PIXR’S
INCRECIBLES 2
BRAD BIRD MAKES A HEROIC RETURN

SONY’S
HOTEL TRANSYLVANIA 3
GENNDY TARTAKOVSKY TAKES THE HELM

BILBY & BIRD KARMA
DREAMWORKS ANIMATION SHORTS MAKE THEIR DEBUT

NINA PALEY’S
SEDER-MASOCHISM
A BIBLICAL EPIC YOU CAN DANCE TO
Publisher’s Letter
6 First-Time Director Domee Shi Takes a Bao in New Pixar Short
8 Brad Bird Makes a Heroic Return to Animation with Incredibles 2
12 Genndy Tartakovsky Takes the Helm of Hotel Transylvania 3: Summer Vacation
17 Nina Paley’s Biblical Epic Seder-Masochism
21 Masaaki Yuasa Speaks in Many Colors
18 News DreamWorks Shorts Program Is for the Birds (and Marsupials)
28 Interview with Annecy Artistic Director Marcel Jean
31 Interview with Mifa Head Mickael Marin
33 Women in Animation to Receive Fourth Mifa Animation Industry Award
26 Special Programs at Annecy Celebrate Music in Animation
35 Drinking Deep from the Spring of Creativity: Brazil in the Spotlight at Annecy
37 Political, Social and Family Issues Stand Out in a Strong Line-Up of Feature Films
39 Annecy 2018: The Short and Short of It
39 Marc James Roels and Emma De Swaef Return with This Magnificent Cake
41 Cats & Peachtopia Looks at Father-Son Relationships from a Feline Perspective
43 The Moneygoround: Liu Jian’s Have a Nice Day
45 Unconditional Love: Julia Pett Journeys to Summer Camp Island
46 DreamWorks Animation Television Spreads its Wings
50 The Moneygoround: Liu Jian’s Have a Nice Day
54 Interview with Warner Bros. Animation Artistic Director Marcel Jean
56 CG Global Entertainment Offers a Total Animation Solution
59 Let’s Get Digital: A Global Entertainment Media Ecosystem Is on the Rise
61 Golden Eggplant Media Brings Creators and Investors Together to Produce Quality Animated Products
62 After 20 Years of Excellence, Original Force Awakens
64 Dragon Monster Brings Traditional Chinese Culture to Schoolchildren
66 Dreamers Studio Takes an Innovative Approach to Animated Movie Marketing, Merchandising and Distribution
68 Silkroad Provides Integrated Visual Services for a Booming Industry
73 KreBiFF 2018: A One-of-a-Kind Festival in Southeast Asia
75 Giggles from Asia...
A

s we gather again for the largest festival dedicated to the world of animation, the scope of the Annecy International Animated Film Festival continues to grow. With an ever-increasing number of big studio features, shorts and series; the incredible work of a diversity of indie producers; and the latest VR/AR and immersive media productions, the animation industry is more expansive and vibrant than ever. And once again, creative director Marcel Jean and Mifa director Michael Martin have done a superlative job of bringing together a truly representative sampling of this creative abundance in one beautiful place, and ANIMATIONWorld Magazine is again proud to be an integral part of the celebration.

With some 25 features screening in and out of competition, as well as a number of special events, this year’s festival is a delight for fans of long-form animation. In our cover story, we talk to Brad Bird about Incredibles 2, the long-awaited sequel to his 2004 hit, which premieres at Annecy on June 15. We also talk to director Genndy Tartakovsky about his return to helm the third entry in the wildly successful Hotel Transylvania franchise, and take an in-depth look at Nina Paley’s highly personal biblical epic Seder-Masochism and Marc James Roels and Emma De Swaard’s anti-colonial epic This Magnificent Cake. Directors Liu Jian, Masaki Vara, and Cary Wang talk about their latest features, while Joe Strike provides a rundown of all the feature films in competition.

This year’s guest country is Brazil, whose animation industry has experienced explosive growth over the past decade. Brazil-themed screenings, curated by the founders of Anima Mundi, include three programs of contemporary shorts, the best of Brazilian TV series, a documentary about Brazilian animation, and special showings of Ale Abreu’s Boy and the World and Luiz Bolognesi’s Rio 2096: A Story of Love and Fury. For those interested in the business side of things, Brazil will be invading Mifa with some 30 companies and more than 200 delegates.

Animated TV series are big and only getting bigger, with many major studios continuing to expand their offerings. Our stories on DreamWorks Animation Television and Warner Bros. Animation offer insider looks at two of these. We also talk to British animator Julia Pott about her new Cartoon Network series, Summer Camp Island. DreamWorks Animation also has a new shorts program, and their first two productions, Bird Karma and Bilby, will open and close the festival. In our shorts coverage, we also preview some of the outstanding films in this year’s competition, talk to first-time director Domee Shi about her new Pixar short Bao, and interview the creators at Google Spotlight Stories about their latest VR projects, which will be—that’s right—spotlighted at the festival.

We also have pieces on festival poster designer Pascal Blanchet, Mifa Animation Industry Award recipient Women in Animation, and this year’s special “Music in Animation” program.

So what are you waiting for? Start reading and enjoy ANIMATIONWorld’s celebration of all things Animated @ Annecy!

See you by the lake.

Dean Sarto
Co-Founder & Publisher, Animation World Network – AWN.com
A n aging Chinese mother suffering from empty-nest syndrome gets another chance at motherhood when one of her dumplings springs to life in Disney-Pixar’s new animated short, Bao. The film, directed by Domee Shi, will screen with the company’s other shorts: Incredibles 2, which launches on June 15.

The first Pixar short directed by a woman explores loneliness, loss and the magic of dumplings.

BY SCOTT LEHANE

Shi, who has worked on such films as Inside Out, The Good Dinosaur, Incredibles 2 and Toy Story 4, drew inspiration for Bao from her upbringing as an only child in a Chinese-Canadian family in Toronto’s bustling Chinatown. She explained that bao has two meanings in Chinese: said one way, it means “dumpling,” but said another way, it means “treasure” or “something precious.”

“Ever since I was little, my mother has always treated me like her precious little baby dumpling, always watching over me, making sure I was safe, making sure I had a good education and got into a good college,” says Shi. “Growing up, she’d always make dumplings for me from scratch. Food was how my mom showed her love, and we’ve always had this special connection making dumplings together on weekends and holidays and Chinese New Year.”

Shi is the first female director to bring a story to Pixar, which has an in-house professional development program that allows employees to pitch ideas for shorts.

“I initially pitched the story to Pete Docter, the director of Inside Out, just to get his feedback,” says Shi. “But his response was so positive—he encouraged me to pitch it to the studio. With his support and feedback, Bao got green-lit as the next Pixar theatrical short in 2015. I couldn’t believe it got picked. It was amazing.”

Producer Becky Neiman explained that the shorts program at Pixar is a place to try out new technology, as well as new leadership opportunities, and Bao is no exception. It’s not only Shi’s first time as a director, but Neiman’s debut as a producer, and Rona Liu’s as production designer.

Shi recalls that “after it got green-lit, I really started to dive deep into the story. I always knew I wanted to create a story about a lonely empty-nester mom who goes through this crazy dumpling fantasy in order to process her real son moving away. The core of that story was always the same, but in earlier versions of the story, I had more characters.”

She explained that drawing heat maps—angle images that capture crucial story points—helped her refine the story and figure out the pacing of the whole film.

Then, as she progressed to storyboard—she would send them to editor Katherine Ringgold. “We would work together in her dark office to cut the storyboards together with temporary sound effects and music to give us a rough version of the short called a story reel. It’s kind of like the blueprint for what the short ends up being.”

According to Shi, these story reels are very useful in seeing the big picture and getting feedback on what’s working and not working. “After we have a basic idea of what the short’s going to be, we move on to other departments down the pipeline, the layout and animation,” she adds. “Animation is especially critical in Bao, because it’s really where these characters come to life.”

Shi reported that she was particularly influenced by Japanese animation, like My Neighbor Totoro, as she gathered up examples of animation styles as references for animation supervisor Juan Carlos Navarro. “I loved how squishy their character looked, and how pressed their expressions are,” she says. “We drew inspiration mostly from 2D animation, which became a challenge in 3D because of how big the characters’ heads are, and how exaggerated their limbs are.”

But, says Shi, as they were going into animation, they soon realized that some of the expressions that worked well in 2D were not right for 3D at all. “3D is its own medium,” she explains. “Design elements that might look good on paper look really strange when you turn them into 3D shapes. Cartoon eyes look like they’re popping out of a character’s head. And so we really had to work closely with the animators and modelers to translate our designs into 3D.”

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Shi added that they also struggled to bring him into sculpting as quickly as possible, to see how that cuteness would translate into a 3D space. And one thing we discovered early on is that his arms actually cannot reach his mouth. And that gave us a lot of information and helped us identify certain problems that we might run into down the road in animation.”

She added that they also struggled to make sure the mother’s charm comes through in the final film. “We did a lot of research trips to Chinatown and found that we were seeing a lot of bold fashion choices, and that’s when we realized that we can actually use Mom’s outfits—her colors and patterns—to support her emotional journey throughout the film.”

Shi said this short be fun to watch, but also an accurate portrayal of a Chinese mom’s life.” concludes Shi. “And I think the crew did an amazing job of both.”

Scott Lehane is a Toronto-based journalist who has covered the film and TV industry for over 25 years.
BY DAN SARTO

Pixar’s most beloved and "super" family, the Parrs, blasts onto screens once again with the release of Incredibles 2, director Brad Bird’s follow-up to his 2004 Oscar-winning animated superhero adventure. Incredibles 2 will open in theaters in the U.S. and have its French premiere at Annecy on June 15. It will not be a good day for raccoons.

Much has changed at Pixar and in the animation business since 2004, when Bob, Helen, Violet, Dash and Jack-Jack first delighted audiences worldwide with their superhuman powers and quintessentially human frailties. For starters, the studio is now part of the Walt Disney Company, no longer the upstart juggernaut that defined CG animation. In addition, the studio is home again to prodigal sons Bird and Andrew Stanton (Finding Nemo, Finding Dory), both of whom returned to write and direct sequels to hugely successful animated films after leaving Pixar for the bright lights and big city of the live-action world.

THE POWER OF FAMILY

The success of the first Incredibles movie can be credited in large part to an aha moment that Bird had more than 20 years ago, long before he joined Pixar as its first outside director. “When I first had the idea,” he recalls, “I went to a comic book shop thinking ‘I gotta think up new super powers.’ And after about an hour I realized every power has been done by somebody somewhere. Everything had been done. So I thought that I’m not very interested in the powers. What interests me is the idea of having a family and having there be a reason to hide their powers.”

As anyone who has seen and enjoyed the end result of Bird’s deliberations knows, his insight was sound, and led to the highest opening-weekend gross for a Pixar film up to that time. Fourteen years later, Incredibles 2 picks up right where the original story left off, a decision also rooted in Bird’s interest in the characters’ interpersonal relationships. “I thought about aging everybody the way everybody does and then I thought, ‘No, that sucks.’ The Parr family dynamic changes if the characters age. I’m not interested in a college-age Jack-Jack. It stays more iconic if everyone situates themselves. I was on the first eight seasons of The Simpsons and that’s worked out rather well for them, so I’ll stick with that.

Bird also explains that the long hiatus was due to his wanting to wait until he had the right story to tell. “What interests me is the idea of family.”

Brad Bird makes a heroic return to animation with the incredible INCREDIBLES 2

The two-time Oscar winner continues the adventures of everyone’s favorite superhero family in the long-awaited sequel to Pixar’s 2004 hit.
“Any film that is ambitious has pain. It just comes with the territory.”

There are countless stories of hard shoots on beloved films, with directors and crews working long hours to make something great. But the Pain of Pixar: The Long Road to Incredibles 2 tells the story of how one team overcame significant challenges to create a film that is ambitious and visually stunning.

The long-awaited Incredibles 2 picks up right where the original left off. We follow the Parr family as they navigate their way through the chaos of being superheroes. But this time, the stakes are higher than ever, and the Parrs must put their family first.

Ultimately, for Bird, the challenges of making a film as visually and narratively sophisticated as Incredibles 2 are worth it when he sees the great work a dedicated and motivated production team can accomplish under his direction. “Any film that is ambitious has pain. It just comes with the territory.”

But the tight schedule also forced Bird to look in main story elements much earlier in production than is normal for a Pixar film. “We were talking about a lot of things that were usually further down the road. That’s not a comfortable or usual way to work, because you kind of have to over-discuss things early. But it also helps everybody get clear. And then, when you get further down the line, things move more swiftly.”

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“The original Incredibles was supposed to come after Cars,” he remembers. “It was gonna be Yen Sid, Cars, then Incredibles. Our reels came together a little earlier than Cars, so we moved up. The same situation happened here with Toy Story 4.’” Bird also dealt with a highly compressed production schedule when he took the reins on Ratatouille after Jan Pinkava left the production in 2005. “When I got involved,” he says, “there was a little over a year and a half between my start and the finished film. And we only retained two lines of dialogue and two shots from all of the previous versions that had been done. So it was like running in front of a train, laying down track, like Wallace and Gromit.”

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CRUISE CONTROL:
GENNDY TARTAKOVSKY TAKES THE HELM OF HOTEL TRANSYLVANIA 3: SUMMER VACATION

The acclaimed director returns to cowrite and direct the third installment of Sony Pictures Animation’s ghoulish adventure comedy.

BY DAN SARTO

In 2011, after many years stalled in development, the troubled Hotel Transylvania was taken over by acclaimed director Genndy Tartakovsky—the sixth director attached to the film. The following year, the film took everyone by surprise by generating $358 million at the global box office against a reported budget of $85 million. Hotel Transylvania 2, also directed by Tartakovsky, fared even better in 2015, grossing $473 million worldwide.

Yet, despite the box office success, Tartakovsky proclaimed that he was done with the franchise. Subsequent work with Cartoon Network reviving his award-winning, immensely popular hit animated series Samurai Jack made him even more determined to work solely on his own material. “The Samurai Jack experience was so rewarding because I could literally do whatever I wanted,” he notes. “The ratings were amazing, and the response was so great, I realized, ‘Yeah, I've gotta just do my own stuff.’”

