

TV Review: 'Hawthorne' is Custom-Made Drama For Summer TV Wasteland

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on June 22, 2010 - 8:45am

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CHICAGO – Summer is the time for fluff. And that's what "Hawthorne" is. It's a drama that crosses the genre boundary into the realm of soap opera. Having said that, the second season premiere of "Hawthorne" is not nearly as melodramatic as TNT's on-air promos might have you believe with their "she's all woman" tagline.



TV Rating: **3.0/5.0**

The key to enjoying this season premiere is to turn off an overly critical mind and any persistent intellectual snobbery. The acting can be stilted and the show is formulaic, but for a fluffy summer diversion, it suits its purpose.



Hawthorne

Photo credit: TNT

"Hawthorne's" aforementioned formula is in line with Showtime's provocative "Nurse Jackie" and NBC's flailing "Mercy." All three hospital-based series have a tough-as-nails heroine with a heart of gold (here, the eponymous Christina Hawthorne, played by Jada Pinkett Smith), an emotional or human obstacle that stands between the protagonist and her in-hospital love interest, a faithful same-sex best friend, an in-hospital adversary, and an innocent, idealistic junior nurse who's taken under their wing. Down to the last of these details, the three series use this formula, but to varying degrees of success. In comparison, "Hawthorne" fares decently — it is not as edgy as "Nurse Jackie" but certainly overtakes "Mercy" in quality of the acting and originality.



Hawthorne
Photo credit: TNT

Vanessa Lengies (“American Dreams,” “Waiting...”) is characteristically good, if a little saccharine, as the innocent junior nurse Kelly. Michael Vartan (“Alias,” “Monster-in-Law”) plays Tom, Christina’s patiently devoted suitor. Vartan is as sweetly likable as always, and the unlikely pairing of Vartan with Smith actually works as they display a subtl-but-palpable chemistry. It is when Vartan tries to belie his meek sensitivity, by playing a guy’s guy in a scene with his newly introduced but supposedly long-time guy pal Paul (Kenneth Choi), that he seems awkward and his otherwise-plausible performance falters.

Smith (“The Matrix Reloaded” and “Revolutions,” “Collateral”) is at the center of it all as Christina, with mixed results. She physically fills out the role of the prototypical strong-willed female protagonist – she’s almost wiry with jutting cheekbones and fixed eyes. But her execution of the character is patchy. She veers into stilted and stiff delivery at times, lending moments unnecessary melodrama. For instance, in the opening scene of the episode, when she reacts to news of her hospital’s closing with angry incredulity, it is a performance that seems reliant on physical gestures and voice fluctuations, keeping it from feeling natural or true.

“Hawthorne” is a suitable summer diversion for viewers looking for drama in the “I am woman, hear me roar” category. And TNT knows what they’re doing programming it into the alternate summer lineup: it is enjoyable but not substantial enough to hold up to the stiff breeze of the fall schedule.

The season two premiere of “Hawthorne” stars Jada Pinkett Smith, Michael Vartan, Vanessa Lengies, Kenneth Choi and Suleka Mathew. It airs on TNT on Tuesday, June 22 at 8:00 pm CST.

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Source URL (retrieved on Apr 18 2024 - 9:12am):

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