

TBI Television Business International

Switched on thinking

Where next for the global animation industry?

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Delivering diversity

How kids TV is approaching inclusivity

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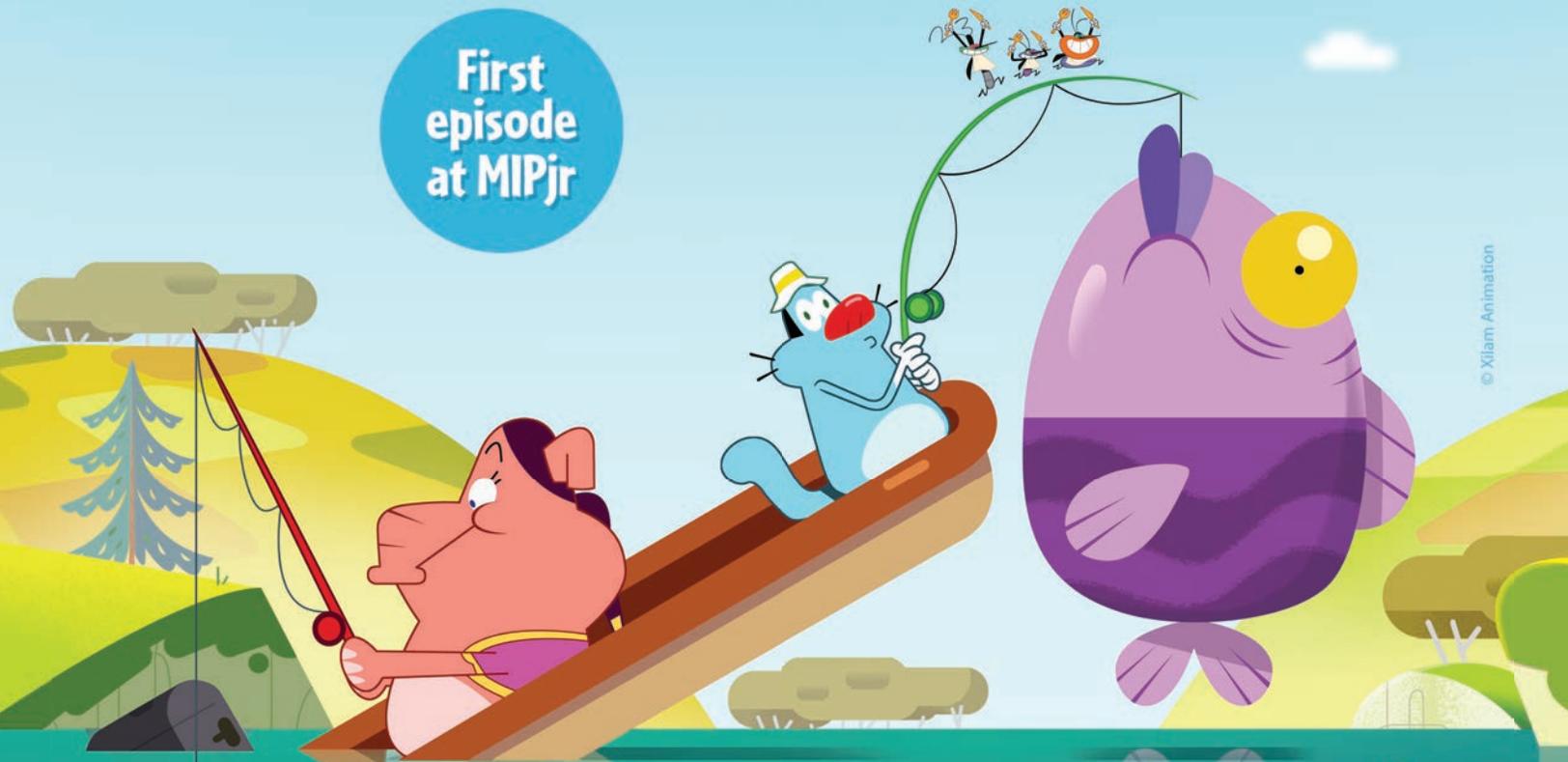
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Contents TBI August/September 2020



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Editor's note Richard Middleton

Animation & action

When the world was plunged into lockdown earlier this year, huge swathes of the content business were pole-axed almost overnight. Yet looking back on stories from those first few months, it is remarkable how quickly the industry reacted – rejigging schedules, commissioning self-filmed dramas, stocking up on library content, cutting costs by the billion, working together to deliver government-backed insurance schemes – even coming up with new formats that included strapping cameras to dogs.

TV's nimble-footed nature was on full view, no matter where you were in the world.

That response comes in sharp contrast to the discussion around inclusion and diversity, which continues to generate reams of quotes calling for change. Yet that's hardly new. In this edition, we explore how the next generation of adult viewers are being influenced by what they watch and take a deep dive into what the kids business is doing to improve inclusivity and representation at all levels.

We are also delighted to welcome Deborah Williams, exec director of the UK's Creative Diversity Network, to TBI's pages, with a new monthly column that will explore how the industry can deliver meaningful action – again, at all levels – while celebrating the creativity that comes from having inclusive and diverse content that reflects the audience watching it.

We also travel the world – virtually, of course – to find out how the animation business has adapted and thrived over recent months, take a trip to Latin America to explore the region's burgeoning scripted business, track down how distributors are planning on attracting buyers this fall, and pick out some hot new shows heading to a virtual market near you.

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ZOG and the FLYING DOCTORS

New for Christmas 2020
1 x 26'



Pip and Posy

New for Summer 2021
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THE GRUFFALO

1 x 26'



Room on the Broom

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STICK MAN

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MAGIC LIGHT



Well-being Tracy Forsyth

You can't wear a crown if your head is down

In this edition's well-being column, corporate wellness coach Tracy Forsyth provides five physical exercises to help boost your confidence and self-belief

We all know that when we are stressed and panicky our breath gets short and shallow. In the old days the remedy for a panic attack was to put your head between your knees and breathe in and out of a paper bag. Reason being, this helped to slow down and deepen your breathing, increasing oxygen to the lungs in order to send more oxygenated blood to the brain to help you think clearer. The slowing down of the breath also lowers blood pressure and stress levels. Clever huh? The body does its best to help you in times of need. And it can do so much more. So, if you are ever in a position where you want a boost of confidence and self-belief then try these methods using your physical being.

Use your breath

If you've got a big presentation or a difficult conversation coming up and want to feel powerfully calm, try this: breathe in for two counts and out for four counts. Conversely, if you want to feel pumped up and ready for action, try it the other way around: breathe in for four counts and out for two counts. The first calms and focuses you, the second wakes you up and energises you.

Stand or sit tall

If you want to make a physical impact either around a table in a big meeting or just when meeting someone for the first time, pull yourself up to your highest point possible with a long straight spine. Even if you are tiny, this will work. And if you are already tall, don't slouch to come down to other people's levels. Standing or sitting tall will not only make you look more confident but feel it too. One of the simplest standing postures in yoga is called Mountain Pose, because a mountain is tall and strong. Stand like a mountain!

Shoulders back

We live in the digital era, which means we are almost constantly hunched over a laptop or a smartphone. What this means is that we are curving inwards with our pectoral muscles getting tighter and shorter and our shoulder muscles getting weaker and weaker pulling everything forward and down. The more that happens, the harder it is to counter-balance. So, on a daily, hourly basis, raise your shoulders up, back and down. Keep them back and down. If this feels weird, you need to do it more! The benefit of this posture is that your ribs have more room to expand meaning you can take deeper breaths, enabling you to bring more oxygen into your system.

Chin up

My Dad always used to say this to me if I was feeling down. There is something about having your chin up that makes you look confident, nonchalant, undefeated. Having your chin up physically means that the throat is open and not constricted. And in yogic philosophy, the throat area relates to expression and speaking your truth. We all know that when we are deeply moved or upset, we can have a lump in our throat or find it difficult to speak. Lift your chin up to free that throat area, enabling you to speak more confidently.

Crown on

Lastly, hold your head high as if you were being pulled by a thread from the crown of your head. If you've watched Beyoncé's new film *Black Is King*, you might remember a fantastic quote: "You can't wear a crown if your head is down". Literally, hold your head as if you are wearing a precious crown. You will look regal, empowered, confident and feel it too. Namaste (which literally means, I bow to you). **TBI**

Tracy is a creative mentor for the Channel 4 Indie Growth Fund, the producer of the WFTV mentoring scheme and a professional executive coach. Follow her at [walterwootze.com](https://www.walterwootze.com)

About Town

Virtually speaking

Jet-set TV folk have, like the rest of the world, been grounded by the pandemic and the traditional events circuit has been thrown into disarray. But that hasn't stopped organisers from shifting their keynotes online, with the recent Edinburgh TV Festival proving that a jam-packed line-up available virtually can still offer plenty of punch.

