

TV Review: Great 'Southland' Premieres New Episodes on TNT

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 2, 2010 - 4:16pm

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CHICAGO – The most notable casualties of the disastrous “The Jay Leno Show” may have been Conan O’Brien and the reputation of “The Tonight Show” but the fate of scripted drama on NBC also took a hit, exemplified by the fact that the network let arguably their best show go without much fanfare. Someone at TNT saw the potential of “Southland” to be the next “NYPD Blue” or “ER” and agreed to air the six episodes that NBC left in the can. They start tonight and if they do well enough, we may get more. Do your part and watch.



TV Rating: **4.5/5.0**

Complex ensemble dramas are a thing of the past on network television. Think about the most recent network hits. Do you think even something like “ER” would have found an audience? I don’t. I think the networks have given up on scripted drama, realizing that they can’t compete with networks like FX, AMC, TNT, HBO, and Showtime, so why bother? In other words, “Southland” never belonged on NBC. It should have been on TNT all along.



Southland Season Two

Photo credit: TNT

In fact, when I reviewed the first episode of "Southland" on NBC in 2009, I wrote, "'Southland' doesn't quite feel as much like a show of the prime era of NBC as it does a part of the networks that are pushing drama today - basic cable. "Southland" would be right at home on FX, TNT, A&E, or AMC. In other words, it's pretty damn good." I'd like to take credit for the show ending up on TNT but even I know that's highly unlikely.



Southland Season Two

Photo credit: TNT

Whatever channel it's on, "Southland" features some of the best writing on television with arguably the best ensemble cast, period - cop show, drama, cable, broadcast, whatever. Created by John Wells ("ER"), the show is remarkably deep in that it features multiple characters and subplots but never feels cluttered or overcrowded with them. Great performances from Michael Cudlitz, Regina King, Arija Bareikis, and Ben McKenzie add to the depth.

The premiere of new episodes on TNT - the network has been airing the previously-on-NBC eps since January - features a pair of excellent guest performances from TV veterans Amaury Nolasco ("Prison Break") and Wood Harris ("The Wire"); the former will clearly be a series regular and another strong addition to the excellent ensemble.

As far as plotlines for the new "half-season" are concerned, Russell (Tom Everett Scott) is in the hospital, leaving partner Lydia (King) to solve an unusual missing persons case with a new car-mate (Nolasco); Chickie (Bareikis) is struggling to deal with life in a police station where she's being ostracized for revealing her partner's addictions; Ben (McKenzie) and John (Cudlitz) deal with daily drama along with the latter's addiction to pain medication; Sammy and his wife decide to have a baby; and Nate deals with the trouble caused in his marriage after the revelations about his past.



Southland Season Two

Photo credit: TNT

"Southland" is a show that could really elevate TNT into a player alongside more critically acclaimed networks like Showtime, AMC, or HBO. King and Cudlitz deserve serious award consideration and the writing is strong enough to merit numerous trophies. Most notably, the show feels like it's just getting started. This is the kind of character-rich drama that gets better each of its first few years (as did "NYPD Blue," "ER," "Hill Street Blues"). As the actors and writers become more in tune with their characters, the show feels more genuine and honestly dramatic. "Southland" has that kind of potential.

TNT has yet to agree to produce any new episodes on their own and ratings for the repeats have been good but not great. Tonight is the big

test as the show’s first unaired episode goes up against USA’s “White Collar” and, of course, the NBC premiere of “Parenthood”. “Southland” is easily the best show of the three, but it’s going to face a serious ratings battle. Give this show time and it will become must-watch TV, one of the most highly rated on cable. I have no doubt about that. The writers, actors, directors, producers, and even two networks have done their part. Now it’s your turn to visit “Southland”.

New episodes of ‘Southland’ premiere on TNT on Tuesday, March 2nd, 2010 at 9pm CST. It stars Ben McKenzie, Michael Cudlitz, Regina King, Tom Everett Scott, Michael McGrady, Shawn Hatosy, Kevin Alejandro, and Arija Bareikis from creator John Wells.



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By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [21]
Content Director
[HollywoodChicago.com](http://www.hollywoodchicago.com)
brian@hollywoodchicago.com [20]

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