

"Portlandia" Season Two Blu-ray Review

Portlandia: Season Two (2012)

Show and Blu-ray Details

Co-Executive Producers: Fred Armisen, Carrie Brownstein / **Executive Producers:** Jonathan Krisel, Andrew Singer; Lorne Michaels; Debbie Demontreux, Dan Pasternack, Jennifer Caserta, Evan Shapiro

Writers: Fred Armisen, Carrie Brownstein, Karey Dornetto, Jonathan Krisel, Bill Oakley / **Director:** Jonathan Krisel

Regular Cast: Fred Armisen (Fred, Peter, Candace, Doug, Dave, Brendan Marston, Malcolm Singer, Spyke, Gil, Nina Carrico, Garmin, Bryce Shivers, Canoe Dancer, Marc Gemmer, Gahvin Quin, Jason from LA, Mailman, Driver #2, Grocer, Marcus Harris, Phil, Joaquin, voice of Rat, and Various Others), Carrie Brownstein (Carrie, Nance, Toni, Claire, Kath, Michelle Marston, Kris Singer, Iris, Merrill, Lance Oliver, Lisa Eversman, Linda Lawrence, Jayde/Christina, Melanie, Movie Watcher, Driver #1, Amanda, Madeleine Harris, Gigi, Raven, voice of Rat, and Various Others)

Recurring Cast Members: Kyle MacLachlan (Mr. Mayor), Sam Adams (Mayor's Assistant Sam), Dana Millican (Wedding Planner/Brunch Customer), Jana Lee Hamblin (Jana), Corrina Repp (Parent/Hostess), Ehren McGhehey (Produce Vendor/Motorcycle Man), Marshall Bangs (Boy)

Notable Guest Stars: Andy Samberg (Andy), Kumail Nanjiani (Johnny the SoCal Waiter), Ernest Adams (Brian the Air Conditioner Repairman), Pat Boyle (Woman), Alex Gavlick (Alex Singer), Mikki Lipsey (Grandmother), James Callis (Himself), Jeff Goldblum (Allen), Ronald D. Moore (Ken Reynolds), Edward James Olmos (Himself), Eddie Vedder (Himself), Henry Cottrell (Ronald D. Moore), Scott Green (Scott Dentzer), Evelyn Murray (Renee Moore), Shohreh Aghdashloo (Nelofar Jamshidi), Jack McBrayer (Zupan's Customer), Sean Hayes (Sean), Isaac Brock (Album Donor), Annie Clark (Betsy), Kristen Wiig (Gathy), Miranda July (One Girl), Amber Tamblyn (Bookstore Intern), Jaime Langton (Jaime), Joanna Newsom (Hippie), Robin Pecknold (Hippie), Ebbe Roe Smith (Swinger Husband), Ellen Bloodworth (Ellen the Babysitter), Ashby Collinson (Ashby), Kristine Levine (Swinger Wife), LaMarcus Aldridge (Himself), Penny Marshall (Barbara), Angel Bouchet (Angel), Greg Louganis (Himself), Johnny Marr (Bike Valet Customer), Ulf Bjorklund (IOC Chairman), Tim Robbins (Crazed Leader), Ed Begley Jr. (Ed), Steve Jones (Thug)

Running Time: 225 Minutes (10 episodes) / **Rating:** Not Rated (TV-14 on air)

1.78:1 Widescreen / Dolby Stereo 2.0 (English)
Subtitles: English for Hearing Impaired; Not Closed Captioned; Extras Not Subtitled

Season 2 Airdates: January 6, 2012 - March 9, 2012
Blu-ray Release Date: September 25, 2012 / Suggested Retail Price: \$24.95

Two single-sided, single-layered discs (BD-25s) / Thin Cardboard Book in Slipcover

Also available on [DVD](#) (\$19.95 SRP), [Seasons 1 & 2 DVD 2-Pack](#) (\$29.95 SRP), and Amazon Instant Video: [SD](#), [HD](#)



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By Luke Bonanno

It's always fun to discover a television show in an unusual way. If you're tuning in because you follow an actor or a creator, you do so with expectations that will either be met or not. Likewise, going on a recommendation by a friend, an article, or Netflix gives you an inkling of what you're in for. None of those scenarios is as thrilling as finding a show on a whim. There's much greater room for error entering blindly and there's a good chance you won't even finish an episode, let alone come back for more. But, every once in a while, you encounter something worth treasuring. In those cases, it's fascinating to trace back your origins to the source and consider how easily you could have missed knowing and enjoying something you love.

