

HOLIDAY FUN IN IRVINE • RSV HEALTH EMERGENCY • CENTRALIZED HEALTH CARE CAMPUS

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ON A ROLL

**CRUNCHYROLL IS
TAKING ANIME FANDOM
WORLDWIDE
BY LINA LECARO**

NEWS

RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS
PROMPT LOCAL HEALTH
EMERGENCY IN O.C.FLU, RSV AND COVID-19 CASES ARE IMPACTING
OC'S HEALTHCARE SYSTEM.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

A rise in pediatric respiratory infection, specifically Respiratory Syncytial Virus cases among children and adults, prompted Orange County's chief health officer to declare a local health emergency on Nov. 1.

Since then, the Orange County Board of Supervisors has extended the local health emergency at the request of the Orange County Health Care Agency and Children's Hospital of Orange County. Meanwhile supervisors have reassured residents the latest health emergency will not result in lockdowns or face mask mandates.

Leon Page, County Counsel for the Board of Supervisors, explained that the difference between this local health emergency and the COVID-19 emergency is that instead of ordering quarantine and isolation, this order works to appeal the regulation and licensing required to convert adult beds to pediatric beds at hospitals throughout Orange County.

Health experts at CHOC say pediatric cases involving influenza A and RSV are worsening while case volumes are increasing earlier than expected. Dr. Regina Chinsio-Kwong, Chief Medical Officer of the HCA, said that the county's emergency departments are being filled with both pediatric and non-pediatric cases of severe respiratory illness, with no guarantee beds will be available.

During a recent Board of Supervisors meeting, O.C. Fifth District Supervisor Lisa Barlett asked about the possibility of adding medical tents to bring in additional space for hospitals to care for patients during bad weather.

Chinsio-Kwong acknowledged that medical tents are a last resort due to the fact

that tents require additional staffing.

"Our emergency departments are full and sometimes are housing patients that should be in an inpatient bed. So they are exhausted and overwhelmed," Chinsio-Kwong said.

At its pre-pandemic capacity, CHOC's Orange facility has a total of 334 pediatric beds, with 104 NICU beds and 54 pediatric beds, plus 22 NICU beds at Mission Viejo, according to Dr. Sandip Godambe, Chief Medical Officer at CHOC.

In a presentation to the Board of Supervisors on Nov. 29, Godambe said emergency departments are being overrun, and in some cases causing CHOC to divert ambulance delivery to other facilities.

"At this point we do not know what Jan. and Feb. 2023 will bring – traditionally our busiest months," he said. "We've declined 300 to 350 transfers from neighboring hospitals in the last 30 days. This is reevaluated every three hours, so we are able to call some of them back when space opens up."

Godambe added that the state of emergency has helped CHOC get critical medications it would otherwise not require.

Irvine Weekly emailed CHOC on Tuesday, Dec. 5, to confirm the total number of beds available at both facilities – Orange County and Mission Viejo – and to confirm what percentage of beds are being occupied by pediatric RSV patients at CHOC. CHOC did not provide Irvine Weekly with a total number of RSV cases in Orange County, nor the total number of pediatric beds available within CHOC facilities.

In response to questions from Irvine Weekly, a CHOC PR representative wrote the following in an email sent on

Wednesday, Dec. 6:

"Unfortunately, no one is available at this time. We can tell you that as of yesterday, we had 42 patients at CHOC Hospital in Orange with RSV and today we have two at CHOC at Mission Hospital."

Local health experts say the current epidemiological data is pointing to an earlier-than-normal flu season, and if paired with heightened RSV and COVID, could be a gut punch to an already stressed healthcare system.

Andrew Noymer, Associate Professor of Population Health and Disease Prevention Public Health at UC Irvine, said he is unsure how this combination of respiratory illnesses will play out this winter, but said it could be troubling.

"There's three epidemics intermingled here – RSV, flu and COVID," he said. "COVID tends not to send kids to the hospital, but the other two do. Both flu and RSV levels are unusually high for this time of year, because these diseases peak in early February."

Noymer said the worst case scenario is that all three of these viral infections continue to proliferate throughout the community.

"The real unknown is whether these diseases are peaking early this year. One possibility is that the epidemic of these two diseases that normally happens every winter is happening, except it's happening earlier this year, so it'll start to go down," he said. "Another option is that it's going to plateau off, and remain high for much longer than it normally does – that can't be ruled out."

Noymer suggested a third scenario in which this is just the beginning of what

could become unprecedented levels of illness.

"The third possibility is that the early start is not a signature feature of this, but it's a flu and RSV season on steroids and it's going to keep going up, reaching new heights," Noymer said. "That's the scariest of these three possibilities."

While it is unclear what current staffing levels are at CHOC facilities, the shortage in health care workers has proved to be a growing concern for health care providers.

Greg Adams, Chair and CEO of Kaiser Permanente CEO, referenced the nationwide shortage of health care workers in an email to members on Dec. 1.