From outgoing BBC chief Tony Hall to FX's John Landgraf, organisers of what is normally a mainstay in the UK events calendar attempted to overcome physical barriers with a schedule that ranged from Sky's Zai Bennett and Netflix's director of unscripted originals Nathaniel Grouille to the ever-elloquent Ben Frow.

Talent on the festival's small screen included *Game Of Thrones* star Emilia Clarke talking to director Paul Feig, while the team behind hit BBC and Hulu drama *Normal People* – including its stars Daisy Edgar-Jones and Paul Mescal (right) – joined their Oscar-nominated director Lenny Abrahamson to discuss the series and its widespread success.



And despite its online-only presence, the annual MacTaggart continued its long tradition of sparking discussion and debate, with British broadcaster and historian David Olusoga (left) blasting the UK TV industry for creating a “lost generation” of black talent. Reflecting on his experiences of being left “isolated and disempowered”, the former producer said that while he had been given “amazing opportunities” through his work, he had also been “patronised and marginalised”.

Olusoga also highlighted recent developments around inclusion and diversity following Black Lives Matter, adding that the UK industry has “been part of this great wave of introspection and action.”

“So much has been promised that there is reason to hope that this really is a moment of change for our industry,” Olusoga continued, “rather than a false dawn – and we have had a number of those.”

Mountain movers

Summer might have been largely a domestic affair for many with little international travel on the cards, but those in the business could at least transport themselves to a myriad of virtual destinations as conferences and festivals moved online. Banff World Media Festival offered sneak peeks of shows such as Netflix and TNT's drama *Snowpiercer*, while Sunnyside Of The Doc and *Série Series* were among a myriad of events to move their own mountains to ensure they could welcome visitors warmly and, of course, virtually from their makeshift home offices.



Building up Budapest



NATPE chose to turn its annual Budapest event into a virtual conference, complete with exhibition space, networking capability and on-demand conference sessions, with subjects including Indonesia's booming TV business to Latin America's fast-moving media ecosystem.

Swings and Roundabouts

20bn TikTok's eventful summer ended with the exit of CEO Kevin Mayer, while Netflix & Microsoft were reportedly looking at acquiring its US business – valued at \$20bn+

230 UK broadcaster ITV said 230 of its shows were impacted by Covid-19 shutdowns, but 70% had either been delivered or were back on set by early August

600 WarnerMedia's streaming focus saw Warner Bros. distribution chief Jeffrey Schlessinger among around 600 staff to lose their jobs

3000 A similar process was underway at NBCUniversal, with around 3,000 positions affected as TV and streaming divisions were merged under Mark Lazarus





Diversity Deborah Williams

A black life

In this new monthly column for TBI, the Creative Diversity Network's executive director Deborah Williams reflects on her own role and explores how the industry can deliver change rather than simply talk about it

Deborah is executive director at the UK's Creative Diversity Network and has worked in arts, culture and the creative industries for more than three decades

A year ago, I was in Minneapolis. It was my birthday. I should have been in NYC with my mother celebrating Stonewall as I was born on Stonewall Sunday. But my mother had passed in January and the world and his mother was going to be in New York for World Pride. So I got me some creative inspiration from Paisley Park and soaked up Prince and his creative emporium on my birthday.

A year on, Minneapolis has the world at its door. This time, it was in response to the murder of a black man because he was a black man. This – matched with the global pandemic – has given me time to think about my role and the work that we do at the UK's Creative Diversity Network.

Inequality and injustice is built into the bones of this industry. In fact, every industry is built on institutional racism. We don't like to talk about it and acknowledge it but it's true. It is now clear that seeking to be part of the institutions, structures and networks that already exist is a fruitless exercise if what you are looking for is truly transformational change. And to avoid any confusion, that is what I am working towards. If Black Lives Matter means anything, it means transformation.

I'll admit that my way of working is very much the Gordon Ramsay approach to diversity – and I am proud of it. I get called on to do things, come in and transform, as a result there is change, there is success. I then get hatred and doubts, as well as recriminations, for doing what I said I would. If I am honest, it took me a while, but I've now got used to it and in truth, when it is followed through with the action prescribed, the outcome is so supreme that I can't help but let things go. And then I wander off into the darkness to start all over again, somewhere else.

There are however downsides. It leaves you open to 'allies' who think they are better placed to

tell you that lynchings are not a 'black thing', and organisations that flex muscles and head at you like a bull out of the gate to knock you out of what they perceive to be 'their space'. And then there's the chattering voices off stage left, made up of those people who read something once and are now experts in your life's work. It hurts. It's personal and it's relentless and real.

I believe that we all need to take this time now to reflect and to consider what we are seeking to achieve, how to achieve it and most importantly how we do this together.

First, I will say that recent developments should be celebrated and enabled to take seed. We also have to make sure that the doors do not close after the noise has stopped.

Secondly, there are so many more indices that need to be considered as the debate is opened up.

Finally, the whole business of diversity is overcrowded and unmonitored – and there is little to no quality control, which it needs.

I hope that with this monthly column we will bring big thinking and ideas to the fore, so we can discuss and debate things that are less shared: real people, insights from academics, thinkers and influencers. And, of course, the most important thing of all: that the talent, quality and creativity of diversity will highlight how the lack of plurality is having a negative impact on our industry.

I also want to show that it doesn't need to be as difficult as we are making it; that collaboration is the key to our success. Ultimately, it will prove that we never have to go back to normal, as we all know that 'normal' was not good enough. 'Normal' was daily injustice, large and small. Personally, and professionally, I need to be sure that when we say Black Lives Matter, we mean all black lives, including mine. **TBI**

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Switched on thinking

Kids animation companies have adapted rapidly to the effects of the global pandemic, but what lessons have been learned and where does the industry go next? Helen Dugdale reports

When the lockdown axe fell around the globe, large parts of the TV and content industry ground fairly swiftly to a halt. Thankfully, out of all the doom and gloom from the past few months, the animation sector continued to shine like a beacon of light offering others in the industry hope. As explored in a digital session at the Children's Media Conference this year – online, of course – animation studios have shown true grit as they've battled with remote working and frozen budgets to continue to create award-winning shows and exciting content for commissioners on the prowl for new acquisitions.

Josh Bowen, MD at Toronto-based Look Mom! Productions, a subsidiary of Blue Ant Media, believes the industry has fared well. "Animation already had people working from home, with entire studios finishing productions and even getting projects greenlit by buyers committed to ensuring that they have enough high quality, entertaining content in their pipeline to outlast this pandemic," he says. "We anticipate more bumps in the road as we navigate through uncharted territory, but we've been able to adapt and communicate effectively and get our entire staff and process running efficiently remotely. It's shown us how resilient and flexible creators can be, even in the most extraordinary circumstances."

Sashim Parmanand, CEO at Singapore-based *Oddbods* producer One Animation, says that Covid-19 and the impact of working from home "broke a norm" in terms of how the industry had become used to collaborating.

"Almost every animation studio, including us, has experienced an almost seamless transition and in many cases higher productivity in adapting to the work from home model. This has proved that animation is a robust and adaptable format. I believe over the next 12 months producers will be looking to future proof with remote



studios and cloud-based workflows because the need for one central bricks and mortar HQ is diminishing."

Marika Makaroff at Gutsy, the company behind award-winning series *Moominvalley*, adds that working with CGI animation makes the production process under lockdown a lot easier. "The big difference is when you're working with CGI you don't all have to be there, unlike when you're shooting live. As a business, we have employees across the globe in seven different sites – from Europe to Kuala Lumpur to Canada – and we're used to working on different time zones and having digital meetings. The structure was already in place when lockdown started."

This way of working isn't universally welcomed in the kids business, however. Bruno Felix, co-founder and co-MD at the Netherlands-based *Submarine*, believes that remote working is only effective for so long. "We



prefer artists working together in the same space physically to enhance creativity and ensure consistency in our projects,” he says. “The wider impact is on the ecosystem of content as a whole down the chain – for example, if our sales partners, theatrical distributors and broadcast partners have budgetary constraints or barriers to financing new productions that limit possibilities for creators.”

Mindful commissioners

It’s a point that Makaroff picks up on, adding that commissioners will need to be more mindful of the conditions studios are facing. “There are still challenges, especially with broadcasters who can be demanding and sometimes inflexible. At times it’s felt like the broadcasters have been doubling our work.

CGI can make shows such as *Moominvalley* (above) easier to produce remotely

“We want the cash crisis to go away – especially because we’re working on such a high budget animation series – and broadcasters need to be more understanding of our situation.”

As the sector takes small steps to some form of new normality, Parmanand at One Animation is taking a realistic approach to life in animation after lockdown. “On the negative side, creators on AVOD platforms have been undeniably hit by diminishing returns, and producers using that model are going to be challenged further as marketing budgets weather the fallout into next year.

