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 that Walter's DEA 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). More-over, the usual violence and villainy was tinged with visceral heartbreak (R.I.P., Opie), and the show benefitted 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 Harleys" has managed to keep its motor runnin'.

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 relationship between high-strung CIA operative Carrie Mathison (Člaire Danes) and bedeviled congressman Nicholas Brody (Damian Lewis). Meanwhile, the performances by the entire cast continued to be bril-

liant. 4. "The Walking Dead" (AMC)

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

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Any horror show with a decent special-effects budget can give off a creepy vibe by filling the screen with ghastly ghouls 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 (Danai Gurira), 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-thanglitzy 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-

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KSCB KSIN	97	Supernat. Winston Nutcracker Ballet	Jeremiah	-	Inc'sing Fa		Jakes 30 Cat-Christma	0/30	Rejoice in the Luther: Tiding			Youssef e Classic "D		Franklin	Report MI-5 CC	End	J. Osteen Independer		Reflec (Off Air)	Hillsong	JONI L.	Youssef
KXNE		Keep Up Outnumber		NE Sto	Moyers &		Doc Martin CC		Luther: Tiding			e Classic "D			-	Stories	Fiddlers' Ja		(Off Air)			
	CHANNE	LS											_						,			
нво	17 (401)	* "New Year's Eve" (2011) ©		Picture Paris		I Noise" (201 ke Palmer. (In		fah, Dolly	** "Cowboys Harrison Ford.			niel Craig,	Girls 🖾	Girls 📼		Enlight- ened		ar's Eve" (20 on Jovi. (In S	11) Halle Be	erry, Jessica	*** "Die (1988) Bruc	
HBO2		** "Stuck on You" (20		Fight			Richard Roxburg	rgh.	"Journey 2-My			This Is	** "Love &	& Other Dru	gs" (2010) 🖸			arcy May Ma		"Harley Day		
MAX	(420)	*** "The Horse	* "Dream I	House" (201		*** "Gard	len State" (200	04) Zach	** "The Thing	a" (2011) I	Marv Elizab	eth Win-	** "Wande	erlust" (2012	2) Paul	Zane's Sex	Chronicles	Feature 8: I	Envy A com-	**** "Alr	nost Famou	s" (2000)
MAX2		Whisperer" (1998) "The Kids Are All Righ	Craig. (In St t" (2010)		Win" (2011)	Braff. (In Ste	ereo) © ★★★ "Americ		stead, Joel Edd			Rundown" (Rudd. (In St 2003)		(2012) (In S	pilation of ep		Stereo) 📖 Live" (1988)		Billy Crudup		
SHOW	18(435)	** "Peace, Love & Mis			Untold His		Dexter CC	Jan i Gyoll	Homeland CC			fic" (2000) M			(-) (-	"Sexy Baby		(1900)		** "Brüno		
SHOW2		*** "The Help"	"Saint Joh	n of Las Veg	gas"	* "Brake"	(2012) (In Stere		** "Barbersh	op " (2002	2) Ice Cube.	CC ()	*** "The	Help" (2011)	Viola Davis.	(In Stereo)			tate" (2011)	CC	"Ghosts of	
TMC		"The Perfect Score"	"Love's Kit	tchen" (201	1) 🖸	** "Murde	r in Mind" (199	97)	** "Die Anoti	her Day" ((2002) Prem	niere.	*** "Rans	som" (1996)	Mel Gibson.	(In Stereo) 🛙		"Chick Mag	gnet" (2011)	CC	*** "Chry	/stal"
CAB A&E	LE STAT	Panic 9-1-1 📧	Panic 9-1-1	CC	Storage	Storage	Storage St	torage	Storage St	orage	Storage	Storage	Storage	Storage	Be the Boss	s (N)	Storage	Storage	Storage	Storage	Storage	Storage
AMC	41 (54)	"Miracle on 34th Street				h Street" (19	•	lorugo	*** "Miracle						cle on 34th S					racle on 34th		
