

"Portlandia" thrives with variety, rebounds from lack of consistency

JACK LAMMERS

"Portlandia" is like a box of chocolates; you never know what sketch you are going to view. When you are forced to turn away from the television screen or cringe at a scene from a comedy or sitcom, it usually means they do their job correctly.

In the case of "Portlandia," this year's new comedy on IFC, they evoke the reactions at another level through irregular and unexpected shifts in humor. The question I still have is if that is for better or worse. The show is a farcical comedy about the city of Portland starring Fred Armisen of "Saturday Night Live" and northwest native Carrie Brownstein known as a musician in the Portland band Sleater-Kinney which disbanded in 2006.

Some of the shows are dead-on in their reflection of Portland, from questions regarding organic chicken to the importance of individuality and creativity, Portlandia covers it all, but sometimes the scenes feel as if they are speaking to completely different audiences.

From scene to scene, the audience has no clue what kind of content they are about to observe, ranging from friendly comedy appealing to all audiences such as a hide and seek sketch in the Portland Community College Library to scenes that are

inappropriate in their own right, such as one scene that involved gender reversal.

The rhythm of the show is another thing entirely. If you have any preconceptions of "Portlandia" as being similar to "Saturday Night Live," be prepared to throw them out the window. The setup is similar in its isolated scenes, but in attempt to include scene progression in some sketches and not in others, I felt that I was being told which scenes they put time into and which ones they simply hurl in to fill the time slot.

The first episode proved to be awkward in the way it let the major scene take control over the others. The predominant scene, broken up in the first episode, involves a couple that orders chicken at a restaurant and a visit to a farm where the chicken is raised. This series of interrelated sketches struck hilarity, but the separation between them slightly diminished the sketch's comedic value.

I've found myself questioning the show's intentions. What kind of audience does this show want? With such a variation of content and humor, the show requires the viewer to step just

outside his or her comfort level and perhaps that is the message. Just as Portland requires us to be more accepting of the idiosyncrasies in the lifestyles of one another, perhaps the show is trying to unite an alternative viewer with the more traditional Saturday Night Live comedy junky.

Although the successful scenes are fantastic in their creative and authentic merits, the ineffective ones test my patience and deter me from staying through the show. When the bad chocolates outweigh the good, it is time to consider the produce section.

After viewing the last episode of "Portlandia," I found the high-quality chocolate. The scenes felt smoothly connected and cohesive which sparked my interest and kept me involved for the full episode. This left me to question my skepticism. Just as I was about to put down the box of sketches, I felt my sweet tooth emerge once more. Maybe "Portlandia" deserves a second chance. With only six episodes in total, it is hard to say if the show can make the comeback and highlight the talent of Armisen and properly introduce the talent of Brownstein, but at least the show demonstrates sporadic brilliance.

"Portlandia" gazes into looking glass of Portland

DANNY MCGARRY

Portland, known for its eco-friendly lifestyle and alternative based bands, now has its own show. "Portlandia," starring Fred Armisen ("Saturday Night Live") and Carrie Brownstein (Portland-based band Sleater-Kinney), shows off Portland in comedic fashion. And it's actually funny, especially if you're an Oregonian.

A few of the skits include: a hipster (a hipster is some who is in the know before everybody else, and sees popularity trends before popular people do) who only wants hipsters to like hipster things, a women's only bookstore, and a hide-and-seek club that takes the game a little too seriously. All these skits are supposed to interpret Portland and how its people act. And I think it characterizes Portland very well.

One of my favorite skits is when two vegans are out to lunch and they want to have chicken, but they are asking odd questions to the waiter about the chicken. At one point they ask, "How big is the area where the chickens can free roam?" I love this skit because it's so interesting to see what other people

think of Portland, and how they think Oregonians act. Which honestly, isn't too far from some of these skits.

This show is even featuring some pretty big actors too. Steve Buscemi ("Boardwalk Empire"), Aubrey Plaza ("Parks and Recreation") and Jason Sudeikis ("Saturday Night Live") all have guest-starred in "Portlandia." Having it receive some favorable reviews from the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times isn't to so bad either.

I'm glad all these stars are coming here. Not only does it add to the already great comedy, but it also shows that productions can film here. It's not very often someone in Portland says, "Oh, they filmed that here."

Not only does "Portlandia" make fun of Oregonians, but it does it in a way that some Oregonians are going to find funny. It's common to see a skit and say, "Oh I hate it when people do that." Obviously, it's pretty extreme, but the kernel of truth is there. My old teacher always used to say, "There's always a grain of truth with sarcasm."

"Portlandia" shows on Fridays at 10:30 p.m. on IFC. Check the Amplifier blog (www.blogs.wlws.wlww.k12.or.us/amplifier) for Carrie Brownstein's Portland theme song.