"Across the country, health care organizations are struggling to deliver three years of delayed care and address the dramatic increase in demand for mental health services, while continuing to manage care for COVID-19 patients," Adams wrote. "At Kaiser Permanente, we're also experiencing a high demand for care with fewer staff members available to work in our facilities, due to a nationwide shortage of healthcare workers."

CHOC did not immediately respond to Irvine Weekly's request for comment on the nationwide shortage of healthcare workers nor did it confirm staffing levels at its Orange County facilities.

In terms of other illnesses, the HCA's COVID-19 dashboard indicates that between Nov. 23 and Nov. 30 there were 299 patients hospitalized with COVID-19 in Orange County. Of that number 38 required ICU care. It is important to note that HCA's COVID-19 dashboard includes incidental case numbers, in addition to COVID-19 cases.

Statewide RSV continues to show steep increases in the number of cases requiring hospitalization, especially in children less than four years old.

In the week ending on Dec. 3, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's RSV-Net Interactive Dashboard showed children under four are being hospitalized at a rate of 109.9 cases per 100,000.

Nationwide, RSV cases involving children 17 and younger are being hospitalized at a rate of 111.5 per 100,000, while adults between 18 and 49 are being hospitalized by RSV at 2.8 per 100,000.

The local health emergency order will stay in place until it is terminated by the Board of Supervisors.

CHRISTMAS TREES, ICE SKATING & HOLIDAY FUN IN IRVINE, OC

THE HOLIDAYS WILL COME TO LIFE WITH THESE EVENTS AROUND TOWN.

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER



drz (Unsplash)

With a winter chill lingering in the Southern California air, residents in Irvine are surely getting into the holiday spirit. From selecting the perfect Christmas tree or snagging a photo with Santa Clause, there's plenty to do around Irvine.

Christmas Tree Shopping

Tanaka Farms

Tanaka Farms offers a wide range of wreaths, garlands and Christmas trees shipped directly from Oregon.

Tanaka Farms is located at 5380 3/4 University Dr, Irvine

Santa's Garden

Specializing in Douglas Fir, Nordman Fir, and several other Christmas tree types, Santa's Garden is an annual lot with locations in Irvine and La Habra.

Santa's Garden Irvine is located at 5840 Walnut Ave, Irvine

www.santasgarden.net

Peltzer Pines

Located in Silverado, Peltzer Pines is one of the last standing true Christmas tree farms near Orange County. Owned and operated by the Peltzer family since 1963, Peltzer Farms hosts its annual opening day celebration the Saturday before Thanksgiving.

Locals know one of the most unique aspects of Peltzer Farms is the ability to select a tree from the ground, and have it professionally cut on the spot.

This year, Peltzer's Silverado tree farm is open on weekdays from 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. On weekends the farm will open at 9:00 a.m.

Live, fresh cut trees will be available until December 20.

Peltzer Pines is located at 7851 Blackstar Canyon Road, Silverado, CA
www.peltzerpines.com

Photos with Santa

South Coast Plaza – Santa's Village &

The North Pole

Santa Clause will be available for photos all December long. Santa's Village is located in the Carousel Court. The North Pole is located inside Macy's Home Store West Wing on Level 1.

Photos with Santa will be hosted during all operating hours. Visit South Coast Plaza's website for pricing information.

Santa's Village in Fashion Island

November 18 – December 24

Located on the Atrium Lawn, Santa's Village at Fashion Island opens at 11 a.m. on weekdays, closing at 7 p.m. The Village opens at 12:30 p.m. on Sunday and closes at 6 p.m.

Santa's Village will operate during special hours on December 11 and December 18, from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. The last day for photos with Santa will be Christmas Eve between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m.

Fashion Island is located at 401 Newport Center Drive, Newport Beach

Visit Santa at the Irvine Spectrum

November 25 - December 24

Check out Santa's Beach Chalet for photos with Santa between 11:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m., but just remember, Santa will be gone to feed his reindeer between 2:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m.

Visit the Santa's Beach Chalet website for pricing information at www.irvinespectrumcenter.com

Holiday Fun

Skating Under the Stars at Irvine Spectrum

November 25 - January 1, times vary

The Irvine Spectrum transforms into a winter wonderland with an outdoor ice skating rink. The annual celebration

of Skating Under the Stars is open daily until New Year's Day.

While the Irvine Spectrum Ice Rink will be closed on Christmas Day, there will be slots available on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve.

Tickets start at \$23 per person if they bring their own skates or \$25 per-person with rental skates included. Skaters can hop the line for \$45.

