

Sir Billi

SIR SEAN CONNERY'S ANIMATED FEATURE FILM "SIR BILLI" PREMIERES AT SONOMA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, SAN FRANCISCO

Glasgow, Scotland, 15th March 2012 – Producers of Sir Billi, the first full length animated feature to be produced entirely in Scotland, have announced that the film will get it's first international screening at the 15th annual Sonoma International Film Festival in San Francisco in April 11th-15th, 2012.

Festival Director Kevin McNeely said: "We are thrilled to host the U.S. Premiere of 'Sir Billi' featuring the powerfully dynamic voice of Sir Sean Connery...Tessa and Sascha Hartmann have produced an highly entertaining, family orientated film that sizzles with fun, non-stop action and an awesome title track sung by Dame Shirley Bassey, which was composed by Sascha...bring on the Scots...!"

Sascha Hartmann is directing 'Sir Billi' from a screenplay written by his wife Tessa Hartmann, from an original story they developed together. John Fraser is producer, with Sir Sean Connery serving as executive producer.

Expanded to a feature length CGI film from a 2006 short concept, this is a roller coaster adventure about the race to save the last beaver in Scotland, led by Sir Billi and voiced by Academy Award® winner **Sir Sean Connery**, in his first ever voice over role. ***Sir Billi is a vet by profession, skateboarder by passion and grandfather by love.*** He is joined by Tony Award® winner **Alan Cumming** (The Good Wife) who voices Gordon, a goat and Sir Billi's confidante.

Sir Sean Connery has been heavily involved in the making of the film since its inception and was inspired to take on the lead role of "Sir Billi" after being contacted by the husband and wife producing team.

"I'm excited to be a part of this incredible film and Scotland's first animated feature," said Connery. "'Sir Billi' is truly a first class film, with an exceptional cast, and is sure to delight audiences of all ages. There's an incredible amount of work that goes into

animated productions and I am delighted that Sascha and his team have completed what has been a labour of love. I am thrilled with the final cut!"

Academy Award® nominated Scottish composer **Patrick Doyle**, ("Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire," "Sense and Sensibility"), created the film's music score and also lends his voice as a key character in the film.

"Sir Billi's endearing multi-generational family story and cliff-hanger action spikes in the storyline provided me with just the right elements to compose a score I'm proud to say is among my best work to-date," said Doyle. "My goal was to shine a light on the soul of this colourful cast of loveable characters through the power of music."

"Being a part of Sir Billi meant so much because animation has always been a fascination of mine especially because I am from Scotland and know all of the areas where the film is based," said Doyle.

"The fresh look of 'Sir Billi' and its original storyline gave me all the inspiration needed to create some of the best composition work I feel I've done."

British singing legend **Dame Shirley Bassey** also joined the project to perform the title track "Guardian of the Highlands," marking the first time Connery and Bassey have worked together since the 1967 James Bond film "Diamonds Are Forever." Dame Shirley Bassey was also seen last summer on the red carpet at the Scottish Fashion Awards escorted by the film's director Sascha Hartmann. She was wearing a couture gown in the Sir Billi tartan, which was designed by Scots designer Graeme Black.

Scotland's first full length animated feature also showcases the voice acting talents of **Miriam Margolyes** ("Harry Potter," "Romeo & Juliet"), **Alex Norton** ("Pirates of the Caribbean," "Taggart"), **Ford Kiernan** ("Chewin' the Fat," "The Last Great Wilderness"), **Barbara Rafferty** ("The Wicker Man," "River City"), **Greg Hemphill** ("Still Game," "Chewin the Fat"), **Kieron Elliot** ("How to Train Your Dragon"), **Ruby Wax**, **John Amabile**, **Larry Sullivan**, **Valentina Fraser**, **Tallia Storm**, **Elliot Doyle**, **Chris Jai Alex** and NYC night queen **Amy Sacco**.

Sascha said: "To get this film made and completed has really been a true labour of love. We received a good studio offer to go to Los Angeles about 3 years ago with a deal that was pretty exciting but we decided to remain in Scotland, keep creative control and produce a truly Scottish product! Granted it's taken longer than we expected and we had to raise more finance, which was challenging, but this is an expensive business and it has to be done right. Fortunately animation stories are

timeless and so there are no restrictions on them. Thanks to the support of our producer and mentor John (Fraser) we made it!"

"Sir Sean has been incredible too. We have worked hand in hand with him for over 6 years. From day one we knew Sir Sean was perfect for the role of 'Sir Billi'- being a true Scottish hero and also a grandfather himself. No matter how many times I hear his legendary voice on the film, it still gives me a thrill!" said Hartmann.

Producer and Scottish industrialist John Fraser said: "We're well aware how competitive this market sector is with the heavy weight animation studios out there – I guess you could call it a 'David and Goliath' adventure, but we believe we have produced an end product that is something to be proud of as independent film makers. At the end of the day, this film was produced and made in Scotland, because that's what we believe in. Investing in local creative talent, jobs and ultimately investing in a Scottish film industry. Sascha and his team couldn't have worked any harder so the rest is in the hands of the gods as they say".

There is no doubt that the entire project took relentless determination and perseverance from the husband and wife team. **Alan Cumming** said: "I think it is amazing that they have persevered so long and hard to get this project made in Scotland, when there was absolutely no precedent for anything like this there. Their enthusiasm was so great and I'm very predisposed to doing Scottish things. Though neither [Sir Sean nor I] live in our home country we feel very connected to it."

