

# Cloudy with a Chance of Friendship

Michael Dudok de Wit and Christophe Erbes' best-selling book about a boy's friendship with a cloud becomes a charming new animated show.

By Ramin Zahed



When writer Christophe Erbes met award-winning animation director Michael Dudok de Wit (*The Red*

*Turtle, Father and Daughter*) more than 20 years ago, he was struck by the poetry and simple beauty of his work. So, he sent him his book (he writes under the pen-name Théo de Marcousin) about an imaginative boy's friendship with a cloud. "I was truly dumbfounded that he [agreed] to illustrate the story, which is called *Oscar and Hoo*," recalls Erbes, who is also a well-known international children's media consultant. "HarperCollins was also pleasantly surprised when the book became a bestseller in the U.K. and asked for a sequel (*Oscar and Hoo Forever*)."

Of course, the book's beautiful story and lush illustrations made it a natural for a TV adaptation. So, when Normaal Animation's producer and founder Alexis Lavillat expressed interest, Erbes worked closely with the studio's creative team, which included director Emmanuel Linderer, to develop the show as a children's series. "We changed the concept to include a young girl name Ella who lives next door, and renamed it *Ella, Oscar & Hoo*. The concept attracted Canal+/Piwi+, who decided to commission and co-produce the series," notes Erbes. "SVT and YLE also jumped on board to help us finance and produce the show. With the additional support of Creative Europe, MEDIA Programme of the European Union, Magelis/Région Nouvelle-Aquitaine, the CNC and PROCIREP/ANGOA, we were all set to start the production."

The first season of 52 x 11' is now delivered and is being aired on Piwi+ in France. The series has also been pre-sold to Knowledge

Networks in Canada, JY in China, TV5 Monde, Discovery MENA – and many other broadcasters will join soon. Erbes adds, "We're now



Author/creator  
Christopher Erbes

developing electronic stickers and interactive animated posters to keep all heads in the clouds and ... a second season, potentially, as an international co-production."

*Ella, Oscar & Hoo* was produced in France by Normaal, at their Angoulême and Paris studios. The animators used open-source CG tool Blender to create the show's 2D visuals. Erbes says he is quite happy with the way the show was able to capture the characters' subtle feelings and the energy of childhood.

## An Homage to the Artist

One of the show's biggest challenges was how to adapt and remain faithful to the art and poetry of Dudok de Wit. "The team had to find the right combination of brush calligraphy with refined lines together with the

presence of paper and watercolors," explains Erbes. "They also had to find the right balance for the composition of the images, learn-

ing from Michael's use of wide frames and size ratio between characters and backgrounds. The essential, simple drawings of Michael are so expressive. We also introduced in each episode a brief, expressive, abstract sequence to emphasize an emotional moment – an homage to Michael's other shorts such as *Father and Daughter* and *The Aroma of Tea* – which is what many call the lost paradise of childhood."

Erbes says he's pleased with the fact the series is able to capture the heart of childhood and celebrate friendship, curiosity and play in a subtle way. "Each episode is based on a main emotion and each day is a new adventure where Ella, Oscar and Hoo are learning from each other," he notes. "Because when you're a kid or a young fluffy cloud, you're a greenhorn with wide opened eyes!"

The team behind *Ella, Oscar & Hoo* are hoping to encourage young viewers to spend quality time together, playing outdoors and taking time to live and enjoy the seasons, beyond the limitations of their room and electronic gadgets. "We play and stay at the child's level," notes Erbes. "The nature around them is prominent and full of potential for small discoveries, big emotions and fun daily adventures, which are a mixture of reality and kids' imaginations. Of course, there is also the perspective from above, thanks to Hoo, our cloud out in the sky" ♦

You can find out more about *Ella, Oscar & Hoo* at [normaal.fr/filmography/ella-oscar-hoo](http://normaal.fr/filmography/ella-oscar-hoo).