

TV Review: ‘Memphis Beat’ Returns For Improved Season Two With Jason Lee

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on June 14, 2011 - 8:33am

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CHICAGO – Jason Lee, best known as the star of “My Name is Earl,” took a different direction last year when he took the lead as a police detective in “Memphis Beat.” The second season premiere is June 14th on TNT Network.



All the characters on the show seem more comfortable in their roles, the pacing is more relaxed and the show is improved, but the common elements seen in every cop show since “Dragnet” – tough but benign department head, detective who plays by his own rules, in-station comic relief – remains proportionately intact in this by-the-book police drama.

The second season premiere starts with a tragic bang – a Memphis cop has been murdered and dumped by the Mississippi River. Detective Dwight Hendricks (Jason Lee) is on the case, backed by his partner Charlie “Whitehead” White (Sam Hennings). Their precinct supervisor, Tanya Rice (Alfre Woodard), wants Dwight and Charlie split on this case, and assigns new Internal Affairs director Claire Ryan (Beau Garrett) to ride along with Dwight.



The murdered cop is suspected of gun running for a white supremacy group, that’s why Internal Affairs is involved. Superintendent Rice is

also pushing Charlie to be a better cop, thinking he is coasting. And with his new lovely police bureaucrat partner, Detective Dwight's hard heart may be softening. In the midst of the investigation and a sad police funeral, it's just another day on the Memphis Beat.

Jason Lee remains kind of strange in this role. He is an unabashed promoter of all things Memphis, even moonlighting as a singer (with an emphasis on Elvis, naturally). As a cop character, the script and his performance makes him too all-encompassing and saintly. It would be more interesting to explore the mama loving, singing or relationship-challenged side of his soul rather than the TV stereotype of the 24/7 available, one-man police force.

The supporting cast is what gives Memphis Beat a little spice. The steady Alfre Woodard, in her conflict with Charlie, adds a little mystery to the usual light-hearted police station atmosphere. Celia Weston is Dwight's mother, and has a nice moment involving the worship of her long-dead husband. D.J. Qualls (Sutton) and Leonard Earl Howze (Reginald) are less intrusive in their supporting roles, part of the overall story without feeling shoehorned in.



Left to Right: D.J. Qualls, Sam Hennings, Leonard Earl Howze, Jason Lee and Alfre Woodard in 'Memphis Beat'
Photo credit: TNT

It's obvious that the show is adding a romantic element with Beau Garrett (Claire), but why do police shows insist on casting so attractive? It's just not interesting anymore and just rings unbelievable. When Steven Bochco broke the mold 30 years ago with "Hill Street Blues," by casting more appropriate woman cop role models, there was a indication that police shows would modify the hottie as police woman. But this is TV in the image conscious post millennium, heaven forbid they would try something different.

Memphis Beat is setting the stage for some more character driven elements, which may make it a better diversion in its second season. Jason Lee has both a badge and a guitar, and in ElvisLand that means a little jailhouse rock.

"Memphis Beat" starts its second season Tuesday, June 14th at 9pm EST/8pm CST on TNT. Check local listings for channel location. Featuring Jason Lee, Alfre Woodard, Sam Hennings, D.J. Qualls, Celia Weston, Beau Garrett and Leonard Earl Howze.



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