Immersed with requests to direct other creators’ work, Tartakovsky said no, until Sony Pictures Animation made him an offer he couldn’t refuse—or, rather, embraced his idea of setting the film on a luxury cruise ship. “Honestly, it was that idea of the cruise that made me reconsider,” he says. “I actually went on a big family cruise, and ideas started talking to me. ‘Oh yeah, that feels really good. It feels very natural to put them in this setting.’ And I’ve always wanted to do a Dracula-falling-in-love story, because it felt like it was time for him to have a different arc. After doing Samurai Jack, it felt like a good fit.”

“We wrote the script to spotlight the animation. All the gags are more physical—there’s a different feeling to the film.”

The gags fly fast and furiously in the third iteration of the wildly successful Hotel Transylvania franchise.

A HAPPY MARRIAGE

While SPA President Kristine Belson loved the idea and was ready to go forward, Tartakovsky needed to know he would have the creative control he required to make the film properly. He explains, “While Adam [Sandler, the voice of Count Dracula and a creative force on the first two films] is still the voice of Drac, he wasn’t involved as much creatively on this film. Adam is amazing, very talented, and really funny. But it’s frustrating when sometimes I don’t get to do the gag that I want to do, when other people’s sensibility is different than mine. It’s like any marriage, or collaboration—creatively, there are ups and downs. So SPA set up a situation that was very favorable to me, and I decided, ‘I’ve got a really good story idea, the situation is different, so I’ll do it.’”

Creative control ultimately meant Tartakovsky assumed the writing chores, something he didn’t do on the first two films. “I wrote the script with Michael McCullers, and when we wrote it, we wrote it to spotlight the animation. So, all the gags are more physical. There’s a different feeling to the film. I was able to control things and make the film much more from an animator’s perspective.”

Writing as well as directing actually made Tartakovsky’s job simpler, since he was able to lock in the main story early and stick with it for the entire production. “There’s a very specific style to my storytelling,” he explains, “and because I was able to set the story up early and get it signed off on, things were easier. We had the basic structure of the movie early. Then, we just changed some locations, always playing with pacing, playing with sequences...
ANIMATION-DRIVEN APPROACH

The director appreciated that Hotel Transylvania 3 gave him a chance to focus his attention, and production resources, on a more physical, cartoony style of animation. “Many of the animators worked on the first two films, which was very helpful. By having more scenes that are physical-gag-driven, and more visual, you have a chance for the animation to shine. Like, rather than sitting in the car talking, or sitting at a table, there’s a dancing sequence or a swimming sequence. It makes it a whole different experience.”

The director was also able to enlist one of his long-time collaborators, Scott Wills (Samurai Jack, Clone Wars, Sym-Bionic Titan) as the production designer, which enhanced the creative dynamic and meant the animation could be pushed more than ever. “With him, I knew we could push the look, we could push the color, we could push everything, and have this be a really cool next chapter of Hotel Transylvania.”

Tartakovsky believes that Hotel Transylvania 3 is the kind of broad animated comedy many big animation studios have moved away from in their quest for more “family-friendly” entertainment. He explains, “I always talk about tone in animation. In live-action comedy, you can have a movie like When Harry Met Sally or Airplane or Dumb and Dumber. Those are all very different comedies, all equally good. But, for some reason, in animation, you have to have this formulaic comedy, most likely because of the success of all the Disney and Pixar films. But we have a much broader comedy. It’s sillier. It’s more lighthearted. We don’t take ourselves too seriously. If you can get like five to ten amazing laughs, and you’re watching a sequence and smiling, then it’s fun, and it’s money well spent. Sometimes, you need a little Three Stooges to balance all the drama and heartache in life.”

Ultimately, Tartakovsky acknowledges that SPA’s trust in his creative decision-making means the film’s success, or lack thereof, rests firmly on his shoulders. “There’s a lot more pressure on this one, because I am responsible for writing it with Michael,” he concedes. “So, if it fails, I can confidently say it’s my fault. But at the same time, if it succeeds, then I can confidently say, all the decisions were correct! Yes, it was a challenge do a third film, to make it feel fresh and new, but at the same time, retain the core and everything that was successful about the first two. But, I’m super-excited, and very happy, about this film.”

Extremism in the pursuit of big laughs is no vice in Genndy Tartakovsky’s wacky high-seas comedy.
Having plumbed the depths of the Indian Ramayana in her 2008 feature Sita Sings the Blues, filmmaker Nina Paley sets her sights closer to home (cultural heritage-wise) in her new film Seder-Masochism. A wild ride through the traditional Passover Seder, this splendid 2D animation offers a cornucopia of rich graphics set to musical themes ranging from liturgical to pop, the whole as profoundly humorous and intellectually challenging as the best of Monty Python.

Knitting together the visuals is an informal dialogue between the filmmaker and her terminally ill, atheist Jewish father, who is still annoyed that Paley dropped out of university and isn’t earning a steady income. “He was just a frightened father worried about his kids,” says Paley. But in the biblical context of the film, it isn’t always clear exactly which patriarch Paley is referring to—especially since Paley’s father is depicted here as a God-like figure arising from a U.S. dollar bill.

As an artist, Paley doesn’t shy from raising thorny issues and generating conflict. In Sita Sings the Blues, her irreverence opened her to charges of unwarranted cultural appropriation. While she felt strongly about the material and identified honestly with it, critics accused her of exploiting deeply meaningful elements from a culture with which she had no connection.

No such conflict is inherent in Seder-Masochism, which began as a search for meaning in a ritual event familiar to Paley from her childhood. She was also attracted to these stories because, as part of the Old Testament, they are foundational to Christianity and Islam, as well as Judaism.
DANCING GODDESSES

After working on the film for three years, Paley had much of the Exodus story animated, but found she could not identify strongly with any of the characters in the original text. She wanted to incorporate a strong feminine presence, so she searched the texts, the myths, the commentaries, and the commentaries on the commentaries. Where are the Jewish goddesses? In the biblical narrative, there is almost no mention of them.

At that point, she turned to other sources for inspiration, including The Creation of Patriarchy by Gerda Lerner and The Language of the Goddess by Marija Gimbutas. While these books were illuminating, Paley decided she wasn’t comfortable re-conceiving the film from a radical feminist position and chose to take a break, which wound up lasting several years.

Only very recently did the pieces fall into place. Seeking something spiritual and existential that she could relate to that was also supported by archaeology, Paley conceived of an introductory sequence based on 30,000-year-old stone goddess carvings. Redrawing the carvings as vector images in the 2D animation software Moho, it dawned on her that Moho supports rasterized images. She taught herself how to animate the bitmaps, and once she got them dancing, the pieces of the narrative began to come together.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the most endearing characters in the film are not the patriarchs, but these dancing goddesses. Animating them to the gospel standard “(Give Me) That Old Time Religion,” Paley has them bopping in and out of the story, giving her revisionist narrative an overall structure, as well as a delicious twist.

SMASHING THE IDOLS

Paley brings in another goddess element by re-imagining the idol-making at the foot of Mount Sinai. Instead of a calf, the molten gold takes the form of the ancient Egyptian deity Hathor, a fertile woman with the head of a cow. Was it she whom the Israelites were dreaming of while Moses climbed Mount Sinai in search of laws and rules? It’s an interesting and provocative thesis, an invitation to debate, which of course is what the Seder is all about.

As if all of this were not enough food for thought, Paley also challenges us on the issue of terrorism, finding a parallel between twenty-first century extremists destroying priceless artifacts and the smashing of idols, as dictated in Exodus. To add to the cognitive dissonance, Paley sets this scene to the ’70s pop hit “The Things We Do For Love” by the band 10cc.

The film’s most affecting narrative thread comes from the recorded conversations Paley has with her gravely ill father. In these sequences, Paley visualizes herself as a small goat—a loaded image, considering the many references to the sacrificing of goats in the Bible. Her father, in his dollar bill skin and long flowing beard, presides in fatherly fashion over a family Seder table. Cultural rather than religious Jews, her extended family used the Seder to tell the exodus story and argue about which rituals were morally proper to follow and which should be omitted in the name of compassion. The father-daughter conversation, and bits of family history that Paley interposes, imbue the film with a poignant personal component that grounds the more outrageous and whimsical elements.

Visually, the film offers a profusion of delights, with every scene providing its own pleasures. Among these are the marvelous use of light and dark as characters move from brightness and life to shadow and death; Escher-like negative-positive space reversals and illusions; and the remarkable dancing Venus of Willendorf figurines, which appear only briefly, but are a joy to watch. Also, if you are not too busy tapping your toes or snapping your fingers to Louis Armstrong’s rendition of “Go Down Moses,” you might notice that the bouncing ball in some of the shots is actually tracking vowels and consonants on the wall of hieroglyphs behind the central characters, spelling out the English words phonetically.

Coming in at just over an hour, Seder-Masochism is so full of visual, intellectual and emotional stimulation that it seems much shorter. In its own way, it’s something of a Passover miracle.

Like a good Seder, Nina Paley’s biblical epic is a stimulating provocation that invites debate.

Author of the “Ambling Around” blog on Animation World Network, Sharon Katz is an Ottawa-based visual artist working in animation.
MASAAKI YUASA SPEAKS IN MANY COLORS

The fearless multi-award-winning Japanese director embraces all of animation’s many possibilities.

BY CHRIS ROBINSON

In 2017, Masaaki Yuasa, already something of a cult figure in the animation scene, added substantially to that reputation by releasing not one, but two, stunning and widely acclaimed animated features: Lu Over the Wall and Night is Short, Walk on Girl. The former — about a displaced young boy who befriends a local mermaid — grabbed the Cristal for Best Feature Film at the 2017 Annecy International Animation Festival, while the latter — set during a seemingly endless evening of insane alcohol consumption in Kyoto, where a young university student creates some “chance” encounters to win over a woman — took home the Grand Prize for Animated Feature at the 2017 Ottawa International Animation Festival. Both films have been picked up for distribution in North America by animation powerhouse GKIDS.

The contrast between these two love stories couldn’t have been much greater; yet anyone familiar with Yuasa’s work — which includes short films and TV series, along with the cult favorite feature film Mind Game (2004) — probably took the disparate themes in stride. Bursting with visual energy, rapid-fire color patterns, sudden shifts in character design, and elastic character movements, Yuasa’s style might be described as a kaleidoscope of color and movement. This was certainly the case for his two latest releases, which are visually intense and captivatingly dynamic.

Lu Over the Wall (2017) is a fantasy fairy tale set in a small coastal town where a young boy named Jiro becomes friends with a mermaid named Mako. The film is a visually stunning work that features a unique color scheme for each scene, with each scene in the film featuring a different color palette. The film was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Animated Feature.

Night is Short, Walk on Girl (2017) is a surrealistic romance set in Kyoto, Japan, during a seemingly endless evening of alcohol consumption. The film follows a young university student named Kyo, who creates some “chance” encounters to win over a woman. The film is notable for its detailed and realistic animation, as well as its use of color and light to create a sense of mood and atmosphere.

Yuasa’s work is often characterized by its use of surrealism and dreamlike imagery, as well as its focus on themes of identity, relationships, and personal growth. His films are often praised for their unique visual style and their ability to evoke a sense of emotion and wonder in the viewer.

Despite the contrast between his two latest films, Yuasa’s work is often praised for its coherence and consistency. His films are often characterized by a sense of narrative flow and a deep exploration of the human condition. He is known for his use of color and light, as well as his ability to create a sense of mood and atmosphere in his films.

Yuasa’s latest releases, Lu Over the Wall and Night is Short, Walk on Girl, are testament to his continued creativity and talent as an animator. His work continues to be a source of inspiration and wonder for audiences around the world.
Yuasa's style is like a fusion of Tex Avery, Salvador Dali and Soren Kierkegaard.

Japanese director Masaaki Yuasa has won multiple awards for Lu Over the Wall and Night is Young, Walk on Girl.

A college student pursues the girl of his dreams during a seemingly endless night in Masanuki Inamura’s Night is Short, Walk on Girl.
The 2016 transition from a publicly owned company to part of the Comcast-NBCUniversal family was rough and tumble for DreamWorks Animation. Gone was founder Jeffrey Katzenberg and in came a new wave of management. Among them was a new president of feature animation, Chris deFaria, tasked with managing the studio’s feature slate, which included sure-fire hits like How to Train Your Dragon 3 and less certain projects like The Croods 2 and Larrikins.

When both The Croods 2 and Larrikins were canceled, deFaria needed something to boost the morale of an idled creative workforce. While he recognized that making blockbuster features was essential for the studio’s bottom line, he also knew that an animation studio is deep down a creative endeavor.

“Our competitive edge going forward was going to be how innovative was our storytelling, how innovative was our technology, and how committed were we to growing new artists and supporting some of the great artists we already had working there,” he says. “It didn’t take long to realize that a shorts program would do just that.”

A new shorts program opened, with everyone at the studio eligible to pitch. Twenty-eight projects came in, and the first two finished have earned the honor of bookending the 2018 Annecy International Animation Festival. Bird Karma, directed by William Salazar, will open the festival; closing it is Bilby, director William Salazar.

NEW DREAMWORKS SHORTS PROGRAM IS FOR THE BIRDS (AND MARSUPIALS)

The program’s first productions—Bird Karma and Bilby—will open and close this year’s Annecy International Animation Festival.

BY TOM MCLEAN

The beauty of 2D animation

Bird Karma began life more than 20 years ago, when Salazar made a minute of animation of a bird dancing to tribal music—just for fun. When the shorts program was announced, he boarded out a story to go with the animation and pitched it as a short.

“It wasn’t a pitch; he played us a reel,” says Jeffrey Hermann, the producer of Bird Karma and the overall shorts program. “It was gorgeous, even in that early stage, and we just wanted to help finish it right.”

