

TV Feature: The 10 Most Promising Network Shows of Fall 2013

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 10, 2013 - 1:32pm

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CHICAGO – In the decade-plus that I’ve been covering network television, no season comes close to this upcoming one in terms of lackluster, bland, uninspired programming. For the first time, it was incredibly difficult to get to ten shows that made me even remotely curious about what was coming in the second episode. Don’t consider anything after the top three as too strong of a recommendation. Yep. Three.

Interestingly, the networks seem to be holding back their best product for the midseason. Alfonso Cuarón’s (“Gravity”) “Believe” (NBC), a TV adaptation of Nick Hornby’s “About a Boy” (NBC), the twisty “Resurrection” (ABC), and the incredible cast of “Us & Them” (FOX) would be my top four if they were airing this Fall. So, while the new season gets off to a slow start, it should pick up in early 2014. Even FOX’s “Rake” and CBS’s “Intelligence” could take off midseason.

Until then...

First, a quick note on the worst. Avoid “Dads,” “Trophy Wife,” “Back in the Game,” “Ironside,” “Welcome to the Family,” “We Are Men,” and, most of all, the abrasively awful “The Crazy Ones”. All will be individually reviewed here over the next few weeks. Most of them won’t be pretty.

Second, ABC did not make the premiere of “Marvel’s Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.” available in time for this piece. I think they know they don’t need the buzz. Hopefully, it’s not because it doesn’t work. I’m excited for it but this annual feature only includes things I’ve seen.



The Originals

Photo credit: The CW

10. “The Originals” (The CW, Tuesdays, 7pm CST)

Like the All-Star Game player from the Houston Astros, this one is a bit of a quota situation in that I felt like I should include at least one CW show and I find “The Originals” the most intriguing of the three offerings this season. “Reign” is a bit too much of a dress-up piece: pretty young people pretending to do a period soap opera. None of it feels real. And “The Tomorrow People,” a remake of the Brit sci-fi show, has close to the same degree of promise as this “Vampire Diaries” spin-off but I find the network’s most likely hit it’s most engaging program, just barely. The show’s use of setting — the always-creepy New Orleans — is effective, the cast is beautiful, and the stakes seem melodramatically high enough to attract fans of “TVD” while also perhaps appealing to some of their older siblings as well.



Mom

Photo credit: CBS

9. “Mom” (CBS, Mondays, 7:30pm CST)

Here’s a variation on something you’re going to read several times in this piece — it’s mostly about the talent involved and not that this first half-hour is particularly well-done. TV pilots are weird things, especially for comedy, in that you’re gauging what the show *could be* as the writers learn to write to their actors’ comic timing. The pilots of shows with loyal followings like “Community” and “30 Rock” were nowhere near as tight as they would become just a couple months after their debut. “Parks and Recreation” barely resembles its entire first season. So,

while the debut of Chuck Lorre's latest attempt at world domination is hit-and-miss at best, one cannot deny that Anna Faris and Allison Janney have what it takes to make this work. In fact, the first scene between the two actresses totally hits. But the writing needs to pick up to match their talents. Again, this won't be the last time you read that or think it yourself in this lackluster season filled with stars to the degree that there was apparently no budget left to pay good writers.



The Millers

Photo credit: CBS

8. "The Millers" (CBS, Thursdays, 7:30pm CST)

Will Arnett can't catch a break. He finally gets a great time slot (post "The Big Bang Theory") and a great supporting cast, including Beau Bridges and Margo Martindale, who can do anything, going from one of the most malevolent performances of the last decade on "Justified" to fart jokes here on Thursday nights, and critics are already calling it crap. Admittedly, Greg Garcia, the creator of "Raising Hope" and "My Name is Earl," goes WAY too broad here with the sex and bodily humor jokes but Arnett, Martindale, J.B. Smoove — this great cast and Garcia's wonderful ability to blend heartfelt family dynamics with relatable humor makes this feel like a show that could quickly tighten into something entertaining. Or not. Again, consider this one of the "more promising losers."



