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BEST OF 2007

The year in TV

Times' TV critics love "Mad Men" and "Damages," but how did "Chuck" rate?

By Los Angeles Times Staff Writers



Robert Lloyd: A TV fall to remember

Although it became a kind of journalistic reflex to dismiss the fall season, it says something about the general health of television that this is an exclusionary list -- the hard part was working out what to leave off. (Next year it may not be that hard, if the strike continues.) And so here are some things out of the many I liked on TV this year, with a slight bias toward the new.

Prince at Super Bowl XLI (CBS). "Purple Rain," in the rain.

"30 Rock" (NBC). Nothing on TV makes me laugh harder or fills me with as much admiration. Tina Fey and Co. have rapidly entered their "Revolver" phase, going where they like without fear. And by openly engaging the compromised nature of the business they're in, they've managed to transcend it.

"Mad Men" (AMC). A vision of 1960 (pictured above) as much based on the movies as the reality of the time, ripe with the dreadful thrill of a world on the verge of redefinition. Beautifully designed, with an abundance of fine performances, out of which I am arbitrarily moved to mention Robert Morse as the corporate eminence and Christina Hendricks as a smart woman.

"Damages" (FX). Glenn Close has her harsher qualities put to good use in this thriller. Made with a wit, intelligence Lumet or Alan J. Pakula.

"Life Support" (HBO). A beautifully performed performance by Latifah -- tamping down her natural sardonic wit to the heart of Nelson George's quiet portraiture.

Donald Sutherland and Jill Clayburgh in "Dirty Sexy Money" (ABC). A solid enough series, but there is a separate pleasure in the mere fact of these performances -- eminent actors in parts that let them use what they have.

"Yo Gabba Gabba!" (Nickelodeon). **"Pancake Mountain"** (a Washington, D.C.-based cable access show, also available on DVD). That a life in pop means never having to quite grow up is borne out in these two super-hip, music-filled kids shows, not for kids only. Indie stars participate.

"Nimrod Nation" (Sundance). Real people in a real place -- a small town in Michigan's Upper Peninsula -- required only to be themselves, as a high school basketball team drives toward a championship.

"Pushing Daisies" (ABC). A fairy tale for grown-ups, as dark and as light, as desperate and liberating as fairy tales are meant to be.

"Chuck" (NBC). Spies and sales. It may not be TV's most ambitious hour, but I look forward to it in an almost childish way, as once I looked forward to, say, "The Wild, Wild West."

The worst

So much to choose from. But seeing an ad for a DVD of "The Bourne Ultimatum" pop up during a recent episode of "Chuck" was no fun at all, and surely a sign of worse billboarding to come, as media conglomeration is allowed to go its merry way. Your TV screen may soon look as cluttered and incoherent as the average Web page. (Cable news is already there.)

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