

## The 10 Most Promising New TV Shows of Fall 2009

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 1, 2009 - 7:31am

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CHICAGO – Satire (“[Glee](#) [7]”), family comedy (“[The Middle](#) [17]”), animation (“[The Cleveland Show](#) [15]”), a remake of a soap classic (“[Melrose Place](#) [11]”), and three medical dramas (“[Mercy](#) [12],” “[Trauma](#) [19],” “[Three Rivers](#) [18]”) - this Fall TV season attempts to offer something for everyone. But is any of it worth watching? Is there another “[Lost](#) [20],” “[Pushing Daisies](#) [21],” or even a “[Grey's Anatomy](#) [22]”? Let us guide the way.

For the first time in years, there’s some excitement surrounding the new Fall TV season. We’ve been under the shadow of the writer’s strike for the last few seasons with very few breakout hits after Fall 2007 was cut short by the strike and Fall 2008 was underdeveloped because of its fallout.



The new comedy for the aspiring underdog in all of us premieres Wednesday, Sept. 9 (9:00-10:00 PM ET/PT) on FOX. Pictured Top row L-R: Chris Colfer, Jenna Ushkowitz, Kevin McHale, Matthew Morrison, Lea Michele, Cory Monteith and Amber Riley. Bottom L-R: Jessalyn Gilsig, Dianna Agron, Mark Salling, Jane Lynch and Jayma Mays.

*Photo credit: Matthias Clamer/FOX*

Some TV watchers even theorized that the strike would end up killing broadcast television, sending people away to other options for their

entertainment, never to return, a theory that seems bolstered by the increasing presence of shows like [“Dexter”](#) [23], [“Mad Men”](#) [24], [“Damages”](#) [25], [“Big Love”](#) [26], and [“Flight of the Conchords”](#) [27] in the annual Emmy nominations, indicating that perhaps viewers came back but not to the old guard of broadcast TV.

This is the first Fall season where that theory will be truly tested. There are twenty new scripted programs debuting on the five broadcast networks. The good news is that at least one of them is already great and several others have the potential to be so.

Here’s the best way to express the potential of Fall 2009 - this feature/list was originally conceived as a top five based on how many promising pilots we’ve seen in recent years, but there were enough interesting programs green-lit by the networks that we expanded it to a top ten. For the first time since 2004 - when the pilots for “Lost,” [“House”](#) [28], “Desperate Housewives,” and “Veronica Mars” premiered and “Grey’s Anatomy” was to come in mid-season - there’s a reason to think that broadcast TV may not be dead quite yet.

We have seen several final versions or at least rough cuts of most of the new fall shows (only a clip reel of “The Forgotten” was available and “NCIS: Los Angeles” was not available at all yet) and these are the ten that show the most potential.

Note: Some of the pilots were rough cuts and they may see major changes before they debut. Just because a show is NOT on the list, doesn’t mean it can’t be tinkered with enough to make it a quality program by the time we review the finished pilot and we suppose it’s possible that what works about some of these could be mangled before airing but that seems unlikely. Expect to see full-length reviews of every new show at HollywoodChicago.com in the month of September.

#### 10. “Modern Family”

**Network: ABC**

**Premieres: Wednesday, September 23rd, 8pm CST**



ABC’s “Modern Family” stars Rico Rodriguez as Manny, Sofia Vergara as Gloria and Ed O’Neill as Jay.

*Photo credit: Bob D’Amico/ABC*

The ten spot could have also gone to ABC’s “The Forgotten” (Slater is always interesting) or CBS’ “The Good Wife” (which is much better than the non-stop promos are making it out to be), but, for some reason, we really want “Modern Family” to work. With a slate of TV veterans including Ed O’Neill, Julie Bowen, Ty Burrell, Sofia Vergara, and more, “Modern Family” feels like a good lead-out for “The Middle” (which you’ll find higher up this list).

