FOCUS/ “In fun we trust!”. Borrowing the motto of Atlantyca Entertainment which, alongside Iginio Straffi’s Rainbow and the Corradi family’s Mondo TV, is certainly the most international of all the Italian animation companies, we can also confirm that, despite our domestic problems, the economic crisis and the recession, the Italian animation industry still believes in this sector and is continuing to invest in it. Although in Italy, it is not technically correct to talk about an animation industry since, like most of our national production base, it mainly consists of small-sized businesses. With the help of Rai, the public broadcaster, both small and large players have now become a consolidated presence on the vaster international market, exporting “made in Italy” around the world. Internationalization has become the key word for survival in the world of audiovisuals, as well as most of the other production sectors.
We never refer to a single market when creating a new product because we invest so much in the property that the Italian market would never be enough to recover our investment. We have always leaned towards internationalization, says Caterina Vacchi, Head of the production department and executive producer of Atlantyca Entertainment, the company behind the success of “Geronimo Stilton”, the second most famous mouse in the world after Mickey Mouse, whose books have sold more than Harry Potter. With an office in Beijing and an international team, Atlantyca has just announced the third season of Geronimo Stilton, another Italian-French co-production in which the Milan-based company is the major investor, with Moonscoop and, in addition to Rai Fiction, France Télévisions and M6. New characters and new locations await the most famous mouse journalist in the world whose TV series has been sold to over 100 countries. “Season three is due to screen in fall 2014 with another 26 x 23’ episodes, making a total of 78 episodes, almost 30 hours of animation”, Ms. Vacchi proudly explains, drawing our attention to the extraordinary ratings it has had on the various networks that broadcast the cartoon, the latest of which is Germany’s Kika. “Geronimo is definitely something out of the ordinary, quite a sensation. We sold over 45 million copies around the world, right at the beginning, when we sold the first season”, she continues. “The fact that the character was already well known certainly helped. The ratings of season one were very important for season two. Atlantyca’s policy is to start with a product that has been successful on another market, in this case, the publishing market. It is easier to work in a universe that has already been constructed and you have proof that it does not just work in Italy but on other markets as well, so you have the guarantee of an international base”. Like Bat Pat, Atlantyca’s latest gamble, “this is a 52 x 11’ episode “creepy” sit-com”, continues Ms. Vacchi.
THE INTERVIEW/ Rai Fiction has been supporting Italian animation for over 15 years, not only financially but also by following every creative aspect of the projects it finances. We talk to Luca Milano, head of marketing and animation.

WITH RAI IN EUROPE

· Ginevra Scuderi

Which are the characteristics that an international animation co-production should have for the Rai?

Our objective is twofold: on the one hand, to produce series and, as an exception, single movies, that can be easily integrated with our networks’ proposals, offering exciting and educational content for children and teenagers and, on the other, to support and consolidate the Italian animation sector, from young talents to well-established production companies. For this reason, a co-production has to have a strong editorial content, involve an Italian production company and be suitable for our networks’ schedule.

The Rai networks are doing an excellent job: from Raidue, which offers the latest episodes of the best Italian and international series, to Yoyo, which has become the leading Italian network for children, and Gulp, aimed at the more demanding audience of older kids. Our proposals are amongst the best in Europe (around 750 hours of cartoons on the generalist networks every year, plus two themed networks). We can say, with great satisfaction, on our own behalf as well as on the part of our Italian producer and film-maker partners, that the series co-produced by Rai Fiction are successful and are some of the most watched and enjoyed by the public.

In such a fragmented television panorama, how can success be calculated?

The first indicator of the success of a cartoon series is replicability. When I see that, in ten years, the 130 episodes of Winx Club produced so far have had a total of 11,000 screenings, or that, in just three and a half years, the 52 episodes of Geronimo Stilton have already been screened 2,000 times, always with excellent viewing figures, it is evident that we are talking about successful products. And the same goes for many other titles, starting with the evergreen Pimpa. But, along with the figures, the editorial content is also important for a public broadcaster. Our series have to help small children to develop, whilst enjoying themselves. We have to stimulate their imagination, their curiosity and their taste for beauty, illustrations and music. We have to help them learn about literature (which is why many of our series are inspired by books) and sport, we have to promote the values of tolerance, friendship, respect for nature and for others and – increasingly – to have self-confidence and not to give up in the face of difficulty, to know where to get help and to offer help where necessary. It is easy to find these messages in even our most carefree cartoons.

