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animation  
germany



**CONNECTING TO GERMANY PRODUCTIONS PRODUCERS & STUDIOS EXCELLENT!**

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**+++ Interviews with +++ Emily Christians +++ Nils Engler +++**

## Newsletter #3

Last weekend the LOLAs, the most prestigious and highest-paying awards for German films, were presented for the 68th time. As usual, this year's German Film Awards took place in an opulent setting to broad and appreciative media coverage.

This year's balance sheet for animated films made-in-Germany remains modest: of three projects that made it on the shortlist, none were nominated.

A film whose imaginary world was largely brought to life through VFX: the cinema box

office hit “Die kleine Hexe” was nominated for best children’s film. Kudos to Nils Engler and his team, along with Jakob Claussen and Uli Putz, for this honor!

Animation and VFX have long been considered not only as creative elements, but also as art and narrative forms in their own right by moviegoers, film and series fans. Beyond that, German animations are popular sales hits for world distributors. What’s missing is the connection to Germany, which boasts a modern, innovative production scene and thus has every reason to be proud of its expertise in this sector. Prestigious prizes and awards strengthen the self-perception of their capacities and attract attention, thereby opening new international doors for all those involved in the production process and exploitation. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences has been awarding the Oscar® for best visual effects since 1940 and in 2002 successfully introduced the trophy for best animated movie.

It is high time to discuss the issue of a corresponding category in the German Film Awards that includes and honors animated film and the use of VFX. This would also be a publicly visible implementation of the current coalition agreement: strengthening animation and VFX in Germany!

Best wishes,

Tania Reichert-Facilides & team **Animation Germany**

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## Producers & Studios

### Made in Germany!

Interviews with two experts from Germany!

### Emily Christians

**Ulysses Filmproduktion GmbH**

**The animated movie “Luis and the Aliens”, to be released on May 24, is a European coproduction that your company, Ulysses Films, produced jointly with Fabrique d’Images (Luxembourg) and A.Film**

**Production (Denmark).**



**For years, your focus has been on high-quality family entertainment. How did you end up in animation?**

Originally, I worked in a renowned photo agency in Hamburg, which sold second window rights of our photographers' reports in *Stern*, *Geo*, *National Geographic*, etc., to other magazines and advertising clients. This involved copyrights as well as image content editing. I really enjoyed this work. But as a result of digitalization, the photography market changed drastically in the following years. After obtaining my business administration degree, I worked in the business and legal department of a film production company in Ireland. In 2005 I had the chance to take over the German subsidiary and subsequently produced "Niko - Ein Rentier hebt ab" my first successful animated movie. At that time, Ulysses was already working closely with Studio Rakete – a tandem that has served us well for all eight of our films to this day.

**Ulysses Films has been developing, financing, and producing animated films as international coproductions for cinema and TV since 2004. How would you compare development, financing, and production then and now? What has changed for the better?**

In the last 14 years, surprisingly, movie financing hasn't changed much. The factoring components are much the same.

Technically, of course, a lot has changed in the animation area: the increasingly powerful net and the fact that ever larger data can be processed in a short time offer tremendous possibilities.

Germany is a great hub for animation. In the last years we have gained much expertise and artistic and technological perspectives – this can really be seen as positive. And we dare more. We no longer need to hide behind American studios – particularly if we focus on stories and efficient production, where we Europeans have a lot to offer.

**In 2016 Ulysses Films was voted producer of the year by the European animation sector. In 2018 you won the Bavarian film award for "Richard the Stork," whose principal producer was Knudsen & Streuber Medienmanufaktur. For "Luis and the Aliens" you've got two Oscar® winners on board, writers-directors Wolfgang and Christoph Lauenstein. What are key factors for success? Do you have any advice for animation experts who wish to become more involved with European coproductions?**

I consider the screenplay and solid visual development to be crucial in launching a

successful production. We invest a lot of money in every single film idea – not just subsidies, but cold hard Ulysses cash. In addition, a proven network of strong partners is indispensable; all those involved, artists and investors, need to work together in concert.



For a start, to make European coproductions, you have to want it!

All of Ulysses' films are international coproductions; we have not produced or financed any film just in Germany. Thus we're able to attain the budgets we need in order to compete internationally.

