

Station Control

DIFFICULT SUBJECT MATTER

BY BENJAMIN CARR

THE BEST STORYTELLING CAN BE challenging, political and divisive. It takes stances on issues. Its characters take risks and carry viewers along to view the consequences. When you agree with the points of view, it affirms your worldview. When your television program diverts away from what you find normal and acceptable, it can change the way you look at the world. It isn't necessarily easy to watch but can make for very intriguing television. While 2017 has been divisively political from its outset, it seems fitting that some of its newest television offerings are tackling challenging ideas.

THE HANDMAID'S TALE (Hulu)

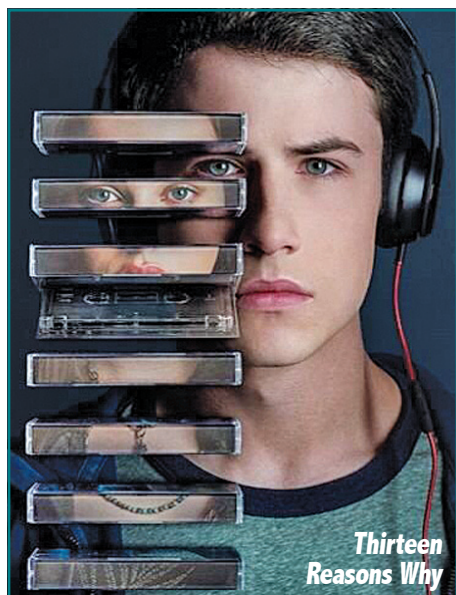
The Handmaid's Tale is a stunning, faithful and downright scary adaptation of the 1985 Margaret Atwood sci-fi classic. It stars *Mad Men's* Elisabeth Moss as the title character, alongside *Gilmore Girls* star Alexis Bledel, *Chuck* star Yvonne Strahovski and *Orange Is the New Black's* Samira Wiley. Both the book and show take place in a near-future Boston where infertility is epidemic and fundamentalist Christians have taken over society and enslaved the remaining fertile women, forcing them to become concubines and incubators for infertile, high-ranking couples. Everyone within this society is assigned a role within a household. The commander husband, played by Joseph Fiennes, attempts to conceive a child with the handmaid only at "ceremonies" wherein his wife is present and participating. The handmaid lies in the wife's lap as conception is attempted. This moment, played out in the pilot episode, is perhaps its most jarring, even though other scenes are more violent and the show's look and atmosphere is oppressive. Atwood's world is vivid and frightening; her ideas are weird, difficult, resonant and nightmarish. The fact that the show is watchable and wry - even at its most troubling - is a credit to the show creator Bruce Miller and the director Reed Morano.

THIRTEEN REASONS WHY (Netflix)

When suicide occurs within a family or within a group of friends, there are rarely satisfying answers that can be found - only heartbreak, pain, blame and confusion. Teen suicide can be more tragic as youth hold so much future and promise.

Any show that attempts to focus on this topic is walking a fine line. The new Netflix series, based upon the popular Jay Asher novel, places teen suicide at its center, focusing its entire narrative on why a young, pretty girl named Hannah Baker - played by newcomer Katherine Langford - would slit her wrists.

The show is partly an escapist fantasy for Hannah has narrated her own suicide note into a



series of audiotapes, devoting blame for her death to 13 acts from colleagues in her high school. As the protagonist Clay - played with an awkward Everyman charm by Dylan Minnette - puzzles his way through what Hannah says happened to her, the implicated classmates all attempt to control the fallout of their actions.

This whole premise is challenging because it dares to suggest that one person's suicide is other people's fault or that life is governed in a cause-and-effect way. It also builds momentum as a mystery as the main character doesn't listen to the suicide note all at once. The pilot is directed by Oscar winner Tom McCarthy, who also serves as a producer in this gripping drama.

ONE DAY AT A TIME (Netflix)

To end on a brighter note, Netflix also launched the reboot of this Norman Lear sitcom earlier this year, and it is a wonderful, fun show that isn't afraid to take a stand. Still a sitcom about a divorced mom raising her kids in an apartment with a wacky superintendent named Schneider, this new version stars the great Justina Machado and Oscar winner Rita Moreno.

Machado portrays Penelope Alvarez, a Cuban-American nurse who is recovering from PTSD from an Army deployment to Afghanistan. The scene-stealing Moreno plays her mother Lydia, a beautiful Cuban immigrant who still engages in salsa dancing. Penelope has a daughter and son, both coping with their parents' recent divorce. The oldest daughter also is a vegan environmentalist questioning her sexuality.