Considering the cost of animation products and the cultural differences that often make international co-productions difficult, do you think the latter constitute an opportunity or a necessity?
International co-productions are generally a necessity. It is difficult for a broadcaster, producers and distributors in a European country to be able to finance the production of a series on their own, with an adequate budget for making quality products. It can happen, but it is not the rule. So co-productions are inevitable. They can also become an opportunity when reliable partners are involved: Italian producers who are able to move on international markets and dependable foreign partners, better still if linked to other broadcasters right from the start. Collaboration between producers can improve a product, making it possible to find the best writers, artists, musicians and directors on an international and not just a national level. The dialogue between broadcasters is also important. The periodic meetings we have at international events like Mip, Mifa, the Cartoon Forum, the Kidscreen summit, and so forth, are very useful not just for talking about individual projects but also for discussing common strategies for television companies that need to be constantly updated in order to keep up with changes in the market.

**How much does Rai invest in international co-productions?**
As you know, our total budget is 15 million Euros a year, and more than half of the biggest titles are realized as international co-productions.
The first step is to approve the estimate for each project, taking into account the differences in budget composition in different countries, and the division of the work agreed between the production companies: how much work will be carried out in Italy, the film-makers and studios involved, if there are any non-European partners and, obviously, all the technical aspects.
Our participation ranges, in general, from a minimum of 10% to a maximum of 40% of the total budget. The actual involvement of an Italian production company, which is proposing the project or is at least responsible for realizing an important part of the work, is an element that will move us towards the higher part of this range. Then, during negotiations, obviously our rights and the possibility of the commercial recovery of our investment quota are important.

**Which are the new Rai Fiction titles that, although not co-produced with foreign partners, you think will have an international appeal?**
To tell the truth, the production of an animated series requires such a high level of investment that foreign investment should always be sought, except perhaps for special products of civil value such as the film about Garibaldi’s expedition and the unification of Italy, or the specials dedicated to Falcone and Borsellino, or Father Pino Puglisi.
We can and must also allow ourselves to make some products that are destined for an audience of Italian children and families only.
Amongst the titles to be released soon, apart from the new Winx series, an Italian series that is distributed all over the world, I think that the series about the young Jules Verne, the new season of Spike Team about girls’ volleyball and L’arte con Matì e Dada, an amusing and educational series about figurative art, are examples of Italian products that can certainly also be appreciated by other countries.

Above, on the left, “Jules Verne”, on the right, “Mofy” (Misseri Studio) and three scenes from i Saurini (“Jurassic Cubs”, Animundi)
project, Koouka, which consists of amusing 1 minute long “pills”. We are thinking of making over 100 episodes which can be used in themed blocks of five episodes linked to the same topic (e.g. a baseball match, breakfast, etc.). Koouka is a chameleon who involuntarily transforms himself. This is a totally Italian visual project for all types of audiences. There is a Chinese partner on the horizon, nothing definite yet, the situation is still being assessed. Obviously, everyone wants an Italian broadcaster to be included in the project’, continues Mr. Marcolini, ‘that is a kind of guarantee (Ed: for Koouka it could be Gulp or Rai YoYo) but, on the other hand, we have to develop an increasingly larger number of projects, like the French. How can you do that if you only have one broadcaster who invests in animation products and maybe the project fails to take off?’ An old, unsolved question in the atypical panorama of Italian television where only Rai, through Rai Fiction, invests in the sector (the annual budget is over 16 million Euros), apart from a few productions, which are insignificant on an economic level, from the other themed TV broadcasters.

There is still, however, a lot of margin for improvement in the area of foreign sales. This was the conviction behind Anna D’Alessandro’s decision six months ago to set up, with Cristina Angelucci, Aldebaran Distribution, the first Italian company to specialize in the foreign distribution of the best Italian animation products, whose portfolio includes numerous animated series. In addition to the ‘classic’ products from The Animation Band (Lupo Alberto, I Cosi, Stefì, Spaghetti Family) and Koouka, there are two series of Uffa! Che pazienza (Oh Boy!, Oh Boy! II) produced by Enanimation (the new series, The Linkers, is due to arrive at the end of the year). The product list also includes Penny X, About Love and the Sbrain series project for school-age children set inside the nervous system of a young girl, all from Gertie Production; plus the Christmas special La cantata dei pastori (The Song of the Shepherds), the series A Skeleton Story, and the movie L’arte della felicità (The Art of Happiness), produced by MAD Entertainment (see interview). ‘All of us hope that they manage to achieve their goal and are rewarded for their efforts’, says Marco Marcolini who has kept the sales of Ulisse, il mio nome é nessuno for himself. This first animation series to feature the Homeric hero (Ulysses) was recently broadcast on Rai 2 and Rai Gulp and is directed by Giuseppe Maurizio Lagana. ‘I have a lot of faith in this new adventure’, explains Anna D’Alessandro, ‘but the selection in the West is very fierce. The high content classics which have already been broadcast on Rai networks are considered to be very good by western markets but they always need new products. So we have to move to emerging markets. For these places, it is an element of pride to be able to count on a good Italian product, and Italy is the driving force, so we go there basically to export Italy as a brand.