A new shorts program opened, with everyone at the studio eligible to pitch. Twenty-eight projects came in, and the first two finished have earned the honor of bookending the 2018 Annecy International Animation Festival. Bird Karma, directed by William Salazar, will open the festival; closing it is Bilby, director Pierre Perifel, J.P. Sans and Liron Topaz.

THE BEAUTY OF 2D ANIMATION

Bird Karma began life more than 20 years ago, when Salazar made a minute of animation of a bird dancing to tribal music—just for fun. When the shorts program was announced, he boarded out a story to go with the animation and pitched it as a short.

“It wasn’t a pitch; he played us a reel,” says Jeffrey Hermann, the producer of Bird Karma and the overall shorts program. “It was gorgeous, even in that early stage, and we just wanted to help finish it right.”

Told over richly toned watercolor textures, Salazar’s film features a long-legged bird that becomes enamored of a gloriously colored fish. When he finally captures and eats his elusive quarry, the karmic consequences prove highly unfortunate for him.

The short has a classic 2D look—there are ink and paint credits, folks!—and the rough, sketchy style is something Salazar says he has always admired. “As soon as [animation] was cleaned up, it lost something for me,” he says. “Keeping it rough allows the movie to have this handmade look, and that’s really important.”

The studio had to create a pipeline for the short because it no longer had one for 2D animation, says Hermann. Despite the handmade look, the film is produced digitally, with the backgrounds painted on paper and then scanned into Photoshop. TVPaint was used for the animation, and Adobe After Effects for the rest. “Every time there was something that looked CG, we tried to make it look more handmade,” Salazar says.

The Indian music Salazar animated the short to turned out to be problematic. “Our intention was to try to acquire the rights for that piece of music, and we weren’t able to,” says Hermann. “We had to replace it, and we were nervous because it had to be a different piece of music, but it had to do the exact same job.”

From top: Bilby directors Pierre Perifel, J.P. Sans and Liron Topaz.

“Every time there was something that looked CG, we tried to make it look more handmade.”
LIFE AFTER LARRIKINS

Bilby evolved directly out of the canceled Larrikins feature, on which Perifel, Sans and Topaz had been animators. It was a painful process to go through, Perifel says, but the shorts program gave them a way to re-channel their energy and ideas.

“We felt that the characters were so appealing and had so much potential,” says Topaz. “And one of the things we were thinking about is how can we basically give a metaphor of what happened to us.”

Bilby is about a small Australian marsupial trying to survive in the harsh desert of the Outback. When a fluffy, defenseless chick shows up, Bilby saves it from a predator—only to find himself having to repeatedly defend his new friend from a wave of attackers, concluding with a climactic confrontation with an eagle.

The animators decided to pitch late in the process, with only two weeks before the deadline. So they found a room in DreamWorks’ campus and started brainstorming. “We did not leave this room for probably two weeks, until we pretty much had the whole thing boarded,” says Sans.

They worked on a consensus basis, ensuring that all three were in agreement on everything. Their entry resembled an animatic more than a pitch, and was the first project chosen to go into production, with the artists given full creative freedom.

“Short films don’t have as much scrutiny as the features,” says Perifel. “So we were left very free to tell the story the way we wanted to.”

When others saw the passion the directors were putting into the project, they wanted to join in. Among them was producer Kelly Cooney, another Larrikins orphan, who handled the technical issues involved with Bilby.

“It was really kind of an amazing experience how the new technology and the artists all kind of came together,” Cooney says. “The results speak for themselves.”

“Bird Karma has been making festival rounds, something DreamWorks plans to do with all its shorts. Of the 26 original pitches, eight are in some form of production and the studio plans to roll out a couple per year for the next few years.

But the Annecy screenings will be the program’s arrival, and deFaria is thrilled to launch with so high-profile a platform. “It’s an acknowledgement of the accomplishment,” he says. “It’s also really an opportunity for our artists to be among their peers and show off a little bit about what we can do.”

Tom McLean has been writing for years about animation from a secret base in Los Angeles.

Fons world premieres of highly anticipated animated features, to a bumper crop of exceptional shorts, to a trove of historical and contemporary treasures from this year’s guest country Brazil, the 2018 Annecy International Animated Film Festival offers something for every taste and enthusiasm. Whether you’re a veteran or a first-time attendee of the world’s largest animation festival, you’ll find that, when it comes to the art and the business of animation, Annecy has no equal.

In this special section, ANIMATIONWorld provides both an overview of the festival and an up-close look at some of the key components that comprise the essence of Annecy. We begin with interviews with artistic director Marcel Jean and Mifa head Mickaël Marin that offer an insightful perspective on this year’s festival, as well as what we might expect in the future. We also present comprehensive coverage of the special “Music in Animation” program and tell you everything you want to know about the Brazilian invasion of Annecy. (Hint: Get ready to samba!)

Finally, veteran AWN writers Chris Robinson and Joe Strike preview the short film and feature competitions, which are the heart of the festival, and there are also mini-profiles of 2018 poster designer Pascal Blanchet and 2018 Mifa Animation Industry Award recipient Women in Animation.
ANNECY 2018: STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

Annecy programmer Marcel Jean discusses the challenges of finding the right balance for a major international film festival.

BY DAN SARTO

Marcel Jean took the helm as artistic director of the Annecy International Animated Film Festival in 2012, ushering in an era of change for the storied event held every June in the French city of Annecy, near the border with Switzerland. Founded in 1960, the festival has grown to be a major stop on the international festival circuit. It is one of the four international animated film festivals sponsored by ASIFA—the body that bestows the Annie Awards every year.

AWN publisher and editor-at-large Dan Sarto recently spoke with Jean about the state of the industry and his plans for this year's festival.

Dan Sarto: Is it just me, or are we seeing a surge in independent animated feature production?

Marcel Jean: You’re right. There are more and more film-makers who are well-known in the world of shorts who have decided to work on features. It’s clearly happening.

I must say, also, that even the short films tend to be longer and longer. Every year we receive more and more 15- to 20-minute shorts.

DS: From a programming standpoint, how do you straddle the line between the big studios and the independent world in a way that works for both?

MJ: Well, when I took on this job at the festival six years ago, my first impression was that it was an important place for the major studios, but that it was very hard to find a place for more experimental work.

That is the reason that I created the Off Limits section—as well as the Young Audience section and the Perspectives section—to make sure that there was still room at the festival for that kind of programming. To me, it’s very important to offer a big-picture overview of the situation in the animation world.

And I want the festivalgoers to be able to decide what kind of festival they want to have, because a festivalgoer like you and another festivalgoer can have two completely different experiences.

I think there is enough room in Annecy to offer that.

DS: So what do you have planned for the spotlight on Brazil?

MJ: There will be Brazilian speakers in different conferences and roundtable discussions at the Mifa and the festival. On the festival side, we prepared a retrospective of Brazilian animation with the people of the Anima Mundi festival. There will also be a celebration of the most important recent Brazilian animated features, as well as a program on Brazilian television animation.

“A"nnecy gives you a perspective on the past, present and future of animation.

Marcel Jean, artistic director of the Annecy International Animation Film Festival.

PASCAL BLANCHET EVOKES ANOTHER TIME IN 2018 ANNECY FESTIVAL POSTER

Canadian illustrator and graphic novel artist channels the early twentieth century in his Deco-inspired design.

BY JON HOFFERMAN

Joining a long and illustrious tradition, Canadian graphic artist and author Pascal Blanchet has brought his considerable talents and signature style to the creation of this year’s poster for the Annecy International Animated Film Festival. The poster, which features iconic elements of the picturesque French town, is in Blanchet’s trademark streamlined, Art Deco style and incorporates colors associated with 2018’s guest country, Brazil.

“Creating the Annecy poster was a superb opportunity,” says Blanchet, “especially as it evokes the classic travel posters and seaside resorts of the 1930s. Everything was in place, with the superb lake, the spectacular mountains and the all-white Imperial Palace.”

A self-taught artist born in 1980 in Trois-Rivières, Canada, Blanchet has contributed illustrations to many leading publications, including The New Yorker, Wired, San Francisco magazine, and The National Post, as well as Penguin and Tor books. His graphic novels, which are published by La Pastèque, include the award-winning La fugue (2005), Rapide-blanc (2006), Bologne (2007), Nocturne (2011), and En voiture! L’Amérique en chemin de fer (2016). Blanchet also designed the album covers for Pierre Lapointe’s Paris tristesse and La science du cœur.

Currently, Blanchet is directing his first animation short film with the National Film Board of Canada. Produced by Julie Roy, The Procession takes place at a woman’s funeral, “an endless afternoon during which the family, guests, friends, leave one by one to finally leave the bereaved alone in the face of his loss.” The Procession is scheduled for release in winter of 2019.
Mifa head Mickaël Marin details new offerings at this year's edition of Europe's largest animation marketplace and pitching forum.

Continued on page 32

Over the last 10 years as head of Mifa—Europe's only dedicated animation marketplace and pitching forum—organizer Mickaël Marin has guided the event through a period of enormous growth, especially internationally. The four-day event, running June 12-15 alongside the Annecy International Animated Film Festival, offers a global platform for financing, sales and co-production deals, as well as education, recruitment and, of course, networking. The event is expected to draw more than 10,000 people, including 3,000 accredited producers, distributors and broadcasters.

Last year, the market added 1,000 square meters, bringing it to a total of 4,200 square meters. This year, the exhibit area will grow by another 600 square meters, making room for several new exhibiting partners, including delegations from Cameroon, Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru and Georgia. In addition, 2018 will see the return of an Irish pavilion.

Creative Europe, which organizes “Media Umbrella” booths at major international film fests and markets in order to help smaller companies and startups get a precious little slice of floor space, is organizing an Eastern European pavilion that will be over 100 square meters.

"More than 40 professionals from Eastern Europe will participate in this pavilion," says Marin. "And I think that's one of the trends this year—Eastern European animation is booming. And it's really important for us, because we really want to see how we can help professionals from Eastern Europe participate in Annecy."

He added that he expects to see more projects from Eastern Europe in the festival selections.

"The biggest difference from other events is that we combine the Annecy festival and the Mifa market," says Marin. "We have all the creative people coming at the same time, and so we can help develop connections."

He added that these connections can help newcomers meet investors, distributors, broadcasters and producers to launch new projects, or just recruit new talent.

Overall, 468 projects were submitted to Mifa this year—compared to 325 in 2017—with 121 submitted to the “Animation du Monde” category.

Marin explained that the surge in interest is probably because they have a better dialog now, especially with animators in emerging markets. In fact, a key focus for Mifa is help-
**MARCEL JEAN**

Continued from page 28

DS: What's the biggest challenge of programming a big festival like this?

MJ: I think balance is the most important criterion for the festival. We must find the right balance between the experimental films and the films from the major studios. And there are more and more players every year. Many years ago, Warner wasn't a player, now they're big. And almost every year, there are important new studios. It means that we need to make a place for all these different players.

DS: What is it that makes Annecy so special within the animation community?

MJ: I think it's the fact that Annecy gives you a perspective on the past, present and future of animation. What I mean by that is that there is the festival, the market, and more than 2,000 students that come together at the same place, at the same time.

So, while you have the retrospectives and tributes to the history of animation, there is also the present state of the industry with the market and with the different competitions. And then, there are all of these enthusiastic young people from all over the world who represent the future. Almost every week I receive a message from somebody saying, “I went to Annecy when I was a student and it basically changed my life because this is where I found my first job. Since then, I've worked for over 20 years in the industry and I came back last year with a TV show that I directed or that I produced, which was in competition.”

If you ask me for one element, for one key ingredient, I would say it's the students. The students are the blood of Annecy. DS: Have you thought about adding more screenings to accommodate more films in the future?

MJ: I think there is already heavy pressure on the festivalgoers, because there are a lot of screenings in Annecy. Sometimes we are invited to meet the talent, follow their project and then help improve the project. Then, the projects are stronger when they apply for the competition. "I travel a lot with my team. We travel to a lot of festivals and markets," he says. "Sometimes we are invited to meet talent in some countries, and what we do is work with local experts and film commissions to meet the talent, follow their project and then help improve the project. Then, the projects are stronger when they apply for the competition."

He explained that this network of worldwide contacts has grown as the market has grown, especially in the feature film industry. In fact, this year they’ve received a huge number of feature films for the festival. Among other changes, Marin explained that, this year, the library—which includes roughly 500 titles selected for the festival, as well as projects that participate in Mifa—will be released online, where the films will be available for up to a year.

Marin, who has served as head of Mifa since 2008, was recently appointed CEO of parent organization CITIA. He will continue to oversee the marketplace, but when he assumes the new role July 1, he will also manage the Annecy festival, the educational program and the Forum Blanc, as well as a lot of the organization's local events and activities.

"Summing up, Marin explains that, in the past, when people in the animation industry had to choose between going to Cannes or going to Annecy, they would drop Annecy. The difference now is that they go to Annecy. "I think that more people are aware about what Annecy can do to help get a project produced," he says. "Of course, we always need to explain to people what they can do in Annecy, but it's not like I remember 10 or 15 years ago."

Continued from page 28

**MICKAËL MARIN**

Continued from page 29

ing talent from emerging markets like South America, Asia and Africa to break into the global industry, with an educational program designed to give them a better understanding of how the industry is organized and what it takes to develop a project through to completion and international distribution.

"I travel a lot with my team. We travel to a lot of festivals and markets," he says. "Sometimes we are invited to meet talent in some countries, and what we do is work with local experts and film commissions to meet the talent, follow their project and then help improve the project. Then, the projects are stronger when they apply for the competition."

We won't do that this year, but this is the kind of thing we're always discussing.

**ANNECY 2018 SPOTLIGHT:**

**SPECIAL PROGRAMS AT ANNECY CELEBRATE MUSIC IN ANIMATION**

Screenings, a conversation with animator-composers, and a nine-film concert capture the multi-dimensional legacy of music in animated films.

