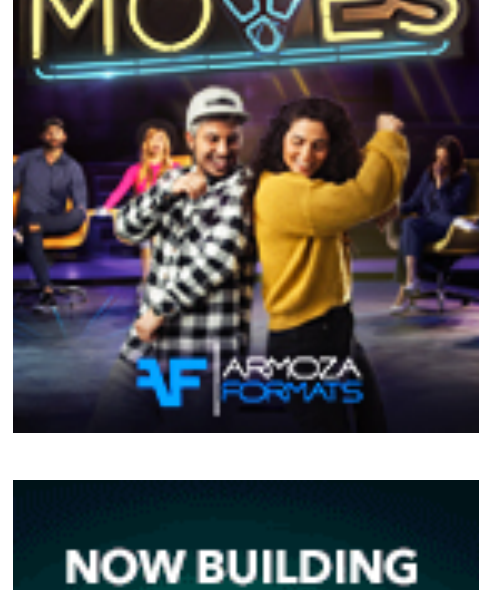


SCREENING NOW: **Secrets In The Water** A mother tracks down her daughter's killer only to realize her friend could be the killer

Home > Departments > Countryfile > **Éires to the throne**



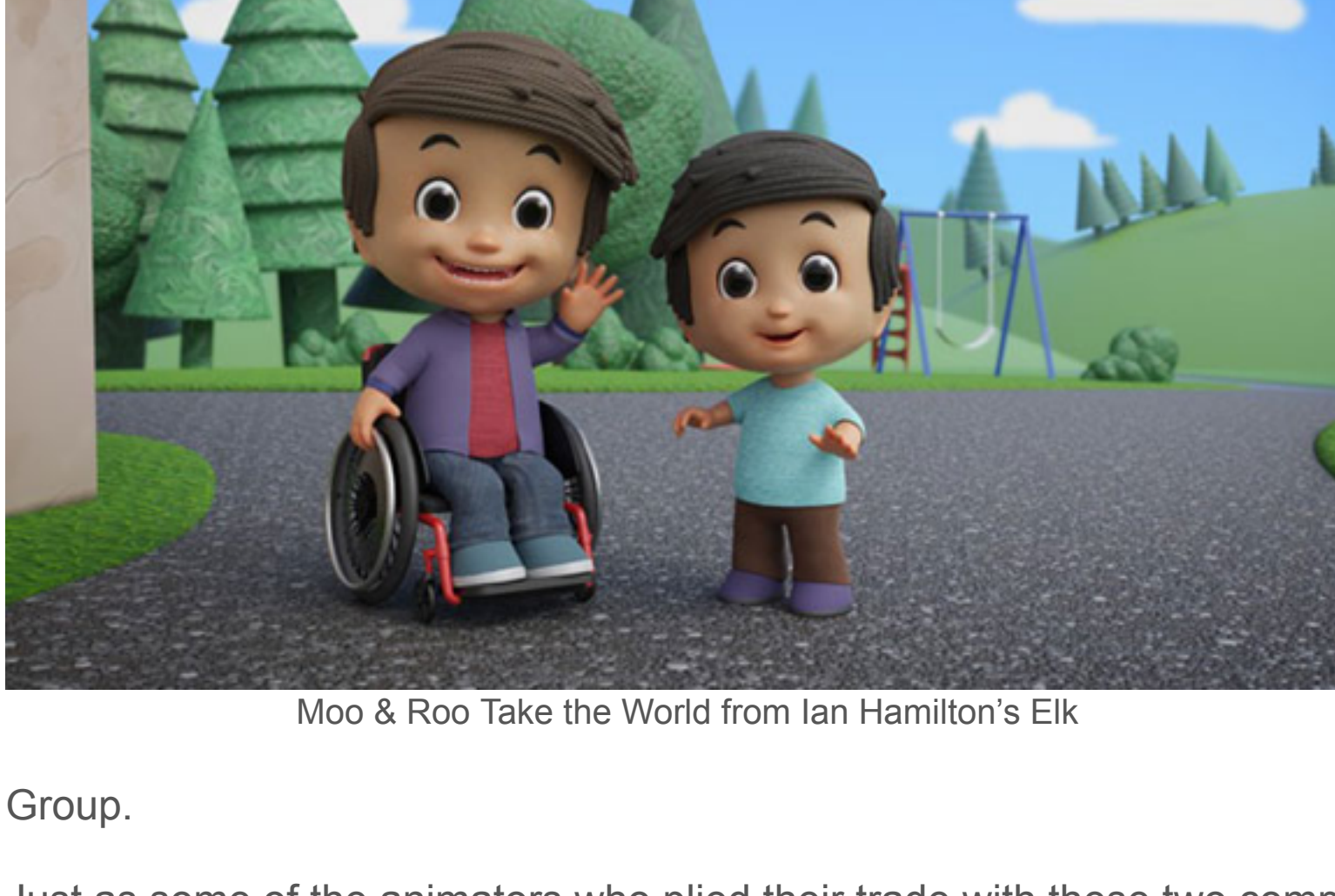
COUNTRYFILE

Your essential market-by-market guide to the worldwide content business.