We won’t get into the start of the night, Kelsey Grammer’s “Hank,” or the lead-out for this show, Courtney Cox’s “Cougar Town,” until we’ve seen final versions that we can review, but let’s just say that there’s a reason they’re not in the top ten when it comes to the potential of what we’ve seen so far. They need some work as they are now. “Modern Family” may still have a ways to go but is much closer to greatness.

“Modern Family” is a single-camera show about three couples in different stages of “family”. A gay couple has just adopted a child, an older man is dealing with his hot young bride and his new stepson, and a traditional family is anything but. Of course, all of these mini-families happen to be on the same larger family tree.

There's enough edgy potential in the premise and ensemble of "Modern Family" to give it a chance to find its legs. It could devolve into predictable sitcom scenarios, but we think the concept is strong enough to warrant a look in week two, which is the only real test of a pilot's potential - will you tune in for the next one.

#### 9. "The Cleveland Show"

**Network: FOX**

**Premieres: September 27th, 2009, 7:30pm CST**



THE CLEVELAND SHOW is a new animated series that follows everyone's favorite soft-spoken neighbor, CLEVELAND BROWN, to his hometown in Virginia as he settles down with his high school sweetheart, her unruly kids and his own 14-year-old son on the series premiere of THE CLEVELAND SHOW Sunday, Sept 27 (8:30-9:00 PM ET/PT) on FOX.

*Photo credit: FOX*

This one's just too easy, right? Being a fan of "Family Guy," how could "The Cleveland Show" NOT have potential? With three shows on one night in 2009, we're convinced that by 2020, we'll be watching a Sunday night that consists of six Seth MacFarlane creations from "Quagmire Knows Best" to "Stewie Goes to School". Why not?

The only question to ask yourself is if the MacFarlane brand of humor has grown a little stale by being spread so thin. "American Dad!" still doesn't quite live up to the Best Comedy-nominated "Family Guy" (even if it does entertain more often than we once thought it would) and we expect that "The Cleveland Show" will be a similar program, one that doesn't ever threaten to overtake its TV ancestor on the "Family" tree, but can be consistently entertaining.

What we've seen of "The Cleveland Show" is undeniably funny but also undeniably familiar. A crazy child, a talking animal, wacky references - "The Cleveland Show" takes the idea of not fixing what isn't broken to extremes. The show will need to find its own identity outside of "Family Guy" or "American Dad!" to really register as anything more than a spin-off. The potential is there to do so, but the potential is also there for the show to always stay in Peter Griffin's over-sized shadow. Only time will tell.

#### 8. "Accidentally on Purpose"

**Network: CBS**

**Premieres: September 21st, 2009, 7:30pm CST**





Jon Foster, Grant Show, Nicolas Wright, Ashley Jensen, Jenna Elfman and Lennon Parham star in the new comedy series ACCIDENTALLY ON PURPOSE on the CBS Television Network.

*Photo credit: Art Streiber/CBS*

We're as stunned by this one as you are. We thought for sure that another Jenna Elfman comedy would be like sticking "Dharma & Greg" collectible pins under our fingernails and, for every great show like "The Big Bang Theory" on CBS, there's a "Rules of Engagement" or "The New Adventures of Old Christine" that makes us think that it's not exactly the home for comedy. And the premise of "Accidentally on Purpose" - the older woman and the younger, irresponsible man forced to be together after one night of passion produces a child - sounded like absolute torture, the kind of thing that a hack writer would pitch in an episode of "Entourage" before getting bitch-slapped by Ari Gold.

And yet here we are telling you that "Accidentally" has potential. Elfman may have gotten a bit over-exposed in her "Dharma" days, but she has undeniably expert comic timing. And even better than Elfman is the fantastic Ashley Jensen ("Extras") as her best friend. Watching these two comedienne do what they do so well makes for a more enjoyable 22 minutes than you might expect.

Tighten up the show by not focusing so much on the age or gender gaps and just let the talented cast do their thing. Despite the dumbest name of the new year (a challenge considering there's a program called "Cougar Town" on the air) and a premise that once made our collective skin crawl, "Accidentally" could surprise.

