

Chasing Creativity in Catalunya

European TV animation producers and financiers find their way to the Spanish town of Girona to face the hustle and bustle of the annual Cartoon Forum event.

by Ramin Zahed

This fall, before the madness of the MIPCOM Jr. and MIPCOM markets takes Cannes by storm, 60 animated TV projects from 12 different European countries will be competing for buyer and investor attention at the 18th edition of Cartoon Forum (Sept. 19-22). Organized by CARTOON (European Association of Animation Film), this year's event is held at the Catalan city of Girona and will showcase some 400 hours of content with a price tag of 216 million euros.

Among the countries participating at this TV toon event, France has the highest number of projects (15) followed by U.K. with 12, Spain with 11 and Germany and the Nordic countries each have six shows to present. Among the trends noticed by the organizers this year: The 26-part 10- to 13-minute package aimed at kids, 6-12, is the dominant format, while 2D animation is still the medium of choice over complete CGI. The average cost per minute is projected to be in the 9,000 to 10,000 euro range. More than ever, producers are showing interest in developing multiplatform projects and many are creating High-Def cartoons as well as planning distribution on VOD, IPTV, ADSL, TV and mobile players. Since the launch of the event, over 300 projects have obtained financing (for a grand total of one billion euros) and are currently being produced or broadcast in countries all over the world.

France's SIP Animation is one of the 15 companies representing the country at the Forum. The toon shop is bringing *Astaquana: The Xtreme Wader's Legend Fish Tournament*, a 26x22 series produced in full HD Hybrid animation. Based on an original concept by Charles Barez and Nadege Giardot, the series will help bring urgent messages about the future of our planet to

young viewers.

"We wanted to create a show in which nature was treated like a full-fledged character," says Stephanie Kirchmeyer, SIP's managing director. "Threatened by the terrifying and powerful Nightmare Fish (The Omega) who tries to shatter nature's balance, nature will be saved thanks to the bravery, solidarity and humanity of our kid heroes. The show offers action, comedy and thrills: We wish to go a step further than other productions to deliver an intriguing mix between the *Harry Potter* and *Indiana Jones* series."

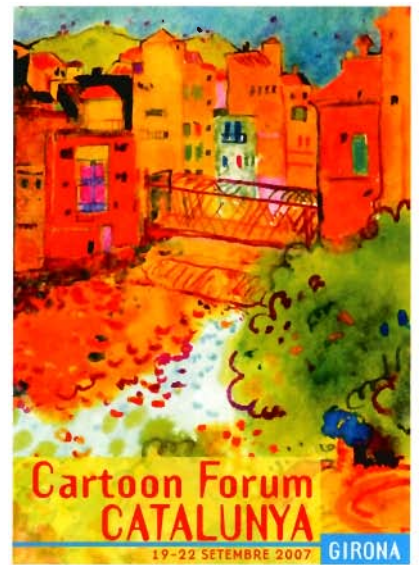
Kirchmeyer points out that although the show's main topic—fishing—is very different from other animated projects'

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—Christophe Goldberger, ICON Animation's head of sales

content—it offers an original and creative answer to young people's interest in fishing and nature in general. "The biggest challenge in creating an animated TV show for kids that will educate and entertain them is establishing and maintaining creative excellence in an environment where it is becoming more difficult to raise financing," she notes.

Spain's Screen 21 (BRB) will offer its buzzworthy new project *Angus & Cheryl* for buyers and financiers. Currently in production at the Catalonia studio, *Angus & Cheryl* is a series of 104 one and a half-minute episodes produced in high-definition 3D. The dialogue-free comedy offers a fun look at the daily clashes in any couple's relationship, and explores universal truths through



the conflicting personalities of Angus, who is very simple and direct, and Cheryl, who is complex and devious.

