

So Much Time to Smell the Roses

Oh, to have free time — the things you could do! Search for a cheaper, larger apartment. Put in some hours at the gym, maybe. Finally organize your closet

JON CARAMANICA

TELEVISION REVIEW

and give away a few bags of clothes to charity. Not in Portland, Ore., where indolence is a virtue, and free time only creates more opportunities for not working.

The Portland of “Portlandia,” which begins on Friday on IFC, is a city where no one can complete a task: a couple ordering chicken in a restaurant are derailed by questions about its provenance; a man trying to patronize a bookstore is stymied by its flaky owners.

“A city where young people go to retire,” is how Jason (Fred Armisen) describes it to Donnie (Carrie Brownstein) in this comedy’s opening vignette — widely circulated on the Internet in recent weeks — which culminates in a musical number featuring leather daddies, clowns, 1992-vintage alterna-girls and the Portland Gay Men’s Chorus.

That’s what the Portland of the imagination theoretically excels at: happenstance beauty. After all, this is the perpetual summer-camp city where Seth Cohen retreated to lick his wounds and teach sailing on “The O.C.,” where a spunky orphan tracked

Portlandia

IFC, Friday nights at 10:30, Eastern and Pacific times; 9:30, Central time.

Created and written by Fred Armisen, Carrie Brownstein and Jonathan Krisel; directed by Mr. Krisel; Lorne Michaels, executive producer; Mr. Armisen, Ms. Brownstein, Mr. Krisel and Andrew Singer, co-executive producers; Debbie DeMontreux, Dan Pasternack, Jennifer Caserta and Evan Shapiro, executive producers for IFC.

WITH: Fred Armisen, Carrie Brownstein, Kyle MacLachlan, Aubrey Plaza, Selma Blair, Heather Graham, Edie McClurg, Kumail Nanjiani, Jason Sudeikis, Sam Adams and Gus Van Sant.

down her semi-bohemian parents and stitched her family back together on “Life Unexpected.”

But most of the story lines in “Portlandia” revolve around the sheer unnavigability of a city with no rules and no desire to have them. Even the song playing during the title credits — “Feel It All Around,” by Washed Out — is lazy, moving at molasses speed.

Most of the main characters are played by Mr. Armisen and Ms. Brownstein (of the much-admired indie rock band Sleater-Kinney), in scenes drawn partly from sketches the two made over the past few years as ThunderAnt, a comedy mini-troupe.

Often Ms. Brownstein, wide-eyed and sincere, gets the best of Mr. Armisen, who’s been exaggerating characters for so long on “Saturday Night Live” that it’s tough for him to capture the understatement of these caricatures. She’s especially sharp as the tightly wound feminist bookstore owner, Toni, who in the

show’s second episode sternly tells a college student pointing at a volume on a shelf, “Can you put that away please?” — the finger, that is — “Every time you point, I see a penis.”

No one says the word “slack-er” on this show, because that would imply both something to aspire to — the film by that name — and that the city offered some other lifestyle option.

Except that there is, on this show, a tension between lethargy and efficiency — the one can’t exist without the other, it turns out. When Nance (Ms. Brownstein) asks about the chicken — “Is that U.S.D.A. organic? Or Oregon organic? Or Portland organic?” — she’s presented with detailed paperwork of its origin, including a picture. The farm of Aliko (a confidently tranquil Jason Sudeikis), whence the chicken hails, turns out to be a gleaming bastion of cultish efficiency, both to produce organic chicken and to collect wives for the owner; they wear outfits that recall the prairie dresses of the women of the Yearning for Zion Ranch in Texas, the fundamentalist Mor-



SCOTT GREEN/IFC

Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein play a cast of recurring characters in “Portlandia.”

mon compound that became tabloid fodder after a controversial raid in 2008.

In next week’s episode a spirited Kyle MacLachlan plays the city’s khaki-clad, bicycle-riding, indigenous-art-inspired mayor: He’s a goofball but, seen sitting

on an exercise ball during a meeting, he could also be some sort of new-media guru. (The city’s actual mayor, Sam Adams, plays his flustered assistant.)

