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Cartoon Forum 2008

At the 19th edition of the premier event for European animation, new media -- and, once again, France -- lead the way.

September 24, 2008
By Bob Swain and Ron Diamond

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A move away from longer formats toward shorter running times and new media platforms was the main trend identified in the latest crop of European animation series in development presented at this year's Cartoon Forum.

The Cartoon organization celebrated its 20th anniversary this year at what was the 19th Cartoon Forum, staged in Ludwigsburg, Germany. A total of 63 new projects were presented to broadcasters and investors with a total budget of around 300 million euros.

According to Cartoon director Marc Vandeweyer, this was the first time that the majority of projects were for series of 11 minutes and under. He believes this may be because of a growing market for new platforms -- 21 percent of projects were conceived with platforms such as cell phone, Internet or games in mind, and this was reflected by a greater number of investors from these markets attending Cartoon Forum. Vandeweyer hopes this trend will result in greater opportunities for smaller production companies and smaller countries within the European Union.

Once again, France was the top country represented, with 28 percent of all projects and half of the top 10 in terms of attendance at presentations. Germany had 17 percent of projects and two in the top 10, the U.K. came in third with 16 percent, but none in the top 10.

Over the years, Cartoon Forum has become the number one gathering place for producers, broadcasters and investors in the European animation industry. So it was a natural extension when the Cartoon Tributes were instituted three years ago. Attendees get to vote on awards to the companies or personalities that have had the most positive influence on the industry over the past year.

Producer of the Year this time was Cartoon Saloon from Ireland, a small company that caused a lot of waves with its tremendous first series *Skunk Fu* and upcoming feature debut *Brendan and the Book of Kells*. Investor/Distributor of the Year was the U.K.'s Rubber Duck Ent. -- part of the Contender Group and particularly known for its success with *Peppa Pig*. Broadcaster of the Year was France 3.

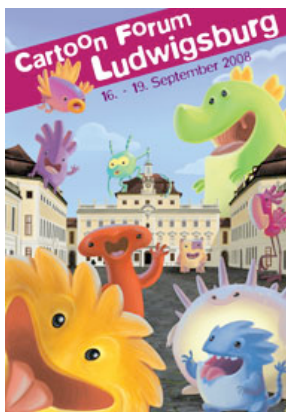
The annual Cartoon d'Or screenings and ceremony also took place, with a strong lineup of finalists nominated by partner animation festivals throughout Europe over the past year. The winner was French director Benjamin Renner with his graduation film from French animation school La Poudrière, *A Mouse's Tale*.

The top three projects of the 63 on view at the Forum in terms of the numbers at presentations were the French trio of *Mouk's World Tour* from Millimages, *Pok & Mok* from Alphanim and *Mr. Baby* from Xilam.

Mouk's World Tour is a 62x11 concept for a four- to five-year-old audience, sponsored by France 5. It follows a curious bear to different parts of the world, where he finds answers to questions in a treasure hunt, while also finding out about the inhabitants of each country and their environment.

Pok & Mok is a 78x7 series for six-to-nines in a style that features 2D characters with backgrounds and props created from digitally treated photographic scenes. It's a zany, energetic and off-the-wall treatment of environmental issues through the eyes of a boy called Mok and his furry pet Pok.

Mr. Baby is a 52x3.5 series for all ages designed for cross-media Internet and cell phone applications about a 15-month-old baby with the mind of a 50-year-old man.



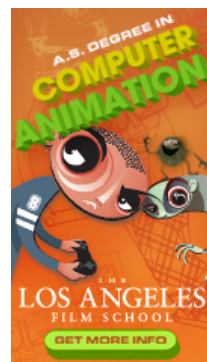
At the 19th Cartoon Forum, a new trend was unveiled: for the first time a majority of projects were for short series, reflecting the growing importance of alternative platforms.



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It was the cross-media applications that scored big this year. Immediately after the big three in terms of popularity came a big surprise for the organizers. *Plankton Invasion* is a 52x6 cross-media concept from Belgian outfit Tinkertree, which wasn't even chosen by the selection committee. But when the producers persisted and sent in their trailer anyway, the organizers decided to add it to their list. The investors still didn't bite when advance details were sent out, so the presentation was staged in the smallest available room. But on the day, almost 200 people enthusiastically squeezed in for the show.

Badly Drawn Roy was the latest offering from Irish cross-media specialist Jam Media. Founded six years ago, the company has already completed four seasons of *Pick Me* for RTE -- a show where kids get to star in the animation by sending pictures of themselves to be dropped into an episode. *Funky Fables* -- presented two years ago at Cartoon Forum -- has just started airing on BBC with a similar concept. But producer John Rice says that this time around that idea has been turned on its head.

"The stuff we've done to date has been a matter of putting real kids into a cartoon world," he says. "But *Badly Drawn Roy* is the exact opposite -- putting a cartoon kid into a real world. It's inspired by a short film we made in 2006 about an animated character who couldn't get work, so his mates all have a whip round to get him cleaned up and sent to Hollywood."

