

Bringing home the bacon

Perhaps as a result of shrinking animation and drama budgets in Britain, UK toons are dominating the Cartoon Forum in Denmark this year. Cgi is leading the pack on the production front while themes include space discovery, education and ecology. Jules Grant looks at what's hot this year.

The Danish seaside town of Kolding is host to the 16th Cartoon Forum this month, which since its launch in Lanzarote in 1990, has seen broadcasters, producers, distributors and investors flock to far-flung European destinations for three days of intensive pitching with the aim of getting kids projects financed, typically via coproduction.

This year, 69 European TV series will be presented at the forum on September 22, 23 and 24, representing a total of 422 hours of programming for an overall budget of €239m.

They come from a core base of 16 countries (see Fig 1), but as there are collaborations between producers and studios in other countries, such as Luxembourg, Greece, Cyprus, Estonia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and The Netherlands, the number of countries participating goes up to 24.

Corinne Jenart, general manager of Cartoon, describes the Forum as more of a coproduction market than a festival. "Each producer is obliged to be involved in a coproduction before entering the market," she says, while acknowledging that it is almost impossible to fund kids series without cofinance these days.

An interesting point to note is that Danish projects have the highest per-minute cost, at €12,600, followed by Germany (€11,000), the UK (€10,500), Italy (€9,500) and France (€9,300).

The UK's Target Entertainment, which represents Keith Chapman's *Fifi and the Flowertots*, is attending the forum this year, on the hunt for a preschool boys property with international legs as well as coproduction partners. Referring to the

subsidies and tax breaks currently available in some countries, John Eastaff, director of marketing and brand development, says: "France and Canada are very likely routes for us, as there is so much more finance available in these countries than in the UK."

Robin Lyons, md of Welsh toon house Calon, agrees. The firm is launching *Safehouse Hotel* (26x30') at the forum, a Flash animation action comedy targeted at six- to eight-year-olds. It is being described as a cross between *Fawlty Towers* and *The Prisoner*. "France and Canada are traditional copro partners for animation because of their subsidy systems, but we'll also be looking to Australia and Italy," he says.

Eastaff notes another trend on the financing front: "Many broadcasters these days are looking at projects then asking to see them again once they have gone into production. This is a bit of a catch-22 situation, as you need the broadcasters to get into production," he says.

But how much are the broadcasters prepared to put

in? "This varies enormously," says Eastaff, "but on average you'd be looking at 30-35% on a commission and 10-15% on a presale."

WHAT'S HOT

Britain is leading the race at this year's Forum, with the most entries on the slate (see Fig1).

"This year the UK is the big leader, with 19 projects, representing 28% of the entries," says Jenart. "There's a big gap between this and the second biggest player, Spain, which has nine projects this year, followed closely by Germany, Ireland and France." ☺

“The kids sector is beginning to attract City money following changes to the terms of trade in the UK. There are a few investors out there that can risk £2m or £3m on a project and it won't affect them too much. The benefit of that risk is that the project may turn out to be the next

Teletubbies or *Bob the Builder*.”

John Eastaff, Target Entertainment



French offering *Bali* is aimed at the four-to-seven age group

UK hot tickets include Lupus Films' *Pinky and Perky* (52x11'), the classic 1960s children's TV show that is set for a cgi makeover. It will skew slightly older than Planet Nemo's original *Bali* (52x13'), a 2D animated copro for four- to seven-year-olds that is flying the flag for France.

Hop & Calamity (52x11') is a new preschool property from Spain's Icon Animation based on Hop the puppy and Calamity the fairy, while Dublin's Monster Animation, creator of the digitally remastered *Roobarb and Custard Too*, will be highlighting *Fluffy Gardens* (52x5'), a preschool series that in each episode introduces children to a new animal that lives in the garden and tells a story about them.

In terms of target audience, preschool and projects for six to 12s are almost on level pegging this year, representing 28 and 29 toons respectively.

"This is the first year we have seen so many preschool projects: 40% of the total," says Jenart. "The majority of TV programmes are still targeted at children, with feature films more frequently addressing teens and family audiences."

As it becomes more prolific in cinema, cgi/3D projects are dominating things on the production front this year, with 28 projects employing the technique (see Fig 2). Six of these come from the UK, with Spain following closely with five, representing 55% of total Spanish projects.

Barcelona's Lion Toons is showcasing its six to 10s targeted project *Cosme the Astronaut* this year. Sales exec Jorge Patino says: "The big challenge is

to make attractive properties and stories with low budgets. That is why Cel action, Flash, Concerto and other animation software is being so used, and it will increase until 3D costs fall even more. It is also easier for mobile and internet broadcast, something which is also in demand right now." Elsewhere, 2D accounts for 23 projects, whereas a mixed 2D/3D technique is accounting for 11 projects.

