it, "The Paul Reiser Show" stands out even more than it otherwise would. It would be easy to say that "The Paul Reiser Show" is a relic, a program that feels out of date compared to modern comedy, but the fact is that this program would have been a dog in any era.

"The Paul Reiser show" stars Paul Reiser, Amy Landecker, Ben Shenkman, Omid Djalili, Duane Martin, and Andrew Daly. It was created by Reiser and Jonathan Shapiro. It premieres on NBC on Thursday, April 14th, 2011 at 7:30pm CST.



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