And we enjoy coproducing. For us, it's not an unpleasant necessity; rather, we see it as a great opportunity. We produce in English. Because several countries and thus several market participants work on a film, we analyze the projects not just from a German cultural and financial standpoint. From the start, we produce international stories – and our worldwide sales bear out the validity of this view. Our last film, "Luis and the Aliens," was distributed in over 150 countries.



**What changes would you like to see in future to help European coproductions get off the ground quickly and economically?**

My desires for change are more on the film financing side, rather than the artistic or technical aspects, where we in Europe are very well positioned.

Our cooperation with the film board in Hamburg is excellent; animation projects are given very appropriate consideration. Here the focus lies on the sustainability and long-lasting subsidization of local companies.

What we need is more equity for the productions – money that does not have to be spent in the region for the projects. Even though this corresponds to the usual clichés, in Germany we have the advantage of being able to plan strategically, with a developed structure, in realizing our films and scheduling our productions. We produce on budgets that represent a fraction of US budgets, yet we deliver excellent quality.

If we could increase these European budgets by, say, 3 million euros through equity and other investments, our projects could absolutely compete with US films.

More investment is also needed for exploitation and marketing. The fact is, the annual deluge of cinema releases require certain budgets for exploitation. We need to make our films visible, otherwise we can't attract audiences.

**Your personal statement on "Animation Germany," please.**

I think the initiative **Animation Germany** is good and important. Presenting our sector's know-how internationally is a good idea; we offer plenty of talent and strong production partners.

At the same time, I also believe we still have a lot to do here in Germany to make the sector visible and, particularly, to show this is an important economic factor. Animated movies are expensive to make, but they have the potential for large returns on investment – and to make a lot of (young) audiences happy!

Thank you!

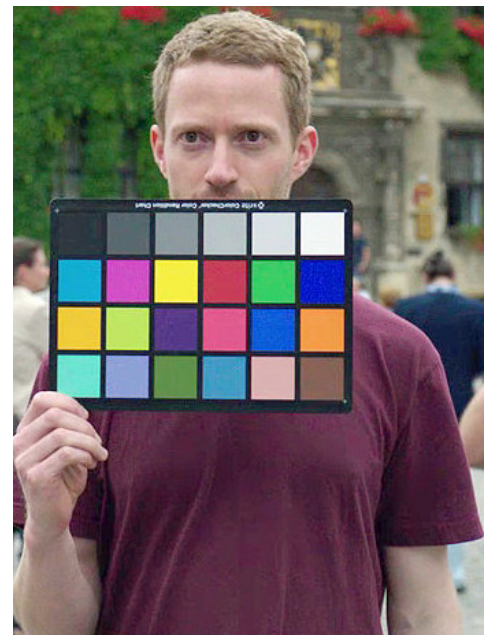
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Our next expert in interview with **Animation Germany**

## **Nils Engler**

**KELLER.IO Team**

**On April 27 the German Film Awards were presented. With your team KELLER.IO, you were responsible for the visual effects for “Die kleine Hexe”. You specialize in VFX solutions, planning, programming, and implementation. Your production list for film projects and commercials is very prominent.**



**Could you explain how you carry out VFX planning and implementation? How were VFX integrated into the production of “Die kleine Hexe”?**

In my opinion, producing visual effects works particularly well if the actual production process holds few if any surprises. For this reason, I try to enter into the planning process as early as possible. How early depends on the project, of course, but this has mostly worked quite well over the last years.

In the case of “Die kleine Hexe”, Uli Putz and Jakob Claussen contacted me immediately after they decided to make the film. We had a very early meeting with screenwriter Matthias Pacht, whose initial treatment already allowed us to discuss visual effects. I'm very grateful to be included at such an early stage because this gives me time to deal with the subject and explore possible solutions before working with the artists.

As soon as the initial script is finished, I normally try to develop a list of possible VFX shots, which provides a basis for discussion with the artists and producers. During this step I include everything that might not be possible to shoot, and thus may have to be edited. This usually leads to a very long list, which we flesh out during the planning and preparation process. In this phase it's important for me to understand the artists' ideas in terms of content, after which we jointly develop solutions.

Ideally, we have a clear concept of what we're striving for before shooting, so shooting and

everything that follows is simply implementing the plan. In theory, anyway.

