

My Sunny Maad & Even Mice Belong in Heaven to world-premiere in Annecy

The Annecy International Animation Film Festival will give floor to world premieres of three Czech long-awaited animated feature films – ***My Sunny Maad*** and minority co-production ***The Crossing*** in Feature Films in Competition and ***Even Mice Belong in Heaven*** in the Screening Events section. Furthermore, short film ***Sisters*** has been selected for the Graduation Short Films in Competition section, and Meet the... Producers – Gap Financing section, held within the Mifa, includes co-production animated feature film projects in production ***The Websters*** and ***Heart of a Tower***.

My Sunny Maad (Feature Films in Competition)

Celebrated animator Michaela Pavlátová garnered international attention with her short film *Words, Words, Words* in Annecy in 1991 (followed by an Oscar nomination in 1993), and also presented at the festival shorts *Repete* (in 1995, Berlinale's Golden Bear for Best Short Film same year), *Carnival of Animals* (in 2007) and *Tram* (winner of The Annecy Cristal in 2012). This year, the director celebrates a comeback with her long-prepared animation feature ***My Sunny Maad*** which will compete in Annecy's Feature Films in Competition. The film is produced by Petr Oukropec and Kateřina Černá of Negativ in co-production with French Sacrebleu Productions, Slovak BFILM, Alkay Animation Prague, Czech Television, Gao Shan Pictures and Innervision (both FR). International sales are handled by Totem Films.

Pavlátová paints a picture of society in post-Taliban Afghanistan using the story of Herra, a Czech woman, who falls in love with Nazir, an Afghan, and has no idea about the life that awaits her in a new country, nor about the family she is about to join.

"*The story lays on gentle humour and well observed everyday details of the family life,*" says Michaela Pavlátová about her film, adapted for the screen by Ivan Arsenjev (*Shadow Country*) and based on the critically acclaimed and popular book *Freshhta* (2012, Stork Press, UK) by Petra Procházková, a Czech investigative and war reporter with a pile of personal experience of the realities of Afghanistan and everyday family life there.

The Czech Film Fund supported *My Sunny Maad* with EUR 807 000 for both development and production and backed the film also within the incentives programme with EUR 392 000. As a project in the making, the film was supported by Creative Europe – MEDIA within the slate programme in 2013 and by the Eurimages (EUR 340 000 in 2019) as well, and it was presented at Cartoon Forum or Venice GAP Financing Market.

My Sunny Maad is the first Czech film in Annecy's feature film competition since Břetislav Pojar's *The Time of Butterflies* (in 1993). In the last two decades, two Czech films by Jan Balej appeared Out of Competition: *One Night in a City* (in 2007) and *Little from the Fish Shop* (in 2015).

Even Mice Belong in Heaven (Screening Events)

Czech-French-Polish-Slovak co-production feature *Even Mice Belong in Heaven*, selected for the exclusive Screening Events section, tells an adventurous story about a little mouse Whizzy and Whitebelly the fox, who after an unfortunate accident meet in animal heaven where they lose their natural instincts and gradually become best friends. Their wish to stay together after they return to earth comes true, but they are reborn into opposite roles. Thanks to the power of friendship, they can even overcome what seems to be impossible.

The puppet-animated film is directed by Denisa Grimmová & Jan Bubeníček (*Murderous Tales*, 2016) and produced by Vladimír Lhoták of Fresh Films (CZ) & Alexandre Charlet of Les Films du Cygne (FR). The co-producers include Grzegorz Waclawek & Piotr Szczepanowicz of Animoon (PL), Marek Jeníček & Tomáš Janísek of CinemArt SK (SK), Czech Television (CZ), Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes Cinéma (FR), DD Production (CZ), Barrandov Studio (CZ), EC1 Łódź (PL) and Canal + (PL).

International sales are handled by French sales company Charades.

It has been a long journey for the creators of “*Mice*” to world premiere at the world’s biggest animation festival. The idea of adapting Iva Procházková’s eponymic book came up in 2010 and within two years, the development of the project started. The film was supported by the Czech Film Fund for development (EUR 23 000 in 2012), production (EUR 338 000 in 2014) and also in the incentives programme (EUR 321 000 in 2020), by the Creative Europe – MEDIA (EUR 60 000 in 2014) and by the Eurimages Fund (EUR 370 000 in 2018).