continued on page 14

SCENARIOS/ THE CHARGE OF THE 3000

When Bruno Bozetto and John Lasseter met for the first time last year at the inauguration of the wonderful Pixar show in Milan, the person who was most thrilled was Lasseter. “You are my idol”, the founder of Pixar told the Italian film-maker, and kept him by his side all evening. His son, who has recently graduated with a degree in cinema, had only just finished a thesis that compared “Fantasía” (Disney, 1941) with “Allegro non troppo” (Bozetto, 1977). A few months later, Lasseter, now also the head of Disney, invited Bozetto to California to visit the studios and talk to the artists. The admiration of US animators for their Italian colleagues has deep roots and is reminiscent of that of Hollywood for our cinema. There are some members of the Academy who still regret not having been able to give an Oscar to “Flauto magico” by Gianinni and Luzzati (1978), because it was too long for the shorts category and too short for the features. They are fascinated by our creative craftsmanship and by our ability to create masterpieces from nothing, like Carlo Rambaldi did in his highly imaginative workshop in Los Angeles.

As it has passed on to new generations, the art of our great film-makers – to which we should add at least the Pagot brothers and Gavili, Pierlugi De Mas, Osvaldo Cavandoli, Manfredo Manfredi and Guido Manuli – has partly turned into an industry. Today we work with digital images in the most disparate spheres. The main one is television series, followed by feature movies, arthouse movies, visual effects, advertising, video games and the up-and-coming digital publishing. There are around three thousand people currently working in this sector in Italy: film-makers, directors, screenwriters, artistic directors, storyboard writers, animators, scene designers, character designers, set designers and 3D modelers, special effects technicians, musicians and sound designers, dubbing artists plus producers, distributors, marketing and licensing experts and administrative personnel. These artistic, technical, organizational, managerial and cultural skills feed a small industry that has to measure itself against the international market. Animation studios are image factories where one production has to follow another, so as not to lose the skilled personnel and, therefore, a large part of the company’s know-how. The problem of production continuity; along with the ability to create works that are suitable for global markets, mean that animation studios are more similar to the manufacturing industry than the cinema and television sector.

The problem is that, in Italy, the only television interlocutor for independent producers is Rai, to which the whole sector is naturally very grateful for the production and editorial commitment it has made for nearly twenty years. A commitment that should be shared with private broadcasters or at least redrawn, also in terms of content, in the light of the new distribution platforms and changeability of international scenarios. It would, for example, be a good idea to liberate children’s animation, finally managing to provide a different, more original representation of individuals and society compared to real life productions. In the past, Italian film-makers have demonstrated that they can do this very well and we are certain that the younger generations of film-makers and scriptwriters will be able to do the same, particularly if we take into account the fact that, today more than ever, animation is a liquid language that can adapt itself to multiple screens and increasingly fragmented audiences.

*President of Asifa Italia (Italian Association of Animation Films)
CASE HISTORY! Italian creativity and a Hollywood business model: this is how Iginio Straffi’s Rainbow has scaled the international market

A TYCOON IN LORETO

Paolo Di Maira

With over 300 employees and 11 companies, Rainbow is the largest studio in Europe dedicated to cinema and television animation production. The organization and business model are very American (Rainbow directly manages every aspect of each project and activity: from the concept to the production, from the distribution to the licensing) and is very “Disney-like”, with its Rainbow Magic Land, the theme park created a couple of years ago in Valmontone, near Rome. However, the company is also characterized by a strong Italian identity. It was, in fact, founded by Iginio Straffi from Marche (he was born in Gualdo, a village near Macerata), and has set up its headquarters in the region, in Loreto. This glocal approach is behind the international success of Winx Club, one of the biggest successes of all time aimed at 4-12 year old female audiences: the famous fairies have become Italian fashion icons for girls the world over.

Winx Club is the only brand with its own 360° platform consisting of 130 x 26’ episodes, two movies, a Broadway style musical, a show on ice, an MMO online game, billions of merchandising products distributed all over the world and a theme park. Winx Club is a global phenomenon and is broadcast non-stop in over 130 countries with excellent results.

The secret of this success can be summed up in just one word: innovation. Straffi explains to Cinema & Video International how this applies to Winx Club. Firstly, the way the stories are told, “they have a narrative arc that last for tens of episodes along with a subplot which comes to a conclusion at the end of each episode”. Then there is the attention to clothing: the fairies have an outfit for every moment of the day. “You can’t dress the same way in the gym, at school or at a party” comments Straffi. A revolutionary idea – immediately welcomed by the millions of fans – compared to normal cartoons where the leading characters always dress in the same way.

