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‘Nashville’: Perfect twang

By [Hank Stuever](#), Published: September 13

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Easily this season’s most promising debut, “Nashville” has the potential to be the perfect drama, even for people who don’t give a spit about country music. Created by “Thelma & Louise” writer Callie Khouri, with expert musical choices from her husband, T Bone Burnett, and some top-notch direction from documentary-maker R.J. Cutler, “Nashville” won me over mainly with its strong sense of grace and heartache.

The reliable Connie Britton (“American Horror Story,” “Friday Night Lights”) stars as Rayna Jaymes, a chart-topping country music queen who’s hitting a dry spell, hitwise. Her record company strong-arms her into touring with Juliette Barnes (Hayden Panettiere), a conniving up-and-comer who knows all about Eve and then some. “Nashville” nicely juggles the backstage back-stabbery with Rayna’s growing marital distress, as her husband (Eric Close) is coerced into running for political office by her manipulative father (Powers Boothe).

Yet “Nashville” never strays too far from its real story — the ups and downs of glitzy stardom, with Britton and Panettiere performing their own vocals. Near the end of the first episode, an unknown songwriter and a waitress (Sam Palladio and Clare Bowen) sing a duet at a waterin’ hole’s open-mike night that is far and away the loveliest thing you’ll see on TV this year. I half expect that “Nashville” may well be lured down the path of eye-rolling melodrama soon enough (like NBC’s “Smash”), but until then, I’d like to bask in its tender perfection.

Grade: A+

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