

# The Asian Reporter

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## MY TURN

■ **Dmae Roberts**



# Summer viewing

It's summertime ... And the viewing is easy. Back in the day, when there were only three or four television channels, summer meant rerun time. Though I spent most summer daylight hours outside, the evening meant watching replays or perhaps sitting through shows I didn't really appreciate, but there were no other options. Read a book, you say? Of course I did that as well. But I was part of the TV generation, a low-cost way for families to sit together after dinner, watch our favorite shows, and talk during commercials.

The tradition still exists for families who have a tight budget. These days, however, the era of 500-plus cable channels in multiple languages with on-demand platforms provides many options to satisfy one's television fix. In addition, there are also shows and films that actually feature Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) talent. During the primetime television season (fall through spring), there are a plethora of options, but summer is fast matching that number during a time of year that was once considered a programming desert.

A good number of my friends have cancelled their cable or satellite service and now rely on Roku, Amazon Fire TV, or Apple TV to view shows. With these options, one is able to watch cable networks and pay individually per channel. My favorites are Netflix, which costs \$10 per month, and Amazon Prime Video, a service that is included with a yearly \$99 Prime membership that also allows free two-day shipping on many Amazon purchases. Both providers now create their own films and television series. They have also brought more — not a lot, but more — opportunities for AAPI actors and directors to produce work.

Though Amazon is a great service for watching international Asian films, its only television show featuring AAPI talent is the high-concept, Emmy-winning "The Man in the High Castle," a reimagining of the 1950s era had Germany and Japan been victorious during World War II. The show gives AAPI actors such as Joel de la Fuente and Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa meaty roles.

Netflix certainly places near the top when it comes to offering more original content to AAPIs. Besides numerous options for Asian-language films and television shows, Netflix originals have featured many top-notch AAPI offerings. The most recent is "Master of None," a co-production of Aziz Ansari (who also stars in the show) and Alan Yang, and the new film *Okja*, directed by Bong Joon Ho, the director of the environmental-disaster monster flick *The Host*, which is also available on Netflix.

"Master of None" has evolved into a cinematic masterpiece in its second season. Each of its episodes play out almost as art films, especially the first one — aired in black and white — which is a take on the Italian classic film *The Bicycle Thief*. It features Ansari in Italy and New York continually breaking new ground with social commentary. The recent season focused on Dev (Ansari's character) realizing he's in love. Though there was criticism his love interest was not another South Asian, I enjoyed the handling of the poignant love story, which allowed for an AAPI male lead to be seen as an attractive and compelling love interest.

The "Thanksgiving" episode played out the entire friendship of Dev and his lesbian best friend Denise during Thanksgiving dinners since the '90s. In it, viewers witness Denise coming out to her family and watch the family's gradual evolution of their acceptance.

In *Okja*, viewers see the marvellous young lead actress An Seo Hyun and Steven Yeun of "The Walking Dead" in a film that does the seemingly impossible — combines a family film with serious messages about animal rights, corporate crime, and the ethics of genetically modified food. While I wouldn't recommend the film for anyone younger than 13 or 14 years old, it could help create thoughtful family discussion. For adults, it is cinematically stunning, well acted, entertaining, and a moving summer film.

What's helpful for viewers who watch Asian and AAPI content using online services is their interests are noted and recommendations are suggested about similar content based on past viewing. It's almost like voting. And in turn, the more subscribers who view AAPI shows and films, the more likely the companies might produce and acquire more AAPI content.

So during the next few months when you come in from the great warm outdoors and want to relax by watching some shows, here are a few more Netflix offerings featuring AAPIs. For families, I suggest AAPI-starring films such as *Moana* and *The Jungle Book*. Those who love international films and television should simply enter "Asian" into the search window to generate a list. For the sci-fi/fantasy/action set like me, I heartily recommend programming with AAPI lead characters such as "Sense8" (an MA-rated wild international show), "The Magicians" (Narnia gone wrong and adult), "Dark Matter" (space opera with dark twists), and "Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D." (from the Marvel comics universe), which features two, count them two, AAPI female leads. Happy summer viewing!

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