That an engine of hard work powers a city of relaxation is a characterization that might in-

spire locals to protest via site-specific art, or to create a new eco-friendly blend of coffee using beans from Ecuador and Madagascar, with proceeds going to finance clever counterprogramming. But no one there has TVs, right?

“THE MOST RICHLY ENJOYABLE NEW PLAY IN MANY A SEASON.

Seriously satisfying and gorgeously acted. Whomever you’re watching in this production, you’ll find something wonderful. You never want to take your eyes off a single one of them. As directed by Joe Mantello, who does his most sensitive work in years here, this is a work in which every character is created equal—every one of them emerges as selfish, loving, cruel, compassionate, irritating, charming and just possibly heroic in Mr. Baitz’s most fully realized play to date.”—Brantley, *The New York Times*

ONLINE: ‘PORTLANDIA’

An article about the series and a scene from the premiere: nytimes.com/television



MOVIES

Jake Gyllenhaal and Michelle Monaghan race against the clock

In the new sci-fi thriller *Source Code* (out April 1), Gyllenhaal plays a military operative who is sent back in time—over and over again—to figure out how to foil a terrorist plot on a train. On board, he falls for one of the ill-fated passengers (Monaghan). The movie's multi-level plot has already earned blogosphere comparisons to brainteasers like *Inception*—which doesn't bother director Duncan Jones (*Moon*) one bit. "I'm a big fan of Chris Nolan's and would love to be put in the same category as him someday," he says. (Fun fact: Jones is David Bowie's son.) But don't look for any Nolanesque nihilism here. "The tone of the film is quite light," says Jones. "We get to see Jake play a leading-man action role but still have that little sense of humor to him—almost like an Indiana Jones." So it's *Indiana Jones* meets *Inception*? All aboard! —Adam Markovitz



TV

Fred Armisen gets crunchy

Live from...Portland, Ore.? In his new IFC sketch series *Portlandia*, Armisen (right) and former Sleater-Kinney riot grrrl Carrie Brownstein (left) poke gentle fun at the hipper- and veganer-than-thou foibles of the Pacific Northwest. (In episode 2, airing Jan. 28, they fall in with a cult leader played by guest star Jason Sudeikis, center.) Armisen, who was a drummer before *Saturday Night Live*, says he and Brownstein see similarities between music and comedy. "A sketch is three or four minutes, and that's about the length of a song," he notes. "And there always needs to be a hook." —Keith Staskiewicz

SOURCE CODE: JONATHAN WENK; PORTLANDIA: SCOTT PATRICK GREEN/IFC

January 21, 2011

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newsday.com

TV

Television

Great, but will it play in Portland?



ON TV
Verne
Gay

verne.gay@newsday.com

THE SHOW "Portlandia"
WHEN | WHERE Tonight at
10:30 on IFC

REASON TO WATCH Terrific
new sketch series starring
Valley Stream's — not Port-
land's — Fred Armisen.

WHAT IT'S ABOUT Based on
the Web series "Thunder-
Ant," "Portlandia" stars "Sat-
urday Night Live's" Armisen
and Carrie Brownstein (a
founding member of Portland
riot grrrl band Sleater-Kin-
ney) as various residents of
Oregon's largest city. They
include a pair of hostile lesbian
owners of a bookstore,
Women and Women First;
another couple who insist on
visiting the organic farm
where the chicken they are

about to order at a restaurant
was born and raised (next
week's episode); and two
friends commissioned by
Portland's mayor (played by
Kyle MacLachlan) to write a
song celebrating the city, "but
not Seattle."

With cameos next week
from Steve Buscemi; and
Jason Sudeikis, leader of a
polygamy cult that's a front
for that aforementioned or-
ganic chicken farm. Lorne
Michaels is executive pro-
ducer.

MY SAY By this point you've
correctly deduced that "Port-
landia" is a satire of the
city's subcultures: animal and
biker rights activists, femi-
nists, '90s-era hipsters, folk-

ies, transgenders, anarchists,
bisexuals, radical vegans,
greens and all others who
harbor a seething bias against
Seattle for being a bigger and
somewhat cooler city. (Port-
landia, by the way, is the
name of large statue in the
city, but Seattle has the
Space Needle, so there you
have it.)