In the case of "**Portlandia**", I am indebted to "Onion News Network" and the cable service formerly known as Comcast. That cable service, since rebranded xfinity (and cancelled by me), did not include IFC, the Independent Film Channel that has been building a reputation for offbeat original and rerun comedy programming. It did, however, include IFC On Demand and that is how I saw "America's Finest News Source" transition into the world of fake television news with their satirical CNN/Fox-inspired parody. Partly out of not wanting to miss any fake commercials, I must have seen and noticed multiple ads for "Portlandia", a sketch show debuting the same Friday night in January 2011. I gave it a chance and I've been a fan ever since.

I'm not sure why I gave "Portlandia" a chance. There are few current television shows I enjoy and "Saturday Night Live" hasn't been one of them since around 2001. But that was the most kindred production, being a fellow sketch comedy series and the one for which co-creator/star Fred Armisen, producer Lorne Michaels, and numerous guest stars are better known.



Happily, "Portlandia" isn't very much like "Saturday Night Live." Where that mainstream nearly 40-year-old NBC institution goes broad with impressions and topical comedy, this IFC program goes folksy and alternative. Its setting of Portland, Oregon and status on a sparsely-watched cable network allow "Portlandia" to be more specific, intelligent, eccentric, and distinctive. There is no warmed-up studio audience with their overzealous laughter. Sketches can run as short or as long as they want, with costume changes and commercial breaks almost not even a consideration. It's all filmed in Portland with a single camera, providing the cinematic look that "SNL" rarely can offer.


The results of the six-episode first season were favorable. "Portlandia" was funny a lot more often than it was not. When IFC renewed the show for a second season, it did so with an order for ten episodes. That seemed like both a vote of confidence and a tough task to live up to.

After all, "Portlandia" is basically a side gig for Armisen to make on his summers off from "SNL" with his co-creator and co-star, indie musician Carrie Brownstein. Though Armisen, Brownstein, and their director/third creator Jonathan Krisel had nearly twice as much airtime to fill and presumably not much more time to do so, "Portlandia" somehow got noticeably sharper and better in **Season Two**.

More confident of its unique voice, the show was willing to get even more off the wall and creative this year. For me, it more than earned its status as one of the few series to watch faithfully as they air (Saturday morning being the soonest IFC On Demand would let me) and stood out as one of the two funniest shows on television. Like the other, Adult Swim's "Check It Out! with Dr. Steve Brule" from Krisel's former collaborators, I knew that "Portlandia" wasn't setting any viewership records and wasn't everyone's cup of tea. Yet, that somehow factors into the appeal, making such comedies well-kept secrets that don't have to worry much about ratings, hype, gimmicks, or Middle America appeal.



I was so excited to find the Season Two Blu-ray in my mailbox over the weekend. Its arrival in stores tomorrow amidst the home video releases of most of last year's more traditionally scheduled programming and more than three months before Season Three's premiere can be questioned. But its content must be praised and highly recommended.

Just last night, "Portlandia" surprised no one by losing the Emmy for Outstanding Writing for a Variety Series to "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart", which has taken that category eight times  in the past twelve years. To even compete for that honor against the likes of "Daily Show", "The Colbert Report", and "SNL" in deep cable obscurity is an impressive feat and one well deserved.

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The three "Portlandia" creators and their Season 2 co-writer Karey Dornetto ("Arrested Development", "Community") have love for their characters and appreciation for their fans. Their comedy is full of callbacks and of little touches that unify and strengthen this colorful little world that's comparable to an adult Sesame Street or "The Simpsons" Springfield. What on the surface may just look like hipsters skewering hipsters is in fact a richly constructed celebration of contemporary existence, from fitting in to standing out, from getting ahead

to contentedly staying put.

Here is a detailed look at what goes down in Season 2. Feel free to sample, skip, or consult this section to find your favorite sketches. I've designated my favorite episodes of the season with a red star (★).



★ 1. *Mixologist* (22:39) (Originally aired January 6, 2012)

Fred and Carrie journey to SoCal to find a mixologist (Andy Samberg) who makes unique, inspired drinks for his bar patrons. En route, they find it challenging to order at Around the World in 80 Plates. Bryce and Lisa pickle things. Dave and Kath take precautions for river tubing. An old air conditioner repairman is called to the Women & Women First Bookstore. A young man promotes a cause door to door with his parents providing nearby backup.

★ 2. *One Moore Episode* (22:36) (Originally aired January 13, 2012)

A couple shuns life's responsibilities to feed their addiction to watching all of "Battlestar Galactica" on DVD. When they finish with that, they seek out Ronald D. Moore to write another episode with their help and two of that show's cast members. Portland holds its annual allergy pride parade. The Singers build a fire pit that doesn't quite live up to their wild expectations. A couple gets help buying an artisan knot (from Jeff Goldblum) as a gift for a friend. A woman's relationship stalls over an unfortunate Eddie Vedder tattoo.