Skating Under the Stars opens at 2:00 p.m. daily, with hour-and-a-half time slots running until 9:30 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, and 11:30 p.m. Friday through Saturday. Visit the Skating Under the Stars website for more information or to purchase tickets at www.irvinespectrumcenter.com

Pajama Party Movie Night

Saturday, December 10

The Great Park will host a Pajama Party Movie Night on Saturday, Dec. 10, as a part of Holidayz in The Park. Registration opens Wednesday, Nov. 30.

yourgreatpark.org/holidayz

Holiday Pet Adoption Fair

Sunday, December 11, 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Irvine Animal Care Center

Local animal care groups will be coming to the Irvine Animal Care Center to support the 16th Annual Holiday Pet Adoption Fair. There will be hundreds of dogs, cats and other animals like rabbits available for adoption. The event will also feature a bake sale, food trucks and art.

www.Irvineanimals.org/homeholidays

Hikari – A Festival Of Lights

November 25 – December 30, 4:30 p.m. – 9 p.m.

While Tanaka Farms will be closed on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, there's still plenty of time to check out all the festivities. Tanaka Farms has installed more than 1 million lightbulbs of colorful Christmas lights for the 2022 season and offers two different options to view the lights, Chinese lanterns and other festive installations set up throughout the 30-acre farm.

Hikari is open every day from 4:30 p.m. – 9 p.m. The Holiday Wagon Ride departs at 4:30 p.m., and runs every 10 minutes with the last ride leaving at 8:30 p.m. Entry gates will close at 9 p.m.

www.tanakafarms.com/hikari

ENTERTAINMENT ON A ROLL

CRUNCHYROLL IS TAKING ANIME FANDOM WORLDWIDE.

BY LINA LECARO



Anime is more popular than ever before, with a market topping over \$25 billion in 2022 globally. That number is expected to double in 10 years, largely due to its U.S. growth, accelerated by merchandising, streaming and events held here. The Japanese animated art-form, as seen in films, games, events and collectables, has nearly as many fans in North America as it does in Japan. Southern California in particular has played a significant role in this growth thanks to Crunchyroll, the popular anime streaming network based here,

which was acquired by Sony Pictures Entertainment Inc., in 2020.

Crunchyroll has been a major player in anime and manga (Japanese comics) culture since it was created back in 2006 by a team of Berkeley graduates who launched the online channel and helped it expand with over 100 million registered users and 5 million paying subscribers at the time it was purchased. Since the Sony merger, it's nearing 10 million paying subscribers globally, with availability in over 200 countries. Its quarterly seasons have doubled over the last three years, with 40-50 new and returning titles. And the

crunch keeps getting louder, especially after the success of this Summer's *Dragon Ball Super: Super Hero*, its first-ever global release (outside of Japan). The film played in 100 countries, with 13 dubbed and 29 subtitled languages, and did extremely well at the U.S. box office, earning \$21 million in its opening weekend alone.

Clearly, Japanese animation is no longer a nerdy niche form of entertainment. It's permeated all facets of pop culture and everything indicates it's only the beginning. *Irvine Weekly* caught up with the Crunchyroll crew to learn about its latest phases of promoting, expanding and re-

defining anime with a focus on satisfying longtime fans and engaging newbies.

"It's important to recognize that [it] has decades of conventions, culture, influence, and extremely dedicated fans under its belt," says Crunchyroll host Lauren Moore. "But it's definitely more on the mainstream surface in the West than it ever has been. People who never understood my job or the things I worked on are now saying, 'Oh, I recognize that!' when they pass a movie poster or see a piece of merch, and that's really cool to me. It makes me excited to see what new stories and characters we'll get to fall in love with, and what new ideas we can come up with to create cool experiences for other fans."

For non-fans and very casual ones, recognition usually doesn't go beyond *Sailor Moon* and *Pokémon*; *Naruto* and *Dragon Ball* also have broken through somewhat. There are hundreds and hundreds more titles with avid followings to match. Conventions – from S.D. Comic Con to L.A. Comic Con to the recent Anime Expo at the Downtown Convention Center – have helped these fandoms take hold, as like-minded followers connect, collect and cosplay their favorite titles, characters and stories. Anime has officially transcended the cartoon world and become a very real lifestyle. Though the majority of anime fans are millennial men, the consumer profile is changing with more women and more ages getting into the art, fantasy, dress-up and storytelling aspects.

"It's common for hip-hop artists to make anime references, anime art to show up in the latest fashions, or see athletes impersonating their favorite character on the field. One way Crunchyroll has leaned into that is by partnering with icons like Lady Gaga and Megan Thee Stallion on exclusive product collaborations," shares Travis Page, Chief Financial Officer at Crunchyroll. "What we are most excited about is our ability to bring so many things together for the anime fans. We have to deliver a great streaming product, but we also want to be great in commerce, mobile games and theatrical. We think the best way to serve the fan is to tie those all together and create more of a feeling of membership, not just a streaming subscription."



As with most successful subcultures, community is key. "Anime has played a very big part in my life," Moore adds. "Attending conventions led to friendships and great networking opportunities. It was nearly a decade ago when I was working in the gaming industry that I was first approached about applying for a marketing and hosting job in anime. There was no way I was missing that chance. I went from attending my local cons religiously, to hosting panels on some of the biggest stages in the industry and being part of some of the biggest events in the US. And this job keeps getting bigger."

