Izzie Stevens Lives!

Rash Report: But 'Grey's Anatomy,' Other Drama Reruns on Life Support

By John Rash

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MINNEAPOLIS (AdAge.com) -- OK, "Grey's Anatomy" fans, spoiler alert! Maybe you thought you had to wait until September's season premiere, but after last May's dramatic denouement, the fates of two key characters have been revealed: According to a Reuters report, Katherine Heigl (Izzie Stevens) will be back. But her co-star T.R. Knight will not.

So the show hung onto one star in the off-season. Too bad it can't do the same with viewers. In fact, last night's fast-affiliate ratings indicate that only one out of 10 of those who watch "Grey's" originals bothered to show up, as it finished fourth in its time slot, with a .6/2 rating and share in the ad-centric 18-to-49 demographic, which was just above the CW's .4/2 for a "Supernatural" rerun.

But it's not just a summer swoon. During the regular season, "Grey's" repeats held only 29% of their original-episode ratings. The medical melodrama's lead-in and lead-out programs also have had a lot of...
loyalists call in sick. "Grey's" spinoff "Private Practice" (.5/2) for instance, held only 13% of its original-episode viewers last night, and during the season, second showings lost two-thirds in the demo. The numbers for "Ugly Betty" aren't pretty either: Last night's .7/3 was 29% of its original-episode average, and during the season only half of the original-episode audience watched repeats.

CBS held its more august audience, many of whom grew up with the one original/one rerun construct, a bit better. But even "CSI" (1.7/5) held only a third of original-episode viewers last night, and during the season 54% recused themselves from reruns; they'd already seen whodunit.

While NBC's "Must-See" comedies "Friends" and "Seinfeld" are still running reruns, repeats of its current comedies play to half the crowds of original episodes during the season, and last night "The Office" (1.4/4) and "30 Rock" (1.1/3) held only a third.

So it wasn't reruns but reality that won the first two hours of prime time last night, with NBC's "I'm a Celebrity ... Get Me Out of Here!" (1.8/7) winning at 8 p.m., and at 9 p.m. Fox's "So You Think You Can Dance" (2.9/9) leading the network to an first-place 2.1/7 overall. (Please see the chart for all show and network ratings.)

If the networks hope to break out of their summer ratings malaise, they will need to break the business model. Repeat showings of scripted series are a product of a three-network environment; now hundreds of channels are available.

And if consumers don't watch one of those channels, they go online -- sometimes, of course, to catch up on that week's "Grey's" episode. Recently released Nielsen data show that in half of homes with internet access, users have downloaded or streamed video clips. YouTube gets the most use, with 68%, but network and news program sites are second and third, with 49.5% and 28.5%, respectively.

Among those who indicated why they were streaming a TV show, the top response -- at 46.2% -- was to catch up on a missed episode. The lowest-ranking response: to rewatch an episode. Not surprisingly, it seems that watching reruns on computer screens is about as popular as watching them on small screens.

So far, broadcasters are sticking to the same model that made Thursday night's prime time more Must-Flee than Must-See. This in turn has led each network to retreat to reality.

But the real solution is to copy their cable competitors, and have a whole new season of summertime scripted series. Just this week, for instance, HBO premiered "True Blood," which had the biggest audience since "The Sopranos." And the series premiere of TNT medical drama "Hawthorne" delivered a healthy 1.2/4, double last night's delivery for "Grey's."

So apparently Katherine Heigl's Izzie Stevens can come back from the dead. But it's probably time to read repeats of network dramas their last rites.

**WHAT TO WATCH:**
**Friday:** Remember CBS's '70s-era series "Alice"? OK, time to forget the trite TV version by watching
the gritty drama that inspired it, "Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore," which won Ellen Burstyn an Oscar for her portrayal of Alice.

**Saturday:** The third round of the U.S. Open golf championship on NBC.
**Sunday:** Whatever dad wants.

**WHAT TO WATCH FOR:**
Assuming the black clouds over Bethpage Black golf course clear, the convergence of the summer solstice, Father's Day and Tiger Woods should mean great ratings for Sunday's final round of the U.S. Open.

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*NOTE: All ratings based on adults 18-49. A share is a percentage of adults 18-49 who have their TV sets on at a given time. A rating is a percentage of all adults 18-49, whether or not their sets are turned on. For example, a 1.0 rating is 1% of the total U.S. adults 18-49 population with TVs. Ratings quoted in this column are based on live-plus-same-day unless otherwise noted. (Many ad deals have been negotiated on the basis of commercial-minute, live-plus-three-days viewing.)*

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