

TV Review: Talented Ensemble Drives ABC's 'Modern Family'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 23, 2009 - 2:06pm

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CHICAGO – The highlight of tonight's debuting shows on [ABC](#) [15] is one of the most promising new comedy pilots of the season, the multi-layered "[Modern Family](#) [9]," a sitcom that both skewers the conventions of the typical TV family show and lovingly embraces them at the same time.



Television Rating: **4.0/5.0**

The word "family" has changed a lot since "Leave It To Beaver" and it's about time that a clever comedy takes a look at the modern composition and complexity of the new look to the family tree in 2009. With a dozen speaking roles, "Modern Family" can sometimes feel a bit too cluttered for a 22-minute show, but it's hard to get too down on a sitcom for being too ambitious and once the show stops defining its characters and lets them grow, this could be one of the best comedies on the air.



Ed O'Neill, Rico Rodriguez, Sofia Vergara, Nolan Gould, Julie Bowen, Ariel Winter, Ty Burrell, Sarah Hyland, Jesse Tyler Ferguson, Eric Stonestreet.
Photo credit: ABC/Bob D'Amico

Two talented comedy vets - Christopher Lloyd and Steven Levitan (creator of "Just Shoot Me") - bring their skills to the story of one massive family divided into three separate arcs. The show sometimes telegraphs its sense of self-awareness at how clever it thinks it is a bit too much,

particularly in some over-used, straight-to-camera techniques like something you would see on "The Office," but it's a minor complaint considering how often it warrants said self-awareness with laugh-out-loud writing and diverse characters.



Eric Stonestreet.
Photo credit: ABC/Ron Tom

In the most consistent and funny of the three arcs, Jay ([Ed O'Neill](#) [4] of "Married With Children" fame) deals with the pitfalls of having a gorgeous young wife ([Sofia Vergara](#) [10]) who most people think he's the "grandfather to" not the "lover of". Jay and his new wife have a scene-stealing stepson named Manny, who just happens to be the most romantic pre-teen on TV.

The other two arcs include a gay couple (Jesse Tyler Ferguson, Eric Stonestreet) who have just returned home with an adopted Vietnamese baby and a couple of parents (Ty Burrell, Julie Bowen) trying to raise children in the age of Twitter and "High School Musical". Burrell is particularly funny as the dad who thinks he's cool enough to hang with his kids but, of course, is SO not.

The cast of "Modern Family" is clearly immensely talented with a slew of TV veterans like O'Neill, Burrell, Bowen, and Vergara. What works the best about the show is the melting pot of comedy styles. So many sitcoms feature characters who were clearly written by the same staff, as they all sound the same with nearly identical vocabularies and speaking styles. Such is not the case on "Modern Family" as O'Neill's low-key delivery perfectly balances Vergara's sexy style and Burrell is unlike, well, anyone.

With just one episode, the characters are well-defined, funny, and interesting. Think about the great ensemble shows like "Cheers" or "Arrested Development". Each character had their own identity. Of course, this is nowhere close to the caliber of those classic shows yet, but the potential for that to happen on "Modern Family" is higher than most pilots of the last several years.

The biggest problem for "Modern Family" may have nothing to do with the show itself. Like a lot of unique families, it's neighbors are a bit average and they could bring down the property value of "Modern Family". The show leads into "Cougar Town," one of the worst new shows of the year, and the disappointing "Hank" and so-so "Eastwick" are going to help bring the night down overall for the network. It's unlikely that five new shows are going to survive the whole season. When the inevitable rezoning happens, let's hope that "Modern Family" is one of the programs that makes it out of the TV neighborhood alive.

'Modern Family,' which airs on ABC, premieres on September 23rd, 2009 at 8PM CST. It stars Ed O'Neill, Sofia Vergara, Jesse Tyler Ferguson, Eric Stonestreet, Ty Burrell, and Julie Bowen. It was created by Steven Levitan and Christopher Lloyd.



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Source URL (retrieved on Apr 20 2024 - 12:15am):

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