BY SARAH VAN SIEVER

From the familiar (think: *Henry Mancini’s Pink Panther theme*) to the esoteric (e.g., Georgy Sviridov’s prescriptive “Time, Forward!” in Theodore Ushev’s *Tower Bawher*) to the commercial (*Catch Me If You Can*, 1999), *Jeu Jeu Jeu* (*Theodore Ushev’s Time, Forward!*), this year’s Annecy Interna-


tional Animation Film Festival shines a spotlight on music in animation. Music adds integral dimension to the worlds animation creates, helping to catalyze laughter, nostalgia, uncertainty, or excitement. Mute, inconspicuous textural music forms the fabric of films’ reality. Earworm melodies from *Wallace and Gromit*; *The Good Dinosaur*’s signature saxophone melody; *Pink Panther*’s jaunty brass melody are inseparable from long-time creative relationship between music and animation. "Both are based on rhythm, in a certain way, both are art of time," says Jean of the special affinity between the two art forms. As he notes in the festival announcement about the program, even in the silent era filmmakers “dreamed of creating visual music by moving graphic shapes according to specific rhythmic dynamics... The greatest animators have made musical films and the greatest composers have written works for animation... We want to let the com-

posers speak for themselves, to endow animation with lasting impact for audiences. In recognition of the essential role played by this non-visual element, Annecy Artistic Director Marcel Jean devised a series of special events to highlight the

longtime creative relationship between music and animation.

These connections can help newcomers meet investors, distributors, broadcasters and producers to launch new projects, or just recruit new talent."
for animation in 2003, and he went on to win the award two more times with "Delina" and "Lovers" (2005)—based on a song by Les Clichés—and "Ffyll" (2012), inspired by the music of Mnsorgyke. Vladimir Leschiov, a Latvian animator who studied at the Janis Rozentals Art School in Riga and Sweden’s Konstfack, is the founder of the animation studio Lunohod. His short films include "Sphères" (2004), "Lost in Stone" (2007), "Sparni un Airi" (2009), "Villa Antropoff" (2010), and "Brayny Days" (2014), which was created with tea and ink.

The Composers Speak

Jean will provide this platform for composers when he moderates a panel with composers when he moderates a panel including television, music videos, and the animated musical "The Monster of Nix" (2016), and Patrick Bouchard’s "Ffyll". The composers include Serge Prokofiev, Erik Satie, Arve Angellovsen, Camille Saint-Saëns, and Johann Sebastian Bach.

The pop rock selections feature musical films with riffs and themes dictated by songs. Notably, the songs tend to take on new meanings when paired with visuals. Selections include "Are You Lost in the World Like Me?" (Steve Cauth, 2016, music by Molby), "Take Me Out" (Jonas Oedell, 2003, music by Franz Ferdinand), "There, There" (Chris Hopewell, 2003, music by Radiohead), "Mutual Core" (Andrew Huang, 2012, music by Björk), "Dehors novembre" (Bartek Kulas, 2010, music by Nick Cave). The Velvet Underground Played at My High School (Robert Pietri and Anthony Jannelli, 2015), and Steevenman’s "Walking Tall" Man" (Michel Gondry, 2003).

Finally, the "De Visu" category spotlights films that attempt to create something like visual music, parallelizing, interweaving, and/or opposing the soundtrack in a variety of permutations. Among the selections are Virtus Virtud (Thomas Stellmach and Maja Oschmann, 2013, music by Mercefsd/ Spahn), Angel (Lef Marussken, 2002, music by Handel/Dvořák/Berthoven/ Kopper), Webdiagram/virendiagram/bert Gotschalk, 2007, music by Schubert), "Bu Ho Hu!" (Steven Woloshen, 2002, music by Satie), Recuerdos (Leopoldo Carreno and Alessandro Pierratini, 2009, music by Mozart), and Tower Boucher (Theodore Ushev, 2005, music by Georgy Sviridov).

OCTUOR DE FRANCE

In a special live event, Octuor de France, an octet under the artistic direction of clarinetist Jean-Louis Sajot, will perform new scores composed by Gabriel Thibaudeau for nine classic silent films. Having a modern composer craft scores for these films reinvents the silent film convention of live pianists or organists creating on-the-spot film scores, and offers a rare opportunity to hear a composer’s complete compositional thoughts crafted for a specific musical ensemble.
From the country’s first recorded animation from 1917 to the vibrant contemporary scene, the 2018 Annecy International Animated Film Festival presents the best of a century of Brazilian animation.

BY CHRIS COLMAN

When Brazil won consecutive Annecy Cristal Awards for Rio 2096: A Story of Love and Fury and The Boy and the World in 2013 and 2014 respectively, the animation world couldn’t help but take notice.

But in truth the twin victories were just the icing on the cake for an industry that has enjoyed remarkable growth over the past decade. In 2008, there were just two animated shows in production in Brazil. Today, 44 homegrown shows are being shown on Brazilian television and being exported to more than 150 countries. Moreover, 2017 also saw the release of seven feature films, with another 25 currently in production, including numerous co-productions with Latin American and European partners.

Annecy named Brazil its “Country of Honor” for 2018, with artistic director Marcel Leclerc declaring: “Brazilian animation has burned its star status into Annecy’s firmament… We want to show how this major territory is a powerful spring of creativity, how Brazilian animators have drunk deep from these waters to establish an unusual and striking expression.”

THE BIRTH OF A FESTIVAL

In tracing pivotal moments in Brazilian animation, we might look to the country’s first recorded animation, O Kaiser, in 1917, or to Tourbillon, by Bassano Vaccarini and Rubens Luchetti, the first Brazilian film to appear at Annecy, in 1963. But probably the most important milestone came in 1993, when four frustrated animators decided to start a festival.

Back in the 1970s and 1980s, there was no Brazilian animation industry. Ennio Torresan, now a story artist at DreamWorks Animation, explains that a realistic aspiration for a young Brazilian artist in those days was “to be accepted at Annecy with an animated short, then get a real job at a bank, or become an art teacher. We never thought this thing would last a lifetime… We were crazed about drawing on the walls of a zoetrope.”

In 1982, the government of Brazil brought Canadian animators over to build the nation’s first animation training program. Filmmaker Marcos Magalhães, empowered by such hefty numbers, the festival has been able to wield influence among would-be investors, producers and government policymakers, including enacting real measures like establishing a special line of credit for animation production.

“I think we are responsible in some ways for the growth of the industry,” says Zagury. “We created a venue where people could network, see new productions from other countries, and learn. A lot of the young animators doing well right now began at Annamundi.”

External factors also played a part. First, the greater availability of computers and software brought down the cost of production and put tools in the hands of filmmakers. Then, in 2011, domestic producers urged the government to pass a law obliging all cable TV channels to reserve a three-hour block each day for Brazilian productions, prompting the commissioning of swathes of new shows.

THE BRAZILIAN INVASION

In 2015, the creative industries in Brazil were worth US$7.1 billion, making up 2.7 percent of the country’s total GDP. With animation an increasingly important component, the Brazilian government is not missing the opportunity to showcase its industry on the world’s largest stage.

The Brazilian Trade and Investment Promotion Agency, Apex-Brasil, whose mission is to promote Brazilian audiovisual content abroad, is masterminding a “Brazilian invasion” of Annecy this June, organized by four export bodies and bringing 30 Brazilian companies and over 200 delegates.

Leading the charge is Brazilian Content, which has managed the Brazilian delegation at Mifa since 2012. Comprising more than 600 companies, of which around half are animation, Brazilian Content promotes independent TV and digital content production abroad, enabling partnerships between Brazilian and foreign companies.

Alongside them will be Cinema do Brasil, in charge of Brazilian film and FilmBrazil, the largest advertising network in Latin America, representing over 50 Brazilian production, interactive, and postproduction companies.

Another government-backed agency, Brazil Trade Exchange, will bring live bands in to perform around town. Ruben Feller, the maestro behind several animated film scores, including The Boy and the World, Tito and the Birds, and at least eight TV series, will also appear on the “Music & Animation”
There will also be a Brazilian animation history exhibition curated by ABCA (Brazilian Association of Animation Cinema), and a special book, film, website and advertising campaign created by Apex-Brasil.

**LIGHTS, ANIMATION, ACTION!**

For the Brazilian festival content, Annecy has granted creative control to the Animamundi founders. Alongside screenings of the best TV series episodes and a documentary about Brazilian animation—Luz, Anima, Ação—there are three programs of shorts.

The team opted to focus on the vibrant contemporary scene, rather than curate any specifically historical programs. Over the years, Animamundi has screened all of Ale Abreu’s works, and will bring his Oscar-nominated Boy and the World to the giant screen on Annecy’s Paquier lawn. There will also be screenings of Rio 2096: A Story of Love and Fury and, if they can dig up a copy, Amazon Symphony, Brazil’s first animated feature-length film from 1951.

In addition to the curated program, the Official Selection includes eight Brazilian productions, including the feature Tito and the Birds, episodes of the TV series Angel’s Killer by Guada Films, and Copa Studio’s José’s Brother, which Guell describes as “one of the best TV series in the world. Very funny and at the same time very Brazilian.”

Brazil will also compete in the Short Film category (Guaxuma, a Brazil-France co-production), Off-Limits Shorts (Boy Transcoded from Phosphene and The Feather Pillow) and Commissioned Films, for which Vetor Films is bringing two projects. Brazilian Fabio Yabu, who wrote the book-turned-animation No Princes, will be on the jury.

Brazilian Content Executive Manager Rachel Do Valle says that the goal is “to promote Brazil’s animation industry and to generate new business, partnerships and co-productions. It’s a step-by-step process to become more international.”

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Brazilian, “he says, “We started by creating our own IP characters and shows. We aren’t known as work-for-hire.”

Despite the large positive strides in recent times, Brazil’s industry still faces challenges. Domestic distribution remains stunted, particularly for art house content, while recent political and economic turmoil has tempered growth. Yet those involved in Brazilian animation remain optimistic.

“We’ve always had waves in the country where everything was better, then went bad” says Zagury. “But Brazilians are very creative. It doesn’t matter what happens, we’re always going to be moving up.”

Chris Colman is a writer and producer based in Shanghai. He’s the founder of the China Animation & Game Network, encouraging communication in the industry via live creative networking events.

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“We’ve always had waves in the country where everything was better, then went bad” says Zagury. “But Brazilians are very creative. It doesn’t matter what happens, we’re always going to be moving up.”

Chris Colman is a writer and producer based in Shanghai. He’s the founder of the China Animation & Game Network, encouraging communication in the industry via live creative networking events.

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Panel in Mifa. There will also be a Brazilian animation history exhibition curated by ABCA (Brazilian Association of Animation Cinema), and a special book, film, website and advertising campaign created by Apex-Brasil.

**LIGHTS, ANIMATION, ACTION!**

For the Brazilian festival content, Annecy has granted creative control to the Animamundi founders. Alongside screenings of the best TV series episodes and a documentary about Brazilian animation—Luz, Anima, Ação—there are three programs of shorts.

The team opted to focus on the vibrant contemporary scene, rather than curate any specifically historical programs. Over the years, Animamundi has screened all of Ale Abreu’s works, and will bring his Oscar-nominated Boy and the World to the giant screen on Annecy’s Paquier lawn. There will also be screenings of Rio 2096: A Story of Love and Fury and, if they can dig up a copy, Amazon Symphony, Brazil’s first animated feature-length film from 1951.

In addition to the curated program, the Official Selection includes eight Brazilian productions, including the feature Tito and the Birds, episodes of the TV series Angel’s Killer by Guada Films, and Copa Studio’s José’s Brother, which Guell describes as “one of the best TV series in the world. Very funny and at the same time very Brazilian.”

Brazil will also compete in the Short Film category (Guaxuma, a Brazil-France co-production), Off-Limits Shorts (Boy Transcoded from Phosphene and The Feather Pillow) and Commissioned Films, for which Vetor Films is bringing two projects. Brazilian Fabio Yabu, who wrote the book-turned-animation No Princes, will be on the jury.

Brazilian Content Executive Manager Rachel Do Valle says that the goal is “to promote Brazil’s animation industry and to generate new business, partnerships and co-productions. It’s a step-by-step process to become more international.”

Magalhães believes Brazilian creativity is its greatest asset: “We aren’t known as work-for-hire.”

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ONE THING YOU CAN SAY ABOUT ANNECY THIS YEAR: THERE'S NO SHORTAGE OF COURAGEOUS CHILDREN ON VIEW. MULTIPLE FILMS IN THE FEATURE COMPETITION FOCUS ON ADOLESCENT KIDS FINDING THEIR WAY IN THE WORLD, OR COMING TO THE AID OF THEIR PARENTS.

THE FESTIVAL OPENS WITH MICHEL OCÉLOT’S DILILI À PARIS. SET IN BELLE ÉPOQUE PARIS AT THE CUSP OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, THE FILM Follows DILILI, A YOUNG, DARK-SKINNED KANAK GIRL FROM THE SOUTHWEST PACIFIC ISLANDS, AS SHE TRIES TO UNRAVEL THE MYSTERY BEHIND KIDNappings OF YOUNG GIRLS.


The trials of childhood, adolescence and teenage rebellion follow, as Paola copes with moody sisters, a fortune-telling mother and a defrocked priest father, as she makes her way to adulthood. Also in competition is Seder-Masochism, Nina Paley’s first feature since Sita Sings the Blues (2008). Her deconstruction of the Book of Exodus and the defeat of “the Goddess, humanity’s original deity” by the forces of patriarchy echoes Sita’s feminist retelling of the cruel treatment of a prince’s wife in the Indian epic Ramayana.

Twenty-five hundred years after the events explored in Paley’s biblical epic, a different perspective on the Holy Land is offered by Cam Christian’s Okko’s Inn. Scripted by Oscar-nominated screenwriter and playwright David Hare, who also appears on-camera, Christian’s film charts the impact of the 440-mile barrier Israel has built to protect itself from (and isolate) adjacent Palestinian lands.