“On the positive side, the more remote approach to working is great news for talent acquisition. We have sometimes been limited by the need for people to relocate to Singapore to work with us out of our studio, whereas a more online structure means we can explore talent based in other markets, without requiring them to uproot themselves or their families.”

Bowen from Look Mom! Productions thinks the lack of jumping on a plane for “doing business” can only be a good thing. “Less international travel has taken away the ability to make in-person presentations, meaning buyers and partners are now more flexible in how they receive pitches. So, from an original content perspective, working remotely has been a great equaliser as everyone has had to pitch over video calls. Wherever you are in the world, we’re all now on an equal footing in terms of pitching our creative ideas.”

Makaroff and the team at Gutsy are investing money and time into human resources to make sure that everyone is happy to return to the office when the time is right. “We have a team of 50 people and this is the first time we’ve hired people to be part of the team working on *Moominvalley* without seeing them first. We’re spending time looking at how and when our staff come back to our offices and how they will feel. It’s important that we hear their worries.”

Lockdown acquisitions

Despite the myriad repercussions that the pandemic has had on the business, Covid-19 doesn’t seem to have stood in the way of commissioners snapping up new shows and content, Parmanand reflects. “We signed a deal on Jacinth Tan’s animated series *Sharkdog* – a Netflix original commission and produced in partnership with ViacomCBS International Studios – the same week we went into lockdown. It’s a project that came out of Nickelodeon’s Global Animated Shorts Program, which we’re very excited about.”

Caterina Vacchi, head of animation and distribution and a director and executive producer at Italy’s

Atlantya Entertainment, completed the final episodes of their new series *Berry Bees* to deliver to Italy's public service broadcaster Rai under lockdown. "We have closed contracts for our brand-new *Berry Bees* series, which has been sold to several new broadcast partners including VRT Belgium for the channel Ketnet, AMC Networks International – Central and Northern Europe for Minimax channel, and Minika for the kids' channel Minika GO. We have also signed some important renewals of rights for our flagships properties, such as *Bat Pat* and *Geronimo Stilton*," she adds.

In the UK, Magic Light Pictures – known for their Christmas delights such as *The Gruffalo*, *Room On The Broom* and *The Snail And The Whale* - announced they were working on their very first pre-school series, *Pip And Posy*, just as lockdown kicked in across the UK.

"It's a joint production between Sky Kids and Channel 5 Milkshake! to go with ZDF in Germany," explains Michael Rose, joint MD at the multi Oscar-nominated studio. "We were working on production of *Pip And Posy* throughout lockdown. It's done in CGI animation and we're making it at Blue Zoo Studios in London, which has very seamlessly got their whole crew working and the whole production has carried on."

For UK-based Media IM, the pandemic shutdown was a busy time. Their show *Sunny Bunnies*, a pre-school non-dialogue slapstick comedy, seemed to tick all the right boxes, with broadcasters and streamers around the world interested.

"Since March this year, we have signed a raft of new and renewal deals for the show with some top platforms and broadcasters globally," says Maria

"We anticipate more bumps in the road as we navigate through uncharted territory but we've been able to adapt – it's shown us how resilient and flexible creators can be"

Josh Bowen, Look Mom! Productions



Sharkdog (below) was among a number of animated shows greenlit during lockdown

Ufland, Media IM's co-founder & joint MD, "and we have managed to venture into some new exciting territories too." Agreements were struck with companies including Tencent in China, Kids Zone Pakistan and HBO Europe across CEE, plus a "brand-new content deal" with an undisclosed major SVOD platform globally. "Lockdown for us was anything but quiet," she adds, reflecting the international animation sector's resilience over the past six months. **TBI**

Looking ahead...

Animation studios around the world have fought to remain operational, but they are eager to highlight to broadcasters and platforms the issues they continue to face as the sector starts to unlock – and the potential problems posed by a second wave.

Sashim Parmanand, One Animation

One of the biggest drawbacks is not being able to pitch a show in person. Being in the room and able to convey your passion for a project and feel a connection with potential partners is irreplaceable, and the lack of trade shows and face-to-face meetings does impact the greenlighting process. There are also new platforms launching and relationships with these services are harder to build without the traditional networking opportunities available to us.

Josh Bowen, MD, Look Mom! Productions

Not having that day-to-day playful interaction with each other, and the organic collaboration that often comes outside of scheduled meetings, is something that creative people are missing out on.

Bruno Felix, co-MD & co-founder, Submarine

The main problem is that financing from traditional sources relying on theatrical distribution or advertising-driven revenue is seriously impacted by the pandemic, and those financiers are going to be cautious before committing to new projects.

Michael Rose, Magic Light Pictures' Pip and Pop

We had challenges around voice recordings – we had five young children as the voices, which they had to record in their homes. Ideally, with child actors, you want to be in the studio with them to be able to direct them and create that relationship between the director and the child. Instead, we've directed them over Zoom with the help of their parents with equipment delivered to their homes.



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Who's doing what this fall?

As Covid-19 continues to hamper international travel and affect the traditional events calendar, TBI checks in with a variety of distributors to find out how they're planning to attract the attention of global buyers

Fremantle

What's the plan? A brand new screenings website, with best-in-class technology to enable a seamless experience for buyers. One-on-one buyer sessions, with Watch parties and digital experiences.

Key scripted shows: *We Children From Bahnhof Zoo* (left), *Anna*

Key unscripted shows: *Day Zero* and *Empires Of New York*

Key format: *Rolling In It*

Key execs available: Jens Richter, CEO, International; Angela Neillis, SVP, non-scripted content, International; Christian Vesper, EVP, creative director, global drama; Rob Clark, director of global entertainment



Entertainment One

Name of event: eOne Preview: Studio Edition

Start/End dates: 5-9 October

What's the plan? eOne presents our first online showcase event and exclusive preview – a new line-up of high quality content including development updates on Hasbro brand-driven film and TV, plus all-new scripted & unscripted programming.

From London to LA, via Toronto, hear from an exceptional array of on-screen and creative world-class talent including eOne's new president of global TV, Michael Lombardo.

Key scripted shows: *Feudal*, *Family Law*, *Cruel Summer*

Key unscripted shows: *London Zoo: An Extraordinary Year*; *Arctic Vets*; *Lost Worlds And Hidden Treasures*

Register: eOnePreview@entonegroup.com

Key execs available: Stuart Baxter, president, international distribution; Dan Gopal, EVP, EMEA; Dan Loewy, EVP, Americas; Joyce Yeung, EVP, APAC



BBC Studios

Name of event: BBC Studios Connect

Start/End dates: 28 September, for three weeks

What's the plan? A new, specially created sales website will offer our customers everything they need, from our content pipeline to curated collections designed to meet current audience needs, as well as exclusive insights into our latest front catalogue, including unique footage from our must-see new shows, producer & talent sessions, and behind-the-scenes news.

Key scripted shows: *The Pursuit Of Love*, *The North Water*, *The Watch*

Key unscripted shows: *A Perfect Planet* (right), *Greta Thunberg Doc* (w/t), *Top Gear*

Key formats: *Weakest Link*, *Our DNA Journey*, *We Hunt Together*

Register: <https://sales.bbcstudios.com/contact>

DCD Rights

Name of event: DCD Rights Virtual MIPCOM

Start/End dates: 28 September

What's the plan? Tailor-made presentations for each of our key genres: drama, factual entertainment and factual documentaries, with some surprises from our exciting team of featured acting and entertainment talent.

Key unscripted shows: *Disasters Engineered (S2)*; *Fatal Shot*; *Penn & Teller: Fool Us (S7)*

Register: www.dcdrights.com

Red Arrow Studios International

Name of event: Red Arrow Studios International's FormatsFest

Start/End dates: End of September

What's the plan? Red Arrow Studios International is holding a virtual FormatsFest event at the end of September for international format buyers, showcasing Red Arrow's latest and biggest formats, via a mixture of panels and pitches.

Register: Invite-only

ITV Studios

Name of event: Fall Festival

Start/End dates: 14 September – 2 October

What's the plan? The ITV Studios Fall Festival is an extension of its award-winning Drama and Formats Festivals. It is a series of virtual content and production sessions for buyers, including a number of curated sessions with producers for a deeper dive on some of ITV Studios' upcoming titles.

Key scripted shows: *Vigil* (right), *The Pembroke Murders*, *Line of Duty* (S6)

Key unscripted shows: *Love Island US*, *Vintage Voltage*, *Surviving The Virus: My Brother And Me*

Key formats: *Don't Rock The Boat*, *We Want More*, *Let Love Rule*

Register: www.itvstudios.com

Key execs available: Ruth Berry, MD global distribution; Maarten Meijs president, global entertainment



Lineup Industries

Name of event: The Daily Lineup

Start/End dates: 12-14 October

What's the plan? Access a range of distinctive brand-new format and factual entertainment content created by established and high-profile producers from across the globe. The Daily Lineup will include dedicated packages for all new shows including promos and screenings, producer and creator interviews, and comprehensive factsheets for each title.