Being based in L.A. keeps Crunchyroll close to the heart of entertainment, which allows them to host anime movie premieres at locales such as The Academy Museum and LA Live, and to cultivate a major presence at conventions. Page says it also keeps them close to their parent company, Sony Pictures, which will become more significant as they expand cinematically in the coming years.

Beyond conventions and social media,

"there is nothing like the experience of being in a dark theater, watching your favorite films with friends on the big screen," states Mitchel Berger, SVP of Global Commerce at Crunchyroll. "That's a big part of why Crunchyroll is bringing anime to theaters globally."

Dragon Ball Super: Super Hero became the fourth top-grossing anime film of all time in the U.S. and Crunchyroll has distributed 10 of the top 20 anime films in U.S. box office history. Next up, the company is excited to release award-winning director Makoto Shinkai's newest film, *Suzume*, due in April 2023. "Theatrical is just one of the ways we create connection for the anime community," Berger adds. "Anime fans are collectors and want to wear their fandom on their sleeve as a badge of honor, literally. We're excited to keep meeting fans where they are, and attracting new fans into the colorful world of anime."

Until the next big theater release, Crunchyroll's focus remains online. The Crunchyroll app is available on over 15 platforms, including all gaming consoles and digital devices, with different pricing



and platform options. The free version is ad-supported, and has limited programming (basically a sampler of its most popular anime for a limited time, including the first three episodes of new content, as well as a limited selection of manga titles to read). Crunchyroll's premium plan gets you new episodes one hour after they air in Japan, and offers unlimited ad-free anime content, plus hundreds of manga titles.

Sony's acquisition of another anime company, Funimation Global Group in 2021, and its unification under the Crunchyroll banner only added to its volume of anime and manga. The combined catalogs increased its offerings from 30,000 to 40,000 episodes equaling more than 16,000 hours of content. Current stats indicate Crunchyroll now has the largest anime library in the world: 18,000 hours, 44,000 episodes of series and films, and new series being added daily in various languages subtitles and dubbings: including English, Spanish (Latin America and Spain), Portuguese, French, Russian, German, Arabic, Italian, and, of course, Japanese. This year they also launched dubs in Hindi, Italian and Castilian Spanish.

Right now, popular titles include *Chainsaw Man*, following the adventures of a "devil hunter" named Denji; and *SPY X FAMILY*, about a spy, a telepath and an assassin who pose as a family to fight evil. Crunchyroll is also home to faves including *My Hero Academia*, *Demon Slayer*, *Attack on Titan*, and *JUJUTSU KAISEN*.

Beyond competing with other streaming services, Crunchyroll, which has a social footprint of 150M+ fans worldwide, is incorporating an experiential approach to promotion. Now that society is resigned to living with COVID-19, moving the fandom beyond the computer, phone and TV screens to facilitate in-person interactions is the next step. Theatrical releases are a big part of it, but so is gaming (popular titles include *My Hero Academia: The Strongest Hero* and anime RPG *Princess Connect Re: Dive!*) and events. From musical experiences like the Second Sky festival, which took place in Northern California back in October, to its celebrated annual Anime Awards show, which will take place in March next year in Tokyo, the profile of Crunchyroll and anime continues to expand, evolve and engage.

"It's been pretty extraordinary seeing the industry blossom in such a massive and fruitful way," says Ryan Colt Levy, lead voice actor on *Chainsaw Man*. "For far too long, it wasn't the popular or "cool" thing to enjoy or be able to celebrate among friends or peers without getting confused responses or worse. And now, we see anime celebrated everywhere from art to music and clothing culture, and now entire families share these experiences together. It's truly a beautiful thing. I would love to see it further grow into a place where more people can see themselves in these stories and feel more connected to the real world and people around them."

MUSIC



The Living Tombstone (David Suh)

IT'S ALIVE!

THE LIVING TOMBSTONE IS CREATING WORLDS FOR ITS FANS TO PLAY IN.

BY BRETT CALLWOOD

The Living Tombstone isn't likely to be a band that you've heard on the radio, or through the conventional and traditional means of discovering new music.

TLT (as they are often known) initially became well-known by writing songs for fandoms of the likes of the *Five Nights at Freddy's* (FNAF) video game franchise, and even *My Little Pony*. They would put those songs on YouTube and watch them catch fire. Then, as they realized that they had earned a fan base of their own, they created their own worlds. It's a brilliant, fascinating and fresh approach, and TLT is now wildly popular with an online audience.

The Living Tombstone is Yoav Landau, a producer and composer originally from Israel who met musical partner Sam Haft shortly after relocating to the States through a mutual friend.

