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For the ‘This Is Us’ women, it’s all about striving to be better

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Actresses Susan Kelechi-Watson, left, Mandy Moore, center, and Chrissy Metz, right, who star in "This Is Us." (Michael Nagle / For The Times)

NBC's "This Is Us" takes its audience on an emotional roller coaster weekly and, as we learned earlier this month, that ride has been extended for three more seasons. But one of the key reasons its stories feel so incredibly heartfelt and human is its stellar trio of female leads: Mandy Moore (Rebecca Pearson), Chrissy Metz (Kate Pearson) and Susan Kelechi Watson (Beth Pearson). All three ladies took a break recently from the network's presentation to advertisers in New York City to sit with The Envelope to talk about handling babies, learning from TV shows — and their series not getting all the credit it deserves.

All three of you play mothers on the show, though you're not moms — yet — in real life. What's been strange about that experience for you?

Mandy Moore: We're all moms!

Chrissy Metz: I'm a little afraid of when the toddlers arrive. Right now I'm just handling dolls. But I had an experience with a movie I did where I had to hold the baby up like ["The Lion King's" Simba] and I was sweating so profusely, my mascara was running, I'm like, "Please get your baby!" So, we'll see.

Are you channeling anything about your own mothers or childhoods?

Metz: It's sort of inevitable that you bring whatever you know to the scene or the role. I try to be a little more patient because my parents weren't very patient.

Susan Kelechi Watson: Patience is very big. Our generation — we're much more conscious about taking the time before responding to something [children do]. Allowing a moment to metabolize information so you can approach it differently. Beth reflects to me the strength of my mother and grandmother, and all these strong and powerful women in the family.

It's clear that you're all three good work friends; does that carry over outside of work?

Moore: Our lives are all so busy. It's not that we don't want to, but Susan's here in New York, Chrissy just had a movie come out, I've been in New Zealand. And the show is cutthroat with its pace when we are working. We don't even have table reads anymore.

Watson: We don't block, either.

Metz: We might rehearse once or twice and then the cameras are out.

So there's no crying together in your trailers after an emotionally heightened scene?

Actresses Susan Kelechi-Watson, left, Mandy Moore, center, and Chrissy Metz, right, who star in "This Is Us." (Michael Nagle / For The Times)

Metz: We cry enough on set!

Moore: Yeah, we don't need to bring it back to our trailers. And I don't know about you guys, but I don't spend any time in my trailer. It's a very lean amount of downtime.

Metz: We all text each other.

Not too long ago, the biggest show was "Seinfeld," which had the motto of "no hugging, no learning." "This Is Us" is pretty much the polar opposite of that. Why are we into learning and hugging again on TV?

Moore: People are hungry for that. We're living in crazy times. It can be escapist, but it's also unifying. This show highlights the best of who we are, and that differences we have may be the things we need to celebrate and connect us.

Watson: The stories are ones that show we can really embrace each other and not isolate one another; we can actually listen and hear one another. Things don't have to end with a pretty bow around them — but it's a conversation.

Moore: I also love that our characters are trying to be their very best version of themselves. They're fallible. They're only human. For so long, especially for men, everything had to be about the antihero. I love that all of our men are upstanding; they make the right choices.

One aspect that's rarely discussed about the show is how it presents racially integrated families as a matter of course, not as exceptional. Do you think "This Is Us" doesn't get enough credit for that?

Metz: We don't get enough credit for a lot of things, if I'm very honest. We do things no show has ever done in a 42-minute, commercial space on a network.

Watson: It's funny how people will just take the ride, take your word for it. Whether people recognize it or not, these characters will have dignity, there'll be a family at the core, these characters will try to do their best. We're not asking anyone if that's OK. It's at the core of what the show is founded on. Everything grows out of that.

[ALSO: The intense emotional connection 'This Is Us' has with its viewers overwhelms the team behind it »](#)

Do you think audiences really learn anything from TV?

Watson: I can tell you shows that taught me stuff I still carry to this day. We're looking for how to do this life, know what I mean? And because some of these conversations aren't happening in the home, we want to be someplace people can look to. That's why representation is so important. We always get feedback about seeing a black couple on TV that's having a good relationship, or a real relationship. That matters to people.

Showrunner Dan Fogelman has been quoted as saying he knows just how the show will end. How would you like the show to conclude, eventually?

Moore: However Dan wants it

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Metz: Yeah, I trust Dan. He's got this.

Watson: He's still so excited. He'll still come to you and be like, "You've got to see what I just wrote. Let me let you read it." He's somebody who believes in all of this. And there's a trickle-down thing to us. It starts from the top. This is the thing you can look at and go, "I trust you. You brought us this far; we're just going to keep carrying the ball to the goal line." We do it for the team.

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