

TV Review: David E. Kelley Returns with Effective ‘Monday Mornings’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on February 4, 2013 - 11:37am

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CHICAGO – David E. Kelley is one of the most influential and important TV voices of the modern era with massive hits like “L.A. Law,” “Picket Fences,” “Chicago Hope,” “The Practice,” “Ally McBeal,” “Boston Public,” and “Boston Legal”. However, it’s been a few years and a few failures for Kelley in the recent past and he’s overdue for another hit. Maybe it will be TNT’s “Monday Mornings,” premiering tonight and delivering in unexpectedly successful ways.



Television Rating: **4.0/5.0**

I approached “Monday Mornings” with serious trepidation, exhausted by the seemingly neverending cycle of crappy medical dramas (recent entries include “The Mob Doctor,” “Saving Hope,” and even sorta “Do No Harm”). Another medical drama. Woohoo. And the opening beats of this intense look into the life of neurosurgeons based on the novel by CNN correspondent Sanjay Gupta felt overly familiar. And then “Monday Mornings” started to work on me. The ensemble is excellent and that’s often what we remember most about medical dramas. It wasn’t so much the cases on “ER” or “St. Elsewhere” but the doctors caught up in them. And the doctors on “Monday Mornings” are interesting enough that this could not only break the pattern of misfires for Kelley but redeem the modern medical drama as a whole.



Monday Mornings
Photo credit: TNT

Like his “Chicago Hope” but with a lot more intensity, “Monday Mornings” allows viewers a look into the lives of people who arguably come the closest to playing God. These men and women touch brain tissue every day. The mortality rate is insane and they have to make decisions in the blink of an eye. The title refers to a weekly morbidity and mortality conference in which the doctors meet to discuss the mistakes they have made and serve as a checks and balances system on each other. They have weekly meetings to try and lower that mortality rate and they’re led by the Chief of Surgery at Chelsea General Hospital in Portland, Oregon, Dr. Harding Hooten (Alfred Molina) and Dr. Jorge Villanueva (Ving Rhames), the hospital’s trauma chief.



Monday Mornings
Photo credit: TNT

Molina and Rhames are excellent, adding weight to the proceedings that is often missing from medical dramas. There’s no scenery-chewing by either of these talented stars, just steely-eyed intensity. The melodrama is left more for the doctors who serve under them, including cutting edge neurosurgeons Dr. Tyler Wilson (Jamie Bamber) and Dr. Tina Ridgeway (Jennifer Finnigan), who have to deal with a case involving a child who needs emergency brain surgery in the premiere. I’m tired of medical dramas using the manipulative device of children in jeopardy but even that arc is surprisingly well handled and even moving.

Other doctors at Chelsea General include Dr. Buck Tierney (the great Bill Irwin), the bedside-manner-lacking Dr. Sung Park (Keong Sim), the committed-to-the-detriment-of-her-personal-life Dr. Sydney Napur (Sarayu Rao), and resident Dr. Michelle Robidaux (Emily Swallow). All of the doctors get a notable amount of character development in the premiere as Kelley and his writers deftly balance the medical stories with the personal ones.

“Monday Mornings” doesn’t break any new ground and I feel that a lot of the plotting and dialogue in the premiere could have been less generic but the A-list cast really elevates the production in ways that can’t be underestimated. Molina & Rhames anchor the show but Bamber, so good for years on “Battlestar Galactica,” makes a very charismatic lead and Bill Irwin makes everything better. There’s really not a weak link in the cast as I found acting decisions made by lesser-known names like Rao and Sim interesting as well.

People often turn to drama for not the plotting but the people they meet there. On Monday nights, after a long day at work, I could easily see people spending time with the doctors of Chelsea General (although pairing it with the much cheesier “Dallas” is a boneheaded move on the network’s part) and realizing that as bad a day as they may have had at work, it was probably nothing compared to people who deal with life and death on a daily basis.

“Monday Mornings” stars Alfred Molina, Ving Rhames, Jamie Bamber, Jennifer Finnigan, Bill Irwin, Keong Sim, Sarayu Rao, and Emily Swallow. It was created by David E. Kelley. It premieres on TNT on Monday, February 4, 2013 at 9pm CST.



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By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [17]
Content Director
HollywoodChicago.com
brian@hollywoodchicago.com [16]

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