

## HEY, LANDLORD! THOUGHTS (2021)

*Hey, Landlord!* (1966-'67, NBC) is a low-concept multi-cam about two twentysomething men living together in a New York City apartment building, for which one of them serves as the landlord. It's a great example of the mid-'60s' emergent interest in targeting the 18-49 demographic with young, urban fare – a lot of it containing a snappy Neil Simon sensibility. (To wit, the premise itself is not *totally* dissimilar to *The Odd Couple*, which creators Garry Marshall and Jerry Belson would go on to produce just three years later.) Unfortunately, my thoughts on this series have not changed over time – I still think the core problem is that its leads are terribly undefined, which means they can't motivate story or encourage big laughs. Accordingly, it illustrates everything we talked about in the recent essay on Garry Marshall's style, specifically how I don't believe his sitcoms use the fixed elements of their "situation" well for regular comedy.

However, the show's funny ideas are no less funny than those on, say, the following season's *Good Morning, World* (1967-'68, CBS), which hailed from another pair of *Dick Van Dyke* vets, Bill Persky and Sam Denoff, and also sought a low-concept urban modernity... only to similarly fail in providing clear characterizations for its central pair. (This was largely because it also lacked the autobiographical structure, attention to detail, and intense threshold for believability that had made Carl Reiner's *Dick Van Dyke* so masterful with character.) In terms of quality, the only real difference I think is worth acknowledging – besides the fact that Marshall's work always feels a little more rose-colored and intentionally naïve in relation to most of his contemporaries – is that the *supporting* players on *Good Morning, World* actually do have comic shapes, so even though the leads don't, it boasts better character stuff overall than the almost totally blank *Hey, Landlord!* But that's faint praise, especially when they're situated next to *He & She* (1967-'68, CBS), another low-concept husband-wife multi-cam that's often compared to that year's *Good Morning, World* and is also a mid-'60s Neil Simon wannabe. For, you see, Leonard Stern's series, with help from a variety of sources, like *Mary Tyler Moore's* Allan Burns, was able to offer funny ideas *and* funny characters, eventually attaching them together in somewhat earned, motivated stories. Sadly, neither of these other two series, and particularly *Hey, Landlord!*, are ever as capable of the same.

As for episodic recommendations, I've only seen 16 of *Hey, Landlord!*'s 31 aired offerings, but of those 16, the most notable is easily "Testing... One, Two," given that it was remade for a classic installment of *Laverne & Shirley* (after also being sold as the story for a 1971 segment of the short-lived *Getting Together*, which, like *Landlord*, is also lacking as a result of not having strong comic personas equal to Marshall and Williams). Other than that, the worthiest entry I can currently vouch for is "Safari" (Episode 9), which takes advantage of the central pair's bachelorhood in a way that feels youthful, modern, and a little bit sexy – validating the low-concept premise and revealing the inherent freshness of the series' desire to reflect its targeted demographic. Oh, don't get me wrong, it's still goofy too – quintessentially '60s, and pure Garry Marshall – but it feels like a good sample of what the show could uniquely be as part of this mid-decade push for a specific subset of the audience (who seemed to be wanting more approximated realism and relatability, relative to the era), and for this representational value alone, I include it here in this brief footnote.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SX60VPSfI-Q>

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