"We exchanged details, and with Sam it was interesting because after we started to talk, Sam and I started sharing stuff," says Landau. "Sam sent me a really cool cover of a Radiohead song. I remember it was really impressive and cool, and basically we started to know what each other does. I think the first actual gig that we got to do for each other was me doing a remix for a movie project they were involved in."

"At the time, Yoav was doing The Living Tombstone on his own and had been for about five years," adds Haft. "I had been doing a comedy music project called Sam & Bill. My comedy music band got the opportunity to do music for the end credits of a pulpy horror film called *Pool Party Massacre*. Yoav and I had just met at this party and he did the production for the Sam & Bill song in the end credits of that film. That was the first time that we worked together on a music project."

Haft would then provide backing vocals to a track for Landau called "Jump

"OTHER ARTISTS GET VERY SURPRISED AT HOW MUCH WE DO OURSELVES. WE ALMOST ACT LIKE OUR OWN CREATIVE AGENCY. IT'S BEEN A DIY OPERATION SINCE DAY ONE, AND THAT'S HOW WE'RE MOST COMFORTABLE WORKING."

Up Superstar," and that led to them writing their first song together, "My Ordinary Life." To this day, that latter song is their most popular online.

"We worked together so well and understood each other's creative intentions in a very instinctual way, and from then on we couldn't stop writing together," says Haft.

TLT effectively operate as a DIY entity, with the pair basically working full-time office hours on this.

"We treat this as a very structured full-time job, and in spite of the fact that now we have moved into the music industry formally instead of just being on YouTube, we still operate in that DIY fashion," Haft says. "Other artists get very surprised at how much we do ourselves. We almost act like our own creative agency. It's been a DIY operation since Day One, and that's how we're most comfortable working."

It's not easy to describe the TLT sound, by design. Landau is essentially an electronic music producer, but he's bringing Middle Eastern folk music influences

with him, plus pop and rock. The last thing they want is to be pigeon-holed, restricting what they can do later.

"Yoav's influences are different to anyone else I've worked with," says Haft. "That wide musical palette, and listening to a lot of folk music and reggae growing up, and interpreting that into electronic rock music in a way that I hadn't heard before we started working together. A lot of people that I'm used to writing with have the same influences that I do. They vary of course, but we've all been exposed to the same music. Even though our specific influences may be different, we've been swimming in the same lake and Yoav has not. That's part of what makes his melodies really stand out."

"I need to not ignore what people like nowadays," adds Landau. "It's more my job to notice the similarities of things that are odd, and see where that fits into what people listen to nowadays. Surprise them that way."

The TLT song "Five Nights at Freddy's," about the game of the same name, saw them earn a massive amount of cool points from the online gaming community.

"The culture of the internet is about being there first, being the first one to make a meme about a thing," says Landau. "In the case of FNAF, when I started to see people talking about it, it was easy to make a post with a song and lyrics about the game, see this thing catch fire, and then it goes on YouTube. It's weird because it's not mine, it's someone else's intellectual property, but Scott Cawthon [creator of FNAF] was super nice. He said, as long as you give some of the money to charity that should be OK. That's what I did."

Their experience with Hasbro after making music about *My Little Pony* wasn't so pleasant, such is the giant, corporate nature of that toy company. After playing with other people's worlds for a while, they created their own via the

zero_one comic book and the *In Sound Mind* horror video game.

"A big question was, now that we have fans, what does fandom of us look like?" says Haft. "The way that we historically engaged in fandom has been engaging with story and characters, lore, the world, that kind of thing. We realized early on that we needed to have our own characters and our own world that were not just us. The Tombsonas, which is what we call those characters, arose out of that. They are a manifestation of screen names. They are aliases, they are masks, they are their own entities and identities."

From the beginning, TLT has been an audio-visual project, not just audio. So their creations make complete sense. The *In Sound Mind* video game sees players journey through the damaged psyches of characters, and the psyches sing. That allows TLT to insert their zany music into a horror game. There are simply no limits here.

"The Living Tombstone is music first, even if we're doing other kinds of content," says Haft. "People are here for the music, and we're just trying to create as big a universe or playground as possible where they can play with our music and engage with it."

By god, that's what they've done. And The Living Tombstone universe is only going to expand.

"We're currently working with an incredible production designer and costume designer to create these AV-enabled LED-enhanced costumes for the Tombsonas, so we can actually perform live embodying this full set of characters. Going into the new year, one of the things we're going to try and launch is this live concert experience and try to make it more than just us dancing around on stage to our music. There's nothing wrong with that, but again it's that idea of, we know what our fan base likes and we really just want to give them as much as we possibly can give them. That means costumes, full light show."

"We want to make something just as involved, expressive and expansive from the stuff we make songs of," adds Landau. "Otherwise it wouldn't feel right."

For more information, go to [instagram.com/livingtombstone](https://www.instagram.com/livingtombstone).