While it sounds like it might be a feline version of the classic fairy tale, Gatta Cenerentola (“Cinderella the Cat”) is actually a stylish crime thriller set in a dystopic future Naples. In this grown-up retelling of the glass-slipper saga, a pistol-packing Cinderella faces down her evil stepmother and not merely two, but six equally villainous stepisters. La Casa Lobo, or The Wolf House, is easily the most challenging feature film in the competition. As much an art piece as a narrative work (production took place in art galleries and at public exhibitions in six countries), the stop-motion Lobo is reminiscent of the work of the Brothers Quay or Jan Svankmajer. Directors Cristobal Leon and Joaquin Cocina took their inspiration from the history of a real-life Jim Jones-style Chilean cult, imagining the kind of movie the cult leader might have made to keep his followers in thrall. (“What if he had been a sort of Walt Disney, what story would he have told?”) Assuming his perspective, they weave a tale of a young woman who flees the cult, only to find herself trapped in a nightmarish house.

Unfortunately, not much can be said about the final feature in the competition, Okko’s Inn. At the time of writing, the film was still in production and information about it was hard to come by. Its director Kitaro Kosaka is a longtime Ghibli veteran, working with the legendary Hayao Miyazaki on Nausicaä (1986), Castle in the Sky (1986), Spirited Away (2001), Howl’s Moving Castle (2004) and Ponyo (2008) with credentials of that order, one can reasonably hope for a film with more than a touch of Ghibli magic to it.

Joe Strike has written about animation for numerous publications. He is the author of Furry Nation: The True Story of America’s Most Misunderstood Subculture.
ANNECY 2018: THE SHORT AND SHORT OF IT

Outstanding films from a diversity of countries highlight this year's shorts competition.

BY CHRIS ROBINSON

There is the usual assortment of old and new in play in this year’s Annecy short film competition. Veteran animators Paul Fink (Bide), Riho Unt (Mary and the 7 Thieves), Cedric Gachell (Not My Type), and the French duo of Maxin Gachon and Jean-Loup Feliu (The Cat’s Regret) all have films competing this year. The competition also features the long-awaited return of David Fincher and Alon Snowdon, whose film Animal Behaviour (about an assortment of animals in group therapy) is the couple’s first short film since the 1994 Oscar winner, Bob’s Birthday.

Other highlights include new works from Vladimir Lechovin (Electrocinem’s Day), Marcus Armitage (That Yorkshire Sound), Patrick Bouchard (The Subject), and the French duo Not My Type (about an assortment of animals in group therapy) is the couple’s first short film since the 1994 Oscar winner, Bob’s Birthday.

“Handful of shorts that ignited a wee gleam in my eye this year and should be — pending the always unpredictable and occasionally mystifying tastes of juries — collecting a few ribbons, coins and shiny trophies during the next couple of years, I hope.”

I’M OK (ELIZABETH HOBBS, CANADA/UK)

Following the end of a fiery and passionate love affair with Alma Mahler (muse to many an artist of her time and the widow of composer Gustav Mahler), Austrian expressionist painter Oskar Kokoschka endorses in the First World War. He suffers serious wounds in battle. As medics rush him through the forest of the Russian front, he encounters a fever of memories, emotions, daydreams and nightmares as he struggles to find himself and be, well, OK.

Highlighted by a lively operatic soundtrack and beautifully improvised images taken from ink drawings, I’m OK places us in a hazy, hurried, transient world that aptly mirrors the confusion and fragility of Kokoschka’s state of being. Inspired by Kokoschka’s art, the images act like faint memories as they struggle to take shape, find form and being — before vanishing as rapidly as they appeared.

TEARS OF CHIWEN (SUN XUN, CHINA)

Though he’s better known as a painter and artist, Sun Xin’s animation work — as vividly demonstrated in Tears of Chiwen — is equally impressive. In discussing the genesis of the film, Sun Xin says that he started with two words “tradition” and “myth.” Chiwen is a mythological Chinese dragon that often appears as an architectural ornament. Placed on rooftops or elsewhere on buildings, it is believed, according to Feng Shui theory, to protect inhabitants against fire, flood and typhoon. Chiwen has also been described as “the dragon who likes to swallow things.”

Starting with a long tracking shot, Tears of Chiwen takes us through an assortment of Asian-inspired mythical imagery and landscapes before being interrupted by an Abraham Lincoln-like figure standing outside what appears to be a temple. Slowly but surely, images and icons from Western culture begin to subtly invade the screen.

Exquisitely animated, this beguiling work explores — and laments — the demise of Asian influence in the world, pushed aside by the often brash and facile voices of modern Western cultures that have infiltrated, effaced and increasingly altered Asian traditions, and, with them, cultural and individual identities.

CYCLISTS (VELJKO POPOVIC, CROATIA)

In a gorgeous Mediterranean seaside village, the final cycling race of the season is about to begin. The two top racers envision not just a championship, but an erotic payoff from a local paramour. As the race unfolds, the two rivals slip into sensual daydreams about their anticipated orgasmic payoff, unaware that the woman of their fantasies has other plans.

Inspired by the paintings of Croatian artist Vasko Lipovac, director Veljko Popovic (Planemo, 2016) has created a quiet, old-school piece, marked by gentle comedy and erotic beauty. Of Lipovac he says, “He was an artist of the people, bridging that gap between high art and your local fisherman or port worker. He managed to create something that was poetic, complex and of high artistic value, but was at the same time accessible, funny and based on simple everyday moments.”

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MR. DEER (MOJTABA MOUSAVI, IRAN)

Normally, animation films that borrow the often exhausted hallmarks and tropes of live-action works are tedious, leaving you wondering why on earth the artist used animation to begin with. Mr. Deer is different. Set on a subway car during an apparent global catastrophe, this riveting, tense and creepy work touches on class, race and ethics, depicting a disturbingly familiar world where people have become vile beasts with no sense of morality or compassion.

A FLY IN THE RESTAURANT (XI CHEN & XU AN, CHINA)

This mesmerizing cut-out film from the unsung Chinese animator Xi Chen (The Swallow [2014], The Poem [2015]) and Xu An (who co-directed The Swallow) is set in a local restaurant. Told from what seems to be the perspective of a rotating ceiling fan, the film follows the interior and exterior action as a cook chases a fly and a variety of patrons (soldiers, hunters, artists, men, women) mingle, sleep, eat and come and go.

Along the wall of the restaurant is a slogan that translates as “Revolution is Not a Dinner Party.” Mixing shades of red for the exterior with dirtier, greyer interior colors (depicting a dreary daily existence), A Fly in the Restaurant is a not-so-subtle critique of a complacent populace ensnared in a Chinese landscape in constant political and social flux. Ironically, the only character with any life and purpose seems to be the fly — and everyone wants to kill it.

III (MARTA PAJEK, POLAND)

The much anticipated sequel to Pajek’s incredible Impossible Figures and Other Stories II (2016) is set in a similar dreamscape, but this time a middle-aged man and the female protagonist from Impossible Figures meet in some kind of waiting room. From there, they slowly begin to explore the floral garden landscapes of their bodies, organs and faces. Their reactions shift between pleasure and horror, gentleness and aggression, becoming increasingly more hostile as they continue their explorations.

Pajek, like Samuel Beckett, uses minimalist settings, sounds and designs to explore a complex bouquet of themes: unhealthy, stagnant relationships; the inevitability of the decay of the body; and the impossibly, no matter how hard we try, how deep we dive, of ever really knowing or reaching the core of another.

MR. DEER © 2018 RED DEER STUDIO

A FLY IN THE RESTAURANT © 2018 CONGRONG FILM

MR. DEER © 2018 ANIMOON SP. Z O.O.
This Magnificent Cake is an astonishing, sensitive and original stop-motion work that echoes time and subtly drifts between reality and illusion. “I don’t really remember how or when we came up with the idea,” says Roels, “but I do remember both of us really getting into Journey to the End of the Night by Gérard and being inspired by that. In one chapter, the main character meets a black servant sitting in the kitchen of a manor making bombs. In another chapter, the main character describes going to an African colony to work and how terrible that was. The one idea that stuck with both of us was that it was nearly always the very worst individuals that Europe had to offer who ended up going to these colonies.”

While two chapters focus on the utterly devastating experiences of slaves, the other storylines are tragic in different ways. One involves Van Moller, a baker who has fled to Africa with the profits from his family’s bakery. The other follows Louis, an army deserter who escapes to Africa to avoid enlistment or prosecution.

“The two storylines,” says Roels, “were initially going to be part of one story, in which a young Belgian in colonial Africa is terrified by the very imposing and promiscuous behavior of his next-door neighbor. Many drafts later, this next-door neighbor with his odd habits and excessive drinking morphed into the character of Van Moller, the shady baker. Writing the film, we went through so many different iterations we sometimes forgot if one of these drafts lying somewhere in a drawer is the real gem and this just a mere compromise. As Emma often says, ‘Did we get off one stop too late?’

“The decision to make an anthology film came quite late in the pre-production process. In early drafts of This Magnificent Cake, Roels and De Swaef had no specific storylines or consistent characters. ‘It was supposed to be a fragmentary portrait of a period and setting,’ says Roels. ‘Then we realized we were getting stuck and actually really missed following characters through a longer narrative. Right up until the start of the shoot, we were cutting our characters and settings some of which had already been built (e.g., a manic Jesuit, a bereft ape). We wanted to find a good balance of drama, comedy, tragedy, absurdity and plain stupidity, which might have been a little too much for a single narrative to handle.’

This Magnificent Cake creates a wonderfully disorienting dreamscape in which we never quite know where we are.
GOOGLE SPOTLIGHT STORIES
RETURNS TO ANNECY

Experimental storytelling is pushed to the limits with four new VR experiences, including a new short film directed by John Kahrs.

BY JENNIFER WOLFE

G oogle Spotlight Stories is bringing four new virtual reality projects to Annecy this year: PPGI — Age of Sail, and Back to the Moon, as well as a behind-the-scenes look at the VR experience created for director Wes Anderson’s new stop-motion animated feature, Isle of Dogs.

A division of Google’s Advanced Technology and Projects (ATAP) group, Google Spotlight Stories has won a slew of accolades for its experimental shorts, which have paired top animation talents with pioneering technology in order to push the boundaries of immersive, interactive storytelling.

Partnering with VR@Annecy for the third year running, Google Spotlight Stories will be presenting a Studio Focus Session on Wednesday, June 13 at 6:00 p.m. Entitled “Animation Everywhere,” the session will be moderated by GSS executive producer Karen Dufilho and creative director Jan Piskava with GSS directors Fa Goby, Hélène Leroux and John Kahrs joining in on the discussion.

HERE’S LOOKING AT YOU, PIG!

PIGGY, directed by Piskava and co-director Mark Oftedal (Rugby Night), is essentially a set-up for an experiment in interactivity. “It’s an allegory of desire,” Piskava says. “Piggy is everyone who wants something that they’re not allowed to have. He wants this cake, but he’s too embarrassed to eat it while we’re watching. As long we’re watching him, he can’t have the cake. It’s as simple as that.”

“How can Piggy avoid the viewer’s gaze?” “Normally, you do such a thing as a classic Warner Bros. series of gags in an animated short, and we wanted that kind of feeling,” Piskava explains. “But now it’s interactive and the timing is up to the audience to some extent. The question is, can you do something funny and comedic when you’re giving up a lot of the timing of the gags to the audience?”

The genesis of the project, according to Piskava, was wanting to explore technical developments in the platform. “What is it that we want to be better at? How can we push our tools to do more?” he asks. GSS developed a number of things for PPGI, including, for the first time, device-independent viewing. Previously, each project had to be tested extensively across multiple devices and optimized for each one, resulting in the production of multiple versions of the same film. “One of the big improvements we made, under the hood, was to make the technology more general, so it doesn’t matter what you use—a VR headset, small screens, big screens, whatever—our software just works. Regardless of what kind of device you’re watching it on.”

But the biggest development with PPGI is the level of interaction between the character and the viewer. The viewer watches Piggy, and, in a new twist for VR, Piggy watches the viewer right back. This interactivity is achieved with the use of a trigger system that can be applied to objects, locations, and even entire scenes, along with improved eye-tracking technology. “Piggy’s eyes really follow you in that 3D space,” Piskava notes. “If you’re wearing a VR headset and wandering around the room, his gaze follows you. You have the feeling that he’s really watching you. You’re watching him, he’s watching you, and between you is the cake that he’s trying to get.”

While PPGI might appear to be one of the more simplistic shorts to come out of Google Spotlight Stories, its apparently straightforward minimalism belies the amount of research and development the project entailed. “It’s probably the one that took us the longest, that’s been the most painful, that’s been the hardest to produce,” Dufilho comments. “The character interactivity has to be so precise and so good. And that’s really the trickiest part. Making something really hilariously interactive is an art in and of itself.”

REAL-TIME GRAPHICS

Meanwhile, Age of Sail, directed by John Kahrs and produced at Chromosphere, is one of the longest and most visually complex VR projects GSS has undertaken to date. “It’s an homage to Georges Melies,” Kahrs says. “It’s a tribute to a time before the Wright Brothers conquered the skies, the Age of Pearls” is produced by Nexus, the studio behind last year’s Rain or Shine, and directed by Fa Goby and Hélène Leroux.

With production design by Céline Desrumaux, Age of Sail employs an illustrative style reminiscent of Patrick Osborne’s Academy Award-nominated Pearl (2016), yet also delivers a sweeping cinematic experience that is a Google Doodle. “It’s an homage to Georges Melies,” Kahrs says. “We’re using actual voices and real performances, so that makes it tricky, and a little risky.”

A tribute to a time before the Wright Brothers competed the skies, Age of Sail takes place entirely on the open sea, which according to Dufilho, involved a lot of calculation. “The specifics of it feel real. It’s math, but it’s lovingly done math,” she says. “And it’s just phenomenal. Water has been done a lot, it’s not a new thing. But water in real-time is new. It takes a lot of math to make it work and keep it looking beautiful.”

TO THE MOON AND BACK

Described by Piskava as “one of the most richly realised and complex Google Doodles ever made,” Back to the Moon is an homage to Georges Mélies’ father of visual effects. “It’s a fully interactive animation production that is a Google Doodle,” he says. “Full of many of the iconic, classic stage effects and gags that Mélies pioneered, the new Google Spotlight Stories short is produced by Nexus, the studio behind last year’s Rain or Shine, and directed by Fa Goby and Hélène Leroux.

