



FILM MUSIC TV ARTS LIFESTYLE INT'L FOLLOW US



[JOIN TEAM BUZZINI](#) for daily updates and exclusive giveaways
[LOGIN](#) [SIGN UP](#) [Login with Facebook](#)

Share

IF MY TEEN WAS OFFERED DRUGS, HE WOULD TELL ME ABOUT IT.

Get help and see what others think about Emotional Drugs. [Go](#)

TV REVIEW: 'PORTLANDIA'

Now Streaming: SNL's Fred Armisen's Sketch Show Celebrates the Absurd & Bizarre

By: [Jesse Livingston](#)
May 22, 2012



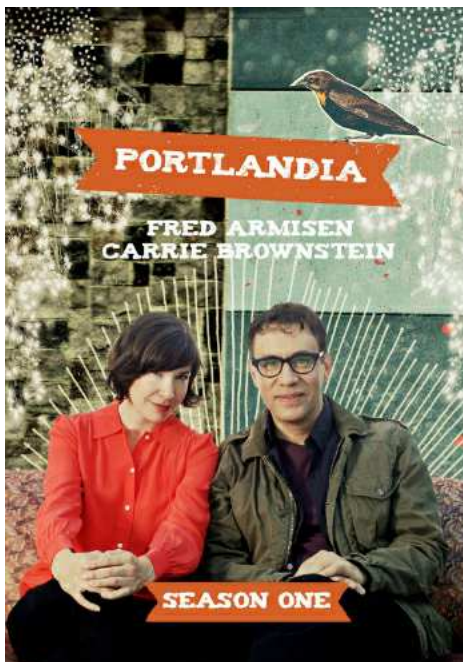
(IFC) *Portlandia* has been getting great word-of-mouth. You may have heard people you know singing "The Dream of the '90s is Alive in Portland" or quoting lines like "Put a bird on it!" The show deserves the buzz it's getting, but maybe not for the reasons you'd guess. As a satire of hipster culture, it's fair-to-middling, but as a celebration of the bizarre, it's excellent.

The premise of the show is pretty unique: a series of sketches that affectionately poke fun at the city of Portland. It recalls *The Kids in the Hall* in both tone and structure, but while the Kids often did similar sendups of their fellow Torontonians, they weren't quite so explicit in their intent.

Here's where the divide between *Portlandia*'s premise and its actual comedic success comes into play: although the show is ostensibly a satire of the land "where young people go to retire," its stars – Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein – put most of their considerable comedic talents into portraying the kind of outlandish characters that could exist in any city. Portland is often little more than a backdrop or a narrative device for bringing these crazed individuals together.

True, there is a recurring sketch involving the mayor of Portland (Kyle MacLachlan, *Twin Peaks*) and his assistant (Sam Adams, the real-life mayor of Portland); and, yes, the show does feature endless jabs at the hoodie-wearing, fixed-gear-riding vegans of the Great Northwest; but those gentle souls live pretty much everywhere these days, and the satire seems directed at their worldview rather than at a particular geographic location.

Where the show really shines is in little touches of absurdity. For instance, there's the relationship that Brownstein has with an anonymous and ill-fated chubby man during the course of a single phone conversation. Or, how about the weirdly hypnotic gaze of Alikei (the bewitching Jason Sudeikis, *SNL*, *30 Rock*), organic farmer and erstwhile cult leader?



FEATURED CONTENT

- MUSIC INTERVIEW: WORLD PARTY
- FILM INTERVIEW: CHAZZ PALMINTERI
- INTERVIEW: CAST OF 'DARK SHADOWS'

RELATED CONTENT

- TV REVIEW: 'BLACK BOOKS'
- TV REVIEW: 'BOB'S BURGERS'
- TV REVIEW: 'THE LOST ROOM'

YOU MAY ALSO LIKE

- TV REVIEW: 'BOB'S BURGERS'
- TV REVIEW: 'BLACK BOOKS'
- TV REVIEW: 'THE LOST ROOM'

RELATED TAGS Sort: [alphabetically](#) | [popu](#)

Aimee Mann Jason Sudeikis Fred Armisen Carrie Brownstein Alternative Come comedy IFC Portlandia Mor Python Kyle MacLachlan **Jess Livingston** kids in the hall Lor Michaels **Reviews** saturday nig live The Whitest Kids You Know TV Upriz Citizen's Brigade

RECENT COMMENTS

- In response to: [FILM REVIEW: 'THE KARATE KID](#)
"i see your movie and that was excellent and i have nice plan you can make..."
- In response to: [MUSIC INTERVIEW: K.FLAY](#)
"Thanks KFlay dats what up.. lemme kno if u ever wanna collab -- Here's a post..."
- In response to: [MUSIC INTERVIEW: DANNY ELFMAN Q&A - PART 3 OF 3](#)
"Where can I find the lyrics to "Scarlett Balancing"?"