BAKE ANIME: THIS COOKBOOK IS A SWEET AND VISUAL DELIGHT

75 DESSERTS BASED ON YOUR FAVORITE ANIMES.

BY MICHELE STUEVEN

Inspired by the design, characters and storylines behind the world of Japanese animation, Emily Buschman's new cookbook, *Bake Anime*, is a fun and unique compilation of 75 recipes that is a feast for the eyes.

The book is packed with colorful photography and is divided into three sections - Japanese desserts, western desserts and character desserts.

Bushman is a self-taught cook and baker who started her blog targeting food in anime, called Penguin Snacks, in 2015. The blog has since evolved into a career working on video creation for the anime streaming platform Crunchyroll, and for franchises like *Naruto*, *One Piece*, *Food Wars! Shokugeki no Soma*, *Jujutsu Kaisen*, and more. She currently lives, works and bakes in a small apartment in Tokyo, Japan and shared her recipe for Mini Kitty Cakes with Irvine Weekly Weekly.

Excerpted from Bake Anime. Copyright © 2022, Emily J. Bushman. Reproduced by permission of Simon Element, an imprint of Simon & Schuster. All rights reserved.

Mini Kitty Tarts

Hello Kitty, also affectionately known as Kitty-chan, is one of the most iconic Japanese characters. Her image has spread to anime, manga, games, theme parks and more. Beloved for her cute appearance, she's meant to be a friend for the people - there to support you no matter what.

To depict this beloved and trendy kitty, I opted for a Japanese treat with

matching characteristics: the Hokkaido cheese tart. This treat is a mild, creamy cheese tart encased in a crunchy outer shell. These have become very popular in Japan and for good reason - they're addictive. Plus, the white cheese filling is the perfect backdrop for Hello Kitty's face.

3 TO 4 HOURS

MAKES EIGHT 2-INCH TARTS

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT:

EIGHT 2-INCH EGG TART MOLDS, INFRARED THERMOMETER, PASTRY BAG
NUT-FREE

For the Tart Shell:

1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting, if needed
Pinch of kosher salt
1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature

3/4 cup confectioners' sugar

1 large egg

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

For the Cheese Filling:

5 ounces cream cheese
2 ounces mascarpone cheese
1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1/3 cup whole milk

2 Tablespoons unsalted butter

1/3 cup confectioners' sugar

1 1/2 Tablespoons cornstarch

1 large egg, at room temperature

1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice

1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract

Pinch of kosher salt

For the Decoration:

Black, red, and yellow fondant, or an assortment of black and yellow sprinkles

A red chewy candy or fondant, for the bow

Recipe Tip:

Don't feel like making tart shells? You can find them online or in baking stores.

Don't want to decorate the tarts?

Refrain from smoothing the cheese filling out and instead simply brush the tops with egg wash (whisk an egg with a tablespoon of water) before they go in the oven, to give them an attractive browned appearance when they come out.

1. Make the tart shells: Whisk together the flour and salt in a small bowl to combine. Be sure to remove any lumps.

2. Combine the butter and sugar in a large bowl and beat with an electric mixer until smooth and light. Scrape down the sides of the bowl with a rubber spatula, then add the egg and vanilla. Mix again to incorporate, scraping down the sides as you go. Add the flour all at once and mix on low speed until just combined.

3. Turn the dough out onto a sheet of plastic wrap and press it into a disc shape. Wrap the dough in the plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least an hour and up to three days.

4. Make the cheese filling: Fill a pot with 3 inches of water and bring to a boil over high heat. Combine the cream cheese, mascarpone, Parmesan, milk, and butter in a tempered glass or metal bowl. Place the bowl over the pot to make a bain-marie (make sure the bottom of the bowl does not touch the water), reduce the heat to medium-high, and allow the cheeses to melt, stirring occasionally. While you wait, whisk together the confectioners' sugar and cornstarch in a small bowl. Prepare the other filling

ingredients while you wait for the cheese to melt.

5. When the cheese has melted, add the confectioners sugar and cornstarch a little at a time, whisking to bring everything together, then cook, whisking continuously, until the mixture has thickened to a puddinglike consistency. Add the egg and lemon juice and whisk briskly to incorporate, then cook, stirring the cheese as it thickens, until it reaches 150°F. Remove the bowl from the pot and whisk in the vanilla, then taste and add salt if needed. Strain the mixture through a fine-mesh sieve into a bowl to remove lingering lumps. Cover with plastic wrap, pressing it directly against the surface of the cheese mixture to prevent a skin from forming, and refrigerate until cool, at least an hour.

6. Preheat the oven to 350°F.

7. Roll out the tart dough between two sheets of parchment paper to a thickness of 1/8 inch, dusting with flour as necessary to stop sticking. Cut rounds of dough that are about 1/2 inch bigger than the tart molds. Press the dough into each mold and prick the bottoms with a fork to prevent bubbling. Place the tart shells on a baking sheet so they're easy to maneuver into and out of the oven. Bake for 10 minutes, or until the tart shell is golden brown all over. Remove from the oven and allow to cool before filling. Raise the oven temperature to 450°F.