Éires to the throne

By Nico Franks 25-08-2020

Ireland's buoyant animation scene is riding a wave of new independent studios set up by alumni from established prodcos and each developing their own IP.



Moo & Roo Take the World from Ian Hamilton's Elk

Group.

Just as some of the animators who plied their trade with these two companies went on to set up their own studios, alumni from those outfits are now setting up shop around the country as Ireland's animation industry continues to grow.

At the last count, the sector directly employs more than 2,000 people, while Animation Ireland, the trade association for the country's animation studios, now has more than 30 members, up from 25 in 2018 and 14 in 2015.

The new wave of studios has been set up by animators who previously worked at companies such as Cartoon Saloon, Jam Media, Kavaleer Productions, Giant Animation and Treehouse Republic.

Having cut their teeth on service work, many of them are set to bring original projects to pitching event Cartoon Forum next month – although the lack of direct flights between Dublin and Toulouse, coupled with the risks of travelling during a pandemic, could prevent many of them from appearing in person.



Ian Hamilton

Crucially, many are operating outside of Dublin and are using that as a unique selling point to attract talent tired of the capital's high cost of living and lack of affordable housing.

Ian Hamilton, the former chief operations officer at Jam who set up his own animation studio, Elk, to provide service work as well as develop original IP in the county town of Dundalk in 2018, sums up the appeal.

"We deliberately set up outside of Dublin so we could offer our crew a different way of life. If you're on animation industry wages, you're not going to be able to rent an apartment in Dublin city centre on your own. If you do, you're literally going to be in a tiny box," he says.

"I know a lot of European animators who loved Dublin but left because they wanted their own space. We can still pay really good rates, maybe even match Dublin rates, but the cost of living is much cheaper in Dundalk.

The producer is gearing up to pitch Moo & Roo Take the World (52×11') at Cartoon Forum and the show follows two young brothers, one confident with some 'street smarts' and the other with weakness in his legs meaning he uses a wheelchair.

"Dundalk is a big town, with a music scene and different coffee shops you can drink in every day. But after less than a 10-minute drive you're up a mountain or by one of several beaches. We're offering a way of life where you're not just stuck in the middle of a city and can't move," says Hamilton.



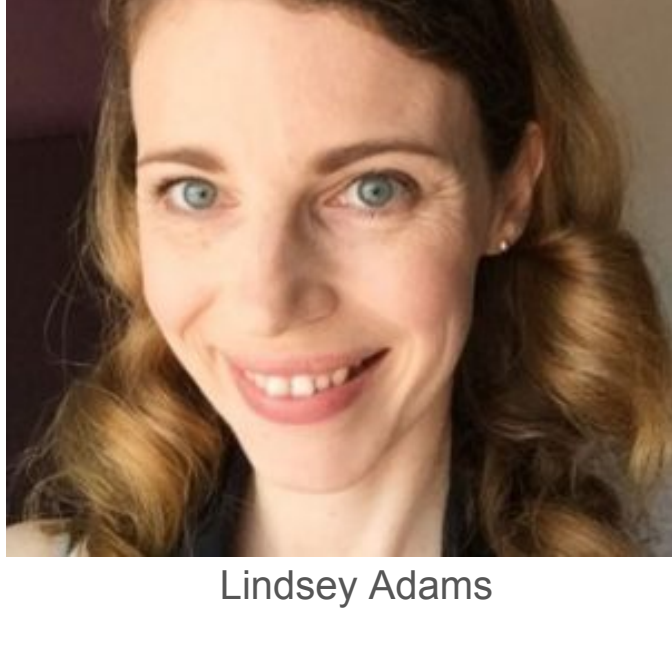
Preschool comedy T.A.I.L.S at Animal Airport from Studio Meala

over recent months as a result of the pandemic is only set to accelerate employees' drive to live outside urban centres and work from there.

One of the newer Irish studios already operating on such a basis before the pandemic is Studio Meala, set up by former Treehouse Republic MD Stephan Fagan last year and run out of Boyle in County Roscommon.

"We were working remotely a year ago and people have asked us if we saw the pandemic coming," says Fagan. "We live in a really picturesque part of the country. It's not young and happening like Dublin, but it has a lot going for it in terms of a place to raise a family. We have office space as a place to collaborate but other than that, people are free to work from home if they want to."

