

TV Review: NBC’s ‘Bent’ Has Promise But Likely Won’t Have Time to Fulfill It

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 21, 2012 - 9:38am

- [Amanda Peet](#) [2]
- [Bent](#) [3]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [4]
- [David Walton](#) [5]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [6]
- [J.B. Smoove](#) [7]
- [Jeffrey Tambor](#) [8]
- [Jesse Plemons](#) [9]
- [Joey King](#) [10]
- [Margo Harshman](#) [11]
- [NBC](#) [12]
- [Television](#) [13]

CHICAGO – The cast of NBC’s “Bent” is strong enough that it could easily pull that common sitcom trick of a shaky start that develops into something greater. I’m not trying to compare the programs directly in terms of quality but have you see the first 5-6 episodes of “30 Rock” now that it’s in syndication? They were awful. “Community” started half as creatively as it is today. There’s no guarantee that “Bent” will become a comedy titan like those two shows but the ensemble is surprisingly strong and there is definitely the potential for greatness. However, NBC’s plan to air two episodes back to back in a flimsy timeslot in the middle of the week against the biggest comedy on TV should make their intentions clear. There will be no time for “Bent” to get in shape.



“Bent” is essentially a romantic comedy between a bad guy and a good girl. She’s a single mother who is recently divorced and hasn’t had sex in a year. He can’t go a week without a one-night stand and, when he sees someone who looks familiar, he has to stop and think if it is because he slept with them. Don’t worry. The prude meets the rebel angle of “Bent” isn’t over-played even if it is the basic foundation of the show.



Bent
Photo credit: ABC

She is Alex (Amanda Peet), a type-A personality moving into her own place after her philandering husband went to jail. Alex and her daughter Charlie (Joey King from “Ramona and Beezus”) are trying to get by in their new Venice, California home, which could seriously use some work.



Bent
Photo credit: NBC

Enter Pete (David Walton), a contractor who was fired from his last job after sleeping with the married woman of the house. That job broke his crew apart but he convinces them to get back together for Alex's extensive work not only because it looks like a money pit but because he clearly has a thing for Alex. Pete's crew includes scene stealers like J.B. Smoove and Jeffrey Tambor while Alex is supported by her rebellious sister Screwsie (Margo Harshman).

Most people who know TV know that Tambor and Smoove have stellar comic timing and the few fans out there of "Studio 60 on Sunset Strip" know that Peet can handle this material easily. The lesser-known actors in "Bent" deliver as well with Harshman and King providing nice, believable support. But the show belongs to Walton, who plays his smooth character with a nice gawkiness within it. He's not "too cool," which would have made him unlikable. He's got a crazy ex and his own issues. They just don't compare to most of the people around him. The most important thing is that the cast of "Bent" have great timing.

However, they're not always given a chance to prove it. Created by Tad Quill ("Scrubs") and directed by the great Craig Zisk ("Weeds," "Nurse Jackie"), "Bent" needs the most work behind-the-scenes. Zisk directs his cast well but the pacing on "Bent" is a bit bizarre and unrefined. And too many of the jokes fall flat. If the show can relax and find its character's voices, it could be a wonderful mid-week surprise (like "Suburgatory" has slowly become).

The fact that NBC has decided to air new, unrelated episodes back-to-back for the first few weeks reeks of a network that's just trying to burn off that for which it has already paid. An hour of a sitcom VERY rarely works, even for a known, beloved quantity. For a new show, it's a disastrously bad idea. I like "Bent" and even I would have probably tuned out over an hour, especially with the first episode going up against "Modern Family" and the second up against a show with a similar demographic, "Happy Endings." They really couldn't have done worse by this show. It would take a miracle for it to survive long enough to work out its kinks, and miracles are becoming fewer and farther between on the peacock network.

"Bent" stars Amanda Peet, David Walton, Margo Harshman, Joey King, J.B. Smoove, Jesse Plemons, Pasha Lychnikoff, and Jeffrey Tambor. It was created by Tad Quill. It premieres on NBC on Wednesday, March 21st, 2012 at 8pm CST.



[14]

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