Germany's EM Entertainment is attending the forum to look for international copro partners for its forthcoming preschool project *Zigby*. Based on the English books by Brian Patterson, the 3D show is about a little zebra. Angelika Stebbings, head of content and acquisitions at EM Entertainment, says that with UK and US writers on board, the firm has high hopes of a big international production of the project, which is in early development.

"Lots of broadcasters are seeking Japanese animé projects with Euro content but with the Japanese look maintained," she says. "I'm also noticing great potential in China, a country we'd like to work with more as they have lots of technical knowledge."

Humans lead the character trends this year (see Fig 3) and, not surprisingly, animals come next. Ten projects this year have an animal hero alone, whereas a further eight include bands of animal friends. Magic and the supernatural is also a popular theme, with entries including ghosts, elves, monsters and vampires. There are also seven alien-based projects or toons including characters from other planets. Jenart says: "Subject matter is varied this year, ranging from space discovery to ➤



Cosme the Astronaut from Lion Toons

ecology to emotions to education. Every year there are always some madcap entrants, like a band of sperms this year (*A Sperms Life*).

The Cartoon d'Or is a key attraction each year, where the winning animated film gets to bag the top prize of €15,000. This year five projects that have won prizes at partner festivals such as Annecy have been short-listed. They are *City Paradise* (2D/3D/live action) by French filmmaker Gaelle Denis; *Jo Jo in the Stars* (computer animated) by British filmmaker Marc Craste; *Little Things* (2D) by the UK's Daniel Greaves; *Flatlife* (Cel) from Belgium's Jonas Geirnaert; and German entrant *Falling* (3D). The jury is made up of three well-known filmmakers: Aardman Animation's Peter Lord, Denmark's Karsten Kollerich from A.Film and France's Philippe Leclerc, director of *Les Enfants de la Pluie*.

As a result of the Forum last year, 200 series were co-financed, to the tune of €1bn. Cartoon's Jenart is hoping that this year's Kolding rendez-vous will build on this. And with the rare exception of projects like *The See Show* from the UK, which has been fully funded by the BBC, the increasing move towards coproduction seems certain.

Eastaff notes the rare exception: "The kids sector is beginning to attract City money following changes to the terms of trade in the UK. There are a few investors out there that can risk £2m or £3m on a project and it won't affect them too much. The benefit of that risk is that the project may turn out to be the next *Teletubbies* or *Bob the Builder*. For projects like these, the return on investment is massive."

Whether the Pact model will be taken up outside the UK remains to be seen, but it is understood that so far, Germany and Canada are hoping to emulate it.

The location for next year's Forum will be Pau, near Biarritz in France. ■

FIG 1.

COUNTRIES/PROJECTS PARTICIPATING IN CARTOON FORUM 2005

| COUNTRIES | No. OF PROJECTS | % |
|----------------|-----------------|------|
| United Kingdom | 19 | 28.3 |
| Spain | 9 | 13.4 |
| Germany | 7 | 10.5 |
| France | 6 | 8.9 |
| Ireland | 6 | 8.9 |
| Italy | 4 | 6.0 |
| Denmark | 3 | 4.5 |
| Sweden | 3 | 4.5 |
| Iceland | 2 | 3.0 |
| Belgium | 2 | 3.0 |
| Norway | 1 | 1.5 |
| Slovenia | 1 | 1.5 |
| Finland | 1 | 1.5 |
| Austria | 1 | 1.5 |
| Latvia | 1 | 1.5 |
| Bulgaria | 1 | 1.5 |

FIG 2.

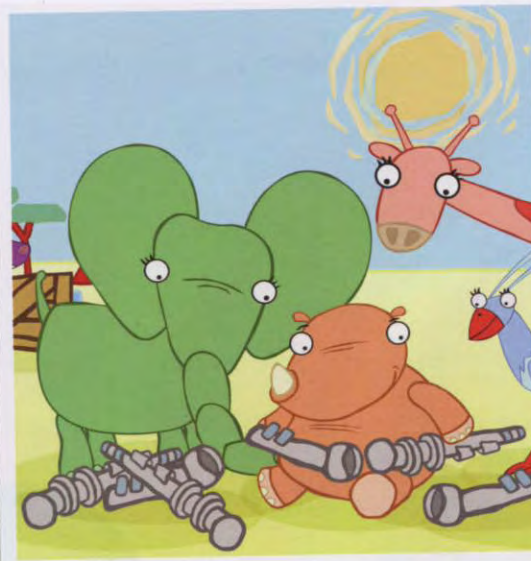
PRODUCTION TRENDS

| TECHNIQUE | No. OF PROJECTS |
|-------------|-----------------|
| CGI | 28 |
| 2D | 23 |
| 2D/3D | 11 |
| Flash | 4 |
| Puppet/clay | 1 |
| Real actors | 1 |

FIG 3.

