

Television cult fave runs out of steam

After a quick four seasons, "The O.C." (9 p.m., Fox, TV-14) airs its final episode tonight.



Kevin McDonough

I do not pretend that I have faithfully followed every nuance of the show since its debut in late summer 2003, when it quickly became a pop culture phenomenon.

I was not shocked that Marissa Cooper was killed off last season, only that she didn't succumb to starvation.

Few shows inspire a line of Christmas, or make that Christmukkah, cards or generate as much cannibalizing cable competition ("Laguna Beach: The Real Orange County" and "The Real Housewives of Orange County").

Whatever one thought of the teen soap shenanigans on "The O.C.," the casting was strong, and the young leads, Mischa Barton, Benjamin McKenzie and Adam Brody, were endowed with star power.

The contrast between Ryan (McKenzie), the strong, silent type from the wrong side of the freeway, and Seth (Brody), the pop-culture-saturated chatterbox, was a natural.

And it was always fun to watch Peter Gallagher as bleeding-heart lawyer Sandy Cohen.

With rare exceptions, I am never happy to see a show canceled. But there is something about the fast and furious trajectory of "The O.C." that may make it more memorable than the average network series.

Many shows, even the best, outlive their greatness and outlast their audiences. Shows like "That '70s Show," "Malcolm in the Middle" and even "Seinfeld" come to mind.

In contrast, "The O.C." will vanish after a season that many in its dwindling cadre of fans consider a vast improvement over the previous one. No show lasts forever, and few shows could survive competition from "Grey's Anatomy" and "CSI."

"The O.C." will not be soon forgotten. Particularly since it begins a five-night-a-week round of syndication on Soap Net, beginning April 9. And there are always DVDs.

Former Oscar winners Julia Roberts, George Clooney, Nicole Kidman, Russell Crowe, Jamie Foxx and Sidney Poitier appear on "The Oprah Winfrey Oscar Special" (10 p.m., ABC).

Oscar purists need not worry: The Barbara Walters special will air on Oscar night (Sunday) as it has in years past.

Winfrey has a long Oscar history. She was nominated for Best Supporting Actress in 1985 for "The Color Purple" and was subject to David Letterman's awkward "Uma ... Oprah" routine during her last appearance.

ing his disastrous 1995 turn as host of the Academy Awards. • Filmmaker Rory Kennedy interviews soldiers, prisoners and experts on torture in the film "Ghosts of Abu Ghraib" (9:30 p.m., HBO). She tries to understand the policies and atmosphere that contributed to the use of torture and explores how the incidents and images from the prison have come to define the United States in the minds of the very people our government wants to liberate or at least make sympathetic to us.

Tonight's other highlights

• Joy's pregnancy makes Earl reminisce about their time together on "My Name is Earl" (8 p.m., NBC, TV-14). • Two men and two women face the ax on the results show of "American Idol" (8 p.m., Fox).

Cult choice

Michael Keaton gives the performance of his career as the trickster ghoul in the 1988 supernatural comedy "Beetlejuice" (8 p.m., Family), co-starring Alec Baldwin and Geena Davis.

Series notes

A third torch extinguished on "Survivor: Fiji" (8 p.m., CBS, TV-PG) ... The Green Arrow proposes a super league on "Smallville" (8 p.m., CW, r, TV-PG, D, V) ... Therapy on "Scrubs" (9 p.m., NBC, TV-14) ... Imaginary friends on "Supernatural" (9 p.m., CW, TV-14, D, L, V).

Late night

Billy Bob Thornton and Bare-naked Ladies appear on "Late Show with David Letterman" (11:35 p.m., CBS) ... Jay Leno hosts Peter O'Toole and Hello-goodbye on "The Tonight Show" (11:35 p.m., NBC) ... Randy Jackson, Jonathan Silverman and Boys Like Girls appear on "Jimmy Kimmel Live" (12:05 a.m., ABC).

Steven Kaplan chats on "Late Night with Conan O'Brien" (12:35 a.m., NBC) ... Craig Ferguson hosts Wolfgang Puck, Tom Lennon and Ben Garant on "The Late, Late Show" (12:37 a.m., CBS).

Kevin McDonough is a TV columnist for United Features Syndicate.

THURSDAY EVENING FEBRUARY 22, 2007

Table with columns for time slots (7 PM, 7:30, 8 PM, 8:30, 9 PM, 9:30, 10 PM, 10:30, 11 PM, 11:30) and rows for various TV channels (WTTV, WRV, WISH, WTHR, WFYI, WNDY, WTIU, WHMB, WCLJ, WXIN, WIPX, WDTI, A&E, AMC, AP, BET, BRAVO, CNBC, CMT, CNN, COM, DISC, EI, ESPN, ESPN2, FAM, FNC, FOOD, FOXMV, FOXSM, FX, HALL, HGTV, HIST, LIFE, MSNBC, MTV, NICK, OXY, SCIFI, SPIKE, TBS, TCM, TLC, TNT, TOON, TVL, USA, VH1, WE, WGN, DISN, ENC, HBO, SHOW, MAX, TMC, STARZ) listing their respective programs.