ANPL		Rattlesnake	Rattlesnak	-	Rattlesnak		Finding Bigfo		Rattlesnake		Gator Boys		Finding Big		Lost Treasu	-	Finding Big		Rattlesnak		Finding Big	
BRAVO		Million Dollar Listing					Shahs of Sun		Housewives/A Kirk Cameron. (Housewive		Shahs of S		Housewives		Shahs of S		Housewive		Shahs of S	unset Music
CMTV CNBC	53 52	Fireproof ** "Unlike Cook Cindy C	WEN Hair		Paid	Paid	Princess W		(Dis)Service		Mob Money	Angels Am	American C	Angels Am	60 Minutes	Angels Amo on	Hotel: Marr	Angels Am	American (Angels Am Greed	Paid	Paid
CNN			CNN News		CNN News		CNN Newsroo		CNN Presents		Piers Morg		CNN News		CNN Preser		Piers Morg		CNN News		CNN Prese	
COM	45 61			pe From Gu	uantanamo I		Dunham		Jeff Dunham		Dunham	-	Jeff Dunha		** "Nation	<u> </u>				Santa" (200		
CSPAN DISC		Washington This Week Buying Buying		Buying	News Amish Mat		n This Week Amish Mafia		Q & A Amish Mafia ©		P.M. X-Ray: Yello	Road to the	Zombie Ap		Q & A Amish Mafia		P.M. X-Ray: Yello		e White Hou Zombie Ap		Washingto Amish Maf	
DISC	64 36	Phineas Fish		Good	Austin			ìood	"Santa Clause			Good	· ·	Austin				Wizards		Deck	Good	Twas
DISXD					I, Adventure)			•	Buttowski Bu			Phineas	•		Suite Life		Tron				Buttowski	
E!TV ENC	51 <u>62</u> (480)	** "Sweet Home Alab Donnie "Catch .44"	ama" " (2011) (In S				orge Clooney. nimal House"		Bachelorette: ** "Heartbreat					Celebrity O	ops: 3) Al Pacino.		The Soup		Ice-Coco 38) (In Stered	Celebrity O	ops: "Replacem	Love You
ESPN	28 24	Nation 30 for 30 ICC		510100)	30 for 30			portsCent		C Storied		30 for 30			SportsCent				ter (N) (Live)		SportsCen	
ESPN2	29 25	Poker World/Poke		World/Pok		World/Poke		/orld/Poke		orld/Poker		World/Poke		World/Poke		College Bas			1	Poker	World/Poke	er
EWTN		Univ. Concert 2012 "Willy Wonka"	Icons	Rosary Polar Expre	Mother An	gelica	World Over Li		Collin Raye e Grinch Stole						ts perform a point of the second s		Daily Mass J. Osteen				In Concert 3x Faster	Doid
FAM FX	62 <u>40</u> 23 <u>56</u>	"Alvin and Chipmunks				e Halls" (20	06) Danny DeV		** "Christma		-				e Kranks" (2	-			06) Danny D		Paid	Hair
FXNWS		America's News Heado	uarters (N)		Fox News		FOX Report (!		Huckabee (N)		Fox News	Sunday	Geraldo at	Large (N)	Huckabee		Stossel	1	Geraldo at	Large	Fox News	Sunday
FOXSP	35 27	Tennis	XTERRA	Game	The Best o		Action Sports		World Poker To		World Poke	er Tour	The Best of			SnowTrail			Premier Le	ague	UFC	
GOLF	55 <u>310</u>	2012 Open Champions "Christmas With Holly'	nip Final Ro י (2012) רמי	n Faris	Golf "Debbie M		aolf The Player: rading Christm		onship, Final Ro "The Most Wo		me of the V	'ear"		Golf Golf Be	PGA Tour G fore Christm				Round. as" (2011) @	6]	"Christmas	Scrt"
HALL	<u>22 33</u> 54 34	Love It or List It	Love It or L				Million Dollar		Extreme Home		Property B		House Hun		Hunters		Property B		House Hun			Hunt Intl
HIST	46 (47)	God vs. Satan Beliefs a	bout Armage	eddon.	Bamazon	CC	American Pic	kers	Ax Men 💷		Ax Men "Sa		Bamazon (I	N) 🖸	Outback Hu	nters (N)	Ax Men 🚾		Ax Men "Sa	abotage"	Bamazon 🛛	:C
KAUN		Bowie Bowie	Cis. Kid		B. Cosby				City Cit		Route 66	M* A * C ***	The Saint "	Sophia"	*** "Scro	•	Intelligence		Da Vinci's I		The Collec	
