

## SMILING THROUGH IT

**Smiling Friends mixing joy with horror and weirdness in the best way**

This year, I've been streaming the Cartoon Network's newest Adult Swim animated series, *Smiling Friends*. For the last decade, I have been watching online animations from the two creators, Zach Hadel and Michael Cusack, so finding out back in 2020 that they were getting a series was the greatest news to hear.

In 2024, they have been releasing new episodes of season 2 — six so far, with even more to come as I write this. *Smiling Friends* follows animated creatures Pim (pink) and Charlie (yellow), two employees of a small business looking to buoy spirits — and each weird 10-minute episode deals with topics more grim than perky, from family dysfunction to horror.

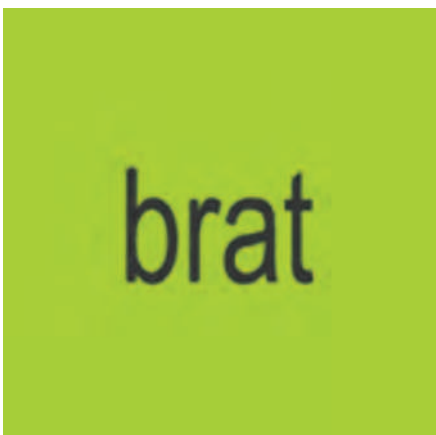
The newest season has been even funnier since the first and does a great job mixing various animation styles — some very old school — and live-action footage. Some have even compared it to *The Amazing World of Gumball* but for adults. (*Gumball* is Cartoon Network's series about a middle school attending blue anthropomorphic cat and his adopted goldfish brother.)

The first two episodes of the newest *Smiling Friends* season have been the strongest, satirizing both the video game industry and the current political climate in America — the second episode addresses the unhygienic and unintelligent president of the United States, Jimble, played by Mike Bocchetti, as he runs for office. Sound familiar?

If you appreciate animation, mixed mediums and raunchy adult comedy, I highly recommend *Smiling Friends*. — *Ridic Ferrand*

## WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A BRAT

**Charli XCX's new album *Brat* is the album of the summer**



Are brats annoying? Cool? Jaded? Perhaps they're just misunderstood? But honestly, who cares? Charli XCX's newest album, *Brat*, isn't trying to put brats like her in a box — she just wants to put her hands up and dance to club classics with her best friends.

*Brat* is 15 songs of intoxicating, energizing, dancing bliss. Charli XCX's singles "360," "Club Classics" and "Von Dutch" are the perfect party precursors to an album that DJs will remix in Brooklyn warehouses for years to come.

*Brat* is nothing if not honest. With songs like "Sympathy is a Knife" and "I Think About it All the Time," Charli unleashes her fears and contemplations. She addresses her incessant comparing of

herself to other artists and her need to outdo herself at every new project. She talks about feeling like a loser in her ripped tights on a lawn chair in the track "I May Say Something Stupid."

Every lyric is just as much specific as it is relatable, but even her most vulnerable lyrics are encased in heavy dance production making it the perfect Party Anthem

Charli XCX doesn't have Taylor Swift's pop "it girl" appeal — she's far too honest for that. Instead, she has found a place in pop by doing what so many pop girls fail to do — release loud, fun music that is simultaneously intimate and original.

Above all, *Brat* encapsulates what Charli does best, which is capture the heartbreakingly beautiful, empty and wild noises of partying. — *Emerson Brady*

## UPLIFTING CRIME DRAMA FROM DOWN UNDER

**Fascinating detective stories, minus car chases and gore**

*The Brokenwood Mysteries*, streaming on Acorn, Amazon Prime, Roku and other services, is the best quirky murder mystery police procedural you've never heard of. It's filmed in a small town in the rainy, chilly, hilly, forested Auckland region of New Zealand, which makes it a natural binge for Oregonians.

A killing or mysterious death is at the heart of each episode, but *Brokenwood* is largely nonviolent with little or no gore, and with the death typically taking place mostly or entirely off screen. The series features engaging lead actors, a sprawling array of bizarre, humorous and idiosyncratic supporting actors, sharp dialogue, eye-catching settings, and the labyrinthine twists and turns the police team must take to unearth the truth.

The odd-ball supporting cast, the sweet yet snarky relationships among the police team, and the lack of violence make this a relaxing, enjoyable stream, especially for viewers turned off by the endless on-screen bloodlettings and shootings of many recent U.S. cop shows.

While the main brunt of the acting is borne by the three lead characters — Detective Senior Sergeant Mike Shepherd and his two assistants — the recurring supporting cast give the show much of its buoyancy. These include a love-sick Russian pathologist, a shrewish ex-con bar owner, a deer-in-the-headlights coffee cart operator, a gay church pastor and his psychiatrist partner, a gay pharmacist who is also the mayor, and a smarmy but likable defense lawyer.

The actors' New Zealand accents are a surprise plus — both the English as spoken by the white actors and the somewhat different English accents of the Maori actors, who are indigenous to New Zealand.

The series just celebrated its 10th season, with an 11th on the way. Each season features five to six episodes that run for about two hours apiece. It's time well spent. — *Jody Rolnick*



CHARLI XCX Photo by Harley Weir