CHARACTER TRENDS

| TYPE OF CHARACTER | No. OF PROJECTS |
|---|-----------------|
| Humans | 33 |
| Animal hero alone | 10 |
| Band of animal's friends | 8 |
| Aliens | 7 |
| Magic and supernatural | 4 |
| Without category | 3 |
| (Jesus, a band of spermatozoa friends, a band of bubblegum friends) | |
| Plants | 2 |



Randolph: A Rhino for the 21st Century
 HoneyComb Animation

Produced and directed by UK prodco HoneyComb's Sara Bor and Simon Bor, *Randolph* centres on an African rhino who happens to be an internet shopoholic. He surfs the web for gadgets and receives them on the African plains in a variety of unusual ways, such as canon, pony express and parachute.



Rocket Rodents (26x30')
 Breakthrough Animation

Created by Steven Schnier, the show features six inmates, aka The Dirty Half-Dozen, who are en route to an off-world penal colony when they accidentally 'acquire' a starship that none of them can fly. From the same prodco behind *Atomic Betty*, the project is now in development with YTV Canada.



Wiggly Wizard (26x13')
**First Freedom Productions/
 Eesti Joonisfilm**

Having produced factual and arts programmes since 1988, UK indie First Freedom Productions has partnered with Estonian prodco Eesti Joonisfilm to develop its first animated production. The series has been created by US writer Joe Raff, and centres on a Gandalf-style wizard who keeps all the weather in his Gladstone bag. Talks are underway with BBC Worldwide and DIC Entertainment.

Z-Force (26x22')

Earthworks Entertainment

This US\$8m 2D/cgi show is an action series for boys in which viewers are encouraged to role-play along with whichever of the 12 Chinese zodiac-based characters in the show corresponds to the year of their birth. Some 40 episodes are planned by LA start-up Earthworks.



Pinky and Perky (52x11')
**Lupus Films/
 Picture Production Company**

Celeb-savvy six- to 11-year-olds weaned on *Pop Idol* and *Fame Academy* are the target demo for Lupus Films' updated remake of the singing piglet puppets of the 60s, Pinky and Perky. Scripts for the new series have been written by Bafta-winning Alan Gilbey (*Dead Ringers*, *Flowerheads*), with producer Camilla Deakin likening the show to "*Dick and Dom in Da Bungalow* meets *SpongeBob*."

Skyland (26x30')
Méthod Films/France 2

This US\$9.2m futuristic cgi series hails from France's Méthod Films and follows a young girl with super powers who fights villains in a floating world set in 2454. Broadcasters signed up so far include France 2, ITV, Nickelodeon channels in the US, Latin America and Europe, Teletoon Canada and ABC Australia. It will be delivered in January.

Oliver Pan Pot (13x26')
Funkhauser Films

Aimed at the 7-12 year-old demographic and families, this cgi extravaganza hails from Denmark's Funkhauser Films. It's a swords 'n' sandals saga about two girls whose identities get mixed up after a tyrant takes over the throne. Denmark's Radio is already onboard.



Frankenstein's Cat (26x11')
 Mackinnon & Saunders/Kayenta
 With development support from North West Vision, the well-known Cheshire puppetmasters behind *Bob the Builder*, Mackinnon & Saunders, have developed their first 2Dtoon property, about the Frankie's unfortunate feline, whose sewn-together body keeps falling apart. Created by Curtis Jobling, the show already has French copro partner, Kayenta Productions.



Hop & Calamity (52x11')
 Icon Animation

A new 3D preschool property from Spain's Icon Animation was unveiled at Cartoon Forum in Denmark in September. It follows an ultra-happy Dalmatian pup whose tail wagging and general hyperactivity set him and his fairy sidekick, Calamity, on a collision course with a canine witch who can't bear to see people having fun.

Alex (104x4')
 Anera Films/Motion Pictures

These two Spanish companies have come together to create a new high-definition 3D animated character called Alex, a pre-school boy curious about life and his environment. Anera's Álex Colls is directing, and sharing producer duties with Enrique Uviedo of Motion Pictures.



Little Einsteins
 Curious/Buena Vista

Set to launch on Playhouse Disney in the UK on October 3, new interactive preschool toon *Little Einsteins* uses a combination of 2D animated characters and photo-real environments. Produced by Curious Pictures of New York and exec produced by Eric Weiner (*Dora the Explorer*), it is aimed at two- to five-year-olds.

My Little Fox (26x30')
 Foothill Entertainment/Seoul Movie

New to Mipcom this year is a brand new animé-influenced toon, *My Little Fox* (26x30'), from Korean toon house Seoul Movie, about an angel banished to Earth as a fox. California-based Foothill is onboard as copro partner, as it is with Seoul Movie's new film, *Toy Warrior*.

