



The Beasts from Oz

A fresh creative voice from the great Aussie outback offers a new CG-animated series about a very funny farm. **by Ramin Zahed**

Although the subject of city animals adjusting to a new life on a farm may have been tackled before at the movies, perhaps nobody can do this theme more justice than Scott Strachan, the man behind the new CG-animated series *FARMkids*. A former elementary school music teacher, Strachan actually grew up in a remote part of the Australian outback. "We didn't have television coverage," says the charming idea-man from Oz. "I grew up surrounded by great bush characters who were unbelievable storytellers and influences."

Strachan says he used over 14 years of his education background to come up with the idea behind his new show, which is being distributed by Los Angeles-based ParchLight Entertainment at MIPTV this month. "The *FARMkids* were 'nurtured and raised' by myself in classrooms around Australia where they were adored by thousands of children during this period."

About four years ago, Strachan was approached by an American producer who saw the character designs at a retail store when he was vacationing Down Under. "He contacted me and made me an offer to turn the characters into an animated property," says Strachan. "I explored the idea, talked to studios in Australia, finalized a budget (had a heart attack!), raised all the funds from private investors myself and started to make the show!"

Aimed at six- to 11-year-old audiences,

FARMkids looks at what happens to a group of spoiled nursery petting zoo animals when they suddenly get relocated to the country and have to adapt to their new rustic lives! "You have a star-struck mutt, a sports-crazy bull, a power-tool-packing pig, a culinary goat, a tech-savvy horse, a lipstick-wearing cow and a duckling that can't swim or fly," says the ebullient Strachan. "The simple farm life gathers a new meaning when they have to defend their ranch against such things as giant alien tomatoes, monster pumpkins and out-of-control genetically engineered ninja corn!"

It didn't hurt that Strachan, a graduate of the Queensland Conservatorium of Music, has performed with major symphony orchestras around Australia as a trumpet player and was instrumental in developing one of his country's most recognized music programs. He says he also has a love and passion for drawing and art from his father. "Although I have no formal training, I created and drew the original characters and developed every aspect of the 3D-animated characters and sets used in the show."

One of the strong selling points of the show is the fact that there's a *FARMkid* for every kind of young viewer in the mix. "They've been created to accommodate the passion of every child in the world—be it fashion, beauty, technology, cooking, inventing, engineering, singing, acting, etc.," explains Strachan. "I also wanted the characters to teach



Scott Strachan

tolerance to children, and this is very important in today's world."

Although the creative team is based in Brisbane, Australia, the production also has contract service studio contacts in India and China. "Being located so close to Asia, and the cost factor making large-scale animation studios unviable in Australia, we were the first large-scale production to create this type of production pipeline of creative management in the country."

According to Strachan, his team recently completed the first season of *FARMkids* and is working on the second batch of episodes. "We also have future series and a full-length movie in the pipeline," he says. "When I first started looking at developing the show, I investigated both 3D and 2D and felt the characters were better suited to the CG medium. However, I am looking at the use of some innovative formats combining 3D and 2D features."

So what does the enterprising man from the outback think of the whole animation scene he sees at the markets? "I didn't grow up with television or cinema," he points out. "Therefore I didn't see many of the animated classics until I was in my late teens and at university. I still have a lot of catching up to do, but this perspective does give me an element of freshness in my creativity! Today, I love shows like *The Simpsons*, *SpongeBob* and *Jim-*



my *Neutron* and, of course, the Pixar movies. Mind you, I am discovering and enjoying great shows everyday, like Warner Bros.' *Road Runner* shorts for the first time on DVD with my young children!"

Well, mate, this business could certainly use a real unspoiled view from the great outback, and chances are those eclectic *FARMkids* are the ones to deliver it to the world. ■

To learn more about the show, visit www.farmkids.com.au.