★ 3. *Cool Wedding* (22:07) (Originally aired January 20, 2012)

An alternative couple wants a wedding unlike any other. Carrie's falling phone prompts memories and fear. Drivers at an intersection try to give each other the right of way. A man (Jack McBrayer) forgets his bag at an environmentally friendly grocery store. A mailman recommends *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* to a movie renter on his route. Candace and Toni ask an accomplished author (Shohreh Aghdashloo) visiting their shop about printing.



4. *Grover* (22:32) (Originally aired January 27, 2012)

Yuppies Brendan and Michelle prepare their son for a life of success with an application to a selective preschool. Fred and Carrie are swamped by invitations to see people DJing. Dave and Kath visit a dog park with their tsunami-surviving dog. The Dial Tones play music for those put on hold by the DMV. A homeless couple figures out how to maximize their sidewalk donations. And a little guy helps his team in a scavenger hunt.

5. *Cops Redesign* (22:33) (Originally aired February 3, 2012)

Fred and Carrie help the Mayor (Kyle MacLachlan) give Portland's police force an image makeover by designing hip new uniforms. The series' opening sketch is reimagined as Portland is declared the place where the Dream of the 1890s is alive.

In a stop-motion sequence, rats cautiously celebrate the opening of a zero-packaging grocery



store. Brendan and Michelle object to a preschool's music library. Two people compete to see who knows more people. Bad Art, Good Walls comes up with unsightly decorations for a new coffee shop.

★ 6. *Cat Nap* (22:32) (Originally aired February 10, 2012)

A band gets a cat to join them as their gimmick to stand out. After finding success, they are held hostage by their biggest fan (Kristen Wiig). The store Two Girls, Two Shirts opens. An aspiring singer solicits her dad to help her fund a music video. The feminist bookshop's unpaid intern (Amber Tamblyn) looks to reorganize. Bicycle movers help a woman relocate. A sister's career changes are the subject of salon talk/song.

7. *Motorcycle* (22:32) (Originally aired February 17, 2012)

Middle-aged couple Peter and Nance set out to prove that they're still wild. Hippies give a harpist a ride. A woman trying to resell her old clothes is ridiculed at a shop. Nina creates a Facebook account for Lance. A babysitter is hired for full-grown man Doug.



8. *Feminine Bookstore 10th Anniversary* (22:33) (Originally aired February 24, 2012)

Toni and Candace celebrate the tenth anniversary of Women & Women First, with a former friend (Penny Marshall) present to reopen an old grudge. Sanitation Twins Marcus and Madeleine introduce an extensive new recycling program. Dave and Kath get prepared for a hike. Peter and Nance print a banner for their first Portland Timbers game. A lawsuit-averted dance class assembles. Brendan and Michelle are stumped on how to open a durian.

★ 9. *No Olympics* (22:22) (Originally aired March 2, 2012)

With the Mayor's blessing, Fred and Carrie protest against Portland ever hosting the Olympics, but a hot tub chat with Greg Louganis changes their minds. In a highlight of the season, an old gentleman performs a canoe dance to Erasure. Park designers unveil their specific visions. High school students get a weird presentation from Lewis and Clark at the Oregon Historical Society. A bike valet service experiences difficulties.

★ 10. *Brunch Village* (22:32) (Originally aired March 9, 2012)

In an epic, cinematic single narrative season finale that breaks with tradition, many characters decide to try the Sunday brunch at Fisherman's Porch, an acclaimed new restaurant. As Fred and Carrie wait for Mr. Mayor to show, Nance gets abducted by madmen in the bad part of town.



VIDEO and AUDIO





As with Season 1, the Blu-ray's presentation is positively flawless, boasting some of the cleanest and clearest 1.78:1 television you'll find and even surpassing the quality of HD broadcasts. Unfortunately, once again, no 5.1 surround soundtrack is offered, as we're stuck with just plain Dolby Stereo 2.0. The sound is of a high quality, but for a show with such winning values and which makes inspired use of music, a more expansive mix would have been appreciated. In an improvement over Season 1, English SDH subtitles are thankfully provided this time around. They are sharp and thorough.



