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The Bomb Squad: TV's Biggest Flops

BY MICHAEL HEWITT

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Every fall brings failure to a few hopeful new shows, but rarely do they fall as hard as "Utopia."

Fox committed a top of money

Fox committed a ton of money to producing the reality series — reportedly \$50 million — and spent a lot of time promoting it this past summer, giving it a harder push than any of its other new fall programs.

America responded with indifference. The ratings have been abysmal, and already Fox has cut the show back to just Friday nights, where it will do little damage to the network's overall numbers.

"Utopia" at least is likely to sur-

vive for an entire season. Few of TV's notorious disasters even earned that much grace.

Here, in chronological order, are a few of the boob tube's biggest blunders:

"YOU'RE IN THE PICTURE" (1961)

Jackie Gleason and game shows were both hot properties in 1961, so NBC scored a coup when it arranged for the Great One to host this.

The concept for "You're in the Picture" is hard to explain briefly, but it involved celebrities trying to identify a picture via yes or no questions while their heads were stuck through holes in said picture. Gleason spent the entire second episode apologizing for the first, saying: "Last week we did a show that laid the biggest bomb. It would make the H-bomb look like a 2-inch salute."

The next week, "The Jackie Gleason Show," a hastily arranged talk show, took the time slot and

ran for two months. "TURN ON" (1969)

"Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In" on NBC was the biggest thing on television in early 1969, and Bristol-Myers hired its creators, right, to produce this similar venture. NBC and CBS both rejected it, but ABC took it on and gave it a big push, hoping to grab a large chunk of the "Laugh-In" audience.

"Turn On" premiered Feb. 5, 1969, and was received so poorly that Cleveland's ABC affiliate pulled it 11 minutes in. Stations all around the country reported being flooded with complaints. ABC immediately put the show "on hiatus" and it never reappeared.

"THE MCLEAN STEVENSON SHOW" (1976-77)

The most celebrated defection of the 1970s had nothing to do with the Soviet Union; it involved McLean Stevenson leaving "M*A*S*H" and CBS.

Stevenson had wanted his character, Lt. Col. Henry Blake, to have a bigger role. When that didn't happen, he asked out of his contract. The dispute got plenty of attention, but no one seemed to care any more six months later, when Stevenson's first NBC series premiered. The family comedy flopped from the start, and only 10 episodes made it to air.

"BATTLESTAR GALACTICA" (1978-79)

Glen A. Larson first conceived of this outer-space adventure in the late 1960s, but it got nowhere until "Star Wars" erupted in 1977. Suddenly, science fiction was cool, and ABC was willing not just to produce the show, but also to spend big money on it. The pilot reportedly cost \$7 million, the equivalent of \$25 million today.

The initial ratings were strong, but it didn't take long for viewers to decide that the expensive special effects couldn't cover for the silly scripts. After one season of 17 episodes, "Battlestar Galactica" was mothballed. An attempt to revive it as "Galactica 1980" failed even more quickly.

"SUPERTRAIN" (1979)

The most expensive series made to that date, "Supertrain" was meant to be a dramatic version of "The Love Boat," with the passengers providing the main story lines of each episode. The titular train was an imaginary nuclear-powered bullet train that zipped from Los Angeles to New York in 36 hours.

The show didn't get enough air time to make the trip; it was canceled after nine episodes.

"CASABLANCA" (1983)

This was the second attempt to make a series out of the beloved 1943 film: ABC tried and failed in 1955. NBC spent enough money on this version, which starred David Soul as Rick Blaine and Hector Eli-

zondo, right, as Capt. Renault, that it won an Emmy for cinematography. That's an amazing feat when you consider that the show was canceled after five episodes.

"THE FUGITIVE" (2000)

You remember Tim Daly as Dr Richard Kimble, right? That's OK, neither does anyone else. CBS tried to revive the franchise, which had been very popular as a 1960s TV series and a 1993 movie, but the third time was not a charm. Despite heavy promotion from the network, "The Fugitive" fizzled and lasted just one season.

Chances are that you have heard of the show that came on after "The Fugitive" on Thursday nights, even though it didn't get quite as big a promotional push: "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation."

"STUDIO 60 ON THE SUNSET STRIP" (2006-07)

After "West Wing," television audiences were dying to find out what Aaron Sorkin would come up with next. After seeing this, they were probably sorry they asked. "Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip" was as ungainly as its name, a drama about backstage life at a "Saturday Night Live"-type show that was dull and oddly humorless. The ratings started moderately well, but the viewers didn't stick around. The show was canceled after one sea-

"CAVEMEN" (2007)

Everyone loved, loved, loved those cavemen from the Geico

commercials, so why not put them in a sitcom? Turns out, there were plenty of reasons why not. The transition from ad spokesmen to series stars earned the "Cavemen" plenty of media attention, but that did not lead to an audience for their show. Thirteen episodes were produced, but only six made it on the air.

