

Why recycle the Osbournes?

by *L_Brent_Bozell*

When MTV creates hazardous waste on television, there is no Superfund cleanup program. Worse still, sometimes their toxic programs end up getting recycled by desperate executives eager for a sleazy splash. Fox is the latest network to ooze desperation by trying to take its hottest program, "American Idol," a huge hit with families, and follow it with "Osbournes Reloaded," a show so vile and lacking in redeeming social value that even Fox affiliates (reaching up to 11 percent of the nation's viewers) have delayed or refused to air it.

After seeing the promos for the program and looking at the six-minute "sizzle reel" the network sent their way, at least 16 Fox TV stations refused to air the rocker-shockers' truncated 35-minute "variety" special. An additional 10 Fox stations moved it into late night, as late as 1:35 in the morning. Fox was so concerned it screened the whole special for the Maryland-based Sinclair Broadcast Group, which sadly decided to stick with sewage in prime time on its 19 affiliates.

The protesting affiliates should be saluted for putting any kind of brake on this profanity-celebrating bleep-a-rama, especially when it's aired right after a show watched by an estimated four million children. The Osbournes proudly announced at the show's open they were the nation's "first family of being fâ€”-ed up."

Fox knew this was garbage; it did not make the first hour available to the media or to most of its stations. The Washington Post reported the "sizzle reel" that affiliates were given featured "a grandmother in silhouette, stripping and playing with her breasts," as well as an unsuspecting young man in a blindfold being tricked into kissing an elderly woman. It also included a dreadfully unfunny skit imagining elementary-school versions of Ozzy Osbourne and wife Sharon cursing their mouths off at their first date inside a movie theatre. Interestingly, the stripping, stroking grandma somehow didn't end up in the 35-minute cut, perhaps due to the affiliates. But the Parents Television Council still counted 49 bleeped and unbleeped expletives and partially obscured obscene gestures stuffed into this show.

Fox issued a statement suggesting it still has a Standards and Practices Department, which is a little like suggesting Elvis is alive. "'Osbournes: Reloaded' was thoroughly vetted by our Standards and Practices Department to ensure it was appropriate for broadcast during the scheduled time period. If any network affiliate feels the programming may be inappropriate for its individual market, however, it has the right to preempt the program." This is a network with no shame.

One of the sadder gimmicks in the last few years has been a horrific attempt at an old-fashioned "variety show" like Ed Sullivan's or Carol Burnett's, with none of yesterday's charm and all of today's cynical sleaze. NBC thoroughly flopped with a crass Rosie O'Donnell hour last Thanksgiving. Why would this be any better?

In fact, "variety" isn't the proper word for this incessant spectacle of infantile rebellion and swear words.

"Comedy" doesn't fit, either. It was apparently defined by 60-year-old Ozzy putting on a leotard and pretending to be the dancing girl in "Flashdance," with the alleged punchline of a concluding fart.

The saddest stunt in the whole wretched mess was a forced wedding ceremony. The Osbournes pulled a "random" man out of the audience, then presented him with his longtime girlfriend, who came on stage in a wedding gown and threatened "It's over â€” unless you marry me tonight." Family and friends and a minister were all pushed in the groom's face. "The marriage union is the closest relationship that can ever exist between two individuals," the preacher declared. "It is not something to be entered into lightly" â€” as if being forced to marry on a trashy Osbournes special isn't taking it lightly. The groom surrendered, and Ozzy soaked the audience with foam from a hose.

Why would Fox try to resuscitate the nasty, cursing Osbournes four years after their program died on MTV? It certainly wasn't done for critical acclaim. Tom Shales of The Washington Post flagrantly denounced it as "Must-Flee TV." Even Post TV reporter Lisa DeMoraes, who normally finds indecency to be an occasion for fun and frivolity, suggested it had "gone too far, even for Fox." Newsday insisted: "Too bad it wasn't shortened to 35 seconds ... 35 microseconds ... In fact, too bad it just wasn't canceled."

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