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Cartoon Forum 2008 Preview

Every year, Europe's animators, broadcasters and distributors gather for a few days of brainstorming and assessing the very best of the new animation in development. Here's a sneak preview of what to look out for at this year's Cartoon Forum.

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"Mr. Baby" centers around a 15-month-old baby who sits in his high-chair in the family kitchen and causes havoc and conflict in the family with a dry, cynical and acerbic wit seen more in a man of 50 years than 15 months.

The project has a budget of €2 million, (U.S. \$3.2 million) and is 65 percent funded. Thirty percent of that funding comes from commissioning broadcaster FR3 and 35 percent from various government subsidies and other French revenue. Xilam is seeking the remaining 35 percent at Cartoon Forum, although du Pontavice points out, "We are looking for presales and co-financing rather than co-production deals." Xilam will have three episodes available for screening in Ludwigsburg.

Also attending with a pilot is Cosgrove Hall's "Squidge and the Hardnuts." Planned as 104x5 minute episodes aimed at preschoolers, "Squidge and the Hardnuts" follows the comic adventures of Squidge and his best friend Splat who are hurled through space to Planet Hard when their own planet, Splodge, is hit by a wobblequake. Squidge and Splat are globular and stretchy, very much like the planet from which they come. By contrast, Planet Hard is angular and clunky.

Cosgrove Hall Films managing director Anthony Utley says, "We have made a conscious decision not to have anything in place as we very much wanted to launch 'Squidge and the Hardnuts' with a blank canvass at the Cartoon Forum." Underlining just how blank that canvass is, Utley goes on to reveal that "the budget for Squidge could be anything from £2-£4 million (U.S. \$4-\$8 million) depending on what our partners want." This might seem like an odd approach, but Utley explains his reasoning like this: "Cartoon Forum is a great place to launch a show. If you have a strong concept and design, it is possible to take the forum by storm, which is what happened with 'Charlie and Lola' and 'The Secret Show.' The U.K. kids market is currently very difficult. ITV is hardly commissioning anything, and almost everything at the BBC is being postponed or pushed back, so we wanted to make a big splash at Cartoon Forum."

Welsh animation house Calon, formed three years ago by the management of the late Siroil Animation, ("SuperTed," "Hilltop Hospital," "Under Milk Wood") will be at Cartoon Forum with "Abercadabra." Robin Lyons, Calon's managing director says that, "'Abercadabra' is the most magical town in Wales, and it is also home to 'The Great Cadabras,' the stage name of a group of friends who have formed a secret junior magic society and who perform under said stage name. Calon, which planned the show as 26x26 minutes, has a letter of support from S4C, the Welsh language service from Channel 4, and says Lyons, "We hope to have more interest by the time we get to Germany, where we will be looking for a co-production partner and some prebuys." With the exception of Welsh language rights, most other rights are available.

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