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TV

This year in holiday TV movies: What's new and used (a lot)

Expect a sleighload of personal shoppers, inheritances, and canceled flights

BY DAN SNIERSON - @DANSNIERSON

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Posted November 25 2015 — 3:14 PM EST

Mariah Carey may be the biggest draw of the small screen's seasonal offerings by directing and starring in *A Christmas Melody* (Hallmark, Dec. 19) (<http://www.ew.com/article/2015/11/24/mariah-carey-christmas-melody-lacey-chabert>), but she's not the only one getting festive. (Well, as festive as she can be playing a mean-girl PTA president who matches wits with Lacey Chabert.) Three dozen-plus new Yuletide movies — overstuffed with hokey holiday cheer — are vying to shimmy down your chimney, so pull up your stockings and brace for these trends.



Image Credit: Hallmark

RUNAWAY ROYALS!

In *A Prince For Christmas* (lon, Nov. 29), a king's son, who is faced with a looming arranged marriage, flees to America and dons plebeian duds to find truer love. *Once Upon A Holiday* (Hallmark, Dec. 4, pictured) reverses the lead's gender with a princess who ditches her royal obligations and regal garb to experience life like us commoners — one of whom wins her class-oblivious heart. Oh, and in semi-related royal news, *The Wonder Years* alum Danica McKellar stars in *A Crown for Christmas* (Hallmark, Nov. 27) as an unemployed maid who becomes a governess for a princess — and possibly a soulmate for her father, the King of Winshire (who, no matter how rich he is, is no Kevin Arnold, clearly).

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Image Credit: Eike Schroter

ANIMAL ATTRACTION

Are your heartstrings easily pulled by a puppy? A young mixed breed finds friendly shelter with a little girl after a dog tag appears in a magical stocking bought at a church rummage sale in *Magic Stocking* (Hallmark Mysteries and Movies, Dec. 6), while an adolescent Jack Russell terrier is adopted by two strangers brought together by a road trip in *Debbie MacComber's Dashing Through the Snow* (Hallmark Movies and Mysteries, Dec. 13, pictured). Prefer to see multiple dogs at once? A coddled college student exercises a real estate developer's canine and possibly helps save a pooch park in *A Dogwalker's Christmas Tale* (UP, Dec. 9). Do you find deer dear? One of Santa's helpers searches for a substitute reindeer for the injured Prancer in *Last Chance Christmas* (Lifetime, Dec. 6). Wait, wait, let me guess — more of an equestrian? A woman gets gushy over a special horse and strapping cowboy in *Rodeo and Juliet* (UP, Dec. 21, and winner of this year's hammiest title). What's that? You need to see a photo from *Rodeo and Juliet*? One gift horse, ready to be looked in the mouth ...



Okay, moving right along ...



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Image Credit: Lifetime

CLASSIC SITCOM PARENTS REUNION ALERT!

Mom and dad are getting back together! In *Becoming Santa* (Lifetime, Dec. 12, pictured at top of story), *Family Ties* liberal patriarch and matriarch Michael Gross and Meredith Baxter play the politically ambiguous *Santa and Mrs. Claus*, whose daughter brings her unsuspecting beau home to the North Pole. (Sorry, no Michael J. Fox.) *The Flight Before Christmas* (Lifetime, Dec. 5, pictured) features *Family Matters* folks Reginald VelJohnson and Jo Marie Payton as innkeepers in a tale about two strangers — she, freshly dumped; he, about to propose to his girlfriend — who meet on a plane before winding up stranded together in a Montana town. (Sorry, no Jaleel White.) And if you'll allow us to slightly stretch the term "classic sitcom," in *Karen Kingsbury's The Bridge* (Hallmark, Dec. 5), *Hope & Faith* parents Faith Ford and Ted McGinley play a bookstore-owning couple. (Sorry, no Megan Fox. Look it up — she played their daughter!)



Image Credit: Marcel Williams

BLIZZARD OF AHHS

Does a little snowfall make you happy? Not really — you want craptions of snow. In addition to the previously mentioned *Flight Before Christmas*, which includes a plane-diverting storm, *Angels in the Snow* (UP, Dec. 5) focuses on two families stranded at a plush cabin during a whiteout. Over on *A Christmas Detour* (Hallmark, Nov. 28, pictured), two travelers — he, freshly brokenhearted; she, about to get married; yes, kinda like in *Flight Before Christmas* — are drawn together when their flight to New York is rerouted to Buffalo during a



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blizzard, and they spend most of the movie arguing over what's better: Buffalo wings or New York pizza. (It's possible we're making that last part up.)



Image Credit: Ion

HEIR YE, HEIR YE!

Where there's a will, there's a way to find drama. Maureen McCormick stars as a woman who inherits her grandmother's run-down Christmas tree farm, which she plans to sell in *Christmas Land* (Hallmark, Dec. 13), whereas in *Northpole: Open for Christmas* (Hallmark, Dec. 2), a woman is bequeathed her aunt's hotel and she aims to cash out. Meanwhile, in *A Christmas Reunion* (Ion, Dec. 13, pictured), Denise Richards plays an ad exec (slightly more realistic than a nuclear physicist) who learns that her aunt left her — and her ex-boyfriend — a bakery. Our prediction: They bake it 'til they make it.



Image Credit: Fred Hayes

REGIFTED FROM THE BIG SCREEN

The aforementioned *Prince for Christmas* seems awfully similar to *Coming To America*, and the celluloid semblances don't end there. Things get a little bit *Freaky Friday* when a father (William Baldwin!) and 11-year-old son (some kid!) switch bodies in *Christmas Trade* (UP, Dec. 1). And our pants would be engulfed in flames if we didn't say that *I'm Not Ready For Christmas* (Hallmark, Dec. 10, pictured), in which a girl's wish for her aunt to stop fibbing comes true, sounds like a Carrey-over from *Liar, Liar*.



Image Credit: Dan Power

ON TWO WINGS AND A PRAYER

Angels, those messengers and meddlers from upstairs, are a stalwart staple of the Christmas TV movie genre. This year, you get one in guardian form — played by Dean Cain — in *Beverly Hills Christmas* (Up, Dec. 6), one in handcarved ornament form in *Angel of Christmas* (Hallmark, Nov. 29), and one who can't make her final ascent to heaven until she fixes something from her past in *How Sarah Got Her Wings* (Ion, Dec. 6). But only one film — *Just in Time for Christmas* (Hallmark, Dec. 5, pictured) — had the brass balls to deck its halls with William Shatner as a spiritual emissary. He whisks a woman a few years into the future (and given that time travel is involved, you gotta throw Christopher “Doc Brown” Lloyd into the cast, right?) to help her with a huge decision: Stay in this small town and get hitched or become a professor at Yale far, far away? Our prediction: She lives long and prospers after naming her own price for happiness.



Image Credit: Lifetime

SHOP TIL YOU DROP ... INTO A RELATIONSHIP

Personal shoppers are apparently all the rage this season. (Chanukkah movies are not, totalling zero.) In *The 12 Gifts of Christmas* (Hallmark, Nov. 26), an unemployed artist buys for an overworked corporate exec, while in *A Gift-Wrapped Christmas* (Lifetime, Nov. 28, pictured), a purchaser helps, yes, an overworked corporate exec/single dad with his to-do list. But what if a shopper gives a shoppee the greatest gift of all this holiday season? (Hint: It's either love or Bose noise-cancelling headphones.)