For “Die kleine Hexe” we began developing Abraxas and the software for his feathers during preproduction. Abraxas is half animated CG raven, half animatronic puppet built by Fixas in Sweden and animated on the set by Rob Tygner. Other effects include the flying witch, the bonfire on Walpurgis Night, and various other small witcheries.

I prefer to have the VFX team directly under the film production’s roof rather than outsourcing the VFX work to a service provider. The short communication channels facilitate a high level of engagement and allow the team – and of course me – to concentrate on a single project. As a rule I spend a lot of time on the set and try to be there even when we’re not shooting VFX shots; this allows me to gather a maximum of input and to work closely with director and camera, production design, editing and production.

Depending on the project, my task varies. For “Die kleine Hexe,” for example, collecting additional information on the set (in addition to the usual VFX data) included directing the puppeteer and Abraxas’ performance. For instance, “Godless Youth,” which production I worked for with Alain Gsponer, Uli Aselmann, and Sophia Aldenhoven immediately prior, and “Heidi”, a Zodiac Pictures/Claussen and Putz coproduction, both required architectural extensions and thus required close cooperation with the set designer.

Digitalization and its associated technological possibilities enable limitless creativity; productions have unlimited possibilities for naturalistic depiction. Breathtaking scenes and realistic digital people convey audiences into new worlds.



**How did you get into producing VFX? In your view, what were the milestones in the development of digital images in terms of application possibilities and the use of VFX? And how has your work changed?**

My journey to the world of visual effects began with an early interest in graphic design, form, and movement, followed by motion graphics/broadcast design. In the mid-1990s, I began experimenting with video and editing. That led initially to smaller jobs, followed by a degree course as “digital artist” in Elstal, west of Berlin. After that I began working as a 3D artist, first in advertising, then increasingly in movies. In 2007 I began to work as a (set) supervisor, and since 2011 I’ve been working mainly as a VFX supervisor.

During this time I experienced the high-end workplaces of the 1990s slowly being replaced by workstation PCs; software became much less expensive; and small studios proliferated. At the same time, the demand, the requirements, and the visual complexity continuously increased. After a period during which the small studios could just keep up with demand,

the gap is widening again. This is mainly a question of scale, i.e., the ability to process large capacities reliably. Small boutiques have found their niche or have disappeared again, while international enterprises need a certain magnitude before they can even compete.

In my view there have been several milestones during this time. In recent years, digitalization of cameras, as the last component in the image chain, was paramount. This enabled us to access the data directly after postproduction. It was also the first step toward digitalizing film shooting. The various sectors will move closer together, as we have seen in postproduction. In the near future, I foresee that light and grading, for example, will be of interest, especially as HDR exploitation becomes more important. HDR is also interesting in this context because it illustrates the strong influence of the home entertainment market on the technological requirements of productions.

In the world of computer graphics, I'm especially and repeatedly impressed by the open communication across company and project boundaries, e.g., Siggraph, or the annual FMX.

Milestone moments for me personally were HDRIs and GI rendering, openEXR format, 64bit systems, all the open source initiatives and standards (Alembic, Open Image IO, Open Color IO, OpenVDB, USD, etc). At the moment I'm particularly excited about the basic idea behind ACES, the Academy Color Encoding System.



**Given your expertise, which VFX created by German studios recently pushed the production limits? And why?**

Generally, I'm impressed with the high quality of German studios to date. In particular, internationally active studios like Scanline, RiseFX, and Trixter regularly deliver outstanding work. At the moment I wouldn't venture to say whether we here in Germany

are able to push the production limits. There is still simply too much fundamental development work necessary. Nevertheless, Scanline's Flowlines Water System has certainly contributed to this.

Perhaps in this context (and as a further example of the various departments closing ranks in the wake of digitalization), one should mention the cooperation between the VFX and SFX departments for "Blade Runner 2049," for which Gerd Nefzer, John Nelson, Paul Lambert, and Richard R. Hoover were awarded a VFX Oscar®.

Digital image production is taking over ever larger shares of the entertainment formats such as movies or series.