Dracula

Photo credit: NBC

7. "Dracula" (NBC, Fridays, 9pm CST)

I know. It's exhaustingly overdone. "Once Upon a Time," "Sleepy Hollow," "Grimm," "The Vampire Diaries," "Once Upon a Time in Wonderland" — when does it end? I don't think it ends here, with this well-made update of the Bram Stoker classic, a highly-polished show that I expect will hit with "Grimm" fans. With the low expectations of ratings that come with any network on Friday night, especially NBC, all "Dracula" needs to do is appeal to a few fans of the legendary character to hit that bar of Friday nights. And, you know, it's not as bad as this faint praise makes it seem. Jonathan Rhys Meyers has always had that suave creep factor that makes him perfect for the titular role and the supporting cast includes interesting players like Nonso Anozie and Thomas Kretschmann as Van Helsing.



The Goldbergs
 Photo credit: ABC

6. "The Goldbergs" (ABC, Tuesdays, 7pm CST)

The great Patton Oswalt narrates this broad comedy about teen life in the '80s from Adam F. Goldberg & Seth Gordon. Yes, the non-stop references to '80s pop culture and the loud sense of humor that typifies most of the jokes (everyone's always yelling at each other) can be grating but those both feel like elements that can be toned down post-premiere. In the world of the sitcom, a show often comes across its most cliched in the premiere since it has to grab people enough during pilot season to get picked up. If the show remains all references and yelling, it will be below the talents of Oswalt, Wendi McLendon-Covey, George Segal, and the great Jeff Garlin. It may not matter since ABC hasn't been able to figure out comedy on Tuesday nights but I love Garlin & Oswalt enough to give them the benefit of the doubt. And ABC has a tired line-up this year. Something had to make the list.



Brooklyn Nine-Nine
 Photo credit: FOX

5. "Brooklyn Nine-Nine" (FOX, Tuesdays, 7:30pm CST)

It's a hipster "Barney Miller" on another show that makes the list purely because of its potential and not the strength of its mediocre pilot. There's a lot of set-up required in the first episode of this "The Office"-esque look at life in a wacky police precinct but the cast is excellent, especially the always-great Andre Braugher. Joe Lo Truglio, Terry Crews, Andy Samberg — this show is the most likely to be "The Mindy

Project” of 2013, another program that started slowly but had the talented ensemble to get over the growing pains and turned into a great group piece. I hope the same happens here.



The Michael J. Fox Show

Photo credit: NBC

4. “The Michael J. Fox Show” (NBC, Thursdays, 8:30pm)

How can NBC save the once-great Thursday night line-up? Bring back the people who made it great in the first place. And, so, right in the middle of the night, comedy fans can see if Sean Hayes (“Sean Saves the World”) and Michael J. Fox can save the peacock network (before leading into the “why didn’t they put it there years ago” Thursday night premiere of “Parenthood”). It makes perfect sense. Bolster the night with one of the biggest comedy stars of all time. And the way that Fox has slowly come back into the spotlight with guest appearances on “Rescue Me,” “Curb Your Enthusiasm,” and “The Good Wife” has made this feel like a natural progression. He’s well-matched with Betsy Brandt (“Breaking Bad”), who proves she can do comedy as well as drama. The pilot is overly self-referential in that Fox plays a newscaster returning to TV after dealing with Parkinson’s, but I believe this show, already ordered to a full season, is likely to be a breakout hit. It could easily be on for years.

