

Will Mavka mark the return of Ukrainian animation greatness?

New movie about a Ukrainian forest nymph makes a splash at the prestigious Cartoon Movie festival in Bordeaux, France.

There was a time when Ukrainian animation was considered to be among the best in the world. From hits as early as 1927's 'Ukrainianisation', 1966's Golden Shoe-winning 'Little Bear and the One that Lives in the River' and the spectacularly successful and long-running 'Cossacks of the Zaporizhia Sich', to more recent hits such as 1983's multi-award winning Sirko (Once Upon a Dog) and this year's inaugural Ukrainian Dziga (Oscar) winner for Best Animated Feature, Mykyta Kozhumiyanka (The Dragon Spell) – Ukraine has a long and rich history of animation. It looks like they'll have a new film to join them after Animagrad Studio's Mavka: The Forest Song wowed audiences during a pitch at Bordeaux's influential Cartoon Movie festival.

The forest nymph falls in love

Still in production, and not set for release until late 2018, the movie is about Mavka, a beautiful forest nymph that faces an impossible choice between her duty as guardian of the forest and the love of a human, a talented young musician named Lukash. "Since time immemorial, the vast Ukrainian forests have harboured countless secrets and unfathomable mysteries", the film's sleek website explains. "Will Mavka and Lukash be able to defend their feelings for each other? Will Mavka be able to save the forest and protect her love? Will each of the two young lovers from different worlds make the right choice?"

The festival falls for the forest nymph

The production team at Mavka certainly looks to have made a few right choices of their own. Mavka became the first-ever Ukrainian project selected by the Cartoon Movie European animation forum to be selected to pitch their film, and the team didn't disappoint. Presenters wore traditional Ukrainian outfits by designer Olga Navrotskaya and film footage was accompanied by original music by ethno-rockers Dakha Brakha. Representatives from Disney called the presentation of Mavka the highlight of the forum and are in negotiations on joint production, while forum participants named Mavka as one of the best 50 pitches, citing the high-quality visuals and strength and originality of the leading character as reasons. Mavka herself made it to the cover of Animation Magazine, which as an event partner, ensured her face was omnipresent throughout the event. The magazine also listed the project as one of the most important upcoming animated



projects. The Cartoon Movie festival has attracted some of the biggest animated movies over the last decade, including 2003's 'The Triplets of Belleville', 2010's 'A Cat in Paris' and 'Chico & Rita', 2012's 'Ernest & Celestine', and 2015's 'Shaun the Sheep' – all of which have been nominated for or won Academy Awards.

A breakthrough for Ukrainian animation?

Mavka is based on a Lesya Ukrainka play of the same name, as well as on traditional Ukrainian myths and cultural traditions. The team has worked with many of the country's leading ethnography institutions to ensure a beautiful interpretation of Ukrainian myths, legends, customs, and rituals and has received a grant by the

Ukrainian State Film Agency towards 30 percent of its total budget of \$3.7 million USD. Animagrad Studios was founded in 2012 and is developing several animated features for foreign markets, including Stolen Princess (2018), Snow Republic (2020), and Roxelana & Suleiman (2021). These film projects have yet to attain the polish or generate the buzz that Mavka has, but if the level of talent and commitment shown in Mavka can be applied to the other features, Ukraine looks to have a major player in European animation on its hands – a return to the glorious past of Ukrainian animation. For more information, check out the Mavka website at www.mavka.ua

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