

TOON BOOM

NEWS

The animation community platform





Going multiplatform in Harmony

Big Bad Boo Studios is one of the top Toon Boom animation studios in Canada, offering premium animation that is high quality, cost-effective and delivered on time. Their core animation team is in Vancouver, giving them access to Canadian tax credits. This and the benefits of digital animation enable them to compete with the Asian markets. In addition, they offer a closer location to clients which naturally brings them closer to their projects creatively. Being in the same time zone as their clients in Los Angeles is an added bonus. Their New York and Burbank offices serve as business development and pre-production facilities, respectively. Their clients and prospects have a big presence in both cities and they like to have people close to them for better communication and effective delivery.

Aly Jetha and **Shabnam Rezaei** started Big Bad Boo Studios in January 2008. Both are Producers and Co-Creators of *Mixed Nutz*, as well as Partners of Big Bad Boo Studios in New York and Vancouver. They have attracted a talented group of animation veterans and Emmy award winners such as **Alfred Gimeno**, **Randy Rogel**, **Glen Kennedy** and **Joe Banaszkiwicz**. Their directors are **Dustin Ellis** and **Alfred Gimeno** in Burbank. They are supported by **Nicolas Actis** and **Nick Duenez**. **Glen Kennedy** is their animation director and he runs the Vancouver studio with Art Director **Mathieu Causee**. Out of Burbank, **Randy Rogel** writes a lot of their songs. Their core animation team in Vancouver consists of 20 very talented Toon Boom artists who were classically trained at the best schools but also have a deep knowledge of the system. Joe Banaszkiwicz, Senior Storyboard Artist, is a veteran of the animation industry, having more than 18 years of experience ranging from design to storyboarding.



"Aly and I started Norooz Production with Dustin Ellis and Mastaneh Moghadam with the mission of teaching kids culture through entertainment. In the last two years, we raised enough money to develop 13 episodes of *Mixed Nutz* with a multiplatform strategy in mind."

"We really pride ourselves on our quality and quick turn around times. We have the top talent in the animation industry working on our show. Glen Kennedy runs the animation group in Vancouver and has more than 20 years of animation experience. He trained under Bill Hanna of Hanna-Barbera and has worked on some of the favourite shows of all times, such as *He-Man*, *The Smurfs*, *The Jetsons*, Disney's *Aladdin*, and PBS's *Zula Patrol*."

"It was important to me and Aly that our operation be as efficient as possible. That is why we chose Toon Boom as the way to create a smooth workflow between our three offices. Every individual on our team is also capable of doing many different things. So for example, an animator will design props or backgrounds and vice versa. By being flexible we adapt quickly to the changing needs of the market," shared Shabnam Rezaei.

The team is currently working on the *Mixed Nutz* show, a 22-minute sit-com style 2D show destined for mainstream television around the world. With *Mixed Nutz*, they will be also offering webisodes, short interstitials, an activity filled website and other hooks to

bring the audience in. The style of the show is very simple, comparable to *Peanuts*. *Mixed Nutz* is about a group of kids and their day-to-day struggles at Terra Firma school. The neighbourhood where the kids are growing up consists of monotone row houses which look the same from the outside. However the inside of the homes feature unique décor. The main characters are *Babak*, a self-conscious kid who is struggling with his identity; *Jae*, a natural-born leader who has lots of gadgets and tries very hard to please his father; *Damaris*, a quiet bookworm who lost her mother at a young age; *Adele*, an environment lover who can fix anything with her chewing gum; *Sousanne*, Babak's confident and bossy cousin and *Sanjay*, a self-deprecating romantic who just came over from Mumbai. Real children provide the voices and that gives an innocent tone to the show. The universal themes of friendship, jealousy, responsibility and reaching for your dreams are all explored in a funny and fresh way.