**In your opinion, given the high demand for digital image production, what are the essential requirements for VFX made in Germany to be able to compete nationally as well as internationally?**

For the VFX sector, I would say that to keep up with the high standards in the long run, the industry must grow with its tasks. This involves various aspects: For companies, economic competitiveness in an often strongly subsidized field of activity and the possibility of long-term strategic and economic planning despite relatively short-term, but frequently technologically complex projects.

It concerns parameters that facilitate streamlined management without sacrificing speedy and flexible responses. It also concerns the availability of staff generally, as well as the artists' skills, their education, the opportunities for further training, for leisure activities, for their pay in metropolitan areas.

For long-term development of the sector, we also need optimum facilities for research and development in the area of computer graphics. This means training should not just take place at film schools, but also and especially in cooperation with scientific departments of universities and technical colleges. An interesting example is the Computer Graphics Lab of ETH in Zurich and their partnership with Disney Research.

Germany's film history is rich: important developments repeatedly arise from the various enterprises of the traditional film technology, e.g., ARRI, with its Alexa or the Skypanels. In view of ongoing digitalization, I see a huge potential in close cooperations.

For international projects, the growing complexity of tasks makes it desirable to provide businesses with the necessary backing to meet the challenges. Here I believe the capacity to further develop the projects is crucial. For German films, or films that generally have a smaller budget, good planning and preparation is essential to be able to produce in an integrated and efficient manner.

**Your personal statement on "Animation Germany?" 😊**

I'm very grateful for the attempt to increase visibility of the animation and VFX sector. It helps all of us. At the moment, our industry isn't well organized; all too often we don't speak as one voice. Improving that is a worthy goal!

Thank you!

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# Excellent

## Filmfestivals / AWARDS



**Nominee!**

## Die kleine Hexe

**GERMAN PRODUCERS** Jakob Claussen, Uli Putz

**GERMAN PRODUCTION COMPANY** Claussen + Putz Filmproduktion GmbH

**GERMAN STUDIOS** Keller.io

**LINK** [http://www.studiocanal.de/kino/die\\_kleine\\_hexe](http://www.studiocanal.de/kino/die_kleine_hexe)

© Studiocanal / Claussen+Putz Film



**Winner Grand Prix - International Competition!**

## Cat Days

**GERMAN PRODUCERS** Jon Frickey

**LINK** <https://www.catdays-shortfilm.com>

© Jon Frickey



**Screening at the Festivals!**

**Cannes - LA SEMAINE DE LA CRITIQUE - Competition - Feature Films!**

**Annecy - Feature Films in Official Selection out of Competition!**

## **Criss - the Swiss**

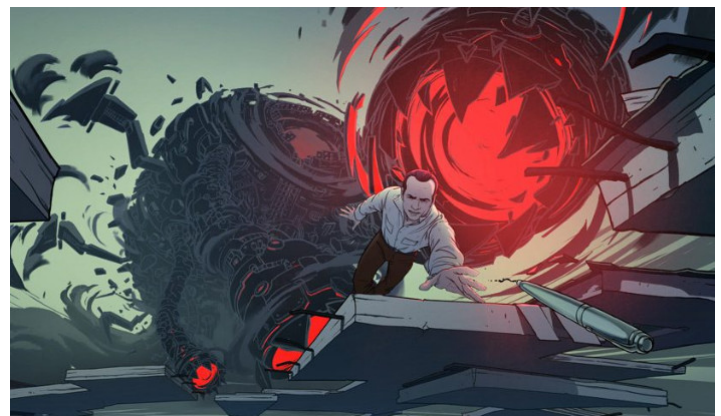
**GERMAN PRODUCERS** Heino Deckert

**GERMAN PRODUCTION COMPANY** Ma.ja.de. Filmproduktions GmbH

**GERMAN STUDIOS** Balance Film

**LINK** <http://majade.de/films/chris-the-swiss-2/>

© Dschoint Ventschr Filmproduktion / Nukleus Film / Ma.ja.de. / IV Films / SRF / SRG SSR 2018



**World Premiere at the Festival!**

**Official Selection out of Competition – Special Screening**

## **Another Day of Life**

**GERMAN PRODUCERS** Jörn Radel, Stefan Schubert

**GERMAN PRODUCTION COMPANY** Animationsfabrik GmbH, Wüste Film GmbH

**GERMAN STUDIOS** Animationsfabrik GmbH

**LINK** <http://anotherdayoflifefilm.com/>

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**Sceneing at the Festival!**

