

TV Review: NBC Has Likable Hit in ‘The Michael J. Fox Show’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 25, 2013 - 3:28pm

- [Betsy Brandt](#) [2]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [3]
- [Conor Romero](#) [4]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [5]
- [Jack Gore](#) [6]
- [Juliette Goglia](#) [7]
- [Katie Finneran](#) [8]
- [Michael J. Fox](#) [9]
- [NBC](#) [10]
- [Television](#) [11]
- [The Michael J. Fox Show](#) [12]
- [Wendell Pierce](#) [13]
- [Theater, TV, DVD & Blu-Ray](#) [14]

CHICAGO – Seriously, if “The Michael J. Fox Show” doesn’t connect with NBC’s target audience, they might as well give up. Yes, the show could use a stronger lead-in but it pairs well with “Parenthood,” also returning tomorrow night, September 26, 2013, and it’s the most straight-up likable new sitcom of the season. The first episode is a bit rocky and overly self-referential but it settles in nicely over the next two and already looks like it could be on for years.



Mike Henry (Michael J. Fox) is a beloved TV icon who was forced to stop his star from rising in the New York news scene when he was diagnosed with Parkinson’s Disease. Get it? Kind of like the guy who plays him? Just like Fox, it’s now time for Henry to come back into the spotlight. It’s been five years since Henry was on the air and he’s learned how to live with his disease, even if it still impacts his daily life. The kids are growing up and Henry is getting bored. He goes back to work.



The Michael J. Fox Show
Photo credit: NBC

It’s a simple concept, done well, like so many sitcoms, although the originality of a household name like Fox addressing his own personal issues through a fictional character gives the show an added strength. We all kind of felt like Jerry Seinfeld, Ray Romano, and even Charlie Sheen were basically playing variations on themselves and so it makes perfect sense that Fox would craft a show that doesn’t ignore his health issues.



The Michael J. Fox Show
Photo credit: NBC

However, “The Michael J. Fox Show” is far from a pity piece. It’s clear that Fox isn’t interested in using his disease to get attention or ratings. It’s a fact of his real life and so it’s a fact of his fictional life. And the truth is that the way it’s handled here is far more inspirational than if it had been handled in maudlin tones. Just as Fox has triumphantly come back to TV on “Rescue Me,” “Curb Your Enthusiasm,” “The Good Wife,” and now a show with his name on it, viewers with diseases many consider life-changing can have it all as well.

And Fox really does have it all in terms of ability. It would be a lie to say that the disease hasn’t altered his delivery but it has in no way impacted what matters about performance. Fox was always so good on shows like “Family Ties” and “Spin City” because he knew that it was the relationships within the show that mattered. His family and his co-workers on those shows were as important as he is. Good comedy is about teamwork and Fox may be the all-star on his shows but he’s not the only talented player.

And so we get to the other stars of “The Michael J. Fox Show.” Betsy Brandt’s turn here as Fox’s wife makes me like her dramatic turn on “Breaking Bad” even more. She has great chemistry with Fox, feels believable as a loving mother, and has perfect timing. Wendell Pierce (“The Wire”) proves as deft at comedy as he is at drama. Mike’s family is perfectly balanced. Everyone works, down to even guest performers.

The structure of “The Michael J. Fox Show” is definitely simple and safe, which many will see as clichéd. You know what? So is “Modern Family.” So is “The Middle.” So is “The Big Bang Theory.” Each new sitcom doesn’t have to be “Louie.” Sometimes a show like “The Michael J. Fox Show” works because it does something familiar so remarkably well. The familiarity makes it even more rewarding here with the real-life saga of its star. It feels like he never left.

“The Michael J. Fox Show” stars Michael J. Fox, Betsy Brandt, Conor Romero, Juliette Goglia, Jack Gore, Katie Finneran, and Wendell Pierce. It premieres on Thursday, September 26, 2013 at 8:30pm CST.



[15]

By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [16]
Content Director
HollywoodChicago.com
brian@hollywoodchicago.com [15]

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