

Tune in tomorrow

Midseason highlights will be hit-or-miss BY MICHAEL GILTZ

Thanks to the writers strike, TV has been thrown into chaos. But after weeks of repeats and confusion, the midseason will kick off with new episodes of most late-night talk shows and the unkillable "American Idol." In addition to their returning shows, the networks are preparing new programs, reality stunts, miniseries and specials to flood the airwaves and recapture our attention. Here's a selection to watch for in the coming months.

NEW SERIES

■ **"CASHMERE MAFIA"** (ABC, Jan. 6) This Darren Star series wants to be the next "Sex and the City," just like "Lipstick Jungle." Its smart and sexy career women include Lucy Liu, Frances O'Connor and Miranda Otto. After debuting on Sunday, Jan. 6, it moves to its regular slot on Wednesdays.

■ **"GHOST HUNTERS INTERNATIONAL"** (SciFi, Jan. 9) A reality series about worldwide apparitions. Because the U.S. isn't the only country with ghosts. In fact, Europe's been making them for years.

■ **"TERMINATOR: THE SARAH CONNOR CHRONICLES"** (Fox, Jan. 13) Lena Headey stars as Sarah Connor, the mom who decides to take the fight to the machines rather than keep running (in the "Terminator" movies, she was played by Linda Hamilton). John Connor is played by Thomas Dekker ("Heroes"). Arnold Schwarzenegger will probably not be making a cameo in this sci-fi drama.

■ **"IN TREATMENT"** (HBO, Jan. 28) This nine-week, half-hour drama stars Gabriel Byrne as a therapist, with the nifty gimmick of Byrne having a session with a different patient every night of the week (and dealing with the same person each night throughout the show's run). The show is on every night of the week. So on Mondays, he talks with "Laura," who is having trouble with her boyfriend and transferring her affection to Byrne; Tuesdays are "Alex," an Iraq war veteran suffering post-traumatic stress, and so on.

■ **"LIPSTICK JUNGLE"** (NBC, Feb. 7) Will this be the new "Sex and the City," just a tad older, more powerful and more obsessed with careers than guys? Based on the book by "SATC" author Candace Bushnell, it stars Kim Raver ("24"), Lindsay Price ("Beverly Hills, 90210") and Brooke Shields.

■ **"THE BABY BORROWERS"** (NBC, Feb. 18) Remember when you were given an egg to "baby-sit" in school, carrying it around all week and making sure it didn't break, all to illustrate what a responsibility caring for a baby can be? This reality show ups the ante by giving teenage couples real babies to care for. A good lesson for them... not so good, perhaps, for the baby.

■ **"UNHITCHED"** (Fox, March 2) The Farrelly brothers tackle prime-time TV — and a major network, not cable — for



their show about four buddies (led by Craig Bierko) who actually want to get married. Will the restraints of censors force the gross-out kings to be more creative and clever, or just make them dull?

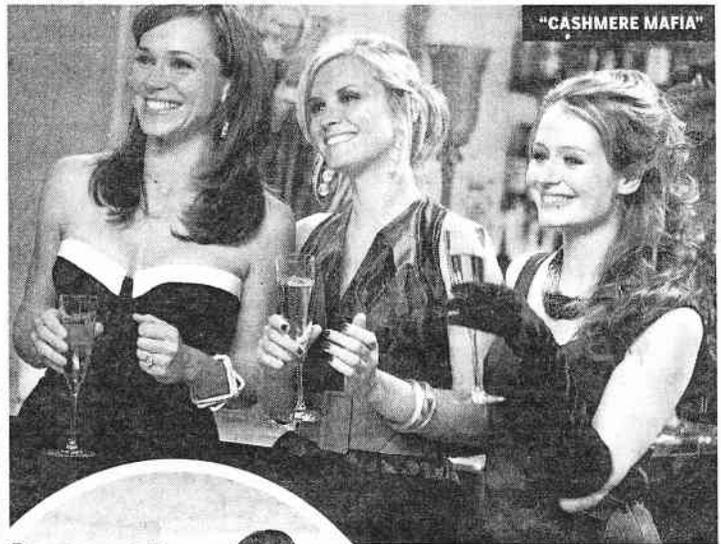
■ **"THE RETURN OF JEZEBEL JAMES"** (Fox, March 7) The creators of "Gilmore Girls" tackle an out-and-out comedy in this show where Parker Posey is a successful but uptight children's book author who convinces her hippie-ish younger sister (Lauren Ambrose) to bear a child for her.