Beyond all of the issues mentioned, which are handled gracefully and organically, the show is also very, very funny. It's a thoughtful, intelligent and well-meaning show. And its heart is strong.

SHAFFER FROM PAGE 14

business. So I made this record for him. It's on Rhino but the label says Sire just for old time's sake.

In keeping with the whole historic vibe, you have Seymour's old partner at Sire as producer.

Yeah, Richard Gottehrer. I used to work for him when I was doing union sessions in the '70s. You know, he was in The Strangeloves and they had that hit "I Want Candy" and he wrote "My Boyfriend's Back." So anyway, with this record I got a lot of that old history and filled in some of the blanks of my own knowledge of that early New York rock history.

You certainly assembled an eclectic all-star lineup for it.

Yeah we have Bill Murray on it and the great Jenny Lewis, this fantastic alt-country-rock chick. She does a beautiful job on the song "Sorrow" that Richard wrote, The McCoy's first recorded and David Bowie also covered. We have Darius Rucker, Shaggy, the incredible Dion - my goodness, "The Wanderer" himself - and Valerie Simpson who sings her own hit "I Don't Need No Doctor."

She's on tour with you and was on your first album. You guys must go way back.

We've been friends since we used to run into each other when we were both doing session work in the '70s. She's a background vocalist on anything from the first Blood, Sweat and Tears record to commercials for Dermassage lotion - which is when I met her. We were both selling Dermassage! And now on the tour she comes out and does a half hour in the middle of the set. I think it's really worth seeing.

This tour is your first big-scale project since that final Letterman broadcast a couple

of years ago. [Drummer] Anton Figg said that last show was a surreal experience. What's your take on it in retrospect?

Surreal certainly describes it. Then there was that moment when I said, "What am I going to do now?" It had been 33 years when you combine the NBC and CBS shows.

33 years of always knowing where you're going to be and then, all of a sudden, you're free to do anything you want! It took me a good year to kind

of get over it and regroup and try to figure out what to do. Taking the band on the road has been great.

Without the daily pressures of TV has the band dynamic changed it all?

Well certainly when we start a song we can finally play it all the way through. We don't have to fade into commercials anymore.



YOU'VE GOT A GREAT MUSICAL TRADITION DOWN THERE IN ATLANTA, TOO. "TRACES," OF COURSE, IS ONE OF MY FAVORITE SONGS FROM ATLANTA BY THE CLASSICS IV. AND THE ATLANTA RHYTHM SECTION, PAUL DAVIS, ALL OF THAT STUFF.

HOME THEATER

NEW RELEASES

THE LATEST DVD, BLU RAY & VOD RELEASES

By John Moore

BLACKHEARTS

(MVD Visual)

Whether you're a fan of the music or not, Black Metal has always been a fascinating topic. Thanks to whispers about ties to Satanism and church burnings, it's likely one of the most widely talked about genres that very few have ever actually heard. In this fascinating documentary, filmmakers follow musicians from Iran, Greece and Columbia as they all make plans to trek to Norway, the birthplace of Black Metal. The individual stories are fascinating, especially that of Sina an Iranian metalhead who can easily end up jailed or kicked out of his country for playing Black Metal. There is also a subplot around one Greek Black Metaler who dreams of writing a memorable Christmas song and even more laughable, the Columbia band that pledge their souls to the devil to help get enough money to make it to Norway. Devil horns high in the air for this one.

SPLIT

(Universal Studios Home Entertainment) Despite being a wildly entertaining

thriller, *Split* will likely always first be known as the movie that revived M. Night Shyamalan's career. It focuses on Kevin (played brilliantly by James McAvoy), a loner who kidnaps three teenagers from a mall parking lot. As he holds the girls captive underground somewhere, they begin to discover his multiple personalities, (23 that his psychiatrist knows about). A final personality is revealed toward the end and like all of Shyamalan's great early movies, there is definitely a twist. A fantastic thriller from start to the very final minute.



DONNIE DARKO LIMITED EDITION

(Arrow Video)

Sixteen years after it was first released, Richard Kelley's *Donnie Darko* has morphed from a simple cult classic to outright cultural touchstone. The puzzling, but fantastic '80-set drama mixes teen angst with mystery and sci-fi, a formula that creators of *Stranger Things* borrowed liberally from for their series. Arrow Video has just put out a fantastic 4-disc collector's set that includes the original movie on Blu-Ray and DVD, a director's cut of the film and a slew of extras including several featurettes, deleted and altered scenes and infomercials for the movie. This beautiful box set also comes with a book featuring an interview with Kelly and promotional material.

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