

Alternate history

ABC's new legal drama rewrites a familiar true story

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TV Media

Legal action, character-driven drama and a healthy dose of wish fulfillment (with origins that trace all the way back to the early 1990s) — ABC's new 10-part series has it all, and it premieres Monday, March 18. It's a blend of genres and inspirations that mixes the traditional scripted network drama with true crime in a way similar to what shows like FX's "American Crime Story" have done. "The Fix," however, does away with the "based on a true story" caveat and instead goes straight for the ripped-from-the-headlines, heavily fictionalized approach made infamous by "Law & Order."

The cast of "The Fix" is led by Robin Tunney ("The Mentalist"), who plays Maya Travis, a former district attorney in Los Angeles who disappeared from public life after losing a high-profile case that snatched the attention of the entire nation. Opposite Tunney, playing the apparent antagonist of the show, is Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje ("Lost"). He portrays Sevvu Johnson, a mega-successful, Oscar-winning Hollywood leading man who was the defendant in the aforementioned case.

Eight years before the "The Fix" opens, Johnson was tried for the stabbing murder of his wife. Travis led the prosecutorial team responsible for proving the state's case — and lost. After a trial that divided the nation, stirred up uncomfortable questions about justice in America and generated a hectic media circus, Johnson was acquitted of the murder charges and was released. Having suffered irreparable personal and professional damage, Travis relinquished her post and withdrew to rural Washington to live a quieter life, free from the scrutiny of the media and the vengeful scorn of

the public.

All of that ancient history is stirred up, however, when Johnson once again becomes a suspect in a murder case. This time his girlfriend, Jessica Meyer (Taylor Kalupa, "Law & Order True Crime"), has been brutally slain, and the evidence once again points to him. For reasons we don't yet know, the powers that be in the L.A. justice system reach out to Travis in Washington and lure her back to the DA's office for a redemptive shot at putting Johnson behind bars.

If you're old enough to remember the '90s (and even if you're not), all of this surely rings a bell. If you're saying to yourself that the plot of this show sounds almost exactly like 1995's culture-dominating O.J. Simpson trial, you're right on the money. And guess who serves as an executive producer and writer of this new series? None other than Marcia Clark herself — the very same deputy district attorney who served as lead prosecutor in that infamous trial and fell short of securing a conviction in much the same way as the fictional Travis.

Clark has undergone a bit of a cultural reappraisal in recent years, thanks mainly to Sarah Paulson's incredible portrayal of her in the true crime anthology "American Crime Story." It's no surprise that network executives sought her out to contribute to a crime drama. In exchange for her legal expertise and the prestige of her name, Clark gets an unusual chance to write herself a fantasy alternate history wherein her fictional alter ego gets a second chance.

In previews and teasers for "The Fix," Clark isn't coy about that element of the project. She openly refers to the plot as a "revenge fantasy," and isn't shy about promoting the series with a bit of sleazy enthusiasm. Clark's participation increases the fledgling show's credibility and authenticity, although she



Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje as seen in "The Fix"

has been quite clear that "The Fix" doesn't aim to wade too deep into the legal weeds.

The creators of the series say they're more interested in the personal relationships of the characters involved in this massive legal spectacle than they are in producing a detail-oriented legal procedural. And beyond its opening premise, the show seems destined to move away from its real-world inspirations

in an attempt to separate itself from the competition. Instead of offering a dramatized version of a well-researched legal case, "The Fix" travels its own course and generates dramatic heft from scratch.

As for the rest of the cast, Merrin Dungey ("The King of Queens") plays Travis's loyal and supportive colleague, C.J. Bernstein. The cops and legal eagles tasked with helping Tra-

vis build her case, while trying to keep her personal vendetta from contaminating the investigation, include Adam Rayner ("Tyrant") and Breckin Meyer ("Franklin and Bash"). And, of course, someone is required to play the shady legal counsel of the accused. Scott Cohen ("Gilmore Girls") takes on the role of "The Wolf," a cunning and ruthless lawyer who helped Johnson avoid conviction

in his first trial, and is back to do so again.

ABC has promoted the "The Fix" as a self-contained 10-part series, so viewers who stick it out should be able to expect a solid conclusion. However, if the show proves popular, it could be renewed for further installments, possibly as an anthology series. Check out the premiere of "The Fix" Monday, March 18, on ABC.