Bluey: A cartoon for kids and parents about kids … and parents

Ed Hightower
5 September 2021

The notion that lasting art makes sense of life and reveals hidden truths and connections also holds up just fine when it comes to television programming designed for young children.

All too often children's film and television offerings fall into extreme silliness and pure fantasy entertainment, on the one hand, or rather dry, instructive content, on the other. The hit cartoon *Bluey* takes a different and refreshing approach, eschewing the goofy lingo of a show like PBS's *Pinkalicious*, as well as the light-minded pandering of *Paw Patrol* — where talking puppies operate rescue vehicles to thwart a neighboring mayor's selfish schemes.

Bluey's subject matter is everyday life for a family of anthropoid Blue Heeler dogs [a breed of herding dog] in suburban Brisbane, Australia. Both parents, Chilli and Bandit Heeler, work. Children, Bingo, age 4, and Bluey, age 6, go to school and otherwise play constantly.

The show premiered in October 2018 on Australian Broadcasting Company (ABC) Kids channel and quickly became the most streamed program in the channel's history. The Disney Plus streaming service began offering all 102 episodes of Seasons One and Two in early 2020. Episodes run about seven minutes each and frequently feature adult characters gleefully (sometimes reluctantly) indulging in the children's imaginative play.

Parents will recognize familiar scenes. The backseat of the Heeler family vehicle sports two car seats and a realistic smattering of crayons, snack remnants, toys and other evidence of day-to-day domestic entropy. The conflict between professional and family life emerges gracefully in the episode "Fairies," where Bandit takes a sharp tone with little Bingo for interrupting an important work call. Bingo's hurt feelings metastasize—with a notable dose of magical realism—into mischievous fairies wreaking havoc on the Heeler household. Through playful retribution, including public river dancing, the fairies are appeased. Bingo and Bandit reconcile.

Creator Joe Brumm described the centrality of pretending and playing in *Bluey* in an interview with *The Father Hood*: "It's to encourage people to look at play not just as kids mucking around, but as a really critical stage in their development that, I think, we overlook at their peril."

Thematically, *Bluey* has an Epicurean streak, with several episodes highlighting the ephemeral character of life and youth, and the imperative of enjoying them both. The series evinces a love of nature and advocates an acceptance of the passage of time.

In the episode "Take Away," Bandit picks up Chinese food with his daughters while background music of classical guitar strumming away provides a mood of increasing chaos. First, the order isn't finished, and Bandit has to play *restaurant* with his daughters while waiting. At the real restaurant the egg rolls get left out, prolonging the wait. Bluey turns on a faucet outside the storefront and the water flow gets out of control. Later, Bingo poses the question, "Dad, is everything in the world made of atoms?"

Bandit, spread thin at this point, believes so, then must rescue Bluey from a rush of water. Crows destroy the takeout boxes and their food, and everything has to be cooked again from scratch. To make the wait easier, the restaurant worker brings some fortune cookies, one of which contains a bit of wisdom: Flowers can bloom every year, but you can never be young again. Taking it all in, Bandit ends up playing in the water with the kids as the restaurant owner herself notes what fun it looks like.

© World Socialist Web Site

The episode “The Dump” also seems to be taken from the works of Lucretius or from Ecclesiastes, only for children. “Dad, where was I before I was born?,” asks Bluey on the way to the local recycling center. When it becomes clear that some of Bluey’s old crayon drawings are destined to return to paper pulp, she protests. Bandit explains that new paper will be made, and other kids will draw and color on it, then it will be recycled for still other kids to use. The paper’s life cycle is a metaphor—so unusual for a children’s series—for mortality. Nothing to be morbid about! The explanation appeases Bluey, and the trio celebrates with a trip to the car wash, a thrill the kids call the hairy monster machine.

Some episodes appeal more to the parents watching with their children, including one where Bandit takes the girls to a formulaic, big-budget Disney-style kids movie: *Chutney Chimp*. Early in the film, the title character sings “I wish I wasn’t different; I wish I was the same.” Bandit assures an anxious Bluey, “Don’t worry … I suspect that by the end of the film everybody will be happy that Chutney Chimp is different.”

The most memorable episodes in Bluey tend to say something about how both the children and the parents deal with a challenge. “Baby Race” thoughtfully recounts mother Chilli’s eagerness for young Bluey to hit all the developmental milestones—an unavoidable stumbling block for new parents—at the same time the other babies in her mums’ group do.

The episode “Bike” follows Bandit and Bluey at the playground watching different children failing at and then slowly but surely achieving tasks—using the monkey bars, putting on a backpack and drinking from a water fountain—with the brilliant musical accompaniment of an adaptation of Beethoven-Schiller’s *Ode to Joy*.

The use of music in *Bluey* stands out, with both original numbers and adaptations of classical pieces. A favorite episode in the latter regard is “Sleepy Time,” where the “Jupiter” movement from Gustav Holst’s *The Planets* sets the scene for a dream sequence where little Bingo learns to sleep in her own bed (Earth) without Bandit (Jupiter) and Chilli (the warming, nourishing Sun).

Season Three of *Bluey* is in production at the time of this writing for release this autumn. If you watch it with or without children present, it will likely be time well spent.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site