Barcelona-based Icon Animation (*Lola & Virginia*) will also have a strong presence during the pitching sessions. According to the company's head of marketing and sales Christophe Goldberger, the studio will launch a new series titled *Lucky Fred* at the Forum. The (52x12) 2D-animated series centers on an inventive 13-year-old and an amazing Reality Enhancement Drone (RED) which crashes into his life and changes

his world forever. "The series is a great combination of comedy and the relationships that develop amongst the show's characters," says Goldberger.

When asked about the importance of Cartoon Forum to European producers, Goldberger responds, "The Forum has been a great venue for Icon Animation's projects. We successfully launched both our shows *Lola & Virginia* and *Sandra: The Fairy-Tale Detective* at the event. It's a great platform to secure financing from European investors just before going into MIPCOM to complete the financing and investment structure." He adds, "This year the keyword is multiplatform again. You need to have a great property with built-in features which will facilitate its cross-media distribution,



RAI/Gruppo Alcini's SLASH://



SIP's Astaquant



Leon Animation's Lucky Fred



Screen 21's Angus & Cheryl



whether it be online, mobile phone or publishing."

Also riding high on the promise of new technologies is Italy's Gruppo Alcini, which is bringing a new 26x26 2D-animated series to the Forum. Co-pro-

duced by RAI Fiction, SLASH:// follows a group of adventurous kids who discover a magic stone that allows them to actually travel through the Internet. "Positive values like friendship, teamwork and creativity are emphasized in the series," says creator Sergio Manfio. "We intertwine these values with themes such as ecology, cherishing past traditions and the search for individuality in our show."

Manfio is quite open about the many challenges facing animation producers in Italy. "The major difficulty is the lack of a proper production groundwork," he explains. "By this, I mean a network that brings together producers, broadcasters, distributors and anyone else in the field with a common goal. Cohesion is the key for dealing with a changing animation market."

Guillaume Hellouin's Paris-based outfit TeamTO will attend the Forum for the second year in a row. This year's pitch is

centered on *How to Drive Everybody Crazy*, a great-looking CG-animated series about a mischievous 10-year-old boy named Angelo who offers tips on how to play jokes on family members, teachers, neighbors—or as the title promises—everyone!

"The series is based on a series of illustrated books and developed in collaboration with France 3," says Hellouin. "Created in the first-person style of sitcoms like *Malcolm in the Middle*, the project centers on Angelo and his friend Lolo as they share their pranks with the young audience. Their jokes are funny and unexpected, but they are never mean." He also mentions that the new series will be avail-

able in both a 78x5.5 package and a 78x1.5 format to make it easier to offer to TV/cable broadcasters and multiple platform outlets alike.

Although we only had the space to highlight some of the shows being presented at the event, we know from past experience that there will be a lot of creative sparks flying in the charming town of Girona. As one veteran of the cartoon business puts it, "Sure, it's a pain to sit through all these pitches for three whole days, but, hey, you have to kiss a lot of frogs to find that one prince charming among these toads." ■

A complete list of Cartoon Forum projects can be found at www.cartoon-media.be/FORUM/6_Projects.htm

Good As Gold

One of the recently added sidebars to the Cartoon Forum event is the European Assoc. of Animation Film's award for best short film. The prestigious Cartoon d'Or winner will be announced during a ceremony on Sept. 21 in Girona's Teatre Municipal. The five finalists were selected from 27 candidates that received awards from Cartoon's European partner festivals. This year's jury was composed of Hungarian director Aron Gaude (The District!) Estonian director Jano Poldma (Lotte from Gadgetville) and Televisió de Catalunya's head of children's programs Xavier Romero. The '07 nominees are:

- ★ *Life Line* by Tomek Ducki (Hungary)
- ★ *Peter & the Wolf* by Suzie Templeton (U.K.)
- ★ *The Irresistible Smile* by Ami Lindholm (Finland)
- ★ *The Pearce Sisters* by Luis Coope (U.K.)
- ★ *f.o.m.* by Daniel Gray & Tom Brown (U.K.)