“Winx Club has become a TYCOON in Loreto. Above, on the opposite page, the countryside around Loreto”.

A Skeleton Story

Although the distribution of classics is, unfortunately, very slow, we try to maintain a high level of broadcasters, whilst the co-production sector has exceeded our expectations”. In fact, Aldebaran is also involved in co-production agreements and licensing projects. “There is a lot of interest in Kosouka and we can say that we have reached completion for A Skeleton Story, bringing two important foreign partners into the project alongside Rai, one British, the other French”, she concludes.

Also in Cannes will be the Turin-based studio Làstrego e Testa Multimedia which, after a problematic co-production experience with the Chinese on the 3D TV series Marco Polo, still on stand-by, will be returning to Mip with the third series of Amita della Giungla (Amita of the Jungle), co-produced with Rai Fiction and currently in production. There will be a total of 79 x 7’ episodes for children aged 4-6 years about a girl who lives in a magical world where people and animals can speak to each other. “Ours is a workshop-type artistic-craft proposal in an increasingly industrial world”, explains Francesco Testa. “We sell to small, sophisticated TV networks. Amita 2 will be broadcast before the summer on Rai Yoyo and we think that the 26 new episodes will be finished this year. For Mip’TV we also have around 20 out of 52 x 1’ episodes ready of Il Circo (The Circus) which went down very well at Mipcom and for which we already have some concrete interest”. The great appeal of this series is the artistic quality. It is based on a series of drawings that originated as independent works of art, by Cristina Làstrego, with highly original graphics featuring animated objects and fabrics using the digital decoupage technique. Làstrego and Testa moved to animation after working in the early Seventies as illustrators and authors on a number of children’s books which were translated all over the world, about the adventures of Giovanni and Tommasone, a good, fat dragon, which then became the animated series I sogni di Giovanna. Today, after numerous CD Roms, they have launched themselves with the same enthusiasm into the world of Apps with IdentiKat, an original semi-animated series for iPads that has received a positive response from all over the world. “For those who, like us, have a past in publishing and television”, says Cristina Làstrego, “the iPad is a stimulating tool and a revolutionary invention, similar to that of Gutenberg, that opens the door to a more evolved form of interactive communication”. “Many talk about the concept of cross-media but few put it into practice”, continues Francesco Testa. “The passage from App to TV program is a media phenomenon that is starting to take shape. We are explorers. The idea is to turn IdentiKat into an animated drawing. We should also remember that an App can be put on the international market without the mediation of publishers whereas, for TV programs, unfortunately the well-known distribution problems persist”.

continued on page 16
are always wearing new clothes, and the songs create dubbing problems), but all of this “has given the series something special”. Straffi has been able to rise to the challenge because he plays outside national borders. In addition to Rai, Rainbow has managed to collect international partners of the caliber of Nickelodeon (Rainbow is also the exclusive agent for Nickelodeon products in Italy), Warner Bros, Disney and Cartoon Network. For the last couple of years Viacom Paramount has held a 30% interest in the company. A cartoon empire that, starting with the market research, creates in-house TV series and movies for cinema, as well as drama and live action through Rainbow Entertainment.

The licensing is an essential part of Rainbow’s core business, with more than 350 active licenses on the world market in over 40 different categories. And if the success of the Wixx movies (Wixx Club – The secret of the lost kingdom in 2007, and Wixx Club 3D – Magical adventure in 2010) was, in a certain sense, expected, less so were the excellent results of the more recent theatrical offering, Gladiators of Rome 3D, a feature which took 5 years to make and, says Straffi, cost 35 million Euros. Already sold in over thirty countries, the movie was released last fall in Italy with excellent results (4.5 million Euros), considering the genre. It will be released in US movie theaters in August, distributed by Paramount.

“What pleases me the most”, comments Straffi, “is that in the countries where the movie has been released so far - Italy, Russia and Israel - it has positioned itself immediately behind the big Pixar and Dreamworks movies, but much higher than the animations made by independent European producers”.

A new challenge for Straffi, accompanied by some positive predictions for the future. However, it would be impossible to fully understand Rainbow’s success without returning to Le Marche, to Loreto where, a year and half ago, Rainbow Magic Town, the company’s new headquarters, was set up: 10,000 square meters, half of which designed for the wellbeing of the people who work there. In addition to innovative environmentally compatible solutions (solar panels, photovoltaic systems and geothermal fields that produce all the energy the company requires), there is also a fitness center, a swimming pool, a 3D movie theater and, naturally, wonderful views of the gentle countryside of Le Marche.