Not for you? Then consider
this review an attempt to
persuade otherwise. Brown-
stein and Armisen move so
effortlessly between charac-
ters, then execute their riffs,
tics, styles and voices with
such skilled abandon that
before long this doesn't seem
like satire any longer but a fun
house mirror reflection of
intensely real people.

BOTTOM LINE Hilarious send-
up of Portland, but Corvallis,
Salem and Eugene may well
see themselves in this rip as
well.

GRADE A



SNL's Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein star in the satirical, lyrical dis to Seattle, "Portlandia," spawned online, on IFC.

IFC PHOTO



Go behind the scenes
with videos of the new
"American Idol" crew

newsday.com

/tv

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Our Picks: TV

Editor: Sarah Hepola
UPDATED: TODAY

THURSDAY, JAN 20, 2011 10:01 ET

"Portlandia": Can the left laugh at itself?

SNL's Fred Armisen dares to poke fun at organic food-eating, liberal culture in "Portlandia." But is it funny?

BY MATT ZOLLER SEITZ Like 515



IFC

Fred Armisen (left) and Carrie Brownstein in "Portlandia."

In a restaurant sketch on the new IFC series "Portlandia," a waitress approaches a man and woman at a table and asks if they're ready to order. The woman says she'd like to know more about the chicken.

"The chicken is a Heritage Breed, woodland-raised chicken that's been fed a diet of sheep's milk, soy and hazelnuts," the waitress replies.

"This is local?" man asks, leaning thoughtfully on his hand.

"Yes," the waitress replies.

"Oregon organic, or Portland organic?" the woman asks.

"It's just all-across-the-board organic," the waitress says.

The questions get more intense and detailed, to the point where the couple sounds as though they're doing a background check on a Supreme Court nominee. The waitress leaves for a moment, then returns with a dossier. "His name was Colin," she says. "Here are his papers."

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Can the 21st century, granola-crunching, organic-farm-supporting, "Daily Show"-quoting, early-technology-adopting, bike-lane-promoting American left laugh at itself?

IFC surely had to ask itself that question before bankrolling "Portlandia," a pet project of "Saturday Night Live" star Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein, a former guitarist and vocalist for Sleater-Kinney. The limited-run series, which premieres Friday night at 10:30 p.m./9:30 Eastern, is as subtle as an off-kilter, half-hour sketch series can be. Armisen and Brownstein play most of the characters, often with strange wigs and facial appliances (in one sketch, Armisen sports a mustache that seems to be made of black electrical tape), but unlike so many "SNL" creations, the performers don't get up in your face and demand to be laughed at.

And yet the humor is still corrosive. Armisen and Brownstein are targeting a specific Pacific Northwest subculture, but their barbs should lodge deep in any North American neighborhood in which people patronize food co-ops and vegan restaurants and independent bookstores with stacks of homemade zines on the checkout counter, then zip home on mountain bikes bleating little warning noises from a whistle and muttering, "Bike, bike, bike, *bike coming through!*" Kyle MacLachlan -- a Yakima, Wash., native and the star of the greatest Pacific Northwestern pop culture touchstone ever, "Twin Peaks" -- shows up in the second episode; he's ostensibly portraying the mayor of Portland, but he's actually doing a devilishly funny send-up of a relatively new type of politician that has infiltrated every layer of American government: the soft-spoken, smiling, beanbag-chairs-in-the-office, "No, tell me about *you*"-type; the executive alpha dog as loyal puppy. (Portland's real mayor, Sam Adams, plays the fictional mayor's assistant.) All these social types and many others get slow-roasted (organically) in the first couple of episodes of "Portlandia."

Series director Jonathan Krisel ("Tim and Eric Awesome Show, Great Job!") even identifies certain modern, IFC-approved filmmaking clichés and works them into the sketches. The payoff to the restaurant scene -- the couple's pilgrimage to the woodland commune where Colin was raised -- mocks the sensitive/eccentric post-collegiate visionary type of direction where, for example, two people who've just been introduced instinctively realize they have a Deep Connection, and the scene conveys this realization by shifting into slow-motion close-ups of the connected people staring into each other's eyes while the soundtrack blasts a morose/magnificent pop tune that sounds like New Order played at half-speed.

