



THE HEIGHTS' R'N'R BRATS, BRACING FOR CANCELLATION: How do you talk to an angel?

## Taken to *The Heights* of ecstasy

by Rosie McCobb

Every single person I know has groaned in disbelief when I've told them that I love the Thursday television show "The Heights" [Except for your dear editor who think that it deserves to rank among the greatest bad TV programs of all time.—ed.]

Originally, I think the Fox Network came up with this show when they heard that the Seattle thing was really big with the twentysomethings. Eight kids living in an industrial town, schlepping through blue collarish day jobs in order to afford their after-work pipe dreams. Which is being in a band and making it work on their own terms. And wearing lots of plaid flannel and leather. And hanging out in the local pool hall in a town that's anything but flashy. Not a particularly original premise, especially with the release of "Singles" coming out shortly after the first episode, but not bad. At least it's a little closer to the real life of a typical twentysomething American than the saccharine environment that the characters on "Beverly Hills 90210" and "Melrose Place" dwell in.

The problem is, though, that the music this fictitious band "The Heights" makes is so drippy that I don't think even the drummer who doubles as a plumber could salvage the gush. And who the hell wants to admit to liking a show where the song that advertises it is "How Do You Talk to an Angel" (Capitol). Even I thought it sucked the first time I heard it, and after hearing it by accident when I've flipped by Kiss 108 on numerous occasions, I think that that in itself makes it suck even more. That plus the fact it was the number one single in the country.

But the point is, while it is somewhat embarrassing to stand up for a show that is trying to score an audience through this horrible concept of a band making mainstream, pop music on TV and getting on real-life Top 40 playlists, I've kept watching because the show, plotwise, is *really* good.

No joke. There are times during the Thursday night 9-to-10 slot that I actually say "Yes!" out loud, meaning something is occurring on screen that I can relate to. Take the recent episode when, for example, one of the girls, Rita, was asked by her female chums if she'd done "the deed" yet with her smokin' beau, Alex. The answer was "no," and after dealing with the shock and disappointment of her friends, and her own worries over why this hadn't yet occurred, she decided to put the major power moves on him. What happened is that she got stone cold dissed. So not only did she end up looking like a horndog sleazebucket for having gone to such extravagant lengths (a short, black dress, plenty of cleavage, a new 'do, candlelight dinner, some cool old Ella Fitzgerald record) to entice her man, she ended up feeling rejected.

I'm sure any single female in these modern times can guess why, 'cause in real life (as many of my female friends have

complained about) the norm seems to be that not only are guys are no longer interested in sex, they get offended when *you* put the moves on *them* [Eeeiiyyh! Chris Cornell imitators, no doubt.—ed.]. They have to be in the mood, and god forbid you should want it when they aren't.

I guess, though, this frighteningly realistic portrayal of modern relationships, where air time is frequently devoted to solving disputes by way of feminine logic, is what causes each and every one of my guy friends to not budge on their stance of "The Heights is stupid." While many of my female friends originally had that kind of attitude, after they actually sat down and watched the thing, they developed a fondness for it. Not only were they impressed with the fact that the problems and situations on the show were very real and easy to relate to, they were impressed with the way in which the issues were presented. Unlike "Beverly Hills 90210," where sometimes you wonder just who the block-head writer is who comes up with some of the truly awful soliloquies which Brenda and Brandon seem to spout to no one in particular when they're trying to make a righteous point, the characters on "The Heights" are lucky enough to have a writing team who actually remember how real people talk to each other. And that, at times, real people can be real assholes on purpose.

No one on the show makes speeches. No one on the show ever says anything that would cause a viewer to scream "who the fuck would really say that?" And while there are definitely some "tender" moments towards the end of each episode, they aren't drowning in sentimentality; they're well deserved and usually schluffed off by the characters themselves—making a joke out of the situation to clear up any discomfort over a heavy moment.

And unlike the problems on "Melrose Place," which are all entirely solved by the end of each show and result in their own brand of "tender moments," the problems on "The Heights" never really end, because the characters have been assigned certain personality traits since the first episode. So while Jane from "Melrose Place" acquires, realizes and loses an eating disorder all in one episode, Jody (who like Jane, is young, in love and pregnant, but unlike Jane, has been so for the entire time, not just for one episode), over a period of a few weeks, becomes increasingly estranged from her mother. Due her mother's dislike for Dizzy, her fiance, Jody has to tell off ma to stick up for Dizzy.

You also don't get that feeling that you're watching something that's been entirely fabricated for TV. Unlike "Melrose Place," the characters move around in a real town, where there are other people around. The photography (videography?) has a movie-like quality and that sometimes utilizes minor slow-motion effects or striking camera angles. Plus, it's easy to believe that the ensemble cast are truly friends who naturally hang out together, whether they have a big "issue oriented" problem or not (unlike the cast on "Melrose Place" who only seem to come in contact with each other when problems arise). Most importantly, the writing is really on it. The characters speak like real people (and occasionally say things that are truly ironic or amusing), have problems that your average person has and allows for true human emotion to effect the viewer [I know I wept for hours when they got their first gig—a \$1000 affair for a Sweet 16 party.—ed.].

So I'm gushing over a Hollywood-produced TV show. But the word is it that "The Heights" is going to get canned. If any show deserves to get the axe, it should be "Melrose Place" in my opinion, but if you still think "The Heights" doesn't deserve a chance, due to the embarrassingly lame music the band makes, I'm happy to report that the writers are smartening up. Last week, instead of ending the show with a band video in an effort to sum up the problems that had arisen on that episode, they left it out, realizing that the band thing should just be a part of the Heights kids' lives, not a major requirement in every episode.

And while I doubt the producers are going to make the music the band plays more cutting edge, what they've actually done in terms of presenting a realistic forum for the lives of twentysomethings is pretty fucking cutting edge in my opinion. Take, for example, the episode where Rita and Alex were actually shown, nude limbs and all, having a steamy encounter. They made out, declodded and grabbed for a condom. On national, prime-time TV. So if for nothing else, being able to see James Walters' tattoo in the flesh should at least make the women and gay men of this country watch "The Heights" from now on. And write to the Fox Network to make sure it stays on the air. ♦

## Uggblatt

by J.T. Colfax

**I CAN'T EVER SEEM TO REACH YOU... What did he say after I left?... YOU'RE IN AN OBVIOUS RUT AND THEREFORE YOU'RE FIRED...I thought of something you can do today... CLAIM YOU COULD DO IT WITH YOUR EYES CLOSED... I'd like to buy a bell, you know, a woggin bell, it's a gift... I SUSPECT THAT THIS WAS DELIBERATELY COOKED CARELESSLY... That would look great on the bottom of a pool... THAT VACUUM SURE IS MAKING AN AWFUL RACKET...**