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CBS/CNS

Melina Kanakaredes and Gary Sinise star in the new CBS series "CSI: NY," the second spinoff from the original crime-scene investigation show.

• "Boston Legal" (Sundays, 10-11 p.m.) — Spinoff of the courtroom drama "The Practice."

• "The Benefactor" (Mondays, 8-9 p.m.) — Unscripted series in which billionaire Mark Cuban tests the mettle of 16 contestants as they compete for the chance to win \$1 million.

CBS

"Listen Up," Mondays, 8:30-9 p.m.

Jason Alexander ("Seinfeld") stars as a brash sports talk-show host and columnist juggling work and family while coming up with a fresh topic for his weekly humor column that usually includes anecdotes about his family. The sitcom's writing is witty, but still needs some fine-tuning. Alexander seems comfortable in a role that hints of George Costanza's neurosis while still being original enough to stand apart.

"Clubhouse," Tuesdays, 9-10 p.m.

A teenage boy gets the job of his dreams as a bat boy for the mythical New York Empire and tries to navigate the world of immature but powerful athletes as he faces tough decisions likely to shape his character. The premise has all the underpinnings of a good show, which makes one want to root for it, but the execution is flawed. Hollow characterizations, exaggerated story lines and phony sentiments make the show strike out. Not even the moral-of-the-story ending can save the game.

"Center of the Universe," Wednesdays, 9:30-10 p.m.

John Goodman stars as a happily married family man patiently trying to keep his parents and siblings from driving him nuts. Good actors don't necessarily translate into good TV. In spite of a cast loaded with talent (Jean Smart, Olympia Dukakis and Ed Asner), this sitcom is weighed down by dreadful writing

and off-the-wall (and derivative) characters that don't work. It's too bad, since the show's sentiment of loving your family, warts and all, is heartfelt.

"CSI: NY," Wednesdays, 10-11 p.m.

The second spinoff in the series takes the action to Gotham City with more of the same high-tech science used to solve crimes and forensic thrills (read: darker, edgier) laid out, Big Apple-style. Gary Sinise and Melina Kanakaredes ("Providence") never crack a smile in this serious drama with satisfying, yet conventional, writing which pushes the envelope toward the grisly in hopes of standing out. Some viewers might be put off by the gruesomeness.

"Dr. Vegas," Fridays, 10-11 p.m.

For the last few years, Sin City has been growing in popularity as the hottest television show location, and now it is being used as the backdrop for Rob Lowe's new drama. He stars as an offbeat doctor at a high-stakes casino run by his best friend, Joe Pantoliano. Both Lowe and Pantoliano lost their gamble with dramas last season, and it looks like they may be sitting at the loser's table again this season. However, the two have a surprising amount of chemistry and charm and the show has plenty of razzle-dazzle. But artificial setups and pat endings may have the actors cashing in their chips.

NBC

"LAX," Mondays, 10-11 p.m.

Blonde bombshell Heather Locklear returns to TV land, this time paired with Blair Underwood as her adversary in this plucky drama centered on Southern California's international airport where bomb scares, customs snafus and political scheming go hand-in-hand with arrivals and departures. Although the drama needs some polish before it takes off, engaging characters zip through

the action. But attempts to "lighten up" terrorism are questionable, while comic relief scenes remain grounded. However, the tension between the leads might be enough to fuel the drama through the season.

"Father of the Pride," Tuesdays, 9-9:30 p.m.

Offbeat computer-animated comedy about the behind-the-glitz domestic lives of a family of lions performing in the Siegfried & Roy show in Las Vegas. Pride members include Larry (voiced by John Goodman), his lioness wife (voiced by Cheryl Hines), their two cubs and crotchety father-in-law (voiced by Carl Reiner), as well as a menagerie of fellow show biz animals. The concept is amusing, but like the city in which it is set the sitcom's fun-filled facade belies an underlying seediness in the form of unnecessarily crude language and sexual humor, which is nothing to be proud of.

"Hawaii," Wednesdays, 8-9 p.m.

"Hawaii Five-O" has been revamped and souped up with all the trimmings of a 21st-century cop show: tough detectives, gruesome crimes, office politics (and romance) set against the island's idyllic backdrop. The familiar format holds no surprises as it mixes forensics and good old detective legwork in solving the grisly crimes. Yet the believable casting of ethnic characters, the beautiful local color and

even the Hawaiian music give this drama an authentic and fresh feel that helps it stand out, marginally, from other run-of-the-mill police series.

"Joey," Thursdays, 8-8:30 p.m.

Graduating from "friend" to main player, Matt LeBlanc leaps into his own show, with his dimwitted Joey character moving to Los Angeles to pursue his acting career, incurring the wrath of his sassy hairdresser sister (Drea de Matteo from "The Sopranos") when he allows her son (Paulo Costanzo) to move out of her place and into his. The good will of "Friends" fans will be tested by this mediocre spinoff, as the Joey character, who was OK in small servings, is served up as the main dish. Forced dialogue and worn, predictable situations will need the show's canned laughter to generate chuckles.

"Medical Investigation," Fridays, 10-11 p.m.

"CSI" meets "ER" in a sci-fi world where bizarre health mysteries, supposedly inspired by true events, are solved by the nation's top medical experts who fly around the country saving citizens from the next big epidemic, outbreak or plague. The drama generates some suspense, but can't disentangle itself from the sometimes hokey writing and the predictable "saved-the-day-again" ending.

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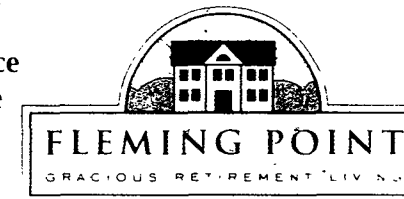
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