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Portlandia Blu-ray

Season One / Blu-ray + DVD
MVD/VSC | 2011 | 132 min | Not rated | Dec 06, 2011



Video
Video codec: MPEG-4 AVC
Video resolution: 1080p
Aspect ratio: 1.78:1
Original aspect ratio: 1.78:1

Audio
English: Dolby Digital 2.0

Subtitles
None

Discs
25GB Blu-ray Disc
Two-disc set (1 BD, 1 DVD)
DVD copy

Large: Front

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Packaging
Slipcover in original pressing

Playback
Region A (B, C untested)

Price
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Movie rating 7.1 / 10

1 ratings

Blu-ray review
Movie 3.5
Video 3.5
Audio 3.0
Extras 2.5
Overall 3.5

Movie appeal
Comedy 100%

23% popularity, 16 collections, 2 fans

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Portlandia Blu-ray Review
Take that, Seattle!

Reviewed by Jeffrey Kauffman, December 13, 2011

Okay, here's the deal: I have lived in Portland, Oregon for most of my adult life, but I was neither born nor raised here and therefore am treated as a social pariah and complete outsider. Well maybe my behavior has something to do with that as well, but I digress. Portland is a gorgeous city, more like a really big town, actually, and I frankly wouldn't live anywhere else. Unless you paid me large sums of money to. But as much as I love Portland (and I do, despite the fact that I mercilessly joke about the place), I am not immune to its peculiarities and peccadilloes. This is the place, after all, whose most iconic bumper sticker states "Keep Portland Weird," whose one-time Mayor Bud Clark (a dear man and one I actually accompanied in some parody fund raising musicals) made a lot of money with a poster where he was flashing a statue, a poster labeled "Expose Yourself to Art," and who later won the Mayorship largely on his claim of being a "born again Pagan," and of course we're the city that nurtured Tonya Harding into the fine, upstanding citizen and eventual (and appropriate) celebrity spokesperson for America's Dumbest she became. Well, two out of three ain't bad. More recently another Mayor of ours made headlines by being one of the first openly gay Mayors of a major metropolis (Portland insists it's a major metropolis), and then within days of his inauguration made more headlines when it was revealed he had had an "inappropriate" relationship with a young man who may have also been a minor at the time, a young man whose last name was (and this is the honest truth) Breedlove. You can't make this stuff up, folks.

Portland has always had an inferiority complex, at least in the decades I've lived here. It's smaller and less upscale than either Seattle, its sibling to the north, or San Francisco, its even weirder sister city to the south, and since it's somewhat more secluded than either of those places, set about an hour inland from the Pacific coast, it doesn't have the beach access cachet that either of its civic rivals do. But Portland has always had a certain allure for a certain type of people, those who would become known (rightly or wrongly) as slackers. As a hippie buddy of mine once stated (and, yes, there are still hippies in abundance in Portland, they may be elderly, but they've lost none of their counter cultural leanings), "Portland is still a place where you can coast." The city has become immensely more gentrified over the past decade or so, especially with the huge influx of California creative types seeking the relatively lower housing prices here. For goodness sakes, we actually have several television series filming here right now (Leverage has for goodness years, Grimm just started here this season), as well as numerous feature films that traipse through our soggy climes before heading back south for post-production. And among the series making its home in Portland, perhaps wed to its locale more than others, is the deliciously outré and frankly sometimes just plain stupid IFC entry Portlandia, a series which seeks to skewer the city's odd and occasionally loveable denizens. Believe me, Portland and its inhabitants are easy targets, and Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein have no dearth of

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subjects to exploit as they explore life in this moist environment which has spawned all sorts of peculiar species.



Do you want a great example of why Portland considers itself the Rodney Dangerfield of cities? Take the environmentally friendly cardboard case enclosing *Portlandia*'s two Blu-ray discs. It contains a mockup of a map of Portland with a few randomly chosen spots highlighted (the map is also repeated on the disc menu itself). One of those is "Kearny Street." Excuse me, Carrie, Fred?: Kearny Street is in San Francisco. Kearney Street is in Portland, I know, I used to live on it. It's a small slight, to be sure, but when a series that is anchored here and is supposedly celebrating us in its own satiric way can't even spell our street names correctly, you start to understand why so many SNOBs (that's the Society of Native Oregon Born, in case you were wondering) have such a defensive attitude about our state's largest aggregation of people.

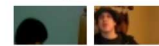
As might be expected of a series co-starring a *Saturday Night Live* alum, parts of *Portlandia* are downright hilarious and brilliantly conceived. Other skits just kind of lie there, semi-dormant like Mt. St. Helens (which is in Washington, but in a typical case of sibling rivalry, dumped almost all of its ash on Portland when it erupted in 1981). My personal favorites from the first season both are in the first broadcast episode, one of which involved the laugh out loud segment in a tony organic restaurant where Armisen and Brownstein need *personal* data concerning the chicken they're about to consume, though the skit goes completely off the rails and turns into a weird sort of riff perhaps based on our notorious infestation by the followers of the Bagwan Shree Rajneesh many years ago. (Say what you will about the Rajneeshies, they had a *killer* vegetarian restaurant in downtown Portland, and I don't mean that literally considering their plot to poison several government officials over in Eastern Oregon where their Rancho Rajneesh was). Another fantastic skit involves recurring characters at a lesbian themed bookstore, and my favorite segment had the fantastic Steve Buscemi using the restroom without first having made a requisite purchase, and then getting harangued into buying a book, though the two owners keep rejecting his choices.

