

**CLAIRE MUNDELL,
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
FOR CBBC SCOTLAND
AND CO-CREATOR
OF SHOEBOX ZOO**



The germ of the idea which became Shoebox Zoo was first mooted over two years ago by Claire Mundell, then Head of CBBC Scotland and Justin Molotnikov, who directed the award-winning CiTV sitcom *My Parents Are Aliens*.

Claire, who is Executive Producer on the series, and is currently on a secondment from her position as Head of CBBC Scotland explains: "I was keen to raise CBBC Scotland's game in the children's and family drama stakes and get a more ambitious, international show with high production values commissioned.

"Justin and I, and the department, had been working on an idea using CGI but aimed at a much younger audience and of a simpler format. It wasn't right, but it got us thinking and we finally decided on a quest idea."

Scottish writer, Brian Ward, became co-creator after he was approached by Claire and Justin and became a key part of the three-way team who created Shoebox Zoo.

Claire continues: "Brian has over 20 years experience in writing features for mainstream family audiences. Both Justin and I felt a real connection with him and together we started to develop the idea further. It had a lot of big elements, including: live action, drama, CGI animation, special effects and grand locations, which all add to the cost."

Looking to raise significant deficit funding, Claire travelled to the 2002 Banff Television Festival in Canada with BBC Scotland's Commercial Manager. They were seeking a co-producer for the project and it was there Claire and CBBC Scotland joined forces with Blueprint Entertainment. The young Los Angeles-based company had been set up in 2002 by former Head of Television for the Canadian television company Alliance Atlantis, John Morayniss, and Noreen Halpern.

In his position at Alliance Atlantis, John had overseen the ground-breaking CGI animation series *Ace Lightning*, which used techniques similar to those seen in *Shoebox Zoo*.

"We wanted to find people with the same mindset as us and who could open up the potential of a Scotland/Canada co-production and we found it in Blueprint," says Claire.

The next stage was finding internationally known names to star in *Shoebox Zoo*. Claire managed to talk Hollywood A-lister, Alan Cumming into playing the voice of one of the animated animals.

"Luckily, he said he really liked the idea and a few weeks later said he would do it," she explains. "Once he had agreed, there was a domino effect. Simon Callow is a big fan of the writer, Brian Ward, so he said yes. Rik Mayall, Jason Connery and Siobhan Redmond really liked the scripts as did Peter Mullan and David McKay."

With big names signed up, and funding secured, the hunt began in earnest for a young actress to play the key character of Marnie McBride, who appears in almost every scene.

"To find Marnie, we had casting agents doing a sweep across North America," says Claire. "Justin and I attended the last audition and Vivien stood head and shoulders above the rest. She was the character and it was completely effortless."