The series rather pointedly teases a core section of IFC's audience -- a portion that will watch Armisen and Brownstein's antics very closely, with an eye for accuracy, and then either roar with recognition and approval, or go on the Internet immediately and write a blog entry about how "Portlandia" doesn't get Portland or Oregon or feminist bookstores or urban bike culture. Armisen and Brownstein's masterstroke is showing how certain flavors of modern leftist sensitivity/engagement can seem (to outsiders) like passive-aggressive self-absorption laced with contempt for the unenlightened.

"He looks like a happy little guy that runs around," says the man in the restaurant sketch, glancing at a wallet-size photo of Colin. "Does he have other chickens as friends?"



Matt Zoller Seitz is Salon's staff television critic. More: [Matt Zoller Seitz](#)



TV in the news

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MY.HSJ.ORG

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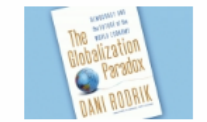


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The Boston Globe

January 21, 2011

The dream of the '90s alive and well in 'Portlandia'

By **Matthew Gilbert**
GLOBE STAFF

Portlandia" is a special sketch comedy series. It affectionately mines Portland, Ore., and the Portland state of mind, for sly cultural humor. The Pacific Northwest city, somehow already a relic of 1990s alternative slackerism, takes it lightly on its pierced noggin for angry bike messengers, for its artisanal obsessions, for competing with Seattle, and, of course, for flannel.

The six-episode series, which premieres tonight at 10:30 on **IFC**, is the brainchild of Fred Armisen from "Saturday Night Live" and Carrie Brownstein, formerly a singer-guitarist in the Portland band Sleater-Kinney now trying her hand — quite successfully — at comedy. In a way, "Portlandia" does to Portland what NBC's "Parks and Recreation" does to small-town Indiana; it gives us a little population of local misfits, then teases them for their exaggerated provincial affectations. But almost all of the "Portlandia" characters are played by Armisen and Brownstein,



SCOTT GREEN/IFC

Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein star in "Portlandia."

and each half-hour is broken up into snippets of story line, some recurring. It's not a sitcom so much as an urban portrait.

When I first heard that the show stars

Armisen and that it is executive produced by Lorne Michaels, Armisen's "Saturday Night Live" boss, I was afraid I'd find merely bottom-drawer "SNL" filler. But "Portlandia" is more subtle and less bombastic than most of the sketch work on "SNL," and without a live audience it is calmer in tone. The guest stars, including, tonight, Steve Buscemi and Jason Sudeikis, slip quietly into and out of the scenes. Next week's episode features the hysterically deadpan Aubrey Plaza from "Parks and Recreation" and Kyle MacLachlan as the mayor of Portland, fixated on being better than Seattle (real mayor Sam Adams cameos as his assistant).

Among the recurring characters created by Armisen and Brownstein are two women, Candice and Toni, who own a feminist bookstore called Women and Women First. They're belligerent toward their customers, self-righteously withholding their merchandise in what winds up being an amusing case of self-sabotage. In another sketch, a couple having dinner at a restaurant ask the waitress questions about their free-range chicken, which escalates to the point where they are compelled to go to the farm where "Colin" — that's the chicken's name — was raised.

And in what has become the show's calling card online, tonight's episode includes a video of a song about how "the dream of the '90s is alive in Portland." The lyrics portray a pre-George W. Bush world where "young people go to retire," "the tattoo ink never runs dry," and "all the hot girls wear glasses." Like so much of "Portlandia," it's a pitch-perfect satire of a city that time forgot.

Matthew Gilbert can be reached at gilbert@globe.com.

TELEVISION REVIEW

PORTLANDIA

Starring: Fred Armisen,
Carrie Brownstein

On: IFC

Time: Tonight, 10:30-11 p.m.

Los Angeles Times

January 21, 2011

TELEVISION REVIEW

'Portlandia's' quirky scene

Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein star in a charming and funny comedy show.

ROBERT LLOYD
TELEVISION CRITIC

In "Portlandia," a funny and charming new six-episode, single-camera sketch comedy from IFC, Fred Armisen, of "Saturday Night Live" and Carrie Brownstein, formerly of the band Sleater-Kinney and now of Wild Flag, come together to gently lampoon life in what has repeatedly been proclaimed one of America's, and even the world's, most livable cities, Portland, Ore.