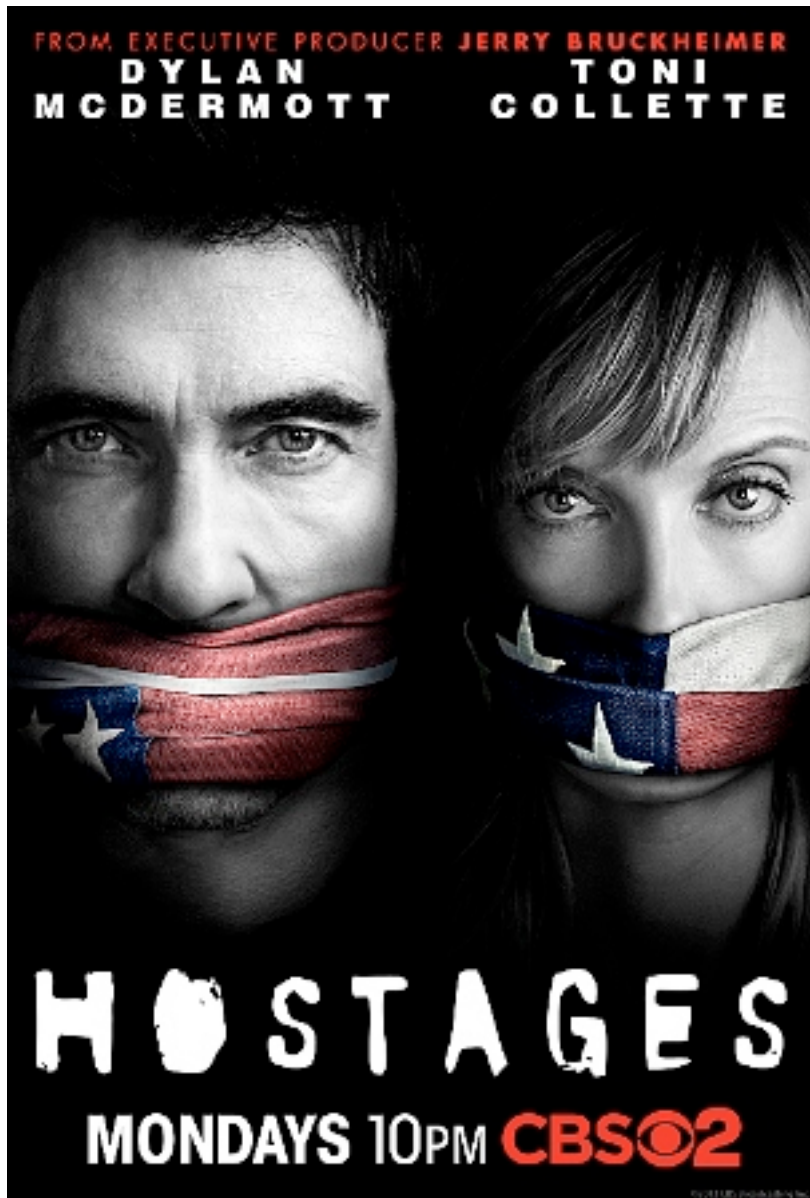


The Blacklist

Photo credit: NBC

3. “The Blacklist” (NBC, Mondays, 9pm CST)

The sheer star power of James Spader combined with the production values brought to the pilot by director Joe Carnahan (“The Grey”) makes this the most surprisingly entertaining hour of the new season. I didn’t see it coming but this “Silence of the Lambs”-esque tale of a notorious criminal (Spader) and the new, young, sexy female recruit (Megan Boone) who is the only person he’ll talk to is incredibly well-paced to the point that its flaws and cliches become easy to overlook. Like the other two shows above it (and, remember, these are really the only three that I feel strongly about on the entire list), it passes the ultimate test of the pilot — I want to see what happens next week. With “The Voice” as its lead-in, NBC has a hit on their hands.



Hostages

Photo credit: CBS

2. "Hostages" (CBS, Mondays, 9pm CST)

A great cast, a clever premise, and strong production values combined with the fact that we've been told that this limited series will wrap up satisfactorily before winter ends? Sign me up. Like some other programs that seemed to defy multiple seasons — "24," "Prison Break" — "Hostages" seems to be more of a mini-series but even if it only gives us one great season, I'll take the ride. The GREAT Toni Collette stars as the President's surgeon. She's kidnapped (along with her husband played by Tate Donovan) by Dylan McDermott and some other masked men, who order her to abuse her position. "Hostages" is well-paced but could easily devolve into cliched silliness in a week or two. I hope the writing and pacing stays consistent throughout its limited run. And then we can figure out what the Hell they do in season two.



Almost Human

Photo credit: FOX

1. "Almost Human" (FOX, Mondays, 8pm CST)

The pilot for this FOX series was directed by the great Brad Anderson ("The Machinist," "Session 9") and produced by J.J. Abrams. It just

doesn't seem fair, does it? Especially not this season. The sheen brought to it by Abrams feels more like the confident, genre-busting material he did on "LOST" or "Fringe" than a lackluster misstep like "Alcatraz". The pitch is simple — a buddy cop show where one of the cops isn't all human. It's the future and Karl Urban and Michael Ealy star as the human and the almost human, respectively. Both stars have great charisma on their own and chemistry together. Add their star power to Abrams & talented people behind the camera like Anderson and you have a likely hit. It doesn't debut until after the World Series. So it will be awhile before I'm proven wrong.



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