ACCENT ON PEOPLE

The Associated Press

Britney ends another short stint in rehab

Britney Spears left a live-in rehabilitation facility early Wednesday, less than a day after checking in, according to several reports.



SPEARS

It was the second time in a week that Spears entered a rehab facility and checked out before her first day was finished.

The television news magazine "The Insider" initially reported that Spears called a car service, walked out of the Promises Malibu Treatment Center and left the facility early Wednesday morning.

Later, the TV show "Extra" and the celebrity Web site TMZ.com said the 25-year-old pop star had left the center far short of the usual 45-day stay.

Entertainment TV shows and Web sites reported Friday that Spears had gone in and out of rehab that week. Some reports identified the facility as Eric Clapton's Crossroads center in Antigua, in the Caribbean.

Eddie Michaels, a spokesman for the public relations agency that handles Promises, said he had no comment. He would not confirm that Spears had been there or that she had left.

There was no response to an e-mail sent Wednesday to Spears' manager, Larry Rudolph. On Tuesday, Rudolph said Spears had voluntarily checked herself into an undisclosed treatment facility. Spears had a meltdown weekend that included shaving her head, tattooing her wrist and

clubbing with friends. On Friday night, she sheared off her hair at a salon. Spears was later seen wearing an inexpensive blond wig.

Since filing for divorce from Kevin Federline in November, Spears has been photographed pantyless, wearing skimpy outfits and partying heavily.

Burial takes on urgency as body decomposes

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla.

The drawn-out court battle over what to do with Anna Nicole Smith's body has a new sense of urgency: the starlet's remains are decomposing more quickly than expected and a public viewing could be in danger.



SMITH

That warning from Broward County's medical examiner Tuesday came as Smith's boyfriend and her estranged mother fought over where to bury the former Playboy pinup. The legal maneuvering that was set to continue Wednesday has been going on for about a week, and Smith died Feb. 8. Her cause of death is under investigation.

Also at issue in a California court is who fathered Smith's 5-month-old daughter, Dannielynn, who could inherit millions of dollars. Boyfriend Howard K. Stern is listed as the father on the birth certificate, but a photographer who once dated Smith says the girl is his.

Stern wants Smith to be buried next to her son Daniel in the Bahamas, where he died from apparent drug-related causes last year. The mother, Virgie Arthur, wants Smith and her grandson buried back in Smith's native Texas, her attorney said.

McCartney's estranged wife cast in 'Dancing With the Stars'

By DAVID BAUDER

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK Here's a bet there won't be any Beatles songs on the next 'Dancing With the Stars.'

ABC announced Wednesday that Paul McCartney's estranged wife, Heather Mills, will be among the competitors.

Mills will be the first contestant with an artificial limb to compete on the series, which returns for its fourth season March 19.

She lost the leg in a motorcycle accident in 1993.

Olympian Apolo Anton Ohno, boxer Laila Ali, former basketball star Clyde Drexler and actor Vincent Pastore, who played gangster Salvatore Bonpensiero on "The Sopranos," are also in the cast.

Jerry Springer, one of last season's competitors, teased ABC's "Good Morning America" audience before tossing out Mills' name.

"She may be a sentimental favorite," said Springer, even though Mills has Yoko Ono-like favorability ratings among many Beatles fans.

Her selection delivers a message that whatever challenges people face in life, they can dance, he said.

Mills is an activist for animal rights and elimination of the use of land mines.

"Dancing With the Stars" has proved to be a substantial hit for ABC, although this is the first time it will air when a season of Fox's "American Idol" is under way.

ABC will air its dancing competition on Monday and Tuesday nights to avoid going head-to-head with "American Idol."

Actor and former country star Billy Ray Cyrus, former "N Sync member Joey Fatone, Miss USA



Talk show host and former "Dancing With the Stars" cast member Jerry Springer announces the men and women who will be part of the show's new season. The contestants include Paul McCartney's estranged wife, Heather Mills.

petition on Monday and Tuesday nights to avoid going head-to-head with "American Idol." Actor and former country star Billy Ray Cyrus, former "N Sync member Joey Fatone, Miss USA

2004 Shandi Finnessey, former "Entertainment Tonight" host Leeza Gibbons, model Paulina Porizkova and former "Beverly Hills, 90210" star Ian Ziering round out the cast.

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