

Alternative Medicine

By Dr Oh Jen Jen

The first instalment of this series was published in the August 2013 issue of SMA News (<http://goo.gl/aFmygt>).

IN THIS instalment, I introduce three vastly different TV series that feature doctors in situations ranging from odd to outright bizarre. These shows are guaranteed to induce serious bouts of head-scratching and eyebrow-raising, but are also thoroughly entertaining in their own unique ways.

Do No Harm

Dr Jason Cole (Steven Pasquale), the renowned Chief of Neurosurgery at a posh hospital, suffers from dual personality disorder. Every night at precisely 8.25 pm, he transforms into an evil alter ego known as Ian Price, who wreaks havoc for the next 12 hours. The potential for this Jekyll-and-Hyde premise could have been more fully realised if not for the ridiculous plots. A layman might find the storylines perfectly plausible, but anyone with medical training will have a field day poking holes in them.

One particularly annoying detail involves Jason's ability to avoid working at night, somehow always managing to escape from the hospital just before Ian manifests. In one episode, Ian waits in the operating theatre while a patient lies on the table, just after 8 am. When Jason reappears – after zero sleep the night before – he magically knows exactly what to do, and looks super perky without imbibing any coffee.

Despite the paucity of logic, I still sat through the entire season (the show has not been renewed), solely on the strength of lead actor Pasquale's performance. The gifted Broadway actor is terribly wasted in this role, but he plays both characters spectacularly.

Dracula

This updated version of the well-loved Transylvanian legend is lush, sensual and full of surprises – one of which occurs in the very first episode.

Van Helsing (previously known as a ruthless vampire slayer) is now a distinguished medical school professor; while Mina (the doppelganger of Dracula's long-lost love) is a medical student. And if these revelations were not shocking enough, Van Helsing and Dracula form an alliance to destroy a clandestine order that murdered their families, with the former sacrificing a human in order to resurrect the latter.

Errr, remember the Hippocratic Oath, Professor?

In his free time, Van Helsing works on a serum that enables Dracula to resist the incinerating effects of sunlight. Mina, on the other hand, excels at looking pretty, snooping around the professor's secret laboratory, and having erotic dreams about you-know-who. Ludicrous, I know. Nonetheless, the cast (especially sultry and intense Jonathan Rhys Meyers, who is famously known for playing Henry VIII in the excellent drama, *The Tudors*) handles the material with grace and total commitment. *Dracula* is definitely one of my favourite new shows for 2013 and 2014.

Part 2

Masters of Sex

This highly acclaimed series has yet to make an appearance in Singapore and, judging from its provocative content, probably never will (unless it is severely censored).

Based on the true story of Dr William Masters and Mrs Virginia Johnson, who pioneered human sexuality research, this drama is not for the prudish or humourless. Featuring no-holds-barred scenes of copulating couples and discussions on orgasms, positional preferences and genitalia, it expertly avoids degenerating into lewdness, instead rewarding viewers with astute observations and priceless one-liners. The writers also delve into each character's personal life, revealing fascinating details that add more layers to the plots and subplots.



Photo: Showtime Networks Inc

Michael Sheen (*The Queen* and *Frost/Nixon*) is perfectly cast as Masters, playing him with a mixture of clinical restraint and explosive rage. Relative unknown Lizzy Caplan matches Sheen as Johnson – free-spirited, intensely curious and highly intelligent. Their on-screen chemistry sizzles; I cannot remember the last time I saw anything quite like it.

As for the wisecracks, Masters is described as “the alpha dog of coochie medicine”. Yet, at the other end of the spectrum, the good doctor states with a straight face that “the study of sex is the study of the beginning of all life”.

On that note, here's hoping for more intriguing medical characters on television in the coming year! **SMA**



Dracula airs every Monday at 8.55 pm on Starhub's DIVA Universal (Channel 522). *Do No Harm* and *Masters of Sex* can be found via online sources.



Photo: DIVA Universal



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