BONUS FEATURES, MENUS, PACKAGING and DESIGN

Disc 1 includes audio commentaries by Fred Armisen, Carrie Brownstein, and Jonathan Krisel on four episodes: "Mixologist", "One Moore Episode", "Cool Wedding", and "Brunch Village." If you enjoy the show, these are worthwhile listens, as the creators discuss locations, local guest cast (pointing out the other episodes they have appeared in), the stories behind sketches, the content as a reflection of the city, their use of a music library, and the differences between fully-written sketches and heavily improvised ones. The chosen episodes also allow them to discuss their experiences with celebrity guest stars, as they reveal what Tim Robbins, Ed Begley Jr., and Eddie Vedder brought to the table. Though nothing groundbreaking, these casual, screen-specific chats do enhance one's appreciation of the show.

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Though they would have easily fit on Disc 1 if it were dual-layered, video extras are given their own lightweight bonus Blu-ray disc, which presents them all in high definition.

"Portlandia: The Tour - Seattle" (3:20) follows Armisen and Brownstein to Washington for some looks at a December stop of their 2011-12 touring stage show. They are joined on stage by Kyle MacLachlan and Dan Savage.

"Inside Portlandia" (22:39) is an episode-length behind-the-scenes look at the show, designed to promote Season 2 with clips from Season 1. Looking back at Armisen and Brownstein's past with clips of their bands performing and previous

comedy shorts, it's a fun special that while serious about its subject still manages to be plenty entertaining.



The season finale "Brunch Village" is presented in a director's cut (45:03). MacLachlan introduces this extended edit, which adds and extends a number of scenes, both with regular characters and otherwise cut residents in line. Among them are an irate man (Danny Belrose), a young woman in the midst of a ten-day cleanse (Sierra Quitquit) and the doctor who treats her after she faints. This fine episode isn't improved by the six added minutes. Padding to fill a one-hour timeslot, the final fifteen minutes are made up a mockumentary taking us "behind the scenes" of this episode's challenging "over budget" production. Artistic, ironic footage details Jonathan Krisel's quest to get the perfect marionberries for the one pancakes shot, a journey that brings him to Lorne Michaels and Bobby Flay.

A single deleted scene (2:50) takes Toni and Candace to Eden's Earthly Delights to redeem a gift certificate, which they do begrudgingly in front of a perky sales clerk. It's disappointing and strange that we get just one deleted scene and no bloopers from this longer season after Season One offered much more.



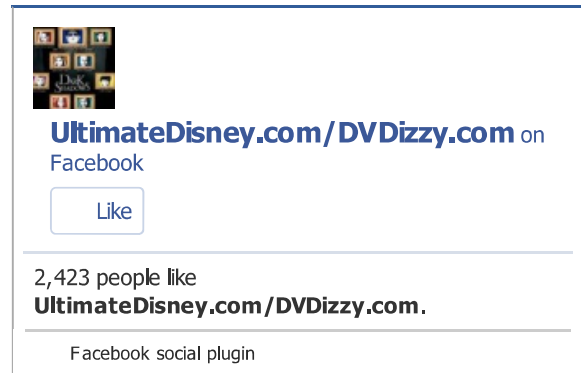
Finally, we get an excerpt from Armisen and Brownstein's upcoming book Portlandia: A Guide for

Visitors. It displays the cover and ten pages from a section from a monthly femzine by feminist bookstore owners Toni and Candace which lays out their store's amusingly contradictory policies and includes a calendar of events, a recipe for vegan birthday cupcakes, poetry critique, and a winning piece of artwork.

It sounds like once again VSC doesn't short-change DVD customers, with all the Blu-ray's bonus features seemingly also included on the DVD. Unlike Season One, no combo pack is offered here.

Classily putting a bird on the title logo, the discs' menu loops the theme music (Washed Out's "Feel It All Around") while the season's assorted colorful characters pop up and pass by. The set is hindered by the lack of bookmarks, especially without a scene selection menu for quick sketch access. Furthermore, the discs do not resume playback.

"Portlandia" is once again packaged with environmentalists in mind, with the two discs placed in pockets in opposite sides of a nicely illustrated recycled paper tray inside a thin cardboard slipcover. An insert further promotes A Guide for Visitors.



CLOSING THOUGHTS

I had doubts that "Portlandia" could maintain its high quality, but Season Two of this delightful sketch comedy even improves upon the satisfying short first season. While I must reiterate that not everyone will enjoy this quirky show, those who do are likely to consider it one of the funniest things on television and fit for owning and frequently rewatching.

VSC's Season Two Blu-ray forgoes including a DVD and scales back slightly on bonus features, but the hilarious show is treated to first-rate picture and sound (now with subtitles!), good extras, and a list price that's reasonable even with mild discounting. While you'd probably be okay to save \$7 and just get this on DVD, the Blu-ray is easy to strongly recommend for fans with hi-def setups.

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