Key unscripted shows: *Born Without Trace*, *The Unknown Soldier*, *A Full House*

Key formats: *Born Without Trace*, *The Unknown Soldier*, *The Handover*, *1 Year Off*

Register: www.lineupindustries.com

Key execs available: Ed Louwense and Julian Curtis, co-founders of Lineup Industries

All3Media International

Name of event: All3Media International Upfront

What's the plan? Our MIPCOM Upfront session will be focused on entertainment content,

revealing more about exciting new talent show *Little Mix's The Search*,

the reboot of studio favourite *The Cube*, and a

brand-new gameshow from Studio Lambert,

The Hustler. We will also be screening the highly

anticipated *Roadkill*, starring the Emmy Award-

winning Hugh Laurie.

Key scripted shows: *Roadkill*, *All Creatures Great And Small*, *Des*

Key unscripted shows: *Gordon Ramsay: Uncharted*, *The Savoy*, *Trafficked*

Key formats: *Little Mix's The Search* (above), *The Hustler*, *The Cube*

How to register: www.all3mediainternational.com

Key execs available: Stephen Driscoll EVP, EMEA & European co-productions; Sally Habbershaw EVP of Americas; Sabrina Duguet EVP of Asia Pacific



Beta Film

Name of event: Beta Brunch

Start/End dates: 13 October

What's the plan? The traditional Beta Brunch, one of the 'not to be missed' buyers events at MIPCOM for decades, switches

from the Majestic to online. The unique high-profile trailer compilation of Beta's new line-up will be

introduced – as always tongue-in-cheek – by CEO Jan Mojto, who will bring some

unexpected guests. Stay tuned!

Key scripted shows: *Tell Me Who I Am* (right), *Labyrinth Of Peace*,

Dead Mountain – The Dyatlov Pass Incident

Key format: *Professor T*

Register: www.betafilm.com





Delivering diversity

Mark Layton takes a deep dive to explore how the global TV industry is working to improve inclusivity and representation in children's programming, and asks what needs to happen both in front of and behind the camera in order to bring about real change

Every child deserves to see themselves reflected in the programmes that they watch, but while strides are being made to improve inclusivity and representation on screen, children's television is still often poorly served.

Programmes with a female or BAME protagonist or featuring leading characters that are part of the LGBT+ community, disabled or from a lower socio-economic background remain, generally, the exception to the rule. And this is also an issue mirrored behind the camera.

Obviously, some territories perform far better than others in this regard when approaching the subject from an international perspective. But the invigorated global support for the Black Lives Matter movement in recent months, coupled with the drastic increase in children's TV viewership during lockdown, has brought some of these issues into sharp focus in many territories and changes are taking place as a result.

"It seems to me that the high level of activity and the acceleration of heartfelt change that we've witnessed in the last few months is an indication that



Apple Tree House (above) has eschewed media tropes about inner-city life, while *The Bravest Knight* (right) has put both BAME and LGBT+ representation at the heart of the show

the TV industry as a whole could and should have done more sooner,” observes Cheryl Taylor, head of content for children’s programming at the BBC.

The UK pubcaster has a variety of inclusive content, with shows such as the pre-school animation *Hey Duggee* and the long-running magazine series *Blue Peter* being among the popular stand-outs.

Its CBeebies channel also recently launched *JoJo & Gran Gran*, the first British-made children’s animation focused on a black family. While the series has been widely praised, a fair question is why it took so long for this landmark moment to reach screens.

“We know there is more we should be doing to stimulate stories based on a greater variety of experiences,” acknowledges Taylor, adding that animations with black protagonists have previously been “in short supply”.

“There is a sense that the animation industry still has some way to go in terms of representation in several key production areas – and this has impacted on the type of stories that are developed,” she says.

Where the BBC has seen improvements, Taylor explains that these have initially been led by a more representative approach to casting, as well as providing “focused support for new writers, directors and producers.”

She elaborates: “I’ve been impressed by the delicate development process on shows like *Pablo* [an animated series on CBeebies that follows a five-year-old boy with autism], wherein the employment of autistic contributors across several production disciplines ensured the important ‘seeing the world in different ways’ message of the show was conveyed

from lived experience.

“More recently, we have commissioned a raft of 10-minute monologues and seven-minute mini *My Life* documentaries as opportunities for new writers, directors and producers from under-represented groups to get their first role on a broadcast piece.”

Taylor also highlights series like children’s drama *Apple Tree House*, where the production team was able to provide training opportunities for directors from under-represented backgrounds – enabling the show to mirror the onscreen diversity.

Akindele Akinsiku, co-creator, director and writer on *Apple Tree House*, says that it was important to the team that the stories and characters featured in the series were relatable.

“Unfortunately, people assume if the characters are multi-ethnic, then the show and the urban setting might be alien to them. If we can relate to a talking pig or an anthropomorphic yellow sponge, then I think a bunch of kids that live on a council estate shouldn’t be that difficult to empathise with,” remarks Akinsiku.

“So *Apple Tree House* couldn’t just be a show about ‘diversity’. We wanted to create a positive show about everyday children who just happen to live in a rich and magical inner-city estate, one that didn’t involve the usual media inner-city tropes of poverty and crime that unfortunately are still commonplace.”

He continues: “To be honest, this is not rocket science. It’s paying attention to your environment and your entire audience, especially if you live in a big city. “It’s never a bad thing if your audience is reflected in your show’s makeup.”



“If we can relate to a talking pig, or an anthropomorphic yellow sponge, then I think a bunch of kids that live on a council estate shouldn’t be that difficult to empathise with”

Akindede Akinsiku,
co-creator of
Apple Tree House



European lag

David Michel is founder and president of Paris-based production studio Cottonwood Media, as well as co-founder of French production and distribution firm Federation Entertainment and MD of its children’s division Federation Kids and Family. He suggests it has taken European networks longer to catch up to issues that the US industry has been tackling for many years already.

“When I produced *Totally Spies!*, back in the day, we had Disney Family and then Cartoon Network on board and having a character from a different ethnicity was very important to them. From our perspective as Europeans, at that time, it wasn’t as much on the radar, which I am sad to say, especially as we are all finally thinking in different ways now.”

He adds that, even today, he doesn’t get “enough diverse stories about characters of multi-ethnicity in Europe” brought to him as a producer and says that “you really have to make a clear and conscious effort about that.”

Michel says that while he has never received any pushback around the ethnicity of cast when selling shows abroad, he has faced resistance for including LGBT+ characters.

Cottonwood Media produces the live-action teen dramedy *Find Me In Paris* for Hulu in the US. When creating the show, the team made a conscious effort to craft characters from diverse backgrounds, social groups and sexual orientations. “One of the various storylines features the relationship between two boys

who are together and very happy, and we are vocal about this, but in certain countries we could not sell the show because of this,” says Michel.

“At one point we were presented with the choice of basically either taming down these stories, including with dubbing the show, or losing a sale – and we chose the latter. We didn’t want to compromise on that,” he reveals.

Shabnam Rezaei is co-founder and president of Canadian animation studio Big Bad Boo, whose series *The Bravest Knight* launched on Hulu last year. Based upon the book *The Bravest Knight Who Ever Lived* by Daniel Errico, the show follows a 10-year-old black girl and wannabe knight, whose adopted white father tells her about his own past adventures before he settled down with the prince of his dreams.

Rezaei’s experience of heading to market with a series fronted by a female character of colour and a same-sex relationship at the heart of the show echoes Michel’s. “It was really important to us to not just feature but also celebrate a two-dad household on our show, while also empowering young women – especially young women of colour,” says Rezaei.

“We took the show out to MIPCOM first and received mixed reactions from international audiences, who may not be as ready to reflect reality.

“When we finally greenlit the show with our US partner Hulu, we realised how lucky we were to work with such an incredibly progressive and inclusive team. They were very committed to telling an authentic story about a modern family, which ultimately connects with audiences.”



Find Me In Paris was created with a cast of characters from diverse backgrounds, social groups and sexual orientations

NATPE VIRTUAL

— BUDAPEST —



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NATPE VIRTUAL

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14-17
SEPTEMBER
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NATPE MIAMI

AT



AND

NATPE VIRTUAL

19-21
JANUARY
2021



JoJo & Gran Gran is the first British-made animation focusing on a black family

American awareness

If the US TV industry is indeed leading the way in matters of inclusivity and representation, then kids’ powerhouse Nickelodeon is often seen to be sitting at the front of the class.

The channel has worked to ensure there has been a firm ethos of authenticity woven into its seams since the word go. “We simply said let’s authentically reflect the world in which kids live in at all times, from day one until today,” says Nina Hahn, SVP of international production & development at Nick.

