

TV Review: Riveting, Spectacular ‘Justified’ With Timothy Olyphant

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 16, 2010 - 11:21am

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CHICAGO – In the hundreds of shows that I’ve reviewed in my decade covering television, I’ve rarely been as instantly blown away as I was by the premiere of “Justified,” a riveting, perfectly paced, expertly acted piece of drama that simply must be seen. The next two episodes are a slight step down but that doesn’t change the fact that this is the best new drama of 2009-2010.



TV Rating: **5.0/5.0**

Almost like musicians playing riffs off tunes that have become hits before, Timothy Olyphant takes the lawman persona he honed on HBO’s “Deadwood” and Walton Goggins amplifies the righteous sleaze he mastered on “The Shield” in the premiere of “Justified,” a modern Western about two men willing to take the law into their own hands to justify their definition of right and wrong.



Justified

Photo credit: Miranda Penn Turin/FOX

Based on another cool character created by the great Elmore Leonard (“Get Shorty”), Olyphant plays Raylan Givens, an old-fashioned U.S. Marshall introduced in a high noon showdown with a modern man in black. Givens has given a drug lord 24 hours to get out of Miami and it’s clear that the bad guy isn’t taking the threat very seriously. The dusty center of town of the classic Western may have been replaced by a rooftop lunch table in Florida but the beats of the scene and the inevitable quick draw are as timeless as John Wayne.



Justified
Photo credit: Prashant Gupta/FX

After the inciting incident, Givens is shuffled off to the Western U.S. office based out of a small town in Kentucky that happens to be near where Raylan grew up. A shady character from Givens’ past named Boyd Crowder (Walton Goggins) has been causing trouble as a maniac white supremacist. After Crowder and his boys blow up a black church with a missile launcher, Givens is forced to go to the other side of the tracks to bring his own friend in for a lineup.

Raylan also crosses paths with Ava Crowder (Joelle Carter), Boyd’s sister-in-law who happens to have just shot her abusive husband at the dining room table and has a romantic past and potential future with the smooth-talking lawman, and his ex Winona Hawkins (Natalie Zea). By the time the premiere has ended, Raylan will be forced to quick draw again and even to question his belief that he never pulls a trigger unless he means to kill someone.

So many great shows have been about the gray area between right and wrong but rarely has a show been so built around that concept as “Justified”. The entire premiere is about characters, both good guys and bad, going to extremes in pursuit of what they think is right. Even Goggins’ Neo-Nazi believes he is doing the right thing fighting for his race and against a corrupt government. Goggins is brilliant in that he doesn’t merely turn Crowder into the caricature he easily could have become.

But this is Olyphant’s show in every conceivable way. He was overshadowed by McShane on “Deadwood” but he gets to shine in “Justified” with the perfect blend of smooth-talking humor and tough-guy body language. With one episode, he creates a more interesting and well-rounded lead character than most actors do in an entire season. It’s the best work he’s ever done and that’s coming from someone who’s always been a fan.



Justified
Photo credit: Prashant Gupta/FX

Olyphant is great but the key to “Justified” is the same as most great shows - the writing. This is spectacular drama, particularly the pilot, of the kind almost never seen on network TV any more and usually relegated to pay channels like HBO or Showtime. Creator Graham Yost (“Boomtown”) and his team of writers have crafter an amazing blend of Leonard-esque dry wit, social commentary, action, and character drama. The first episode is so award-worthy that the fact that the second two aren’t quite as strong isn’t too much of a surprise.

It becomes clearer over the next two weeks that there may be more “mystery-of-the-week” structure than you would think with Raylan solving a new case with each outing, although even the episode-contained arcs fit within the theme of the show and its title. This is a show about

people put into situations where they feel they have no other option whether that be to shoot a man or take up arms against the government - either way, they feel justified.

The plotting of the subsequent episodes doesn't match the first and there's no supporting performance as strong as Goggins but I'll take a couple of good-not-great outings for something remarkable as the premiere a few times a season and I'm confident "Justified" will get back to the peak of its amazing first episode, one of the most entertaining and riveting hours of television in a long time. I have a feeling that we'll be watching "Justified" for a long time.

'Justified' premieres on FX on Tuesday, March 16th, 2010 at 9pm CST. It stars Timothy Olyphant, Erica Tazel, Walton Goggins, Natalie Zea, Joelle Carter, Jacob Pitts, and Nick Searcyas. It was created by Graham Yost.



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