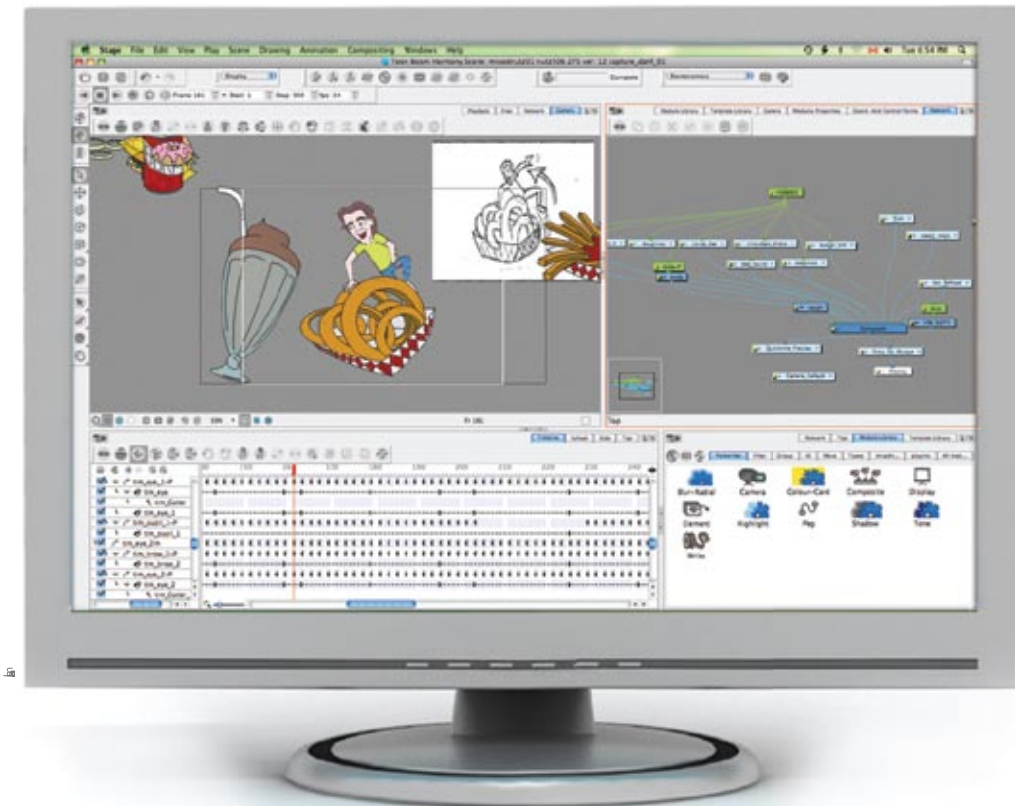
Another 2D show that they have in development is called *Gone Bananas!* The series consists of three-minute shorts about three monkeys who get themselves into all kinds of trouble with absolutely no dialogue. The work is done in Toon Boom Harmony.

"We will typically start our day by brainstorming the episode idea between Aly, me, Dustin, Alfred and

"Harmony has brought all of our top management team closer to the production, which everyone appreciates. That is a priceless advantage."



From left to right: Alfred Gimeno, Aly Jetha, Dustin Ellis, Glen Kennedy, Shabnam Rezaei, Randy Rogel and Mat Causse



Glen. Then we get a group of writers to write the show and when the script is ready, we record the voices in Los Angeles. We typically hand out 11 minutes of each show to two storyboard artists. The board artists can be located in Burbank or Vancouver and they are given the option of working on paper or directly into Storyboard Pro. Most of our older artists prefer paper and we just scan the sheet into Storyboard Pro but we are experimenting more and more with direct drawings on our **Wacom Cintiq** stations. We also import the script and recorded dialogue into the program and then we are able to create the animatic. While the boards are taking shape, we simultaneously get started on model builds, layouts, prop designs and character designs. Most of this work is done in Vancouver directly in Harmony. We are currently delivering about 6 minutes of the show per week. Our post-production is currently split between Burbank and Vancouver.”

“We are at the beginning stages of using Storyboard Pro. We have been able to scan boards in and experiment with scripts and dialogue being brought in. We are also looking to deliver our animatics directly out from Storyboard Pro. What is great is the level of flexibility



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we have. I can give my artists the option of drawing on paper, the traditional way, or doing the work digitally. Some artists work faster on the Cintiq and prefer to draw the roughs right in and then go in and clean up the work. I am really excited to get all of our board artists thinking in this way because it will save time without jeopardizing the quality. We have already seen tremendous efficiency by doing the animatic in this way. We used to outsource that bit and we have saved time and money using the software. Approvals are also running much smoother since everything is online and shared between our team members in the three cities.”

“We use Harmony for the entire animation process. We build the models directly into the system. We knew we wanted to go digital because of the multiplatform distribution strategy that we are looking to offer to our fans. We did a lot of research on software and potential partners who could do the work for us. Flash seemed to be the only other option and since the software is not made for animation, it did not give us the environment or tools that we needed. The look of flash is also very flat, as if there are cardboard models moving across the screen. We were all keen on the tradition-

al look and that can be achieved with Harmony. The system also gave us the ability to move our production from overseas to a local office in Vancouver, which has done wonders for reducing our timelines and giving us more creative freedom. As a creator of the show, I am delighted to be able to walk up to the animator who did a scene and ask him to change the expression of a character on the fly. That would have taken two weeks in another environment and we would have had to pay a price for it. The message also gets lost in translation and the end result is a compromise. Harmony has brought all of our top management team closer to the production, which everyone appreciates. That is a priceless advantage,” concluded Shabnam.

As markets evolve and people change their viewing habits, Shabnam and Aly feel it is important for content producers to stay adaptable. At Big Bad Boo, they certainly have the team in place to offer services for not only high quality animation that is on time and on budget in a convenient location, but also for a strategic solution to providing a multiplatform strategy. Check out this very talented group as you might want them involved in your next project!