

Southern Belles



By Heather C. Watson

Southern Belles: Louisville debuted on SoapNet last week. Now, I must admit I'm familiar with SoapNet and their programming; while some people are cursed with a lifelong drinking problem, the life-long monkey on my back is an addiction to "my stories." (Shut up!). Over the years, I've watched this weird cable channel to catch in late-night showings and I have been sucked into the occasional (read: every) 90210 marathon. Now, it seems, they are "branching into original programming." Original meaning *Samantha Who?* knockoff *Being Erica*, and *Real Housewives* ripoff *Southern Belles: Louisville*. As a native Kentuckian and former Louisvillian, I just had to check out this show for myself. Many of my friends had reported seeing the "Belles" doing promotional events at the Louisville Sephora store, attending middle school with a Belle, or other run-ins. While I doubted the show would be a full-on zeitgeist, I thought it would be interesting to see how my home state was portrayed.

Five minutes into the show, my Facebook status reads "Yeah, this show is dicey. The announcer's faux Southern accent is starting to grate." Seriously, y'all. Louisville is within walking distance of Indiana. There's almost a non-regional diction there, as it is such a melting pot of Midwestern, Southern, and rural people. Louisvillians, particularly the upper crust, do NOT take on an Alabama twang. But, let's move on from regional dialects....

Let's meet our Southern Belles.

WE HAVE EMILY, A BLONDE whose life's work appears to be adding and removing her hair extensions between scenes. She wants us to know that, even though her Daddy isn't real showy, he's super rich. He's also super down-to-earth, and does crazy things like wearing a denim workshirt to the din-



ner table and saying a blessing before the family eats dinner. He seems less than amused that Emily is flaunting his family and their wealth before the entire nation....

GIRL NEXT-DOOR HADLEY wants us to know that she isn't all about money, and that she isn't as wealthy as her *SBL* counterparts. She! Buys! \$5! Tee-shirts!, she tells us via voiceover as she and the Belles peruse Grasshoppers, a chichi shop that carries True Religion, Juicy Couture, and other staples of the upscale boutique experience. (Think: Isle of You meets Worlds Apart) Hadley is just looking for fun!, she tells us cryptically. She apparently put her Ph.D. on hold so that she could go to 4th Street Live! every night. Hadley's poor boyfriend Sterling wants to get serious, but she wants to make sure he knows that they can ~~sleep with~~ see other people. Hadley also has a "best guy friend" who may want more....

KELLIE, A DELICATE LOOKING BLONDE, has been married twice, most recently to a very wealthy man who apparently

wasn't willing to part with his money when they divorced. Kellie must sit among her Two Men & a Truck moving boxes and discuss her epic misfortune: her new house is the size of her old poolhouse! She had to convert a bedroom just to accommodate her Chanel bags! I just hope poor Kellie didn't get the same TM&T moving crew we used; one guy fell off the truck, went to the ER, and returned to job site with bandages wrapped loosely over his uniform and around his backside. Our girl doesn't seem like she would deal well with a mover who has broken his ass. She's had enough tragedy in her life, you know....

SHEA wants the world to know that she is very, very wealthy. A pretty brunette with severely plucked eyebrows, Shea wants a big-ass society wedding with all the fixin's. And she wants boyfriend Jeff to give it to her. Only, you know, Jeff has cheated on her once before. And he doesn't have the financial resources she desires. So, Shea charts her daddy's private jet and flies Jeff to diamond-fittings in Chicago. The kind where the helpful staff pours champagne immediately upon the arrival of the happy couple. To, you know, set a celebratory mood. Or possibly provide social lubricant. Because our friend Shea wants a RING. Five karats. Jeff sadly voices over that, even though he wants to give Shea the world, he can't afford the ~~ice ring~~ ring she so desperately wants. Shea basically offers to buy the ring herself, to the sales associate's barely contained dismay. Here's a little piece of free advice, Jeff. Unless you wake up tomorrow and have suddenly become Sheik Jeff, you'll never be able to afford her. Run now.

AND THEN THERE'S JULIE, the pretty African-American Belle. Julie is clearly the Chuck Cunningham of this show; every place the other Belles go, they have to add throwaway lines like "Oh, where's Julie?" or "Why couldn't Julie make

it?" Julie's sitch, it seems, is that she formerly modeled in venues all over the South, but now she's realizing that thirty-somethings don't get modeling gigs. Maybe I'm really slow, or perhaps I'm not Southern enough, but where exactly are the modeling venues "all over the South"? Was she on Belk's Teen Board? Yeah, I've got nothing.

So, now that we've met our girls, we follow them across various Louisville venues. They sure seem to go to 4th Street Live! a lot more than any Louisvillians I know (many of whom consider it a hangout for out-of-town bachelorettes and conventioners). The Belles also conduct pow-wows at trendy Heine Brothers coffee shop and tony Audubon Country Club. (How many Lexingtonians visit Third Street Coffee and Idle Hour in the same day?) These sessions are so forced and fabricated as to make *The Hills* seem realistic by comparison. The Belles seem to have three topics of conversation: a fundraising event they'll be holding, Julie's inexplicable absence, and their love lives. I don't know where Julie is, either, so we'll focus on the other topics.

