

## TV Review: 'Law & Order: Los Angeles' Goes Through Cast Overhaul

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on April 11, 2011 - 8:58am

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CHICAGO – The revolving door of Dick Wolf's legendary creation keeps on spinning. Cast members have come and gone from the "Law & Order" franchise for years, but this time the door only goes in one direction as Skeet Ulrich's Detective is being killed off with no chance to return. So, is it an upgrade, downgrade, or more of the same? Consider version 2.0 of "Law & Order: Los Angeles" a step in the right direction with some room left for improvement.



TV Rating: **3.0/5.0**

To kick off the new version of "Law & Order: Los Angeles," the writers and producers present a two-part episode ("Zuma Canyon" and "Silver Lake") featuring multiple murders, miscarriages of justice, rape, perversion, and the death of more than one child. The "Law & Order" series has never shied away from the seedy underbelly of humanity but you may need a shower after "L&O: LA," which seems to feature heartbreaking plot twists every week. It ain't easy living in the city of angels.



Law and Order: Los Angeles

*Photo credit: NBC*

Of course, the headline-grabbing event in the first episode, one that has been heavily advertised and so I feel no compunction about spoiling it, is the death of Ulrich's Detective Rex Winters. Ulrich has been good on television before, helping carry the cult hit "Jericho," but he was never the right fit here and I think the producers probably knew it from the very beginning. It could be a byproduct of his youthful looks, but he never looked comfortable in the shoes of a tough police officer and it feels like this development was a matter of time.

There were probably two other reasons for the cast overhaul of "Law & Order: Los Angeles" and that is that the ratings started strong but sunk steadily over the following weeks and one must assume that the reason Alfred Molina and Terrence Howard traded off weeks in the legal half

of the show at the beginning of the season is that these two talented actors probably didn't have time in their busy schedules. Well, now they do and having two actors of this caliber on the show every week instantly makes this the best ensemble currently in the "Law & Order" universe. No offense to fans of Christopher Meloni and Mariska Hargitay.



Law and Order: Los Angeles  
Photo credit: NBC

Molina plays Deputy D.A. Ricardo Morales, a man shattered by injustice in the first half of tonight's two-part episode. Morales is so defeated by the action of "Zuma Canyon" that he leaves the D.A.'s office and returns to his former job as a police detective, sliding effortlessly into the first half of the show and allowing Terrence Howard to appear in every episode as Deputy D.A. Jonah Dekker.

The cast overhaul works. Molina is great in both episodes and seems reinvigorated by the opportunity to solve crimes instead of just prosecuting them. If "Law & Order: Los Angeles" sticks around for the Fall — which is a big "if" at this point — Molina's work could eventually turn this show into a hit. I like Howard a lot and always have but this is Molina's show and, to a lesser but notable extent, Corey Stoll, who has really developed as Detective Tomas Jaruszalski. Molina and Stoll could make a potent TV crime-solving time.

Emphasis on the word "could." The problem on "Law & Order: Los Angeles" is the writing. Both episodes tonight feel overly sensational or tabloid-inspired. Both episodes feature that bastion of easy, manipulative writing — dead children. And both episodes featured moments where even I, who doesn't have a legal background, went "that probably wouldn't happen." The show constantly feels like its defying the suspension of disbelief — such as when a Mexican consulate protects a child murderer for political gain, which just doesn't seem likely — for the sake of attention-grabbing plotlines. Molina, Stoll, and others are working to find the realistic characters who defend the innocent in Los Angeles but both cases tonight feel overly scripted.

Take the second episode which follows that classic "Law & Order" formula of grabbing a real-life story and tweaking it slightly for the show. The story this time was just featured on "48 Hours Mystery" two nights ago and features a Secret Service agent who was well-respected but took an obsession with breaking into houses and trying on panties to extremes that included rape and murder. The real case is sensational enough that the legal nonsense the writers of "L & O" inserted into it and catchy twists and turns stand out and feel unnecessary. Of course, the plot needs to be changed enough to avoid playing just like "Dateline," but they need to work more on making it feel realistic.

The "Law & Order" machine is not what it used to be. The original is gone, "Law & Order: Criminal Intent" is beginning its final season next month, and "Law & Order: Los Angeles" has struggled enough in the ratings that it's unclear if it will get a spot on the fall schedule. There's a chance that there could be only one "Law & Order" on the air in a year's time ("Special Victims Unit" ain't going anywhere). Even if that's the case, the revolving door of cast members will likely keep spinning.

*"Law & Order: Los Angeles" stars Alfred Molina, Terrence Howard, Corey Stoll, and Rachel Ticotin. It returns to NBC tonight, April 11th, 2011 at 8pm CST.*



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