

Another TV season ends: Who's left standing?

Series change, switch networks, say farewell

By Steven Alan McGaw

For television critics, the constant influx of hype is a little deadening. Whether it's a "groundbreaking new drama series" or an "innovative comedy concept," it seems it's all been said before.

Yet the end of this season, and its implications for the next, deserves to stand out in the mind of viewer and pundit alike. It is surely unprecedented for a single season's passing to bring so many changes, adjustments and ends.

Many didn't believe Bill Cosby when he declared this would be the last season for the still highly rated "Cosby Show," but end it did, taking a final, exultant bow on Thursday, April 30, with son Theo Huxtable's college graduation. Just five days earlier, ABC bid farewell to three of its prime-time mainstays: "Growing Pains," "Who's the Boss?" and "MacGyver." Each of the aforementioned series leaves a

noticeable hole in the schedule, but none more so than "Cosby," which had never strayed from its Thursday night opening berth, even when challenged by Fox's "The Simpsons" in later years.

This Saturday marks the conclusion of another NBC staple and one long regarded as the linchpin of that network's comedic domination of Saturday night: "The Golden Girls." In the final episode, Dorothy (Bea Arthur) decides to play a joke on her roommates and feign romance with a handsome widower (Leslie Nielsen). The plan backfires when real love sets in and the couple decides to marry.

But the story won't stop as the honeymoon starts. Next season, Rue McClanahan, Betty White and Estelle Getty will re-create their characters in a new show on another network. Titled "Golden Palace," the CBS series will have the ladies installed as proprietors of a hotel. Word is that Arthur will visit from time to time.

Also jumping from NBC (after being dropped by that network) to CBS is Carroll O'Connor's "In the Heat of the Night," but the format is

unclear, originally announced as six two-hour movies, it now appears "Heat" will show up in a regular weekly berth. Another hit waving goodbye to the Peacock network is "Matlock," which relocates to ABC. Star Andy Griffith has been openly resentful of his former employers' claims that he didn't draw younger viewers in sufficient numbers and equally grateful for the new lease on network life.

At least two spin-offs are penciled in for next season. "Melrose Place" is a new address from the producers of Fox's "Beverly Hills, 90210," who are this time aiming for a slightly older audience. (In other words, "90210" fans who've received their diplomas.) Grant Tinker stars as Jake Hanson, a construction worker who lives in the same apartment complex as many of his "twentysomething" friends. On CBS, Nell Carter will star as a no-nonsense bail bondswoman in an as-yet-unnamed comedy spin-off from "Jake and the Fatman." That series, incidentally, is also leaving the air, reportedly because stars William Conrad and Joe Penny aren't interested in returning.

CBS' popular "Designing Women" will be back next year but without Julia Duffy, whose whining Allison proved unpopular with viewers. Rumor has it that former regular Jean Smart, who left the series to spend more time with her children, may return for periodic visits, and Jackee will come aboard the show late this year as Meshack Taylor's new love interest. Jackee also has a regular role on CBS' "The Royal Family," but if that series fails, she could join "Women" full time.

So what does it all mean? When so many popular series are judged to have run their course, are there replacements with genuine potential waiting in the wings? Will those replacements break new ground and bypass the clichés that plague prime time, or will they be pallid imitations of the programs they replace? And when next season comes, with so many new shows on the schedule, will the programming execs be more inclined to give those new entries a fighting chance? As the song says, "...see you in September."

TUESDAY



On Tuesday, NBC offers an encore presentation of *This Is Gersh Brooks*. The special features interview clips with the country star, as well as performance footage.

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