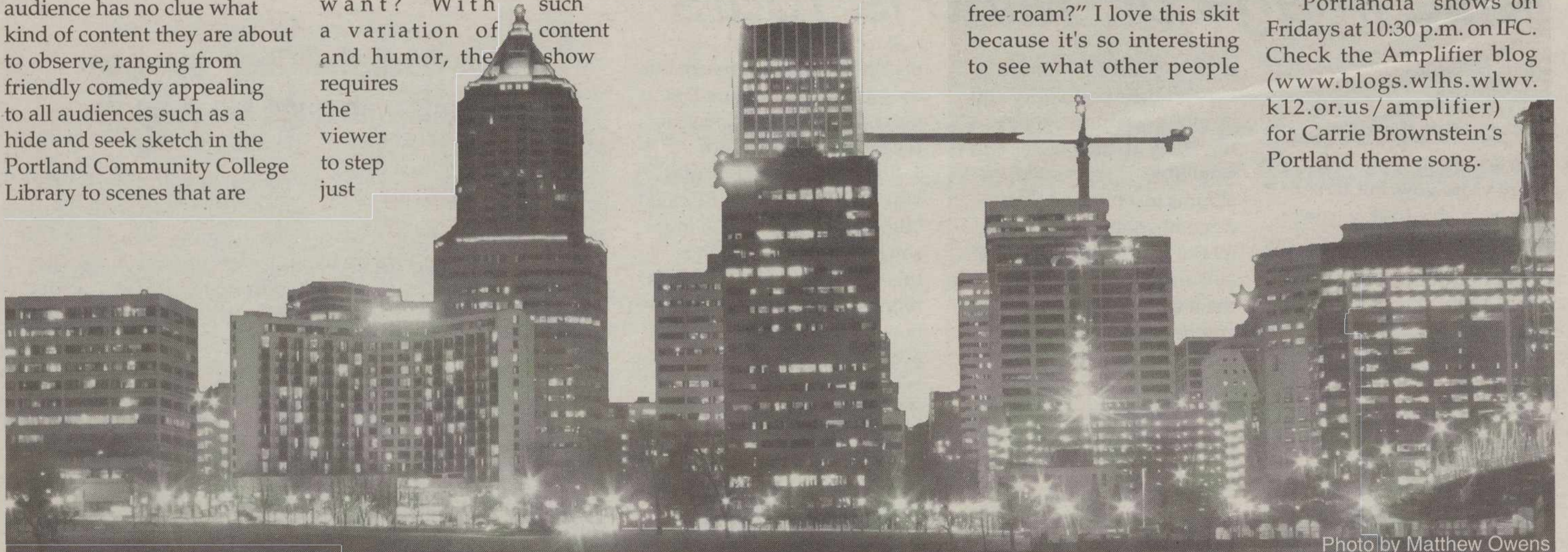
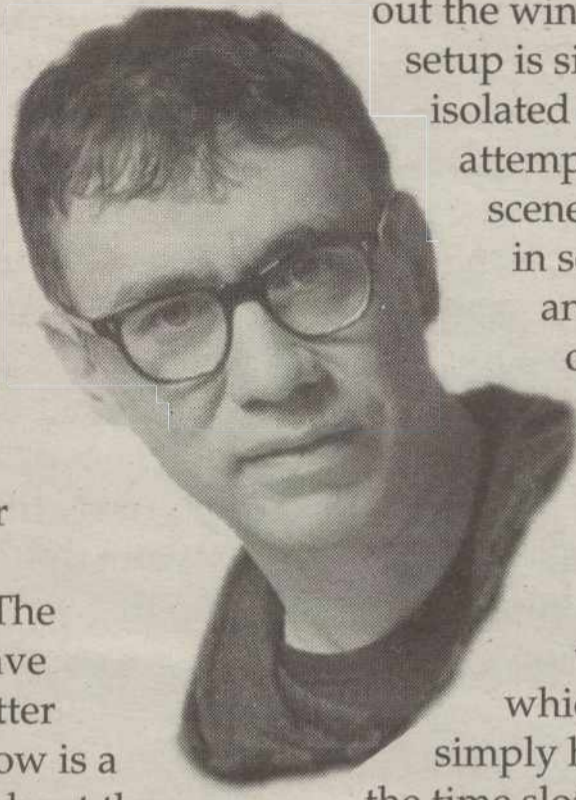
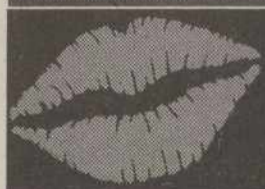


Photo by Matthew Owens



Dwight and Meredith

TOO MUCH LOVE. NOT ENOUGH PEOPLE

Dear Dwight & Meredith,

I have two friends who aren't friends with each other. They have both gone out with the same guy. One went out with him last year and the other is going out with him now. A few weeks ago, the friend who went out with him last year wanted him back and made him choose between her and his current girlfriend. He chose my friend who he was still dating. I'm happy

for one friend and sad for the other. What should I do?
Caught in the Middle

Dear Caught in the Middle,

Your main goal here is to not take sides and support both friends. You do not have to do anything if you don't want to. This is a hard situation that you have been put into, but if your friends are making you take sides, they may not be very good friends at all. If they are not,

stay neutral and try to be the best friend to all parties that you can be.

Dwight & Meredith

Dear Dwight & Meredith,

I am currently dating my dream girl. She is perfect in every way. There is only one problem; my friend is also in love with her. I don't blame him because I know how great she is—seriously, she is the best. The way the light shines off

her hair gives me shivers. Her scent makes me tingle all over. My friend is also an attractive guy, and I am worried she will lose interest in me. What should I do to make sure I can keep her heart?

Not a Big Fan of Triangles

Dear Not a Big Fan of Triangles,

Your girlfriend sounds great. It sounds like you definitely have strong

feelings for her, which is a great foundation for a relationship. The best way to keep a relationship strong is honesty, so make sure you have a talk about your jealousy and anxiety. Emphasize how much you care about her and make the best of the relationship you have. Regardless of what happens in the future, make sure to enjoy the present.

Sincerely,
Dwight and Meredith