

SPECIAL: CARTOON FORUM

The top of the class

Reporting from last month's 14th annual Cartoon Forum in Italy, Bob Swain selects his top 10 most promising European animation projects for the future

ORGANISED under the umbrella of the European Media programme and moving from country to country each year, the Cartoon Forum was set up in order to encourage a stronger European animation sector, increase the number of co-production partnerships and encourage a faster investment cycle. And it's proved a big success – with some 30% to 40% of projects pitched over the years going on to be produced.

It's an exclusive gathering, open only to producers whose projects have been selected for presentation to invited investors. Buyers attend a series of 40-minute pitches – 81 of them this year, over three days, seeking a total investment of €280m (£194m).

In terms of numbers through the door, this year's most popular project was

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Village People from The Illuminated Film Company. Essentially a British sitcom meets *The Simpsons*, it should hit the spot for a family audience. Producer Iain Harvey is looking to make an initial series of 26 half hours with a budget of \$250,000 (£151,000) per half hour.

Close behind in terms of attendance and high on many shopping lists were the beautiful oriental designs of **Skunk**, from Irish animation house Cartoon Saloon. The studio may not be well-known but the project is spot-on and managed to beat most of the bigger names to the draw. Aimed at six to 12-year-olds, producer Paul Young plans a series of 26 episodes of 13 minutes.

Just pipping *Skunk* to the post as the

most universally praised project, was Tiger Aspect's **Charlie and Lola**, an utterly charming 26 x 10-minute pre-school series. Based on the popular books by Lauren Child and with Kitty Taylor slated to direct, it successfully enters the fantastical world of young children while hitting all the right buttons for parents. Unusually, many of the broadcasters in the room gave notice of their interest. The proposed budget is £2.34m.

Watch out as Aardman Animations continues its bid for world animation domination. This time it was unveiling its first move back into children's television series since the classic *Morph*. The 52 x 13-minute 3D computer animation **Chop Socky Chooks** is based on a gang of Kung Fu chickens and is guaranteed to fly. Development has been undertaken in collaboration with Finn Arnesen at Cartoon Network. As this is Aardman's first CGI series, producer Miles Bullough and director Sergio Delfino said the plan is to handle all design and pre-production work in Bristol, with volume animation being outsourced to studios around the world. The budget is €380,000 (£263,000) per half hour.

Of the other CGI projects on show, the most interesting was **Fairy Mary** from Two Sides TV, created at animation facility The Hive by director Nathan Laud. The pre-school format enters the world of two home-made fairies and a pixie, living in a child's bedroom. In the style of *Tiny Toon*, they come to life and get into scrapes once left on their own. Producer Catherine Robins is looking for a budget of €2.5m (£1.75m) to make the 26 x five-minute series.

A new name with a hot project was Peter Dodd of Mummysboy Productions. A veteran of the commercials sector and of series work with both Cosgrove Hall and Egmont Imagination, Dodd has developed his own stop-frame series **DreamMakers**. It's a lot of fun. Aimed at a six-to-nine audience, it's about the antics of bedbugs, tooth fairies and jump-

ing sheep in a tin pot studio trying to film dreams to beam into the heads of young children. Former Cosgrove Hall director Iain Pelling is on board as executive producer. The budget is €10,000-€11,000 (£6,900-£7,600) per minute for a 26 x 13-minute series. Another stop-frame delight came along in the shape of **The Christmas Bunny**, a 50-minute special from Living Doll in Cardiff. Producer Jackie Edwards and director Tracy Spottiswoode have put together a beautiful story about Truffly the Easter Bunny, who gets mixed up with the Christmas decorations and is determined to make it to the top of the tree. S4C has already put up €400,000 (£277,000) of the €1.7m (£1.2m) budget so the chances are high of transmission in Christmas 2005.

From the charming to the bizarre – **Sam Hamwich, Superhero Sandwich** is a kind of *Spongebob* on acid for seven to 13-year-olds. This everyday tale of a flying ham sandwich was served up by TV Loonland development executive Jennifer Upton. Each of 52 x 11-minute episodes is set to see Sam and sidekick Chip Sideorder take on the evil likes of Dr Broccoli and Gina Fettucine.

If the spirit of co-production is to be honoured, **Angelo** will be a smash. Jointly presented by Karsten Küllerich of Denmark's A Film, Ralph Christians of Ireland's Magma Films and Matthias Walter of NDF in Germany – successful animation producers both in their own right and as co-producers – the show tells the story of a 12-year-old nerd who gains a wild and fun-loving guardian angel. The 26 x 22-minute series has a budget of €6m (£4.2m) and is aimed at an eight to 12-year-old audience.

Last but by no means least, watch out for **The Amazing ADRENALINI! Brothers** from Pesky. Already stars of a series of two-and-a-half minute shorts on CBBC, Nickelodeon and channels around the world, the most fearless stunt performers of all time are teaming up once again for 26 expanded 11-minute shows.