## 7. "Community"

**Network: NBC**

**Premieres: September 17th, 2009, 8:30pm CST**



Chevy Chase as Pierce.

*Photo credit: Jardin Althaus/NBC*

If we had placed odds before watching any of the new Fall offerings, we would have guessed that “Community” would have been the most promising new show of the season based on the pedigree of the cast and the show’s creators. Joel McHale is hysterically deadpan on “The Soup” and Chevy Chase’s return to television has to be one of the more notable star stories of the new season. NBC clearly thinks the show is a good fit for fans of “The Office” and “30 Rock” (scheduling it on Thursday nights) and there’s a chance that it will be, but it’s not quite there in the premiere.

What I keep coming back to with “Community” is the fact that the first few episodes of “30 Rock” were sketchy at best but they displayed the potential that the show eventually clicked with after about a half-dozen episodes. “Community” may not be perfect (although, like I said, it could be tinkered with before premiere and we’ll run a full review once we receive a copy to do so), but there’s enough potential there to stay tuned.

From Emmy Award-winning directors Joe and Anthony Russo (“Arrested Development”) and Dan Harmon (“The Sarah Silverman Program”), “Community” is about a group of misfits at Greendale Community College. McHale plays the put-upon lead, but this feels like a program that will be driven by the supporting cast (a la the way Jason Bateman played straight man to the lunacy of the rest of the cast on “AD”). Chase is the highlight of the premiere, proving that he should have gone back to television years ago.

So, why not higher on the list? Comic timing in a pilot is a tough thing and “Community” just isn’t quite funny enough. The writers and directors have to introduce you to their style, pace, and a whole cast of characters in only 22 minutes. There’s potential in “Community” for something great, but it may take a little time for it to come to the head of the class.

#### **6. “Melrose Place”**

**Network: The CW**

**Premieres: September 8th, 2009, 8pm CST**



Stephanie Jacobsen as Lauren, Colin Egglesfield as Auggie, Ashlee Simpson-Wentz as Violet, Shaun Sipos as David, Katie Cassidy as Ella, Michael Rady as Jonah, Jessica Lucas as Riley in MELROSE PLACE on The CW.

*Photo credit: Patrick Ecclesine/The CW*

We're not trying to claim that the new version of "Melrose Place" is going to draw comparisons with the best of television. This is not "Lost" or "Mad Men". But not everything needs to be. We all need a guilty pleasure or two, fun shows with laughable characters doing ridiculous things to one another in the name of pure, stupid entertainment, and "Melrose Place" could easily be the most successful guilty pleasure of the new season.

All of the ingredients are there including a great villainess in the Heather Locklear mode (the show-stealing Katie Cassidy, most recently seen on "Harper's Island"), a pop star turned actress (Ashley Simpson-Wentz), a cast of beautiful people, and tawdry plotlines (in the premiere, a medical school student may turn to sex for money to pay the bills and a young filmmaker may blackmail a high-profile producer after catching him fooling around).

