

TV Review: Jonny Lee Miller, Lucy Liu Carry CBS's 'Elementary'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 27, 2012 - 1:43pm

- [Aidan Quinn](#) [2]
- [Brian Tallerico](#) [3]
- [CBS](#) [4]
- [Elementary](#) [5]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [6]
- [Jonny Lee Miller](#) [7]
- [Lucy Liu](#) [8]
- [Sherlock](#) [9]
- [Television](#) [10]
- [Theater, TV, DVD & Blu-Ray](#) [11]

CHICAGO – “Elementary,” starring Jonny Lee Miller and Lucy Liu and debuting tonight on CBS at 9pm CST, is a tough show to review. Yes, it’s another procedural mystery show and I wouldn’t blame you if you’re just not interested in one of those. Who has time for all the fictional crimes being solved on TV every week? And “Elementary” isn’t quite good enough to stand far enough above in its genre to overcome the general familiarity TV goers will feel with it. However, if you do watch shows like “Castle,” “Bones,” and “The Mentalist,” “Elementary” fits snugly in your groove.



Television Rating: **3.5/5.0**

It makes sense that a genre that has been so heavily inspired by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle would work its way back to the legendary crime solver that has so clearly influenced characters as diverse as Columbo, Monk, and “The Mentalist.” It’s actually somewhat surprising that the popularity of the genre and the modern love of the reboot didn’t force “Elementary” into existence before 2012. It’s far from groundbreaking television (and pales in comparison to the brilliant “Sherlock,” although that show is ultimately doing very different things in a very different format) but it works on its own terms. If you judge a show based on what it sets out to accomplish, “Elementary” works.



Elementary

Photo credit: CBS

Like so many of these shows, a large degree of the success of “Elementary” comes down to casting. What would “Monk” be without Tony Shalhoub? How would “Castle” work without Nathan Fillion & Stana Katic or “Bones” without Emily Deschanel & David Boreanaz? And so the creators of “Elementary” know that the show is going to largely live and die on who plays the two central crime solvers from week to week — Miller as Mr. Holmes and Liu as the trustworthy Watson. Both stars are remarkably charismatic and carry the show when the routine nature of the plotting threatens to turn it into tedium.

And that’s my biggest concern with “Elementary” — how long can Miller and Liu do the heavy lifting required to make another generic mystery show must-see television? They probably can’t and I suspect that “Elementary” will settle into a nice groove like “The Mentalist” — a show with a loyal audience but not the most creative program on television and nothing that will win awards.

It raises a critical question — Is it wrong to give a show a pass for just being OK when that’s really all that its genre sets out to do? Quick,

name the last GREAT mystery series. The fact is that unless its a mini-movie like "Sherlock" or "Wallander," the genre was exhausted years ago. And so "Elementary" faces a different standard. It's not breakthrough television. But it doesn't try to be. And it's entertaining enough to satisfy audiences committed to CBS on Thursday nights. Will I watch it every week? Probably not. But I bet I'll be entertained when I do tune in.

"Elementary" stars Jonny Lee Miller, Lucy Liu, Aidan Quinn, and Jon Michael Hill. It premieres on CBS on Thursday, September 27, 2012 at 9pm CST.



[12]

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