KWSD		He-Man and She- "Dad-Christmas"	Snow White		Cricket on ut Street" (2		M*A*S*H M		Columbo "A M mas" (2005) ©			M*A*S*H Christmas B	Thriller Ressing" (20	005)	Zone *** "Craz		The Fugitiv		Naked City	Christmas E	Gunn Jessing" (2	Gunn 005)
LIFE MSNBC		MSNBC Live (N)	Caught on		Caught on	,	Caught on Ca		Caught on Ca		Chained to		To Catch a	,	Lockup: Co		Lockup: Co		Lockup: Co		Meet the P	
NICK	32 37	Big Time Rush 🖾	iCarly	iCarly	Sponge.	Sponge.	Sponge. S	ponge.	See Dad "A	Fairly Od	dd Christma	as" 🖸	Nanny	Nanny	Friends	Friends	Friends	Friends	See Dad	George Lop	ez 😳	George
RFDTV				Church	Brule Chris			•	Hee Haw (N)		Agribusine		Farming					Tractor				Gilley
SOAP		One Tree Hill CC Hot Rod Hot Rod	One Tree H Hot Rod		One Tree H Hot Rod		Days of our L Auto Racing	lves	Days of our Li Festival of Spe		Days of our Goodwood		Days of our Classic		Days of our British Tour		General Ho Festival of		General Ho FIA GT1 Wo		General Ho Unique Wh	
SPEED SPIKE		Ink Master 🖾	Ink Master		Ink Master		Ink Master CC	1	Ink Master CC		Ink Master		Ink Master		Ink Master		Tattoo Res		Bar Rescue		Bar Rescu	
STARZ		"The Pirates! Band of	Misfits"	* "Ultravio	olet" (2006)	CC	** "Colombi	iana" (201	1) Zoe Saldana	. '	** "Van H	elsing" (200	4) (In Stereo)	** "Pirates	of the Cari	bbean: On	Stranger Tic	les"	*** "Anal		
SYFY		** "Star Trek Generati					Trek: First Cor					Trek VI: The						ction" (1998	/	* "Mutant		
TBS TCM		** "Yes Man" (2008) J *** "3 Godfathers" (1		5			nd Jane" (1977 Dick Van Dyke.	,	** "Evan Alm *** "The Bis					• • •	007) Steve C h Avenue" (*		Wedding B		*** "Fun Joan of Arc'		d Jane" (19 "Grand Illu	
TLC		Toddlers & Tiaras	Toddlers &	Tiaras	Toddlers &		Sin City Rules				Sister Wive		Sin City Ru		Sister Wive		Sin City Ru				Sin City Ru	
TNT	37 59	*** "The Lord of the	Rings: The 1		" (2002) 🖻		*** "The Lo		Rings: The Ret	urn of the	e King" (200	03) Elijah Wo	od. 🖸		*** "The l	ord of the	Rings: The 1	Two Towers'	' (2002, Fant	asy) Elijah W	ood. 📧	
TOON		Tom & Jerry: Nutc.	Reindeer			eld's Fun Fes	· · · ·	ud a !::		-	<u> </u>	King/Hill	King/Hill		Fam. Guy		Chicken	Metal	China, IL		Fam. Guy	
TRAV		Bizarre Foods Most Shocking	No Reserva Most Shoc		No Reserv Most Shoc		Anthony Bour	irdain	David Blaine Wipeout CC		Magic Wipeout 📼	Magic	David Blain Jokers	Jokers	Hunt for Mis World's Dur		Magic World's Du	Magic	David Blair World's Du		Hunt for M Jokers	Isfit Toys
TRUTV		Unwrapped		Health	Diners	Diners	The Next Iron	n Chef	Sugar Dome (I		The Next In		All-Star Far		Iron Chef A		The Next Ir		All-Star Fai		Iron Chef A	
TVLND	47 39	Cosby Cosby	Rose.	Rose.	Rose.	Rose.	Rose. R	lose.	Rose. Ro	ose.	Raymond	Raymond	Raymond	Raymond	Raymond	King	King	King	King	Divorced	Divorced	'70s
UNI	69	Navidad en El Vaticano		01/11	Comed.				Una Noche co		Feliz Navid		Sal y Pimie					con Yuri (S		1. H. W. (006 -)	Navidad-Va	
USA VH1		Law & Order: SVU Tiny Tonight	Law & Orde Bask. Wive		Law & Ord Bask. Wive		Law & Order: Bask. Wives L		Law & Order: Hip Hop Song		Law & Orde Hip Hop So		Law & Orde T.ITiny	er: SVU T.ITiny	Law & Orde Marry		Law & Orde	er: SVU ht! Year in R		licity" (2009) Bask. Wive		ts. Music
VH1 WE		Bridezillas	Bridezillas		Bridezillas		Bridezillas		Bridezillas		Bridezillas		Bridezillas	r.a i iiiy	Bridezillas		Bridezillas		Bridezillas	BUSK. WIVE	Bridezillas	
WGN		"Devil-Prada"					Bloopers! M	lother				Mother		Replay	30 Rock			Rules		Scrubs		Sunny