

TV Review: Sundance Continues to Impress with Riveting ‘Rectify’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on April 22, 2013 - 10:26am

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CHICAGO – Cable networks often develop an identity, whether or not it’s through an intentional marketing strategy like “Characters Welcome” at USA or a network like Showtime building shows around TV actors and actresses who have previously found success in the form (Duchovny, Falco, Hall, Lewis, etc.). With the Sundance Channel’s premiere of the brilliant “Rectify” (now available on Netflix Instant, BTW) and tonight’s two-hour premiere of the riveting “Rectify,” what identity are they developing? Character-driven, deliberately paced, genre pieces that transcend the cliches of their form to become something greater. “Rectify” is at once familiar and unlike anything else on TV right now. Yes, it’s great.



Television Rating: **4.5/5.0**

Daniel Holden (a beautifully understated Aden Young) has spent the majority of his life behind bars. In fact, his life was supposed to end there. He was on death row for a brutal murder in his small town before DNA evidence exonerated him. Now, he greets the world not unlike a teenager sent 20 years in the future. It seems like Daniel was always a simple boy and he’s become a simple man. A simple man who’s still the target of controversy and a local celebrity. And yet he’s not an idiot. He says things like, “*Justification is a slippery slope*” like a man who has read a lot behind bars but social interaction eludes him. He’s fascinating.



Rectify

Photo credit: The Sundance Channel

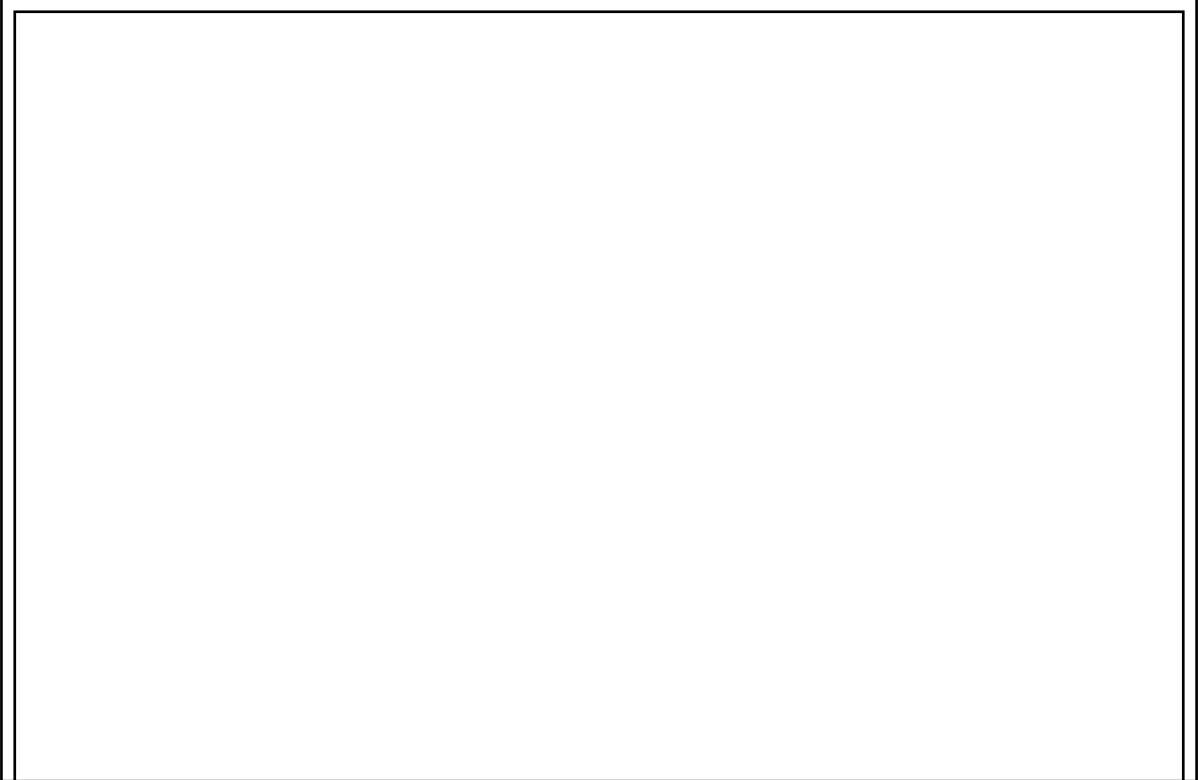
But is he innocent? The former prosecutor and now state senator (Michael O’Neill) thinks he’s still guilty and doesn’t want to give up the case. And there are hints that Daniel may have been involved in some capacity, along with others. So there are elements of “The Killing” in the sense that “Rectify” has a mystery at its core. If Daniel didn’t do it, who did?



The mystery is often placed on the back-burner for scenes involving Daniel’s reassimilation to society and the varied responses from his family to his return. His sister (Abigail Spencer) seems to be the most actively helpful while his mother (J. Smith Cameron) doesn’t know how to deal with Daniel. His step-brother Ted (Clayne Crawford) isn’t sure how to handle Daniel either although wishes he would do more to help his public image. Ted’s wife (the suddenly-everywhere Adelaide Clemens of “Parade’s End” & “The Great Gatsby”) may be the only one who sees redemption in God’s eyes for Daniel.

One thing everyone will notice about “Rectify” is its realistic, simple pace. A man who has been behind bars for 19 years is buying Smart Water and 5-Hour Energy in a convenience store. It’s not done in montage. It’s done in handheld camera, as if we’re spying on him seeing a new world. And the monologue is internal. What the heck is Smart Water? Who are these kids looking at me? Is that really me on the cover of the newspaper? Flashbacks are used sparingly. Conversations seem to take place in real-time. And yet it brings a dark realism to this piece that other filmmaking techniques or a quicker pace would have punctured.

“Rectify” is such a smart program because it works more like literature than television. Most characters on TV say what they’re feeling, thinking, or planning to do at every moment. The great characters — Tony Soprano, Walter White, Al Swearengen — very rarely outline their intentions or motivations. Every character on “Rectify” feels complex, like real people in a strange situation. The show will feel “different” to a lot of viewers. In the cookie-cutter world of TV, “different” is good.





Rectify
Photo credit: The Sundance Channel

Another element that “Rectify” shares with the great TV of the ’00s is in casting. Young seems at first to be not unlike Billy Bob Thornton’s character from “Sling Blade” but he’s far more complex. His stoicism seems to hide deep thought instead of mere naivete. He wasn’t just gone or in a coma for two decades. He was on Death Row. What does THAT do to a man? It’s clear Young has considered every aspect of this character. As have Spencer and Clemens, two interesting actresses who shine here. In particular, Spencer is truly spectacular. There’s not a weak player in the cast.

“Rectify” will be too slow for some viewers accustomed to “The Walking Dead” and “Bates Motel” degrees of action. “The Sopranos” often worked at a slower pace than fans wanted but it found the details in its characters to make it one of the most beloved shows of all time. “Mad Men” and “The Wire” were accused of not moving quickly enough. “Rectify” is slow but never boring. I’d say the same about “Rectify.” If this is the identity of the growing Sundance Channel — deliberate, character-based dramas — I’m very happy to welcome them to the list of important cable networks. Their competition should take notice.

“Rectify” stars Aden Young, Abigail Spencer, J. Smith Cameron, Luke Kirby, Clayne Crawford, Adelaide Clemens, Bruce McKinnon, Jake Austin Walker, and Michael O’Neill. It was created by Ray McKinnon and premieres on Monday, April 22, 2013 at 8pm CST on the Sundance Channel.



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