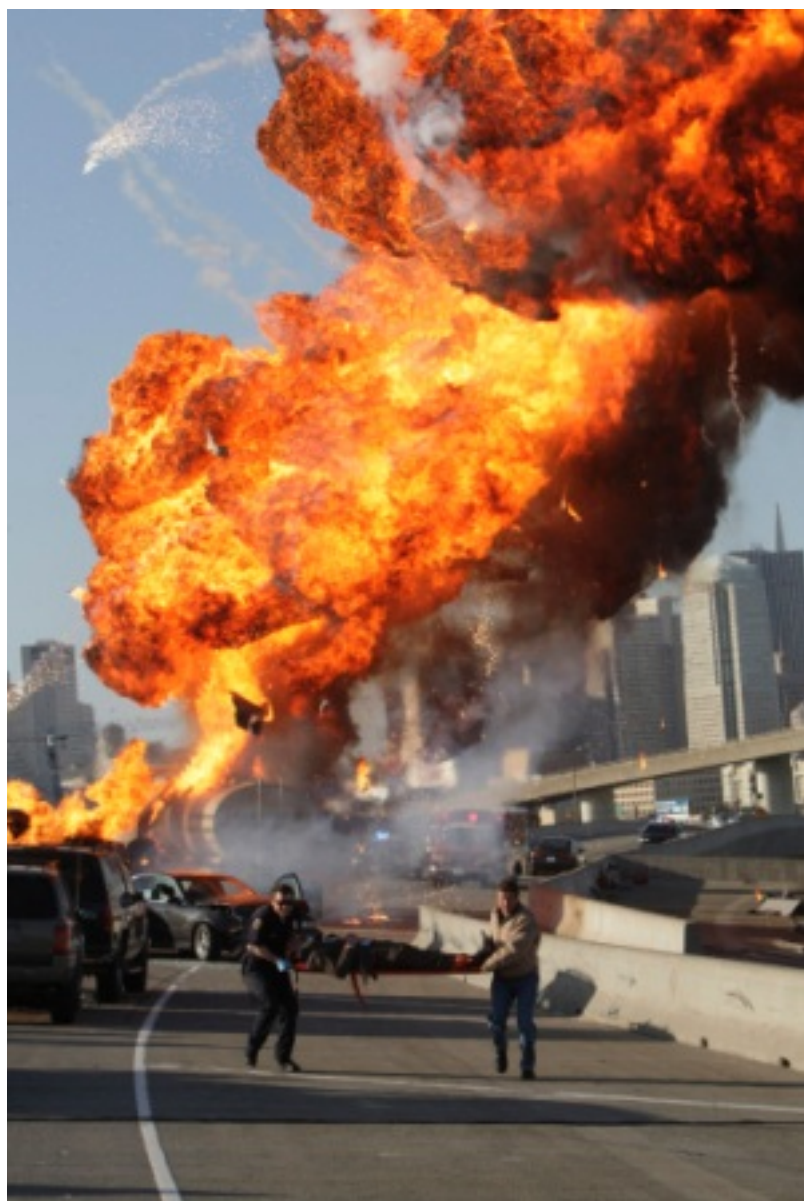
"Melrose Place" is the kind of show that really *shouldn't* work and that you may not admit to your friends that you watch it while they're discussing the latest "Dexter" or "Breaking Bad," but it could easily be appointment television every week and one of the true water cooler (or more like water *fountain* in the high school hallway) shows of this season.

## 5. "Trauma"

**Network: NBC**

**Premieres: September 28th, 2009, 8pm CST**





Kevin Rankin as Tyler.

*Photo credit: Chris Haston/NBC*

We know, we know - ANOTHER medical drama? What we like about “Trauma” is how different it feels from not just NBC’s other medical offering “Mercy” but also most medical shows we’ve seen to date. It also has arguably the most promising cast of the season and, if given time to find an audience, could really become the next “ER” for the peacock network.

The difference between “Mercy” and “Trauma” is simple - the former is mostly set at the hospital with the patients and the people who take care of them while the latter focuses on the people who are tasked with getting injured or dying people to the nurses and the doctors no matter what. It’s an action-driven show more than a typical medical drama.

Take for example the opening scene of the premiere with a helicopter crash that is more adrenalin-pumping than a lot of the summer movies from the season just passed. “Trauma” immediately sets itself up as a heart-racer, a show that tries to put you in the middle of the intense action that comes with rescuing people from dangerous situations. These are the men and women who run *toward* the leaking gas tanker just in case there’s someone underneath. It makes for some riveting television. And the cast is spectacular, led by the great Derek Luke and underrated Cliff Curtis. If NBC gives it time to find an audience “Trauma” could be must-see television.

#### **4. “Mercy”**

**Network: NBC**

**Premieres: September 23rd, 2009, 7pm CST**



James Tupper as Dr. Chris Sands, Taylor Schilling as Veronica Flanagan Callahan.

