

TV Review: Edgy Comedies ‘The Big C,’ ‘Weeds’ Return to Showtime

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on June 27, 2011 - 12:15pm

- [Alexander Gould](#) [2]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [3]
- [Gabriel Basso](#) [4]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [5]
- [Hunter Parrish](#) [6]
- [John Benjamin Hickey](#) [7]
- [Justin Kirk](#) [8]
- [Kevin Nealon](#) [9]
- [Laura Linney](#) [10]
- [Mary-Louise Parker](#) [11]
- [Oliver Platt](#) [12]
- [Reid Scott](#) [13]
- [Showtime](#) [14]
- [Television](#) [15]
- [The Big C](#) [16]
- [Weeds](#) [17]
- [Theater, TV, DVD & Blu-Ray](#) [18]

CHICAGO – The revolving door of talented actresses has turned at Showtime. “Nurse Jackie” and “The United States of Tara” just ended their seasons and so Edie Falco and Toni Collette head out one side while Laura Linney and Mary-Louise Parker come in the other with the season premieres of “The Big C” and “Weeds,” respectively. While the second season of “The Big C” shows immense promise, the seventh-season premiere of “Weeds” hints at another disappointing season of this once-great show.



Television Rating: **4.0/5.0**

“The Big C”

The first season of Darlene Hunt’s edgy comedy was a bit inconsistent with a revolving door of guest stars (including Idris Elba & Cynthia Nixon) and a tone that kept the characters at arm’s length. The show veered wildly from cynicism to melodrama and realism was lost somewhere in between. Despite that, the cast was always strong enough to keep it entertaining and one could tell that this was the kind of show that could really take off in a second season if it found its creative footing.



The Big C

Photo credit: Showtime

How does one even craft a second season for a show about a woman with stage 4 cancer? Such is the premise of the Golden Globe-winning series (and Linney is sure to repeat with at least an Emmy nomination this summer and a likely win), which centers on the life of Cathy Jamison, a woman who realizes her life is kind of a mess after learning that it will soon come to an end. Her lazy husband Paul (Oliver Platt) has never really been the right fit for her. Her petulant son Adam (Gabriel Basso) is as distant as most teenage boys are from their mother.

And her hippie brother Sean (John Benjamin Hickey) is just a pain in the ass.

In the first season, Cathy struggled with telling those close to her about her disease, befriended the cantankerous old woman across the street (Phyllis Somerville), tried to mentor an overweight girl at the school she worked at (Gabourey Sidibe), and even had an affair (with Elba) while also flirting with her cute doctor (Reid Scott). The season ended with her preparing for chemotherapy after finally telling her husband and son what was going on.

It's too soon to tell if the whole season will be as consistent as tonight's season premiere but there's reason for hope. The first season of "The Big C" was all over the map tonally. The characters felt more like devices of a comedy writer trying to be edgy than real people. From the very first episode of season two, the show feels more grounded, which is exactly what it needed to resonate. It's clear that "The Big C" wants to avoid the maudlin sentimentality that could easily invade a show about cancer but it too often pushes too hard in the other direction. The characters feel more genuine at the start of season two and if that relatable quality is maintained then this will be one of the best shows of Summer 2011.

If you want to catch up, the first season of "The Big C" was released on DVD by Sony on June 7th, 2011 in a pretty-standard three-disc set. It's inexcusable that any show with these kind of production values isn't being released on Blu-ray as well. I just don't get it. If fans of the show are willing to pay for Showtime, don't you think they're willing to pay for HD? Oh well. The show is presented in 1.78:1 anamorphic widescreen with a Dolby Digital 5.1 track. Special features include deleted scenes, outtakes, "Complex Characters," interviews with cast members Laura Linney, Gabourey Sidibe, Oliver Platt, and more.



Television Rating: **2.5/5.0**

"Weeds"

Can anyone else believe that the Botwins have been dealing drugs for seven seasons? Where Jenji Kohan's creation was once one of the most engaging and entertaining comedies on the air, it's just lost its power, like a buzz that wore off long before the party ended. I still love some of the performers (Mary-Louise Parker is always great) but the writing on the show has been meandering over the last few years as Nancy Botwin's life has gotten more and more ridiculous. The show about a suburban drug dealer has become an international adventure and it hasn't been the same since it left the 'burbs.



Weeds

Photo credit: Showtime

At the end of last season, Nancy took the ultimate bullet for her family and went off to jail while her boys Silas (Hunter Parrish) and Shane (Alexander Gould) jetted off to Copenhagen with Andy (Justin Kirk). The new season picks up three years later as Nancy is being released from prison early. She's instructed to go to a halfway house in New York and her overseas family hears about her release despite her wishes. Will they come to the Big Apple? Will she break her probation and head overseas? What wacky incident will happen next?

Drugs just weren't enough for "Weeds" and the show kind of jumped the shark when it headed south of the border and got involved with politics and even murder. The cast is still uniformly strong, especially Parker and Kirk, but I liked the program so much more when I believed what was happening. The action of "Weeds" has become so ridiculous that it has overshadowed the characters. I miss the Botwins and the Hodes. Maybe they'll come back to Earth before the final token.

"Weeds" stars Mary-Louise Parker, Hunter Parrish, Alexander Gould, Justin Kirk, and Kevin Nealon. The seventh season premieres on

Showtime on June 27th, 2011 at 9pm CST. “The Big C” stars Laura Linney, Oliver Platt, Gabriel Basso, Reid Scott, and John Benjamin Hickey. The second season premieres on Showtime on June 27th, 2011 at 9:30pm CST. The first season was released on DVD on June 7th, 2011.



[19]

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