

TELEVISION EUNY HONG KORAL

# Marriages and summer misfits

I've been watching the network season finales over the past few weeks. The networks declined to send advance tapes; they were worried reviewers would disclose the endings. But what could we give away that hasn't already been hinted at? Weeks prior to airdate, adverts for the finales showed clips of Christina Applegate (from *Jesse*), Tori Spelling (*90210*) and Jane Leeves (*Frasier*) donning wedding gowns.

Once the flossy-haired, flat-tummied Beautiful People have been married off, the edgier shows can rear their heads. Television networks typically order these summer series a year in advance, but treat them like insane relatives, chaining them to a bed until the regular programmes go on hiatus.

The first to come out at this summer's anti-debutante ball is Michael Moore's *The Awful Truth*, a counter-cultural television magazine in the tradition of an over-staged student protest. (Bravo, Wednesdays at 10pm ET.)

Moore's *modus operandi* reminds one of a passage from Jonathan Swift: "When a true genius appears in the world, you may know him by this infallible sign, that

— or, to use conspiracy theorist parlance, "the military-industrial complex".

The gonzo-style documentary *Roger and Me* (1989) marked Moore's first big splash on the media scene. The chummy-sounding title gives the impression that this film is about two buddies on a road trip. Only here, the buddies are actually total strangers, and rather than travelling together, one of them is stalking the other.

The film chronicles Moore's gutsy but failed attempts to bring Roger Smith, then CEO of General Motors, to Flint, Michigan, to show him how the town unravelled when GM closed the car plant there.

The film billed itself as the "story of a rebel and his mike". It is a droll and mostly likeable film, but it has an ironic

being admitted to Smith's office, home, and private athletic club. It does not occur to him that few people would open their homes to an overgrown Holden Caulfield barking accusatory questions at them, clad in a dusty baseball cap and an untucked shirt, guerrilla camera crew in tow.

*The Awful Truth*, which has just begun its second season, shows us an ageing lout going off the deep end. The season premiere had Moore thumbing his nose at the corporate sponsors who, he claims, were too timid to purchase commercial slots during his programme. He had criminals endorse these companies' products: "I did 19 years in Trenton State prison for first degree murder, and I only use Windows 98."

In one of the premiere episode's segments, Moore visits the campaign headquarters of US

and be passed around. When he confronted George W. Bush with the offer, the candidate replied: "Go find real work." Sounds like good advice.

Another seasonal offering is the adversarially titled *M.Y.O.B.* (Mind Your Own Business), a new half-hour dramatic series about a teenage orphan named Riley who comes to San Francisco to live with her aunt.

So aware is this programme of its summer misfit status that its heroine dares the viewer: "You don't wanna watch? That's okay. *Law and Order* is bound to be on somewhere." Please, what channel?

Nothing about *M.Y.O.B.* makes any sense. (NBC, Tuesdays at 9:30 pm.) In the season premiere we learn that Riley's mother is living in a cult commune in Finland and thus cannot be re-united with her long-lost daughter. The cult apparently is not that isolated after all, because somehow the mother is able to e-mail her sister that she has no interest in the child.

It is hard to imagine that anyone would be interested in this child. She hypocritically makes fun of other teen shows, remarking eloquently: "God, can you believe this crap?" No, I can't.

It's all right to be acerbic if one wants to be, but there