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### Lovable—and Brilliant!—Lunacy: Remember David and Maddie?

It's been 20 years since David Addison and Maddie Hayes set up shop together at the Blue Moon Detective Agency, doubled the entendeds, tripled the word-per-minute pace of television dialogue and instigated Wednesday-morning water-cooler-area gridlock. *Moonlighting*, the convention-flouting romantic detective comedy starring Bruce Willis and Cybill Shepherd, has never been heavily syndicated or on home video, and its first two seasons come to DVD just in time to rescue it from oblivion.

When *Moonlighting* premiered in March 1985, the actors were hardly selling points. Thirty-five-year-old Cybill Shepherd had gone into hiding following the debacles of *Daisy Miller* (1974) and *At Long Last Love* (1975) (in *The Last Picture Show* (1971), *The Heartbreak Kid* (1972) and *Taxi Driver* (1976), she'd essayed convincing, if routine, chilliness). Bruce Willis, 29, was an unknown New Yorker who'd been in a Sam Shepard play.

Instead, it was former *Remington Steele* writer Glenn Gordon Caron whose track record excited ABC. Mr. Caron begrudgingly agreed to do another guy/girl detective show on the condition that he could do it any way he saw fit. Quickly getting the pesky template particulars out of the way—she's an ex-model whose embezzling accountant has left her with little more than ownership of an unprofitable detective agency; he's the detective earning said unprofits—Mr. Caron set about burning the rulebook of network television. That meant rapid-fire double-tracked dialogue, Orson Welles introducing a mostly black-and-white episode, a Shakespeare parody in iambic pentameter, a dance number directed by Stanley Donen, Claymation interludes, characters turning to the audience in the middle of arguments, a

Dr. Seuss tribute and even an episode in which the leads do not appear. (Only a badly timed writer's strike prevented *Moonlighting* from creating the first national broadcast in 3D.)

Shoving so much ambition into the staid television formulas of the time makes for a messy first season. The pilot is a *Marathon Man* retread; most of the subsequent cases feel like *Columbo* rejects. But such hackneyed constructions can be seen as olive branches offered to an audience of *Airwolf* and *Hotel* fans who might otherwise have thought this new show was a hallucination.

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More distracting are the growing pains of the actors. Cybill Shepherd initially rocks what I'll call the Jerry Seinfeld Reflex—an involuntary and ever-present grin that usually befalls *SNL*-hosting athletes. And despite undeniable magnetism, Bruce Willis spends much of season one as the most grating hipster since Maynard G. Krebs. He repeatedly dons Wayfarers and desecrates Motown songs, mercilessly bridging the Blues Brothers and the California Raisins. The combination of her uptightness and his immaturity make for some dynamite gags, but still adds up to a lot of screeching and mugging.

And then, early in season two, everything falls into place. The not-yet-lovers begin to tease out the softness in one another and investigate each other's weekend plans. Mr. Willis finds inspiration in the strangest of places—injecting *Diner*-era Mickey Rourke (the whispering, the wounded smirk) and *Ghostbusters*-era Bill Murray (the droll sarcasm) with Three Stooges physicality. It's a delicate alchemy: Mr. Murray never could have made Maddie Hayes swoon, and the tongue-twisting dialogue would have K.O.'d Mickey Rourke in round one.

Meanwhile, Ms. Shepherd's reflex-

ive grin is harnessed into a useful indication of suppressed adoration for her crime-solving partner, even as anger replaces the default poutiness. (Perhaps there was some Method to her mad; Ms. Shepherd claims that she and Mr. Willis had a real fight before every filmed one.) The other employees of Blue Moon, led by Allyce Beasley's compulsively rhyming secretary Miss DiPesto, provide a comedic springboard; the characters are mostly blank faces who don't have lines or backgrounds (though often they will be limboing, cheering or sighing in unison). This stock-company-as-deadpan-army is one more way in which the show succeeds in merging the screwball with the absurd.

By the time of "Twas the Episode Before Christmas," the confidence of *Moonlighting* is intoxicating. After an hour of sly Bible jokes, sexual innu-

cue, *Moonlighting* was only interested in timelessness.

So what is the legacy of *Moonlighting*? Surprisingly, the genre of guy/girl detectives fell away rather than flourished; NBC's *Remington Steele* and CBS's *Scarecrow and Mrs. King* were canceled, while *Moonlighting* survived the fittest. (As if in eulogy to the clunky old dinosaurs he'd outlasted, Mr. Caron later wrote a *Remington Steele* cameo into *Moonlighting*; an uncredited Pierce Brosnan sportingly played along.) The movie-star action-hero persona of Mr. Willis and the vague iconicity of Ms. Shepherd have nearly eclipsed the memory of their greatest characters.

Which leaves us with *Moonlighting*'s risk taking and rule breaking. What detective show in its right mind would feature episodes in which there was no case to solve—or allow throv-



Bruce Willis and Cybill Shepherd, all decked out in 1986.

endoes and a toy-gun shootout with Richard Belzer, snow begins to fall inside the detective agency. David and Maddie wander to the office door, walk off the set, and the entire cast and crew (and their children) begin a full two-minute a capella rendition of "The First Noël" before waving goodnight to the audience. Which is fitting: Despite the gimmicks, despite its warm pastel glow (and the occasional Robbie Neville or Starpoint music

away quips about E.E. Cummings or Sylvia Plath? In an accompanying documentary, one writer sighs that all the other shows threw out jokes if it was believed only half the audience would get them; *Moonlighting* left them in. The true influence of *Moonlighting* is not cast in particulars, but rather in its belief that a television show could be as smart as those who made it, and even those they hoped might watch it.