This mission statement has led to the creation of many shows celebrated internationally for their inclusivity, from the multi-cultural makeup of *Hey Arnold!* to *Dora The Explorer* bringing one of the first Latinx cartoon characters to screens, and all done decades before any current push for diversity.

Nickelodeon’s current output also includes *The Casagrandes*, which features a character who has Down Syndrome, while the series *Paw Patrol* recently introduced a pup with a physical disability.

But that doesn’t mean the company is resting on its laurels. Its parent, ViacomCBS, made a clear commitment to strengthening its commitment to inclusivity in its UK operations earlier this year, with its “no diversity, no commission” policy for suppliers.

“This is something that has driven the entire fabric of what it means to be a piece of content on Nickelodeon’s air, a piece of content made by a producer with Nickelodeon and also to even work at the company,” says Hahn. “If you’re trying to sell a show to Nickelodeon you should have done your homework to come with a concept that is authentic to kids and reflects the world in which kids live.

“It’s an instinct for Nick, it’s a natural part of our DNA. If you come to us without that, it’s not a conversation.”

The Jim Henson Company is also known for its history of promoting diversity. As its president of TV, Halle Stanford, puts it: “I always hear Kermit in the background saying: ‘It’s not easy being green.’”

The company has produced shows like *Fraggle Rock*, which she points out “was created to promote world peace and showcase interconnectedness” (and is being brought back as an Apple TV+ Original) and *Sid The Science Kid*, which Stanford says was “the first show where we really dug in and showcased kids from different racial, religious and economic backgrounds”. She adds: “I’m super proud that Sid was the first bi-racial pre-schooler on TV.”

The company is, of course, best-known for its work in animation and puppetry (or, rather, Muppetry), which is why Stanford says that the next step for Henson is to develop more live-action programming.

“We need to make a shift towards showing real children up on the screen, even more. I’ve actually committed our slate to showcase more real children in terms of race, community and neurodiversity.”

Among the projects in the pipeline, Stanford reveals, is a show “focusing solely on the Latinx community and then another one specifically aimed at the neurodiversity community.”

Stanford says the company has started to realise that “we don’t have to necessarily always go broad; we can always speak to a specific community.”

Streaming focus

The rise of streaming services has opened up the catalogue for children to view not just homegrown talent showcasing diversity, but also content produced by cultures different to their own.

“Streamers have played a big part as they have made a conscious effort in pushing diversity with great results,” says Michel, while Rezaei suggests that “digital platforms and newer media rebels” are the ones “allowing space for new stories to come out.”

Anish Mehta, CEO of Indian animation studio Cosmos-Maya, however, highlights how shows from some territories notably travel further than others. “We strive for our content to feature in the international market and enjoy the same acceptance and popularity as international storylines do in our home market,” he says, noting the disparity, but also the positives. “The fact that we’re currently in an era where global streaming platforms are setting up shop in India signifies a welcome shift,” says Mehta. “Shows like *Mighty Little Bheem* have initiated a trend where a homegrown Indian title has worked really well with big streamers such as Netflix in international territories, and this is merely the tip of the iceberg.”

“Until we see parity in top management, in the creative departments and the decision-making roles, we won’t make a huge dent in authentic storytelling”

Shabnam Rezaei
Big Bad Boo



Ellen Solberg, head of content at global kids' streamer Hopster, meanwhile, says that she sees "a huge positive coming from kids seeing different cultures represented on screen."

Solberg adds that while culture representation is definitely improving with global streaming, there are still areas for improvement. "I'd like to see more stories where girls are leaders and boys are open about their feelings, where different family structures are shown, and where kids from different backgrounds, abilities and classes are represented."

Last year, Hopster published a report titled *Is Kids TV Making Your Child Prejudiced?* which examined 50 of the most popular shows aimed at UK pre-schoolers on public service broadcasting channels, streaming and VOD services. Its findings included minimal disability representation in these shows, high rates of gender stereotyping, little evidence of LGBT+ representation and only six out of the 50 examined had BAME characters in leading roles.

Solberg comments: "Our aim has always been to be inclusive, but the report did highlight to us how many of the top shows are still lacking representation. It has definitely made us more aware of harmful stereotypes and underrepresented groups. When commissioning content, we always take this into account. In 2019, we created a show called *Rainbow Stories*, which introduces children to LGBT+ families and different family structures. In another Hopster original, *Two Minute Tales*, we meet BAME characters, LGBT+ characters, characters with disabilities and characters from different classes."

Social immobility

While there has been more overt ground gained with pushes for racial, gender and sexual inclusivity, it is

"I'd like to see more stories where girls are leaders and boys are open about their feelings, where different family structures are shown, and where kids from different backgrounds, abilities and classes are represented"

Ellen Solberg, Hopster



Cosmos-Maya's *Selfie With Bajrangji* is one of Disney India's most-watched



apparent that social issues and disability representation can often be left behind.

Olivia Dickinson, executive producer of the Inclusivity Now strand at the 2020 Children's Media Conference, says that while there are positive examples like the aforementioned *Pablo*, disability representation in children's programming can often be tokenistic.

Dickinson gives an example of an existing character introducing a friend with a hearing aid or in a wheelchair, rather than someone with those disabilities appearing as part of the regular cast of characters.

Stanford agrees these issues are "absolutely not given the same amount of attention" and has plans for Henson to "open ourselves up" to more projects focused specifically on the disabled community.

Dickinson also notes another troubling trend. Even in positive LGBT+ stories it is "often more acceptable to have a coming out story for boys. There is that sense again that the male experience gets to lead."

On and off camera

While efforts are clearly being made to improve inclusivity and representation, all those spoken to by TBI for this feature agree that there is much more to be done. And the answer, to quote Akinsiku, is "not rocket science". Beyond improving on-screen representation, broadcasters and content creators need to also put in the work behind the scenes – and at every level – whether that's adhering to an ethos, implementing an initiative or ensuring that the content they create comes from a place of real authenticity.

"Things have changed a lot. It is certainly no longer incredibly rare to see BAME characters on children's TV," says Akinsiku. "But there is that little question of what lies behind the camera. We need more representation at levels where it matters, especially creative and shot callers. When you have influential people on side at the highest levels, it can make a difference."

"True change comes from changing the make-up of the industry," agrees Rezaei. "Until we see parity in top management, in the creative departments and the decision-making roles, we won't make a huge dent in authentic storytelling."

If these positives changes continue, however, Rezaei believes the future is an inclusive one. "I am convinced one day we will reach a place where kids can turn on the TV and feel like they are being represented and reflected. This will allow them to know that they are OK just as they are and that they are loved. That is what this is about. We want to make kids feel that they are loved and that they matter. That is the most important part in all that we do." **TBI**

Talking it out



Spanish-language scripted product is in demand and Latin American producers already widely renowned for their film output are finding new opportunities to take their content global, as Nick Edwards reports

The Latin American region is highly coveted by global media firms and with many Spanish-speaking countries - the second-most spoken language in the world - it has proven to be of particular appeal to TV and streaming companies keen to bolster subscriptions. While the culture of producing high-end TV drama might be relatively new, Latin America has a highly regarded history of independent filmmaking and the two ends of the industry are now combining to make the region a landscape of opportunity, but also nuance.

The Latin part of the world is perhaps most famous internationally for its telenovelas, the long-running soap opera-like productions that feature high

Brotherhood (Irmandade), which has sold to Netflix, explores the dangers of life in a Sao Paulo prison

drama and romance. Most countries have a mix of government and commercially-funded channels, with Mexico the biggest producer of high-end content, followed by Brazil and then Columbia. But smaller countries such as Chile often punch beyond their weight, too.

The region is also heavily penetrated by streamers and according to Ampere Analysis, a research company that monitors activity in the industry, there are currently more than 150 premium drama productions in active development.

Of these, Netflix is behind 28 and Amazon has 11, while an array of other streamers and local channels make up the remainder.

Where HBO led...

However, reflecting the situation in North America, it was HBO that led the boom in high-quality TV drama. Around 15 years ago, its first show *Epitafios*, an Argentinian crime drama in the vein of films such as *Seven* or *Silence Of The Lambs*, was shown alongside HBO classics such as *Oz*, *The Sopranos* and *Sex And The City*. “It took audiences by storm, people were not prepared to see something like that,” says Roberto Rios, corporate VP of original programming at HBO Latin America. To date, the company’s Latin American arm has made more than 80 shows and now produces between five and six series each year.

It is not only the well-established operators, such as HBO and Netflix, which have settled themselves here. Innovative new players across the business are spotting opportunities too, such as Vuulz, the online marketplace for trading content rights, which has just added 52 shows from Mexican broadcaster Televisa to the 50,000 plus hours of content in its library (consisting of programming from more than 70 countries in 60 languages).

