

## TV Review: 'Big Love' Starts Promising Fourth Season, Great Third Now on DVD

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on January 11, 2010 - 11:04am

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CHICAGO – It took me some time to get on the “Big Love” wavelength. HBO’s controversial show hasn’t really been on my radar since its debut season, one that I thought featured a great cast but underdeveloped dramatic potential. A few seasons later, with the fourth season debuting on HBO and the third just released on DVD, “Big Love” has found its footing and become one of the most intriguing and captivating dramas on television.



Television Rating: **4.5/5.0**

With each passing season, the characters and writing as a whole of “Big Love” has become more confident and emotionally resonant as the characters have escaped the sensational trappings of the concept to become three-dimensional people. For the better part of two years, “Big Love” was “the polygamy show”. While the lifestyle of the Henricksons is still a major part of the show, the relatable human emotion has transcended it.



Big Love

Photo credit: HBO/Lacey Terrell



Like a lot of HBO programming, "Big Love" is incredibly layered with characters but the focus is on Bill Henrickson (Bill Paxton) and his three wives Barb (Jeanne Tripplehorn), Nicky (Chloe Sevigny), and Margie (Ginnifer Goodwin). Just the extended Henrickson family, including daughter Sarah (Amanda Seyfried), son Ben (Douglas Smith), and Bill's lunatic parents (Grace Zabriskie & Bruce Dern) would make for enough family drama for several broadcast network series.



Big Love

Photo credit: HBO/Lacey Terrell

But the Henricksons are often the calm in the center of a religious storm sparked by the more old-fashioned religious followers of Juniper Creek, the compound where Bill was raised. Much of their life has been turned upside down by prophet Roman Grant (Harry Dean Stanton), who also happens to be Nicky's father, and his son Alby (Matt Ross).

Even that's just the beginning with Bill's brother Joey (Shawn Doyle), Nicky's mother Adaleen (Mary Kay Place), Nicky's recently returned daughter Cara Lynn (Casse Thomson), Nicky's first husband JJ (Zeljko Ivanek), and Sarah's boyfriend (Aaron Paul) playing major roles in just the first two episodes of season four.

At its best, "Big Love" is a brilliant blend of secrets and revelations. Like every family, the Henricksons have their secrets and the show seems to have become one about what can be forgiven. Who does the forgiving and how do we move forward? Bill is always trying to keep his family together against both internal and external forces trying to tear it apart. He uses ritual and sense of purpose to try and do so. A key exchange between Bill and Roman near the end of season three says a lot about the overall themes of "Big Love":

*"I'm doing this for the greater good."* - Bill

*"As if there were such a thing."* - Roman



Big Love

Photo credit: HBO/Lacey Terrell

Bill honestly believes that he is driven by higher purpose to keep family and his own set of rather traditional values alive against an onslaught of public condemnation and internal strife. Unlike a lot of people who talk a good game, Bill honestly believes that he acts in pursuit of a greater good.

That belief will drive Bill to make a drastic decision in season four - to run for the State Senate despite the fact that he lives an illegal lifestyle. While being pressured to take a more internal route to leadership within his sect, Bill realizes that he's tired of living in the shadows and plans to hide his polygamous lifestyle until he wins the election and then break down the walls between his life and "normal society". It should make

for riveting television.

Meanwhile, the lives of the Henrickson wives are in tumultuous change. Margie has grown new confidence due to her successful business and Nicky's life is still upside down, dealing with the return of her daughter and other drastic family changes.

The plot of "Big Love" is incredibly layered and dense but the show went from interesting to great in season three by giving the characters room to breathe and develop into believable people. And the actors were more than up to the challenge. Paxton is great and Sevigny often steals the show. The entire ensemble deserves praise with some episodes featuring a remarkable number of excellent older actors like Dern, Zabriskie, Stanton, and Ellen Burstyn. The young cast is just as good with Seyfried being an interesting enough actress that she could carry her own show.



But here she's just part of the fabric of "Big Love". And that's what I love about it. Like the best of "The Sopranos," it's never too clear who will come to the forefront next. I expect interesting developments in the arc of Joey and his wife Wanda, JJ and his daughter, Sarah and her boyfriend, and, of course, Bill's pursuit of leadership, but the writers of "Big Love" have pulled off the remarkable trick of truly memorable shows - being completely unpredictable and yet also believable. It's easy to pull a plot twist out of thin air, but it's incredibly difficult to draw characters so completely and believably while you do so. "Big Love" is one of the best written and performed shows on television and, after a real improvement in season three, I feel like it's only going to get better in season four. Don't miss it.

If you need to catch up, HBO recently released the third season of "Big Love" on standard DVD in a decent-but-disappointing box set. HBO Home Video led the way for so many years that it's downright disconcerting how little they seem to care about the HD movement. Why not release "Big Love" on Blu-ray? And, if you're not going to release it in HD, why give it such a lackluster standard release?

Of course, with only two to three episodes a disc, the actual transfer looks spectacular, but the four-disc set is shockingly light on special features without a single commentary track or extensive behind-the-scenes featurette. I understand letting a show speak for itself but this is extreme. The show is spectacular, the DVD set is so-so.

*'Big Love,' which airs on HBO, stars Bill Paxton, Jeanne Tripplehorn, Chloe Sevigny, Ginnifer Goodwin, Amanda Seyfried, Douglas Smith, Grace Zabriskie, Bruce Dern, Harry Dean Stanton, Matt Ross, Shawn Doyle, Melora Walters, Mary Kay Place, Casse Thomson, Zeljko Ivanek, and Aaron Paul. Season four premiered on January 10th, 2010 at 9PM CST and reruns throughout the week.*

*'Big Love: Season Three' is released by HBO Home Video. The show was released on DVD on January 5th, 2010. It is not rated. It runs approximately 600 minutes.*



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