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SURFING THE WAVES OF POPULAR CULTURE
BY MICHAEL GILTZ & FRIENDS

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"The Wire" Begins Season Four; Renewed For Fifth And Final Season

Well, I've given HBO plenty of grief for cancelling "Deadwood" prematurely. But at least they haven't made the same mistake twice. (And for various reasons, my rule of thumb is that you can't be disappointed over the cancelling of a show if it's had three seasons cause three seasons is usually as far as any drama should go creatively and clearly it had a shot ratings-wise.) "The Wire" has just begun airing Season Four and hallelujah, HBO has already renewed the show for its fifth and final season.

The reviews for season four have been phenomenal -- and well deserved, based on the first six of twelve episodes that I've seen. It's multi-layered, complex, subtle, and takes a while to build, this series. You can't multitask while watching it. It's best to watch it with a friend because you can parse out the plot twists together or ask what a character has just mumbled (and if you can't figure it out and are watching a DVD, use the subtitle function). No, it ain't immediately accessible. It's just gripping, funny, unexpected, moving, depressing and real.

Season One dealt with a wiretap on an inner city drug ring in Baltimore. Season Two focused on the ports and unions and corruption. Season Three dealt with politics. Season Four is looking at the school system. And Season Five will look at the media. That all sounds very dry -- every season revolves around a core group of wonderful characters on every side of the law, with the principal players shifting from year to year. The lead character of one season -- say McNulty -- will become a secondary character the next year. Literally every character is fascinating, so you are always thrilled to be dealing with whomever is front and center --but at the end of a show or a season, you'll say damn, I miss McNulty. How many shows paint with such a broad canvas? Almost none.

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