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Report: 31 July 2004:

Sanna's Garden: Project ID: 1061397824

Sanna's Garden: Animated animals to teach us about conservation.

Sanna's Garden is an animated series (stop-motion puppet-animation) of conservation programmes aimed at children aged 8 to 10 years of age. In the series viewers are introduced to a set of animal characters, indigenous to the succulent Karoo, a desert region of Southern Africa, and the plot will be focused around a garden they build to protect the endangered plants of the region.

Through a simple storyline, various conservation themes are played out - from the introduction of unusual species of animals and plants, to the prevention of bushfires and littering.

"Sanna's Garden" is unique as it is the first ever stop motion animation series produced in South Africa. It is an educational series focussed on the conservation of a unique geographical area, the "Succulent Karoo", and therefore, while affording the opportunity to use the unique animals of this area as characters, a certain amount of realism was required in the design of the puppets. Characters could not have too many human traits, as they had to remain animal, to ensure that they would be regarded by the audience as a poor creature in danger of extinction, and not a puppet or movie star.

Their actions and behaviour had to be thoroughly animal, but also have a cuteness factor.

A further complication in the character development was that in an area like the succulent Karoo, which is dry and barren, everybody is part of the food chain, making it slightly complicated to assemble a cast of diverse characters which would refrain from eating each other.

A unique challenge, but also a great opportunity, in the design of the series is the cultural diversity of South Africa. It provided us with ample interesting cultural content, while also requiring us to be careful not to touch on cultural taboos or tread on toes. The series is also designed to be easily translatable, as it will be marketed, in theory, in all eleven official South African languages.

Reaction of test audiences has been overwhelming, and the pilot episode clearly appeals to both children in the target audience of 8 - 10 years , and adults. The reason for this may be because the story is simple and the presentation gentle. Though educational, it is not pedantic, and the audience is not flooded with factual information. The characters are beautiful and funny, because they behave and move the way animals do, but have human quirks. There is also a degree of subversion of the usual educational children's programme - the fact that the animals never sing a silly conservational jingle, but rather do a hip closing number with real (and simulated) animal noises.

With this series Fopspeen Moving Pictures aims to create an awareness among children of conservation in general, and depending on its success, we plan to expand the idea into a follow-up series in which the pied crow could travel to other ecologically sensitive areas, meet more endangered animals and plants and lend them a hand in surviving.

1. State of the project

Shooting on 'Sanna's Garden' started middle May, and was bogged down by some unforeseen technical problems. The most serious concerned a very unstable power supply in the area, resulting in rather serious flickering in the footage due to fluctuating power currents. This was solved by purchasing a UPS unit for the main lights - our budget did not allow us to get power supply's for all the lights. From then on shooting progressed at a steady pace, and we completed filming in the first week of July. Editing went fairly smoothly, but we realised that we needed to extend the duration of the episode further to get the timing right.

Broadcasting possibilities: We had a meeting with a national broadcaster, TV 2 and they were very impressed with our pilot episode. They committed themselves to screening it once the series is completed. They will give us a prime slot in the children's programming schedule - 16.45 - but the programme needs to be 12 minutes long as that is the shortest time slot used in their programming. The first presentation edit is currently 7 minutes long, and we can extend it further to 8 minutes without losing the pacing.

To fill the required 12 minutes, we have come up with the idea to use the remaining 4 minutes to impart more factual knowledge on the area, as well as on the animals introduced in every episode (see attached text). This information will be juxtaposed with a "game show" in which Pythagoras the tortoise will ask the other characters questions about this information. This has a lot of comic potential, and offers us the opportunity to further develop the characters

2. Public relations and Press

A general press release has been sent to the local press and outdoor and conservation periodicals. We had a good response from two television magazine programmes - one on the arts and the other a conservation programme, both indicating that they are interested in doing an insert on the series. Final confirmation of this needs to be done, and we will edit a special clip from the first episode for them to use.

We have shown some of the material to two prominent local directors, and the reaction was very positive. Both made some very valuable suggestions concerning the editing, and pledged their support for our project.

3. Schedule

We finished three weeks behind schedule, but the first presentation edit of the pilot episode of "Sanna's Garden" is now completed. This version has been tested on a test audience of 110 children.

We are currently shooting the extended part of episode 1 as described above.

Final editing and voice recording will be done when further episodes have been completed for the sake of keeping costs low, and uniformity in the series.

4. Testing the pilot

Reaction from adult test audiences so far has been very positive. Valid suggestions have been made concerning the narration which will mean that some sound will need to be re-recorded: It was felt that a single narrator had too little variation in voice quality and tone, and as there are up to five characters on screen at times, children were a bit confused as to which one was talking. We will therefore get additional voice artists to do the voices of some of the characters

We have also tested the pilot episode on 110 grade 4 pupils at a multi-racial, multicultural school - Brooklyn Primary in Pretoria. The response was very positive: The children remained captivated, despite intrusions (singing from a class next door). They filled out a questionnaire, from which it was clear that the message gets across clearly.

5. Additional funding

No additional funding has been secured so far. We believe that, with the pilot completed, possible funders will be more confident, as we can show them what they will be backing. We have appointed a media company to find additional funding (SL Media - www.slmedia.co.za)

We re-applied to the South African National Film and Video Foundation for funding to translate and market the pilot episode. We are yet again patiently awaiting their response.

6. The rest of the series

The story outline of the entire series has been finalised (attached).

Even though we are still searching for further funding, work will continue on the series as planned. Three new puppets have been completed, as well as a new set for episode 2. Filming on the second episode will start on 15 September, as soon as shooting the additional 4 minutes for episode 1 has been completed.

We indicated to TV2 that the series will be completed by end of May 2005.

Diek Grobler

Fopspeen Moving Picture

Budget from CEPF: \$7000.0

= R 47, 992.70 (09/02/2004)

Expenses:

Studio set-up

Fittings Bluescreen: Impact Electrical	R 201.40
Uninterrupted power source	R 1662.80
Lighting bars	R 550.00
Various materials	R 358.01
Various hardware	R 2036.46

Puppets:

Fabric	R 349.95
	R 105.00
	R 104.95
Various Hardware	R 208.70
Joints	R 49.00

Research & admin

Illustration: Retha Buitendach	R 500.00
Postage	R 83.53
Telephone	R 1463.98
Sasol Bird book	R 130.00
Photo printing	R 20.20
Scripting	R 2900.00

Set:

Various Hardware: Hi-Lite	R 176.34
	R 83.85
	R 68.95
	R 27.95
	R 90.30
	R 33.00
	R 27.95

Salaries:

Puppetry and set building	R 9000.00
Preparation and filming	R 7000.00
filming	R 15 000.00

Total

R 42 303. 37

The balance of R 5 689.33 (± \$ 864.64) which has not been spent by the end of the project date need to be applied towards final voice recording for the first episode.