



Portlandia

STAFF

Season One (2011)

VSC

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Like the place that inspires it, *Portlandia* is a weird show. From the minds of Fred Armisen (*Saturday Night Live*), Carrie Brownstein (Sleater-Kinney, Wild Flag) and Jonathan Krisel (*Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job!*), *Portlandia* seeks to skewer life in Portland, Ore. The show's first season offers up six episodes that fluctuate wildly in quality and content. Sometimes it's charmingly oddball. Sometimes it's really dark and even sexually threatening. Sometimes it feels like a series of sketches that couldn't make it on *SNL*'s final 10 minutes. Sometimes it's funny. Sometimes it's not.

There are plenty of positives. Unlike *SNL*, *Portlandia*'s skits actually have endings. While the humor is pretty niche (r.e. hipsters 'n' hippies), there are still some comedic takes on things like dodgeball and movies that should appeal to people outside the show's self-imposed cult status. It also tweaks the political left without condoning the right. As a Whole Foods Market employee, I relate to some of these sketches a little too much (<http://youtu.be/l2LBICPEK6w>). But the humor still generally comes from a place of endearment, even if it involves Brownstein having disturbingly rough, mustachioed sex. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idQGPwuHhkM>) The crew packs in plenty of jokes per 30-minute episode, striking a decent balance between *Tim and Eric*'s awkward humor and *SNL*'s wacky characters.

At just six episodes, though, *Portlandia*'s first season has a little too much filler. Much like the sketches on Armisen's other show, *Portlandia* sometimes rams a good premise into the ground. It might be more work in the editing room, but there's nothing wrong with a good 60-second bit. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GkQ8cpPsoWU&feature=related>) And sometimes the show aggressively commits to failing. One of *Portlandia*'s stock jokes involves Armisen and Brownstein screaming the same phrase (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7VgNQbZdaw>) over and over at each other. (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XOQiqDWV_Tc) It's tedious and needlessly manic.

But it when it works, *Portlandia* works quite well. The camera work and soundtrack are great. While the sketches aren't linked completely together a la *Mr. Show*, there is one plotline spread throughout each episode that gives the show some nice continuity. The guest stars actually get to contribute strong material. Between this and *How I Met Your Mother*, Kyle McLachlan has turned in some incredibly strong comedic performances lately. Not bad for the star of *Blue Velvet*

and *Twin Peaks*. Other guests, like Aimee Mann, Aubrey Plaza and Jason Sudeikis deliver solid laughs as well, although I'm sure cool kids will be on the lookout for Colin Meloy and Corin Tucker. While thoroughly uneven, *Portlandia* still warrants a viewing and a second season. And in true Portland fashion, season one comes in biodegradable cardboard packaging.

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