



ORDINARY PEOPLE
Kirke, Dunham
and Zosia Mamet
(from left)

Girls! Girls! Girls!

With her fearless show, 'Girls,' Lena Dunham may be the voice of a generation of women - and that's a little frightening By Rob Sheffield

CAN ANYONE TOUCH Lena Dunham for sheer cringe power? As the writer, director and star of HBO's *Girls*, the 25-year-old comic auteur brilliantly sums up the miseries of youth: drugs,

Girls
Sundays, 10:30 p.m., HBO

diseases, abortions, disastrous jobs, worse sex, doing a Google search on "stuff that gets up around the sides of condoms." *Girls* has some of the deplorablest sex scenes you've ever witnessed. And the post-coital fallout is even worse. When Dunham goes in to get tested for an STD, her gynecologist sighs, "You couldn't pay me enough to be 24 again." Dunham cracks, "Well, they're not paying me at all."

The agonizingly funny Dunham, building on *Tiny Furniture*, the 2010 indie-flick sensation that turned her into America's sweetheart of post-collegiate despair, plays a thinly veiled version of herself, a wiseass brat struggling to get by in the big city, doing as lit-

tle work as possible. Her parents have been supporting her, but now they're cutting off the funds - her mom suggests, "Get a job and start a blog."

Self-absorbed? You could say that. But Dunham is fearless enough to make *Girls* triumphantly sharp and scathing. The likes of *Whitney*, *2 Broke Girls*, etc., can't hold Dunham's bra strap. She's like Larry David's sicko granddaughter. Dunham specializes in mumblecore monologues that get darker the longer she keeps talking. "You know that part on your résumé where they ask if you have any special skills?" she muses. "I don't think I have any special skills." And this is what she says while her moron boyfriend undresses her, in the first of many beyond-awkward sexual encounters. (Dunham gets naked a lot - she is to nudity what Larry David is to baldness.)

How could her life suck any more? That would be her friends, three other twenty-something girls - Jessa, Shoshanna and Marnie - who are as messed up as she is. They panic at the idea of moving past the status quo, even though the sta-

tus of their quo looks bleak. Just as *Sex and the City* sold a glitzy vision of New York in the boom-boom 1990s, this feels like the city four years into the never-ending recession.

The brilliance of *Girls* is how these young Americans have already gotten all the hopes and desires trampled out of them. Twenty years ago, Dunham and her friends would have been

working in coffee shops in some boho college town. The word "slacker" would have gotten kicked around, and they all would have had bands. (Plus boyfriends who pretend to be Steve Albini.) Ten years ago, they would have been DJs or bloggers with podcasts. (Plus boyfriends who pretend to be James Murphy.) But in 2012, these ladies have no aspirations, not even the insanely pretentious and unrealistic kind. They don't daydream about being famous or rich. They're not working on any kind of dream at all.

The only one with any kind of "when I grow up" fantasy is Dunham's Hannah, who says she wants to write a memoir. But since she's never done anything, she's in no hurry. "Gotta live it first," she shrugs. Yeah, if you call this living.

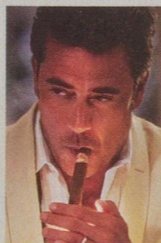
Still, you root for these girls, even when they make you squirm, which is always. Jessa (Jemima Kirke) is a glamorous piece of work, knocking back White Russians on her way to the abortion clinic. (Which gives Dunham something to be excited about: "This is the first abortion I've ever been to!") Presiding over it all, Dunham rarely smiles; mostly she looks lost in thought as she contemplates the bad move she's just made and the horrific one she's about to make. "I may be the voice of my generation," she insists. "Or at least a voice, of a generation." The scary part is that she's probably right. **C**

SHORT TAKE

Evil Under the Sun

Magic City
Fridays, 10 p.m., Starz

Miami Beach, 1959: The mob is hard at work building America's lustiest dream capital. Hotelier Ike Evans (Jeffrey Dean Morgan) is creating a pleasure dome called the Miramar Playa Hotel, with mob kingpin Ben "The Butcher" Diamond (Danny Huston). Will there be betrayal? Will there be near-constant nudity? Yes, yes and *claro que sí*.



Dean Morgan hits the beach.

Starz's *Magic City* has it all: JFK, Frank Sinatra, the Mafia, the CIA and Ray Charles singing "Moon Over Miami." There are echoes of *Mad Men* and *The Sopranos*, but *Magic City* really starts at the same place they came from, the second *Godfather* movie. There's even a key scene on New

Year's Eve 1959, as Sinatra is set to croon at the new hotel. (Or will he?) It's a lush picture of the dirty business of American holidays in the sun. **R.S.**



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