Moreover, the *Mice* are no newcomers to the festival. In 2014, the creators presented the project within the Mifa Pitches programme and it was also part of Works in Progress in 2019. In addition, the film was presented at Junior Co-production Market (winner of the Eurimages Co-production Development Award – Special Mention), at Cartoon Movie, in Malmö, Montréal, Stuttgart, etc.

Even Mice Belong in Heaven will celebrate its world premiere on June 16th within the Screening Events section, focused on major French and international premieres and exclusive never-seen-before content. The last Czech film to appear in this section was Jan Švankmajer’s *Insect* back in 2018.

Another Czech participation at Annecy’s main competition emerged from the co-operation among France, Germany and the Czech Republic. *The Crossing*, a feature-length debut of director Florence Mialhe, is produced by Dora Benousilio of Les Films de l’Arlequin and co-produced by German Balance Film, established Czech company MAUR film, ARTE (FR, DE), Czech Television (CZ) and XBO films (FR).

The film tells a story of never-ending human effort to find a new home, where one can find a better life. An effort for which we are willing to risk our lives. On this journey of hope, people overcome various perils and experience the most terrible of situations. They are fuelled by the awareness of who they really are, what they are running from and what they are hopeful of. In the end an experience like that becomes a story worth telling again and again.

Many Czech artists were involved in the production of this drama, such as – animators Lucie Sunková, Polina Kazak, Eva Skurská, Anna Paděrová and Zuzana Studená, or sound engineer Jiří Klenka. *The Crossing* was also backed by the CFF with EUR 115 000 and it also received support from Eurimages (EUR 400 000), Creative Europe MEDIA, CNC and more. World sales are handled by French company Indie Sales.

Sisters (Graduation Short Films in Competition)

In **Sisters**, selected for Graduation Short Films in Competition, director and FAMU student Andrea Szelesová tells an allegorical story of the Big Sister – a person of colossal size – who is trapped in sand in a deserted landscape. With no way to take care of herself, this burden falls on her resentful little sister. The film will be screened in Annecy in world premiere as well.

Czech student films have a strong tradition of participation in the Graduation Short Films in Competition. Twenty-five Czech films participated in this section over the last 25 years, including Verica Pospíšilová Kordić's *Way of Silvie* (2020), Daria Kashcheeva's *Daughter* (Cristal for a Graduation Film, Junior Jury Award for a Graduation Film in 2019), Jan Saska's *Happy End* (2016), Kateřina Karhánková's *The New Species* (2014), Martin Živocký's *The Case* (2011) or Tomáš Luňák's *Acrobat* (2001).

Websters and A Heart of a Tower at Mifa

Meet the... Producers – Gap Financing section, launched in 2019 by Mifa to provide support to producers and directors of feature films in the final phase of development or production, includes two Czech co-production projects. **The Websters** by Slovak director and producer (Fool Moon) Katarína Kerekesová follows up on a successful eponymic TV series (2017) combining 3D animation with live action in a story of a spider family who live in the highest spot of all the spider families in the house on the Silk Street. Right in the engine room of the lift. Since they already have been through various adventures, they are now in the biggest and most dangerous of all: meeting a human being.

The Websters, co-produced on the Czech side by Karolína Davidová and Anna Vášová of 13ka with PFX, Czech Television and Radio and Television Slovakia (SK) on board as well, have been backed by the Czech Film Fund several times altogether with EUR 177 000. The completion of the feature film and the TV series, both produced parallelly, is scheduled for winter 2021 – 2022.

The second film selected for this year's Gap Financing programme is *Heart of a Tower*, directed by Peter Budinský. Slovak-Belgian-Czech co-operation is led by Peter Badač of BFILM in co-production with Radio and Television Slovakia (SK), Barbora Budinská of plutoon (SK), Stacka (BE) and Badač's Czech company BFILM.cz. The Czech Film Fund supported the project with EUR 604 000.

Story of Riki, a 10-year-old boy, who dives into a big adventure, takes place in two different worlds. "Yourland" is a fantasy world, a place, where everything is possible and where dreams and crazy ideas come true. The other world is Riki's real world - cold, grey, and shrouded in difficult family problems. Time will show however, that if we choose the right path, all problems can be solved. *Heart of a Tower* is not just a fantasy full of crazy inventions, giant robots, and magical creatures, it also points out the problems kids nowadays must face.

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