The series is a better-heeled, better-paced and, within the bounds of its own Portland-ish modesty, a more ambitious extension of the occasional videos that Armisen and Portland resident Brownstein have posted online over the past few years under the name ThunderAnt. If there's an overall theme here, it's that heaven contains its own portion of hell — that right living takes work, relaxation causes stress, and that a thin line separates responsibility and rage. ("Cars, man! Why?" fumes Armisen's "bicycle rights" guy as he navi-

gates the city streets.) Their Portland is a place where your chicken dinner may come with a pedigree ("His name was Colin; here are his papers") and where vegan pastry tastes like sand because it is made with sand.

Yet the tone remains affectionate. Armisen, 44, and Brownstein, 36, are experienced enough to regard their targets with a little dispassion, yet not so remote as to grow cynical about them.

It all begins with Fred (as "Jason from L.A.") coming to tell Brownstein, as if he's just back from Narnia, that he's seen a place where "the dream of the '90s is alive."

"Remember when people were content to be unambitious, sleep to 11, hang out with their friends?" he reminds her. When they just wanted to form bands, he asks, or go to clown school?

"I gave up clowning years ago," Brownstein says.

"Well, in Portland, you don't have to." It is, he says, "a city where young people go to retire."

There is a long tradition of musical comedians and comedic musicians, but over the past 15 years or so, common cause has been made increasingly between them. Yo La Tengo regularly shares the stage with stand-up comics (Jim Gaffigan and Kristen Schaal, recently). Almee Mann, who'll appear in an upcoming episode of

"Portlandia," has used professional comedians to deliver her onstage patter. Patton Oswalt, Eugene Mirman and Flight of the Conchords release records on Sub Pop, home of the Shins and Nirvana. David Cross has appeared in videos for the Strokes and Superchunk (whose drummer, Jon Wurster, also does comedy). And Armisen drummed for the Chicago-based punk band Trenchmouth (and was married for several years to Sally Timms from the Mekons).

The leads have a lovely, light way with one another — this is not the comedic equivalent of Sleater-Kinney's riot grrrl rock — and as an actress, Brownstein is ... a really good actress. They easily inhabit a variety of characters: a couple experimenting sexually (each player takes the opposite gender), tournament hide-and-seek players, craft mavens who insist that the way to improve any object is to "put a bird on it."

In the show's best bit, a recurring holdover from ThunderAnt, they play the co-proprietresses of a feminist bookstore. Armisen's question, "That's a top-selling author — do we want that in here?" and his assurance to a customer (Aubrey Plaza from "Parks & Recre-

ation”) that “We could order that for you, it’ll take a year to get here,” sum up their passive-aggressive approach to business.

As Fred and Carrie, they meet the mayor, played by Kyle MacLachlan — actual Portland Mayor Sam Adams plays his assistant — who displays an award for “best official Website for cities with populations under 700,000 in the Pacific Northwest area,” a certificate he had printed himself, and sets them to write the town a theme song. (“Portland Community College/They sent me a reminder,” Fred

suggests. “Community garden workshop/Teach me to rake and hoe-oh-oh,” Carrie sings.)

“Just one thing,” MacLachlan warns. “Don’t make it sound like it’s coming from Seattle. Go, Portland!”

robert.lloyd@latimes.com



SCOTT GREEN Associated Press

SKETCH COMEDY: Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein transform some of what they’ve posted online as ThunderAnt into a show on IEC.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, JANUARY 2, 2011

AR 7

TELEVISION

Comic Counterculture in the Northwest

By DAVE ITZKOFF

IN the music video that kicks off "Portlandia," a new comedy series making its debut Jan. 21 on IFC, Fred Armisen walks the streets of Portland, Ore., singing to a flat, synthesized soundtrack and praising the city as a flannel-clad slacker's paradise where "young people go to retire." As Mr. Armisen marches along the Willamette River waterfront, he is joined by stylish women wearing vintage eyeglasses, bearded men in leather jackets, circus clowns and finally by his co-star, Carrie Brownstein, who arrives with several facial piercings.

