

ACM Awards 2025



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14/1 ▲

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7/1 ▲

MALE ARTIST

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17/2 ▲

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'I've gotten a high from the gavel': Melissa Rauch on bringing 'Night Court' back to life and crafting Judge Abby Stone



Randee Dawn • TV • April 30, 2025 9:00AM

Melissa Rauch is serious about comedy. Or maybe it's just that in her role as Judge Abby Stone on **NBC's** reboot of *Night Court*, she gets a power rush from waving her gavel around.

"What I've really gotten a high on in playing [Abby] is the judgy powers of having the decision in the palm of my hand," she tells Gold Derby. "There is such a control that comes with that, just by making a decision and going like this—" she mimes banging, "and going for the gavel!"

Night Court is, so far, one of TV's real reboot success stories. With two Emmy nominations and a third season that just wrapped, it's both a riff on and a new way of looking at the original, which aired on NBC from 1984 to 1992. Rauch's Stone is the daughter of original main character Judge Harry Stone (played by the late **Harry Anderson**, who died in 2018), but that's not the only call-back; **John Larroquette**, who earned four Emmys for his role as prosecutor Dan Fielding, is back with a big beard and now plays the court's public defender.

Getting the reboot aspect of the show down correct was critical, says Rauch. "A lot of times when you hear the word 'reboot,' you sort of cringe like, 'Oh, gosh, don't mess up that show that I love so much,'" she says. "Every decision that we made was very much keeping in mind that we had to pay respects to the original and just build on the foundation that they set for us."

Rauch recalls watching that original back in the day with her parents while growing up in New Jersey, but admits, "a lot went over my head." There were scenes where her parents told her to "cover your ears for that part," but she remembers that "there was something so special about the show."

Crafting Abby, she notes, was important because while she has the sunny outlook of her late father, they wanted to ensure that her "optimism wasn't just

Pollyanna or looking on the bright side," says Rauch. Much in the tradition of the original *Night Court*, the reboot weaves in emotional moments within its broad comedy lines, and Abby is a woman in recovery.

Putting Larroquette into the mix has also been a great education, even for someone with the experience of Rauch (who appeared on *The Big Bang Theory* for 10 years starting in 2009). The first scenes during the pilot, which were shot shortly after they met in person for the first time, had a real "electricity in the air," she said. And she's been picking up nuggets of wisdom ever since – down to the way Larroquette fills in the space between when the punchline lands and the audience stops laughing.

"It's otherworldly," she says. "It's sort of like riding a wave and coming to the end of it. I love it so much, getting to watch him do it... I'm constantly just taking notes from everyone."

And that includes costars **Wendie Malick** (as Julianne Walters), **Nyambi Nyambi** (Wyatt Shaw), and **Kapil Talwalkar** (Neil Valluri).

Meanwhile, the show just ended its third season on a two-episode cliffhanger, while the real cliffhanger remains: Will *Night Court* return for a fourth season? Rauch is ready to plead her case.

"People have started to notice that *Night Court* is this comedy playground where you get to play in front of this live studio audience, doing this nostalgia-filled old-school sitcom," she says. "I wasn't expecting audience members who've said that they watch the original, and this feels like a time machine back to a family member that they used to watch with that's no longer here anymore. Getting to watch this show feels like they're with that person. It's been one of the greatest gifts to hear about doing this show."

But that's not the only thing *Night Court* viewers can get out of seeing the show: If you're in the studio audience, Rauch is happy to marry you. Or, rather, be the presiding figure who marries two people.

"Once I realized that the gavel and that robe brought the ability to do things, I got ordained online," she says. "On a break, I'll ask [our studio audience] if anyone wants to renew vows or get married. I've offered divorces — but no one's taken me up on that!"

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