8. Transfer the cheese mixture to a pastry bag. Cut the tip of the bag, then pipe a generous amount of filling into each tart shell. Use a small palette knife (or the back of a butter knife) to smooth and flatten the tops. Bake for 6 minutes, then remove and allow to cool completely.

9. Decorate the tarts: I used fondant, but sprinkles can work. Use two large round black sprinkles for the eyes, a small yellow sprinkle for the nose, and black sprinkles for the whiskers. For the bow, use red fondant or a moldable red candy: Roll it into a pill shape and use the pointy end of a chopstick to press a dot into the candy at either end, then use the pointy end of two chopsticks to pinch in the middle of the bow. Finally, roll a little ball of red fondant or candy into a circle and place it over the pinched middle of the bow. Serve and enjoy.

ENTERTAINMENT

BRENDAN FRASER DEVOURS BLOATED MELODRAMA *THE WHALE*

FRASER PLAYS A 600-POUND RECLUSE IN THIS COMEBACK FLICK FROM DIRECTOR DARREN ARONOFSKY.

BY CHAD BYRNES

With his just-announced and not unexpected Golden Globes nomination and more accolades sure to come, Brendan Fraser has made a remarkable comeback in Darren Aronofsky's *The Whale*. The lovable actor parlayed his role as a hip caveman in *Encino Man* into a handful of interesting characters in the 90s (who else could do that?) only to nearly disappear from the spotlight for the past several years. The actor's unmistakable compassion is still on display in his latest, even as he works within the confines of a girthsome prosthetic suit and maybe more cumbersome— a story that occasionally chokes on the suds of daytime soap melodrama.

Heartbreaking and bleak, Fraser plays Charlie, a 600-pound recluse. Confined to his drab apartment, Charlie spends his days teaching online English courses, gorging on pizzas, masturbating to gay porn and struggling to make it to the bathroom on his walker. The only evidence he actually exists is through a small black box on his oom classes (he tells his students that his computer's camera is dead).

A worthy addition to Aronofsky's canon of lost souls, Charlie is intent on accomplishing one more thing on earth. Much like Randy "The Ram" Robinson's last desperate clutch for glory in *The Wrestler*, or Nina Sayers' grotesque perfectionism in *Black Swan*, Charlie knows it's too late for a second chapter, but still pushes past the imprisonment of his body to attain



Brendan Fraser (A24)

spiritual redemption.

Based on the play by Samuel D. Hunter, who also penned the screenplay, the movie's apartment setting isn't the most cinematic of set pieces. Actually, it'll probably make you squirm. We quickly learn that Charlie's insatiable appetite is a result of the loss of his lover Alan. He simply can't cope. Alan's sister, a prickly nurse named Liz (a fantastic Hong Chau) stops by every day to check his blood pressure, which is growing worryingly high, merit-ing a warning. Since the movie starts with a placard telling us it's Monday and

counts down from there, Liz's warning isn't an empty threat but a prophecy. Of course, Charlie ignores her advice and continues ingesting buckets of fried chicken and candy bars. These scenes are about as unpleasant to watch as an extreme French horror flick from the early aughts. Strangely, Aronofsky stages these sequences with a voyeuristic, doom-laden vibe that's completely out of touch with the empathy we're supposed to be feeling for this poor man.

For a recluse, Charlie gets a lot of visitors. You almost expect him to throw one of his

pizza crusts at them and squeal, "Get out!" If he were playing a relatable human being he would do just that. Instead, the movie opts for dire earnestness instead of irony, which turns it into an insufferable weep-fest. Look no further than the misconceived character of Thomas (Ty Simpkins), a callow missionary from the local church who wants to save Charlie from eternal damnation. Although Simpkins is quite effective as Thomas, his role is a transparent and preposterous means to inject religious themes into a movie that's already brimming with allegory. The movie references *Moby Dick* every ten minutes. Now, we need to talk about The Bible? Jeesh.

The movie has its heart in the right place, but it attempts to shroud everyone in their own existentialist dilemma, which simply feels empty. The improprieties don't make these people more interesting, just confused. Another problem is the narrative's stilted tone. Since it's based on a play, the screenplay relies on too many protracted conversations and mushy theatrics. Aronofsky tries his best to turn this material into something rich and cinematic, but you can feel the struggle.

The Whale shouldn't be taken literally. It's not a think piece about obesity in America, but rather, a look at the relationship between physical decay and spiritual enlightenment. It's a subject Aronofsky's been obsessed with since his breakout film, *Requiem for a Dream*. Embedding spiritual concepts into his past works with a narrative fluidity and visionary flair, *The Whale* feels strained and claustrophobic by comparison. The material is simply too stagey and small for a director with such large ideas.

