

## Television

### Small Screen Sundance

Television searches for its equivalent of independent film.

By Drew Pissarra



*Artistic License* (Photo credit: New York Television Festival)

Budding filmmakers have Tribeca. Aspiring dramatists have the Fringe. So where's a self-styled Mark Burnett or Larry David supposed to go in this town? The answer might be the New York Television Festival. Maybe.

Festival founder Terence Gray has pulled together a formidable board of directors, trend-oriented panels, a handful of how-to symposiums, a couple of gimmicky broadcasts and the requisite lineup of fledgling pilots for his inaugural installment of this five-day-long, small screen answer to Sundance. NYTVF is nothing if not ambitious.

Where it looks most likely to succeed is as a nexus of networking. Industry types and novice videographers (with stars—or dollar signs—in their eyes) will get together to discuss the FCC's influence on network programming, avenues for international distribution and reality television's revitalization of New York as a production hub.

The TV LAND panel on Saturday, October 1, moderated by *Rolling Stone* magazine's David Wild, is as imposing an assemblage of executive producers as you're likely to find in one room on the East Coast: Diane English (*Murphy Brown*), Stan Lathan (*Def Comedy Jam*), Bill Persky (*Kate & Allie*), Phil Rosenthal (*Everybody Loves Raymond*), and Mike Scully (*The Simpsons*) are all slated to appear.

Quirkily conceived screenings of established shows—a cheesy 3-D presentation of *I Love the '80s*, a director's cut of *Arrested Development's* pilot, an episode premiere from *The Office*—are a little more hit or miss.

Even acknowledging the festival's likely successes, however, what should be NYTVF's calling card, the Independent Pilot Competition, is currently its weakest component. 230 pilots were submitted; 25 finalists, selected. In the living room facsimiles where they're presented, only a few of the new shows merit serious consideration despite guest stars like William Shatner (*Cooking's A Drag*) and Paul Giamatti (*The Fan and the Flower*).

*Artistic License*, a sitcom about an artistically inclined photographer at the Department of Motor Vehicles has an engaging cast and clever writing. ("You're a civil servant and an artist. What could be more profound?") Equally promising if less polished, the mockumentary *Made-Up* skewers America's newfound obsession with cinema verite by focusing its handheld camera on a household of earnest, unemployed circus clowns.



*Made-Up* (Photo credit: New York Television Festival)

Far from groundbreaking, most programs favor the familiar then add a questionable twist: an *MTV Cribs* for geriatrics (*Knock Knock*), a *Blind Date* for obsessed pet owners (*Heads or Tails*), a *What's Up Tiger Lily* for those with ADHD (*Criss Cross*). To his credit, director of programming Brent Burnette is already envisioning ways of generating fresher material next year by facilitating connections between writers and directors via the internet and actual get-togethers.

"I have to get the peanutbutter and the chocolate to bump into each other," he said. It's a sweet idea.

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