This is when Mr. Armisen halts the impromptu parade and warns Ms. Brownstein that her look is "a little San Francisco," relieving her of a nose ring and a pair of earrings before allowing the march to proceed.

It is always a risky proposition when anyone tries to codify the spirit of a proudly independent, nonconformist scene. (And in this case Mr. Armisen, a nine-season veteran of "Saturday Night Live" and resident of New York would seem to have less of a claim to it than Ms. Brownstein, a guitarist and singer from the Portland rock band Sleater-Kinney, which broke up in 2006.)

But together Mr. Armisen and Ms. Brownstein, two guileless if unlikely collaborators, hope they possess enough street cred to serve as ambassadors of Portland's counterculture and to present their version of it, in "Portlandia," to an audience beyond the Pacific Northwest.

"It's not funny or that interesting to make a documentary about Portland," Ms. Brownstein said in an interview alongside Mr. Armisen as they worked on the post-production of "Portlandia." "One's interpretation of it is far more magical and curious than what actually exists there."

Mr. Armisen, a former drummer in the Chicago rock band Trenchmouth, made his move to comedy several years ago, helped along by a satirical video he made at the 1998 South by Southwest music festival. Though he is now the resident impersonator of President Obama at "S.N.L.," he has never lost his connection to the alternative scene.

In recent years he befriended Ms. Brownstein and often visited her in Portland, a city whose outsider appeal even he has trouble quantifying. "I liked that it wasn't too sunny," Mr. Armisen said. "I like wearing jackets. It was a place I could walk around in my little jacket."

Mr. Armisen and Ms. Brownstein also began experimenting with short videos that they posted online under the name ThunderAnt. An uncertainty about wheth-



SCOTT GREEN/IFC

Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein conceived and star in six episodes of "Portlandia," which pokes affectionate fun at Pacific Northwest quirks and conventions.

ONLINE: VIDEO

An excerpt from "Portlandia":

nytimes.com/television

er their partnership was essentially comedic or musical can be seen in some early efforts, like a video in which Ms. Brownstein interviews Saddam Hussein, portrayed by Mr. Armisen as an aging, British rock star with a Pete Townshend-esque accent. ("Which is obviously musical," Ms. Brownstein said with some sarcasm.)

The goal of the ThunderAnt segments, Mr. Armisen said, wasn't to "have any punch lines or jokes or anything — just weird, awkward moments, and not even awkward to be funny." But as their video repertory slowly grew, a shape and a voice began to emerge for a television series that Mr. Armisen proposed in late 2009 to Lorne Michaels, the creator and executive producer of "Saturday Night Live."

Though Mr. Michaels always feels a pa-

Fred Armisen of 'S.N.L.' and Carrie Brownstein of the band Sleater-Kinney create 'Portlandia' for IFC.

ternal twang when he sees his "S.N.L." cast members begin to spread their wings, he said he did not interpret Mr. Armisen's pitch as a desire to leave the show.

"Fred is not a careerist," said Mr. Michaels, whose production company, Broadway Video, is producing "Portlandia." "I think he's an artist. I'm happy to support him in any way I can. And needless to say, I don't go on that journey with everyone."

Mr. Michaels compared "Portlandia" to

"The Kids in the Hall," the cult sketch series he produced in the 1980s and '90s. "It's not so much mine as theirs, but I can help it," he said. "It's light and it's smart and it's funny. It's not going to be wildly popular, but I think it'll find an audience."

It's fair to say that the character sketches in "Portlandia" — about feminist bookstore owners, relentless bike messengers and artists who want to draw birds on everything — will probably play to a very specific viewership.

But as IFC tries to define itself as more than a film channel, with a mix of '90s-era reruns (like "Freaks and Geeks") and original comedies (like "Onion News Network"), it welcomes the show's offbeat sensibility and the association with Mr.

Continued on Page 12

Comic Counterculture in the Pacific Northwest

From Page 7

Armisen and Ms. Brownstein.

"I was having a little bit of a hard time wrapping my head around how we're going to see this come to life," said Jen Caserta, the general manager of IFC. "But this really is translatable. It's about Portland, but there's a piece of Portland in many parts of the country."

