

PERSISTENT VOICE WEB EXTRA  
January, 2007

### **New TV Series *Studio 60***

Review by Chris deForest

Uplifting, thought-provoking, challenging: words not usually associated with late-night television – but just right for the new NBC dramedy *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip*. Of course, this isn't a real late-night show, but a show about a show. It's one of two new series that look inside a pretend *Saturday Night Live* – its cast, crew, and the network brass who harass them. The quality of the writing and acting is not surprising. This is, after all, an Aaron Sorkin creation, the writer/producer who gave us *The West Wing*, and who once again surrounds himself with a top-notch cast in an intense environment that brings out the best and worst in people.

The real surprise? To find a show about this industry – especially male-writer-dominated sketch comedy – with such strong female characters, and such rich discourse on faith. Amanda Peet plays Jordan McDeere, the new president of the fictitious NBS, brought in to save the ratings-poor network in general, and the worn-out *Studio 60* in particular. In the whirlwind first episode, Jordan's first day on the job, she single-handedly salvages an on-air disaster – the senior producer interrupts the live broadcast with a 53-second rant against today's TV. With confidence, composure and self-deprecation, she faces off with *uber*-demanding studio boss Jack (Steven Weber) as she cajoles two brilliant former writers (*Friend's* Matthew Perry and *West Wing* alum Bradley Whitford) to return and helm *Studio 60*, even though they'd been fired four years prior and have since gone on to bigger and better deals. She does all this while remaining real and human, caring about those around her, ready to laugh at every twist and turn; and by inspiring all in her orbit to strive for excellence, not out of terror or self-preservation, but in a spirit of creative joy bordering on abandon. For me, though she makes no profession of faith, Jordan lives as we all wish we could: not bound by fear, free to take a chance on each other and ourselves – the way God calls us to live in the gospel.

The other remarkable woman actually *is* overtly Christian. Harriet Hayes (Sarah Paulson) is also smart, sophisticated, and funny as hell. She's described as the greatest talent among these fictional "not-ready-for-prime-time" players, and among the most respected. She's attractive too, but her success is not derived or constrained by her looks. As the show-within-the-show dares to air sketches that tweak fundamentalists, everyone turns to Harriet for a reaction. Her ability to engage in honest dialogue even when she, too, is conflicted, her rational yet faithful responses, her willingness to find humor and hubris on all sides, even within herself – offer the finest role model of authentic Christian living I have ever seen on TV. It seems that Jesus can indeed be found in the strangest places – even in the cynical halls of late-night.

*Chris is currently taking a year off from M.Div studies at WTS, and is supporting his wife, Allison, on her internship in Colorado.*