

Pleshette sitcom based on past plot successes

By Mike Frost

The media is the message. OK, that's not an original thought, but neither is *Suzanne Pleshette is Maggie Briggs*, the latest CBS sitcom offering.

The message is original concepts don't amount to a hill of beans in the crazy world (admittedly, not a new notion, either). *Suzanne Pleshette is Maggie Briggs* (no kidding, that is the show's correct name) is a hybrid of every successful sitcom that has ever aired on television. Maggie Briggs is sort of a newspaper version of Mary Richards, and Walter, her compadre, is a lovable old gruff, who eerily resembles Lou Grant.

The office is a lot like those we saw in both *Mary Tyler Moore* and *WKRP*: There are a lot of people scurrying around, claiming to be journalists, yet they rarely do anything as off the wall as, say, work. They sit around a lot, and talk about each other's personal lives, always caring, always funny.

The show's humor resembles that of Pleshette's last series, *The Bob Newhart Show*. And from watching the love-hate relationship Briggs has with her boss, you'd swear it was *Cheers*.

If they've got to copy sitcoms, at least they're using enjoyable prototypes. *Maggie Briggs*, however, never

quite manages to become enjoyable.

It's more than the show's perpetual state of *deja-vu* that keeps it from taking off. The cast is remarkably weak. Pleshette was an excellent foil to Newhart, but on *Maggie Briggs* she really doesn't have anyone to play off of. Perhaps this is just because the show has only been on the air a couple of weeks. However, it does seem many of the characters here are dead ends in terms of plot potential.

The show also suffers from a distinct air of upwardly-mobile snottiness. This week's episode involved Walter's reluctance to give Maggie a loan to take a trip to Italy. Oh, if only I had a nickel for each time I've asked friends for a few measley thou to take a trans-Atlantic sojourn. The show's premiere concerned Maggie being transferred from news to feature reporting. With unemployment hovering around 8 percent, you somehow get the impression her complaints are relatively minor.

Maggie Briggs could rise above its own triviality. The remedies aren't easy; the writers will have to quit rushing to the sitcom entry in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* every time a plot complication is needed. And a dominant character — be it Pleshette or one of her cronies — needs to be developed.

There's really nothing terrible about this series. Unfortunately, there is nothing wonderful, either.

New Dolby album . . .

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Dolby is more than a songwriter; he is a composer.

Although Simple Minds has been around the music scene about as long as Thomas Dolby, it has not received much recognition in the United States. *Sparkle in the Rain* (A&M) just may be their breakthrough album — even more so than the mildly successful 1982 LP *New Gold Dream*.

The current album is in the tradition of *New Gold Dream*. It's a lot classier than most of the newer music out today. Somehow, they make their electronic gadgetry sound like an orchestra, especially in the instrumental "Shake Off the Ghosts."

Not only do they write their own songs, they also borrow from a most unusual source: Lou Reed. "Street Hassle" combines their British sophistication with a jazz background. They have successfully adapted the song to their style.

"Waterfront," the new single, is representative of the songs on the LP. It has an underlying driving rock force with a soft edge.

Steve Lillywhite, one of the top producers of 1983, produced the Simple Minds album effectively and efficiently, squeezing the most he could out of their potential as a major force in the future music scene.

Sparkle in the Rain is a calming, carefree album. Just lay back, relax and let the music take over.

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