“We definitely see the potential for consumption of Spanish-language content to increase. We are just uploading a large catalogue from Colombia and following up on meetings with several distributors from the region to showcase their content too,” says founder and CEO, Ian McKee.

Guy Bisson, research director at Ampere Analysis, underlines this: “Non-English-language content is on a growth cycle worldwide and Spanish is the second most spoken language in the world, so the opportunities are obvious.”

Global production firms are looking for growth too. Fremantle expanded into the region last year, brokering ‘first-look’ deals with Fabula, the Chilean production

“The competition from Netflix, Amazon and HBO has made everyone up their game and increase the amount of content they make”

Andrea Barata Ribeiro
City Of God producer



Ingovernable producer
Fabula inked a first-look deal with Fremantle

company that produced *Ingovernable*, a web series for Netflix, and *Prófugos*, an HBO Latin America series. It has also forged ties with The Immigrant, the prodco headed up by Camila Jiménez-Villa and Silvana Aguirre, the team behind Netflix’s *El Chapo*. “Several new streamers will be launching throughout the region during the next two years,” says Coty Cagliolo, head of production for Fremantle in Latin America, “and this has caused a regional upscaling of ongoing projects and a thorough search for new content.”

Nuance & nurture

However, there are still major challenges to those taking on the Lat Am region and those who do so discover a nuanced landscape. “Whilst there is a shared language and shared history, it doesn’t mean it automatically resonates,” explains The Immigrant CEO Jiménez-Villa, which has offices across the region as well as in Spain and the US.

“There are many examples of Spanish content that travels well across the Latinx region, but others are too specific to Spanish or the European experience. But if you have a great story with great characters, because of the language and often shared history and cultural references, there is potential for that story to travel across the region straight out of the gate,” she explains.

Likewise, just because there may be large swathes of the public who do not yet have subscriptions, it does not mean they are an easy sell.

“Older audiences who watch free-to-air drama on linear channels can have habits that are hard to change,” explains HBO’s Rios. For younger audiences the challenge is different. “People under 30 who do not own TVs, who aren’t even aware of them, they’re very curious and live in a world where everything is theirs for the picking. They could be watching a 10-minute web series from Russia one minute and then a 30-minute comedy from Korea the next,” he continues. For this group, a company’s role is to curate. If HBO Latin America makes an Argentinian show, they have to be mindful that their subscribers throughout the region may well have seen it, so if the next show is in Mexican or Brazilian, it needs to be something that Argentinian audiences will want to see too. Sophisticated local editorial decisions are made by commissioners depending on local tastes and cultural preferences.

TV & film’s crossover moment

Traditionally, those who worked in the TV end of the industry and film auteurs were considered different breeds, but recently the two sides have converged.





Latin America has a rich independent film history and their directors have been admired by the global community at festivals such as Cannes and Venice for decades. “People making movies 10 years ago saw TV as offering less budget, inferior actors, inferior writers and so on. Then suddenly we started to see crazy money on the TV side,” says Juan de Dios Larraín of Fabula. “Now there’s not much difference between the cost of a minute of TV and a minute of film. What’s changed is the quality of TV.”

This change has been vital in Brazil since Jair Bolsonaro became president. “A lot of tax incentives and politicians used to support the cinema industry but we don’t have that anymore,” says Andrea Barata Ribeiro, the producer behind *City Of God*, one of the region’s best known independent films of the last two decades. “For 20 years, a little industry has been built and now it’s all over,” she says.

Brazil’s local commercial channel Globo made the follow up to *City Of God*, *City Of Men*, which ran over four seasons. “Globo always had very good content,” Ribeiro points out, “but the competition from Netflix, Amazon and HBO has made everyone up their game, and increase the content they make.”

The boom has been great for the TV writing culture of the region. “In the past, players in the film industry needed other jobs to survive. But now, in TV, cast and crews do not need other jobs, that’s a totally new development that has taken place over the last three or four years,” says Larraín of the Chilean situation.

Content buyers need to deliver perfectly executed productions to their subscribers but, unlike America or the UK, the region does not have a bench of experienced writing talent to draw upon. So there is a huge focus on development.

La Jauria was created by Fabula in partnership with Chilean broadcaster TVN

“You need to capture the attention of audiences and retain them for long seasons. Slow burn is not how we would define our slate”

Camila Jiminéz- Villa,
The Immigrant



“What we do is take people we believe in but who do not have an extensive history of writing TV and we provide that shepherding of the talent,” says Camila Jiménez-Villa.

The new TV landscape allows producers to tackle the same kind of socio-political commentary that Andrea Barata Ribeiro tackled in *City Of God*, which looked at the rise of crime in Rio de Janeiro’s favelas, on the small screen. Her recent production *Brotherhood (Irmandade)*, a series for Netflix, explores the astonishing level of violence in a São Paulo prison. Her production company O2 Filmes has also made a social allegorical drama titled *Joint Venture (Pico Da Neblina)* for HBO, which follows the trials and tribulations of a former drug dealer in a world in which marijuana has been legalised. With Paranoid Filmes, HBO Latin America recently made *He, She, They (Todxs Nósotros)*, about the existential crisis of a non-binary 18-year-old.

“You can be as creative in TV today as you can in film,” says Ribeiro. “We have just made a film for Netflix with a young director. They want the freshness of a new director and they allow them to do whatever they want,” she says.

Similarly, Fabula’s new production, *La Jauría*, a partnership between Fremantle and the Chilean public service broadcaster TVN, takes place in the context of Latin America’s #NiaUnaMenos (Not One Woman Less) uprising, comparable to the #MeToo movement. The result is a taught Spanish-language thriller shot in Santiago by Lucía Puenzo, one of Latin America’s most renowned female writer-directors.

There is also the phenomena of ‘Narcos-novellas’, which emerged from the success of the Netflix hit. “You need to capture the attention of audiences and retain them for long seasons. Slow burn is not how we would define our slate,” says Jiménez-Villa.

Larraín underlines this: “If the commissioner is hearing five pitches that day and you are number four, you have to stand out,” he says. “So the TV that gets commissioned is very dynamic. In order to fill eight hours of TV, it has to have a lot of plot twists, sub-plots and narrative arcs. You couldn’t make *Mad Men* or *The Sopranos*,” he says.

The energy of a generation of production companies is creating sustainable talent that looks likely to deliver some of the most exciting storytelling on the small screen for years to come, but ultimately the region is not immune to the challenges of the global market. “It’s a very competitive and very crowded marketplace. To make premium content that pushes boundaries, there is just a handful of buyers, so you have to stand out, just like in the English-speaking market,” reflects Jiménez-Villa. **TBI**

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 Top Pick

Zog And The Flying Doctors

Producer: Magic Light Pictures

Distributor: Magic Light Pictures

Broadcaster: BBC (UK) & ZDF (Germany)

Logline: Lovable dragon Zog and his loyal friends Princess Pearl and Sir Gadabout go on a thrilling adventure

Wondering what the team at the UK's Magic Light Pictures have been doing under lockdown? Well take a peak at the latest show to emerge from the London-based studio, which has already been behind international hits including *The Gruffalo*, *Room On The Broom* and last year's *The Snail And The Whale*.

Like those specials before it, *Zog And The Flying Doctors* marks another adaptation for award-winning author Julia Donaldson and illustrator Axel Scheffler, with the 1 x 30-minute show based upon the sequel to previous book *Zog*, which made its own TV bow in 2018. The new show will also debut on the coveted BBC One Christmas schedule in the UK, while Germany's ZDF is attached as a core partner and ABC in Oz, Spain's Movistar and SVT in Sweden are among those to pre-buy.

The story itself picks back up with the lovable dragon Zog – who has become a trusty air ambulance following the events of his last adventure – along with Princess Pearl and Sir Gadabout. When bad weather forces them to land at the palace, Pearl is locked up by her uncle, the King, who doesn't think that princesses should be doctors. Zog and

Gadabout try everything they can to rescue her but fail – leaving Pearl to come up with her own way of regaining her freedom.

“*Zog And The Flying Doctors* is packed with adventure and fun,” Michael Rose, joint MD at Magic Light, tells TBI. “It has everything kids love: a doctor princess, dragons, unicorns and even sunburnt mermaids and sneezy lions.”

For Rose, the show's key attributes include the originality of the story – which he describes as “hilarious and heartwarming”. But, he adds, the special also offers universal themes, which can be appreciated by young and old viewers globally.

Having its roots in a book written by an author-illustrator combo known worldwide is also likely to help it fly further on the international market.

Rose is also full of praise for Donaldson's “wonderfully rhythmic prose” and Scheffler's “fabulously endearing illustrations”, which, he says, are “loved the world over”. Combined with Magic Light's animated transformation, the result is a half-hour special “for all the family to enjoy” that looks likely to again become a hit worldwide.

