

# TIME

NOVEMBER 7, 2005

## 6 TV SHOWS NOT TO OVERLOOK

Some series are better than their ratings. These underwatched gems—old and new—deserve some love

### ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT FOX, Mondays, 8 P.M. E.T.

CRITICS HAVE SPENT TWO YEARS trying to bolster this show, without success. So here's a change in strategy: do not check out TV's best sitcom when it returns this month. Yes, this screwball comedy about an idle-rich family has simplified its story lines so new viewers can catch up. But who cares? Crackling interplay between a top-notch ensemble, the fastest blizzard of jokes this side of *The Simpsons* and sly guest appearances by stars from Scott Baio to Charlize Theron—they're all overrated. Besides, intense belly laughs can cause abdominal cramps. That's why we critics secretly watch *The King of Queens* instead. We trust you'll follow our lead, as always.

### THE WEST WING NBC, Sundays, 8 P.M. E.T.

A MOVE TO SUNDAY NIGHTS HAS sent the Washington drama's poll, er, ratings numbers tumbling—ironically, just as it's become complex and exciting. In its high-rated days, the show was an eloquent but simplistic fantasy. The presidential race between Matt Santos (Jimmy Smits) and Arnold Vinick (Alan Alda) has given it what it always lacked: a nuanced conflict between two flawed but empathetic opponents. (The Bartlet White House story lines seem like a distraction now.) Santos and Vinick square off for a live debate on Nov. 6—just in time for you to rejoin this political party.

### STARTING OVER

#### SYNDICATED, CHECK LOCAL LISTINGS

THIS UNDERSUNG DAYTIME show takes elements of reality TV and talk shows and improves on both. Here, six women with problems from financial dependence to emotional aloofness spend weeks under one roof in the care of counselors. The show's pop-psych devices can be bizarre—one woman and her "life coach" role-play a dialogue with her absentee dad using sock puppets—but the results are genuinely moving. It's refreshing to see a reality show about a group of women—some in their 40s—who aren't babes looking to bag a man.

### THE OFFICE

#### NBC, Tuesdays, 9:30 P.M. E.T.

WHEN THIS VERITÉ-STYLE comedy made its debut last spring, it got little love from fans pining for the British original. In its second season, *The Office* proves it's no one's poor American cousin; it captures the absurdities of white-collar life right down to the uncomfortable office parties at Chili's. Steve Carell (*The 40 Year-Old Virgin*) is dependably fatuous as a gasbag middle manager. But it's the relative unknowns, particularly Jenna Fischer and John Krasinski as co-workers with an unconsummated crush, that give *The Office* its charm.

### RELATED

#### WB, Mondays, 9 P.M. E.T.

The Sorelli sisters, unlike characters on many new shows, do not fight aliens. And unlike the quartet of *Desperate Housewives*, they don't have affairs with pistol-packing plumbers. But what this winsome wall-flower of a comedy-drama lacks in pyrotechnics, it makes up for with tart, zippy dialogue that explores their work, love and family dilemmas without cracking open the mush barrel.

#### KING OF THE HILL FOX, Sundays, 7:30 P.M. E.T.

AFTER 10 SEASONS, FOX MAY be calling the last roundup for the story of the Hill family from Arlen, Texas. Perhaps because it's a cartoon, *King* rarely gets credit for being what it is: the most realistic, well-observed family sitcom on TV. Few series have captured the details and regional flavors of American life so well—which is, perhaps, why North Carolina Governor Mike Easley considers the show required viewing for Democrats seeking to win over Middle America. Vote with your remote while you still have the chance.

—By James Poniewozik