

TELEVISION PROGRAMMING FOR APRIL 30-MAY 6, 2011

TV The Journal view



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'Law & Order: Criminal Intent' intends to end on high note

Kathryn Erbe stars in "Law & Order: Criminal Intent," which returns for its 10th and final season Sunday on USA Network.

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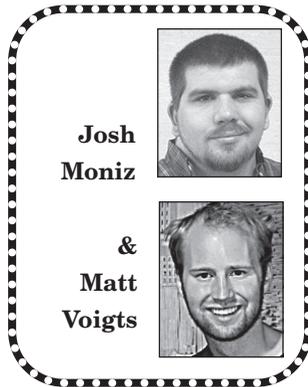
Double Take: "The Lincoln Lawyer"

Josh: "Lincoln" is excellent courtroom fun
Matt: Altogether entertaining and amoral

Josh: The film is a basic courtroom drama, but with enough interesting reversals and hooks thrown in to make it unique. The mystery revelation style of the film makes it closer to a film noire/private investigator film.

Matthew McConaghey, who plays a slightly crooked, slightly skuzzy mid-level lawyer who works out of his Lincoln, carries the weight of the film. He is simultaneously charming, as a smart-guy with a sly attitude, and repulsive, as a blood-sucking lawyer who gets gangsters and criminals off. The character reminds me of the "charismatic bad-guy hero" that has started to show up in other films, such as the smoking lobbyist Nick Naylor in "Thank You For Smoking." It is nice to have McConaghey show his acting chops after the endless stream of terrible romantic comedies he has been going through lately.

This is particularly interesting because McConaghey has played the white knight lawyer in the adaptation of John Grisham's "A Time To Kill."



**Josh
Moniz**
&
**Matt
Voigts**

His character in "Lincoln Lawyer," as well as the film, is the anti-Grisham story. This film has the protagonist struggling against insurmountable odds, but instead of overcoming them to bring justice, the character is overcoming them to do wrong.

The rest of the cast, which contains Marisa Tomei and William H. Macy to name a few, is exceptional and everyone gives good performances even with minor or unimportant characters. Macy's private investigator character is barely in the film, but he really shines at giving off a working stiff persona. He also communicates, in just a few lines, a familiarity with McConaghey's character that makes it feel like there was a long history between them before the film.

At times, the film trends towards being too standards, but only a few of the moments have this problem. Also, McConaghey's character should have been done



Matthew McConaghey leans on his "office" in *The Lincoln Lawyer*.

worse things to make the moral questions more interesting. For example, even when McConaghey's character is getting a prostitute out of jail time, the prostitute always is the "heart of gold" type. The prostitute is clean, never swears and is very helpful throughout the film. Finally, the side characters were interesting enough (mostly thank to the actors) that I wish more of the film had been spent on exploring their development.

Matt: I didn't know anything about this movie going into it except for a quick glance at the poster; when the opening credits appeared I wasn't sure if it was going to be set in the 70s. Those main titles – images all split-screen urbanity and cars, tinted browns and golds, backed by Bobby 'Blue' Bland's soulful take on "Ain't No Love

in the Heart of the City" – represent the film's most concentrated stab at style: cool enough to keep your interest, nondescript enough to avoid saying much. Like the movie that follows, they manage to be entertaining even if you've read all the words before.

I haven't read the book that the movie was based on, and I haven't read enough Grisham to know if this story transcends the formula. I do think Josh is overstating Matthew McConaghey's beleaguered lawyer Mick Haller's anti-hero status. Haller is, to be sure, a jerk – and there's a lot of interesting moral questions to be puzzled watching him confront situations, through the movies twists and turns, where he must decide how to handle clients he believes are guilty and innocent. The movie, unfortunately, does-

n't seem all that interested in these angles – this is one of those movies where the protagonist is the hero, no matter how jerkish. "The Wire" it isn't. Our sympathies stay with Haller for the movie's first half because he has a cool car and is – for once – trying to do the right thing, and they stay in part because he spends the second half of the movie on the defensive.

But then, this sleight-of-hand amorality isn't really the movie's main draw – as Josh says, it's the supporting cast giving it their all. If the movie just lost its pointless final 15 minutes, it could have been the most stylish episode ever of Law and Order: Special Guest Stars Unit.

Josh: I think that the film wants to be edgy like "The Wire," but it is too set on pulling standard, bankable maneuvers (i.e. the good guy is always good) to actually be edgy. However, I think of it like a roller coaster. Yes, you can see the tracks and the safety harnesses, but it still gives plenty of fast thrills with the twists and the turns.

Matt: Josh's roller coaster comparison is apt. I was genuinely invested through most of the movie in seeing where the story was heading, even if it doesn't fulfill much on its thematic potential. Perhaps this is also an argument for going into a movie as free of expectations as possible – if I had known half the

plot twists going in, I doubt I would have cared as much – so read that synopsis with care, friends. There could also be a great spin-off to be made that focused on the movie's supporting cast and left Haller out altogether.

Josh: I suggest watching it in theater or renting. It would also be a good buy when it comes out on video.

Matt: If you like legal thrillers, go have fun!

Josh: 8/10, Matt: 6.5/10

Synopsis:

Defense lawyer Mick Haller makes his money helping criminals and drug dealers avoid sentences while working out the back of Lincoln driven by a former client working off his debts. Mick hits it big when he lands a rich kid accused of rape and assault and much to his surprise, comes to believe he is assisting a man who is legitimately innocent. However, as details of the case emerge, he realizes a deadly connection between his client and one of his past cases. Based on a novel by Michael Connelly.

Starring: Matthew McConaghey, Marisa Tomei, Ryan Phillippe, John Leguizamo and William H. Macy.

Director: Brad Furman

Writer: John Romano



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