The Epic Adventures Of Morph

Producer: Aardman
Distributor: Aardman
Broadcaster: Sky Kids (UK, Italy, Germany)
Logline: Morph and the gang embark on truly epic adventures that take them beyond their desktop home and – for the first time – we see Morph and Chas let loose in the wider world

These bitesize shows pick up on a much-loved classic character from the world of kids TV, with Aardman behind the series. *The Epic Adventures Of Morph* is made up of 15 x 5-minute episodes, longer than the first incarnation of the character several decades ago, but producers promise to again offer up slapstick comedy and Morph’s loveable sidekick Chas. Alongside the duo are their old friends Delilah, Grandmorph and The Very Small creatures.

“It’s incredibly funny and kids will love watching Morph and



his friends get up to all kinds of mischief,” Aardman senior brand manager, Laura Burr, tells TBI, adding that the show will also expand the universe of the clay models. “Morph and the gang embark on some truly epic adventures that take them beyond their desktop home and – for the first time – we’ll

see Morph and Chas let loose in the wider world.” The show remains true to its original format, combining clay and traditional stop-frame animation without dialogue, which should make it accessible to global audiences, with a Sky Kids debut in the due later this year.

The show also promises to

carry all the hallmarks of a classic Aardman series, including that signature Claymation technique, but Burr says the show also “pushes the boundaries of stop-motion to produce fast-paced action to match the comedy,” with a “universal and cross-generational appeal.”

The Dog And Pony Show

Producer: Redknot (a joint venture between Nelvana and Discovery)
Distributor: Discovery (Lat Am), Nelvana (Rest of world)
Broadcaster: Treehouse (Canada), Discovery Kids (Lat Am), Discovery Kids (Italy)
Logline: Two very different best friends leave their magical world of Rainbow Fjörd and move to the not-so-magical Unicity

This pre-school animation marks the first show to come from Redknot, the joint venture between Nelvana and Discovery. It follows Pony, who has outrageous ideas, and Dog, who has a fascination with the everyday, and tracks their adventures as they leave the magic world of Rainbow Fjörd to explore the mundane Unicity.

“Between the characters’ joy and fascination with the everyday and the chaos that

ensues after Pony shakes his ‘magic bottom’, kids will find themselves on a raucous ride with Dog and Pony,” says Pat Burns, executive manager and supervising producer at Redknot.

And while the series is on the surface a buddy comedy, “at its heart, the show explores the exhilarating transition from the magical world of a pre-schooler to that awesome thing known as a ‘big kid’.”

Burns tells TBI that the artistic direction of the series will also appeal, with animation merged with real world elements. “The show’s backgrounds are a collage of images and photographs that are ‘scribbled’ over to give each backdrop the graphic sensibility and allow the

characters to organically exist in the same world.”

With a roll-out on in September across Treehouse Canada and Discovery Kids in Latin America and Italy, the show is now being brought to other buyers – with its roots at Redknot expected to help sales.



Tinka And The King's Game

Producer: Cosmo Film

Distributor: APC Kids

Broadcaster: TV2 (Denmark)

Logline: Sequel series to the popular festive show *Tinka's Tale*

This live-action family series is from Denmark and has been produced as a sequel of sorts to popular festive show *Tinka's Tale*, which follows a 15-year-old girl who discovers she is half pixie, half human and who must embark on a daring mission to bring peace. *Tinka And The King's Game* picks up the story as Tinka's father, the King of Pixies, fails to return from a trip where he was to name her the crown princess. Tinka must enter an ancient competition, the King's Game, to secure the throne and finds help in her trusted human friend, Lasse, freshly expelled from boarding school.

"The *Tinka* series puts teen characters at the centre of the show, dealing with relatable, personal issues, but also showing their strong will to have a seat at the table and to take action," Lionel Marty, MD at APC Kids, tells TBI.

"The serialised aspect of the

story helps captivate viewers, proven by the first season's record average share of 53% on access primetime in Denmark, as well as the great performance on Teletoon+ in France."

The show also pushes the Scandinavian festive format one step further, Marty says, mainly by taking its main themes of tolerance, co-existence and reconciliation beyond the sphere of the family and into a wider approach to society.

For global buyers, Marty adds that the universal values are "wrapped" with elements of the fantasy and adventure genres "that have proven to be appealing to international viewers in recent years."

The 24 x 26-minute show is produced by Danish company Cosmo Film for local broadcaster TV2, with sales now open. *Tinka's Tale* previously sold to broadcasters including Canal+ in France and ERR in Estonia.



Dino Ranch

Producers: Industrial Brothers, Boat Rocker Studios

Distributor: Boat Rocker Studios

Broadcaster: Disney Junior (US)

Logline: Follows the action-packed adventures of the Cassidy family as they tackle life in a fantastical, 'pre-western' setting where dinosaurs still roam



Targeted at two-to-five-year-olds, this CGI animated series takes place on a ranch in prehistoric times, where storylines combine "comedic, rough and tumble fun" while introducing kids to problem solving and forging life-long friendships. The show, which debuts on Disney Junior in the US next year, has been created by Matt Fernandes of Industrial Brothers, which is working with Boat Rocker Studios in association with Disney, Radio-Canada, and CBC Kids.

The show follows three young siblings – accompanied by their own distinctive dinosaur best friends – as they find out about ranch life whilst navigating the great outdoors through a wide variety of different and unpredictable challenges.

"In addition to all the action and adventure, the nurture elements of the show will hold huge appeal," Jon Rutherford, MD & president of rights at Boat Rocker Studios, tells TBI. "As well as a working ranch, the

show features a dino-sanctuary too. Kids will love caring for the dinos, especially in the hatchery where tiny eggs are hatched to reveal a host of adorable baby dinos that need to be cared for."

The show attempts to delve deeply into animal care but also explores the importance of family and community bonds, Rutherford says, adding that the global appeal of dinosaurs will appeal to buyers.

"Dinosaurs are loved the world over and here, on *Dino Ranch*, they're paired with real kids who pre-schoolers will relate to," the Boat Rocker exec says. "The show presents a variety of themes that will be widely recognised globally including action, adventure, nurture, family, friendship and community."

Rutherford adds that the show's unique premise – which sees the kids becoming best friends with their dinosaurs – will engage viewers while the series also features a diverse range of characters.

Royals Next Door

Producers: Pikkukala, Lunanime, Ink & Light Films

Distributor: Dandeloo

Broadcasters: YLE (Finland), Ketnet (Belgium), RTVE (Spain), RTÉ (Ireland)

Logline: A princess leaves her castle behind for a 'normal' home

This 52 x 11-minute animation is created by Veronica Lassenius, creative director at Finnish prodco Pikkukala, and is based on her personal experiences, which saw her move often from country to country. The show, which combines 2D animation with photographic backgrounds, is aimed at seven- to 12-year-olds and revolves around Crown Princess Stella, who must move out of her castle after it suffers water damage. In line with King Bob's royal motto 'closer to the people', the family decide to live in an ordinary suburb, with Stella sharing anecdotes about



her new life as a 'normal' girl.

Emmanuèle Pétry Sirvin, partner at Dandeloo, says that while animated shows about royalty and the 'fish out of water' set-up for comedy have both been extensively used, *Royals Next Door* "will tell a funny story about staying

true to yourself in a changing environment. The fact that the stories are based on real events and experiences makes the show genuine," Sirvin tells TBI.

Sirvin adds that the producers have also created a new-look for the animation using a variety of different mediums.

"We aim to innovate and give a new twist to the animated sitcom genre: the hybrid style, combining 2D digital animation with real-life and CG backgrounds goes in line with what the target audience is experiencing on other screens."

Green Hornet

Producer: WildBrain

Distributor: WildBrain

Broadcaster: N/A

Logline: The Green Hornet and Kato leap back into action in the modern day – but this time it's their children who are the crime-fighting heroes



The Green Hornet will ride again in this new animated series based upon the masked crime fighter, who first appeared in a 1930s radio series.

By day, Britt Reid was a wealthy newspaper publisher, but by night he donned his green mask and ventured out into the city with his sidekick Kato – in their high-tech car 'Black Beauty' – to battle criminals.

This new series is set in the modern day, with a re-imagined Green Hornet and his sidekick Kato now the grown children of the original heroes. It is currently in development and no broadcaster is yet attached.

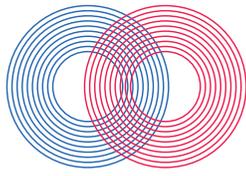
WildBrain has partnered with filmmaker and writer Kevin Smith on the project and he is already rather familiar with

the character, having penned numerous *Green Hornet* comics.

Smith says that it is an "honour" to bring the "iconic" characters back to the screen in an animated series for the first time. "We'll be telling a tale of two Hornets – past and future – that spans generations and draws inspiration from a lifetime spent watching classic cartoons and amazing animation."

Smith lists shows like *Batman: The Animated Series* and *Super Friends* as among his inspirations for the new Green Hornet series, which is to be 'unmasked' at MIPCOM.

