

Director Frank Mosvold about ELLA BELLA BINGO

Many children's film professionals already have crossed paths with ELLA BELLA BINGO. The project has been talked about for years and stood in the spotlight at various Works in Progress. Expectations were high for this animated feature about the little girl with her sporty bike and her loyal friend Henry, who already played the lead in their own TV series. Director Frank Mosvold is a familiar face among visitors to the Kristiansand Festival, where he held a board position for many years. For ECFA Journal he exclusively writes about the genesis of his film, which is now ready to enter the children's film market for the youngest audience.

When I was at film school in the mid-90s, my student film was awarded the Sam Z. Arkoff award. Arkoff was, together with business partner Roger Corman, the king of Hollywood B-movies. In the award ceremony, I sat next to him, smoking his big cigar in the non-smoking area. I had mixed feelings. I wanted to make important films while he basically made

schlock. Self-pompous I asked him, *"So, who are your favourite directors?"* He told me he liked Antonioni, Fellini and Bergman. What a shock! I didn't even expect him to know about these names. I couldn't help asking: then why do you make B-movies? He looked me in the eyes and said: *"I make films people want to see"*. His answer has stayed with me ever since.

The theatrical market has changed a lot since I graduated from film school in 1996. The nineties were the era of independent cinema. My heroes were Robert Rodriguez, Gus Van Sant, Kevin Smith and Jim Jarmusch. After my graduation the cinema market got overcrowded with blockbusters and movie franchises. It was obvious if I was ever going to make a movie, I wouldn't be able to fight the evolution in the global audience's viewing habits. As is often said: if you can't beat them, join them.

Ella Bella universe

In 1999 my friend Tom Petter Hansen



showed me a rather naive drawing he made of his daughter. It looked super cute and I told him we should make a film about the little girl. Excited, we called our screenwriting buddy Trond Morten Venaasen, and told him we had an idea for a feature film.

We realised that if we ever wanted to catch people's interest, we needed to make Ella Bella Bingo a brand. We pitched the idea to a local broadcaster, who was as excited as we were. Together with national broadcaster NRK we produced 104 episodes. In Norway toys and books were produced. In many ways you can say this

TV series was an expensive marketing campaign for our film. We expected the movie to go into production right after we had completed the TV-series, but the financing took longer than expected. This extended period was a perfect opportunity to further develop the Ella Bella universe.

People better than you

When we were finally ready to go into production, we realised that to compete on the international market, we needed to improve the screenplay. We hired two expert screenwriters. My dad always advised me to "work



Richard Kind in the studio

with people better than you are". Rob Sprackling & Johnny Smith (GNOMEO & JULIET, THE QUEEN'S CORGI) are definitely smarter than me. We simply searched the IMDb website to find people who had worked on films that we admired, and Aardman has always been a great inspiration, in the way they combined artistic integrity with a commercial understanding of the market.

While our ELLA BELLA BINGO TV series was made in charming flash animation, all sales agents told us frankly that 2D feature animation didn't sell. It seemed we had to make the film in CGI. Gimpville Studio in Norway did the job, and it is amazing what they achieved on our limited budget.

What sells?

Sales agents also told us pre-school movies didn't sell internationally. Up-aging the character could be a slippery road, but we decided to give it a try.

As a filmmaker you can always ignore what sales agents say, but nobody knows the market better than them. They are your best friends. A good relationship with your agent is essential. After all, they are the ones selling your movie. It is all a matter of trust. I found our sales agent Thorsten Wegener (Studio 100) by accident on a London street corner. He was talking to a friend of mine when I ran into them.

I pitched ELLA BELLA BINGO and he was immediately convinced. His guidance has been essential, advising me on screenplay, trailers, posters and promotion. Together with Red Central (U.K.) we made a splendid style guide to help distributors promote the film.

Smaller markets

Even if Studio 100 attends all the big film markets, it feels important for me to be present there as well. You get to see how your film is doing in market screenings, you get to meet potential buyers and you can see what your colleagues are working on. That is valuable information you can put into practice to make an even better movie next time. I find smaller markets like Cinekid and Annecy very useful, since buyers are more relaxed and take time to sit and talk with you.

ELLA BELLA BINGO is made in Norwegian, but as we want the film to have a global appeal, we also made an English version with Voxx Studio in Los Angeles. And we are very proud of it. Richard Kind (INSIDE OUT) did a fantastic job, and young actors Summer Fontana, Jack Fisher and Benjamin Plessala are simply amazing.

Passion

Despite all the commercial consideration, the passion from my younger days is still in my heart. I wanted ELLA BELLA BINGO to be about something that mattered, something I care about. I wanted to make a film about friendship. We are all afraid of being alone, we want to belong to something bigger. That is why everyone can identify with our young heroes.

It has taken me more than 20 years since I graduated from film school. Finally ELLA BELLA BINGO is ready for the big screen. I hope we have found the right balance between emotion and comedy. I have tried to follow Sam Z. Arkoff's advice about making something people want to see, hopefully without losing my passion for independent cinema.

—
Frank Mosvold

Find more about [ELLA BELLA BINGO](#).

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