

Australian television

From The Katering Show to Fighting Isis: eight of the best Australian web series

The internet is teeming with video content and time is short, so which web series are most worth the effort? Here are our picks



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Kate McLennan and Kate McCartney of cooking-show parody web series The Katering Show. Photograph: ABC

Web series are currently all the rage in Australia. Last year there were 3,248 web series episodes created locally, compared with just 107 in 2012, according to the ABS. The same survey pegged the average cost of television drama at \$645,700 per hour, so it is no mystery why the short-form platform is a viable option for emerging artists to cut their teeth on.

So, with short form in vogue but a staggering amount of it out there, what are the web series most worth your time? I've trawled through many hours of programs and picked eight of the crème de la crème below. Some of these were acknowledged at the recent Melbourne WebFest awards.

But first, the criteria. All series needed to be Australian and current, the latter defined as premiering online no earlier than 2016. If you notice a title not on this list, chances are I've watched it - but, given how incomprehensibly large this thing called the internet is (and my subsequent paranoia that somebody will point out a brilliant series I've never heard of) I cannot claim to have seen everything.

The below are in no particular order. Be sure to contribute your own suggestions in the comments.

1. Fighting Isis



Imagine the untold stories we'll find with more people of colour on television
Ryan Griffen for IndigenousX

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It's King of the Hill meets Down Under meets Team America: World Police in this sassy, yappy, yobbo-lamponing animation from creators Sebastian Peart, Mark Nicholson and Pete Corrigan. Four stubbie-wielding Aussie blokes meet in a garage and resolve to wipe out Isis terrorists once and for all; an alternative title could have been "Straya, Fuck Yeah!"

After resolving to "go over to their joint and bash 'em" - their "joint" being, the singlet-clad men decide, Afghanistan - these beer-infused numbskulls, armed with a can of WD-40, create havoc in the Middle East.

The many jokes involving ignorant bogans jumping to illogical conclusions have an obvious, serious undertone, with Pauline Hanson making a brief cartoon cameo. The three swiftly paced episodes don't outstay their welcome, perfect for viewers partial to a South Parkian mixture of politics and puerility.

2. Almost Midnight

Dave (Stephen Banham, also director and co-writer) is the quintessential, confidence-challenged, can't-catch-a-break average-guy protagonist: one imagines a younger Simon Pegg playing him in a British version, or Jemaine Clement filling his shoes if Almost Midnight were made in New Zealand.

The show catches up with Dave every year, close to midnight, before celebrations inevitably descend into embarrassment and frustration. One year he accidentally drinks a cigarette-filled stubbie; in another he gets locked out of the house wearing only a towel.

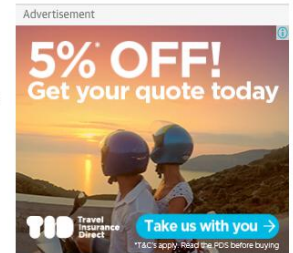
The pernicious grudge fate has against the protagonist - often ruining, in particular, his chances to spend time with Jen (Lucy Lehmann) - reminded me, in a weird way, of the Final Destination movies. Almost Midnight starts solid and gets better, building to riotous semi-naked shenanigans and a sweeter, more optimistic finale.

3. Shakespeare Republic: season two



The mission statement for this polished, beautifully made series from director/producer Sally McLean declares it will "engage new audiences with Shakespeare's works through the use of 'bite-sized' pieces of text", in order to "reduce the anxiety many feel around attending a full Shakespeare play".

A fine use of the platform and, more importantly, a very fine adaptation of the Bard, McLean's assortment of cherry-picked monologues sparkling anew in fresh contemporary settings. In one episode, The Taming of the Shrew's Katherina is a politician's wife at a press conference; in another, Henry V is reimagined as the leader of a laser strike team.



It might sound gimmicky but Shakespeare Republic is put together with grace and wit. An assortment of actors do terrific work making the (non-dumbed down) dialogue accessible, prying it open with great care and skill. Shaun Herberson should also be singled out for his first-rate cinematography.

4. *Girt by Fear*



Six pulpy, snack-sized, wickedly entertaining horror episodes are told in anthology style by directors Yiani Andrikidis, David Ma and Madeleine Purdy. *Girt by Fear* follows a range of 20-something Sydneysiders on their way to a Halloween party who are interrupted by an assortment of strange goings-on.

Series writer Joel Perlgut infuses wacky Australianisms (from games of two-up to bongos made out of tomato sauce bottles) into fright-night stories that evoke memories of many creepy-crawly classics - including *The Ring* in the first episode, *Teenwolf* in the second, any number of vampire stories in the third, and so on.

A playful tone, which oscillates between tongue-in-cheek humour and genuine creepiness, brought to mind the cheeky style of horror-comedy stalwart Joe Dante (particularly films such as *The Howling* and *Gremlins*). Padded out with longer plotlines, *Girt by Fear* would make a perfect, highly bingeable series for a streaming provider.



Handmaid's Tale: SBS streaming ad placement almost as brutal as Gilead

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5. *Goober*

Every episode in this slight, moreish comedy begins with dorky rideshare driver Harry (Brendan Williams) soliciting life advice over the telephone from his dad (voice of Shane Jacobson). Directors Brendon Skinner and Simon Williams keep the action inside and around the car, perhaps inspired by *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee*.

The script has endless potential, with neither Harry nor the audience having any idea who might jump in the car next. Good-natured friction is generated by having the socially awkward Harry, who is on the autism spectrum, thrown into the heart of an environment requiring constant social interaction.

6. *The Katering Show season two*

One is tempted to describe the now-legendary cooking-show satire with the words "needs no introduction". The second season continues the journey of an intolerable foodie (Kate McLennan) and her food-intolerant friend (Kate McCartney) as they whip up a range of dishes, from packet mac 'n' cheese to paleo bone water and a "large mini pancake with some salmon bullshit on top".

The two Kates are currently putting the finishing touches on their upcoming half-hour breakfast TV sendup, *Get Krack!n*.

7. *Like You*



Shot in Perth and featuring appearances from a range of local comedians, *Like You* follows 20-something Elliot (Verity Softly, also creator, co-writer, co-producer and co-director) as she encounters a range of first-world problems, from bad Tinder dates to laborious shopping expeditions and the death of her goldfish.

We want Elliot to succeed, or at least to find a better work/life/love life balance. The look and feel of the series is given razzle-dazzle by cinematographer and editor Robert Woods, with a playful style dabbling in quick cuts and split screens.

The last episode doesn't quite succeed in satisfactorily rounding out the first season, but does carry the (welcomed) inference that more eps may be on the way.

8. *Starting From Now season five*



Writer/director Julie Kalceff's soap opera, which follows the lives of four gay Sydney women, has chalked up more than 30 million views to date. Like many soaps, the narrative is long and lust-filled, with relationships full of simmering passion and a number of "tangled webs we weave" romantic dalliances.

The look and feel of *Starting From Now* is unprepossessing, at times plain. Kalceff understands, however, that successful long-running soap operas are about taking audiences with them, fostering a feeling that we are ageing and maturing along with the characters. Four fine performances round out the primary cast, from Sarah de Possesse, Rosie Lourde, Lauren Orrell and Bianca Bradey.

Honourable mentions: [Bruce](#), [Scout](#), [Black As](#), [No Strings Attached](#), [Little Acorns](#) and [Amazing Grace](#).