

Entertainment

BY JOSHUA MALONI

LIFESTYLE AND ARTS LISTINGS

We welcome your submissions. If you would like Niagara Frontier Publications to list an event, send it to josh@wnypapers.com, or mail to 1859 Whitehaven Road, Grand Island, NY 14072.



Photo 1: Pictured, from left: Noah Wyle (Harry Wilson), Gina Bellman (Sophie Devereaux), Christian Kane (Eliot Spencer), Aldis Hodge (Alec Hardison), Aleyse Shannon (Breanna Casey) and Beth Riesgraf (Parker) on the set of IMDb TV Original Series "Leverage: Redemption." (Amazon Studios photo by Alfonso Bresciani) • Photo 2: ABC's "A Million Little Things" stars Romany Malco as Rome Howard and Christina Moses as Regina Howard. (ABC photo by Jack Rowand) • Photo 3: Christina Custode (Image courtesy of Otter PR)

BETH RIESGRAF

'Leverage: Redemption'

Former cable standout series "Leverage" is returning after a decade off the air in a continuation of TV's favorite rob-from-the-rich-give-to-the-poor storyline. "Leverage: Redemption" premieres July 9 on IMDb TV.

In this new iteration, and new world, the "Leverage" crew has watched as the rich and powerful continue to take what they want without consequence. Grifter Sophie Devereaux (Gina Bellman), thief Parker (Beth Riesgraf), hitter Eliot Spencer (Christian Kane), and hacker Alec Hardison (Aldis Hodge) have watched the world change over the past eight years. Since their last job, it's become easier – and sometimes legal – for the rich to become richer and the powerful to squash anyone who gets in their way. To address the changes in the world around them, the team finds new blood in Harry Wilson (Noah Wyle), a corporate lawyer who is looking for redemption after realizing he'd been sitting on the wrong side of the table for his entire career, and Breanna Casey (Aleyse Shannon), Hardison's foster sister who has a knack for computers, robotics, and getting into trouble.

Read our interview with Riesgraf at www.wnypapers.com.

CHRISTINA MOSES

'A Million Little Things'

"A Million Little Things" is TV's most underrated series.

Though it doesn't have the buzz of cable and streaming programs, the ABC drama has the hallmarks of a show worth watching: characters we care about, relationships to invest in, light-hearted and legitimately funny moments, a storyline that keeps viewers on the edge of their couch – and so. Many. Plot twists. Heck, just in the third season alone, "AMLT" has touched upon disability, divorce, the courage of coming out in high school, sexual abuse, suicide, the weight of the coronavirus pandemic and the tensions that arose from the death of George Floyd.

In fact, creator DJ Nash and his team brought the past year squarely into the lives of the characters – and onto our screens.

Few shows have depicted the onerousness of COVID-19 – wearing a mask, socially distancing from loved ones, wondering if your job will exist tomorrow – better than "AMLT." Perhaps worse than the virus itself is the isolation it caused – and that feeling is deeply explored in each of the on-screen roles.

Rome (Romany Malco) and Regina (Christina Moses) have had the greatest challenge, first in finding out their planned adoption fell through once the birth mother, Eve, had second thoughts at delivery. As they slowly recovered from that blow, their dream jobs fell apart.

He had a chance to direct a major motion picture detailing his depression and the suicide of the man who brought everyone together, John (Ron Livingston). But when COVID-19 struck, the movie studio pulled the plug on Rome's film.

Regina was operating her own restaurant – a final gift from John before his suicide. She had to close/reopen/modify her eatery to abide by safety regulations, which of course meant less tables. An attempt to secure government funding fell through, as Regina forgot to send in necessary paperwork. She has been dealing with memory loss after hitting her head at a Black Lives Matter march.

In the middle of all this, Rome and Regina took in Tyrell (Adam Swain), whose mother was deported. Seeing the country in chaos, and wanting to be a good example to their ward, they begin to speak out against racial inequality and injustice.

What we find each week is this TV series tackling serious issues better than most "news" outlets.

"Reading the pilot, and booking the job once talking to DJ about his plans for the show, he said, 'Look, I'm always going to be doing car flips. I'm going to lead it in one direction and, just when you think this certain thing is happening, I'm going to flip it to the other one,'" Moses said.

