

TV COMPILATION REVIEW

NORTHERN EXPOSURE SEASON 3

By Jeff K

The third season of one of TV's quirkiest hits, "Northern Exposure" has arrived on DVD—all 23 episodes of its first full season packed onto 3 double-sided discs with a decent selection of extras. These include from one to six minutes of deleted scenes per episode, outtakes, and scenes of a few deleted subplots, one of them 12 minutes in length.

Yep, it's another 17 hours and 37 minutes (approx) of Dr. Joe(l)'s anal self-absorption and whining tantrums, Maggie's defensiveness and over-compensation (and of course their by-then-standard sexual uncertainty and fencing), Maurice the astronaut's efforts to make something economically viable of Cicely AK, Holling and Shelley's May-December antics, and Chris in the Morning's philosophical and literary speculations, which include readings from Proust, "Paddle to the Sea" and Jack London. And of course the moose.

Created by Joshua Brand and John Falsey as a follow-up to "St. Elsewhere", "Northern Exposure" was in many ways the ultimate expression of the dialog-and-character-driven dramedy so popular in the late 80's and 90's, featuring eccentric personalities and off-center story lines rather than action.

The third season is usually when a show either runs out of gas or hits its stride, and "Northern Exposure's " third is definitely the latter, winning 6 out of 15 Emmy nominations. The sexual tension between Joel and Maggie is confirmed

in the episode “Oy Wilderness” and exploited in “It Happened in Juneau” and the story lines play with the psychic bond between Chris and his African-American half brother Bernard (who drives a Volvo) and has them trading dreams and desires in “Roots.” The Cirque du Soleil visits in “Get Real.”

We also meet more family members, including Maggie’s and Shelley’s mothers in “Burning Down the House” and “My Mother, My Sister”, as well as Joel’s ex-fiancee Elaine, and an entire new family for Maurice from his Korean War days in “Seoul Mates.” And of course Eve, the hypochondriac wife of the antisocial master chef Adam, in “The Bumpy Road to Love”, a witty send-up of “Misery” for which Valerie Mahaffey took home one of the show’s Emmys.

Special mention should be made of “Democracy in America” in which Holling has to run for mayor for the first time in his 23 year tenure. It’s as concise a primer on the whys and wherefores of voting and the electoral process as you’ll find on The History or Discovery Channels.

The show’s musical pallet expands this season to include not only folk, rock and Native American but Japanese, African and classical—Wagner, Copland, Beethoven and in “Wake Up Call”, the show’s ode to spring, the Bailliero from Canteloube’s “Chants du Auvergne” which accompanies a lyrical sequence that almost transcends the medium.

The DVD presentation is pristine and a notable improvement over broadcast. Even without an S-Video connection, the picture is sharp and the colors rich. The sound is almost clinical in its clarity and the Dolby Surround adds atmosphere to the music, though it all but disappears elsewhere.