

The Top 10 TV Shows Of 2012

BY CHUCK BARNEY

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It's often difficult to heap praise upon a medium that has tortured us with "Jersey Shore" and Honey Boo Boo. But for all its glaring faults, television continues to turn out some exceptional work. Here are 10 great examples in 2012 that made my job a lot more fun:

1. "Breaking Bad" (AMC) — Season 4 of this still-magnificent meth drama ended with Walter White (Bryan Cranston) vanquishing the monster. In the first half of its farewell season, Walter became the monster. High on his own hubris, the meek chemistry teacher-turned-ruthless-kingpin spiraled deeper and deeper into the dark depths while alienating his wife (Anna Gunn) and his longtime partner in crime (Aaron Paul). His journey was disturbing, horrifying — and absolutely mesmerizing. And now with "Breaking Bad" agent brother-in-law (Dean Norris) finally appears to be onto him, I can hardly wait to see where this twisted morality tale takes us next.

2. "Sons of Anarchy" (FX) — The hog-straddling bad boys of this biker drama have always made for good TV. But Season 5 revved up the raw intensity to full-throttle as it chronicled Jax Teller's (Charlie Hunnam) tumultuous transition to club leader and his ugly dealings with the traitorous Clay (Ron Perlman). (Ah, yes, uneasy lies the head that wears a crown). Moreover, the usual violence and villainy was tinged with visceral heartbreak (R.I.P., Opie), and the show benefited from jolts of fresh energy provided by Jimmy Smits and Harold Perrineau. The excessive plot gyrations drive me bonkers at times, but this so-called "Hamlet on Harley's" has managed to keep its motor running.

3. "Homeland" (Showtime) — OK, so that whole bit about hacking into the vice president's pacemaker was a plot line straight out of crazy town. And the hit-and-run storyline? Ugh. After nabbing an Emmy for its extraordinary first season, this political thriller occasionally fell prey to "24"-like contrivances. Still, "Homeland" found ways to keep us on the edge of our seats — and plugged into the twisted CIA operative Carrie Mathison (Claire Danes) and bedeviled congressman Nicholas Brody (Damian Lewis). Meanwhile, the performances by the entire cast continued to be brilliant.

4. "The Walking Dead" (AMC) — Any horror show with a decent special-effects budget can give off a creepy vibe by filling the screen with ghoulish sounds and splattering their brains to bits. That's the easy part. But what makes this survivor saga so impressive is the way it works on a deeply human level. Anyone with a ticking heart, for example, had to be touched by the anguish-filled episode in which we bid goodbye to Lori (Sarah Wayne Callies). Indeed, there are times when all the zombie brain-bashing provides a welcome break from the show's emotional brutality. Like "Sons of Anarchy," "Dead" was bolstered by new characters, in this case a sword-wielding mystery woman named Michonne (Danielle Radcliffe). And the tyrannical Governor (David Morrissey).

5. "Girls" (HBO) — Lena Dunham may or may not be the voice of her generation, but one thing is clear: She knows how to deliver a sly, brazen, polarizing and hilariously original show. Taking inspiration from the anxieties of her own post-college years, Dunham created and stars in this more-gritty-than-glatz comedy about four young gal pals adrift in a recession-era New York. It's "Sex and the City" stripped of its fairy-tale fantasies. Instead of basking in designer fashions and fizzy cocktails, these flawed characters face brutal job prospects, humiliating letdowns and lousy sex. When we weren't cringing, we were doubled over in mirth.

6. "Mad Men" (AMC) — It was a season like none other for this acclaimed 1960s drama. Betty got fat. Roger dropped acid. Lane checked out. Peggy flew the coop. ... And then there was Megan (Jessica Pare), who dazzled everyone with her erotically charged party scene ("Zou Bisou Bisou," indeed). The emotionally fragile newlywed became Season 5's red-hot standout, and her sometimes-turbulent marriage to Don Draper (Jon Hamm) epitomized the era's growing cultural divide. For the first time in five tries, "Mad Men" failed to win the Emmy for best drama, but it continued to wow us with its style and smarts.

7. "Parenthood" (NBC) — I've learned my lesson. Never again will I watch this superb family drama without having the tissues handy. Season 4 really turned on the wa-

