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Smallscreen Features

TNT 'Saving Grace' cast talk season two



Holly Hunter was honored with the 2,363rd Star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in Los Angeles, California 30 May 2008. The actress was joined by cast members from her show 'Saving Grace'. From left: Leon Rippy, Holly Hunter, Kenny Johnson, Laura San Giacomo, Leon Cooley EPA/NINA PROMMER

By April MacIntyre Jul 14, 2008, 6:15 GMT

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The story of detective Grace Hanadarko, (Holly Hunter) a hedonistic, alcoholic lapsed-Catholic with a Priest for a brother and an earthy "chaw-luvin'" angel named Earl (Leon Rippy) who has elected to restore her faith has found a devoted audience of fans, ready for season two of the spiritual drama that is grounded heavily in human flaws.

Grace is a Porsche-driving, chain-smoking hell-bent police officer on the Oklahoma City force whose profession intersects with her out-of-control personal life. Sexual moments with co-workers, drinking before and on the job, her ongoing affair married partner Ham, (Kenneth Johnson) as she attempts to work out her angels (Earl's cryptic wisdom) and demons with her best friend Rhetta (Laura San Giacomo).



Saving Grace cast

Grace's chaotic existence is the direct result of survivor's guilt, fallout from the Oklahoma City Federal building bombing where her sister died; it was supposed to be Grace there that day.

The series is Nancy Miller's pastiche of conflict, guilt and forgiveness, matters of religion and faith and a celebration of earthly pleasures woven inside a redemptive tale of self discovery. Miller, an Oklahoma native, came up as a writer on "Law & Order," "Profiler," "The Closer" and "CSI: Miami."

The show opens to bluesy strains of Everlast to set the tone for Holly Hunter's performance, complemented with brilliantly selected secondary characters played by San Giacomo, Rippy, Johnson, Bailey Chase, Bokeem Woodbine, Gregory Cruz,

Dylan Minnette and Lorraine Toussaint, as they breathe life into Miler's words with their finely honed ensemble work that resonates with each episode you watch.

Monsters and Critics spoke to some of the cast of "Saving Grace" and one common thread was expressed: All roads led back to praise for writer Nancy Miller, who keeps Holly Hunter's Grace in constant motion; this second season now "addressing issues of forgiving yourself and others," according to Holly Hunter.

Kenneth Johnson sat next to Hunter; they often held hands and their chemistry was palpable as the two shared some insight into this new season, their amazing cast mates and even the crew.

We were all sitting together in Grace's living room, a set filled to the rafters with an eclectic mix of House of Blues-tinged southern funk, sixties and seventies kitsch and earthy artwork and objects that reflected the disorganized, Bohemian tastes of Grace.

"This is all the work of Richard Walker," explained Hunter as she swept her arm around the room, from the fireplace where I sat to the kitchen dishes stacked in the sink, beer bottles and stubbed out cigarettes filling each circa 1960's California potteries colorful ashtrays. "He's a genius set decorator."

Her co-star, Kenneth Johnson plays Detective Ham, Grace's partner and lover.

He beamed as Hunter shot him a look, and he noted Grace fed off his energy as Ham. "Ham really gets Grace, on many different levels. I think that there is a profound reason why they're partners. It is their acute ability to read and trust each other is real, it's there."

Hunter and Johnson were in each other's orbit and practically finished each other's sentences. Hunter picked right up: "Yes and there is the effortless, easy sexual element that feeds into their professional relationship, it enhances their professional partnership - this sexual hookup. There are destructive elements to it, in that Ham is a married man, but there are many things about it that transcend that."



Cruz, Hunter, Chase

Johnson concurred. "What she's saying is that there are certain amounts of things you experience with a partner. Not by accident, there's a karmic and profound reason Ham and Grace are in each other's lives. And definitely throughout the second season they deal with some unanswered questions about themselves."

Hunter talked about the challenges too. "The show is complex. It operates on so many different emotional levels, territories. There are a lot of Gods that this show serves. And the first is a deep, emotional investigation. And the second season really explores how we have fun. Which is pretty off the charts."

"Our relationship with Nancy (Miller) is so important to us, she is open to suggestions about our characters, the storylines. She is 1000% open and incorporates our ideas; she is extremely passionate," added Johnson.

Hunter explained her love affair with Grace. "Joy and the quest for it, that was of the things I love the most about her - the joy she brings to the daily grind of life.

Hunter lauded Grace's "large appetites" and "extraordinary taste for her own life."

"I'd never have done episodic TV were it not for this character. When I read this character, I really didn't care what form it was being explored in..."

"This is a collaborative effort in the truest sense," Hunter noted. "This season Grace is taking a leap in a never-ending dive where you don't hit the water. Grace is such a fun character to play, she's thrilling, and it has been a privilege of my career

to play her.”



San Giacomo and Hunter

Next stop was the set of the OK Oklahoma bar, where Leon Rippy and Laura San Giacomo sat and shared their insights regarding the second season. Rippy loves his “rebel angel” character of Earl who revels in his “stimulating conversation.”

“Earl’s overall challenge, his overall mission is measured in these little increments of progress,” shared the very tall and lional Rippy, whose face beamed with kindness. “This has been a great ride, and just by offering a little bit of hope; I am just thrilled to have a role that offers a little more than just entertainment.”



Rippy

Laura shared how her character “was always connected to Grace” and her side story with Earl the angel. “There’s this intersection of faith and science, I love this, exploring this sense of why, what is that visceral feeling of longing, what is my purpose.”

“Faith and science do not have to be in conflict,” explained Laura.



Inside the “Saving Grace” police station set, Gregory Cruz, (Bobby Stillwater) who was recently seen in USA's drama “In Plain Sight” as villain Edwin TallTrees, shared how the atmosphere on “Grace” was head and shoulders above any TV experience he has had thanks to Nancy Miller.



Cruz

“This show challenges your beliefs, and how you react to situations in life,” explained Cruz, whose baritone voice and physicality exudes a mesmerizing masculine energy. “The show deals with the meaty issues of life, thanks to the great writing. I love Nancy (Miller), how accessible she is, and the respect she shows everyone involved on this show. She is an incredible writer; there’s a lot of ‘I trust you’ here.”

TNT drama "Saving Grace," is back for fifteen episodes this season two, Monday, July 14, at 10 pm. [Click Here](#) to enter to win a copy of Saving Grace - Season One.

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