

TV Review: CBS’ Generic ‘Three Rivers’ Needs a Creativity Transplant

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CHICAGO – “Three Rivers” takes its title from the Pittsburgh heart transplant hospital at which it is set but even the dull, “easy listening” name of the show should tell you something about the earnest, drab series debuting tonight on CBS. Generic, manipulative, and almost purposefully wasting the talented cast assembled, “Three Rivers” may satisfy viewers tired after a long weekend of football but only because it’s so safe and predictable - two words that never stopped a show, especially one on CBS, from becoming a hit.



There is nothing overtly “wrong” with “Three Rivers”. The cast isn’t bad and the plot of the premiere is certainly about good people doing great things, but with such a glut of medical shows this year - “Nurse Jackie,” “HawthoRNe,” “Mercy,” “Trauma” - doing “nothing wrong” is the same as doing nothing at all.



Miranda (Katherine Moennig, left) and Sophia (Alfre Woodard, right) discuss the case of a teenager with upper GI bleeding, on THREE RIVERS, Sunday, Oct 4 th (9:00-10:00 PM , ET/PT), on the CBS Television Network
Photo credit: CBS/Cliff Lipson

Easily the best thing about “Three Rivers” is the charismatic cast, led by Alex O’Loughlin (most recently seen in “Moonlight” and “Whiteout”). O’Loughlin plays Dr. Alex Yablonski, a smooth-talking, charismatic transplant medical expert. With his piercing eyes, five o’clock shadow, and succinct delivery, he’s from the “George Clooney on ER” school of TV doctors - the kind we all dream we have the day that we end up in the hospital - caring, brilliant, and movie-star handsome. Yablonski will save your baby, get the girl, and ride off into the sunset. He’s an old-fashioned TV doctor in every way.





Dr. Andy Yablonski (Alex O'Loughlin, center), the highly-skilled workaholic lead organ transplant surgeon, Dr. Miranda Foster (Katherine Moennig), a surgical fellow with a rebellious streak, Dr. David Lee (Daniel Henney), a womanizing surgical resident and Ryan Abbott (Christopher J. Hanke), who despite possessing no prior medical experience, becomes the transplant coordinator on THREE RIVERS on Sunday, Oct. 4 (9:00-10:00 p.m. ET/PT) on the CBS Television Network.

Photo credit: George Holz/CBS

The rest of the cast is filled with TV and film veterans, including Katherine Moennig, Daniel Henney, Justina Machado, Christopher J. Hanke, and the great Alfre Woodard as the hospital chief. The ensemble takes turns talking to people either about to give away their organs or the ones about to receive them. Essentially, "Three Rivers" attempts to turn the transplant process into a "CSI"-esque mystery-of-the-week show. Who will live, who will die, and who will give the gift of life by donating their organs appears that it will be a bit of a mystery of every week.

The original pilot has been massively reworked and "Three Rivers" isn't nearly as painful as it once was. With its two-dimensional dialogue and hero always in scrubs, the original concept of the show was remarkably melodramatic. Things have improved but there's still only so far a show this generic can go. Flashy new graphics and guitar riffs on the score can't hide overly earnest, predictable writing.

There's a fine line between old-fashioned and dull and "Three Rivers" crosses to the dark side far too often for my taste. I'm easily moved by medical dramas (look at positive words for "[Mercy](#) [16]" and "[Trauma](#) [17]" for proof) and I was still more aware of the TV cliches at work in "Three Rivers" than the actual human stories.

It may be too soon to write off "Three Rivers" and allow the cast to be transplanted into other series. These are talented people. O'Loughlin, Woodard, and Moennig are particularly promising and CBS can make practically anything a hit nowadays. The fact is that "Three Rivers" is likely to find an audience looking for heartwarming drama on Sunday nights, even if it's predictable. Now if only the writers and producers of "Three Rivers" could throw them a curveball or two and try and sketch a few medical professionals with flaws as interesting as the people they operate on. "Three Rivers" could yet be saved.

'Three Rivers,' which airs on CBS, premieres on October 4th, 2009 at 8PM CST. It stars Alex O'Loughlin, Katherine Moennig, Daniel Henney, Christopher J. Hanke, Alfre Woodard, and Justina Machado.



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