"I can't believe WildBrain gave me this job and I can't thank them enough for the opportunity to extend my childhood," adds Smith.



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Launch time



Richard Middleton talks to former BBC Studios director of commissioning & co-production Tobi de Graaff about suffering from Covid-19, his agnostic approach to production and why it's more fun to date than marry

For those whose first language is not German, the word beiboot might not mean too much. For others, such as former BBC Studios (BBCS) director of commissioning & co-production Tobi de Graaff, it neatly encapsulates what his newly-launched joint venture company does, while also illuminating how TV's scripted business is changing.

"We are a representation business," De Graaff explains of Beiboot, the business he unveiled last month that has the backing of *McMafia* and *His Dark Materials* financier Anton. "In German, beiboot means dinghy – so if you happen to have a yacht, you lower the beiboot and you can get to harbour."

Choppy waters

That might sound straightforward enough in calm seas, but there's little doubt that De Graaff's Beiboot has entered into the scripted industry when the waters have become somewhat choppier.

That's partly because the former BBCS exec had to deal with suffering from Covid-19 himself as he prepared his new outfit – but now recovered, he is clear about the opportunities for what he describes as his "agnostic" company.

"The reception [of Beiboot] has been great, we've had a lot of companies, producers and writers interested in someone who can help them navigate the richer and more complex world of commissioners," he says, adding that the idea is to enable creatives to navigate the "different scenarios available to put a show together."

De Graaff has long been associated with premium scripted product, joining BBCS (then known as BBC Worldwide) from ITV Studios in 2014 as EVP of western Europe, where he led TV distribution, production and channels.

He was promoted to his more recent commissioning role in 2017, with a focus on partnering with producers to determine funding strategies and execute global sales plans.

That led him to working in tandem with Anton and, most notably, Netflix, as BBCS attempted to deal with the streamer's increasingly stringent demands for global rights deals. As a result, De Graaff became the "point person" on such deals and an expert in the evolution of drama commissioning along the way, while working with Anton on a number of financing initiatives.

"The business used to be that producers would get a commission, then go to distribution and get deficit funding, and perhaps help via a co-production. That's changed in some ways over the past three

De Graaff's Beiboot venture has the backing of *His Dark Materials* (opposite) and *McMafia* (right) financier Anton

years, so I would be increasingly working with producers to get in early, before the script." From there, the focus would be on where the project would best fit, with pitches made to streamers, broadcasters and premium or basic cable in the US and beyond.

Agnostic approach

"That's when I had the idea that a business that could be independent of a studio might work even better," he explains. The idea, he adds, is to focus completely on the project and be "100% agnostic" from any corporate interest a studio might have in terms of SVOD affiliation.

The theory went that if you could work with any distributor, channel or streamer without a conflict of licensing strategies, then the decision-making hierarchy and the focus would become clear: it would only be about the project. As a result, De Graaff says Beiboot isn't looking to represent companies – at least not yet – the idea is to focus firmly on projects he believes in.

"I was working with Sebastien Raybaud and Celia [Meirow] at Anton with BBC's slate financing deal and that's how we met.

"With the idea of being fully agnostic and working in films and TV, there was a meeting of taste and ambitions. They believed in this business model but they wanted to form a separate company run by me, so I have a board with investors, and a pot of money for development so we can get involved early and finance scripts and bibles to kickstart projects."



"If dating is so much fun why get married right now? Being bespoke all the time is an advantage and something that few studios can match"

Tobi de Graaff, Beiboot founder

De Graaff won't reveal just how much funding Anton is providing but says there is a "significant" development budget, adding that it's not fixed if more is required. "For a start-up, we're a very healthily funded business that can hold its own."

He is clearer about where Beiboot's focus lies – premium drama – but he is open about the route to get there. "Certain projects will really benefit from finding a writer, a director and a lead cast and being presented together to the market at that point," he says. "But on other projects, that approach might be unhelpful – I don't have a formula of how things should be done, it will be on a case-by-case basis."

Despite the company's recently launched status, De Graaff has already built up a slate of projects and says he is in conversations with other producers to take on their shows across a variety of different business models. "Some are already developed and they want help to take them out, there are several projects launching soon that are already developed and need a home, then there are others where



we're funding development and these will of course take a bit longer.

"I'm agnostic in this, I just really want to help shows get made creatively to incredible standards while working commercially with streamers, cable or channels to make that happen."

Broad horizons

Reflecting De Graaff's previous international roles, Beiboot is open to partnering on projects around the world but the UK and Europe is a focus, he adds, particularly with "growing demand for Italian, French and German shows, as well as British series."

The impact of Covid-19 on his business has, to date, been limited, he adds, but clearly the drama business will change as it emerges from the grip of the pandemic. "I've been lucky, we are in the slate-shaping stage of our business and we haven't had productions stopped and lost revenues – that has been incredibly hard for others," he says.

"It seems to me that streamers are doing well but channels, especially those that are ad-supported, have been hit. In my mind, it points to [a requirement] for more intelligent maneuvering for shows to bubble up to the fore to make them happen."

And with his agile dinghy designed to get shows safely to shore, the belief is that De Graaff can deal with all manner of operators, from organisations such as the European alliance of public broadcasters (France Télévisions, Italy's Rai and Germany's ZDF), to regional SVODs and "super giant streamers and tech groups".

"They all have something in common," De Graaff says. "They're after big event TV, serving different audience tastes – and that is a creative landscape that we can look forward to. You just have to be prepared to put the leg work in for more complex partners," he continues, underlining the approach of his bespoke model and, he hopes, its allure for creatives.

"If dating is so much fun why get married right now?" he adds. "Being bespoke all the time is an advantage and something that few studios can match. Dealing with different people for different clients and in different territories can be tricky to see through for a small production firm.

"With 13 years on the sales side, there are a few things I have picked up that I can now bring to the table in a more entrepreneurial way and with the interests of both parties at the centre." **TBI**



Last Word Brien Arone

Keeping a focus on kids' climate concerns

“Life is more than just money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth: young people are making a stand”

The norms and values that govern our lives are learned in childhood and consolidated in adolescence. That means being part of the kids TV industry comes with a lot of responsibility – and the power to change the way humanity thinks. Being relatively new to the industry, you might look at me and think that’s a bit much to say. But when I walk into a trade show or market and people point out the big decision makers, everyone is new to me. The beauty here is that I treat everyone as a big decision maker and my approach as someone completely fresh to this industry is an emotional one.

This leads back to our responsibility, because I know that life is too short to stand on the sidelines: what we all do or don’t do will affect all our lives, our children and all future generations. And that was the inspiration for *SeaBelievers*.

Life is more than just money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth: young people are making a stand and we only have to listen to what kids say to embrace and learn what we should teach and talk about. I have taken up the cause for environmental education, ocean conservation and taking care of our planet. The good thing is I am not alone: a survey of 1,000 children aged four to 14 found that 87% believed that saving the environment should be taught in schools. When asked why, more than a third (38%) said it was because they were worried about the future of the environment.

Without environmental education, the vision of sustainable development cannot be realised, either globally or in individual countries. In the future, environmental education will be measured by the extent to which it proves capable of making the expected contribution to sustainable development. Topics such as mobility, lifestyle and consumption, energy, construction and housing, nutrition, health and poverty reduction are all moving to the forefront, as

are questions of participation and networking skills.

After surveying over 11,000 children between the ages of nine and 18 from 14 different countries, including Brazil, India, Kenya, the US and New Zealand, UNICEF found that many are aware their futures may not hold all the promise their parents had hoped for. The survey, which measured children’s attitudes towards global issues, found that many children are “deeply concerned” about problems like climate change – and it can of course be frightening, as can other environmental issues like deforestation and wildlife extinction.

But it doesn’t have to be. It is so important to let kids know that they can change the world, to empower them and encourage them. Truth is, there is a potential hero, a future difference maker, in every young person. Each of them, from whatever background, is a bundle of untapped energy – a positive force who can do something to steer that communal boat that carries us all. All it takes is belief. If young people believe in their own power, they will use it. And they will discover that any person – regardless of gender, age, race, cultural background or economic circumstance – can make a genuine and lasting impact.

I’ve been blessed to have found an all-star team of industry professionals to share this personal connection and they have become part of our amazing *SeaBelievers* family. We decided that we want kids to know that the *SeaBelievers* are at their side – and inventing the whole new genre of ‘eco-tainment’ is exactly that to us. It combines the benefit of edutainment in a CGI series for children, offering informative and realistic insights about real-life issues affecting our ocean and encouraging kids to make a difference – because little kids can do big things! The one thing we need more than hope is action. Once we all start to act, hope is everywhere. Change has to start today. **TBI**

Brien Arone is founder & “SeaEO” of *SeaBelievers*, which houses the eponymous kids show focused on the environment

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