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DVD & Blu-ray Reviews

Portlandia TV Series, Blu-ray (2011)



Published on December 27, 2011



Portlandia, Blu-ray (2011)

Season 1 – 6 episodes – of the new IFC cable comedy

Cast: Carrie Brownstein, Fred Armisen, Kyle MacLachlan, Steve Buscemi, Aimee Mann, Selma Blair

Studio: IFC/VSC BR01838-0 [12/6/11]

Video: 16:9 1080i HD

Audio: English PCM stereo

Extras: Bloopers reel, Extended scenes, Deleted scenes, Armisen speaks to OES high school grads, 2 ThunderAnt videos, Preview of Season 2, Commentary tracks on all six episodes by Fred, Carrie & Director Jonathan Krisel

Length: 132 minutes total

Rating: ****

A number of TV series are now being shot here in Portland, Oregon, but this one is only one focusing on a satirical, absurdist view of Portland itself and its denizens. It has been such a hit that it is now starting a new season on the Independent Film Channel. Armisen describes Portland in the first episode as the place where “young people go to retire.” I had thought the series would only appeal to us Portlanders—with all the local points of interest and local types—but it seems to have fascinated viewers across the country.

The main roles are taken by the team of Brownstein and Armisen, in various costumes and makeup to fit the characters in the sketches. They may be an overly-conscientious couple who want all sorts of assurances about the chicken dish they are going to be ordering—including finding out the chicken’s name was Colin and that he roamed his four acres freely. They can be an artsy couple who promote putting a bird on everything to make it more appealing to buyers. Or they may be the two owners of a women’s bookshop who seem to specialize in totally frustrating their customers. They return a couple times to one couple for which the pair reverse genders—that couple wore out their welcome with me rather quickly.

I found most of the sketches involving other actors, such as the hilarious bit with Steve Buscemi trying to use the restroom at the women’s bookshop without buying anything, worked better than some of the solely Brownstein/Armisen sketches. The guy playing the typical cell-phone store salesman, for example, was absolutely right on. Kyle MacLachlan is good as an absurdly-exaggerated version of Portland’s current mayor (who has a small role as the series mayor’s assistant). In one episode the mayor disappears, only to be found by Brownstein & Armisen playing bass in a reggae band. The episode with singer Aimee Mann might have been funnier to me if I knew anything about her music, but I don’t. The sketches which point up actual people and things guilty of the twee urbanity that fits the “Keep Portland Weird” appellation had the most appeal to me, and others that were just plain silly fell flat. The Blu-ray transfer looks great, and the bonus feature’s extended and deleted scenes—like most—looked like they were appropriately excised from the final product.

—John Sunier

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