“Fx and Hélène even went to the Cinématheque Museum in Paris to talk to the world experts on Georges Mélies and show them the work, and got their blessings,” Piskava recounts. “We’re exploring new techniques, just as Mélies was doing in his time. It’s kind of fitting that we’re using this very new and innovative technology to celebrate someone who was pioneering new technologies and techniques in his own time.”

Jennifer Wolfe is editor-in-chief of Animation World Network.

Left to right: GSS creative director Jan Piskava, executive producer Karen Dufilho and PPGI co-director Mark Oftedal.
THE MONEYGOROUND:
LIU JIAN’S HAVE A NICE DAY

The Chinese director’s violent, yet serene, film explores the contradictions of modern China through a colorful group of unsavory characters.

BY CHRIS ROBINSON

Oh, but life goes on and on and no one ever wins, and time goes quickly by just like the moneygoround…
– “The Moneygoround,” The Kinks

It was not this spring morning which they considered sacred and important, not the beauty of God’s world, given to all creatures to enjoy—a beauty which inclines the heart to peace, to harmony and to love. No, what they considered sacred and important were their own devices for wielding power over each other.
– Resurrection, Leo Tolstoy

A slightly different Tolstoy quote from the same novel opens Liu Jian’s acclaimed animated feature Have a Nice Day, which, one year after being pulled from the Annecy Animation Film Festival by the Chinese government, is screening out of competition this year. But the quote above also serves as a nice summation of this pulp-inspired crime feature that kicks off with a young man stealing a bag of money from a crime boss to pay for his girlfriend’s plastic surgery. From there, with echoes of Stanley Kubrick’s failed-heist classic The Killing, Jian (who also made the 2010 animated feature Piercing I) takes us on a tense and torrid chase, following an assortment of feckless, no-good people as they wander through rainy, dilapidated landscapes in search of the bag of money—a prize they associate with freedom and a chance to finally escape their shitty existence.

While there are also clear reverberations of Quentin Tarantino in Have a Nice Day (e.g., ultraviolent, overlapping storylines, and a whole lot of happenstance), this is more than an entertaining, turn-your-brains-in-at-the-door caper film. Jian’s story is a none-too-subtle commentary on problematic aspects of contemporary China, as well as a meditation on globalization, hypercapitalism, and our eternal hope regarding the promises offered by cold hard cash.

“The movie is set in a town outside a small southern city in China,” says Jian. “And the trends of rapid urbanization and industrialization in the country...
"What some might call surrealism is often the reality in modern China."

Despite its violent imagery and swift pace, Have a Nice Day is an unusually quiet, almost calm film. The silence adds a feeling of claustrophobia and reinforces the sense that these people are all trapped in some sort of hell.

"I was very serious about the music and soundtrack," Jian relates. "I would rather not use any music if there is no best fit. Fortunately, we found great music [including two songs courtesy of the Shanghai Reclamation Project, a group that, aptly, combines traditional Chinese instruments with hip hop and electronica]. Have A Nice Day is the kind of film that explodes its energy in a calm storytelling style, with the simplicity of animation film language. Indeed, it was my intention to create the cold, yet powerful, atmosphere."

"What some might call surrealism is often the reality in modern China."
As China’s box office began to hit unprecedented heights in 2013, Light Chaser Animation emerged amid the hype, declaring its intention to build a world-class studio capable of producing Hollywood-quality animation, only at a fraction of the cost.

It was a highly ambitious project, particularly in an immature market like China. Four years on, though, the Beijing start-up founded by Gary Wang, Zhou Yu and Yuan Ye has delivered on many of its promises.

Light Chaser has assembled a team of 170 passionate young Chinese artists, developed a suite of proprietary production tools, and released, on schedule, three technically and visually accomplished CG-animated features in a little over two years. The latest of those releases, Cats & Peachtopia (2018), is being screened out of competition at Annecy this year.

The third feature by Beijing start-up Light Chaser Animation combines old and new to tell a universal tale of love, growth, and airborne hijinks.

CATS & PEACHTOPIA LOOKS AT FATHER-SON RELATIONSHIPS FROM A FELINE PERSPECTIVE

The third feature by Beijing start-up Light Chaser Animation combines old and new to tell a universal tale of love, growth, and airborne hijinks.

THE TYRANNY OF THE MARKET Despite the company’s considerable technical accomplishments, however, box office performance has been well below expectations. After a modest gross of RMB78 million (US$11.4 million) for their debut effort Little Door Gods (2016), ticket sales have declined with each subsequent production. Cats & Peachtopia was released in China on April 5 and earned just RMB17.75 million (US$2.82 million) in its first week, with little hope of climbing much higher.

That reality poses serious questions for a studio whose stated target has always been the domestic market. The decision to focus on China was partly a desire to tell “authentic Chinese stories that will touch our hearts,” as Wang said at Annecy in 2017, but was also based on the recognition that they couldn’t compete on an international scale against the likes of Pixar, DreamWorks or Disney.

While more realistic, focusing solely on China was still a challenging undertaking. After years of subpar, childish content, the domestic audience had grown jaded and skeptical that a homegrown studio could produce quality animation for the whole family.

With this in mind, Light Chaser set a maximum budget of $12 million per production, less than one-tenth the cost of a typical Disney feature.

That cautiousness was counterbalanced by Wang daring to write and direct the first three movies, despite having no prior experience in either discipline. Indeed, while many large studios in China look overseas for experienced creative guidance, Light Chaser is resolutely powered by homegrown talent. Wang places particular impor-
Like Light Chaser’s previous films, Cats & Peachtopia is set in China and employs distinctly Chinese elements.

“HOME AND AFAR” For Cats & Peachtopia, as with Little Door Gods and Tea Pets (2017), Wang has penned an original story set in China, employing distinctly Chinese elements. Co-founder and executive producer Zhou Yu says, “Gary was inspired by the cats in his house, and by the concept of ‘home and afar.’ It’s a father-and-son story, about growth, adventure and dreams.”

Cats & Peachtopia tells the story of father and son cats, Blanket and Cape, living a childfree life in a tower block in the southwestern Chinese megacity of Chongqing. Curious about the outside world and longing for his deceased mother, Cape sets off in search of the cat heaven Peachtopia. Blanket goes after his son and adventures ensue.

The official press kit elaborates further on the film’s themes and goals: “Fathers play an important role in cultivating their child’s social development, self-awareness, and sense of security. We hope this father-son adventure can alert people to the importance of fatherly love and accompaniment, so fathers can care more for and spend more time with their children.”

The entire film was produced over four years by Light Chaser’s in-house team in a converted warehouse on the outskirts of Beijing. They used the studio’s own rigging system, hair tools, large-scale building auto-modeling system and vegetation systems. The image quality is characteristically high, and the attention to detail impressive. The city scenes were modeled on actual street views and effectively capture an authentic Chinese city.

Light Chaser engaged Xi’an rocker Xu Wei and old school Taiwanese pop star Emil Chau to pen theme songs, and worked with Skywalker Sound and a local studio for the sound design. Zhou also mentions that, in an effort to maximize audience appeal, the studio held more test screenings for Cats & Peachtopia than it did for previous productions.

THE ROAD AHEAD Many more contenders in China’s current animation feature film gold rush are set to emerge in the coming two or three years. Companies including Tencent, Enlight Media-backed Colomroo, and Huayi Brothers are making significant investments in talent and small studios in an effort to produce the next Big Fish & Begonia. Yet Light Chaser’s plight offers a warning about the uncertainty of the domestic market.

Like Light Chaser’s previous films, Cats & Peachtopia is set in China and employs distinctly Chinese elements.
UNCONDITIONAL LOVE: JULIA POTT JOURNEYS TO SUMMER CAMP ISLAND

With a new series in production at Cartoon Network Studios, the Adventure Time alum reflects on learning to collaborate and the benefits of selling out.

BY JENNIFER WOLFE

SUMMER CAMP ISLAND

I’ve made some really, really good friendships here and that’s been great. I think learning not to be so critical of yourself, or learning how to take criticism with a grain of salt, has been a great learning moment for me. Getting a thicker skin.”

LETTING GO AND SELLING OUT

For Pott, one of the biggest lessons of Summer Camp Island has been “learning how to let stuff go when it’s not perfect,” while still being able to love it. “I met up with [Adventure Time creator] Pendleton Ward right after the show got picked up, and he said that if you can find one thing in the episode that you really love, that’s a victory,” she recounts. “There’s been a lot of hurdles, but I would say the biggest hurdle is getting over my own self-criticism or not feeling terrible if you feel like something is slipping through your fingers a little bit.”

At a talk delivered at last year’s Ottawa International Animation Festival, Pott spoke approvingly of what she called “selling out,” tracing the path of personal projects she had developed into commercial viability. And, although she’s quick to note, “for the record,” that she doesn’t consider herself a true distributor, Pott is just as keen on the concept of working at Cartoon Network selling out, Pott is just as keen as we developed it into the show we love.”

“Letting go and selling out” has pushed my work so much further, and it means I can keep doing what I want. If you work with the right brand and the right people who want to retain your vision, that’s good, it’s collaboration. People give artists a hard time for selling out but it’s better than not being able to make your work.”

SUMMER CAMP ISLAND © 2018 CARTOON NETWORK STUDIOS

“T”
DreamWorks Animation Television spreads its wings

By Tom McLean

little has had a greater impact on television animation in recent years than the expansive deal between Netflix and DreamWorks. Signed in 2013, the deal called for the studio to produce 300 hours of exclusive content for the streaming service. While DreamWorks had made series before, the scope of what was required for the streaming service.

Since then, 12 DreamWorks series have streamed exclusively on Netflix, among them: Turbo FAST, All Hat King Julien, The Adventures of Puss in Boots, DreamWorks' The Boss Baby, Rock & Friends, Spirit Riding Free, and Guillermo del Toro's Trollhunters. The first in a trilogy of series the Oscar-winning director has created for the studio. DreamWorks has won 13 Emmy Awards in that time, and there are six more shows on the way this year to Netflix, and more for other outlets.

Cohn says the studio has 20 shows in production right now, and there's still room for more. "We have a limit," she says. "I don't think we've reached it quite yet. But we want to make sure that we maintain our quality and that we're developing everything to its best possible version of itself."

New Production Demands

Producing animated series for streaming is slightly different from producing them for broadcast or cable. With Netflix dropping blocks of 13 episodes at a time, viewers can watch an entire season at any rate they want and without commercial interruption. This more immersive experience lends itself to serialization and to more complex—and meaningful—storylines. Cohn cites as an example Trollhunters, del Toro's mythology-laden series set in the mystic town of Arcadia. "I think there's nothing like that on television for families now," she says. "It just kind of really re-invents what people are expecting from animated television. It's definitely more like reading a book series or enjoying a series of movies."

Developing content that meets that standard on a television-like budget and schedule is daunting. Cohn says, but the studio's upcoming shows—a mix of originals and series based on features—demonstrates it can be done. The Boss Baby: Back in Business dropped its first 13 episodes on April 6, following up on the hit feature with stories focused on the relationship between the titular character and his brother, Tim.

Executive producer Brandon Sawyer says producing for a streaming audience offered creative freedom in surprising and simple ways. For example, he says, the relationship between Tim and Boss Baby's assistant Stars changes from antagonistic to respectful after an episode in which they work together. "We tried to track a lot of little things like that," he says. "If you were paying attention—or even if you weren't—you subconsciously felt this thing where these characters have an active relationship with each other, beyond just the story of the day."

For The Epic Tales of Captain Underpants, executive producer Peter Hastings says the 2D show is more inspired by Dav Pilkey's hugely successful book series than has an animated feature. "The movie and the TV show appear to be series based on the same material," he says.

Creative Freedom

Streaming shows also are not beholden to advertisers in the same way, giving the studio freedom to make the shows it wants to make. "It really changed the business and what can be made because it's not a finite schedule to be filled," Hastings says. "It's more about what we want to make, and what we want to see." Blurring the line between original and revival is Harvey Street Kids, a comedy that stars Little Audrey, Little Dot and Little Lotta from the old Harvey Comics line as regular kids in a neighborhood that executive producer Brandon Hay describes as "the best place in the universe to grow up and be a kid."

This show is unapologetically driven by three distinctly different girl characters," adds executive producer Akiki Theofilopoulos. "We were grateful that the studio wanted to do this. We've made really great stories with the characters, and it just so happens that the boys love it too." Hay says his experience on Harvey Street Kids and Dream of the Croods has been more fun than broadcast, where the stop-and-start nature of making a pilot, halting while it gets sold, and then going back into production can radically change the original nature of a show.

With a commitment to a certain number of episodes right from the start, "you get to learn a little more as you go," Theofilopoulos says. "On the one hand, there's the scary part, because you're trying to build a train while you're driving it. But the fun part is we also have that room to figure things out ourselves. We can try things with a character and find what works."
WARNER BROS.
ANIMATION RAMPS
UP FOR THE
STREAMING AGE

WBA series VP Audrey Diehl reveals
what she looks for in new talent and
what gives a pitch that special spark.

BY SCOTT LEHANE

Audrey Diehl, a 14-year veteran of Nickelodeon,
joined the creative team at Warner Bros. Animata-
tion last summer as vice president, series, report-
ing directly to WBA president Sam Register. In this role, she shepherds new
projects into development and fields pitches for new ideas, while looking for
properties in the Warner Bros. collection with the potential for a reboot.

“When I started, I was thrown right into the deep end, working on the new
Animaniacs’ reboot—helping them to staff up, find the right cast, and bracing
some of our current clients, because obviously it’s a very satirical show, so
we’re finding ways to talk about what’s happening now,” she says.

Slated for release in 2020 on Hulu’s over-the-top (OTT) streaming service,
the series is currently in pre-production on the first and second episodes. “We’re
just getting going, establishing the style, finding the voice and figuring out how
we’re going to honor the characters and make sure that it’s as beautiful and as
fun and as groundbreaking a show as it was when it came out in the 1990s.”

The reboot was announced in Janu-
ary as part of a two-season, straight
to-series order that also brought the
entire original series to Hulu’s video-
on-demand service. Steven Spielberg is
returning as executive producer of the
series.

