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Seven reasons why 'The Good Doctor' is fall TV's only breakout show

The ABC drama thoughtfully explores prejudice and autism, plus it has really cool graphics



"The Good Doctor," the only breakout TV show of the fall season, stars Freddie Highmore (pictured) as a surgeon on the autism spectrum. Photo Credit: ABC

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"The Good Doctor" (Mondays at 10 p.m. on ABC/7) is a good show. Of equal note, it's a *hit* show, and the only breakout of the fall season. About a surgical resident named Shaun Murphy (Freddie Highmore) who's on the autism spectrum, "The Good Doctor" has been averaging more than 17 million viewers so far this season, beating out "This Is Us" and even prime-time champ "NCIS."

How did this happen? Let's count the ways:

It's "House." Of course, "TGD" is not *exactly* "House" — the huge Fox hit that ended in 2012 — because it's based on a Korean show. But "House" is in its DNA. "House" showrunner David Shore developed this for ABC, and at least two "House" producers (Thomas L. Moran and David Hoselton) are among the executive producers. Then there are the comparisons between "House" star Hugh Laurie and Highmore: both English, both Cambridge graduates, both first-rate actors.

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It's about bias and prejudice. There's never *not* been a good time to explore this subject, but "TGD" comes at it in a particularly novel way. The other residents at San Jose St. Bonaventure —

including chief of surgery Marcus Andrews (Hill Harper) and attending surgeon who oversees the residents Dr. Neil Melendez (Nicholas Gonzalez) — have all had to overcome bias in their own lives and careers. Now they must wrestle with their biases against Murphy. The reversal neatly explores the concept of what a “good doctor” is (or is not) but also what a good person is.

It's got cool graphics. Hey, who doesn't love cool graphics? The special effects transpose Murphy's thoughts onto the screen, and suddenly you're inside his head. “House” and “CSI” perfected this technique long ago, but “TGD's” sparkling graphics are at least educational.

It's got cool dialogue. Hey, who doesn't love cool dialogue? You actually learn stuff by watching “TGD,” or at least imagine you do. The dialogue is a constant patter of med-talk, much of it bracing if unintelligible. Recall Murph's insta-diagnosis a couple of episodes ago: “We could manage the clotting risk preoperatively with an infusion of unfractionated heparin,” he said brightly. (Mmmm, unfractionated heparin.) Last week we learned about a “reboa,” otherwise known as a resuscitative endovascular balloon occlusion of the aorta.

It's got a terrific cast. First among equals is Richard Schiff — hospital president Dr. Aaron Glassman — who is the Wilson (Robert Sean Leonard) to Shaun Murphy's Gregory House. Then there are the savvy veterans Hill and Gonzalez, followed by British newcomers Chuku Modu (who plays Dr. Jared Kalu) and Antonia Thomas (Dr. Claire Browne). Thomas — who starred in the Brit TV classic “Misfits” — is the big breakout here.

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Its resolutions aren't made-for-prime-time fairy tales. Patients die at St. Bonaventure, or their fates aren't necessarily reversed. Recall the man who was refused a liver transplant because he had one glass of Champagne at his daughter's wedding; or the little boy who reminded Shaun of his dead brother, and who would end up dying himself after the closing credits? Life's tragic. So is “TGD.”

It's about autism. “TGD” is a sensitive, intelligent exploration of someone on the spectrum. Recall

(for example) the episode where Shaun needed the leak in his apartment faucet fixed so that it would sound exactly like the leak in his childhood home back in Wyoming. That particular bout of OCD in fact led to an inspiration for treating a patient — a plot twist that wasn't about *normalizing* the way someone with autism thinks and feels, but about *honoring* it. That's rare on TV, thankfully not unprecedented (see: Sundance's excellent "The A Word").

Heavy? Sure, at times, but there's levity here, too. Example: Last week, Glassman wondered if Shaun wanted someone to love in his life.

Shaun, abruptly: "I don't *want* love."

Glassman, casually: "OK, you want breakfast?"

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