

TV Review: USA Connects Again With Entertaining ‘White Collar’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 23, 2009 - 1:39pm

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CHICAGO – The creative roll of the USA Network continues tonight with the debut of another quick, clever, mystery-of-the-week series that should satisfy fans of their hits like “Monk,” “Psych,” “Burn Notice,” and “Royal Pains”. “White Collar” doesn’t break any molds, almost fitting too predictably into the USA dynamic, but it’s an entertaining program for the end of a long week and looks likely to be another slam dunk for one of the most successful cable networks of the ’00s.



Television Rating: **3.5/5.0**

“White Collar” practically feels like a hybrid of USA hits from its plot description alone. It features international conspiracies a la “Burn Notice” but does so with a buddy duo like “Psych” and is set in the world of the uber-wealthy like “Royal Pains”. Of course, being derivative means little to viewers of a show like this as long as it’s entertaining and “White Collar” is surprisingly so, held high by one of the best new oil-and-water dynamics of the year.



Willie Garson as Mozzie, Matt Bomer as Neal Caffrey, Tim DeKay as Peter Burke, Tiffani Thiessen as Elizabeth Burke

Photo credit: Nigel Perry/USA

The odd couple at the center of “White Collar” are a con man and a G-man. The former is Neal Caffrey (Matt Bomer of “Chuck”), a

handsome, suave, blue-eyed player who can basically talk anyone into anything and has made millions in the world of art fraud and other white collar crimes. The latter is the man who caught him, Agent Peter Burke (Tim DeKay of “Carnivale”). He’s awkward, anxious, and the A-side to Caffrey’s B-side. He clearly wants justice but wouldn’t mind a few dating tips while he’s taking Neal back to jail.



Matthew Bomer as Neal Caffrey, Tim DeKay as Peter Burke
Photo credit: David Giesbrecht/USA

They are paired up when Caffrey inexplicably escapes from prison mere months before his scheduled release. Burke catches up with him (perhaps too easily) and the two forge an unusual arrangement. It turns out that Neal broke out because the love of his life took off, changed her identity, and disappeared. Why did she leave? Did she do so on her own or is something more dangerous going on?

Caffrey wants to do everything he can to find her and works out an arrangement with Burke. He’ll help the feds find the most elusive criminals in the world, as long as he’s on the outside and able to pursue leads about what’s going on with his lost love. The con man gets an ankle bracelet and the G-man gets a partner.

One might expect that a show with this set-up would play off fears of white collar stories like the saga of Bernie Madoff but “White Collar” feels a lot more playful and less concerned with real world issues than that. At its best, it plays more like “The Thomas Crown Affair” than something ripped-from-the-headlines like the “Law & Order” series. And that’s a smart decision. It makes for a breezy, charming show. We don’t need to be reminded of real-life concerns on a Friday night. There are other shows for that kind of drama writing.



Tiffani Thiessen as Elizabeth Burke, Tim DeKay as Peter Burke, Matthew Bomer as Neal Caffrey
Photo credit: David Giesbrecht/USA

The 90-minute premiere features the overall set-up for the characters and a case of art fraud that is surprisingly well-crafted. The dialogue writing on “White Collar” needs some work but the plot writing is quick and clever with enough twists and turns to maintain viewer interest. Let’s hope they keep it up. And with a few tweaks to the dialogue, something that I think will come as the writers and actors become more attuned to these characters, “White Collar” will only improve.

Of course, the writing of the actual mysteries won’t matter if viewers don’t take to the two leads. A show like this wins half the battle on casting alone and Bomer and DeKay are a perfect pair. Bomer’s smooth style is perfectly balanced by DeKay’s more old-fashioned delivery. The supporting cast, including Tiffani Thiessen and Willie Garson (“Sex and the City”) are also interesting.

On the spectrum of USA shows, “White Collar” is probably closest to “Burn Notice,” the best show on the network right now (and it’s no coincidence as the premiere was directed by a vet of “Burn”). Both series have interesting mysteries/capers that are fueled by the characters

not just supported by them. It’s hard to say how a show will connect after just one episode but, especially with the recent track record of USA Network, don’t bet against “White Collar”.

‘White Collar,’ which airs on USA, stars Matt Bomer, Tim DeKay, Tiffani Thiessen, and Willie Garson. The show premieres on October 23rd, 2009 at 9PM CST.



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