



PAGING Doctor Love

The idea of yet another drama set in a hospital made many eyes roll when the series, *Grey's Anatomy*, was first slated as a mid-season replacement in 2005. But, soon enough, the television-viewing public became addicted, making it the number one show in official ratings. However, you may wonder what the appeal of the show is. By Faisal Al-Juburi

Last year, the magazine *Entertainment Weekly* named the entire cast of *Grey's Anatomy* - the weekly television relationship drama set in the fictitious Seattle Grace Hospital - the 2006 Entertainers of the Year. Created by Shonda Rhimes and starring Ellen Pompeo and Patrick Dempsey, the series, which began its third season in September of last year, is, quite frankly, a United States popular culture phenomenon, with more than twenty million viewers tuning in on Thursday nights to see how the romantic and professional lives of surgical interns, residents, and their attending doctors unravel. America, it seems, keeps craving for more, and producers are all too happy to feed that hunger, with a spin-off scheduled to begin next season. And, recently, countries around the world - including Jordan - have jumped on the show's bandwagon and embraced its tagline: "Neither medicine nor relationships can be defined in black and white. Real life only comes in shades of grey." *Grey's Anatomy*, for those of you who do not

know, takes its name from the medical textbook *Grey's Anatomy* and centers on intern Meredith Grey, whose mother was once a revered surgeon but later suffered from dementia, and her relationships with her on-again, off-again boyfriend Dr. Derek Shepherd and her friends and coworkers. Meredith is successful and intelligent, and yet she deals with everyday struggles that reveal her flawed nature - sometimes to an extent unheard of for a leading lady. Thus, her main appeal to the masses is that she is human, and she must face life in addition to all of the additional chaos that the hospital provides.

When ABC switched *Grey's Anatomy* from the Sunday to the more desired Thursday primetime slot, the advertisements straightforwardly told us to LOVE Thursdays, and we willingly obliged. After all, at the absolute core of the show - and the ultimate reason why many relate to it as a whole - is love, or, at the very least, the interminable quest for it in all of its forms: romantic, friendly, and familiar. And, as aforementioned, the desire for audiences to explore the nature of love through a one-hour drama appears to have

no foreseeable end. Television-viewers will soon have the opportunity to sift through their emotions on yet another night once Dr. Addison Montgomery, portrayed by actress Kate Walsh, relocates to Los Angeles and, in doing so, begins a new series and chapter in the *Grey's Anatomy* sensation. Aiming to attract a more mature audience, the soon-to-be titled weekly drama will feature an all-star cast in addition to Walsh, including heartthrob Taye Diggs, veteran actor Tim Daly, and Amy Brenneman, of *Judging Amy* fame. And, while solid details regarding the show have been closely guarded, it will apparently follow Dr. Derek Shepherd's ex-wife as she joins a small medical practice in a new city and attempts to start afresh with a clean slate – a situation with which many can undoubtedly identify. However, because *Grey's Anatomy* is embraced by millions and its spin-off has the potential to follow in its footsteps, it is easy to dismiss these fictional circumstances as slight small screen confections. And, while there are indeed moments when an episode of *Grey's Anatomy* can slip into the ranks of melodrama, the ultimate success of the show lies in the brutal honesty of its characters. The point is not whether or not each scene accurately depicts the hospital setting, even though painstaking efforts are reportedly made in order to ensure medical accuracy. Rather, the hospital merely serves as a place in which emotions are heightened, as an incubator, of sorts, in which intense feelings are fostered and eventually explode. The raw passion with which these characters live is what attracts us and makes us beg for more, for a special Super Bowl episode and an unprecedented two-part, three-hour second season finale.

To at least 10 percent of the United States population, the subject matter is undeniably addictive. The subconscious thirst to study and contemplate the characters' actions and reactions – because, frankly, they mirror our own – is like a medical need. And that, in essence, is what the series is saying. Romance, friendship, fear, anger, and hurt are all things that we must live with and sometimes suffer through in order to be whole human beings, in order to function properly. Tending to one's emotions is, in fact, just as important as ensuring the proper physical function of the body. And, ultimately, there are moments when the emotional and physical beings cannot be kept separate, when they must both be dealt with at the same time despite our desire to guard against such a convergence.

This notion is further emphasized throughout each episode of the series because the medical cases that arrive in the hospital on a daily basis – more often than not – parallel the social and mental states of the doctors tending to them. And, at the very least, life on the verge of loss reminds the physicians – and, by consequence, the audience – of the need to embrace and savor each moment, each gift that life provides. The most powerful tool that creator Shonda Rhymes uses, however, is the humanization of the show's central characters through their finely detailed quest for love. Because they have an almost godlike power and ability to heal, doctors are oftentimes held to a status of near-perfection and seen as being on an elevated level of the human race. But, to see them with basic human needs – as *Grey's Anatomy* so readily illustrates – makes us, the viewers populated with Average Joes and Janes, feel a great sense of ease, knowing that even those whom we occasionally deify cannot escape the

day-to-day entrapments of personal and professional lives, that they, too, cannot easily compartmentalize their lives. Ultimately, there are threads of humanity that bind us all, regardless of age, social status, or occupation. So, it is quite fitting that the actors who make up the ensemble of *Grey's Anatomy* were named the Entertainers of the Year. Not only have they invited our attention, they have, from a certain perspective, taken television entertainment to the next level and extended a form of hospitality by offering an olive branch of shared humanity to the portion of society looking for a reflection of itself in popular culture. And, from a far less intellectualized and analyzed perspective, they are the Entertainers of the Year because they are just plain fun to watch; because at the end of the day, drama is always far more enjoyable when one is the spectator rather than the begrudging participant. ■

“Tending to one’s emotions is, in fact, just as important as ensuring the proper physical function of the body”

