

Maya the Bee is taking flight in Sydney, Australia

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Sydney, Australia is now home to the latest 3D stereoscopic manifestation of *Maya the Bee*, a miniature rebel and an early free spirit, much loved by European audiences, since her debut in the 1912 book by German writer, Waldemar Bonsels. Previously, the best remembered adaptation of *Maya* for TV was the 1975 Japanese television series, *Maya the Honeybee*. Now, Flying Bark Productions in Sydney is creating a 3D feature film as part of a co-production with Germany's Studio 100 Media.

Both companies are part of the Belgian group, Studio 100, which includes under its umbrella, the Paris-based, Studio 100 Animation. The French team, lead by Studio 100's Chief Creative, Jan Van Rijsselberge, released the latest 3D television series of *Maya the Bee* in 2012. Now, Van Rijsselberge's design vision has been carried over and adapted for the new feature-length film.

I spoke with *Maya the Bee* Director, Alexs Stadermann and Line Producer, Alexia Gates-Foale, in Sydney this week. They point out that one of the major differences between a television series and a feature film is the attention to detail necessary for the big screen. The French material, they comment, provides an excellent benchmark for the team of sixty in Sydney and around fifty in Munich and Stuttgart, Germany, to further develop the art direction, animation and most importantly, the story. German-born Stadermann has artistic control of both the German and the Australian teams. His vision steers this latest release, and draws on childhood memories of German interpretations of the *Maya* story.

The theme of this charming fable translates well for modern audiences. Maya rebels against her controlled life in the hive and ventures out to explore the bigger world. In the course of her many adventures, the issues of difference, of the individual versus the collective, issues relevant to every contemporary society, are examined. Apart from these themes of conformity and rebellion, Maya's joy in her new

existence inspires us to examine the minutiae of nature as a source of pleasure in life.

I first met Jim Ballantine, Managing Director of Flying Bark Productions, at Anecy 2012, the world's largest international festival of animated film, held annually in France on the shores of beautiful Lake Annecy. There, he was in discussion with members of the French team, responsible for the *Maya* television series. Since then, Ballantine has helped negotiate sales of the Australian-German co-production to more than 20 countries in Eastern and Western Europe.

Ballantine officially announced the film during the recent visit of His Royal Highness, Prince Philippe of Belgium, to Flying Bark's Sydney studio. His Royal Highness was in Australia as part of a trade mission to cement links between the two countries. As Studio 100 is a Belgian-based company, Prince Philippe was delighted to tour one of Australia's oldest animation studios, now home to one of Europe's most beloved characters, *Maya the Bee*.