

TV Review: Comforting Family Drama of NBC's 'Parenthood'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 13, 2011 - 12:55pm

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CHICAGO – There's something comforting about a family like the Bravermans. It's a blend of perspective and identification that allows us to look at the clan at the center of a family drama like "Parenthood". The show returns tonight on NBC at 9 p.m. CST (and the second season of which was just released by Universal on DVD), and both relate to their situation and be happy that our lives aren't as complicated. With one of the strongest ensembles on television, "Parenthood" has developed a loyal audience for good reason. There are still frustrating flaws with the screenwriting and storytelling on this show, but I like that there's always at least one family drama on the fall schedule. It's a TV staple that will never go away.



TV Rating: **3.5/5.0**

Executive produced by Brian Grazer and Ron Howard (who also produced and directed the film on which this dramedy is VERY loosely based), "Parenthood" started as an attempt on NBC's part to craft a star-powered drama a la ABC's reliable "Brothers & Sisters" (a show that became less reliable over the last couple years before a surprise cancellation). Turn up the star power, make four or five of the characters relatives, and give them all distinct arcs. The writing still underlines itself far too much for my tastes — subtlety is not the program's strong suit — and I wish the dialogue wasn't so predictable or cliched but the cast of "Parenthood" elevates the material. These are talented actors and actresses who know how to make characters likable enough that viewers want to spend time with them on a weekly basis. It's nice to have them back.



Parenthood
Photo credit: NBC

"Parenthood" centers primarily around one family made up of two brothers and two sisters (along with their parents, children, and significant others). The quartet at the heart of "Parenthood" includes Adam (Peter Krause), Crosby (Dax Shepard), Sarah (Lauren Graham), and Julia (Erika Christensen). Of course, each has their own drama to bring to their supportive siblings for advice. Adam is unemployed and dealing with pending fatherhood with wife Kristina (Monica Potter) yet again. Crosby has split from his baby mama and is driven to open a new, risky business with his brother. Sarah is dealing with the drama associated with her daughter (Mae Whitman) leaving home. Finally, Julia wants to adopt a new baby so bad that she's considering ordering more than a latte from the pregnant coffee girl at work.



Sound like enough plot for one series? "Parenthood" is one of those programs a bit weighed down by multiple speaking roles — we haven't even gotten into the return of Jason Ritter as a suitor for Sarah or a high school party gone very wrong for Adam and Kristina's daughter Haddie (Sarah Ramos). And Craig T. Nelson and Bonnie Bedelia continue to provide comedic and emotional relief on the periphery. It's a CROWDED show. And the crowd leads to a bit of two-dimensionality in the characterizations. We can't get too deep into any of the motivations or dilemmas because there's simply not time before another character needs to take their turn. It leads to a season premiere script that feels disappointingly surface level. This is one of those shows in which people too often say exactly what they mean to their mother, spouse, or daughter. There's no time for subtext.

Having said that, the ensemble do their best to find the little moments that add up in a show like "Parenthood." The great Lauren Graham isn't just the best actress on this program, she's one of the best on TV. Krause and Potter have developed a nice, believable rhythm as husband and wife. And the young cast of "Parenthood," especially Whitman and Ramos, do equal work to their more high-profile parents. I like this cast. They're enjoyable enough to spend time with every week and that's the ultimate test of a family drama — Are they a family with which you want to sit around the crowded dinner table? It's nice to have a meal with the Bravermans.

Have more than one meal with the five-disc DVD set from Universal, complete with deleted scenes, audio commentaries, and a behind-the-scenes featurette. I keep waiting for that year when all current shows are available on Blu-ray along with DVD as I firmly believe that all shows should be available to fans in the same quality in which they originally watched it and even Hulu has HD streams that are better than standard DVD quality. "Parenthood: Season 2" should be on Blu-ray, but it's a quality DVD release nonetheless. Catch up or prepare for the new season with this solid program, one that may never be great but that I expect will be good for years to come.

"Parenthood" returns on NBC on Tuesday, September 13th, 2011 at 9pm CST. It stars Peter Krause, Monica Potter, Lauren Graham, Miles Heizer, Mae Whitman, Craig T. Nelson, Bonnie Bedelia, Erika Christensen, Sam Jaeger, Dax Shepard, Joy Bryant, Sarah Ramos, and Max Burkholder. It was executive produced by Ron Howard and Brian Grazer. "Parenthood: Season 2" was released on DVD on August 30th, 2011.



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By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [21]
Content Director
HollywoodChicago.com
brian@hollywoodchicago.com [20]

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