

Los Angeles Times

'Still the King' on CMT is familiar, adorable and appealingly weird around the edges

Robert Lloyd, Television Critic

Billy Ray Cyrus, country music's Man With a Mullet back in the last century, better known as Miley's dad in this one — he played that part in "Hannah Montana" too — is back with a new series all his own, a single-camera sitcom called "Still the King." Premiering Sunday on CMT and co-created by Cyrus with costar Travis Nicholson and Patsy Pontciroli, it concerns Vernon Brown (Cyrus), a washed-up-country star turned traveling Elvis impersonator whose alcoholic misadventures lead him to jail, parole and the ongoing impersonation of a preacher — and also to the discovery of a teenage daughter he never knew he had, the fruit of a one-night stand back in his better, badder days.

In its component parts, it resembles things we've seen before, and recently. The bad-behaving former pop star with a long-lost daughter echoes Denis Leary's FX series "Sex&Drugs&Rock& Roll"; the miscreant-as-minister story line favors that of TVLand's "Impastor." I detect notes, too, of Fox's late "Grandfathered" (rascalion with instant family learns to love something besides himself), and an aftertaste of HBO's also late "Eastbound & Down," particularly in the relationship between Vernon and Walt (Nicholson), the son of his former drummer, his endlessly acquiescing sidekick.

But if familiar at its core, it's also rather adorable and appealingly weird around the edges — especially in story lines concerning Walt (a paranormal enthusiast on the lookout for Sasquatches and *chupacabras*) or Ronnie (Jon Sewell in a Sam Rockwell mood), the compulsively shirtless, boatless boating enthusiast, semi-shiftless boyfriend of Joey Lauren Adams' Debbie, the mother of Vernon's newly discovered, skeptical daughter, Charlotte (Madison Iseman). **Also adding color are Kevin Farley as Vernon's star-struck parole officer**, Leslie David Baker (Stanley, from "The Office") as a blind church caretaker and Lacey Chabert as the head of its booster committee.

For all its measured naughtiness — and country songs are, after all, rife with it, the better to repent for — it is, after all, a story set partly in a house of worship; its blasphemies are mild, its long-arc point is Vernon's reformation (at no expense, of course, to his roguishness). He may dream of himself riding in a convertible with a black Jesus and a chicken-eating fat Elvis, but it's only so that, between bites, Elvis may deliver a message: "If you're going to earn your daughter's love, you're going to have to change your heart and learn hope and love and something like that, you know what I'm sayin'?" ("Well said, E," says Jesus.)



[Watch the trailer for "Still the King."](#)

Although he is not to acting born, Cyrus — who also headlined the inspirational Pax TV series "Doc" from 2001-04 — is appealing enough. He's well cast as an Elvis impersonator. He has something of Presley's untrained Southern charm, once (or maybe twice) removed. Oddly, apart from some old source music — there's Billy Ray's "Achy Breaky Heart" coming out of a car radio — Cyrus does no singing. I can't imagine why not, especially since his character is, you know, a singer, and CMT stands for Country Music Television. Perhaps he will eventually.

"Still the King" is the first scripted original for the network, which has rerun other networks' country-flavored comedies alongside its complement of music and reality

shows. Another scripted series, based on the jukebox musical "Million Dollar Quartet," about Sam Phillips, Sun Studios and the fusion of country music and R&B into what the people call rock 'n' roll, is on the docket as well. And the network has also picked up "Nashville," ABC's canceled country-fried quality musical soap, for a fifth, 22-episode season, suggesting that it is looking to grow its audience, and to grow up.

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Still The King infobox 6/12/16

‘Still The King’

Where: CMT

When: 9 p.m. Sunday

Rating: TV-PG-L (may be unsuitable for young children with an advisory for coarse language)