

## TV Review: NBC Wants You to Enroll in Likable ‘Camp’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on July 9, 2013 - 8:32am

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CHICAGO – Here are a few words that adequately describe NBC’s “Camp,” a Summer series premiering this Wednesday, July 10, 2013 — “Likable,” “Amiable,” “Cute,” “Fun.” It’s not designed to challenge your dramatic expectations and delivers exactly what you’d expect it to deliver but the cast has some notable stand-outs and the whole thing has the feel of a long weekend away in the Summer — fun while it lasts if not overly memorable.



At its best, “Camp” is reminiscent of the best shows of ABC Family. It’s a program designed to engage both teens and adults. In fact, it’s closer to a soap opera than viewers may first expect with its counselors in training looking for some action and its camp manager who can’t figure out her own love life. Star Rachel Griffiths has become such a veteran at this kind of thing after hits like “Six Feet Under” and “Brothers & Sisters” that she is always engaging and a few of the show’s new young stars (most of them Australian, where this show was shot) could really develop loyal American followings. There’s some talent here even if the generic plotting (does EVERYONE need to have a dark secret?) does sometimes ruin the bonfire.



Camp  
Photo credit: NBC

The always-great Griffiths stars as Mackenzie Granger, the owner and director of Little Otter Family Camp. She’s still trying to deal with an ongoing divorce while now managing the camp on her own and raising her horndog teenage son Buzz (Charles Grounds). The teenage lead of the piece is a sweet kid named Kip (Thom Green), who comes to the camp trying to keep it secret that he nearly died from Leukemia. He falls quickly and hard for the kind Marina (Lily Sullivan), who is trying to escape a serious social media faux pas.





Camp  
Photo credit: NBC

There are other counselors like couple Robbie (Tim Pocock) and Sarah (Dena Kaplan), who may be drifting apart as hard as he tries to hold on to their relationship, and Cole (Nikolai Nikolaeff), who may have a thing for Mac. And we’ve come full circle. Did I mention the arrogant Aussie who runs the nearby camp (Rodger Corser) who ends up having a fling with Mac even though they have nothing in common?

A vast majority of the plotting of “Camp” goes exactly where you’d expect it to go. Marina and Kip’s secrets aren’t going to stay secrets for long. Mac will keep making mistakes in love. Buzz will keep screwing up sexually (he’s like Jason Biggs in the first “American Pie,” trying hard to get some but only embarrassing himself). And yet the writers, headed by the great Liz Heldens (“Friday Night Lights”), display a true affection for these characters. They’re likable because the writing team isn’t mocking them or presenting them in an overly cynical way. Genre standards only work if you present them truthfully and Heldens and her team know how to craft likable characters from seemingly cliched situations.

It helps that they’ve cast a stronger-than-average cast. Green gets saddled with the most cliched character — the loner who doesn’t really want to be there — but grounds him in unexpected ways. I like Kip and having a likable lead is half the battle in a show like “Camp.” I like Marina, I like Sarah, I even like supporting characters like the “mean girls” who are proven by episode three to have more going on. It’s really only the occasional subplot — an awkwardly-scripted bit about Robbie’s mother being addicted to gambling or an unbelievable dynamic with Buzz’s real father and his new girlfriend — that rings false every now and then.

Overall, “Camp” is a pleasant surprise. As I mentioned, there are more daring and complex programs going on this season but while Showtime’s “Ray Donovan” and FX’s “The Bridge” are required viewing, they’re also INTENSE. If you want a new show that’s going to be a likable, amiable, cute, fun diversion, enroll in “Camp.”

*“Camp” stars Rachel Griffiths, Thom Green, Lily Sullivan, Rodger Corser, Nikolai Nikolaeff, Charles Grounds, Tim Pocock, and Dena Kaplan. It premieres on Wednesday, July 10, 2013 at 9pm CST on NBC.*



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