“With this type of business, the countryside and the light can considerably improve the quality of the work”. This statement is not facile in any way: “One of my colleagues who came to visit me from Rome”, Straffi explains to Cinema & Video International, “told me that he couldn’t understand this need of mine to film long shot sequences”. He found his answer in Rainbow Magic Town: we have no buildings in front of us just “hills, the sea, with its ever-changing colors, sun flowers, fields of wheat and poppies”. All of this spreads out before the eyes of Straffi and everyone who works in Rainbow Magic Town. Rainbow will be promoting the sixth series of Wixx Club, which is currently in production, at Mip Tv 2013, as well as the second series of Mia and Me, a mixture of live action and CGI animation, a co-production between Lucky Punch, Rainbow, March Entertainment with m4e, Hanh Film, ZDF German Television Network and Rai Fiction. The first series was nominated for the “Pulcinella Award” at Cartoons on the Bay and voted the no. 1 program at Mip Junior 2010.

**MARCHE/ FAR-REACHING CREATIVITY**

If Iginio Straffi’s fairies fly above Loreto, his creativity spreads over more or less the whole region of Marche.

Thanks to the Marche Film Commission, the Fondazione Marche Cinema Multimedia is carrying out a census of the companies working in the animation sector.

By examining this “work in progress”, we discover a composite situation, made up of small companies and individual professionals moving towards an industrial dimension or oriented towards experimenting with the art.

One of the names that stands out the most is that of Simone Massi, an animated shorts film-maker who has won many awards at top international Festivals, including the David di Donatello 2011 for “Dell’amazzare il maiale”. Massi trained at the Istituto Statale Superiore “Scuola del libro” in Urbino, the oldest artistic institution in the region which, in recent years, has “produced” a number of important Italian film-makers such as Magda Guidi and Mara Cerri (winners of the Torino Film Festival 2011 in the Italian shorts section), Virginia Mori, Simona Bursi and Caterina Baldi.

Another training center is the Accademia di Belle Arti, Macerata, thanks to the Mentezero cultural association led by teacher Carlo Gioventù. There are also some small production companies that originated from Rainbow and its Rainbow Academy which, in the wake of the success of the Wixxes, are involved in high level serial commercial animation, often produced for third parties (TV, companies) realized using cutting edge technology (3D): such as Gama Movie (Gabriele Marinelli), Barabucha Animation (Lorenzo Garbuglia) and Motus Film (Giorgio Valentinini), as well as individual film-makers like Corrado Virgili (Eventi Culturali), better known as the artistic director of the Wixx movies, Luca Meloni, Francesco Zanotti (Deliranti), Cinzia Battistel, Lorenzo Ciccoli (MattiGatti), Rebecca Lisotta, Nicola Fillai (Cube 3D) and Marco Marilungo Pictor.

Marche Cinema Multimedia is working with this rich group of creative people and companies, which is spread throughout the region, from Pesaro to Jesi, from Fano to Porto Sant’Elpidio to Macerata, with the aim of moving on to the strategic phase of support and promotion. (P.D.M.)
SPOTLIGHT ON ITALIAN ANIMATION

On the opposite front we find **Winx Club**, undoubtedly the greatest Italian animation success which will soon have a new, sixth series (see interview), whilst the new episodes of series five are currently being broadcast on Rai 2 and Rai Gulp. There are also 156 episodes (13 minutes each) of **Cuccioli (Pet Pals)**, the property of the **Gruppo Alcuni**, distributed in over 40 countries, which are due to arrive before the summer. The fifth series has 52 episodes which have been realized in 3D for the first time, like the feature movie that came out of the success of the TV series. Of these, the first 13 have already been broadcast on Rai 2, the network on which Cuccioli and Winx Club are amongst the most popular Rai Fiction titles, along with **I Saurini** (Jurassic Cubs), featuring five brave baby dinosaurs. The successful third season has just finished broadcasting in the Sunday morning family slot. "It has true international appeal due to quality and structure of the story, the Jurassic era in which the cartoon is set, and the fact that the "Saurini" travel in space/time in different periods and places around the world", explains **Raffaele Bortone**, director and producer of **Animundi**, who is already working on **I Saurini 4**. "The cartoon, aimed at 4-8 year olds, has already been sold in around 30 countries including France (TPS), Russia and South East Asia. Moreover, for the last 10 months we have also been directly involved in the licensing which, despite not being our core business, has given good results in a short space of time: Easter eggs, back-to-school merchandise, and an agreement with Nintendo for their stereoscopic portable console". In fact, Rome-based Animundi, which celebrates 10 years of business this year, is a pioneer in transposing 2D cartoons to 3D stereoscopic vision, a method developed in-house and called "Stereotoon".

