

TELEVISION EUNY HONG-KORAL

Why it's a real struggle to care about Kristin

Sometimes while watching a programme, I can feel my brain actually rotting – my neurones shrivelling up and dropping like bad fruit from a vine. NBC's forthcoming mid-season series, *Kristin*, is one such programme. Its titular character (played by Kristin Chenoweth) is a diminutive born-again Christian from Oklahoma who has come to New York to launch a career as a Broadway actress. Just as she is about to return home after one failure too many, she lands a job as a secretary for a sleazy New York property mogul. Will Kristin be corrupted, or will her boss mend his errant ways? Who cares? (NBC. Date to be announced.)

If this were the 1950s, and the programme's stars were Debbie Reynolds and Tony Curtis, and if the writing were any good, this could have been a cute show. I am guessing that this programme's appeal is supposed to lie in Chenoweth's alleged charm: as she tells us in the second episode: "I really like acting and singing and dancing, too, and sometimes I get to do all three at once." It's not a good policy to make such a boast, then to belt out an off-key rendition of "Fever", as she does in this programme.

Chenoweth reminds me of a girl with whom I attended high school, the type who slept in hair rollers and liked horses a great deal. She used to sing "Memories" (from the musical *Cats*) at every assembly. The teachers told her she would make it to Broadway for sure. I thought they were just indulging her, but when I learned that Chenoweth is a Tony Award winner (for her work in *You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown*), I could only conclude there must be hope for anybody.

Another mid-season replacement, but far more worthwhile, is *Three Sisters*,

by David Alan Basche), the bewildered husband of the eldest sister. He feels wiped out by the oestrogen surging around him. The girls and their mother are inseparable, and Steven's only ally is his father-in-law George (played by Peter Bonerz, from *The Bob Newhart Show*).

This is small consolation to Stephen, since George surrendered to henpecking decades ago, and has been reduced to finding solace in arcane concerns. He tries to foist "pant pyjamas" – his newest obsession – on his son-in-law, exclaiming: "They're pyjamas that can pass as regular pants! No, really! Feel it!"

After a rocky pilot, the show picks up momentum with the second episode, in which the exasperated Steven unleashes his pent-up frustration: "I'd like to be

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able to buy a car without having to go through your 52 back issues of Consumer Reports just because 'Only a sucker gets suckered'."

The programme has a certain sweetness. Being the eldest of three sisters myself, I was amused by this programme's stereotypical but recognisable portrayal of the important role birth order plays in three-daughter families. When eldest daughter Bess discovers Nora (middle sister) is using Annie's (youngest) gynaecologist, Bess is insulted: "Why are you seeing her gynaecologist and not mine?" Nora's reply: "I go to you for different things. I go to you for matters of career and

Going in ascending order of quality, we come to *Grounded for Life*, which has elsewhere been given the dubious distinction as the best mid-season replacement of the year. (FOX. Wednesdays at 8.30pm ET, 7.30pm CT.)

I was pleasantly surprised to discover it stars Donal Logue and Kevin Corrigan who, until now, were staples of the impoverished independent film circuit. Logue's stock role was "fat guy" (from *The Tao of Steve*) and Corrigan's was "ugly guy" (from *Walking and Talking*) – the scripts' descriptions, not mine. Independent film used to be a stalwart of anti-commercial arty types. Now there seems to be a direct feed from the Sundance film institute to Fox studios.

If that's the way it's going to be, this programme is an excellent way for them to sell out. Logue's character, named Sean Finnerty, is the hapless father of two children – the result of a teen pregnancy that led to a loving shotgun marriage. He and his wife are still too young and immature to face the responsibility of raising pre-teens, which leaves them living under the thumb of their exasperated children: "Dad, do you mind not watching porno while I'm trying to study?"

This programme is promising, as far as these prime-time family sitcoms go. But it's a sad state of affairs when I watch a character throwing fried chicken at a car – as Logue does in the pilot – and think: "How original."

I watched this programme on a review tape that wasn't completely finished. Towards the end of the pilot episode, the following words flashed on the screen: "Two Logos and Six Seconds of Music." When I realised the text was just a temporary placeholder for information