"And it's great; that's how life is, and that's how we should be reflecting it, right? I think that he's kept his word around that. And I think it's a good thing, because that is how life is. We can't plan or control anything, as hard as we try."

She explained, "George Floyd happened, and he wanted to include that in some way. ... This is what's happening in America right now, in the world right now; and this is what's happening in our lives. And it's impossible for us not to be affected by that as humans."

"I just thought it was extremely bold of us to tell that story. And it's important, too, I think, to not just reflect what's happening as accurately as possible without hammering any agenda or political point of view on anyone's head, but just present what's actually happening and how it affects these characters based on how it somewhat affects us personally, as the actors."

Read the full Q&A online at www.wnypapers.com.

CHRISTINA CUSTODE

Singer/songwriter/performer

Christina Custode is the hardest-working woman in show business – well, at least in Western New York.

Already well-known for her live concerts – prepandemic, Custode was regularly touring around the region – and her talent – Custode is a Grammy Award-contending singer/songwriter/pianist – she has added virtual concerts to her repertoire. In between livestreamed gigs, the Lewiston resident has been raising money for Music Beats Cancer.

Oh, and while navigating her way through the worst industry on the planet – have you seen these reality TV shows? Singers seeking record deals are falling out of trees – Custode is a Niagara Falls High School music teacher. She spends weekdays molding area youth in what is arguably the hardest year to be an educator in the history of mankind. Undeterred by on-again, off-again/in-person, Zoom classroom challenges, Custode has made it a point to instill the value of music into her pupils, and to hammer home her students' self-worth.

The daughter of Niagara Falls Music Hall of Famer Lew Custode – half of the jazz duo Custode & Parisi – Christina made a name for herself with the release of "From Here" and singles "Crush," "Fire," "Light of Day," "Wasting My Time" – and my personal favorites: "High Water" and "Just in Case." She promoted her music by touring in places such as New York City and Toronto, and through a series of YouTube chats Custode titled "Tea and Talk."

For her musical efforts, Custode was honored with awards declaring her "Buffalo's Best Female Vocalist" and "Buffalo's Best Original Music Act." She also was nominated for a Grammy Music Educator Award in 2019.

Custode doesn't have a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame ... and, seemingly, she doesn't care about fame or fortune. For her, forging connections with crowds – in a bar, online or in band class – is the highest mark of success.

"I was performing very heavily as a cover artist for a long time, and my bass player – I didn't tell anybody that I was writing music. I didn't tell anybody. And my bass player – I don't know; maybe she was tapped into some other energy, because she just kept saying, 'Are you writing stuff? I feel like you're writing stuff. If you are, we should play it. If you are we should play it,'" Custode recalled. "I was terrified, because there's such a vulnerability that goes along with sharing your original music, right? 'These are my feelings, my opinion, my perspectives, my worldview.' Because I'm human, so I only right from where I stand. And so, to put that out, and to throw your guts up publicly – in front of strangers – is kind of a very odd thing to be comfortable with."

"And she kept pushing me and pushing me. And we were at a gig on Chippewa – I'll never forget it – and I said, 'Listen, we will play one of my original songs; and I'm not telling anybody that it's an original. This way, if it tanks, we're never doing it again; we're never telling anybody.' I had a great Carrie Underwood tune to pull next, because I was like, if it tanks – you know, you gauge the crowd and, if it's just like everyone's, 'Oh, what was that; that's awful,' we're gonna have a slam-dunk cover to follow it up."

"And so, we kind of went in with this plan, and I played it. And at the end, the reception from the crowd was good. I mean, nobody was singing along, because nobody knew it. But two girls came up to me from the bar and said, 'Oh my gosh, who does that last song you did? I loved it. I've never heard it.' And my bass player kind of looked and smirked. And I was like, 'Oh, thank you so much. It's actually an original.' And they were like, 'You wrote that?!'"

"To hear that from somebody that was a complete stranger – somebody that did not know me – these weren't girls that had followed me through my career; they were not friends; I don't even know their names – I don't even think they know my name, or the impact that that little, 30-second interaction had on me and my career."

"I got a little bit braver with releasing music, and sharing that with people. And I would have people come up to me and they would say, 'Gosh, that last song, that hit me,' or 'I

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