Since the Belles live in a state renowned for its basketball obsession, we'll talk in sports metaphors for a moment. Shea is running a full-court press on old Jeff. She wants to get married. Like, now! Well, at least she wants a ring and a wedding planner. Jeff looks like a caged bird, and the smart money says he'll cheat again.

If Shea's running a press, then our girl Hadley is playing zone defense. She's protecting her heart from all players. Like poor Sterling, a sweet little boy who rents out an entire ice



Belles: Julie, Shea, Kellie, Emily, and Hadley.

"This show is a nightmare. Love it..." That's right. I went all Paris Hilton. Because it's that kind of show.

somebody's accessories.

Finally, it's time for the actual event. The camera spends a lot of time panning between a sad little poster for the Komen Foundation and the exhibits at the Derby

Since we live in a basketball state, we'll talk in sports metaphors. If Shea's running a press, then Handley is playing zone defense.

skating rink so they can skate, have some cocoa, maybe some sex, and see where things go. Like to a relationship with love and flowers and happily ever after. This seems to annoy Hadley. Because she's All.About.Having.Fun!, remember? She plays along with Sterling, then goes over to her Best Guy Friend, Russ's house to discuss her relationship woes. I don't really know what happens next, because instead of listening, I shout at the TV "I might know that guy!" It seems that he and I have several mutual friends on Facebook, and the old FB algorithm keeps suggesting him as a potential friend. Now, I don't actually know him, but he shall henceforth be known as Russ, Whom I Might Know. Anyway, some stuff happens that I'm still not listening to, since I'm busy telling my fiancé that I might know RWIMK. All of a sudden, Hadley and RWIMK are standing in a cornfield in what looks to be The Most Dramatic Rose Ceremony Ever. RWIMK is telling old Hadley that he thinks that, just maybe, they could get their timing right and date each other. Hadley suddenly remembers poor Sterling. She's all in love with Sterling now. RWIMK and she sadly part ways, walking their separate ways toward the opposite ends of the field. Now, I am truly going bananas. A cornfield?!? Give me an effing break. Louisville-Metro is the 17th largest media market in the country. "My mayor" Jerry Abramson has done some great work with protecting and expanding the city's green spaces, but you have to drive to Indiana to see corn.

By this point, the show heading to the home stretch. My Facebook status has been updated to say

So, we join our celebutee Belles for the final ridiculous sequence plot point of the evening. This concerns the charity gala the girls are throwing. They never really tell us the particulars of their charitable foundation, other than a nebulous implication that the funds are going to the local Komen for the Cure affiliate. And a passing statement that they have thrown events in the past. I'm getting more than a little antsy over this part. First of all, are we supposed to believe that the Belles knew each other pre-show? Second, I need details about their event. The Louisville charity circuit is a world that includes many of my friends, and many events which I have both attended and planned myself. I've worked a LOT of fundraisers, Belles. Y'all don't seem to know the first thing about it.

Belle Emily goes on the Terry Meiners show to promote the event. Terry is a local celebrity broadcaster and, it seems, a former colleague of Belle Emily, who once defied her conservative (but still surprisingly rich!) daddy by going into TV broadcasting. Until she stopped. But, she's a rebel nonetheless!

The Belles spend a lot of time bitching at each other. Somebody wants to conduct a fundraiser in which the guests are sold 100 martinis at \$20; one will contain a real diamond, while the others are laced with rhinestones. Then there's some silliness because the huge, gaudy multi-karat diamond necklaces that have been lent them don't match

Museum, the event's venue. Belle Kellie has been pounding Cosmos like it was 1998, and is embarrassingly, slow dancingly drunk. Her drunkenness is of some concern to the other Belles. It seems her behavior is distracting from the gravitas of their event. Not that they actually say "gravitas," but you know....

The Belles are also concerned that they only raised \$3,200 with their event. Of course they didn't raise any money! They did a terrible job promoting it, and the only people who attended were the Belles, their respective men-folk, and a few drunk friends. By my count, \$3,200 is \$200 a head. Seriously, what kind of Southern girls are they? Any self-respecting Junior Leaguer in the state of Kentucky knows how to raise \$3,200 in an afternoon: you plan a catered lunch, make a decent trip to the Liquor Barn, and start a conversation about basketball or politics.

Alas, the end of the party signals the end of our first week with the Belles. Next week promises more excitement: We may learn where Julie is! Shea is proceeding as though she were engaged to Jeff, even though there's no ring! And I wouldn't miss it for the world. ■

Southern Belles Louisville airs Thursday nights at 10pm on SoapNet. Check local listings.

Heather C. Watson is a regular contributor to *Ace Weekly* and *Ace Online*.