**Another main feature** of the second "generalist" public network is the enormous success of Télé Images Productions and Rai Fiction's **Street Football** which, for the fourth season, has been renamed **Foot Extreme**, and is currently in production for the first time in 3D, with a new Italian partner **Magia Animation Studio**. The Monza-continued on page 18

NEW ENTRY/Distributor and theatrical exhibitor, Luciano Stella, embarks on the production of cartoons

**MAD, A NEAPOLITAN FACTORY**

Like any good Neapolitan, Luciano Stella is a great storyteller who, every spring, for eight years, has organized a "festival of words" in his hometown of Naples. "L'arte della felicità" (The art of happiness) is a festival of conversations and meetings involving sociologists, philosophers, theologians and the protagonists of the world of entertainment such as Oscar winner Gabriele Salvatores or Marco Bellocchio, to talk about life", he explains. "What has that got to do with animation? After a meeting in India with the Dalai Lama and other experiences, Stella had accumulated so much material that he was about to turn it into what it should have been: a documentary. "But after seeing "Waltz with Bashir", a new world opened up to me", he explains, "animation makes everything more interesting". This led to the creation of **L'arte della felicità**, an animated movie for adults which was recently presented at Cartoon Movie in Lyon.

A budget of just 800,000 Euros for around 80 minutes of film, co-produced in collaboration with Rai Cinema and Cinecittà Luce, realized in the space of two and a half years. The result of this adventure was the establishment, in 2010, of **MAD Entertainment**, which stands for Music, Animation and Documentaries, as well as being "in praise of madness", with Stella as CEO. However, Stella is not all that mad. He knows the world of cinema like the back of his hand. In the 90s he had the first multiplex in southern Italy and the second one as well. He is the distributor of big Italian theatrical brands like Lucky Red and Bim for the central-south region of Italy. He was also the first president of the Film Commission Campania. Today he is the director and founder of **Stella Film** which owns around 80 cinema screens in the center-south of Italy and, of course, a founding member of MAD, a young all-Neapolitan factory where around thirty people with various creative and professional skills are employed on a permanent basis. Together with Rai and two European partners, they are about to embark on their first international co-production - **A Skeleton Story** – after two TV specials, the second of which, **La cantata dei pastori**, brought Italian animation to Rai’s flagship networks at Christmas.

"We made 52 minutes of **Cantata** in 11 months at a low cost, demonstrating great expertise, which is important for a co-production. It seems we have got the right team together for **A Skeleton Story** (picture above), because it is important who you co-produce with, it is not just a question of money. "We feel ready". Based on the graphic novel of the same name by Alessandro Rak and Andrea Scoppetta, **A Skeleton Story** is a fantasy noir set in a highly imaginative, dreamlike world, filled with skeletons and zombies. A grotesque universe, the protagonist of which is Will, a skeleton who pretends to be a detective, Burma, a strange, mute, fat zombie and an adorable 4 year old girl. The series is directed by Alessandro Rak, a talented Neapolitan cartoonist who is also the director of **L'arte della Felicità**, his first animated feature movie.

"In addition to TV animation, we want to continue to produce low budget independent films modeled on **L'arte della felicità**, explains Stella. "We currently have **La gatta cenerentola** in pre-production, an animated noir musical set in a potential future port of Naples, directed by Ivan Cappiello. The archetype is that of Cinderella, but the true protagonist is traditional as well as modern Neapolitan music, which is famous all over the world. It is a big challenge," admits Stella, "to use animation to tell stories for adults. Stories that are deeply rooted in our culture and have the ability to speak to the world. We can learn a lot from Miyazaki about this". The project already has an Italian distributor on board (Videa cde) and a potential international partner. The estimated budget is around 1,200,000 Euros.

Monica Tasciotti
based studio has already worked with Disney on numerous projects including the new Winnie the Pooh series for the EMEA Disney Channels. The studio also has an original product for Rai: Acqua in bocca (Water & Bubbles) by Guido Manuli, a 3D animated sit-com for the whole family, of which the 26 x 3’ episodes of season three are on their way. Also arriving soon is the second season of Spike Team which has the ideal story – and creator – for foreign markets: the world volleyball champion Andrea Lucchetta (in the cartoon he is the trainer Lucky). This is the first Italian animated series dedicated to this sport, and is produced by Rai Fiction and Lucky Dreams, directed by Maurizio Forestieri. Also being launched at Mip is Oto (Oto and Music). It is the first animated series by Milan-based company Square, ‘although we have decades of experience in animation for TV, cinema and advertising’, explains Cristian Jezdic, the project’s producer and co-director along with Fusako Yusaki. It is part of the Gruppo Mediawacente, the main Italian independent operator providing services for the production and management of digital media content, which has offices in France, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Belgium and Luxembourg (controlled by the private equity fund, Synergo, it has been listed on the Milan Stock Exchange since 2000). With Square, for the first time the “maestro” of Plasticine®, Fusako Yusaki, a Japanese artist, now Milanese by adoption, will be making considerable use of 3D computer graphics. The series of 26 x 6’ episodes will help young viewers to become more familiar with great musicians and musical styles, teaching them how to listen to music and about its history, in the company of a little red octopus who lives in a sea of musical waves.

