

TV Review: Great Cast Keeps 'Family Tools' in Business

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on May 1, 2013 - 8:30am

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CHICAGO – ABC continues to try to use Emmy-winning comedy juggernaut “Modern Family” to create a hit as a lead-in or a lead-out: “The Neighbors,” “Suburgatory,” “Happy Endings,” “How to Live with Your Parents,” and, starting tonight, “Family Tools,” a show with a strong enough comedy pedigree to produce a few laughs but writing that isn’t quite strong enough to warrant comparison with the best of the ABC comedy wannabes. (For the record, “Happy Endings” is great and “Suburgatory” is real good. The rest range from mediocre to awful.)



Television Rating: **3.5/5.0**

“Family Tools” has a pretty generic set-up — a wandering screw-up of a son comes home to run the family business even though he has no experience in doing so and no real connection to the other branches on his family tree. He has a distant dad, an acerbic aunt, a bizarre cousin, and an annoying neighbor. It seems like a great set-up for humor even if it’s an undeniably familiar one.



Family Tools
Photo credit: ABC

Jack Shea (Kyle Bornheimer) has been a pretty big f**k-up for most of his life but when his unsupportive father Tony (J.K. Simmons) has a heart attack, Jack is the only one who can take over the “Mr. Jiffy Fix” family business. Jack’s aunt Terry (Leah Remini) forces her brother to give the job to Jack despite his reservations and encourages everyone to calm down, even trying to get old-fashioned Tony to do yoga. Jack has to deal with a mostly-lazy co-worker (Edi Gathegi) and his flirtatious sister (Danielle Nicolet) while living in a basement and hanging out with his weird cousin (Johnny Pemberton). They all have a jerk of a neighbor (Adam Arkin) too. Can Jack get his father’s approval, figure out how to fix a deck without injuring himself with a nail gun, and maybe even find love too? Welcome to “Family Tools”.



Family Tools
Photo credit: ABC

Why is ABC burying this with a May release? Most networks plant shows this time of year that they're trying to burn off without too much promotion. Anyone remember "GCB"? So I approached "Family Tools" with some serious trepidation and pessimism. It was nearly gone before the credits even ran. The first thing you'll notice is that this show has a stunning ensemble. J.K. Simmons ("Juno," "The Closer") makes everything he touches a little funnier. His comic timing is perfect. Leah Remini never got the credit she deserved for her great work on the underrated "The King of Queens." Kyle Bornheimer is funny, Edi Gathegi has solid timing, and Adam Arkin is always great. Danielle Nicolet is beautiful and actually has chemistry with Bornheimer. Ensemble is half the battle in TV comedy and that half was clearly won here before a frame was even shot. It's one of the best new comedy ensembles of the entire season. Maybe THE best.

Sadly, the other half of the battle is writing and it's not as crisp here as the cast deserves. There are more jokes that work than in the premieres of "The Neighbors" or "How to Live with Your Parents" but the reliance on physical humor is awkward, too much of the writing in the two episodes sent for review relies on misunderstandings (the classic foundation of all comedy but easily overused), and none of the relationships feel genuine yet. We need to believe that Jack, Tony, and Terry are family like we do the Dunphys and the rest of the gang on "Modern Family." It's not quite there yet. It may come over time and I'm willing to give the showrunners a chance to catch up with their cast. Presuming audiences and ABC give the writers enough time to do so.

"Family Tools" stars Kyle Bornheimer, J.K. Simmons, Leah Remini, Edi Gathegi, Johnny Pemberton, Danielle Nicolet, and Adam Arkin. It premieres on ABC on May 1, 2013 at 7:30pm CST.



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