

## THE YEAR'S BEST SHOWS

BY JEFF JENSEN AND MELISSA MAERZ



BEST + WORST

# Television

# 1

## TRANSPARENT AMAZON

YES, IT'S A DRAMA about three adult siblings (Amy Landecker, Gaby Hoffmann, and Jay Duplass) who have a trans parent (Jeffrey Tambor as Maura, formerly Mort). But that's not the only reason this show from Jill Soloway feels so groundbreaking. Maybe it's that Maura's identity

is the most solid one in the family, considering that her kids are still figuring out who they are. Or maybe it's that *Transparent* challenges the idea that great drama needs heroes or antiheroes: Every character is both at once, making you love them one moment and hate them the next. The show also offers sharp observations about the strange intimacy of siblings, the reinvent-yourself culture of Los Angeles, and the hard-to-admit fact that our parents' sexuality plays a formative role in our own. But its most powerful message is that Maura's experience is so ordinary, because no one's self-image matches the way others see them, whether they're trans or not.

ILLUSTRATION BY SIMON PRADES

## 2 / RECTIFY SUNDANCE TV

The long goodbye to the anti-hero era has been fixated on redemption. *Sons of Anarchy* was cynical about it. *Mad Men*, surprisingly hopeful. Searching the hazy in-between is *Rectify*, a drama about a liberated death-row convict bewildered by his freedom. Creator Ray McKinnon elevated his plaintive saga in season 2 by delving more deeply into a lost soul and those damaged by his brokenness as they pursued flawed strategies for reclamation and repair; and by remaining committed to truth-finding, patient pacing, and careful straddling of naturalism and subjectivity. *Rectify*, a spiritual drama most humane, exemplifies the best qualities of the redemptive process not in its story but in the telling.

## 3 / FARGO FX

*American Horror Story* may have reinvented the anthology format, and *True Detective* may have

to die inside you if that's what's required." —CLAIRE (ROBIN WRIGHT), *HOUSE OF CARDS*

to riveting effect, as Don (Jon Hamm) fought through his shame and resentment to reconstruct a better man: daring to be real with his daughter; helping former secretary/now boss Peggy (Elisabeth Moss) flourish. Tempering the optimism were omens of obsolescence and one heartbreaking death that left Don staggered all over again, and us wondering anew where his up-in-the-air life will land. The impending answer will bring to a close one of TV's greatest dramas—and an era.

## 8 / GAME OF THRONES HBO

After four seasons of hero-decapitating, wedding-massacring, small-boy-defenestrating suspense, you'd think *Game of Thrones* couldn't shock us anymore. But with Jonrey's poisoning, the Red Viper's eye gouging, and Tywin's death atop the, uh, "throne," there were more opportunities than ever to yell "WHAT?!" at the TV. What's surprising, then, is that the most talked-about scenes weren't the out-of-nowhere deaths, but the scenes that made us care fiercely about the living. Cersei's rape might've been a showrunner blunder, but it inspired more thoughtful debates about consent than you'll find on most college campuses. And Tyrion's courtroom lampooning of the hypocrites in the Red Keep was deeply satisfying. He wasn't just defending himself—he was speaking for all of us.



## 9 / THE GOOD WIFE CBS

*The Good Wife* continued its resurgence, tracking Florrick/Agos' rebellion and spinning clashes with Lockhart/Gardner into complex, cheer-for-all-sides warfare, while Will's (Josh Charles) death yielded examinations of grief that avoided clichés and assuagements. This season's been telling a slow-burn story about the cost of relativism and limits of progressivism: Cary (Matt Czuchry) facing the consequences of representing a drug lord; Florrick/Agos diversifying; and Alicia (Julianna Margulies) venturing into politics without getting her soul dirty. Emmy, please watch closely.

## 10 / HANNIBAL NBC

This engrossing transmutation of Lecter pulp into TV serial dared to depict pop cult's loony romance with evil as a literal doomed one. Hugh Dancy's Will tried to beat Mads Mikkelsen's cannibal at his own game—and wound up gutted by his adversary. Along the twisted path, the show explored themes of transcendence and transgression in intimacy, religion, art, and dining. The audacity of the subject matter was matched by the inventiveness of its presentation. *Hannibal* is like the roasted bird Will and Lecter swallowed during their last supper, "a rare but debauched delicacy."

## AND THE RUNNERS-UP...

**DOLLY & EM**  
This comedy about an actress (Emily Mortimer) who hires her oldest friend (Dolly Wells) as her assistant was the best depiction of the dark, competitive, mutually undermining underbelly of female friendship on TV.  
—MELISSA MAERZ



**JANE THE VIRGIN**  
It is important for you to know that Jane the Virgin is *may bien*, its virtues are as paradoxical as its pregnant-virgin premise: funny and full of feeling, wick-edly ironic and wonderfully sincere. Gina Rodriguez is the season's best breakout.  
—JEFF JENSEN

