



NEW LINE CINEMA

Kyle MacLachlan (pictured here in *The Hidden*) stars as Special Agent Dale Cooper in the innovative ABC series "Twin Peaks."

★ ★ ★ ★ Twin Peaks

ABC, 9 p.m. Thursdays

The two-hour debut of "Twin Peaks" on Sunday was simply the most accomplished and exciting premiere of a dramatic series since "Hill Street Blues" over a decade ago.

That show revolutionized television by taking the conventions of the soap opera — sprawling casts, mature themes and overlapping story lines stretched out for weeks or even seasons — and raising them to high art. Its impact can be seen in everything from "St. Elsewhere" to "thirtysomething."

This series promises to be just as ground-breaking. It was conceived and directed by David Lynch, who helmed such off-beat movies as *Eraserhead* and *Blue Velvet*.

Like that latter film, "Twin

Peaks" is set in a small, northern logging town. It opens with the discovery of the body of a high school student named Laura Palmer. Her death and the subsequent discovery of another student who has been beaten and tortured by an unknown attacker shock the residents of this sleepy town.

But when Agent Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan) of the FBI appears on the scene, dirty secrets begin to be revealed. Everyone appears to be sleeping with at least two people, and they all have something to hide.

It's a sign of the show's complexity that we are left wondering not only "Who killed Laura Palmer?" but "Who is Laura Palmer?" She was a fresh-faced, innocent girl to most of the residents. But apparently Laura was cheating on her boyfriend Bobby with one or possibly two men, had a safety deposit box stuffed with \$10,000 and was doing cocaine.

The local sheriff (Michael

Ontkean) can't believe such a nice girl would be mixed up in anything nefarious, but there's a lot he doesn't know. Bobby apparently boasted to Laura shortly before her death that he had murdered somebody. The other girl who was attacked was posing in sleazy magazines. Developers are hoping to move in and take over the town.

Lynch presents all of this in a gripping, entertaining style that flourishes under the conventions of television even while it subverts them. His main accomplishment is to turn the television series from a story-driven, actor's medium to a director's medium more akin to the movies.

The main plot of "Twin Peaks" is filled with enough passion and intrigue to keep fans of "Hill Street Blues" or any daytime soap glued to their sets.

But it is Lynch's dry wit and subtle touches that stay with you: the voice of a school principal

floating through empty hallways as he announces the murder of Laura, stacks of doughnuts lined up on napkins in the sheriff's office, a barely visible streetlight swinging in the dark.

The character of a sheriff's deputy provides the quintessential Lynch moment. At every murder scene, he breaks down into desperate sobbing. It embarrasses everyone else and he apologizes repeatedly, but he is helpless to stop. We're so used to seeing policemen on TV and the movies handling such moments with calm and dispatch that his reaction seems almost surreal and comical.

But why shouldn't he cry, Lynch seems to ask? Isn't it more unusual that everyone else can stand in front of a dead, mutilated body and not blink an eye? That mixture of the unnerving and the humorous is what makes "Twin Peaks" so compelling and so good. Start watching now.

BY MICHAEL GILTZ