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Portlandia: Season 1

By: Holly Henschen

Portlandia Season 1 (IFC)

Finally, some good hipster jokes! "Portlandia" is "Monty Python's Flying Circus" for hipsters...by hipsters...about hipsters.

The masterminds behind the IFC Channel's bombshell hit Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein are America's new sweethearts because they're good at poking fun at hipsters. Everyone does it, but they do it well, with a touch of self-deprecation. The project started with "ThunderAnt," a set of sketches the duo built around a feminist bookstore in Portland. It expanded to a six-episode series on IFC.

The season opener is a sketch/music video about Portland, where "the dream of the '90's is alive." The pre-Bush administration-era dream of living well without holding steady white-collar jobs. "It's where young people go to retire." And where things like crepe food carts, artisan light bulbs, dumpster diving, obsession with local food, putting birds on things so they look more appealing and artistic and mocking bizarrely progressive office spaces thrive.

"Portlandia" celebrates the joys and pitfalls of living in any "cool" metro area, i.e. Portland, Brooklyn, parts of Chicago (Logan Square, I'm looking in your direction). If the watcher is unaware of the culture, jokes could fall flat.

One way or another, the series boasts a glut of celebrity cameos and is rife with cross dressing, impressive wiggery and costumery. The skits are part funny ha ha, party funny ironic, part funny strange and part overdoing it funny. Sometimes that last one gets a little lost. The overboard is often hilarious, but just as often it falls a bit annoyingly flat. You know where this punch line is headed. To Repetition Ville.

Let it be known. The participants in the recent debate of "Can women be funny?" (Yeah, seriously, this is a debate.) need only look to Carrie Brownstein for assurance that ladies can be the joker, and not just the jokes or dainty accomplices. Brownstein plays characters of both genders and isn't afraid to be the butt of the joke, because she wrote it.

It's sometimes hard not to judge something great by its own standards. So here's to looking forward to the release of season II, airing now on IFC.

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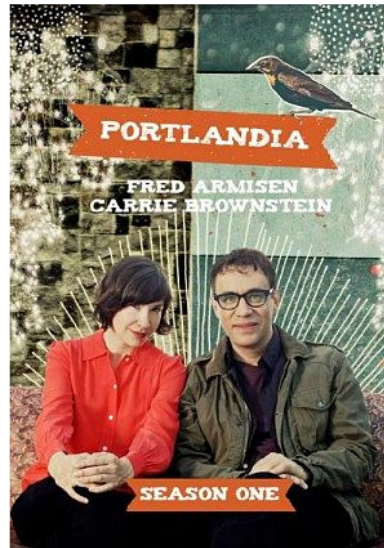
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