

FINE-TUNING

Futuristic court drama, smutty sitcom slated for midseason

Ah, midseason replacements. The law drama *Century City* has ousted *The Guardian*, and the sitcom *The Stone* has knocked off *Becker*. But whether the new shows are improvements is another matter.

Wiseguys have dubbed *Century City* "The *Jetsons* meets *L.A. Law*," but that ridiculous description misses the mark.

Set in 2030, *Century City* shows a future in which fashions are slightly different — men's suits have funky lapels — and technology is a logical extension of today's gadgets. In 25 years, teleconferences will be in 3-D, for instance, with some of the people attending from the other side of the city via hologram projections rather than over telephones.

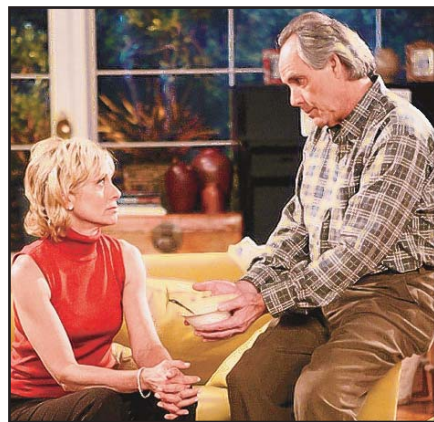
But if the future is glossy, it also is a little grim. Architecture, especially in the offices and courtrooms, is cold. And the court cases that the lawyers — the heart of the show — handle are troubling projections of today's specu-



A doctor (guest star Richard Thomas) on *Century City* withholds genetic information about a couple's unborn child.

lative issues.

In one case, a couple expecting their first child sue a doctor (guest star Richard Thomas of *The Waltons*) because he failed to notify them that their unborn son — a product of genetic engineering — possesses a "gay gene." Rather than being a clerical error, however, the decision to turn on that gene was deliberately made by the doctor to



Barbara (Judith Light) and Stan (Robert Klein) try to outdo one another in a divorce gift-giving battle on *The Stones*.

protect an endangered minority.

"Was I supposed to sit around and watch while an entire population was exterminated?" he says as the parents petition the court for \$20 million in damages.

With such cases, *Century City* is purposely trying to draw parallels and provoke thought about issues. That's fine, and it makes the series far more intelli-

► *Century City* will premiere at 9 p.m. Tuesday on WBNS-TV (Channel 10).

► *The Stones* will premiere at 9:30 p.m. Wednesday on Channel 10.

gent than most TV shows on the air, like a *Minority Report* meets *The Practice*.

But *Century City* could easily overreach its intellectual goals and become obtuse and didactic, especially because more effort seems to have been put into thinking up futuristic issues than the characters, who are at best another comment on the future's push for conformity and at worst warmed-over versions of the *L.A. Law* cast.

Unhappy family

While *Becker* focused on a grumpy doctor, *The Stones* focuses on the ultimate grumpy marriage — one that ends in divorce.

But this is a sitcom, after all. So this is a divorce that's amicable — so amicable, in fact, that, when Stan (Robert Klein) and Barbara (Judith Light) tell their children that they are splitting up after 25 years, Stan continues to live on the property.

This confuses the kids, as it may viewers. Why are they splitting up? Yes, they bicker, but many a sitcom couple has bickered more vociferously than these two, and in other shows peace, love and happiness always prevail.

Viewers can only guess that the premise of the show — created by Jenji Kohan, sister of *Will & Grace* co-creator David Kohan — serves merely as a convenient way to inject more sexual innuendo and low humor into the script.

"Why don't you get her something she needs, like a boob job?" slutty daughter Karly (Lindsay Sloan) asks her father.

Replies Dad, "Ah, you don't put new tires on a car you're not going to drive anymore."

The parents and the daughter are so self-absorbed that they forget the birthday of son Winston (Jay Baruchel), a science nerd who just wants the family to be one happy unit.

CBS reportedly delayed the premiere of *The Stones* to fine-tune it. From the looks of the first episodes, the network could have delayed the premiere until ice skating arrived in hell.

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JUKEBOX

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and loud music (Motley Crue, Sex Pistols) perfectly compliments a raucous bar.

• **Char-Bar**, 439 N. High St. An excellent variety of mainstream and alternative rock (the Libertines, the Vines) is peppered with reggae (Peter Tosh), R&B (Jill Scott), soul (Sade) and — a barroom keeper — Willie Nelson's *Teatro*.

• **Club 185**, 185 E. Livingston Ave. A little bit of country (Willie and Waylon), reggae (Peter Tosh) and jazz (Jimmy Smith) is balanced with a blend of mainstream rock (the Strokes, R.E.M., Bob Dylan, Son Volt) and a heavy dose of Neil Young. His *Harvest Moon* sounds new every time during lunch, the quieter time in Club 185.

• **Dick's Den**, 2417 N. High St. The jazz den offers a sampler platter in all of its 45-rpm glory. To learn which records skip, patrons should check the note taped to the juke's glass before selecting any of the handwritten titles.