Production on the six-episode order of "Portlandia" took place quickly over the summer and fall, with help from Allison Silverman,

the former head writer of "The Colbert Report," and Jonathan Krisel, a "Saturday Night Live" writer. Skits usually began with scripts or at least outlines, while leaving ample room for Mr. Armisen and Ms. Brownstein to improvise their roles.

"What I saw in the two of them was this way of, just, funny stuff coming out and trying to catch it and sort it out later," Mr. Krisel said. "You can always make stuff in editing. Too much structure and scripting would kill it."

For Ms. Brownstein, who does

not come from a professional comedy background, making "Portlandia" meant overcoming a self-consciousness about creating in a group setting, even if it occasionally reminded her of her rock 'n' roll exploits in Sleater-Kinney.

"I did recall those slightly heartbreaking, embarrassing moments," she said, "where you bring in a little bit of a song and you're just met with stares, and you realize maybe you should have kept that idea at home. With comedy writing that's happening

100 times as fast."

Months later Ms. Brownstein still sometimes describes herself as "an imposter" on "Portlandia" and says her primary role on the show is to serve as "the rain stick, the didgeridoo — some little thing that's just there so people remember it really is taking place in Portland."

Mr. Armisen, meanwhile, recognized that his involvement in a sketch-comedy side project would inevitably raise questions about whether he is leaving "Saturday Night Live," a route he said

he is not currently considering.

For comparison, Mr. Armisen mentions Beck, a rock musician who walks a similarly erratic career path and whose major label contract allowed him to continue to release independent albums. "Both seemed to work well together," he said. "I think they can co-exist."

The show's creators are also bracing for reaction from the citizens of its namesake city. But Ms. Brownstein said that for sheer unpredictability the characters of "Portlandia" could never surpass

Portland itself.

"The strange thing we all noticed," she said, "is no matter how far out on a limb we went, we always ran into that person within two days."

For example, Ms. Brownstein said, "the night we wrapped the pilot, the options were: go out to dinner, or we could watch a completely naked bike ride through the city."

Before the obvious follow-up question could be asked, Mr. Armisen answered it. "We went to dinner," he said.



WEEKEND TV

Friday

• **Medium** (8 p.m., CBS/2) — Series finale: The Dubois family changes permanently when Allison and Joe start new careers.

• **Kitchen Nightmares** (8 p.m., Fox/5) — Season premiere: Gordon Ramsay visits a business in New Jersey.

• **Onion News Network** (10 p.m., IFC) — Series premiere: From the folks who brought you the satirical website The Onion.

• **Spartacus: Gods of the Arena** (10 p.m., Starz) — A prequel to "Spartacus: Blood and Sand" with John Hannah and Lucy Lawless.

Saturday

• **Austin City Limits** (9 p.m., WNET/13) — Music from Sonic Youth and the Black Keys.

Sunday

• **Mean Girls 2** (8 p.m., ABC Family) — This made-for-TV movie is a sequel to Lindsay Lohan's popular film. And no, she's not in this, though Tim Meadows does reprise his role.



Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein in "Portlandia" on IFC.

Armisen's 'Portlandia' is a hoot of a satire

Portlandia



BY VERNE GAY
Special to amNewYork

Based on the Web series "ThunderAnt," "Portlandia" stars "Saturday Night Live's" Fred Armisen and Carrie Brownstein (of the of Portland band Sleater-Kinney) as various residents of the Oregon city.

These include a pair of hostile lesbian bookstore owners; another couple who insist on visiting the organic farm where the chicken they are about to eat at a restaurant was born and raised (next week's episode); and two friends commissioned by Portland's

mayor to write a song celebrating the city, "but not Seattle."

By this point you've correctly deduced that "Portlandia" is a satire of the city's subcultures, from animal- and biker-rights activists to '80s-era hipsters to all those who harbor a seething bias against Seattle for being a bigger and somewhat cooler city.

Not for you? Then consider this review an attempt

to persuade you otherwise. Brownstein and Armisen move so effortlessly between characters that before long this doesn't seem like satire any more, but a fun-house-mirror reflection of intensely real people.

Verne Gay is a *Newsday* staff writer.

On TV
"Portlandia" debuts Friday at 10:30 p.m. on IFC.