*Photo credit: Mitchell Haaseth/NBC*

Nothing makes us angrier about this Fall than the fact that NBC has given five hours of time previously devoted to scripted programming to “The Jay Leno Show”. The network that brought us such amazing dramatic writing as “St. Elsewhere,” “Hill Street Blues,” “ER,” and “L.A. Law” is essentially giving it up to the cable channels, admitting that reality TV has won the war and the place for writing is on networks like HBO, AMC, Showtime, and FX. If we were TV writers, we would ignore all calls from NBC. They don’t care about you. And yet, they’re not completely surrendering. They have an aggressive slate of mid-season shows (which I think is just in case Jay doesn’t take off, but don’t tell him that) and three new shows for the Fall. Much to our surprise, all three have enough potential to make the list (tied with ABC for the most in the top ten).

The best is “Mercy,” a medical series with a strong enough ensemble and writing to overcome the deja vu created by yet another 2009 show about nurses (after the inferior “HawthoRNe” and superior “Nurse Jackie”). From a creative team that includes veterans of “Friday Night Lights” and “Pushing Daisies,” “Mercy” is the most expertly-paced new hour of the season. Newcomer Taylor Schilling stars as Nurse Veronica Callahan, a young lady returning to Mercy Hospital after a tour in Iraq. Jamie Lee Kirchner, Michelle Trachtenberg, James Tupper, Guillermo Diaz, and James Le Gros co-star as fellow hospital employees on a show that feels the most like “The New Grey’s Anatomy” of 2009.

Schilling is very good and the diverse supporting cast (which also includes James Tupper and Diego Klattenhoff) keeps the show from getting stale or predictable. Ironically, “Mercy” wasn’t even supposed to be on the Fall schedule, being moved up from mid-season after health issues forced the delay of “Parenthood” to later in the TV year. They were saving this for mid-season? Anyone still think they’re not buying insurance for the chips they’ve bet on Leno?

### **3. “FlashForward”**

**Network: ABC**

**Premieres: September 24th, 2009, 7pm CST**





ABC's "FlashForward" stars Brian F. O'Byrne as Aaron Stark, Courtney B. Vance as Stanford Wedeck, Peyton List as Nicole Kirby, John Cho as Demetri Noh, Dominic Monaghan as Simon, Joseph Fiennes as Mark Benford, Zachary Knighton as Bryce Varley, Christine Woods as Janis Hawk, Sonya Walger as Olivia Benford and Jack Davenport as Lloyd Simcoe.

*Photo credit: Bob D'Amico/ABC*

A man wakes up in the middle of a nightmare. He crawls from a crash scene, where he hears screaming, sees a man on fire, and a supernatural mystery begins. Is this "Lost, Part Deux"? The creators of "FlashForward" will probably grow tired of the parallel pretty quickly, but it's an inescapable one for this show that clearly wants to build the same kind of "WTF" buzz about the mystery at its core.

So, is it "Lost" or is it "Harper's Island"? An obsession or a show that audiences won't commit to every week? It's too soon to say how audiences will respond to such an unusual concept but it's easily the most interesting set-up of the season. For a little over two minutes, everyone in the world blacks out and sees their own future on April 29th, 2010. Naturally, the blackouts cause some serious, immediate problems like massive highway crashes, worldwide death, and an amazing sequence with a helicopter crashing into a building, but the bigger mystery is going to be what drives the show - why did people see the future and is there any way to change it or even make sense of what some of them saw?

The premiere of "FlashForward" doesn't have the impact of the first episode of "Lost," although it's not for lack of trying. A bombastic score, slow-motion action, the creators of "FlashForward" are really trying to tide you over until "Lost" returns. There's even a random animal like the Polar Bear in the "Lost" premiere. We'll cover it in more depth when it premieres with a full-length review, but there's a few elements of "FlashForward" that need tightening before it can live up to its massive potential.

