

Edited for Television

Cheers to the '80s Number 1 TV Show

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1. CHEERS (NBC)

On Sept. 30, 1982, the debut of my pick for the best show of the '80s was destroyed in the ratings by "Too Close For Comfort" and "Simon and Simon." After four episodes, it ranked 60th out of only 66 programs, but critics loved it, and more importantly, so did NBC Entertainment President Brandon Tartikoff, who committed to a full season. Wise decision.

The show is set in a Boston bar, a perfect place where characters can enter and exit the story in an uncontrived fashion. But the show is about characters and not about a bar. Diane sums it up well.

"And where better than here to study life in all its facets? People meet in bars, they part. They rejoice, they suffer. They come here to be with their own kind."

"Cheers" is essentially the story of Sam Malone (Ted Danson) and Diane Chambers (Shelley Long). Sam, a former relief pitcher for the Boston Red Sox, bought the bar while he was an alcoholic and held on to it for "sentimental reasons" after conquering his problem. On the premiere episode, he hires Diane after she is dumped by her fiancé, Sumner Sloan. Over the next five years a stormy relationship ensues.

This relationship was the strength of "Cheers." Producers Glen Charles, Les Charles and James Burrows agreed that the characters should develop from first episode to last episode, unlike most sitcoms. By serializing the romantic story line, the show has a sense of history, with each season being unique. The series is not just a bunch of strung-together gags, and the plots are

not melodramatic. Instead, the quality of writing is sometimes so good there is very little need for situational conflict, and all the humor can come out of the characters.

While casting for the show, the producers went through hundreds of actors and actresses for the main two roles, including William Devane of "Knots Landing" and Fred Dryer of "Hunter." Danson and Long were chosen because of their excellent chemistry; the two assumed the personas of Sam and Diane excellently, and the show was built around them.

But Sam and Diane are also one of the major points of criticism for the show. Neither character is entirely likable. Sam is a womanizer; Diane is an obnoxious intellectual. For some, it is hard to believe that they could have a relationship, but this should be one of the strong points. Sam is not really as uncaring and shallow as he would have us believe, and Diane is not always that bright.

As we begin to see the depths of the characters, we only like them more. Their motivations make sense, and their conflicts are understandable. Although Diane teases Sam about being stupid, she does admit that he isn't. "Sam happens to have a great deal of intelligence. If you could see behind his coarse facade... he pretends to be dumber than he is. Sometimes as a defense, and sometimes to provoke me."

Sam, on the other hand, wonders, "Do you know what it's like to be attracted to someone who makes you sick?"

During the first season, Sam and Diane build a strong platonic friendship. They date during the second season, but split up at the



end. Diane quits Cheers and goes to a nice little hospital in the country. There, she meets Dr. Frasier Crane, and they become the 'item' at the bar for season three. Then, she dumps Crane in Europe.

After leaving Frasier, Diane tours Europe in a mad dash of lovemaking, then repents in a Massachusetts convent. Sam persuades her to return to Cheers, and season four features Sam and Diane almost getting back together before Sam becomes serious with a local councilwoman. Leaving the councilwoman, Sam asks Diane to marry him in the fifth season. She finally says yes, and they buy a house, pick out a china pattern and

— bam — "Cheers" is number three out of more than 70 shows.

But since Shelley Long decided to leave the show, Diane walks out of the wedding after Sam calls it off. She finally has the chance to have a book published, and he tells her to have a good life even though she swears, "I'll be back."

That was "Cheers" for five years — but then came Rebecca, played by Kirstie Alley. After five years of developing the Sam and Diane story, it is terrible that it has to be totally forgotten. Rebecca doesn't work as Diane's replacement; there is no chemistry between her and Sam.

Don't get me wrong. "Cheers" is still an excellent program, but it

is not as good as it was. The show was essentially about Sam and Diane, not about Sam and a bar owned by a large corporation. Long needs to return, and for the sake of the show, it should end with their marriage.

However, the funny writing and the character development keep the show consistently nominated for Emmys. And Alley is able to make her character funny and entertaining, even though the writers don't seem to know what to do with her.

The supporting characters, who are all unique, interesting and

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Andrew Lawler's General College Overview

Major Characters	Current Storyline	Supporting Cast	Recently	Past Trivia
Jason Matthews and Courtney Daniels (Interracial Couple)	Hiding out in S.C. on suspicion of murder; love deepening	Mark and Randy: ex-racists. Grandma: S.C. inn owner	Dating led to violent dissent from members of both races	Jason: ex-philanderer (Meg, Paige, Steve?)
Anne Burns and Tessa Davenport (Enemies)	Tessa convinces amnesiac Anne, that Anne shot Trevor	Savannah: accomplice Trevor: victim	Tessa shoots Trevor after learning he fell for Anne	Tessa dealt coke to Anne and Courtney; Anne was addicted
Ken Bullock and Violet Jenkins (Couple)	Violet's ex-pimp Damon blackmails her into prostitution	Damon: pimp Gabriell: hooker	Ken and Violet met recently but quickly fell in love	Ken was Kyle's roommate and knows nothing of Violet's past
Billy Castle and Paige Ryan (Couple)	Happy, but troubled by Billy's brother, dating a Davenport	Chaz: Billy's brother Tara: dating Chaz	Perennially troubled couple	Paige used to be bulimic and (unknowingly) dated a rapist
Alex Whitney and Jack Christian (Couple)	Trisha Davenport is trying to drive Alex mad	Trisha and Priscilla: Jack's ex Trip: Alex's ex	After series of misunderstandings they are finally reconciled	Alex had multiple personality problems
Meg Ryan and Kyle Donovan (Therapist-patient)	Kyle gets therapy from Meg, and they begin to fall in love	None really	Ex-jock Kyle lost his legs after a drunken accident	Meg was raped by Paige's boyfriend
Brendan and Mary Catherine Grasty (Married couple)	Separated; the mystery of Sarah deepens	Sarah: M.C.'s "friend" Simone: Brendan's ex-lover	M.C. loses baby; Brendan had affair with Simone	(Future Hint) Simone's search will trouble all