Diehl is also currently developing a
new animated series based on the Har-
ley Quinn character from DC Comics’
Batman for a new direct-to-consumer
DC Comics streaming service slated to
launch later this year in partnership with Warner Bros. Digital Networks.

She explained that the show is targeted
at adults, and they are planning “a completely
different kind of show that I think
ain’t out there right now, especially
in the superhero space. It’s been really fun to push the charac-
ter into a place where she can really be
both a badass antihero, but also funny,
and the heroine of her own story.”

A NEW GOLDEN AGE OF
TELEVISION

The bustling studio currently has 17
series in production, with several new
projects in the pipeline.

“It’s a really exciting time in anima-
tion,” says Diehl. “I think the con-
tent still has to be great, because the
consumer is super-demanding and they
have so many options. But I think the
great thing about working at a place
like Warner Bros. is that we can sell
everywhere, and so we have the oppor-
tunity to make kids shows for Cartoon
Network, and also make shows for
Netflix and Hulu and for other digital
platforms. It’s an opportunity to do all
different kinds of shows for all
different kinds of audiences.”

As for the future, Diehl says, “We’re
really looking at making all different
kinds of projects, and we’re leaning ex-
tensively into our existing Warner Bros.
library. And then, in addition, we are
looking at original pitches, so I’m also
building this small original slate that
we’re working on as well.

As we enter an era that some have
called a new ‘Golden Age’ of television,
with new streaming services competing
for content and talent cropping up on a
weekly basis, Diehl says it’s an especial-
ly exciting time in animation. “Twenty
years ago, most of the animation was
going for the kids networks, and now
I think it’s opening up so we can make
animation for other audiences… but
we want our content to break through,
and show that animation can work for
any genre and any audience. It’s not just
kids. It’s not just families. It’s not just
college students. Which means that we
need to make sure we’re making things
that are smart and interesting and
engaging so that audiences will want to
spend their time on them.”

“Animation isn’t a genre, it’s a tool.”
“Probably everyone who works in animation fell in love with Looney Toons and the Hanna-Barbera characters.”

Audrey Diehl, Warner Bros. Animation vice president, series.
CG GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT OFFERS A TOTAL ANIMATION SOLUTION

The Chinese media company integrates project financing, development, content production and distribution within China and throughout the world.

BY RUDY CHAN

CG GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT LIMITED (CGGE) is a Hong Kong-based holding company with offices in China and the United States, with partner studios throughout Asia. The company focuses on several areas:

CONTENT CREATION - FROM IDEA TO SCREEN
CGGE provides original IP creators with a total solution that include:
• Securing financing
• Story development
• Script development
• Pre-production
• Chain of titles and legal support
• Production and outsourcing partners
• Original music and scoring
• Production control
• Post-production

CGGE is currently investing in the CG animated feature film, “Dreamers,” to illustrate the company’s capabilities and commitment to developing and producing a movie project from start to finish. We encourage you to find out more by visiting CGGE at MIFF booth G401 at the Annecy International Animation Festival 2018.

CONTENT DISTRIBUTION
CGGE helps Chinese companies secure international distribution for their feature film and TV series projects. Content is trans-created into English and/or other languages from its original Chinese language version. In addition, CGGE can help foreign companies distribute their IPs in China and other Asian markets—CGGE will help foreign studios get the necessary Chinese government approval to distribute their shows on various theatrical, broadcast and digital platforms in China.

CGGE head Raymond D. Neoh (left) and architect Haim Dotan.

CGGE is planning to partner with Heman Zhangjie’s “Glass Bridge” in China, along with Haim Dotan, the bridge’s architect, to organize a charity concert tentatively set for 2020, to benefit children’s charities around the world. As CGGE’s main business is providing entertainment for kids and families, there is no better way to show support for our world’s next generation than through this fundraising effort. A non-profit subsidiary with committed funding is being established to assist organizations that specialize in helping children all around the world. CGGE welcomes companies to join this effort to provide care and support for children in need across the globe.

CGE will help their clients tailor a 360 IP development strategy and execution plan that includes concept design, IP development, product manufacturing, licensing, merchandising, feature film and TV series production, games and VR/AR/360 immersive experiences.

OUR VISION
• Build a world-class global digital media platform
• Connect the best creative and technical people together through our digital platform. Provide the best professional service for our global members
• Produce projects with teams of leading professionals from around the world
• Invest in education to nurture talent and train future industry leaders
• Continue Research & Development to push technology and creativity to new heights
• Create the environment and opportunity for the next generation to shape the future and change the world.
LET’S GET DIGITAL: A GLOBAL ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA ECOSYSTEM IS ON THE RISE

CG Global Entertainment and Animation World Network are developing a global digital communications platform and membership program to connect the entertainment media world.

BY RUDY CHAN

The CGGE-Global Digital Entertainment Media Platform’s objectives are to support, educate, lead, guide and finance the growth of the global digital entertainment media industry. The CGGE, global membership program is set to service educational institutions, industry organizations, production studios, students and individual professionals—as well as other related groups and individuals—across the globe. The platform will eventually be the hub of a global digital media ecosystem, so that members can find key resources they need for their creative projects and business development efforts. The platform will also provide online access to educational programs and vocational training materials for self-improvement and professional qualifications.

In addition, the platform will establish a development fund to support creativity, invest in productions, and sponsor scholarships for members. The platform also will organize and support member information directory, recruitment services for both employers and job seekers, access to information on co-production development and financing opportunities, service work outsourcing, specialized educational programs, R&D projects, business financing and more.

The CGGE-Global Digital Entertainment Media Platform is also building a global digital media industry “big data” system for our members to access. The “Global Digital Media Industry Directory - China Edition 2018” has just been published, with a North and South America Edition, Europe Edition, and Global Edition—covering regions from Africa to Japan—set to follow in the coming years. The “Global Digital Media Industry Directory - China Edition 2018” provides access to more than 10,000 entertainment media studios, game developers, academic institutions and related organizations instantly. The directory is filled with insightful and pertinent information about the digital media industry in China, a valuable asset for anyone wanting to enter the Chinese entertainment media market.

Please see the “China Edition 2018 Directory” advertisements for full details.

THE CGGE-GLOBAL DIGITAL ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA PLATFORM IS ESTABLISHING REGIONAL NETWORKS TO BOTH BRING REGIONAL CONTENT AND INFORMATION TO THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY, AS WELL AS LOCALIZE INTERNATIONAL CONTENT INTO DIFFERENT LANGUAGES.

GOLDEN EGGPLANT MEDIA BRINGS CREATORS AND INVESTORS TOGETHER TO PRODUCE QUALITY ANIMATED PRODUCTS

Company helps incubate properties, bringing together creative talent and financiers to produce content for international distribution.

BY SOPHIA ZHU

Golden Eggplant Media is dedicated to incubating potential properties, as well as producing fine animated film and TV series for both domestic and international markets through collaboration with professional teams and financial partners.

“It is key to make the right match between the property and the creative team.”

Golden Eggplant Media is looking to collaborate with property owners, animation talent—including directors, animators, designer and writers—and investment agents and film funds from all over the world.
After 20 Years of Excellence, Original Force Awakens

CEO Harley Zhao continues to lead creative and technological achievement at China’s largest and most acclaimed animation studio.

BY EMMA WU

Headquartered in Nanjing, the capital of six historical Chinese dynasties, leading animation studio and content creator Original Force was founded by CEO Harley Zhao, a super-fan of the Star Wars franchise. The company name is derived from the core concept of Star Wars—exploring the unknown and realizing one’s own potential.

In 1999, Harley left his secure bank job and set up Original Force in a small office in the Nanjing Jinpeng Hotel, where his dream of animation first set sail. In 2001, Harley became an Autodesk Maya Certified Professional, taking on the additional role of mentor to animators at his young studio. Before long, Original Force received a project from Electronic Theatre, which enabled Harley to acquire three animation companies in Beijing and Chengdu. The company set its goals towards becoming a major player in a world-class international animation industry. With more than 1,200 artists, Original Force has grown into an ecosystem of the animation industry.

In August 2017, Original Force’s very first original 3D animated family film Duck Duck Goose was screened at the Cannes Film Festival and scored the highest overseas sales among Chinese animation films, restoring the confidence of China’s animation industry. On March 9, 2018, Duck Duck Goose was released in China, and received praise from audiences of all ages.

In 2017, Original Force was selected as the exclusive CG creator of GaO Jingming’s L.O.R.D. Legend of Barraging Dynasties. As the first CG live-action film in China, L.O.R.D. began a new chapter in the studio’s development. With only a little over a year to finish the production, Original Force put nearly 500 artists on the project, providing a strong support for the industrialization and sustainable development of the animation industry.

Industrialized animation production requires efficient pipeline and technical management. Original Force’s artistic team works to ensure that intensive tasks are completed on schedule through industrialized management. To ensure pipeline efficiency, Original Force has set up the Pipeline Development Department to develop and improve pipeline management systems suitable for industrialized production. Knowing that all its efforts depend upon people, Original Force has spent considerable energy and resources on talent training, seeing talent as a key role in the company’s success. Harley Zhao believes that 80% of the biggest problem of the animation industry is not the lack of talent, but the lack of patience to develop talent. He says, “The reason that Original Force can spend 20 years realizing a dream that we are extremely patient in nurturing talent, which can hardly be done by others.”

High-quality CG output requires not only industrialized production, but also advanced technologies. For many years, Original Force has devoted considerable resources to technological research. In 2015, together with Nanjing University, Original Force set up an Unreal Engine 4 Bod Scanning Laboratory, one of the few laboratories jointly established by private enterprise and academia for studying the application of 3D technology in animation, TV shows, games, and VR. Unreal-realistic 36° scanning technology, which can capture even a person’s details, has been applied to the production of several of Original Force’s projects. In 2017, Original Force was authorized to develop Avatar motion capture technology in Asia, and began research on Ncam real-time technology. Artists were sent to Beijing and Shanghai to investigate possibilities for VR photography technology. After many days working around the clock, the team finally overcame significant technological barriers and found a solution for the application of the new technology, perfectly incorporating real-time live action into the visual world of Unreal Engine 4.

Through industrialized production reform and technological research, Original Force has been striving to transform itself from an animation producer into an international content creator. In the future, Original Force will stick to the production of high-quality original animation and entertainment content and strive to continue in its role as an industry leader. With animation, Original Force is always serious.

The original 3D animation industry is one of the core industries in the Asian-Pacific region, invested tens of millions of RMB into Original

Forrest, boosting the company for further development. One year later, Original Force was chosen over five world-famous animation studios to produce Dungeons & Dragons: Riders of Berk, a TV series under the DreamWorks Animation slate. Two animators from Original Force were nominated for Annie Awards for “Outstanding Character Animation.” The whole team marveled at Original Force’s achievements, but the company set its goals towards even higher accomplishments.

The whole industry marveled at Original Force’s achievements, but the company set its goals towards even higher accomplishments.

The reason that Original Force can spend 20 years realizing a dream is that we are extremely patient in developing talent.
With the support of a series of recent government policies, an increasing number of animations featuring themes and stories based on traditional Chinese culture are being developed in China. Dragon Monster, an animated TV series by Xanthus Media Shanghai, is among the best and most influential of those targeting schoolchildren.

Dragon Monster has become a key project supported by the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television (SAPPFRFT) and it will be introduced to the Middle East and North Africa through China’s One Belt and One Road initiative within two years. Xanthus Media Shanghai is also actively seeking opportunities to distribute Dragon Monster in other regions around the world. With the ever-increasing Chinese cultural influence on the international stage, Dragon Monster provides a great opportunity for increased distribution across Europe, America and Asia-Pacific regions.

The series targets children 6-9 years old and integrates Chinese totem culture—the divine dragons, phoenixes, tortoises and other sacred animals from the traditional Chinese text The Classic of Mountains and Rivers. Dragon Monster tells the story of these sacred animals from heaven entering the human world, meeting destined little friends, and running for the totem. Dragon Monster has truly become a part of children’s and their parents’ everyday life.

LC: Since the animation launched, more and more parents and children have expressed their love of Dragon Monster on WeChat and Weibo and what they expressed their love of. LC: Since the animation launched, more and more parents and children have expressed their love of Dragon Monster on WeChat and Weibo and what they express their love of.
Their marketing department has been doing crossover marketing for numerous animation projects; the teams comprehensively integrate rich and diversified channels and customize marketing plans using multi-dimensional communications to promote animation movies.

The studio also has vast experience in working with new media, including numerous apps with millions of users, over ten thousand KOLs, and web celebrities with Chinese fan bases in the millions. Dreamers Studio fully mastered hundreds of famous public accounts on WeChat and Weibo. Through long-term training and preparation, they can now directly approach and influence millions of netizens, effectively promoting and marketing animation movies even when they are still in production.

Dreamers Studio customizes marketing and promotion strategies for all of its clients. Depending on the target audience, the company employs different media with highly focused messages to ensure maximum brand exposure. Based on accurate, real-time age and gender data collected from theatre screenings, they analyze different platforms and, if necessary, will adjust the execution and increase effort and exposure to underperforming segments to make sure maximum results are achieved.

Dreamers Studio will continue to contribute to the development of China’s animation industry, expanding cooperation on Chinese and international animation projects, and hopes to create more and more popular IPs and content with all parties in the future.

DREAMERS STUDIO TAKES AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO ANIMATED MOVIE MARKETING, MERCHANDISING AND DISTRIBUTION

The company specializes in real-time, data-driven promotion based on audience choices tracked in China’s largest theatrical ticketing system.

DREAMERS STUDIO

TAKES AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO ANIMATED MOVIE MARKETING, MERCHANDISING AND DISTRIBUTION

The company specializes in real-time, data-driven promotion based on audience choices tracked in China’s largest theatrical ticketing system.

BY YANG JUNJIE

Dreamers Studio, owned by Weying Technology, is committed to developing the value of animation and comic movie properties through excellence in innovation. Since it began, Dreamers Studio has specialized in developing domestic and foreign animation movie projects, providing project investment, development, production, promotion and distribution, as well as merchandising, game production, stage shows and theme park licensing.