Ultimately, there are two reasons to see this middling yarn: its exploration of spiritual hyperbole and the performances, particularly Brendan Fraser's much-praised channeling of pain and hopelessness. Although he's draped in heavy layers of latex, the actor's eyes convey subtext the screenplay can't excavate. Charlie's life could've come off overwrought and maudlin, but Fraser brings a unique empathy to the character, who clearly doesn't see a way out of his situation beyond no longer taking up so much space.

\$78 MILLION 'CENTRALIZED' HEALTH CARE AGENCY CAMPUS COMING TO IRVINE

**THE PROJECT IS EXPECTED TO
BREAK GROUND IN NEXT SUMMER.**

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

The Orange County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday, Nov. 29, unanimously approved funding for the design and construction services for a \$78 million campus for the Orange County Health Care Agency. Officially recognized as the El Toro Campus Project, the Irvine-based space will enable HCA to create a central location for key services.

Currently located in Santa Ana, the \$78 million Irvine-based campus will specifically address capacity needs for emergency medical services, lab testing and medical storage. The new campus will be located on Marine Way in Irvine, near the Great Park.

In an email to Irvine Weekly, Ellen Guevara, a public information officer with HCA, said construction would begin next summer, with the project expected to take approximately 18 months to complete.

"The building will provide relocation space for key public health divisions. The campus will allow centralization of key divisions in our organization, that work together, to be in one location," Guevara wrote. "The build will address identified needs for increased capacity, proximity, and facility upgrades. Proposed construction is slated to begin at the site Summer 2023, with a goal of substantial completion by December 2024."

In terms of services set to be relocated, the agency has indicated that the Emergency Medical Services, which includes administration, a pharmacy and the

Agency Operation Center, will be coming to Irvine.

The campus will also be home to a Communicable Disease and Control Division, with a Biosafety Level 3 containment capability. A BSL-3 lab is categorized for the ability to contain potentially lethal and highly transmissible respiratory pathogens including Anthrax and brucella.

Guevara explained that during the pandemic, the agency was stretched thin due to a lack of space, adding that the expansion would help address the inadequacies departments like the Agency Operation Center experienced by creating a central location for personnel.

"During the pandemic there lacked adequate space to accommodate all HCA's collaborative parties in the Agency Operations Center and staff had to be stationed at multiple site locations," she said. "The overall function of the new HCA campus is to relocate certain key divisions that work closely together to one location."

The El Toro Campus project is estimated to stand two-stories tall at approximately 68,000 square feet. The Public Health Lab and BSL-3 lab are listed to be 25,000 square feet, with the Communicable Disease Control division estimated at 22,000 square feet.

As the project heads into the schematic design, Guevara said she expects renderings to be made public by late February.

UC AND UNIONIZED STUDENT WORKERS AGREE TO PRIVATE MEDIATION

**UC IS OFFERING TO COVER 100%
OF ALL CAMPUS FEES.**

BY EVAN J. LANCASTER

On Friday, Dec. 9, The University of California Office of the President said it was "pleased" an agreement to enter private mediation with the United Auto Workers to discuss labor relations has been reached. The milestone comes after months of negotiations, and weeks of strikes across UC campuses.

Letitia Silas, Executive Director of Labor Relations for the UC's System-wide Human Resources, said this process of neutral mediation is a path to quickly resolving this issue.

"The University is pleased that the UAW has agreed to neutral private mediation so that we may resolve our differences and end the strike that has been impacting our students, faculty, and staff," Silas said. "We remain committed to securing a fair and reasonable contract with the union that honors the hard work of our valued graduate student employees. With the help of a neutral mediator, we hope to secure that agreement quickly."

In its latest proposal to unions, UC is offering Academic Student Employees – teaching assistants, which represent more than 60% of bargaining units – three-year salary increases of 26%, with experience based increases, and more than a 20% increase on childcare reimbursement.

Set to be implemented by Oct. 2024, the newest proposal also includes

new base salaries ranging from \$29,000 to \$36,000.

The UC is also offering to cover "100% of all campus fees" for eligible academic student employees working more than 10 hours per week or 25% or greater appointments.

Total compensation for teaching assistants, including base salary, campus fees and childcare reimbursement would range between \$46,700 to \$74,700, according to the University of California's newest offer.

Graduate Student Researchers would see three-year salary increases of up to 52%, while remaining eligible for experienced based increases. By Fall 2024, the new proposal indicates the base salary for GSR would range between \$30,500 to \$48,500.

Strikes across UC campuses began on Nov. 14, and have shown no sign of slowing – even as the demands of some unionized workers were met earlier this month.

On Tuesday, Nov. 24, UC postdoctoral scholars and academic researchers agreed to salary increases and workplace improvements but continued to strike in solidarity with other unionized groups.

Currently, there is no timeline on the mediation process. However, once discussions begin, the parties involved will be barred from speaking publicly about the status of mediation.

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