

TV Review: Connie Britton Carries a Dramatic Tune to ‘Nashville’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 10, 2012 - 11:21am

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CHICAGO – It seems unlikely to be the artistic accomplishment of “Friday Night Lights” or “American Horror Story,” but Connie Britton has done it again, bringing another character vibrantly to life on “Nashville” and cementing her position as one of the best actresses on television. She’s easily the best thing about this entertaining if inconsistent show, a program that too often submits to its soap opera trappings but has enough rhythm to presume that it could be a solid weekly diversion.



Television Rating: **3.5/5.0**

“Nashville” works largely for the same reason country music works — strong personalities and timeless narratives. The saga of the aging musician and the starlet who looks to take her place in the spotlight is an ancient one and “Nashville” merely reworks it to make it feel fresh to a 2012 audience, particularly one who loves country music. There are other narratives that support it but it’s the way the writers always come back to that veteran vs. newcomer arc that really works here. A strong ensemble (with one exception I’ll get to later), good music, Hollywood production values — “Nashville” is a hit.



Nashville
Photo credit: ABC

Rayna James (Britton) is a country music legend, a singer who has been topping the charts and selling out arenas for decades. Age is cruel to people in the music industry and singers are often turned into veterans before they really want to leave the stage. Rayna is smart enough to know that up-and-coming Juliette Barnes (Hayden Panettiere) is more than a pretty face. She could be the new model that forces the industry to retire the old one before its time. Can Rayna reinvent herself for Juliette's young audience? Does Juliette really want to learn from a potential mentor or merely usurp her?



Nashville
Photo credit: ABC

The Rayna vs. Juliette arc is the main one on "Nashville" but it's far from the only one. Rayna's father Lamar Wyatt (Powers Boothe) is one of the most prominent power figures in Nashville and he decides that he wants to position his son-in-law Teddy (Eric Close) as the town's next political figure. With Rayna suffering in her career, could her husband's rise to fame and importance hurt or help her? And will Lamar use his son-in-law as nothing more than a puppet figure?

There are other industry types circling "Nashville" including band leader Deacon Claybourne (Charles Esten), a young musician named Avery (Jonathan Jackson), and two struggling songwriters (Clare Bowen & Sam Palladio). All of these characters will intersect with Rayna and Juliette in their struggle to decide which one should be the other's opening act.

As expectedly spectacular as Connie Britton is in the series premiere of "Nashville," I have serious reservations about how Hayden Panettiere is playing Juliette. There's too much of a smirk, a mischievous grin here instead of the realism that Britton is bringing to the piece. To start, Britton is playing drama and Panettiere is playing soap opera. It would be a stronger show if they could ground her more.

I think that will come. Like a band who gets better to match their lead singer, I think every element of "Nashville" will rise to match the performance of Ms. Britton. It's not a show for everyone. You need to have a passing interest in the music industry, be able to tolerate country tunes, and respond to soap opera plotting. But for what it is, "Nashville" works. It's a tune that doesn't break the mold but fits squarely in it. And sometimes those make for the most memorable hits.

"Nashville" stars Connie Britton, Hayden Panettiere, Charles Esten, Eric Close, Clare Bowen, Jonathan Jackson, Sam Palladio, Robert Way Wisdom, and Powers Boothe. It premieres on ABC on Wednesday, October 10, 2012 at 9pm CST.



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