Producer of the Year was awarded to Cartoon Saloon from Ireland for its first series *Skunk Fu* and upcoming feature debut *Brendan and the Book of Kells* (above). © Cartoon Saloon, Les Armateurs and Vivi Film.

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The BBC's Jesse Cleverly saw it and believed it had potential as a series and is now backing production of 13 half hours set for delivery next August.

Ireland's Magma Prods. pitched a touching series of childlike animations of interviews with school kids called *Just A Thought*, based on the 1999 Oscar-nominated short by Karsten Kilerich and Stefan Fjeldmark of Denmark's A Film. That film talked to children about attitudes toward death, but two further pilots have now been made for German broadcaster WDR on *Love and Rich and Poor*. The idea is to extend this into a 26x5 series on a range of themes.

Together with its German subsidiaries Ulysses and Pictorion Magma, Magma also pitched a new preschool show. *Dr. Ella* is a 52x13 CGI concept, which aims to do for doctors what *Bob the Builder* did for construction workers. Magma's Ralph Christians believes kids will actually want to be Ella, just like they wanted to be Bob.

It was a strong year for preschool shows, with the UK's Mackinnon and Saunders following up success with the older-skewed *Frankenstein's Cat* with a move into the youngest audience with *Rah Rah*. Described as a noisy preschool series that helps children find their inner voice, the 52x7 series follows Rah Rah the lion and his animal friends on adventures in the Jingly Jangly Jungle.

Leading U.K. studio Cosgrove Hall also had a new preschool concept in the shape of the 104x5.5 *Squidge and the Hardnuts*. Developed from the premise that it's OK to be different, it features soft CGI characters Squidge and Splat in the hard 3D-modelled world of the Hardnuts.

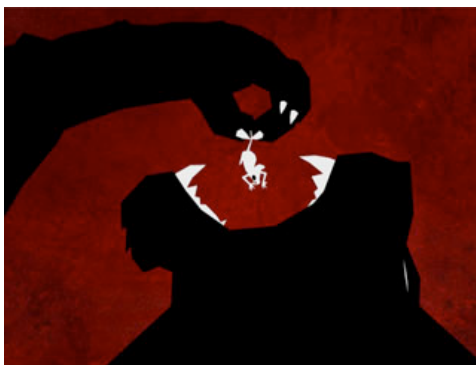
The trailer for *Picnic with Pie*, from Submarine in the Netherlands and Belgium's Walking the Dog, managed to turn a beautiful classic picture book into stunning animation with 2D rendering of CGI models. And the concept for the 26x4 series is equally original. The book features 26 animals and a mystery regarding what happens to pies baked by Mr. and Mrs. Dog. The series will feature common elements, telling the same story over and over, but from the perspective of a different animal each time. The idea is to mirror the process of re-reading a favourite book with a parent.

Myo and Ga kicked up a lot of interest with its fast-paced environmental tale of a rabbit, a chicken and a turtle trying to save the God of the Sea. Produced by Imira Ent. in Spain at Vooz studio and written by British comedian Rebecca Stevens, the show is planned as 78x7 series for kids six to nine.

Colin and Cumberland is a 26x13 CGI comedy adventure for six-to-nines from Axis Animation in Scotland. Director Dana Dorian explains, "It's about a man and his dog. He's an optimistic glass-half-full kind of person. But his dog is just the opposite. He's grumpy and mean. There's an underlying respect for each other, but the dog doesn't like to admit it."

Welsh studio Calon continued its annual tradition of putting on a show for its pitch at Cartoon Forum. And with this year's concept concerning a gang of junior magicians, MD Robin Lyons was in his element as a mind-reading host. *Abercadraba* is a 52x11 series for six-to-nines that will teach kids at home one magic trick during each episode.

Brown & Sticky Productions from the U.K. presented *Adrian's Wall*, a 26x11 CGI comedy show about the Romans in Britain, featuring female lead Nicetosea. Director Sarah Bird says it's



French director Benjamin Renner won the Cartoon d'Or for his graduation film *A Mouse's Tale*. © La Poudrière School.



It was a strong year for preschool shows at Cartoon Forum. Leading U.K. studio Cosgrove Hall presented *Squidge and the Hardnuts*, developed from the premise that it's OK to be different. Courtesy of Cartoon Forum.

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aimed at an older eight-to-12 demographic, with a sophisticated brand of humour.

Next year sees three new venues for the Cartoon organization. Following 10 years hosted at the Babelsberg Studios in Potsdam, Germany, the animation feature film event Cartoon Movie moves to the French city of Lyon March 4-6.

Cartoon Forum itself will be staged September 22-25 in Stavanger, Norway. Then in October, the first-ever edition of Cartoon Connection will aim to bring together animation professionals from different continents with a special event in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Bob Swain is an animation scriptwriter based at Sidewinder Films in the U.K. He has attended every edition of Cartoon Forum since it began in 1990.

Ron Diamond is the co-founder and publisher of AWN and the owner of animation production house Acme Filmworks.

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