**Feature Films in Official Selection out of Competition!**

## **Marnie's World**

**GERMAN PRODUCERS** Jan Bonath

**GERMAN PRODUCTION COMPANY** scopas medien AG

**GERMAN STUDIOS** scopas medien AG

**LINK** [www.scopas.de/projects/marnies-world.html](http://www.scopas.de/projects/marnies-world.html)

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# Connecting to Germany

## **Animation Germany @ FilmfestivalCannes**

**May 8 - 19, 2018**

**German Pavilion #123 - International Village - Riviera**



[Link to FESTIVAL DE CANNES](#)

## **Animation Germany @ Festival d'Animation Annecy**

**June 12, 2018**

**9:00 - 10:30 Networking Breakfast**

**HAENDEL B Salon, Hotel Impérial Palace**

**Allée de l'Impérial, 74000 Annecy**



Premiere: **Animation Germany Trailer 2018**

presenting new releases of theatrical movies, TV series and selected studio works including VFX

[Link to ANNECY](#)

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## Animation Germany @ CARTOON FORUM



**you create, we connect**  
networking and co-pro events

September 10, 2018

4:00 - 6:00 pm

Amphitheater Hotel Mercure

Centre Compans Caffarelli

8, Esplanade, Compans Caffarelli 31000 TOULOUSE

Presentation: Philippe Alessandri - CEO and owner of Watch Next Media, President of SPFA French Producers Association and Chairman of Animation Europe

[Link to CARTOON FORUM](#)

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## Productions successful in cinemas

### Die kleine Hexe

**GERMAN PRODUCERS** Jakob Claussen, Uli Putz

**GERMAN PRODUCTION COMPANY** Claussen + Putz

Filmproduktion GmbH

**GERMAN STUDIOS** Keller.io, Screencraft Entertainment

GmbH, Production Concept GmbH & Co KG

**PRODUCTION** Germany

**GERMAN THEATRICAL DISTRIBUTOR** Studiocanal GmbH

**INTERNATIONAL SALES** Studiocanal GmbH

### Short Cut

in cinema: Febr. 1, 2018 - 1.483.524 visitors

Ressources: SPIO/VdF



## Die Biene Maya - Die Honigspiele

Maya the Bee 2 - The Honey Games

**GERMAN PRODUCERS** Thorsten Wegener, Ulli Stoef

**GERMAN PRODUCTION COMPANY** Studio 100 Media GmbH

**GERMAN STUDIOS** M.A.R.K.13™ STUDIOS GmbH & Co. KG, ARRI AG

**PRODUCTION** Germany / Australien

**GERMAN THEATRICAL DISTRIBUTOR** Universum Film GmbH (Walt Disney)

**INTERNATIONAL SALES** Studio 100 Film GmbH



### Short Cut

in cinema: March 1, 2018 - 306.214 visitors

Ressources: SPIO/VdF

## Isle of Dogs - Ataris Reise

Isle of Dogs

**GERMAN PRODUCTION COMPANY** Studio Babelsberg AG

**GERMAN STUDIOS** Atelier Simon Weisse

**PRODUCTION** USA / Germany

**GERMAN THEATRICAL DISTRIBUTOR** 20th Century Fox

**INTERNATIONAL SALES** 20th Century Fox



### Short Cut

in cinema: May 10, 2018

## Luis und die Aliens

Luis and the Aliens

**GERMAN PRODUCER** Emily Christians

**GERMAN PRODUCTION COMPANY** Ulysses Filmproduktion GmbH

**GERMAN STUDIOS** Studio Rakete GmbH

**PRODUCTION** Germany / Luxemburg / Denmark

**GERMAN THEATRICAL DISTRIBUTOR** Majestic Filmverleih GmbH / 20th Century Fox of Germany / Telepool GmbH

**INTERNATIONAL SALES** Global Screen GmbH

**Short Cut**

in cinema: May 24, 2018



## Shareholder



Verband  
Technischer Betriebe  
für Film & Fernsehen

## Advisory Board



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## IMPRINT

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Productions -  
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Registernummer: HRB 239676



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