



# “IT’S A HIGH-PRESSURED SYSTEM”

A PORTRAIT OF DIRECTOR TOBY GENKEL

In his animation adventure *OOOPS! NOAH IS GONE...* director Toby Genkel brought the hapless creatures who had missed the ark back to life on our cinema screens. This prehistoric cartoon fun hit the spot perfectly for audiences all over the world.

“A cartoon film needs to sparkle with ideas,” Toby Genkel explains. “We sit side by side throughout the design phase. For *OOOPS! NOAH IS GONE...* I needed a creature completely incapable of living in the normal world.” And the way it looked had to convey that hopelessness. “I need a character that tells me the story,” the director explains.

“*OOOPS! NOAH IS GONE...* was a dream project.” In the meantime, the 3-D animation has been sold internationally, to every conceivable country. “Very few films manage that.” Emely Christians, who finances Genkel’s films with her production company Ulysses Film, was named Producer of the Year at the Cartoon Forum for the European co-production in 2015. Due to its immense success, there are plans to offer the scurrilous cartoon film crew surrounding Noah a comeback in a prospective sequel.

But Toby Genkel not only lends wings to prehistoric creatures, he also provides a cast of birds with the necessary lift off. In his latest film *RICHARD THE STORK*, a newly hatched sparrow is adopted by a stork-mother. As he imagines he is a stork himself, he wants to accompany the migrating birds on their long, strenuous journey to Africa. “The lively little sparrow is determined to fly really fast, which gives the film a great deal of its energy.” The character designers studied the movements of birds in order to animate them as realistically as possible: “We exhausted the possibilities available to us and we are very proud of the outcome.”

Genkel learned his craft at Trickcompany. During his studies at the College for Illustration, Fashion and Graphic Design, he completed an internship at the Hamburg-based company. “At that time I played in a band and I wanted to be a rock star,” Genkel recalls. “I hadn’t grasped how amazing it is, the animation genre.” Aged only 20, he was able to try out what suited him best in the various departments. “At the time there was no animation film industry to speak of in Germany. Almost all the animators and character designers came from the USA, Ireland or Canada.

Under the direction of studio boss Michael Schaack, Genkel worked as a layouter and background designer on films like *DER KLEENE PUNKER* and the *WERNER* films. In 1998 he co-directed *OTTIFANT* with Ute Münchow-Pohl. “I was second in command and I learned a lot.” In his 15 years at Trickcompany he co-developed series and played a decisive part in the stylistic conception of the company’s productions.

Genkel underlines that “the German market is very important, but we need to produce films that can be sold internationally. Because we produce our films entirely in Europe, an industry is emerging here. It’s a high-pressured system,” Genkel emphasizes.

His next 3-D animation will be *TABALUGA – THE GREEN DRAGON* by Sven Unterwaldt, in which he is involved as co-author and co-director. And he is working on the films *YAKARI – THE LITTLE INDIAN* and *OLCHI*, which are to be made next year. “Telling stories is my thing, rather than the actual drawing.”

*Birgit Heidsiek*