The company has been involved in many famous animated films—including *Boruto: Naruto the Movie*, *A Silent Voice*, *Kunta: The Floating Planet*, *Tofu*, *The Wind Guardians* and *Dinofroz*—in roles ranging from copyright investment, marketing and promotion, and distribution in China, to copyright trading within and outside of China. Using an Internet integration strategy, the studio has helped companies establish their brands and increase company value.

Dreamers Studio has three teams working on animation development, each specializing in Chinese, European/American and Japanese animation, respectively. They are widely recognized by the industry thanks to their thorough understanding of the Chinese market, customized marketing strategies for targeted audiences, and outstanding production capabilities.

The company selects the best animation projects from around the world to invest in and help secure financing, then helps local and foreign animation companies with fund management. To secure the best promotion results, Dreamers Studio uses extensive data analysis to bring the most effective and precise approach to the target audience, maximizing marketing performance for every animation movie.

Since Dreamers Studio is a part of Weying Technology, which owns China’s biggest online ticketing platform, they can provide a one-stop experience for users that integrates content promotion, ticket sales and merchandising. The studio’s marketing arm teams with a wide array of media partners, including mainstream websites, variety shows, newspapers, TV, magazines and professional journals. They have resources covering 316 cities in China—29 first-tier cities, 46 second-tier cities, 137 third-tier cities and 104 fourth-tier cities. They own thousands of class A media resources and are always one step ahead of the competition.
VR/AR
With its extensive strength in VR/AR technology, Silkroad has created a multi-player VR system, “Silkroad Environment 1.0,” for their real estate clients. This system can create a virtual sand table, city planning tour, sand table tour, mock-up flat, IMAX cinema, conference room, etc. Based on their clients’ needs, they can set up customized parameters to offer them an immersive experience of moving between the different rooms.

RENDERING
In cooperation with Alibaba, Silkroad has developed a global cloud rendering service platform and has quickly become a leader in global cloud computing and cluster rendering in China. The company has clients from over 50 countries and regions, including a number of Oscar-winning studios. Silkroad has provided rendering services for Chinese mega-hits, including Wolf Warriors II and Monkey King: Hero Is Back.

SILKROAD VISUAL MASTER CONFERENCE
The company also organizes an international technology conference, the Silkroad Visual Master Conference and Visual Creative Competition, now in its fourth season. Attendees include academicians and professionals from a wide range of creative industries, including Pixar artists, SIGGRAPH creative producers, Autodesk Research scientists, creative directors from leading Korean digital content studios, senior executives from top Chinese creative studios, and leading university professors. The conference aims to introduce state-of-the-art visual technology and artistic practice to local Chinese markets to help companies raise their capabilities and expertise to world-class standards. In addition, Silkroad hopes to build an interactive communication platform for visual technology industry professionals in China and abroad, as well as help promote local Chinese companies globally.

SILKROAD PROVIDES INTEGRATED VISUAL SERVICES FOR A BOOMING INDUSTRY
The China-based technology company is a one-stop shop for all things CG

BY RUDY CHAN
Silkroad Visual Technology Co., Ltd, a digital services provider based in Shenzhen, China, specializes in CG applications, using state-of-the-art computer graphics technology to produce innovative visual designs and other creative properties. Established in 2000, Silkroad combines technical strength with forward-thinking creative design capability, providing its customers with a wide variety of integrated digital visual services in architecture, design, exhibition hall design, advertising, animation, games, movies, sports, entertainment events, and related areas.

Today, Silkroad, which was the first visual technology company to be listed on the Chinese stock market, employs more than 1,700 employees across the country. The company’s services are based on years of expertise in various areas of visual technology, and Silkroad is rapidly becoming a global player in the field of digital visual technology and its applications.

ANIMATION AND DYNAMIC VISUAL SERVICES
Silkroad employs CG technology to help clients realize their creative vision through animation, dynamic visual effects, and related digital applications. Primarily, they provide services for movies, commercials, and multimedia exhibition and display projects that promote clients’ work and services. Their multimedia projects incorporate a wide variety of technologies—including holographic imaging, phantom imaging, air imaging, interactive touch, somatosensory technology, and virtual/augmented reality—to construct highly artistic and personalized display scenes with a strong experiential component. These projects are often combined with scenery and various forms of performance and stage machinery to create a more powerful and immersive viewer experience.

A recent project was an animation for the National Museum of China based on the famous series of paintings “The Qianlong Emperor’s Southern Inspection Tour.”
THEME PARK
With the theme of “GG Bond,” Party Map is a comprehensive IP theme park specially designed by WinSing’s engineers. Based on WinSing’s animation assets, Party Map has integrated with more than 60 growth entertainment projects, including theme parties, parent-child stage interactions, and training programs for children’s drama performances and other events.

LICENSING PRODUCTS
Collaborated with hundreds of well-known domestic and international enterprises, WinSing has licensed merchandise in 50+ industries, including toys, home supplies, daily chemicals, etc. The products are well received both at home and abroad, with annual revenue in excess of US$45,000,000.

WINNING LIVE SHOW
Launched in 2014 by WinSing Performance, WinSing Theatrical is a parent-child theater focusing on parent-child live shows. Taking children’s live shows as the core, WinSing Theatrical is the first in China to build an animation entertainment ecosystem centering on WinSing’s animation brands.

THE LION LEARNS TO LION DANCE
CG feature animation—seeking co-production partner for global distribution
Big Star is a lion who lives comfortably in the zoo, but his heart is suffering because he likes to dance. The other lions ignore him or laugh at him. However, the festive lion dance held in the zoo offers an opportunity to rekindle his confidence in himself. He feels that learning the lion dance is a new way to realize his dream. In his journey to become the lion dance champion, he learns about friendship, humiliation and hard work. The Lion Learns to Lion Dance is a heartwarming coming-of-age comedy/adventure story for the whole family to enjoy.

THE AWAKENING
CG feature animation—seeking co-production partner for global distribution
In ancient China, there are beasts hidden inside the Earth which have not been conscious for hundreds of millions of years. With the accidental triggering of a curse, the beasts have been awakened and the Earth thrown into chaos. Clued into a conspiracy to awaken the beasts, our hero gathers talented youngsters from all around the planet to help fight against evil and thwart this horrific plot.

Visit WinSing at Mifa booth 4B06.
For more information, contact Zhibin Gu at zhibin_gu@winsing.net.
Kre8tif! 2018: A ONE-OF-A-KIND FESTIVAL IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

The annual event in Cyberjaya, Malaysia features conferences, a business exchange, a multimedia festival, and more.

BY RUDY CHAN

To help develop the creative content industry in Malaysia, the Malaysia Digital Economy Corporation (MDEC) has organized Kre8tif!, an event that aims to spark innovation and exploration of major trends across the creative sector. Taking place August 6 to 12, 2018 in Cyberjaya, Selangor, Kre8tif! will include conferences focused on key areas in creative industries, business networking between local and international companies, pitching and matching, exhibitions of new technologies and IPs, hands-on VR/AR and 3D printing experiences, screenings of movies and shorts from all over the world, music concerts, talk shows and more.

Kre8tif! Conference is a gathering of leading minds in animation, licensing & merchandising, visual effects, and digital technology programmed into business and technical tracks. The conference will offer the following:

- Knowledge sharing in creative content-related business and technical tracks
- Interactive panel sessions sharing experiences and views from industry leaders
- Meetings between international, regional and local industry players
- Business matching sessions with international buyers
- Vibrant networking events across the Kre8tif! Content Festival

Animation developers, animators, visual effects artists and designers, licensors and licensees, broadcasters and students from all parts of the world will gather together to share and showcase their work and bring out new ideas to inspire others.

Kre8tif! Business Xchange is an ideal platform for creative companies looking to dramatically impact the industry and the world. This session is a networking and value-creation platform designed to help business leaders expand their businesses to the next level. It brings together international, regional and local players of the industry to exchange thought leadership, business insights and trends.

Kre8tif! Xhibition is open to all creative and technology companies to showcase their IPs, current hardware, software and services to Kre8tif! delegates and the public. With its strong Kre8tif! branding, the Xhibition is an ideal venue for companies to reach out to existing and new customers. It is also a place where creative companies are able to meet with hundreds of job seekers from around Malaysia.

Kre8tif! SHORTS SCREENING is a showcase of the year’s best works from students and professionals from all over the world. This screening provides attendees with an in-depth exploration of the world of animation, visual effects, and scientific visualization.

Kre8tif! Content Festival celebrates creative technology, art and design, and music by bringing together creative studios, professionals, artists, and students—as well as communities—to share and shape experiences that educate, challenge and inspire.

Kre8tif! programs and activities include:

- Screenings of Local and International Features
- Mascots and Celebrity Appearances
- Talk Shows
- Community Booths
- Food Tracks
- Concert

Kre8tif! aims to spark innovation and exploration across the creative sector.

Kre8tif! @ School is an animation program that enables students to develop artistic skills that can lead to college admissions and lucrative careers using the industry ICT tools. It is a two-day intensive hands-on animation workshop targeted at secondary school students. Upon completion, all participating students will be invited to submit their animation clips of not less than 30 seconds to the Kre8tif! Young Animator Competition. The top four will be showcased at Kre8tif!

Finally, if you want to get animated physically, you can join the Kre8tif! Costume Fun Run on Aug 4. This exciting event is aimed at encouraging people of all ages and backgrounds to improve their mental and physical health through running and exercise. No ordinary run, the Costume Fun Run is designed to appeal to pop culture fans and health enthusiasts alike, allowing participants to enjoy a scenic run, while showing off their best costumes. The Kre8tif! Costume Fun Run is open to everyone aged 7 to 60.
With a name like “Giggle Garage”, the mission of this Malaysian animation company is fairly self-evident—to bring laughs and fun to kids around the world. Established in 2010, Giggle Garage Animations creates original character brands and high-quality animated content for children and families. The studio has created more than 60 hours of content for television and digital platforms, with global partners including BBC Kids, ABC Australia, Netflix, Media Prima, Astro Malaysia, SK and EBS Korea. Giggle Garage also provides CGI animation services, post-production, VFX, and content commissioning for multiple digital platforms. The company was named “Most Admired Animation Company in Malaysia” by Top10 Asia Media in 2014.

“At Giggle Garage, we believe that we can help people to have more fun and to feel good,” says Zeno Gabing, executive director and co-founder of Giggle Garage Animations. “We use our creativity and passion to create beautiful CGI animated content, so we can continue entertaining you.”

Original CGI projects produced by Giggle Garage include the preschool TV series *Origanimals*. The show was completed entirely by the studio with financial support from Malaysia’s Ministry of Finance. In 2016, *Origanimals* won the Grand Prize for Best 3D Animation in Television Programming at the Asian Television Awards. Currently, the show is available in more than 100 countries and the company is actively seeking licensing partners to further develop and expand the *Origanimals* brand.

Giggle Garage has also proven to be one of the most reliable and cost-effective partners for co-producing television series. Recent successful co-productions include *Kazoops*, *Cam & Leon*, produced with Astro Malaysia, and *Being the Play Ranger*, produced with Craze Bird Studios, SK Broadband and EBS from South Korea. *Kazoops* is a top rated Australian show launched on Cbeebies in the UK and Kids ABC in Australia in July 2016, and subsequently streamed to the rest of the world on Netflix in over 15 languages. Consumer products and publishing launched in Australia and the UK in late 2017.

In April 2018, the studio partnered with Primeworks Studio to develop *Fridgies*, a slapstick, non-dialogue comedy series featuring refrigerator magnet characters. Giggle Garage is also developing a new preschool show called *Salad Bunnies*, in which a group of special bunnies use their inherent strengths—their salad power—to help the residents of Sunnyville. Salad power encompasses special abilities gained from consuming vegetables and fruits, including enhanced vision and brain performance, speed and agility, strength and endurance, and a healthy heart.

Giggle Garage will be bringing *Fridgies* and *Salad Bunnies* to Mifa/Annecy 2018 for meetings with interested co-producing partners, distributors and investors.
Today, China is one of the most important markets for the global digital media industry. China is also the fastest growing market in the world for the consumption of digital media, whether animations, games, VR/AR, streaming media, comic books or related content. In 2017, the Chinese animation market size was estimated to be US$25 billion dollars and is expected to reach US$36 billion annually within the next 3 years.

With more than 200 million people under the age of 24, the Chinese market for digital media consumption will soon be the biggest in the world. China has more than several hundred thousand companies involved in the so-called “Culture Industry.” Many are inactive or not involved in the digital media industry. The Global Digital Media Industry Directory, China Edition 2018 gives you instant access to more than 3,000 significant and important companies including animation studios, game developers, academic institutions and related organizations in China. These companies are all genuine and active in the industry. They are looking for co-production partners, service work outside China, and international businesses looking to expand into China.

The Global Digital Media Industry Directory, China Edition 2018 is more than just an industry directory. It is also an up-to-date industry report, full of insightful and helpful information about the Chinese media industry, covering government policies, China’s relationship and perspective on the digital media world, and creative development efforts in animation, games, interactive and peripheral sectors. It also features detailed digital media sector assessments and analysis, touching on the difficulties the industry is facing, sectors expecting the greatest amount of growth, and what shape that growth is expected to take. One chapter is dedicated to each covered sector. The objectives of this directory are to help our industry decipher and better understand China’s digital media industry and the government’s role in its oversight.

How This Directory Will Benefit You!

If you want to develop a mobile game, have an idea about creating an animation series, or are looking for Chinese partners that can co-develop technology and products with your company, this directory is made for you.

If you are new to China’s digital media industry, the Global Media Industry Directory will provide comprehensive information about what to do and what to avoid in China. If you are already seasoned in China’s media industry, you will find the directory a place to update resources to find new production partners or developers inside China.

Whether you are from China, or want to start your business in China, this directory is for you.

The directory is being published in both English and Chinese and will be available on a USB thumb drive at the CGGE MIFA Booth 4G01. Or, order online at www.CGGE.media.