

Are We Still Kids at Heart?

[Malu Rocha](#) explores the rise of adult animation in recent years

Thursday 1 November 2018

What is the appeal of animated shows in the first place? Animations keep us young while helping us come to grips with growing up. These types of shows have the ability of breaking down a complex philosophical issue into simple yet valuable entertainment. As smart as we are, our brains love simple messages. This is true of all animation to all audiences, but let's pull our focus to adult animations. These have often been overlooked but have made an impressive and notable comeback in the last decade.

It is impossible to talk about the recent rise of animation without briefly crediting The Simpsons. Televised animation of the 1960s and 70s was cheaply produced and aimed mostly at indifferent younger audiences, until The Simpsons came along in 1989. The iconic sitcom sprung a huge pop culture movement, which revolutionized the style of postmodern animated comedy. But above all, it proved that there was an audience and a space for animated adult comedy in primetime television, a darker and bleaker comedy at the same time being subversive and topical. These shows constitute a genre of their own and can often make you question life on deeper levels than any psychological drama ever could.

It's been quite some time since The Simpsons first made its debut on Fox, and in the ever-changing world of animation, Netflix seems to be the company that has most encouraged and kept up with the trend and is therefore somehow accountable for this change. Contrary to cable television, Netflix has the prerequisites for providing a greater expansion in the range of voices and styles within adult animations. With this freedom, creators have taken risks, and they have paid off.

Arguably, the most notable of the recent shows released by Netflix is BoJack Horseman. Achieving unexpected depth, the series expertly blends philosophical comedy, clever visual puns, and deeper existential issues. It has received critical acclaim for its brutally honest and refreshing approach to the portrayal of mental health, altogether representing a wider shift in mature comedy, where real life issues are taken seriously without losing their comedic appeal. Besides, there is a deep irony in realising that TV's most human character is a horse, and we love it. Being incredibly daring has paid off, seeing that Netflix has launched 5 more original animated series since BoJack Horseman's premier in 2014.

It's also worth mentioning shows like Disenchantment, the most recent of Netflix's animated fantasy series about Princess Bean, the antithesis of all Disney princesses dealing with issues of femininity, or F if For Family, dealing with issues of masculinity. And even Big Mouth, an intelligent coming of age cartoon following friends going through puberty, depicting it in very honest and frank ways. Animation has proven to be the best medium in which to portray themes like these, embracing its weirdness and priding itself in being progressive. Other shows such

as Rick & Morty also deserve a shout out for having shown incredibly sharp writing and plot development, allowing plenty of room for a vast fanbase.



Older shows such as *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy*, exist exclusively in their individual episodic realms, rarely introducing overarching storylines and character development. Can't get any clearer than saying that Bart and Lisa have been 10 and 8 years old respectively for 27 years now. But modern audiences have encouraged animators to push boundaries (to some extent due to the phenomenon of binge watching), which has led to shows like *BoJack Horseman* and *Rock & Morty* to pay close attention to their continuity. Their characters live in timeline-regulated universes, where they are now capable of referencing their past selves and past plotlines. This new focus on continuity is partly because the audience is now willing to accept cartoons are a form of art and partly because streaming services are increasingly trusting adult animation to keep bringing audiences back.

The series mentioned above constitute simply a snippet of all the available shows in this developing genre, showing that 2D animation is as vibrant as it's ever been. Studios haven't stopped producing 3D animation content, they just came to terms that 3D is not the only pathway to success.

This comeback can be mostly linked to the capitalist side of Hollywood, culminating in what shows make the most profit at the end of the day. These series are all animations produced under a (somewhat) limited budget and a (somewhat) fast-paced timeframe of a television series, inevitably catching the attention of potential executives, producers and companies who are prone to trying something new without having to invest too much.

This rise in adult animation does not look like it's going to reach a plateau any time soon. New seasons have been launched for existing series while new ones are being created. Netflix is now looking to expand its global audience with *Seis Manos*, the company's first period piece anime series to be set in Mexico in the 1970s. Hulu is also expanding its library with a two-season order for *Solar Opposites*, and Apple is launching its first animated comedy series *Central Park*.

Some of the most critically acclaimed series of this decade have been praised not despite the fact that they're animated, but because of it. We will remain kids at heart.



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