



Baby Panda in Africa

ANIMATED PEOPLE TOP STORIES

CMG President Edward Noeltner Discusses His Company's Hot Annecy Slate and the State of Indie Animation



By Ramin Zahed June 6, 2024

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.We had a chance to catch up with **Edward Noeltner**, well-respected industry veteran and president of Beverly Hills-based international sales company, **Cinema Management Group**, which was founded in 2003 with the launch of Miramax's indie animated hit *Hoodwinked*. In recent years, CMG's many successful animation clients have included *Adventures in Zambezia*, *Loving Vincent*, *Seal Team*, *The Little Vampire*, *Ainbo: Spirit of the Amazon* and *The Canterville Ghost*.

Noeltner was kind enough to walk us through the colorful and eclectic new titles he is bringing to Annecy Festival's MIFA market and offered his take on the fast-changing world of indie animated movies. Here is what he told us:



Animation Magazine: Thank you so much for taking the time to chat with us only a few days before you take off to Annecy. What can you tell us about your dynamic new animation slate for 2024?

Edward Noeltner: Well, CMG will be licensing a raft of animated features in Annecy. In the Official Selection, we have **Buffalo Kids** from 4 Cats Pictures (*Mummies*, *Capture The Flag*, *Tad: The Lost Explorer*) and **Panda Bear in Africa** from Katuni (also in the 2024 Annecy Presents Official Selection), with whom we had wonderful successes with *Ainbo: Spirit of the Amazon* and *The Little Vampire 3D*.

CMG will also be licensing **Charlie the Wonderdog** from [Icon Creative Studio] in Canada and final remaining territories on **Kayara**, produced by Tunche Films and B-Water; **Noah's Ark: A Musical Adventure** from Gullane Entertainment in Brazil; and Lupus Films' amazing **Kensuke's Kingdom** which was a wonderful success in France and will have its U.K. release on August 2nd via Modern Films.

We have covered Panda Bear in Africa in our magazine before. Can you tell us what makes this movie stand out in the family market?

All of our 21 international distributors who saw the film prior to Annecy absolutely loved the characters and their fun adventures as they make their way through Africa. It's also extremely well written with many physical gags and wonderful, funny dialog for the kids and parents! The film was just released in Russia by VLG Films where it has become the number one independent animated film of the year with 395,000 admissions so far. Who doesn't like a cute Panda Bear? In France, the film will have a wide release after Annecy by French distributor Le Pacte (winner of this year's Palm d'Or with *Anora* and last year's Palm d'Or winner with *Anatomy of a Fall*).

What attracted you to Buffalo Kids?

We have been following 4 Cats Pictures ever since the first *Tad: The Lost Explorer* movie, which was a huge success. So when we read the script for *Buffalo Kids* and saw the short film, *Strings (Cuerdas)*, which was the inspiration for the feature, we saw a huge potential for the film. By the way, *Strings* holds the world record for most Festival Prizes in the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

The story [of *Buffalo Kids*] is about true friendship, inclusion and "never giving up" — all set in the American far west of 1886. Watching the film is an emotional experience and we are counting on audiences in Annecy embracing the film.



Buffalo Kids

Overall, what are your objectives at Annecy this year?

Besides meeting with our distributors who have one of our films in the Festival, we are always on the lookout for exciting new talent and we hope to watch as many of the films in the Official Selection as possible.

What is your take on the animation market worldwide?

With 33 of the top 100 films on Netflix being animated features, we know there is a huge audience for animated, family features. We just need to get audiences back into the theaters, post-COVID, as for us independents it all starts with theatrical successes and I believe our distributors are doing a good job in this respect.

In your opinion, what are some of the biggest trends that are facing the animation business globally?

There is clearly a lack of broadcast slots on Pay TV and Free TV for animated films and I believe we really need to lobby this sector of the industry to acquire, promote and broadcast more independent animation.

Charlie the Wonderdog

We have heard a lot of doom and gloom in recent months, but there are some silver linings as well, right?

There are definitely opportunities for independent distributors to be successful with independent animated features. It's all about finding the right release date and having the four quadrant type of family animation we have been championing for nearly 20 years at CMG. But we were also hugely excited by the success of *Kensuke's Kingdom* in France with just over 400,000 admissions. Quality animation, good writing and knowing your target audience are the fundamentals to having a successful release.

What would you say is CMG's secret of success as a global indie?

I believe we have consistently tried to back independent animated films that take audiences on a wonderful journey of discovery. Whether that discovery be far-off beautiful countries, different cultures or unique and fun characters whose moral compass is a good role model for children. In the end, we always want our audience to come out of the movie theatre with a smile on their face and that for 85 minutes their own lives will have been enriched with one of our films.

CMG's films will be screening at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival (June 9-15) and presenting to potential partners at the MIFA market (June 11-14). For more information, visit cinemamanagementgroup.com.

Kensuke's Kingdom