Another new title for kids is Mofy, a series made entirely in Italy by Misseri Studio using the cotton ball animation technique, co-produced with Japan’s Sony Creative Products. The second series is currently in production whilst the first 26 x 5’ episodes are about to be delivered. The company was established in Florence in 1986 by Francesco Misseri, one of the protagonists of Italian advertising, the creator in the Sixties of many famous animated “Caroselli” (the Italian television advertising show broadcast on Rai from 1957 to 1977), who is always open to international collaborations (Ed: including co-productions with Channel Five, NHK and Sesame Workshop). This is the first time that the studio has co-produced an animated series with Rai Fiction, a sign that, despite the difficulties of having only one national broadcaster as your natural partner, it is also possible to do without.

“Animation in Italy is moving forward with great difficulty. Mondo Tv can manage because, for over ten years, it has moved on an international level, despite making Italian animation that favors our own culture”, says Gianni Galatoli, head of production at Gruppo Mondo Tv, the company belonging to Orlando and Matteo Corradi that specializes in the production and distribution of TV series and animated movies for TV and cinema, that is also very active in related sectors. Galatoli announces the arrival of a new product, The Drakers, a 26 x 26’ episode TV series about the world of racing, realized in partnership with Ferrari, which has a 5 million Euro budget. “The series will be ready for 2014, but we will already be presenting a trailer at Mip Tv and the first episodes will be screened at Mipcom, in the fall”. The Corradi family’s company is also looking towards the United Arab Emirates and co-producing a series of 26 x 13’ episodes with Dubai Events and Promotions Establishment (DEPE), Modhesh. “Modhesh”, explains Galatoli, “is a very popular cartoon character amongst kids in that country. We will be presenting the first episode at Mip, and the series will be ready for 2014”. However, Rai continues to be an important partner and, along with Mondo Tv, will be producing Elisola del Tesoro (Treasure Island), 26 x 26’ episodes realized using 3D CGI, freely based on Stevenson’s novel. Also very active on the distribution front (the latest purchase for the international market was Cartoon Network’s Ben 10), last January Mondo Tv signed a license agreement with the Lagardère Group for the broadcasting of the French version of The Gormiti on the TV channels Gulli and Canal J. This series is based on the characters from the Gruppo Preziosi toys created by Leandro Consunmi and Gianfranco Enrietto, a worldwide “made in Italy” phenomenon for boys.

“Apart from the fact that the international market gives us the chance to find additional financing for our productions, it also gives us an opportunity to measure ourselves on a cultural and artistic level”, says Anne-Sophie Vanhollebeke, co-production manager of Studio Campedelli. “This aspect is important for us as well as the creative exchange with foreign producers and broadcasters who have a different cultural sensibility. It makes it possible for us to render our projects even more universal and competitive on international markets”. Pietro Campedelli is the doyen of Italian animation producers, well-known in Italy and abroad for his consultancy studio’s involvement in the first animated series co-produced by Rai Fiction after twenty years of inactivity in this sector (Lupo Alberto, Cocco Bill, the first two series of Cucciolli, etc.). “European animation in general has evolved, a sign of this is the Cartoon Forum where, over the years, we have seen the arrival of increasingly elaborate pilots in terms of detail and quality”, he explains. “If we compared ourselves with other countries at the end of the Nineties, it could be said that we were seen as craftsmen with a lot of good intentions who were trying to enter the international market without any culture or knowledge of the same, in terms of content and techniques of representation. That is no longer the situation thanks to the Italian productions which can be found all around the world and constitute our calling card. In fact, now people come and ask us to co-produce whereas before we had to find someone who would deign to accept our collaboration request.”

The latest product from the Studio Campedelli is Topo Top (Tip the Mouse), a character based on a series of books created in 2003 by Andrea Dami which has sold over eight million copies in the more than 30 countries in which it is published. This will be the first time that Giunti Editore, a leading publishing house, has transformed one of its characters into a cartoon: a gentle mouse, who is also a bit unpredictable, like all children of his age. Dedicated to the youngest set, the TV series is co-produced by Campedelli and Giunti along with Studio Bozzetto, Rai Fiction, m4e (Germany), and March Entertainment (Canada). Andrea Bozzetto directs the 52 x 7’ episodes in 3D which are currently in production. Studio Campedelli is also responsible for closing the budget of the new, long-awaited series of Calimerò, currently in production.

