

# The Skinnards

TV bible for a half-hour episodic series

A mixed-race family living in rural Nevada puts their energy and talents to good use by forming a music group and performing their own brand of home-spun hip hop on YouTube.

## The Skinnards

The Skinnards are a family of five from Camelot, Nevada. They have their ups and downs, and needs and dreams like any other American family, but that's where the similarity ends. The fact that they're a mixed-race family, living in a double-wide mobile home in a tiny remote desert community gives them a unique perspective on the world. Add to that their extraordinary creativity, intelligence, and musical talent, and set all of that in a modern world with cellphones and social media, and you have the unlimited possibilities of the Skinnard family.

A major milestone occurs one night when their divergent musical talents unexpectedly converge into one magical musical entity. It was bound to happen. They just needed that lightning strike to create the right conditions for their talents to combine and imbue them with an overwhelming desire to make great music together – a desire they didn't know existed until that moment. And the result is YouTube gold.

Every week, they produce a new song highlighting some aspect of their lives in Camelot, and then spring it on the world via their YouTube channel. They're fresh, clean, and enthusiastic about life. One week, Jane's song and the vignettes that surround it tell us about her struggle as a tween to break free and be heard. Another week, their father sings about keeping it together with his head in the clouds. They present their world from their own, unique, refreshing Camelot perspective, without all the typical big-city jokes and situations. The Skinnards are fun and funny and show us how much their alien world really isn't that much different from our own.

## Setting

It's difficult to tell where a human being ends, and their environment begins, especially when all we see are the same kinds of people in the same kinds of places. How much of the king of Queens is human and how much of him is Queens? We don't know until we take him out of Queens. With the Skinnards out of the big city, we can see what makes them human.

Welcome to Camelot, Nevada (based on the real town of Beatty.) When you ask a Camelotian why they live here, they're liable to reply, "Because no one will find you here." In other words, there are two types of people in this world – the people who live in Camelot and the people who live where they'll be found.





Camelot is the gateway to Death Valley, near the turn-off to the Extraterrestrial highway, not far from the famous Area 51 and Nevada testing grounds. It's about as remote as any place can be but with a strange top-secret military/alien vibe. People here can connect with the world whenever they like with a Starlink satellite dish, or they can switch it off and disappear.

Sitting on the front porch of the Skinnard house is probably the most relaxing position there is. You feel relaxed because you have disappeared – no big city to judge you or government watchdogs to keep you in line. Just you and the other Camelotians, with the shared dream of living their life the way they want with the coyotes and cactus under the big bright sky.

### Social relevance

The Skinnard songs and stories are character-driven, so it's almost impossible for them not to have social relevance. They sing about how they interact with the world and their stories are all about people being people. The Skinnards explores everything from teen angst to racial bias. But most importantly, the show inspires us to dream and channel our natural innocence to go after the most impossible things, to stare out at a barren landscape from a rocky peak and imagine big without any barriers.

### Life after season 1

The arcs of the Skinnard characters are driven by their growth in popularity. After they establish their music group, they grow their video stories in size and complexity, starting with music only videos and expanding with polished wrapper stories. Their demand and income grow as their YouTube hit-count increases. They also grow a fanbase and begin to play live local gigs.

As the seasons progress, the group takes their act on the road, starting with teen venues and escalating to full-on concerts. With the additional income, they buy more equipment, a touring bus and pay for roadies and a manager. Meanwhile, Camelot gains in popularity too. The small town that prided itself on its anonymity is soon overwhelmed with tourists and wannabes.

Eventually, the Skinnards vacate their double-wide for a mansion in the Hollywood hills. And it all takes its toll on their personal lives. The musical group that started in a place with endless possibilities must maintain their sanity in a world that becomes their prison.

### Structure

Each 30-minute episode is driven by a theme typically built around one of the characters. We develop a theme by experiencing moments in a character's life that prompt them to write a song, which they perform at the end of the episode. Typically, a song is paired with a video story, which is edited from footage shot by the videographer character Jonah. Jonah follows the family everywhere and records many of their most telling and intimate moments. The song paired with the story is the content that ends up on the YouTube channel.

In Act 1, we introduce the theme. In Act 2, we develop the story and present the song.

As we experience the thematic elements, we monitor the group's growing online popularity and the business behind it, and we track changes in the group as their lives evolve from simple dreamers to complex superstars.



## Characters



**Derrick Skinnard** (36) is the father. He's white, lanky, and low key. Raised in Henderson, Nevada, he has that casual, unshaven, desert-rat look that one could easily mistake for a homeless wastrel. But there's something about him. He's oddly sensitive and intelligent. He works on and off at the Space Station RV Park a block away. But occasionally he'll disappear without warning for weeks at a time and come home with a new Cadillac or expensive presents for the kids. As the season progresses we learn that he owns the RV park and several other businesses as fronts for his real job working for the federal government as some sort of undercover expert in their top-secret alien tracking division. From looking at him, you'd never guess that he holds a PhD in astrophysics because he appears to spend most of his time drinking beer and channel surfing.



