

TV Review: HBO's 'Eastbound & Down,' 'Life's Too Short' Offer Unique Takes on Comedy

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on February 19, 2012 - 9:54am

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CHICAGO – HBO brings back a few of their most larger-than-life personalities with the third (and final) season premiere of “Eastbound & Down” and the stateside premiere of “Life’s Too Short.” Danny McBride/Kenny Powers should be familiar to anyone with an HBO subscription by now and the super-talented pair that made HBO’s “Extras” — Stephen Merchant & Ricky Gervais — are behind another bout of awkward comedy with A-list guest stars. Both shows are flawed but damn funny. You could do worse on a Sunday night.



TV Rating: **3.5/5.0**

On paper, HBO’s “Eastbound & Down” and “Life’s Too Short” may not seem to have much in common and yet they are perfectly paired on Sunday nights not only by virtue of being unlike anything else on TV but also on a critical level. “Eastbound,” which is starting its third and final season, has been better in the past but still shows signs of that first-season greatness. Similarly, “Life’s” is produced by people who have been better in the past but also shows signs of why Mr. Merchant and Mr. Gervais are considered comedy geniuses. Both shows are significantly more daring and inventive than most network sitcoms, but that doesn’t mean there isn’t room for criticism.



Life's Too Short
Photo credit: HBO

"Eastbound & Down" returns with a final season arc that's just begging to take the bite out of this very dark comedy — Kenny's got a baby to take care of while he continues to claw his way back to the spotlight. There are very funny moments in all of the first three episodes I've seen but this season definitely seems a little more crowd-pleasing, a little lighter than, say, Kenny's cockfighting operation in Mexico last season. While there are dark tones, such as the very fact that Kenny carries around his baby in a backpack or a truly disturbing job for Stevie (Steve Little) in episode two, this definitely feels like a toned down version of Kenny Powers.



Eastbound & Down
Photo credit: HBO

It doesn't help that the season is dominated by guest stars, including a recurring role for Jason Sudeikis, a prominent appearance by Will Ferrell in episode two, and a guest shot by Matthew McConaughey in episode three. And John Hawkes returns as Kenny's brother. I love all these guys, but they need to let this show belong to Danny McBride and they need to let Kenny Powers be the amoral, obnoxious jerk that he's always been destined to be. Please don't let him learn a lesson through fatherhood and slow the revolving door of guest stars.

"Eastbound & Down" may be a tough show to wrap up in a creatively successful way, but I still have hope that McBride, Jody Hill, and David Gordon Green can figure it out. I'm concerned but optimistic. And I know I won't miss a minute.

While Kenny Powers is an over-the-top personality, Warwick Davis is an under-the-top one, pun only slightly intended. Not only is Mr. Davis vertically-challenged but he is also a subdued personality, often the straight man in his scenes in "Life's Too Short," a fictional take on the actor's real life. Davis plays a version of himself — an actor who has appeared in "Star War, Episode VI: Return of the Jedi," the "Harry Potter" films, "Willow" and much more. However, if "LTS" is to be believed, Davis has serious trouble making ends meet and finding roles. He spends time at conventions at which he is rarely recognized or begging Gervais and Merchant (who play themselves) for work.

The first episode features an episode-stealing appearance from Liam Neeson, who tries to do improv comedy with hysterically serious results (hint — don't use the word "AIDS" in any context in comedy), and the second episode is stolen by Johnny Depp, who wants to work with Davis and compares him to a grub crawling out of an apple. "Extras" featured some of the most amazing guest appearances in the history of television (Ian McKellen and Kate Winslet might be the top two...ever) but Andy Millman (Ricky Gervais) and Maggie Jacobs (Ashley Jensen) were fantastic characters in their own right. Davis seems like a likable fellow but he's not yet interesting outside of being a foil for Gervais, Merchant, and the guest star of the week. It leaves kind of a black hole in the center of the show in that the lead feels like more of a gimmick (and I don't mean that as an insult to Mr. Davis but it's also not I who wrote a scene in which he gets stuffed in a toilet or can't reach an intercom).

Here's what really matters — I like "Eastbound & Down" and "Life's Too Short" to recommend that you season pass both of them. Danny McBride is completely fearless and anything by team Gervais/Merchant is worth your time. My only reservations are that these are both good shows by people with the talent to make great ones. But what could have been (or could still be later in the season) shouldn't stop one from enjoying the quality of what is now.

"Eastbound & Down" stars Danny McBride, Steve Little, Katy Mixon, Andrew Daly, John Hawkes, and Jennifer Irwin. It returns for its third season on February 19th, 2012 at 9pm CST on HBO.

"Life's Too Short" stars Warwick Davis, Ricky Gervais, and Stephen Merchant. It premieres on February 19th, 2012 at 9:30pm CST on HBO.



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