

TV Review: Rich Ensemble Drives Heartfelt Humor of ‘Raising Hope’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 21, 2010 - 10:16am

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CHICAGO – Like the last show from its creator (“My Name is Earl”), the new FOX sitcom “Raising Hope” too-often feels like its underlining and pushing its jokes through the screen in desperation for a laugh but the cast of this new comedy entry is the best of the season and their talent alone should overcome the occasional bit of flop sweat.



Television Rating: **3.5/5.0**

The affable Lucas Neff stars as Jimmy Chance, the straight-man lead surrounded by a cast of quirkier characters on “Raising Hope.” The title refers to Jimmy’s new daughter, the product of a one-night stand with a wanted felon (a guest turn by Bijou Phillips) who becomes a statistic of capital punishment shortly after giving birth. Now, this lower-class sweet guy has to deal with the difficulties of being a father while also managing his zany extended family.



Jimmy Chance (Lucas Neff, L) is a well-meaning screw-up trying his best to raise his infant daughter with the help of his dad Burt (Garret Dillahunt, R) in RAISING HOPE premiering Tuesday, Sept. 21 (9:00-9:30 PM ET/PT) on FOX.

Photo credit: ©2010 Fox Broadcasting Co. Cr: Ray Mickshaw/FOX

Said family is run by Virginia (Martha Plimpton) and Burt Chance (Garret Dillahunt), two tough-but-sweet parents who could become breakout characters of the season. Plimpton brings a brilliant blend to her character, finding the grit inherent in the life of a woman who has struggled through multiple jobs to make ends meet for her family and probably had kids too young herself but has also done everything in her power for her son and turned out a pretty great young man. Plimpton perfectly captures one of those women who isn’t the first to openly express her

love but probably has a deeper well of it than most people.



Jimmy Chance (Lucas Neff, C) is a well-meaning screw-up trying his best to raise his infant daughter with the help of the eccentric family who did a less-than-stellar job of raising him in RAISING HOPE premiering Tuesday, Sept. 21 (9:00-9:30 PM ET/PT) on FOX. Also Pictured L-R: Cloris Leachman, Garret Dillahunt, Shannon Woodward and Martha Plimpton.
Photo credit: ©2010 Fox Broadcasting Co. Cr: Matthias Clamer/FOX

And Dillahunt, who may at first seem unusually cast after roles in "Deadwood" and "Last House on the Left," is a spectacular counter to Plimpton. He's a great and underrated actor who has been memorable in nearly everything that he's ever done, so perhaps we shouldn't be surprised that he's so perfect here as well. Plimpton and Dillahunt make a fantastic couple, possibly the best new one of the season.

The other two notable members of the supporting cast are the award-winning Cloris Leachman as Maw Maw and the charming Shannon Woodward as Sabrina. Leachman has been given the broad character; the senile old lady who takes her shirt off and runs into the street. Some of Maw Maw's material is a bit too broad for this talented actress but I can't imagine all of her jokes will be as extreme as they are in the first episode. Most shows would be improved by an actress as talented as Cloris Leachman in the supporting cast. And Woodward is instantly charismatic as the romantic lead of the show, a sarcastic grocery store clerk who's clearly drawn to Jimmy even if she does make fun of him.

Like "My Name is Earl," "Raising Hope" comes from the mile-a-minute school of comedy; the one that works from the strategy that if you don't like a joke, you need not worry since another is coming quickly. Interestingly, it's the moments when the premiere calms down and catches its breath that are the most memorable. There's a surprisingly effective conclusion to Hope's first night of baby-crying that could actually produce tears in the right audience member and I'm intrigued at the idea that Creator Greg Garcia could find the heart that was missing from "Earl." If they can allow the talented cast of "Raising Hope" to continue the character development that happens at the end of the first episode instead of merely going back to wacky bits like topless grandma then it could be one of the better sitcoms on television. We can hope.

'Raising Hope,' which airs on FOX, stars Lucas Neff, Martha Plimpton, Garret Dillahunt, Cloris Leachman, and Shannon Woodward. It was created by Greg Garcia. It premieres on Tuesday, September 21st, 2010 at 8PM CST.



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By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [16]
Content Director
HollywoodChicago.com
brian@hollywoodchicago.com [15]

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