

## TV Review: Take Harrowing Trip to 'American Horror Story: Asylum'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 17, 2012 - 8:41am

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CHICAGO – When we got to the end of FX's excellent "American Horror Story" and nearly all of the characters were dead, a natural question arose — what the Hell do they do for season two? Welcome to "American Horror Story: Asylum," a completely new tale with some of the same ensemble from the first season but a new setting, new characters, and new story but the same goal — to rattle your senses and put you on edge in the middle of the week. The first two episodes of "Asylum" are just as confident, fascinating, and startling as the first two episodes of "AHS" last year. Sure, I miss Connie Britton & Denis O'Hare but the new cast members click immediately and, most importantly, the creative drive here seems the same, arguably even more determined to give viewers a ride they won't find anywhere else.



Television Rating: **4.5/5.0**

My biggest concern about "Asylum" was that the show would lose one of the thematic elements that I loved the most about the first season — the emphasis on ALL three words in its title. People who don't get "AHS" don't understand that Ryan Murphy wasn't just making a "Horror" movie. He was playing with "American" urban legends, the kind of stories passed down through the years in the Hollywood pipeline; the tragic tales that turn into Tinsel Town Murder Tours. Murphy used the history of a town in which men and women would betray each other on a dime for love or career and turned it into a new urban legend.



American Horror Story

*Photo credit: FX*

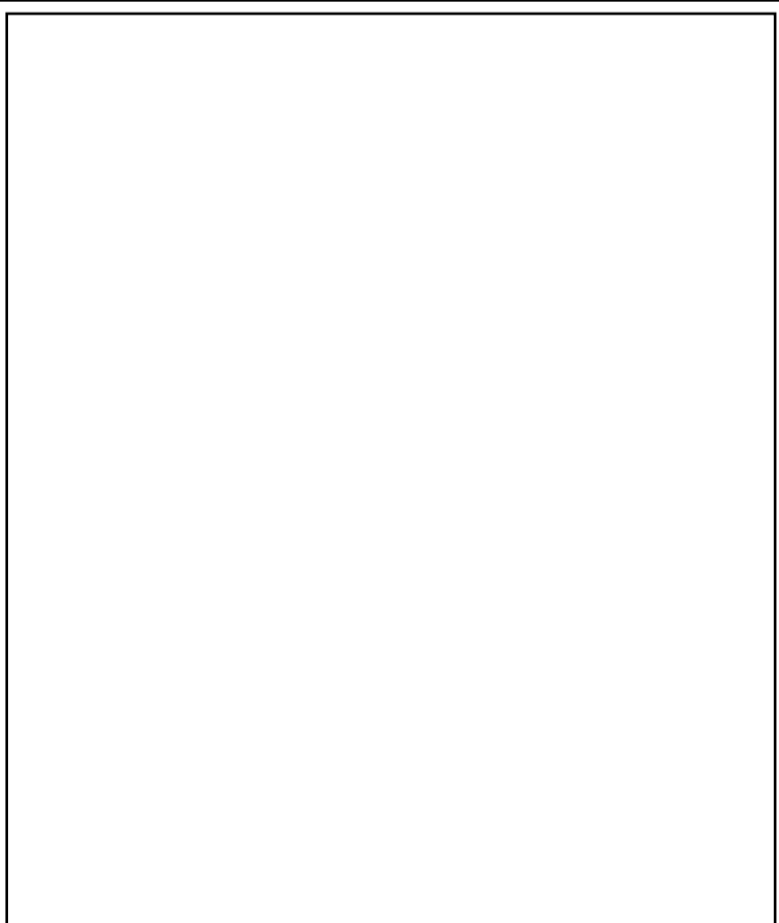
With "American Horror Story: Asylum," Murphy seems to be delving even deeper into Americana by taking his story not only to the heartland but through several issues that defined this country at the turning point of the '60s, including mental health care, reports of alien abduction, civil rights, gay rights, religious freedom, and the emergence of the serial killer. He weaves fascinating themes through a fabric of pure nightmare and does so in a way that those who can appreciate the thematic intent can enjoy it but no more than those who just want to see someone's arm get ripped off in a story that features a character named "Bloody Face."



American Horror Story  
*Photo credit: FX*

"American Horror Story: Asylum" may open in present day as a pair of horny tourists descend on a rundown mental hospital to try and scare up a few of its ghosts with their lovemaking but most of it takes place in the '60s, when the asylum was up and running and doing its evil best. Keeping the viewer off-guard immediately, the season premiere jumps from its startling open (featuring Adam Levine of Maroon 5) to a scene of a mechanic named Kit Walker (Evan Peters, who played Tate in season one) who has been forced to hide his love of his new African-American wife from a racist community. Before you can even imagine how this story will tie back to the asylum, Kit has an event that he thinks is an alien abduction and ends up being told that he's not an average blue-collar guy but a serial killer of women named Bloody Face. He's going to the asylum.

His arrival there brings a reporter named Lana Winters (Sarah Paulson), who wants his story and quickly discovers that things at this hospital are far from normal and her partner (Clea DuVall) becomes concerned for her safety. Patients like Shelley (Chloe Sevigny) are under complete control of Sister Jude (Jessica Lange), who runs the place with a fascinating combination of sexual repression, mental torture, and physical violence. The church, led by Monsignor Timothy Howard (Joseph Fiennes), have forced a sadistic physician, Dr. Arthur Arden (James Cromwell), on the building as well. Most of Arden's patients/experiments end up dead. Meanwhile, another sister (Lily Rabe) hides some dark secrets while another inmate (Lizzie Brochere) tries to be a friendly voice in the cacophony of misery. And, all of this hides the interesting fact that Zachary Quinto is billed as the lead but doesn't even appear until week two as a seemingly noble doctor.





American Horror Story  
Photo credit: FX

If “American Horror Story: Asylum” has a problem in its first two episodes, it’s a lack of a focused protagonist. Dylan McDermott & Connie Britton were our undeniable leads in the first season as the couple trying to mend burned bridges by moving to a house designed to keep embers aflame. This year’s show is all over the map as Peters first seems like the lead, then Lange, then Paulson, and then Quinto in week two. I have no problem with ensemble pieces but a show like this needs to give viewers a set of eyes into the madness, “good guys” to root for and identify with on our journey down the bloody rabbit hole. Luckily, I like all of these potential leads and so the narrative flip-flopping isn’t as much of a concern. Still, if it keeps up too long, the show could go from “layered” to “unfocused.”

The production values are, once again, simply stellar. “American Horror Story: Asylum” really looks like a feature film. Actually, I take back that faint praise that has been a common one in TV reviews for so long. The production values here are MUCH higher than most feature film horror junk like “The Apparition” or “The Devil Inside.” This is a show made by an incredibly talented team of technical experts from the design of the asylum to the editing that always keeps the viewer on edge.

And then there’s the cast. Jessica Lange won an Emmy for the first season and it seems likely that there could be another award winner in this bunch. Sarah Paulson, Zachary Quinto, Joseph Fiennes, and Lange are the early stand-outs but there’s not a single character that feels miscast. I simply love the idea of a troupe of actors like this taking different roles and telling different stories every year with one singular focus — to show you something horrifying that you won’t soon forget. I won’t miss a single minute.

*“American Horror Story: Asylum” stars Jessica Lange, James Cromwell, Sarah Paulson, Evan Peters, Lily Rabe, Lizzie Brochere, Zachary Quinto, Joseph Fiennes, Chloe Sevigny, Adam Levine, and Clea Duvall. It was created by Ryan Murphy & Brad Falchuk and returns on Wednesday, October 17, 2012 at 9pm CST.*



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