The mother **Brenda Skinnard** (36) is black, bubbly, goofy acting at times, extroverted big time, speaks her mind every chance she gets. She grew up Brenda Casabas from Compton, CA, with a black mother and Latino father. After marrying Derrick and moving to Camelot, she became a nurse at the Camelot clinic – oh, the stories she can and does tell. She met Derrick at a Vegas casino. She was overly exuberant after winning big on a slot machine and Derrick, who was playing the slots across from her, fell in love in a heartbeat – she was so free and full of life. Their first child was conceived that night in room 503. She made no bones about her desire to vacate Compton ASAP. Camelot wasn't quite the destination she had in mind, but the place has plenty to offer an outgoing, people person.



**Ben Skinnard** (15) is their eldest. He has his dad's passion for technology and his mom's fiery spirit. He discovered music at an early age – plays guitar, keys, drums, and creates hip hop inspired tracks in Ableton on his computer. He's always shaking their small house with the loud sub-woofers in his mad-scientist home studio. He has been in several noisy music groups with his rowdy school friends. He loves to party and stay out late, but it's all business. He's too busy to be much interested in illicit drugs, but he does like beer, which is easy to come by in the house. He is the guiding light that inspires the family to become The Skinnards.



**Jane Skinnard** (13) is the middle child, the foil to outgoing Ben. While he is wowing the world with his wild musical creativity, she's quietly blossoming into a violin prodigy. She has a few close friends, prefers the still dark desert nights to the boisterous party life, prefers one or two close friends to the extroverted gangs that hang around her noisy brother. But she has the same musical chops, which come from dad, and his passion for complex science and secretive projects. She often waits patiently in the background while others yammer on until just the right time to spring forth with a few choice words and a perfect solution.



**Arnold Skinnard** (7) is the last child, probably an afterthought. Where did he come from? He acquired his mom's free spirit and a strangely engaging personality. He seems to enjoy being the youngest, the sidekick, with no expectations. He's not terribly bright, but a gifted percussionist, cute as hell, and is always off in his own world. Probably takes after his estranged uncle. Kind of bubble-headed, always doing dumb things, wandering off. Arnold, what are you doing? With most of the family drama generated by the other four, Arnold is usually left to his own devices. He has a vivid imagination, very creative but not much common sense. But it doesn't matter because there's always someone around to save his ass eventually.



**Oliver** (13) is the tuba player in Jane's school orchestra. He's hard to figure out, but he definitely has an agenda. He's white with close-cropped red hair, a little on the pudgy side, and shorter than Jane. He doesn't talk much, but we know what he wants – Jane. His parents are cool but are not sure what to think about his crush on this kinky-haired violin whiz kid. He's an anomaly that no one can figure out.



**Jonah** (15) is Ben's best friend and fellow musician/creative guy. He's a good kid: kind of dumb acting, mostly invisible, hangs around Ben, who he thinks is the coolest. He mainly plays an important role behind the scenes shooting the footage that ends up in the video stories. No one ever recognizes his talent for documentary filmmaking – for being invisible and having an intuitive sense of where and when to point the camera.



## The Skinnards

Ben – DJ gear, Ableton, keys, vocals

Derrick – accordion, banjo, guitar, vocals

Brenda – flute, percussion, vocals

Jane – violin, enhanced violin

Arnold – drums, buckets, percussion

## Season 1 Episodes

### Episode 1 – Let’s start a band (pilot)

The Skinnards are a family of five, living in a rural Nevada town. They work, go to school, and have their routines, just like everyone else in town. But one thing sets them apart – their incredible latent musical talents. We hear about Ben’s hip hop group, experience Jane’s obvious talent and discover that even Arnold can lay down a groove. But it takes a spontaneous event to bring them all together and make them realize the remarkable gift they share as a group. The Skinnards become a musical thing. They cobble together a studio and record their first song – Camelot, we love you a lot – and that’s how it all begins.

### Episode 2 – Jane’s song

She’s quiet and sensitive. Something as seemingly insignificant as a sideways look or off-handed comment can tear at her heart. And that’s what happens one day at school. Her song is sweet and powerful. She wants to be something. On top of a driving orchestral bed, her plaintive violin lines play off her lyrics, her personality. She’s a natural introvert, not interested in participating in all the expected banal teen dramas, especially relationships with white cowboy rednecks. She is different – looks different with her kinky hair and dark skin – and Camelot skews to the right. She wants nothing of that. She wants to blossom on her own terms, not make an issue of racist attitudes. But there’s something about one boy, Oliver. He is taken by her free spirit, sees his duty in life as supporting that. He idolizes her, sees her as his ticket out of the Camelot prison. That draws them together.

### Episode 3 – Ben’s song

At a football game, Ben and his musical friends are accosted by a group of drunken jocks. They’re critical of the Skinnards and their videos and deal with their irrational feelings by trying to put Ben in his place. He receives nothing more than a black eye, but it’s enough to set him off. Ben’s hook is fighting inequity, whether in his life or society. His song is strong and loud – rap. They don’t understand is his theme. Life is a constant struggle against ignorance and that consumes him to the point where he prefers gender

neutrality to swimming in a sea of meaningless relationships. He's out to make a difference by being different and doing whatever it takes.