■ **"CANTERBURY'S LAW"** (Fox, April 11) Julianna Margulies ("ER") returns to TV drama as a defense attorney who'd rather bend the law than see a client she believes is innocent go to jail. Habeus, shmabeus!

SPECIALS

■ **"COMANCHE MOON"** (CBS, Jan. 13) Miniseries based on the best-selling novel by Larry McMurtry. This prequel to "Lonesome Dove" — one of the most acclaimed and successful miniseries in TV history — finds Steve Zahn and Karl Urban stepping into the roles of Texas Rangers McCrae and Call (originally played by Robert Duvall and Tommy Lee Jones). Airs over three nights.

■ **"THE 65th ANNUAL GOLDEN GLOBE AWARDS"** (NBC, Jan. 13) No waiver from the Writers Guild means stars would have to cross a picket line to attend; some have already politely declined. The suspense,



for once, is behind the scenes, not on which celeb will enjoy the drinks the most.

■ **"KIDS PICK THE PRESIDENT"** (Nickelodeon, Jan. 13) In "The Kids' Primary," Linda Ellerbee hosts the first of three specials in which kids air their choices for most powerful person on the planet.

■ **"HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL: THE MUSIC IN YOU"** (Disney, Jan. 20) Filmmaker Barbara Kopple trains her camera on kids in their own theatrical version of the TV phenom.

■ **"MANSFIELD PARK"** (PBS, Jan. 27) The ongoing "Let's film every Jane Austen book!" mania continues with this miniseries, with Billie Piper starring as Austen's resourceful heroine (ah, one of those again) Fanny Price.

■ **"THE GUINNESS BOOK OF WORLD RECORDS — LIVE!"** (NBC, Jan. 27) Why didn't anyone think of this before? A TV special where people attempt to break the world record in various events live on camera.

■ **"SUPER BOWL XLIII"** (Fox, Feb. 3) We don't know the teams yet, of course, but the commercials will be desperately funny and Tom Petty is sure to score a touchdown as the halftime performer.

■ **"THE 50th ANNUAL GRAMMY AWARDS"** (CBS, Feb. 10) Kanye West finally expects to get his due with his Grammy-nominated opus "Graduation." That's our bet, too.

■ **"THE 80th ANNUAL ACADEMY AWARDS"** (ABC, Feb. 24) It could be a show without writers — but will any stars show up? Heck, will host Jon Stewart show up? Will everyone ad-lib? This could be the most suspenseful Oscar in memory, whether or not "No Country for Old Men," "Atonement" and "Sweeney Todd" are duking it out for Best Picture.

■ **"A RAISIN IN THE SUN"** (ABC, Feb. 25) The much-lauded Broadway cast reunited for this TV movie of the Lorraine Hansberry classic, with Phylicia Rashad, Audra McDonald and Sean Combs in the Sidney Poitier role of Walter Lee Younger, a chauffeur who dreams big.

■ **"JOHN ADAMS"** (HBO, March) David McCullough's absorbing best seller gets deluxe HBO miniseries treatment, with casting even the Founding Fathers couldn't improve on: Paul Giamatti as Adams, Laura Linney as his wife, Abigail, David Morse as George Washington, Rufus Sewell as Alexander Hamilton and Tom Wilkinson as Benjamin Franklin. ♦