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Portlandia: Season One

by [Ian Jane](#)

Published on 12-29-2011 10:17 AM

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Released by: [VSC](#)
 Released on: December 6, 2011.
 Director: Various
 Cast: Fred Armisen, Carrie Brownstein, Kyle

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According to AWE the soundtrack was released in Denmark as a limited edition by the composer but...

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WOW. Best review on this site EVER.

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Amazing soundtrack on that youtube vid! Thanks for the link.

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No action shots of the spirit monkey mating, though.

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Bonus points for including a screen cap of the Sasquatch Boy.

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The Series:

Portlandia, the low-fi indie comedy that airs on IFC, just finished up its first season. Created by former Saturday Night Live alumni Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein, the series takes place, not so surprisingly, in Portland, Oregon – a beautiful city that sort of exists in its own little bubble. If you've ever spent any time there you'll know that Portland is an odd city. It's picturesque, clean, easy to get around and sometimes overrun by left leaning types, be they aging hippies or crust punks or hipsters or what have you. The series pokes fun at various aspects of life in Portland, and while it does a good job of working in much of that city's local flavor (it's all shot entirely on location), a lot of what Armisen and Brownstein go for here isn't all that specific to the city itself.

At any rate, the show is basically a series of skits with recurring characters, each a caricature of a typical Portland stereotype. You get the well meaning yuppie couple who wind up hiring musician Amy Mann to work as their maid – initially thrilled, as they're fans, but eventually treating her less like a musician they admire and more like, well, a maid. A couple who head out for dinner inquire about the origins of the chicken they consider ordering, which leads to a visit to an organic farm where a cult like farmer brings them into his fold. Two militant feminists run a book store and trap Steve Buscemi inside when he pays them an innocent enough visit. Another couple, ardent about their recycling, become upset when no one shows up for their party, perplexed that none of their friends are interested in the food they've made up based on a series of dumpster dives. Members of an adult hide and seek league meet their match in the library, and Portland's mayor (played by Kyle Maclachlan) becomes the subject of some controversy when it's found out that he's moonlighting as the bass player in a reggae band.

Portlandia is consistently weird. Sometimes it's funny in the traditional way, sometimes it's more of an awkward sort of funny and other times it's probably only funny to people who have spent enough time in Portland to get some of the more specific references that the show does make (for the record this writer spent seven years there and while there's no actual adult hide and seek league

that I'm aware of, there are adult dodgeball, kickball and Frisbee golf leagues). There is a lot of comedy to be mined here, however, as Armisen and Brownstein do manage to create some pretty entertaining characters and put them into situations that, in the context of Portland at least, are actually fairly easy to relate to. The series pokes some good harmless fun at the ridiculous extremes that liberal elitists can go to but never comes across as mean spirited or nasty and you get the impression that the two are just as likely poking fun at themselves and their own politics as they are anyone else. At the very least, they're in on the joke.

The show also does a good job of showing off some of the city's awesome architecture. You get the fancy ass yuppified feel of the city's Pearl District but also get to check out some old Victorian style homes on the Northeast Side of town as well. The show pays a visit to one of the city's numerous strip clubs (surprisingly only one visit – here's hoping season two rectifies this!) and also takes us to a few of the more popular live music venues in the downtown core – so you get a bit of a tour of Portland as well as a peek at the various stereotypical denizens that call it home. Keep your eyes peeled for a blink and you'll miss it shot of [Mary's Club](#) during the opening credits.

At only six episodes clocking in at under a half an hour each in length, this releases cruises by pretty quickly. The show is an easy watch and a fun, creative and unique series that stands out alongside the more common mainstream sitcoms that populate the airwaves. Here's hoping that Armisen and Brownstein are able to expand on things a bit more in the upcoming second season – there's a lot of potential with this show and you don't get the impression that they've quite hit their peak yet.

Video/Audio/Extras:

Portlandia is presented in AVC encoded 1.78.1 widescreen in 1080p high definition and it looks pretty good even if it's not going to knock you to the floor. Detail can sometimes be a little bit soft but skin tones look dead on and color reproduction is strong. There are no compression artifacts nor are there any edge enhancement issues. If you've seen it broadcast on HDTV, you'll know what to expect as this is about on par with a good high definition television broadcast, but it's not the best that the format has to offer. The no frills look and feel of the show is replicated well

here, however.

The only audio option on this release is an English language Dolby Digital 2.0 Stereo track, there's no 5.1 mix or lossless option included, which is bound to disappoint some. The track sounds fine, however, offering clear dialogue and properly balanced levels. It's clean, clear and free of any issues.

Fred Armisen, Carrie Brownstein and Jonathan Krisel all join in to deliver commentary tracks for each of the episodes contained on this disc, with Armisen doing most of the heavy lifting throughout. Topics covered here include writing the skits, recurring characters, location shooting, guest stars and the like. Surprisingly, however, this is all done in a very matter-of-fact way without any humor and with a very dry delivery which actually makes them less fun to listen to than you'd expect them to be.

MVD have also included a handful of deleted scenes for this release: Aerosmith / Aimee Mann Bed / Ambulance Driver / Cambodia Cut / Deuce Hotel Carrie / Forest Meeting / Light Bulb Song. Additionally there are extended versions of Gotta Get Out and the Sparkle Pony Song and a five minute blooper reel here as well.

There's also a fun twelve minute but where Fred Armisen delivers a commencement speech to a class of Graduates from the Oregon Episcopal School and two Thunderant Videos for the tracks Closed and One Man Show respectively. Rounding out the extras is a preview for the upcoming second season of the series, animated menus and episode selection. All of the extras on the Blu-ray are in high definition. As this is a combo pack release, a DVD containing the same content is also included, and both discs are packaged inside an appropriately environmentally friendly cardboard package that suits the show but which is actually kind of a pain in the ass.

The Final Word:

Humor is, quite obviously, a very subjective thing but Portlandia is screwy and quirky enough that you don't have to know the city to get the jokes – much of what Armisen and Brownstein are going after here could be easily transplanted to any left leaning major city you'd care to name. While not every skit is a winner, this is at least something different to enjoy on TV, and the series is frequently very clever. VSC's Blu-ray looks and

sounds decent even if it won't blow you away and it's got a respectable smattering of supplements as well – overall, a pretty respectable release for a fun show.

Click on the images below for full size Blu-ray screen caps!











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3 Comments



Goldberg - 01-01-2012, 01:24 AM [Reply](#)

I'm surprised Ian Miller isn't in it!



Ian Miller - 01-02-2012, 09:01 PM [Reply](#)

Originally Posted by **Goldberg**

I'm surprised Ian Miller isn't in it!

I tried to get on Season 2, but no go. Some friends did though!



Nolando - 01-03-2012, 08:30 PM [↩ Reply](#)

Miller's not in it because the show's producers lack any balls. There, I said it.

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