This is a good place to test-drive music from the past 50 years of jazz, blues, folk, rock and country and learn what one's record collection is lacking.

Contributors include Tony Joe White, Sonny Stitt, Earl Bostic, Cannonball Adderley, Professor Longhair, Lightnin' Hopkins and, for crying out loud, Mungo Jerry and Fontella Bass.

• **Flatiron Bar & Diner**, 129 E. Nationwide Blvd. The classy R&B, blues, rock and singer-songwriter fare on the wall-mounted box is as much a part of the place's character as its classy, clutter-free bar.

"It's an integral part of what we're doing here," said owner Roger McLane. Each album by Big Bill Broonzy, Tom Russell, Dr. John, Snooky Pryor, Chet Atkins and locals such as Hank Marr and Tim Easton seems to have been chosen as selectively as the pristine bottles of liquor.

Said former jukebox vendor Charlie Jackson, who programmed the box: "Roger would have thrown me out if I ever tried to put Jimmy Buffett on there."

• **Johnny Rockets**, 4025 Easton Station (South District) at Easton Town Center (and various other locations) If you're nostalgic for booth boxes, look no further than the suburban burger-and-milkshake joints.

• **Lobaro's**, 980 Barnett Rd., between E. Main Street and Livingston Avenue Late one Saturday afternoon, Lobaro's was quiet until the bar-

tender plugged in the jukebox and Sam Cooke, Jill Scott, the Temptations, Stevie Wonder, Otis Rush, Bobby Bland, Barry White and Nancy Wilson broke the silence.

As Cooke sang about "the sound of the men working on the chain gang," a man at the end of the bar turned to me: "Hey, Superman, take those glasses off. What do you know about Sam Cooke?"

Lobaro's juke, pushed against a wall, isn't prominent, but patrons should seek it out for a fix of rap, blues, jazz vocals or contemporary and classic rhythm and blues.

• **Old Trail Inn**, 72 S. Greener Ave., a stone's throw west of I-270 and W. Broad Street Here's a story overheard two weeks ago to the soundtrack of Johnny Paycheck, George Jones, Hank Williams (and Hank Jr.) and Dwight Yoakam on the hard-core country jukebox:

Bartender: "You broke your jaw? How?" Man — with jaw broken five days before and not yet wired for healing — makes two fists and holds them aloft. Bartender: "Did you win?" Man shakes his head. Bartender: "Are you supposed to drink?"

Man emphatically nods, widens his eyes and says, "Whiskey. Pepsi."

• **St. James Tavern**, 1057 N. 4th St. A well-stocked jukebox exists as much for a hard-working bartender as it does for a paying customer.

"I'll end up spending more money than I make when we're not busy," said barkeep Kristen Davis.

In addition to music by Interpol, Lucinda Williams, the Stooges and Tom Waits, and other sounds that go down easy with \$3 pints, the box is packed with rock from local bands (the Bygones, Sean Woosley's Fierce Lime and His Ponytail Assassins).

Even with such variety, the same-olds are often heard. "I could go the rest of my life without hearing (Social Distortion's) *Ball and Chain*," Davis said, as Mike Ness sang it one more time.

• **Thurman Cafe**, 183 Thurman Ave., German Village Patrons play the lasers out of the digital, touch-tone, ATM-like juke.

"I try to tell people not to put their money in it at 2:15, because we're closing at 2:30," said bartender Wayne Burton, who — glad you asked — is sick of hearing that *Gay Bar* song, so please don't play it again.

"Every night when we shut down, the thing has 50 credits left in it. Songs people tried to play at 11 aren't even going to get played before closing time."

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ZUCK

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center and participates in healing weekends, helping adults who are HIV-positive.

Michael McDonald, outreach coordinator for the OSU Clinical Trials unit and a volunteer with the coalition, often assists Frego.

"Many people who come into these workshops have never told anyone they have AIDS," McDonald said. "They may never have verbalized about their disease at all. As they begin moving to the music, their emotions begin to flow out."

"It's a very remarkable thing that carries across many illnesses and tragedies and that is very personal and unique to each person who goes through it. I am quite passionate about it because, over the years, I've seen how important it is for

people to come together and find other people going through the same challenges."

Frego begins by opening a dialogue with participants.

"He creates a safe environment for them. No one can come into the session once it is started, so it is very private," McDonald said. "If you are overcome with emotion, that's OK. People can be completely who they are. He helps break down walls."

Actual language may present a challenge in Mostar.

"I speak five languages, but this isn't one of them," Frego said.

In fact, the Bosnian people have three official languages: Serbian, Bosnian and Croatian.

"So everything I say will have to be translated three times." Frego knows he must also be attuned to social customs.

"Right now this is an exploration in Bosnia because they

have never done anything like this before," he said. "It takes six months to change behavior, and I know I can't effect much change in just 10 days."

"But if the teachers can see what I'm doing, they can continue. That's my goal."

Barbara Zuck is Dispatch arts columnist and senior critic. bzuck@dispatch.com

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