#### **Episode 4 – Derrick's song**

Staring down the hole of his backed-up RV park waste dump, which appears to be unfixable, Derrick begins to see life from a gloomy perspective. For a moment, he's brought down. He sees the bills piling up and his world beginning to crumble. That's when he picks up his guitar and climbs a mountain – disappears from it all. Derrick's song is folky guitar with a hip hop punch. He sings about life with his Head in the clouds. The answer isn't right here, it's out there and all around us. Don't sweat the small stuff, don't sweat at all. There's nothing to sweat about unless you ground yourself in pursuit of trying to figure it all out. You can't. That night, he's called away. This time, we follow him.

#### **Episode 5 – Brenda's song**

She wakes up one morning to find that Derrick has left. A note explains that he had to go immediately and didn't want to wake her. Bad timing. For some reason, it hits her hard. She must wrangle the kids for school and make it to work in time to face another day of diseases and injuries. But this time it's different. In the lunchroom, she breaks down. She never cries publicly, but now the tears keep coming. Liz finds her in that state and puts her arm around her. For once, nothing is said. They just hold on. Brenda's song is a bit country with that ubiquitous hip hop beat. In the beginning it's slow and mournful, then it picks up and becomes a party. People are the reason. It's right here. Look all around you and hold on tight to the ones you love. Where Derrick is out there, she's right here, in the moment. Let's dance, let's party, let's celebrate our lives together. No matter where you go, what you do, people are the answer.

#### **Episode 6 – Arnold's song**

It's teacher conference night and Brenda and Derrick meet with Arnold's teacher, Mrs. Jefferson. She's not all that inclined to praise Arnold. He has trouble focusing on what he's supposed to be focusing on, doesn't put much energy into excelling. But she does say he has a vivid imagination, so maybe something in the arts would appeal to him. Brenda and Derrick answer in unison, "We'll take that." Arnold's song is a whimsical tour de force, filled to the brim with excessive energy and big beats. It's mostly instrumental with crazy rhythms and wild exotic sounds – high velocity moving, dancing, a rocket blast. The musical outpouring is provoked by the bullies from episode 1, who regularly make fun of his family and their band, prompted by comments from their redneck parents. But his world doesn't exist out there, only in his head. It's crazy nonsense lyrics with rhythmic onomatopoeias, Zubatapootaka.

#### **Episode 7 - A lesson in race**

Most people in the town don't see race as much of an issue, and we make a point of that. But Camelot is famous for its geographical benefit for people who want to disappear. And the popularity of a mixed-race musical group is seen as a threat by a few. There's one old guy in particular who has a problem with the Skinnards and isn't afraid to say his piece. As the family's token white guy, Derrick finds himself in the middle of the discussion, a place he is very uncomfortable with. But in the end, the old Derrick kicks in and he rises above the situation, becoming the calming force that brings the factions together.

#### **Episode 8 – Oliver's song**

He's got latent talent, and not just as an accomplished tubist. He can even dance and has an engaging stage personality. But he is terribly shy and lacks confidence with strict parents who have a problem with his attachment to Jane. It's all about Jane is his song. He wouldn't exist without her. Jane is at first put off

by his awkward advances but eventually comes around. It appears he's head over heels, heavily into hero worship, is as attracted by her god-like violin virtuosity as her beautiful smile. Participation in the Skinnards is strictly forbidden to anyone outside the family. But for Oliver, they make an exception. He's always hanging around, helping whenever he can. They even give him a tuba solo. At the end of the episode, his dream comes true. He finds himself alone with Jane outside their studio. She gives him a peck on the cheek, and they come together in a long loving embrace.

### **Episode 9 – Rich and famous**

In every episode, we track their gains in popularity as The hit counts climb, and their productions grow in length and complexity. Somewhere around episode 6, they're producing 10-minute shows to go along with their songs every week. Then, they start receiving \$500 checks, plus lots of likes and positive comments, and actual fan mail addressed to the city. The city gets involved. They become local celebs, hailed by the town government, and give their first-ever live performance at the local park. Crowds go wild. At the end of May, they hit the YouTube jackpot, \$7,623. They talk about going on the road when summer comes. There's video money they didn't even know about. Reruns keep cash accumulating, and they begin to plan a small tour to Vegas and elsewhere.

### **Episode 10 – Alien song**

In the last episode of the season, just as they're making final arrangements for the Vegas show, Derrick gets called away. Bad timing. The next night a large bright light is seen in the sky over Camelot. When Derrick appears at last, he's not where we expect him to be. He's on TV, being interviewed by the press. That bright light was an alien space craft and Derrick's job is spokesman for the top-secret government agency tasked with tracking UFOs. At last, his secret service is exposed. We discover he has been called away more than usual recently because of ramped-up alien activity. Camelot becomes a media circus and Derrick is in the limelight. It turns out that the craft crashed, and the agency finally has proof of the existence of aliens. Camelot is no longer hidden, and the Skinnards popularity increases in unexpected ways.