

coverstory

BY GEORGE DICKIE

'Rebel' upbraids misbehaving corporations in ABC drama series

Annie "Rebel" Bello is the kind of woman you want on your side in a street fight.

As played by Katey Sagal ("The Conners") in the ABC drama series "Rebel," premiering Thursday, April 8, she's a brilliant blue-collar legal advocate who drives a pickup truck and fights passionately for causes she believes in. She'll also do almost anything to make sure she gets those she helps their due, such as confronting CEOs of irresponsible corporations at stockholder meetings.

While husband Grady (John Corbett, "Northern Exposure") admires her zeal and daughter Cassidy (Lex Scott Davis, "Training Day") has inherited it, her tendencies can prove exasperating for associates such as Julian Cruz (Andy Garcia, "City Island," in his first role as a series regular), the powerful attorney with whom Rebel consults, and ex-husband Benji Ray (James Lesure, "Las Vegas"), a corporate lawyer and natural adversary for her.

The series was created and executive produced by Krista Vernoff ("Grey's Anatomy," "Station 19") and is based on the life of activist Erin Brockovich, who is also an executive producer here.

Sagal, whose long resume runs the gamut from comedy ("Married ... With Children," "8 Simple Rules") to drama ("Sons of Anarchy," "Boston Legal"), was attracted to the series for its blend of those elements and for the bold, don't-take-no-for-an-answer nature of Rebel, whose lack of a law degree the actress says gives her character license to pull outrageous stunts.

"I think what I love so much about Rebel is she can cross a few lines," Sagal says. "She can go outside the box. She can push where maybe I guess it wouldn't be within legal bounds. I mean, not that she's illegal, but she just pushes a little bit further.

"And I think that she takes the best," she continues. "To me it feels like she gathers knowledge from everywhere. I mean, she just takes it all. And then her primary purpose is to do the right thing, is to fight



Andy Garcia and Katey Sagal star in "Rebel," premiering Thursday on ABC.

for the right thing. And I think sometimes legal mumbo jumbo can make that a little bit confusing when it's actually a very straight line in terms of what's right."

In preparing for the role, Sagal decided to meet Brockovich for lunch, not so much to talk about the nuts and bolts of advocacy but to pick up on her energy.

"I got it just sitting and hanging out with her," Sagal says, "because clearly the passion and the fire comes even over lunch."

Brockovich, whose career as an environmental activist was brought to life by Julia Roberts in director Stephen Soderbergh's 2000 legal drama "Erin Brockovich," thinks her doppelganger got the performance right.

"It's her energy. It's her presence ...," Brockovich says. "It's like, 'I'm a badass.' She's it. She gets it. So it's just there."

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