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## Portlandia Season Two

By Calhoun Kersten

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*Portlandia* first made waves when it aired on IFC and hipsters realized they had a place to call home. Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein lead their absurdist cast of guest stars in various skits and sketches that take place around the beautiful Northwestern city. VSC is bringing the acclaimed second season to blu-ray and DVD on September 25.

It's hard to describe what makes this show so charming. Armisen and Brownstein's hipster-friendly coupling is an undeniable draw for fans who have always wanted to see Armisen rise above the mediocrity of *Saturday Night Live*. Brownstein is equally intoxicating as she proves herself to be the indie darling that IFC so desperately needs. But to give all of the credit for *Portlandia*'s success to its two leads is to ignore the true talent of the show. As is to be expected of any sketch show, the humor is the major selling point of *Portlandia*. True, Armisen and Brownstein are a huge part of making that humor translate from the written word to the screen, but there's something about the comedy in and of itself that makes *Portlandia* such a delight to watch.

For starters, *Portlandia* is presented in a perfect format. As previously noted, each episode is comprised of various skits, but throughout each episode, the show returns to segments of one core storyline. One of the strongest episodes of season two features the planning of a pseudo-punk rock/hipster wedding. The preparations for the nuptials play out through the entire episode, but it is interrupted and appropriately punctuated with a number of other vignettes. A show like *Portlandia* benefits from this sort of style because it's hard to believe that co-creator Jonathan Krisel and his talented cast could create a full 20-some minute plot that keeps up the energy level that *Portlandia* has. Instead, they embrace the delightfully ADHD and improvisational style and simply go with it, creating a fast-paced and funny series.

But it isn't just the format that is working in *Portlandia*'s favor. It is often said that any kind of comedy has a good deal of truth to it and *Portlandia*'s style of comedy is no exception. Sure, as the show wears on into its 10-episode second season, as opposed to its first season run of six episodes, the humor becomes a little tired and too out there. However, its early episodes strike that perfect balance of absurdist and honest. One of the best skits revolves around Carrie's first date with a guy and her inability to get over his bad tattoo. Another episode revolves around a couple's attempt to get their son Grover into a good private pre-school so that he doesn't waste his potential at community college years down the road. Sure, these are extremist examples, but everybody knows that one guy or girl who broke up with a seemingly perfect mate because of their bad laugh. Most people know those types of parents that play Mozart to their kid in utero so that they'll be born an evil genius. These characters are funny because they're all too familiar. However, Armisen and Brownstein elevate their intensity to insane new heights to give *Portlandia* the kind of over-the-top charm that makes it such an engrossing show to watch.

*Portlandia* Season Two will be released on blu-ray and DVD on September 25, 2012. Special features include behind-the-scenes footage of the Portlandia Live Tour, creator commentaries, bonus scenes, and more.

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