

## WORST OF '90: TV

By MICHAEL GILTZ

The phrase "worst of the TV season" is redundant, and the batch of new shows from the three networks — and their smart-aleck little brother, Fox — has proven no exception. Not one series has become a commercial or critical success. Not one series deserved to. Not *Lifestories*, the medical drama that hoped to turn rectal examinations into Nielson gold. Not *Cop Rock*, the musical drama that broke into song, whether it ought to or not. Not even *Uncle Buck*, the sitcom that began with a small child saying, "You suck."

That child should have been called Cassandra, for the '90 TV season began with all the top honchos trumpeting risky shows and daring concepts. They were goosed by the unlikely triumph of *Twin Peaks* and the perceived encroachment of cable TV and VCRs. They promised to take the high road, concept-wise, and stick with quality.

Unfortunately, none of the new shows gave them anything worth sticking with. To be fair, network television has achieved a certain level of competence. It's fairly easy to find something

to watch that won't embarrass you in the event someone should walk into the room. And the casts have certainly become larger: *Evening Shade*, *Parenthood*, *WIOU* and countless other shows are simply bursting with formerly out-of-work actors like Dick Van Patten.

All that was missing was imagination. The three major networks — and their wacky next-door neighbor, Fox — turned to movies for help, which is a little like Larry and Curly turning to Moe. The result? *Uncle Buck*, *Parenthood*, two adaptations of *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* and, coming in a month or so, *Look Who's Talking*.

Of course, all these movies have one thing in common: They seemed like sitcoms to begin with. What networks seem to forget is that most successful spin-offs came from movies that didn't appear likely candidates for a weekly series, movies like *M\*A\*S\*H* and *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*. (No, I don't think *Alice* was a good series. But it was successful.) If someone decided to take a shot at adapting *Do The Right Thing*, audiences might perk up. But *Uncle Buck*?

Networks also turned to music for help. The aforementioned *Cop Rock* was

so ungainly it had a certain appeal. When would the men and women in blue burst into song? Has anyone bothered to write a tune for them?

*Hull High*, a musical drama aimed at the family audience, seemed like a live-action version of *Schoolhouse Rock*. Cute kids tapped their feet while sexy teachers cooed lines like, "Soft and round as a peach," to get across the joys of similes and metaphors and tight-fitting blouses.

If something entertaining and unusual did sneak through, such as last spring's *Twin Peaks*, it was hyped to



*Twin Peaks' Sherilyn Fenn does something — we have no idea what — with some sort of fruit. Perhaps there is some hidden meaning. This is supposed to be an example of good TV.*

the PBS documentary *The Civil War* as a reason to push *North and South: Book Three*.

death. Besides, how cutting edge can a show really be if your own mother calls up with her pet theory as to who killed Laura Palmer?

Of course, there are always patches of creativity. Unfortunately, they're likely to turn up on Fox, which isn't available in Gainesville unless you own a satellite dish or live in a bar. But rest assured that all interesting ideas will be quickly drained of vigor. Even now, someone is using the success of