"TERRA NOVA" (2011)

Fox pulled out all the stops for this effects-laden time-travel adventure, which claimed Steven Spielberg as an executive producer. The network spent \$4 million an episode — about \$1 million more than a typical drama's budget — and delayed the premiere from spring to fall to get everything right. Despite the Spielberg connection, the money and a big push from Fox marketing, barely anyone watched. "Terra Nova" made it through a 13-episode first season, then disappeared into the mists of time

"UTOPIA" (2014)

"Utopia," sort of a cross between "Survivor" and "The Real World," even got four hours of Fox's weekly prime time, two hours each on Tuesdays and Fridays.

There's no doubt that "Utopia" is the pratfall of the fall, but compared with some of television's titanic tumbles, it looks more like a slightly ungraceful stumble. "Utopia" at least is likely to survive for an entire season. Few of TV's notorious disasters even earned that much grace.

Lugnuts

From Page 1B

definite itself, Kasik said.

"If you listen to our repertoire, it's all over the road. We play everything from traditional country to reggae to heavy Southern rock," he said.
"We've always been like that. We are

never put ourselves in one genre."
The decision has paid off, Kasik said.

"It's been the smart thing. It's been really good, playing a show with a very diverse repertoire. You can play material for all settings," he said. "As far as making records, our recordings are all over the place. We're half country and half rock."

The Lugnuts reflect the trend in recent years where country and Southern rock have developed a cross-over appeal for a broader audience, Kasik said. The brothers' move to Nashville was a conscious career decision, and they are transitioning onto the scene.

"Especially today, a lot of what you hear as mainstream country is a mix of Southern rock and pop," he said. "You take the rock and roll, and pop, and you put in a steel guitar and

banjo."
For the Yankton concert, the
Lugnuts are bringing a special guest
— Nashville singer-songwriter Shannon Lawson, who has landed on the

Billboard charts.

Zach Kasik originally met Lawson in a Los Angeles recording studio, when Lawson was one of the songwriters and Kasik was working as an audio engineer for country star Jamey Johnson's first two records.

Area fans will get to see Lawson's talents in action during the Halloween gig in Yankton, Kasik said. Besides his songwriting, the guest has a band called Shannon Lawson and Ranchero.

"There are times when Shannon gets to be the headliner. Then, there are times like Yankton, when we're the headliner," Kasik said. "At Yankton, Shannon is going to come up (on stage) and do a set with us that night. Basically, we are letting him do a bunch of his material, songs he

wrote when he was signed to his record label. He charted on Billboard with his singles. He has vocal-driven country songs and is the most amazing vocalist."

A SUCCESSFUL JOURNEY

The Yankton homecoming marks the latest chapter in a long and storied journey for the Kasiks.

In summer 2003, the brothers relocated to Los Angeles to expand their growing fan base. They were joined by Christian, and the threepiece band has played all the Hollywood hot spots, including The Viper Room, House Of Blues Sunset and

The Key Club.
The Lugnuts have opened for everyone from rock n' roll legends ZZ Top to Top 40 Country artist James Otto. The band creates Southern rock, honky-tonk sounds with a South Dakota twist that makes it all their own.

After attending school in Phoenix, Zach moved to Los Angeles to get into the profession in audio engineering. He has worked with everyone from the Rolling Stones to Paul McCartney to Dr. Dre.

"When I was 18 years old, I got into studio work. I worked with the Rolling Stones, and I worked with Keith Richards," Zach said. "I was an assistant engineer and went out on my own. I was the engineer for the platinum-selling Green Day record. We have a lot of major label credits who have used us for engineering."

Kasik was selected for a historic project, when he worked on a Michael Jackson record after the icon had died.

"Michael had passed, and I was working with producers that had started a bunch of recordings to finish," Kasik said. "They had completed all the material (Jackson) was working on, and they released a record shortly after his death. I engineered for that record. It sold millions of copies worldwide."

The process was literally a secret operation, Kasik said.

"It was really complicated with a lot of layers," he said. "It was one of the most interesting recording sessions. I had to check my cell phone at the door. There was security on the record work. They had to make sure I wasn't taking one of the tracks with me."

Kasik was entrusted with completing the work of a legend who remains highly popular years after his passing.

"They had taken all of the songs where he had completed vocals and gave them to us," Kasik said. "They had half the production done. We finished the record with the bass, drums and guitars. We had all the sections to complete the record."

The upcoming Yankton visit is a far cry from Los Angeles and Nashville, but the Kasiks highly anticipate the homecoming.

ipate the homecoming.

By the way, are the Lugnuts doing any Halloween music or costumes to go with their Yankton appearance?

"Good question," Zach said with a laugh. "Not really, we haven't given it that much thought. But then again, every member of this band is a character in his own right."

You can follow Randy Dockendorf on Twitter at twitter.com/RDockendorf. Discuss this story at www.yankton.net.