Studio Meala will pitch T.A.I.L.S at Animal Airport (26×7'), a preschool comedy series about embracing difference and understanding that everyone has a value to add to the world, at Cartoon Forum.



Lindsey Adams

Meanwhile, Dublin remains a draw for animators looking to live in one of Europe's most vibrant cities and is home to some of the newer names on the scene. These include Turnip & Duck, the firm formed by Colm Tobin and Aidan O'Donovan in 2016 to combine their experience producing, directing and writing television at companies such as Kite Entertainment.

Turnip & Duck recently debuted Critters TV, a live-action 2D animation hybrid series featuring animated wildlife characters watching live-action nature documentaries, on RTÉjr.

Tobin believes that fledgling producers in Ireland are benefitting from the work of the country's older animation firms to develop their IP, which includes shows such as Puffin Rock (Cartoon Saloon) that are seen all over the world.

"In the past, the industry in Ireland would have been sustained by service work, with a few notable exceptions, which was a key component in developing the talent base," says Tobin.

"Now that the infrastructure is in place, the new wave of start-up studios has a much more targeted focus on IP creation. Creating Irish stories and formats that can traverse the globe is the next stage of the industry's growth and we hope Turnip & Duck will be at the forefront of this transition," adds Tobin.

For many years, the upper echelons of Ireland's animation industry have mirrored those of the global industry in being dominated by men. Daily Madness, set up in Dublin in 2015 by Lindsey Adams, is one of only a handful of female-owned studios in Ireland.

The company's goal is to tell stories that matter and create worlds that inspire, whilst promoting female characters onscreen, as well as providing opportunities for women behind the camera.

Daily Madness's preschool series Pins & Nettie, created by Adams and creative director Shannon George, premiered on YouTube in April and has already amassed more than one million views.



Daily Madness is pitching Goat Girl at Cartoon Forum

established Irish studios, who have created, and still continue to create, their shows with a strong point of view. We are so excited that we now get to add our own footprint on to the landscape of Irish animation.

"There is always a need for more voices, more representation and different perspectives when it comes to storytelling. Each Irish producer in this new wave has their own distinctive vision of how they will make their mark on the industry – approaches that we are each so passionate about, and we represent this passion in our own distinctive ways."

Daily Madness will pitch Goat Girl (52×11'), a quirky comedy series about a 13-year-old who just happens to have been raised by mountain goats, at Cartoon Forum.



Stephen Fagan

"As the world continues to look for more content, the industry will always need more producers to bring their own slates of fresh content into the mix, which will help broadcasters and streamers to fulfil the needs of everyone, from small, niche audiences to larger mainstream ones," says Adams, who previously worked at Kavaleer and Gingerbread Animation, the joint venture between London-based Cake and Australian firm Studio Moshi.

Animation Ireland has been tracking the industry's growth over the years and its recent data shows that 39 of the projects that received the country's Section 481 tax relief in 2019 were animated titles, with a total value of €372m (US\$403m).

Hannah Dobson, VP, digital entertainment and media at Enterprise Ireland, is responsible for advising and supporting the growth of Irish companies across the North American market.

Dobson has been working with Irish animation studios over the past three years and says that during this time she has witnessed significant growth within the indigenous industry in Ireland.

"This growth has helped to provide a deeper skill set across the industry as the new wave of Irish producers have the opportunity to see and learn from the success that came before them," she says.



Distillery Films pitched Sullivan Sails at Mipcom 2019

five.

Founded by Jonathan Clarke, who previously worked at Giant and Cartoon Saloon in Ireland, the firm is set to bring Sullivan Sails to Toulouse next month.

The show encourages a love of adventure, exploration and imagination in young audiences, while introducing them to incredible facts about geography, the environment and international cultures.

Clarke believes Irish producers have learnt to develop talent over the years, which will stand the industry in good stead in the future.



Jonathan Clarke

the newer companies are particularly in tune with this. As small companies, what we lack in pipeline power, we make up for in appetite for creative and innovative ideas in development and production."

The latest wave of Irish studios stands on the shoulders of those that came before it, who caught the attention of the international animation industry with its 'work hard, play hard' ethos, backed up by eye-catching original IP.

And while the future of doing business and networking at international markets – a domain Irish producers have made their own – is up in the air for the time being, hopefully it won't be too long before you get to meet those behind Ireland's new studios in person.

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Magnetic property



Getting into the room



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Contact C21

C21 Media Limited
2nd Floor, 148 Curtain Road
London EC2A 3AT
+44 (0) 20 7729 7460
c21media.net
post@c21media.net