Television Week

Local Listings For The Week Of December 22-28, 2012

SATURDAY PRIMETIME/LATE NIGHT													DECEMBER 22, 2012										
BROADCAST STATIONS	3:00	3:30	4:00	4:30	5:00	5:30	6:00	6:30	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	11:00	11:30	12:00	12:30	1:00	1:30	
PBS KUSD (2, 8, 2)	Boxing Fight Night: From Bethlehem, Pa. (N) (Stereo) Live	Boxing Fight Night: From Bethlehem, Pa. (N) (Stereo) Live	The Victory Garden	The Prairie Garden	Hometime (N) Live	Classical Gospel Music of Christmas	The Lawrence Welk Show: Songs from the 1970s	Guy Lombardo As Time Goes By	Keeping Up with the Kardashians	Last of the Summer Wine	New Red Green	The Red Green Show	No Cover, No Minimum	Austin City Limits	Underground	Sun Studio Sessions	Globe Trekker	The					
KVC (4, 4)	Boxing Fight Night: From Bethlehem, Pa. (N) (Stereo) Live	Boxing Fight Night: From Bethlehem, Pa. (N) (Stereo) Live																					
NBC KDLT (5, 5)	Boxing Fight Night: From Bethlehem, Pa. (N) (Stereo) Live	Boxing Fight Night: From Bethlehem, Pa. (N) (Stereo) Live																					
KCAU (6, 9)	ESPN Sports Saturday (N)	ESPN Sports Saturday (N)																					
CBS KELO (3, 3)	College Basketball: Kansas at Ohio State (N)	College Basketball: Kansas at Ohio State (N)																					
ABC KSFY (13, 7)	ESPN Sports Saturday (N)	ESPN Sports Saturday (N)																					
KMGH (13, 6)	College Basketball: Kansas at Ohio State (N)	College Basketball: Kansas at Ohio State (N)																					
KTVU (23, 9, 7)	World's Funniest Moments: Christmas	American Ski Classic 2012																					
KLKN	ESPN Sports Saturday (N)	ESPN Sports Saturday (N)																					
KOLN	College Basketball: Kansas at Ohio State (N)	College Basketball: Kansas at Ohio State (N)																					
KPTH	To Be Announced	To Be Announced																					
KSCB 97	Travel	BGEA	Gospel	Gospel	Jesus	Israel	"Christmas With a Capital C" (2010)																
KSN 99 (12)	Quilting	Sew It All	Sewing	Antiques Roadshow	Classical Gospel	Lom	Lawrence Welk																
KXNE (8)	Globe Trekker	Safari																					

SUNDAY PRIMETIME/LATE NIGHT													DECEMBER 23, 2012									
BROADCAST STATIONS	3:00	3:30	4:00	4:30	5:00	5:30	6:00	6:30	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30	11:00	11:30	12:00	12:30	1:00	1:30
PBS KUSD (2, 8, 2)	Purdie Christmas Show 2011 (In Stereo)	Rick Stevens' Europe	Nature Ad-ventures	Antiques Roadshow	Antiques Roadshow	Antiques Roadshow	The Lawrence Welk Show: Christmas	Christmas at Luther: Tidings of Comfort and Joy (N)	Masterpiece Classic: "Downton Abbey"	Spanish flu disrupts Downbeat (In Stereo)	The 28th Annual Fort Lauderdale Christmas Pageant	Globe Trekker: World War II locations in the Pacific	Washington Week	BBC Newsnight	Austin City Limits A	1979 performance by Tom Waits. Live						
KTVI (4, 4)	Triathlon Ironman World Championship	Triathlon Ironman World Championship																				
NBC KDLT (5, 5)	Triathlon Ironman World Championship, From Kailua-Kona, Hawaii. (In Stereo)	Triathlon Ironman World Championship, From Kailua-Kona, Hawaii. (In Stereo)																				
KCAU (6, 9)	CMA Country Christmas (In Stereo)	CMA Country Christmas (In Stereo)																				
CBS KELO (3, 3)	NFL Football: Cleveland Browns at Denver Broncos. From Sports Authority Field at Mile High in Denver. (In Stereo)	NFL Football: Cleveland Browns at Denver Broncos. From Sports Authority Field at Mile High in Denver. (In Stereo)																				
ABC KSFY (13, 7)	CMA Country Christmas	CMA Country Christmas																				
KMGH (13, 6)	NFL Football: Regional Coverage, Chicago Bears at Arizona Cardinals or New York Giants at Baltimore Ravens. (In Stereo) Live	NFL Football: Regional Coverage, Chicago Bears at Arizona Cardinals or New York Giants at Baltimore Ravens. (In Stereo) Live																				
KLKN	CMA Country Christmas (In Stereo)	CMA Country Christmas (In Stereo)																				
KOLN	NFL Football: Post-Monster Jam	NFL Football: Post-Monster Jam																				
KPTH	NFL Football: Regional Coverage, (N) (In Stereo) Live	NFL Football: Regional Coverage, (N) (In Stereo) Live																				
KSCB 97	Supernatural	Winston Jeremiah	Anker	Inc'sing Faith	Jakes	30/30	Rejoice in the Lord	Anker	Youssef Parsley	Franklin	Report	End	J. Osteen	Thomp	Reflec	Hillsong	Jonni L.	Youssef				
KSN 99 (12)	Nutcracker Ballet	European	Walburg	2011	Cat-Christmas	Luther: Tidings	Masterpiece Classic: "Downton Abbey"															
KXNE (8)	Keep Up	Outnumbered	NE Sto	Moyers & Company	Doc Martin																	