

S4C/C4 Schools To Spearhead International Animated Series

by Jean-Fabrice Vernet

Twenty-six countries representing every continent are to take part in the co-production of a new series named *Animated Tales of the World* and get a licence to exploit the entire series domestically. Partners will include The World Summit on Television for Children, Welsh public channel S4C, Welsh producer Right Angle, UK public channel C4 educational arm Channel 4 Schools, US cable network HBO, leading Canadian broadcaster CBC, and broadcasters from countries including Pakistan and Burkina Faso.

An additional nine countries expressed interest in participating in the co-production when the project was first disclosed during a presentation at the Second World Summit on Television for Children in mid-March.

With a cultural tale from each of the participating countries forming the basis of each episode, the new series will be

an innovative project from a creative standpoint, as well as in terms of the production scheme that will bring it to the screen. Actual production of the cartoons will take place in at least seven of the participating countries, and countries which do not have animation production facilities will be

deputy commissioning editor of Channel 4 Schools, said: "The fund, which will be controlled by the new Foundation on Television for Children set up in mid-March at the World Summit on Television for Children, will be used to promote other projects of the sort that will bring money-wise rich

Funds for the estimated US\$8.7 million production will be garnered from participating developers/producers on a sliding scale basis, with countries paying what they can afford

involved at the development stage. Cardiff-based S4C will be the executive producer. Right Angle will provide editing, research, production, and delivery support. Channel 4 Schools will provide the UK tale, as well as financial and editorial support.

Any sales to additional countries will go into a fund which will also include monies from publishing rights of books and spin-offs. John Richmond,

and poor countries together to produce other children's tv projects based on the principle that those who have more pay more."

Broadcasters will pay a single licence fee instead of royalties. Any advances will go to the Summit, and be reinvested into initiatives arising from the Summit. After seven years the rights will revert to World

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TVA to Invest US\$15 million on Family Films

by Marie-Agnès Bruneau

QUEBEC'S leading private channel TVA (formerly known as Télé-Métropole) is to invest US\$15 million in the production of nine international family telefilms.

The move comes in light of the French language broadcaster's strategy to increase its presence on the international market place, according to François St Laurent, vice president of business development for TVA

and vice president of production for TVA International. St. Laurent was hired three years ago to develop the company's international activity. "The exportation of Quebec products is somewhat of a lost battle," he said, "so we decided to go into English-shot programming. TVA International has three targets: to generate revenues in the short-term, to create assets and a library, and to develop a brand on the international marketplace."

The first film resulting from the new strategy, *Shadow of the Bear*, has just been completed and is being sold abroad through a major deal with Rai 3 in which the Italian channel acquired European rights, including for the UK. Negotiations are also underway with a US cable channel. The US\$1.3 million film was completely financed by TVA, but TVA International is aiming to

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Summit on Television for Children, which will hold the equity.

Funds for the estimated £5.2 (US\$8.7) million production will be garnered from participating developers/producers on a sliding scale basis. Countries with smaller budgets like Burkina Faso will provide a minimum US\$750 and countries like the US up to US\$40,000 for each episode. Production of the 15-minute episodes, expected to cost US\$350,000 each, is set to

begin later this year.

Chris Grace, director of animation at S4C, explained: "What underpins this is a fear of loss of cultural memory in television." Each country will provide a tale central to its culture. One episode will be an Innuit tale from Canada.

Animated Tales of the World will be representative of the philosophy shared by Grace and Richmond that the best animation is artisan animation, and that having a variety of styles across a pro-

ject is not confusing, but adds value to the productions. According to Grace, whose track record includes the *Animated Shakespeare* series produced with the BBC and, more recently, an international location co-production with Channel 4, *Animated World Faiths*, the productions will not look like Disney or Saturday morning tv, and the cultural integrity of the tales will be respected. He said: "We're not going to do a *Hunchback* to it."

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produce in the US\$1.1 million to US\$2.2 million budget range, so St Laurent will be open to international partnering for the higher budgets.

TVA's plan to have the nine films produced within only

three years is another motive for the company's search for international co-financiers. St Laurent will also be interested in projects initiated by foreign partners.

St. Laurent wants to focus on the family and adventure film genres on the assumption

that potential abroad is greater for these programmes, which are also suited to home-video. The broadcasting division of TVA is also directly interested in broadcasting this kind of programme, having a weekly Saturday 6:30 p.m. slot to feed.

BBC, Discovery Sign Deal

By Lucy Hillier

BBC Worldwide Ltd. and Discovery Communications Inc., the US cable television company, have finalised an agreement worth over US\$500 million to create what will be the largest global force in factual broadcasting. Under the deal, for which heads of agreement were signed in September 1996, Discovery will invest US\$175 million in production over five years, the programmes eventually being aired on new, global cable and satellite factual channels. The BBC will have a 50% stake outside the US in all new channels developed by Discovery.

Dick Emery, acting chief executive of BBC Worldwide Ltd, said that the deal would "substantially complete the strategic repositioning of BBC Worldwide."

However, the agreement is a knock-back for A&E and PBS, which have traditionally

collaborated on productions with the BBC. Under the new deal, Discovery will now have first rights to BBC material. JVP (Joint Venture Programming), the new company created by the agreement, will act as the North American distribution/production arm for new programmes resulting from the deal.

In addition, a new 24-hour satellite channel, BBC America, showing BBC general entertainment programming, such as *East Enders*, will be launched on March 29, but audiences will be limited until the digital platform becomes more widespread. With \$US100 million earmarked to market and distribute BBC America, 20 to 25 million homes in the US will be able to view the channel in two years' time. BBC America will be owned, managed, and scheduled by the BBC, which will also exercise complete editorial control.

Australian Public Funds In Jeopardy

By Liz Fell

AHEAD of an Australian federal government budget statement in May, the future looks uncertain for the SBS Independent (SBSI) and Commercial Television Production Fund (CTPF) funds, both scheduled to end June 30.

Established in 1994 under the previous government, the CTPF has delivered annual investment of nearly A\$14 (US\$9.3) million for independents and the commercial nets to jointly produce or pilot innovative drama and documentary. SBSI, with an annual budget of only US\$2.7 million, has so far generated about 280 hours of programmes by independents worth, US\$40 million for airing by national multicultural broadcaster SBS.