The cast, led by Joseph Fiennes, Sonya Walger (Penny from "Lost"), John Cho, Courteney B. Vance, and the great Brian F. O'Byrne (mark my words, if the show takes off, he'll be the "Locke") is spectacular. A great concept, a strong cast, and a final shot that's one of the best in YEARS (it's a real chill-inducer and something to get people talking) will keep viewers coming back for week two and probably beyond. That's potential.

## 2. "The Middle"

**Network: ABC**

**Premieres: September 30th, 2009, 7:30PM CST**



ABC's "The Middle" stars Chris Kattan as Bob, Patricia Heaton as Frankie, Neil Flynn as Mike, Eden Shur as Sue, Charlie McDermott as Axl and Atticus Shaffer as Brick.

*Photo credit: Bob D'Amico/ABC*

Patricia Heaton (“Everybody Loves Raymond”) and Neil Flynn (“Scrubs”) star in this single-camera comedy that feels like a blend between “Roseanne” and “Arrested Development”. Produced by writers from the former, Heaton and Flynn play the parents of a middle-class family in flyover country. They’re middle-aged, middle class, and living in the middle of the country. It sounds like it could have easily been a set-up for yet another crappy sitcom - bad family comedies are as common as infomercials - but “The Middle” works. It’s funny, clever, and very well-cast. It’s the best new sitcom of the season.

The deadpan style that made Flynn so effective as the Janitor on “Scrubs” proves to be a perfect counterbalance to Heaton’s more manic delivery as a truly harried wife and working mother of three. Heaton’s Frankie has to balance a dirty teen son, awkward pre-teen girl, and straight-up weird youngest son with her job at a car dealership (with “SNL” alum Chris Kattan) and trying to find any bit of her time for herself. Frankie and her clan could easily be the breakout comedy stars of the year.

The only thing holding them back may be their neighbors. “The Middle” has a lead-in and lead-out of new sitcoms, stuck in the center of an entire evening of new programming on ABC, arguably the riskiest move of the season. (It’s unusual to have five new shows on one entire night, much less one *network* on one night.) If one or two fail, they could drag the whole lineup down and the odds that all five will connect seem slim. Let’s hope “The Middle” breaks out from the pack.

#### 1. “Glee”

**Network:** Fox

**Premieres:** September 9th, 2009, 8PM CST



The new comedy for the aspiring underdog in all of us premieres Wednesday, Sept. 9 (9:00-10:00 PM ET/PT) on FOX. Pictured Clockwise from L: Jenna Ushkowitz, Chris Colfer, Cory Monteith, Amber Riley, Kevin McHale and Lea Michele.

*Photo credit: Matthias Clamer/FOX*

We’ve [already raved](#) [29] about the first episode of “Glee,” which will rerun on September 2nd, 2009, but we’ve been lucky enough to see the next two episodes already and there’s absolutely zero dip in quality. In fact, the show might even get better in “Showmance,” airing September 9th, and “Preggers,” airing September 23rd. From creator Ryan Murphy (“Nip/Tuck”), “Glee” is a clever blend of satire, pop tunes, laugh-out-loud comedy, and rich, interesting characters. It’s easily the best new show of the season and, if it maintains the quality of its first three episodes, it’s one of the best shows on TV... period.

What’s so promising about “Glee” is the scope of the storytelling and the strength of the ensemble. The main focus of the show will always be the actual Glee Club and their clever, plot-driven song choices (including in the next few episodes “Gold Digger,” “Single Ladies,” and an amazing version of “Take a Bow”), but the high school setting and its characters would work brilliantly without the music.

The women rule the first few episodes with Lea Michele, Jane Lynch, Jayma Mays, and the spectacular Jessalyn Gilsig stealing the opening trio of “Glee”. A semi-musical satire with a strong female cast? This is as unique a show on the network schedule as anything we’ve seen in years. “Unique” shows often struggle to find an audience. Don’t let “Glee” struggle.



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