There are occasions where the satire really works, such as a sketch in which musician Aimee Mann is forced to work as a maid for a couple of abusive fans because everyone in the world pirates music. It's a well-aimed shot at the thoughtlessness and selfishness of many of today's music fans, and it's a rare case where the concept takes precedence over the performances.

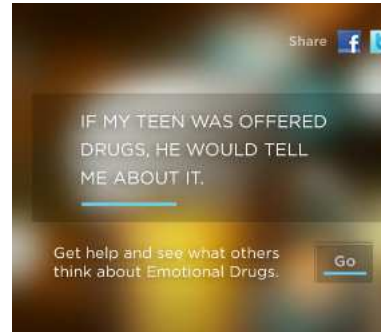
However, for the most part, Brownstein and Armisen don't seem that interested in the politics of their comedy; they'd rather explore the same existential inanity that's been the hallmark of modern sketch comedy – at the heart of which is the observation that humans are generally a glitchy and demented species who perform a thousand self-righteous rituals every day and who evince little-to-no long-term virtue.

Music plays a large role in *Portlandia*, with slyly witty songs thrown in here and there. Brownstein used to play with Sleater-Kinney and now tours with indie supergroup Wild Flag, so she knows what she's doing in that department. Armisen is no slouch either, having played drums for Trenchmouth, Les Savy Fav, and Blue Man Group.

Portlandia came out of a series of web-based sketches that the two eventually pitched as a show. We can thank Lorne Michaels – the man behind *Saturday Night Live* and *The Kids in the Hall* – for making *Portlandia* a televised reality. It's already been renewed for a third season, so we can look forward to more hilariously creepy, unhinged adventures. Like the *Kids* before them, Brownstein and Armisen are using their adopted hometown as a playground for larger-than-life characters that may – to some of us – feel a little too familiar.

For Fans Of: *The Kids in the Hall*, *The Whitest Kids U'Know*, *The Upright Citizens Brigade*, *Monty Python's Flying Circus*

Why We Like It: A cracked view of reality, manic sketches that never go where you're expecting, great musical numbers.

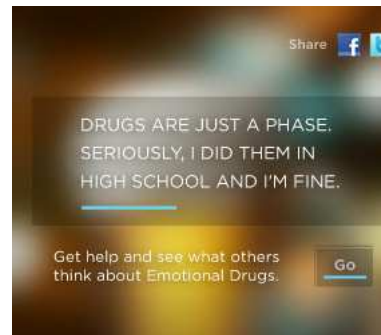


B Buzzine "Spiritualized's 'Sweet Heart Sweet Light' is an exciting & raw experience." ow.ly/b8Bm #reviews @officialSpzd 14 hours ago · reply · retweet · favorite



Join the conversati

Like One like. Sign Up to see what



NEWSLETTER | FACEBOOK | TWITTER | YOUTUBE | RSS

FILM	MUSIC	TV	ARTS	LIFESTYLE	INT'L
INTERVIEWS	INTERVIEWS	INTERVIEWS	INTERVIEWS	INTERVIEWS	INTERVIEWS
REVIEWS	REVIEWS	REVIEWS	REVIEWS	REVIEWS	REVIEWS
COLUMNS	COLUMNS	COLUMNS	COLUMNS	COLUMNS	COLUMNS
GALLERIES	GALLERIES	GALLERIES	GALLERIES	GALLERIES	GALLERIES

COPYRIGHT © 1996-2012 ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

TERMS OF USE | PRIVACY POLICY | SITEMAP | CONTENT CATALOG | COMPANY INFO | OUR STAFF | AFFILIATES | FAQ | BUZZ SHOP | SUBMISSIONS | ADVERTISING