While a lot of *Portlandia* is goofily enjoyable, Armisen and Brownstein too often seem to think that mere repetition creates humor. Thus the really odd "Put a bird on it" running gag which goes nowhere (and which believe it or not is repeated with a little cardboard bird stuck into the disc holder), and several other bits which far outstay their welcome. Kyle McLachlan is among the guest stars in the first season, playing Portland's supposed Mayor (that's our *real* Mayor, the "Breedlover" so to speak, playing his put upon Aide), and brings some great comic energy to the show. Aimee Mann is also hilarious playing herself, now relegated to being a house cleaner since she isn't burning up the pop charts anymore. But what hobbles *Portlandia* more than anything is a certain sameness to the humor. Almost all of the characters Armisen and Brownstein portray seem like the bastard stepchildren of Phil Hartman's great Anal Retentive Chef character from *Saturday Night Live*, that is, they're characters who inevitably get caught up in picayune minutiae and almost always end up whining about some minor element that's gone wrong.

Portlandia might benefit from having at least *one* relatively normal character, you know, the indie comedy analog to Marilyn Munster on *The Munsters* show of yore. There's a lot of great stuff scattered throughout the six episodes of the first season, but when *everyone* is so over the top, it gives the series a lack of peaks and valleys that keep it from a certain consistent hilarity.

Portlandia Blu-ray, Video Quality **B B B B B**

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Portlandia is presented on Blu-ray courtesy of Video Service Corporation with an AVC encoded 1080p transfer in 1.78:1. Despite Armitage and Brownstein's contention of the show offering superb production values, at least relative to its paltry budget, the video quality here, while well above average, is still overall often on the soft side, with a somewhat pallid palette that never really pops very well, even in high definition. While the show has that nice indie look of an on the fly show shot on HD video, it lacks consistent contrast and also suffers from black levels that tend to vary fairly broadly from scene to scene. Still, a lot of the well lit close-up material offers at least passable fine detail, and while the show isn't the most magnificent looking high definition production out there, its very lo-fi ambience actually plays rather well into its whole countercultural leanings.

Portlandia Blu-ray, Audio Quality **B B B B B**



Portlandia only features a lossy Dolby Digital 2.0 soundtrack, which suffices moderately well for the largely dialogue driven proceedings here, but which still comes up short in the series' fairly frequent use of music. (It's kind of odd that the main menu features an uncompressed LPCM 2.0 version of the theme). The standard Dolby track has decent enough fidelity, though there's next to no real stereo separation. Dynamic range is fine, though again the series' self-imposed limitations keep this track from ever being reall over the top with regard to wide variances in amplitude. Hopefully the second season will up the ante and give us a lossless soundtrack to enjoy.

Portlandia Blu-ray, Special Features and Extras **B B B B B**

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- **Commentaries with Fred Armisen, Carrie Brownstein and Jonathan Krisel.** Commentary tracks are included for all six first season episodes, and they're surprisingly low key, non-jokey affairs, with Armisen and Brownstein taking the lead and talking about various production issues, like locations they chose, guest stars and the characters they play. It's actually a bit unnerving to hear them just sit and discuss things in a nuts and bolts way, without any dry or snarky humor.
- **Bloopers** (HD; 4:45) is mostly the actors cracking up and spoiling takes.
- **Extended Scenes** includes "Gotta Get Out" (HD; 2:26), one of the least funny bits, with Armisen and Brownstein repeatedly telling someone "you gotta get out of there" on a cell phone; and "Sparkle Pony Song" (HD; 1:42), a minimally more effective bit with a nonsensical folk tune.
- **Deleted Scenes** includes:
 - Aerosmith (HD; 1:33), a bookstore scene;
 - Aimee Mann Bed (HD; 2:44), cut from the episode with Mann as the kind of maid;
 - Ambulance Driver (HD; 3:29) features Armisen and Brownstein as ambulance drivers;
 - Cambodia Cut (HD; 2:36) has Armisen and Brownstein working on the "Portland Theme Song";
 - Deuce Hotel Carrie (HD; 00:50) has Carrie checking in some guests;
 - Forest Meeting (HD; 1:57) is a rendezvous out in the woods between erstwhile (maybe) lovers;
 - Light Bulb Song (HD; 2:59) has Brownstein doing the stream of consciousness thing with her guitar.
- **Fred Armisen Speaks to Oregon Episcopal School Graduates** (HD; 11:41) is a great little commencement speech.
- **Thunderant Videos** features "Closed" (SD; 3:59) and "One Man Show" (SD; 7:10).
- **Season 2 Preview** (HD; 00:59)

Portlandia Blu-ray, Overall Score and Recommendation **B B B B B**



Is *Portlandia* an inside joke? A lot of us in Portland get a huge kick out of it, but of course we're biased. The show has been a middling success for smallish network IFC, enough so that a second season is underway, but the series would do well to spend a little more time on more scathing commentary and less on the sort of whiney approach that fills up the first season. Still, there's a lot to enjoy scattered throughout the first season, even if it must be stated that Fred Armisen is perhaps the ugliest female impersonator since Peter Kastner in the short-lived 1960s series *The Ugliest Girl in the World*. **Recommended.**

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