After entering Italian homes for the first time in 1963, Calimerò, the famous black chick created by Nino and Toni Pagot and Ignazio Colnaghi for a famous TV advert back in the days of “Caroselli”, will soon return to the small screen with 104 x 11’ episodes in 3D co-produced by France’s Gaumont Animation and Rai, along with Calidra, TF1 and Disney Junior. But Calimerò is more than a cartoon, he has even become a neologism discussed by the famous Italian semiotician and writer Umberto Eco: “When a character generates a common name it has broken the barrier of immortality and entered into the world of legend: you can be a ‘calìmerò’ as you can be a ‘don juan’, a ‘Casanova’, a ‘Don Quixote’, a ‘Cinderella’, or a ‘Judas’”. With these credentials, internationalization for Calimerò, an Italian icon, will be kids’ play.
EVENTS

CARTOONS/ 25 YEARS AT THE SIDE OF EU ANIMATION

April 23rd is the deadline for registering new European TV animation series projects for the next Cartoon Forum which will be held, for the second consecutive year, in Toulouse, France, from September 17th – 20th. If chosen, the producers will have the chance to present their projects to a select public which, every year, numbers around 700 participants, including 250 broadcasters and financial backers, in pitches of 20 minutes per title. This is the tried and tested formula created in 1990 by Cartoon in Brussels, with the support of the European Union’s Media programme. In these 23 years, over 450 projects with a total budget of more than 1.5 billion Euros have passed through the pitching process at the Cartoon Forum, received financing and are in production or have already been broadcast all over the world. “It was February 1988 when 43 European sector professionals met in Brussels to create the European Association of Animation Film, subsequently named Cartoon’, remembers the managing director, Marc Vandeweyer. 25 years after its foundation. “We are very proud to have been able to promote and dynamize European animation with the help of all the institutions that believed in us, and with the incredible support of the European Union’s Media Programme”. Cartoon Movie, the forum for co-produced European feature length animations, created in the wake of the success of the TV program forum, came to an end on March 9th, in Lyon. There was a record number of distributors (120, 20% more than last year) for the 56 new projects from 20 European countries presented this year to over 700 professionals from 40 countries (another record). Cartoon Movie has also achieved some important results since it was set up 15 years ago: the more than 200 features presented were able to find financial backing amounting to a budget of 1.4 billion Euros. “Europe also knows how to produce high quality commercial movies which are every bit as good as US productions”, says Vandeweyer. However, since domestic markets are becoming increasingly saturated – and poorer – and internationalization has become imperative for all, Cartoon has recently accepted a new challenge and, since 2009, has organized an event dedicated, as usual, to supporting European animation, under the umbrella of Media International action: Cartoon Connection. A new event that aims to develop commercial and creative links between European professionals and their Asian, Canadian and Latin American colleagues in order to improve their mutual knowledge of different markets and encourage cooperation and the circulation of animation. Unlike the two European events, Cartoon Connection is held in South Korea, Canada and South America, with a formula consisting of 15 minute one-to-one meetings alternated with presentations to help understand European and non-European markets, as well as case studies about co-productions that illustrate how companies from each area can work successfully together. The last edition, held from March 19th – 21st in in Seoul, Korea, was attended by around 170 professionals of which approximately fifty from the “Old World”, including Italians Gianluca Bellomo, ConneCToon, Cristian Jezdic, Square MTC, Franco Serra, Gertie, and Anne-Sophie Vanhollebeke, Studio Campedelli.

ANNECY/ THE FESTIVAL CHANGES SKIN

An eclectic program, open to little known universes. These are the premises for the next edition of the Annecy International Animated Film Festival, to be held from June 10th – 15th. This is the first edition to be entrusted to Canadian Marcel Jean, the new artistic director, after the 14 editions directed by Serge Bromberg. The latest edition will explore new horizons: Poland is the guest country with fifty or so shorts and the Animation Off-limits cycle: four sections (experimental cinema, video art, shadow puppets and conceptual works) that will allow participants to discover films that are rarely or never shown at animation festivals, “where the frontiers of animation are crossed and we enter the vast territory of hybrid movies”, explains Jean. Another innovation is that the public will be asked to vote for the funniest short in the history of animation through a new system. “Cartoon Connection”, the new artistic director, after the 14 editions directed by Serge Bromberg. The serious side of the schedule, inspired by the traditional program “Animation citoyenne”, will propose a cycle of films dedicated to the concept of “resistance”: from Iranian dissidents to the Polish concentration camps, to the totalitarian universes of science fiction. The 2013 edition will also see a logistical change: since the Bonlieu, the nucleus of the festival with its two main theaters and offices, is currently being renovated, many screenings will take place in peripheral locations.