So on the 13th April, audiences in San Francisco will have the first look at Sir Billi.

But if the enthusiasm from the cast, legendary voices and talent attached is anything to go by, perhaps the Hartmann's are indeed in for a big adventure!

ENDS

YOUTUBE VIDEO – *TALKING TO THE TALENT* – FEATURING SIR SEAN CONNERY, PATRICK DOYLE & DAME SHIRLEY BASSEY http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uyUbTQB_P2s

Key animation art images are available upon request.

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The Sonoma International Film Festival is now in its 15th year and has grown to become a five-day international event, with 8 screening venues and attracting top entertainment talent from around the world. Last year McNeely presented Susan Sarandon with a Lifetime Achievement Award and one of his highlights was presenting a Lifetime Achievement to his best friend and actor Bruce Willis.

After the red carpet premiere, the festival and the Hartmann's will hold a VIP dinner in true Scottish fashion serving, salmon, haggis, Tunnocks Tea Cakes, Walkers Shortbread and a few drams, completed by a Scottish piper to welcome the American VIP's.

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PRODUCTION NOTES CONTINUED /



PRODUCTION NOTES FOR SIR BILLI

SYNOPSIS

When tragedy strikes in the Scottish Highlands, there can be only one man for the job - Sir William Sedgewick, aka Sir Billi (Sir Sean Connery)! An adventure story about an inimitable Highland hero – a grandpa and skateboarding veterinarian who goes above and beyond the call of duty fighting villainous policemen and powerful lairds in a battle to save an illegal fugitive – Bessie Boo the beaver!

A roller coaster adventure, "Sir Billi" braves treacherous ravines and hazardous gullies with his sidekick Gordon, (Alan Cumming) to save Bessie Boo and Wee Dave the rabbit as they hurtle down a yet perilous river.

A heart-warming and hilarious action packed family movie, where thrilling car chases, heroic skydiving and daring stunts from this octogenarian, fueled with encounters with a hostile submarine, will keep you at the edge of your seat! In this race against time, will Sir Billi get to Bessie Boo first?

Explore the powerful force of this international Highland community, with its unrivalled Scottish landscapes, breathtaking scenery and hidden secrets. Discover the power of the local people when they unite as one against evil and embark on an expedition unlike any other.

BORN IN SCOTLAND, CREATED FOR THE WORLD

All animation has been created in-house by the Glasgow Animation team of 60 creative professionals including fellow Scot Kevin McCormack, Sascha's right hand who is Creative Technical Director. Having developed a short film teaser using Maya software in 2005, the company then developed and created a unique proprietary production pipeline in order to complete a full-length feature. What began as a budgetary constraint proved to be advantageous as the film now has a very distinctive look, which has been very well received by test audiences.

EDITED BY STEVEN WEISBERG

Weisberg is one of Hollywood's leading editors and has edited many box office hits. His CV includes an impressive array of work including the critically acclaimed '**Albert Nobbs**' starring the Oscar nominated Glen Close. His credits also included Morning Glory, Mr. Magorium's Wonder Emporium, Man of the Year, Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban, Men in Black II amongst others).

SOUND DESIGN - A LIVE ACTION FEEL

Sound design was led by **Simon Chase**, (Quantum of Solace, Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, Casino Royal and United 93), bringing an edgy live action feel to the animation.

SIR BILLI TARTAN - AS WORN BY SIR SEAN CONNERY AND DAME SHIRLEY BASSEY

Sascha Hartmann created a "Sir Billi" tartan for the film that was exclusively manufactured by **Lochcarron of Scotland**, based in Hawick. The 'Sir Billi' tartan fabric was woven over a period of ten weeks, then registered as a member of the Scottish Tartans Authority, proving its authenticity for the hero's real-life and film wardrobes.

UNIVERSAL MUSIC PUBLISHING SIGN A DEAL FOR HARTMANN'S ORIGINAL SONGS

Sascha and Tessa Hartmann, the husband and wife creative team at the helm on "Sir Billi" have also signed a deal with Universal Music Publishing for the five original songs that will be featured in the animated feature film that is nearing

completion. Sascha Hartmann composed the music, and Tessa Hartmann wrote the lyrics for the five-featured original songs.

Simon Mortimer, Vice President of Business Development & Media at Universal Music Publishing Ltd said, "It's great to be working with Tessa and Sascha who have created a real fun animation film. The songs we are publishing are great commercial songs in their own right and fit perfectly with the film. We wish them all the success they deserve with this terrific project."

SECURING A MUSICAL LEGEND - DAME SHIRLEY BASSEY

When asked how the collaboration with Dame Shirley came about Director Sascha Hartmann, who also composed the original song said: "My wife Tessa and I agreed that Dame Shirley was the ultimate artist to perform the title track for this film, especially given the 'Bond' connection of Sir Sean and Dame Shirley. So I sat down and wrote a song for her! Tessa approached her management and thankfully she fell in love with the song. It really was a dream come true for us as she is an absolute icon, consummate professional and a pleasure to work with".

Dame Shirley was thrilled with the outcome. When asked how the producers persuaded her to join the project, Dame Shirley said: "There was no persuading needed here, I loved the song from the moment I heard it. Sascha and Tessa made the process incredibly fun and easy for me and we got a great result".

ENDS