

'Muppets Now' attempts a new update on the classic

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: «« out of «««««

Running Time: 22 – 24 minutes (per episode)

This Disney+ series will be available for streaming on July 31, beginning with the first episode. A new episode will follow weekly.

Back in the mid-1970s, *The Muppet Show* burst onto the TV scene and became a phenomenon. It was a family-friendly variety show that juggled sketches, musical performances and celebrity interviews, creating iconic moments for families nestled around the television. Over the years, many movies and new shows featuring the characters have been produced. The recent theatrical features were excellent updates, allowing the Muppets to maintain their distinctive humor while taking part in epic, big screen adventures.

However, a more adult-oriented 2015 TV-series based around the felt figures missed the mark (at least, it did as far as this reviewer was concerned) and was quickly canceled.

This week, Kermit, Miss Piggy and the others are back once again with a new Disney+ program called *Muppets Now*, an attempt to modernize the original formula. Based on the first four episodes, the results are mixed, but there are some funny sketches. The show may need a little

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more work, but there is potential and one hopes that after a little fine tuning, later shows will end up providing great family entertainment.

The series is described as being largely improvised, although that may be an exaggeration given the props and scenarios. It's a web series that features tech expert Scooter retrieving segment files and loading them up for viewing, all the while chatting online with Kermit and other Muppets. Many of the segments are repeated, with the most common being a series of competitive cooking challenges involving the Swedish Chef. There is also a themed scientific experiment clip with Professor Bunsen Honeydew and Beaker, self-help lessons and advice featuring Miss Piggy, as well as a game show hosted by Pepe the King Prawn.

Taye Diggs assists Piggy on a few of her scenes and Linda Cardellini also appears in several Zoom chats with the porcine host.

Like any sketch show, it's all a bit hit and miss. The numerous celebrity guests help, surprising viewers and reacting (or trying to keep everyone calm) in amusing ways as chaos and comedy builds. However, there is a tendency for the humor to skew a little young and when episodes are viewed back to back, the segments do feel repetitive. Obviously, it's a lot more work and expense to build additional sets and involve more Muppets, but the concept could use more variety, including unexpected skits and perhaps even a musical number now and again (there is a distinct lack of performances in this iteration of the program).

Still, there are few sharp moments, particularly in the second episode. Specifically in one of the cooking competitions that features the Swedish Chef facing off against actor Danny Trejo. The concept featured involves the cook finding it difficult to match up against his adversary, eventually concocting haphazard dishes. The chef's take on a molé chicken taco does deliver laughs and when his improvised "dish" begins commenting on itself, the results are hilarious. It's strange as a critic to comment on the comic timing and expressions of a Muppet, but it's perfect in this bit.

There's also an amusing science experiment with Professor Honeydew and Beaker using heat to determine what substances will catch fire and which will melt. The jokes work here, too, although parents should be warned that the sketch may turn children into pyromaniacs. And Joe the Legal Weasel also earns yuks with some terrible and aggressively delivered puns based around law-related terminology.

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Parts of *Muppets Now* scramble around in search of wackiness and don't end up amounting to a whole lot. However, every once in a while, there's a sketch or line that makes you remember why you liked these characters so much in the first place. The results are reasonable, but do show room for improvement. As the series progresses, experimenting a little more, adding in some variety with segments as well as earnestness and heart every now and again (like the old series did), will elevate the program and help it reach its full potential.

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